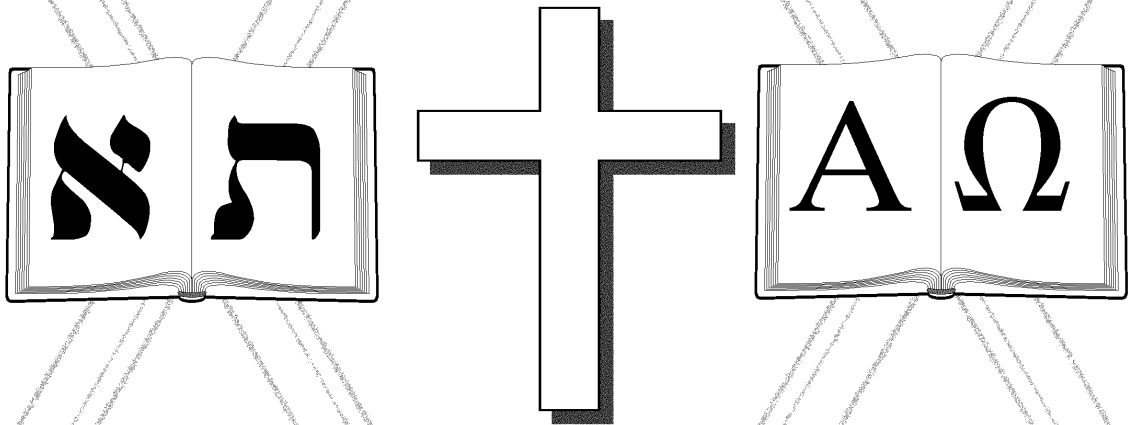


Studies in the
Holy
Scriptures



In Search of God's Wisdom

On:

The Sermon on the Mount

By: James A. Jancik

1st Regular Baptist Church

Read Me Files:

Dec 27th, 2008

These files are presented in their original, unchanged state from when they were originally used to teach adult Sunday school in the early 90's.

I am offering them free to those who may benefit from them. They may not be altered in any way, nor sold. They are free to share.

The addresses, phone numbers and emails have changed:

James A Jancik
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I am no longer teaching at the church mentioned in the studies.

Aug 26th 2018

This was the second of two studies I did when teaching a Adult Sunday School Class at a Fundamental Baptist Church April 1994 - April 1996. Some of my theology has changed (fine tuned) over the years of life and study, but, the principles are still the same. Jesus taught a collections of sayings that are authoritative in defining what a "Christian" is and was and should be used as our supreme guide on what it means to be a Christian.

I suspect I will be presenting these in future YouTube and Speaker talks in up and coming mounts and this may be of interest and help to those following along.

-James Arthur Jancik
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Studies in the Holy Scriptures
In Search of God's Wisdom Found in:
"The Sermon on the Mount"

-File #1-

Prepared for Bible Studies at:
The First Regular Baptist Church

April 1994 - April 1996
By James A. Jancik

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"...freely you received, freely give." (Matthew 10:8)

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First, a note from the author...

My purpose for studying the Sermon on the Mount was as the title suggests: to seek the wisdom of God contained therein. In light of the various Christian denominations and subdivisions, each having interpretations that may arise from their doctrinal perspective, I eagerly sought to approach God's Word as objectively as possible. I would be foolish and arrogant to think I was completely successful. However, it is/was my solemn prayer that God would be my Guide and Interpreter in His Scriptures. After all, HE inspired them; He knows what HE meant.

In that quest, one cannot merely lay one's head on the Bible and pray its truths soak in. It takes effort on our part. We must read His Word to find out His Plan. However, His Word was written in the Hebrew and Greek languages. Most people, myself included, do not take the time to learn these ancient tongues. So, we read an English translation of those original Scriptures. There are many fine translations that help those at various reading levels learn many wonderful things revealed through God's Word. Any translator, however, will tell you that it is hard to pass the entire impact of a word to one word in another language. So, translators must make decisions on how to phrase their translation to convey as much as they can without making it too clumsy. Praise to God for those whose life has been spent in study to perform this near miracle and provide us with an English translation of God's Word.

There are some additional resources we can use to add the missing historical and grammatical information lost in the translation. Dr. Strong, many years ago, took the time and effort to number all the Hebrew and Greek words in the original manuscripts behind our English Bible and made a dictionary in which we can use numbers to look up a word in our Bible and be blessed with additional information which does not alter the meaning, but simply puts it into a broader, clearer context which enhances our understanding. After all, God chose the Hebrew and Greek languages for a reason. One of those reasons may have been due to their richness in subtle meaning, which is lacking in many others. Again, thanks be to God for His people who spend their lives in sharing this information in a format that us lay people can readily find and use.

There are also wise teachers who have recorded their wisdom over the decades of studies in what are called commentaries on the Scriptures. They provide a historical background to an area of Scriptures we may be studying as. Many also add Greek and/or Hebrew grammar information, again, enhancing our understanding of the full richness of Scripture. Some go as far as to offer the writers' informed opinion shaped over years of studying, as to how one may interpret Scripture. Once again, thank the Lord for raising up people to share insight, honed by the Holy Spirit over years of dedicated research, with us so we may benefit in a comparably short period of study time.

It is my contention that the more you seek God's wisdom (with, of course, a sincere heart in faith) the more He will reveal (James 1:5-6). Not in new secret knowledge, hitherto unknown, but a clearer, deeper, richer understanding of His Word. He places this revealed understanding, not only in our minds, but hearts as well. It is through seeking God, we find the way to be more like Him. All thanks to Jesus Christ, to whom these Scriptures all point (John 5:39). It's His sacrifice that cleansed our sins and bridged the gap with God, the Father (Rom 3:25). It's His Spirit that enlightens us with

understanding of this additional knowledge acquired in studying His Word (John 14:26). And it's His Power that can change our lives to conform us to a new creation (Col 3:10). Amen! and Amen!

Getting back to my first statement, it was my goal to seek God's wisdom in His Word, from His Son in the Sermon on the Mount. I prayed for the Lord to lay aside my biases and preconceptions and show me His Truth. I used several Greek and Hebrew dictionaries, lexicons, and concordances to find other verses that shed light on the verses I was studying at hand. I sought insight from those wise men of God with respect to historical and grammatical issues with the verses at hand. However, I sought to limit theological input from these sources and derived ALL precepts and interpretation from the Scriptures, using Scripture to interpret Scripture and compared what I found with these other men. For I believe that if we come with a sincere heart to God, and seek Him with all our heart, mind and soul within the resources He provides, God WILL open our eyes with insight and understanding into His Word and reveal Himself as we could never even dream of. And the more we seek Him, the more we find.

Of course, the clearer we see God, in His Holiness and Power, the more pitiful we realize we are. We can do but one of two things: run away and hide from His presence, or fall before Him in humility and worship, asking Him for mercy and seeking His forgiveness and love. This is why many Christians seek a distant relationship with God. It's easier with less "pain"; but there's no growth, and no gain. God is calling for us to seek him (Jer 29:12-13).

We have the greatest blessing of God so readily available today, and yet, it is so neglected. The Holy Bible is revered and cherished as an shrine, but many times is seldom sought as the Answer Key to Life. Once one commits their life to Jesus Christ and is saved by His grace and enlightened by His Holy Spirit, the Bible becomes the fertile field and the rain desperately needed for growth of a new creation of Christ Jesus. If that water and food is withheld, we can shrivel up and go dormant; even die. We all must stand before Jesus and give account for our Christian life (2 Cor 5:10).

It's my hope, my plea and my prayer, that this study may help somebody get into the Word. It's by no means meant to replace Bible reading. In fact, due to its construction, one can't help but read the Bible during these studies. The majority of the text body are quotes from the Scriptures and all teachings are derived from the Scriptures. If you find your Bible version is hard to read, PLEASE find one you can! Studying may take time and effort, but the blessings you gain will greatly outweigh any inconveniences!

May Gods blessing be on these studies and may He be glorified and honored and praised both now and forever. Amen!

James A. Jancik
April 2, 1996

"For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." -Colossians 1:9-10

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." -Hosea 4:6

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"The Sermon on the Mount" -By James A. Jancik

Introduction

The purpose of these studies continues to seek God's wisdom from the Holy Scriptures. Let's now turn to "The Sermon on the Mount" and ask God to "open our eyes and ears" and bless us with His Truth as conveyed by His Word. Having read other studies on the Sermon on the Mount (hereto referred to as SM), I wish to state the perspective from which we will study Jesus' teachings. This study:

...holds the Bible to be self-authoritative. We won't pursue arguments on the authenticity of Matthew (or any other biblical book, for that matter) or perform textual criticism. There are many fine (and not-so-fine) books that deal with these issues and frankly, I am not qualified to undertake such an endeavour. Also, I feel some of these types miss the prime objective of Biblical studies; that is to seek God's wisdom, learn His Truths and apply them in our lives.

...holds the teachings of Jesus Christ to be timeless and relevant to all cultures and therefore, of particular interest to us as professed followers of Christ (i.e. "Christ-ians"). Some Christians avoid the ethical guidelines of discipleship, taught by Jesus by attributing them to other people in another time in the Bible. Some overstate them, as the means for salvation, and neglect the need for belief in Jesus Christ's Godship, death and resurrection. We will see by examining the SM that they occur all throughout the Bible, as other biblical writers echoed these ethics consistently.

...assumes we shape our theology by the teaching of Scripture and do not interpret Scripture to fit our theology. We must not come to God looking to prove our beliefs, but pray He would reveal His Truths in His Word. We must use Scripture to unbiasedly interpret Scripture, in all humility to the Glory of God and the edification of our Brethern.

...assumes we cannot in ourselves fully understand nor correctly apply these teachings (or any other biblical teaching, for that matter) without God's enlightenment via His Holy Spirit.

...holds that we must actively seek out God's Truths, by studying Scripture (in their contexts and understand the language they're written in) to equip ourselves with the "tools" God can use to guide us to a deeper, richer understanding of those Truths. We must not "sit on our hands", waiting for God to simply reveal it to us.

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let no man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double minded man, unstable in all his ways." -James 1:5-8 [NASB]

(All Scripture quoted from the "New American Standard Bible" [NASB] unless denoted.)

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The Sermon on the Mount: An Overview
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READ: Matthew 4:23-7:29 and Luke 6:12-7:1

This sermon is Jesus' first major teaching in both Matthew and Luke. Here are a few observations we may notice when reading the SM:

[1]- Luke's account is shorter than Matthew's. Jesus probably presented His teachings many, many times in His years before the crucifixion. Luke's account may simply be another delivery of this same, though truncated, sermon with additional nuances, tailored for the crowd on hand. It's a wonderful bonus to us as it expands (or restrains) our approach to interpret and apply these teachings (as we noticed in our prior studies of the parables about the kingdom of heaven). We will follow the SM in Matthew and refer to Luke when applicable.

[2]- Jesus does not proclaim the way of salvation. This may help to identify at least a dual purpose of this sermon. First, to expose our unrighteousness with accurate illustrations of what God expects from us. Second, after accepting the plan of salvation (which was yet to be introduced), we can use these teachings as a guide to righteous living. In any case, we can see that listed are particular qualities of partakers in the kingdom of heaven.

[3]- Jesus spoke with authority challenging, correcting and outright condemning the scribes and Pharisees, hitherto the supreme examples of righteous living on earth. This must of stunned the hearers of the sermon. The offended parties looked for opportunities to expose Jesus as a false teacher, and vindicate themselves. They were unsuccessful, however, as we see in Gospels. Jesus also exalted the lowly over these religious elitists. This was in direct contrast with the arrogant piety professed by the scribes & Pharisees, illustrated later on in Luke 18:9-14.

The following is a topical outline of the SM in Matthew, listing several examples for the categories:

I) Examples of Righteous Living and Rewards

- A) Poor in Spirit (5:3)
- B) Mourners (5:4)
- C) Gentle [Meek] (5:5)
- D) Desirers of Righteousness (5:6)
- E) Merciful (5:7)
- F) Pure in Heart (5:8)
- G) Peacemakers (5:9)
- H) Persecuted for God (5:10-12)

II) Exhortation to Righteous Living

A) By Contrast

- 1) Helping the Poor (6:1-4)
- 2) In Prayer (6:5-8)
- 3) Fasting (6:16-18)

B) By Illustrative Teachings

- 1) Salt of the Earth (5:13)
- 2) Light of the World (5:14-16)
- 3) Befriend an Opponent (5:25-26)
- 4) Seek Heavenly Treasure (6:19-21)
- 5) Lamp of the Body (6:22-23)
- 6) God's Care (6:25-34, 7:7-11)
- 7) Narrow Gate (7:13-14)
- 8) Wolf in Sheep's Clothes (7:15)
- 9) The Fruit Exposes the Tree (7:16-20)
- 10) House on the Rock/Sand (7:24-27)

C) By Correcting Fallacious Teaching and Misconceptions

- 1) On Murder (5:21-22)
- 2) On Offerings (5:23-24)
- 3) On Adultery (5:27-28)
- 4) On Divorce (5:31-32)
- 5) On Vows (5:33-37)
- 6) On Revenge (5:38-42)
- 7) On Love (5:43-48)
- 8) On Prayer (6:7-13)
- 9) On Fulfillment of Law
 - a) In Relation to Himself (5:17-18)
 - b) In Relation to Others (7:12)

D) By Warnings Against Unrighteousness

- 1) On Judging (7:1-5)
- 2) On Sanctity (7:6)
- 3) On Sacrifice and Prevention (5:29-30)
- 4) On Limits in the Kingdom of Heaven
 - a) False Teachers (5:19-20)
 - b) False Prophets/Preachers (7:15,21-23)

III) Righteousness of the Father

- A) He Causes Good for Both Evil & Good Men (5:44-45)
- B) He is Perfect (5:48)
- C) He Rewards Sincerity (6:4,6,8)
- D) He is All-Knowing (6:8,32)
- E) He is Holy (6:9)
- F) He is Man's Superior (6:10,24)
- G) He is Just and Righteous (6:14-15, 7:23)
- H) He is Committed to Our Care (6:26,30, 7:11)

Let us now begin our journey through the SM with prayer:

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we seek your wisdom in understanding the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ in His Great Sermon. We confess we cannot, in our flesh, hope to comprehend and apply the truths found in Your Word to our lives. Open our eyes, ears and hearts. We love you. In Jesus name we ask and pray, A-men.

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 Who was this Sermon Intended For?
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Imagine how a healing prophet of unparalleled magnitude captured the interest of the Palestinians, in absents of modern day mass media. Large crowds came to see Jesus heal the sick. Whether they sought it or not, they also were exposed to His teachings as well.

"...and there was a great multitude of His disciples and a great throng of people ... who had come to hear Him, and to be healed..." (Luke 6:17-18)

Many from the crowds became disciples, and Jesus chose twelve who became the Apostles. So, who was this sermon to benefit? The answer is all of the above!

Jesus, in a later parable of "The Sower" (Mat 13:3-23, Mark 4:3-20 & Luke 8:5-15), said to sow the seeds of the Word of God, letting them fall where they may. Some reject it, some accept it with minimal conviction, some give it higher value, but, competition with other priorities limit it's growth. Only in the case where it's received with it's proper reverence and commitment can it flourish and grow to it's potential [For a more in-depth look at "The Sower", refer to our previous studies in "The Kingdom of Heaven"].

We can find this "layered" reception in the crowds at the SM as well as in people today. By measuring our commitment to Jesus, we can find a relationship between our responding to His teachings and our spiritual growth and maturity and thus, the fruits of the Spirit (i.e Gal 5:22-23) in our lives. The "curious" watch from afar. If they get too close and really understand His teachings, they may have to change their lifestyle or be asked to participate. While, on the other end of the spectrum, the Disciples were right up front, soaking it in, and their lives reflected it. Where are each of us in this crowd today?

"And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him." - Matthew 5:1

The SM can educate and convict non-believers of their unrighteousness. The Christian growing in maturity can consult it for guidance. Even the successful, seasoned Christian, having been involved in many ministries can avoid (or convicted) of the sin of pride his/her work by it. Who is the SM for? We all should answer this question with a resounding, ME!

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Introduction to "The Beatitudes"
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Jesus starts off His SM with a series of "blessings", which we call "The Beatitudes". The word "beatitude" is derived from the Latin word, "beatitudo", which is the Latin translation from the Greek word, "macarios" (Strong's #3107), which we translate in English, "blessed". Today, the full meaning of "blessed" is a bit ambiguous; being rarely used outside religious contexts. Some paraphrased English translations have chosen words like "happy" [J.B. Phillips' N.T. Translation] and "fortunate" [The Living Bible], but these tend to convey the more "secular" aspects of being "blessed". The BAGD Lexicon renders the phrase, "privileged recipient of divine favor" to describe one who is "blessed", which better prepares us for the possibility that being "blessed" may not manifest itself in merely a secular sense.

The format the Beatitude blessings are delivered are as follows:

Blessed is/are _____, for _____.

The first blank is the subject of the blessing in a form describing those attributes that leads God to bless them.

The second blank is a description of the blessing God will bestow. For example:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." - Matthew 5:3

We see this pattern of blessing elsewhere in the Scriptures as well:

"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." -James 1:12

"Blessed and Holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." -Revelation 20:6

"How blessed is the one whom Thou dost choose, and bring near to Thee, to dwell in Thy courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house." -Psalm 65:4

These types of blessings are particularly interesting as many of the blessings in the Scriptures do not specify how God will bless. Simply being "blessed" is the reward in and of itself. These are in the format:

Blessed is/are _____.

"...How blessed are those that long for Him." -Isaiah 30:18

"...How blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!" -Psalm 84:12

"...Blessed among women are you [Mary] ... blessed is the fruit of your womb!" -Luke 1:42

"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." -Romans 4:8

There are many stylistic approaches to blessings. We will look at but one more. It's similar with the first type, but adds warnings and judgments referring to those who act contrary to the blessed in the format:

Blessed are _____ for _____ but woe to _____ for _____.

The first two blanks are the same as previously mentioned, but the third blank is a negative correlation to the blessed, and the fourth is the judgment they incur. A form of this blessing can be seen in several of Jesus' parables (for example: The Wise Servant Matthew 24:45-51 & Luke 12:42-48).

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The Kingdom of Heaven
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The Beatitudes, and several of Jesus' teachings, offer insight to the kingdom of heaven. We recently completed a study into the kingdom of heaven.

For the sake of brevity in fear of confusing this study by overshadowing it with another, I will state the opinions of that study and entreat you review it to refresh yourselves in how these opinions were derived.

[1]- The kingdom of heaven (KH) = the kingdom of God = the kingdom of Christ, etc...

[2]- KH is not salvation, but one needs to be saved (a believer) to see it, let alone enter it.

[3]- KH came with Christ, but will not be fully established until His return.

[4]- Our roles in the KH are effected by our service to God in our lives now.

[5]- Those "roles" are our "rewards", "inheritance" and "crowns" spoke of by the Biblical writers.

[6a]- If your are a Premillennialist, this is you believe Christ will return to set up His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years (a millenium) before the final judgment, the KH will commence at the beginning of the millenium.

[6b]- If you are an Amillennialst, that is you believe there isn't a milleni-um, the commencement begins with the return of Christ at the end of the world and the creation of the new heaven and new earth, after the final judgment.

Jesus is giving us a glimpse of the KH by illustrating the qualities of those found in the KH. He exhorts us to true righteousness by giving exam-ples of those who exhibit true righteousness in this current life, and gives us a peek at the blessings in store for those in the next. By opening up His sermon with these "norms of the kingdom", He sets the tone, not only for this sermon, but for His teaching ministry as a whole.

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Matthew 5:3
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"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What exactly is, "Poor in spirit"? The greek word behind "poor" is "pto-kos" (Strong's #4434) which means, "destitute of wealth, influence, position or honor" (Thayer's Lex). It is poverty at a beggar's level; pleading for means of survival, completely dependent on the mercy of others, incapable of self-provisions.

The second word, "pneuma" (Strong's #4151), has several related meanings. It's where we get our word, "pneumatic" (Webster's Dict., "of, related to or using gas"). It can mean, "spirit, mind, soul, breath, wind in motion, inspira-tion" (Thayer).

Impoverished spirit? Destitute mind? A soul that begs? How can this person be blessed? There are several ways. First, the Lord pledges to care for the poor in general:

READ> Deuteronomy 15:1-2, 7-11

"This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of his troubles." -Psalm 34:6

"I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor." -Psalm 140:12

"You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat..." -Isaiah 25:4a [NIV]

Second, one who is famished in spirit is probably of the mind set to recognize his own "spiritual bankruptcy" (a term used in "Sermon on the Mount", D.A. Carson) and realize the need for sole dependency on God's mercy. Humility comes through poverty of the spirit.

READ> Psalm 69:29-33

"For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." -Isaiah 57:15

"And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." -Deu 8:3

"It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, then to divide the spoil with the proud." -Proverbs 16:19

"A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor." -Proverbs 29:23

"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." -James 4:6

Thirdly, there is a promise of future rewards for those poor in spirit.

"He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with nobles, and inherit a seat of honor; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He set the world on them." -1 Samuel 2:8

"Whosoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." -Matthew 18:4

"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." -James 4:10

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." -1 Peter 5:6-7

"For he will deliver the needy when he cries for help, the afflicted also, and him who has no helper. He will have compassion on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy he will save. He will rescue their life from oppression and violence: and their blood will be precious in his sight;" -Psalm 72:12-14

In another presentation of this sermon, as recorded by Luke, Jesus uses

the "blessing/woe" format we discussed earlier to present this beatitude:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God... But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full." -Luke:20,24

This "poor/rich" contrast is especially found in Proverbs:

"The poor man utters supplications, but the rich man answers roughly."
-Proverbs 18:23

"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered." -Proverbs 21:13

"He who oppresses to make much for himself or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty." -Proverbs 22:16

"The rich man is wise in his own eyes, but the poor who has understanding sees through him." -Proverbs 28:11

Jesus gave similar illustrations at other times as well:

READ> Luke 12:16-21 and Luke 16:19-25

"Whosoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whosoever humbles himself shall be exalted." -Matthew 23:12

"But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony."" -Luke 16:25

"And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." -Matthew 19:23-24

James thought these matters were very important and echoed the teachings of his Master to the readers of his epistle:

READ> James 5:1-7a

"But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like the flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flowers fall off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so to the rich man in his pursuits will fade away." -James 1:9-1

"Listen, my beloved Brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised for those who love Him? -James 2:5

Does this Mean Being Rich is Sinful?

No; not in itself. But being materially poor, as well as mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually poor, tends to humiliation and lead one to solely rely on God. Wealth, however, tends to make one proud and self-reliant. Additional opportunity for temptation and sin appear with wealth. Some are wealthy due to long work days, neglecting service to God and family.

Some obtain riches through dishonest business practices. Others neglect their obligation to help the poor and needy, while hoarding their treasures.

David's position as king of Israel gave him opportunity and the means to fulfill his lust for Bathsheba. Solomon, his son, aided by his position as well, fell to his lusts. King Saul became so fearful of losing his throne to David, he set out to kill him. This, no doubt, is why Jesus, later in His sermon, addresses the sin against pride of position and hypocrisy (See 6:1-8, 16-18).

READ> Mat 23:1-13

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places."
-Luke 11:43

"Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive the greater condemnation." -Luke 20:46-47

This does not mean that poverty in itself is automatically blessed. Some lustful temptation, which in the past may have been formerly reserved for the rich, are available to the poor through relaxed credit practices. Legalized gambling can plunge families into extreme poverty very quickly. Some poor turn to drugs to ease the pain of their condition, rather than God.

It's the poor in spirit in the poverty of circumstance and oppression that are truly fortunate. Realizing their helplessness compels them to cry out to God for salvation from those very circumstances. Then, by the grace of God, they strive to persevere the trials and tribulation in life and grow to spiritual maturity in the ways of the Lord.

"And not only this, but we exult in our tribulations knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." -Romans 5:3-5

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
-James 1:2-4

Theirs... is the kingdom of heaven!

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Matthew 5:4
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"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

This blessing promises comfort for those who mourn. What is biblical mourning? "Penthos" (Strong's #3996), the base Greek word from which we translate "mourn", can be defined: To express one's deep sorrow over anxiety in the awareness of guilt. This isn't simply a feeling, but the manifestation of such a feeling in outward action, i.e. weeping (source: Kittle's TDNT). This

requires sincerity as well, not simply turning on the tears.

Lets look at some examples of biblical mourning. Ezra read the Law to the people for the first time in many years, after their return from Babylonian captivity. Even though it was an happy occasion during the Festival of Trumpets (source: Ryrie), the hearing of the neglected Word of God drove people to tears:

"Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law." -Neh 8:9

When one is "poor in spirit", and is examined by God's Truths, one can't help but weep. Paul cries out in Romans 7:24,

"Wretched man that I am! who will set me free from this body of death?"

Isaiah cries out when he sees the Lord in Isaiah 6:5,

"Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

We as His children, we should mourn the general rebellion against God:

"My eyes sheds streams of water, because they do not keep Thy law."
-Psalm 119:136

"Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men women, and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly." -Ezra 10:1

(Read Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9 for wonderful mourning prayers confessing sins and proclaiming repentance.)

We can mourn for the wrong reasons. Israel mourned on several different occasions, complaining against God and Moses for what they perceived as lack of provisions, as typified by Numbers 11:10,

"Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased."

Does this beatitude call for perpetual mourning? No. Mourning has it's time and place. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

"A time to weep, a time to laugh; a time to mourn, a time to dance."

Jesus promises comfort for mourners. God told Ezekiel to "mark" the mourners as to save them from His judgments in Ezekiel 9:4,

"And the Lord said to him, `Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in it's midst.`"

Blessings for mourners wasn't a new concept. In Job 30:25-26, good for-

tune was believed forthcoming for mourners:

"Have I not wept for those whose life is hard? Was not my soul grieved for the needy? When I expected good, then evil came; When I waited for light, then darkness came."

In fact this blessing is basically found in Isaiah 66:

"Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her... As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." -Isaiah 66:10, 13

Paul writes the Corinthians that the lack of appropriate mourning reflects arrogance:

"And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead..." -1 Cor 5:2a"

READ]=> John 16:20-22

Jesus spoke of mourning His death, but rejoicing in His resurrection. This comforts us to know that we may mourn over sin and the evil in the world, but we can be comforted in the promise of His return when, ultimately, all sorrow is removed!

"for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes." -Revelation 7:17

"and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain; the first things have passed away." -Revelation 21:4

In the Lukian presentation of this Beatitude, Jesus uses the "blessing/woe" format:

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh... Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." -Luke 6:21b, 25b

As with the poor/rich scenario of the first Beatitude, Jesus not only promises relief for the mourner, but, warns of pending judgment for those whose were pre-occupied with their own pleasure and jested over those who mourned. James exhorts those to change in his epistle:

"Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom." -James 4:9

The Preacher (Solomon) in Ecclesiastes gives wise counsel on this subject. Read chapter 7, verses 2-6. Also in Proverbs 14:12-13:

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is in the way of death. Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief."

Mourning shows we have an awareness of our guilt of sin before God. It shows the Holy Spirit is working in our lives. It represents the desire for cleansing and the righteousness of God. This desire propels us to God.

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." -James 4:8

However, the closer we get to God, the brighter His light of purity shines, thus the deeper the shadows of our sins appear. But, God has promised to clean us "white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). Once cleansed, and if we remain in that closer proximity with God's righteousness, we will be aware of future sins quicker and they will appear more grievous than before. Therefore, we repent earlier, and more completely, gaining a better insight to righteous living and grow in spiritual maturity. Praise be to Jesus Christ who bridged the gap to our Father in heaven and paid the price for our sins. It's through Him we mourn and rejoice!

"This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word has revived me."
-Psalm 119:50

"Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have compassion on His afflicted." -Isaiah 49:13

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Matthew 5:5
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"Blessed are the [meek], for they shall inherit the earth."

In order to see the complete scope of this beatitude, we must understand the fullness of the greek word for which we translate, "meek" ("praus", Strong #4239; Hebrew equiv, Strong #6035). Single word definitions are: "meek, gentle, kind, forgiving, mild, benevolent and humane." Kittle's TDNT goes on further to define "praus" as "calm acceptance of fate or human injustice." Similar to the reasoning in retaining the word "blessed" instead of using "happy" or "fortunate", I'd like to use "meek", while keeping in mind the full scope of the meaning so as not to limit the word in any given usage. Thus, I will use, [meek] in place of the translator's choice (which is generally, "gentle" or "humble" [NASB]).

Let's look at that definition again. Not just the "acceptance of fate", but the "calm acceptance of fate or human injustice." In addition to the single word definitions, we might mistake "meek" with "week." They are not necessarily related as a strong individual may choose not to force himself through his strength or authority, though he has the right and ability to do so. Moses, a man of power and authority, in Numbers 12:3 is called meek:

"Now the man Moses was very [meek], more than any man who was on the face of the earth."

Even more striking of an example is Jesus, in Matthew 11:29, who declares Himself meek:

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am [meek] and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls."

The prophecy quoted in Matthew 21:5-6 (from Zec 9:9) prophesies a meek Messiah:

"Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold your King is coming to you, [meek], and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."""

In short, those who are meek lower themselves to raise others. Their needs are secondary to the needs of others. How great an example is Jesus who, being God, humbled Himself to become man, passing on His immediate right to become King, took upon Himself our sins, and, through His Holy Spirit, works in us to perfect us and present us blameless before God in the day of Judgment! Hallelujah! This is a trait sorely missed in our me-first generation today. It's the subject matter of Paul in 1 Cor 10:23-24:

"All things are lawful, but, not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor."

In fact, Paul was quite prolific on the subject of meekness. He includes it in the fruits of the Spirit:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [meekness], self-control; against such things there is no law."

Paul especially emphasized meekness to preacher and teachers:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and [meekness], with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." -Ephesians 4:1-3

"But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and [meekness]." -1 Timothy 6:11

"And the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with [meekness] correcting those who are in opposition..." -2 Timothy 2:24-25b

"Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be uncontentious, [meek], showing every consideration for all men." -Titus 3:1-2

James calls for meekness to confirm wisdom, by example. Read James 3:13-18. Peter calls for wives to be meek in 1 Peter 3:4 and also emphasizes the need for meekness in our witness and defense of Jesus.

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17

In this Beatitude, Jesus is proclaiming a promise for the meek. The OT has several such promises, one of which is where this Beatitude is found:

"But the [meek] will inherit the [earth], and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity." -Psalm 37:11

"When God arose to judgment, to save all the [meek] of the earth" -Psalm 76:9

"For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the [meek]

with salvation." -Psalm 149:4

"The [meek] also shall increase their gladness in the Lord, and the needy of mankind shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel." -Isaiah 29:19

"Seek the Lord, all you [meek] of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek [meekness]. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." -Zephaniah 2:3

READ-> Psalm 147:1-6

The second half of this Beatitude is the promise of inheriting the earth. The meek aren't the only ones with the earth (sometimes translated, "land", but, from the same greek/Hebrew word) as their inheritance.

READ-> Psalm 37 (Note in vrs. 9, 11, 22, 29 & 34)

"Who is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land." -Psalm 25:12-13

"And the descendants of His servants will inherit it, and those who love His name will dwell in it." -Psalm 69:36

"...but he who takes refuge in Me shall inherit the land, and shall possess My holy mountain." -Isaiah 57:13b

"And I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and an heir of My mountains from Judah; even my chosen ones shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there." -Isaiah 65:9

In the NT, the concept of inheritance was broadened and included more than a place:

"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." -Hebrews 6:11-12

"He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. -Revelation 21:7

"And everyone who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life." -Matthew 19:29

READ Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-22, Luke 10:25-28 and Luke 18:18-27

We also see qualities of those who will not have an inheritance:

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God." -1 Corinthians 6:9-11

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are, immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things

like these, of which I forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." -Galatians 5:19-21

"He that overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death." -Rev 21:7-8

Back to the Beatitude, just what does "inherit the earth (or land)" mean? We believe it refers to the new heaven and new earth that will be created after God destroys the current ones.

READ-> Revelation 21:1-11, 22-27, 22:1-7, 11-17

Some would even say that the inheritance begins before this at the time of the Millennium, in Revelation 20.

READ-> Revelation 20:1-6

At any rate, how fitting a blessing for those obeying the call of Christ to humble ourselves, pick up our crosses and do unto others as we would have them do unto us; regardless what they do to us! Praise to the Lord, without whose grace and Spirit, this would be an impossibility!

"And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible." -Matthew 19:24-26

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Matthew 5:6
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"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

At first glance it seems fairly simple. The Lord has promised to feed the hungry and quench the thirsty.

"Who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raise up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous;" -Psalm 146:7-8

"They will not hunger nor thirst, neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; for He will have compassion on them and lead them, and guide them to the springs of water." -Isaiah 49:10

However, Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34, exhorts us not to worry about food or drink:

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things will be added to you." -Matthew 6:33

The hunger and thirst is in a metaphorical sense; that is it's used to

describe the intense yearn or desire we should have for righteousness and God's promise to provide.

"Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness, and to His wonders to the son of men! For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good." -Psalm 107:8-9

Jesus is the One who can satisfy both the way and the means for righteousness:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." -John 6:35

Of course, being a Christian doesn't mean you will never go hungry, as Paul states in Phil 4:12-13:

"I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and feeling need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

What is Biblical righteousness? It can be any or all of the following:

- [1]- To be fair and equitable, dealing justice (Acts 17:33)
- [2]- Piety or godliness (Rom 6:13)
- [3]- Doing good, generous (Mat 6:1)
- [4]- Justified (Rom 4:11)
- [5]- Virtuous (Luke 1:75)

God first exhorted us through His Law, to be righteous by following His Law in Deu 6:25,

"And it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us."

However, righteousness is also declared through faith:

=>Read Hebrews 11:1-11 and Galatians 3:6-9

"For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."" -Romans 1:17

These concepts are further developed in:

"Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and trust in the Lord." -Psalm 4:5

"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed."" -Romans 10:9-11

READ-> Psalm 1 and 1 John 3:7-11

The Pharisees and Scribes of Jesus' day believed they were righteous by performing the "letter" of the Law, however badly they circumvented the "spirit" of the law. They even gave more credence to their "traditions" than the actual Law of Moses. They claimed righteousness before God by way of

those works. This prompted Jesus to point out their hypocrisy in particular, in the SM and later in Chapter 23.

READ-> Matthew 23:23-28

Paul also takes the "wind" out of the self-righteous "sail", as it were, in Romans.

READ-> Romans 3:9-20

God's standards are alive and well in the NT as well as today, and are required of all who enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God." -1 Cor 6:9-10 (Also see Gal 5:19-21)

We cry out, as Jesus' Disciples did and ask, "Who then can be saved" (Mat 19:25). And Jesus answers in vs 26:

"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Let's continue with 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 11:

"And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God."

We ask Jesus into our hearts and lives; ask Him to rebuild our that heart and life with the power of His Holy Spirit and overcome our sinful tendencies. This is the sanctification process that begins with our being "born again" in Christ Jesus.

The Pharisees of old relied on their works to obtain righteousness. The "modern-day Pharisees" recline in the Blood of Jesus for their righteousness and feel there is no need of "works" in righteousness. They recite Ephesians 2:8-9 with religious arrogance:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

Which is absolutely true. But they fail to quote the very next verse, which is most definitely connected to the former two:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

This is the subject matter of a portion of James' epistle.

Read-> James 2:18-29

This Beatitude is not for those who simply wish they were righteous; nor is this blessing, salvation for those who are "justified" by faith (remember, "justification" is an aspect of righteousness). This blessing is for those who hunger (long for) and thirst (search) to be righteous in thought, word and deed. As one's stomach aches with hunger pains, and one's tongue swells for

lack of water, they see the unrighteous ingratitude for a Holy Creator by His creation and long for the soothing cool water of righteous thoughts, and be filled with the fruits of righteous deeds; all to the glory of a righteous God, by whose Spirit righteousness is at all possible.

There is a subtle message found in the tenses of this Beatitude. The first part is in the present tense and is continuing:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..."

The second part, when the "satisfying" will occur, is in the future:

"...for they shall be comforted."

It's not that we seek after and strive for righteousness, and find it. We never fully obtain it in this age, but will be filled in the age to come. Those who sit back and declare themselves righteous are misguided. By the grace of God, and with His guidance sought after in prayer, we study His Word and learn the ways of His righteousness. We then prayerfully seek to make those ways our own. But, as we increase in righteousness, we become ever more aware of unrighteousness. We cry out to God in our frustration and desire for His righteousness, and He answers:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

These Beatitudes have built-in humility. Praise be to God who has laid out a plan in that the more we follow it, the holier we get (the sanctification process). But, the holier we get, the more we become aware of our unholiness, which protects of from false pride and conceit. Instead we push onward holding on to the hope of this blessing in the kingdom of heaven!

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Matthew 5:7
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"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

Let's establish Biblical mercy. In the Greek, as well as the English, is defined as showing compassion or mildness. Let us search the Scriptures for examples of the guidelines and application of mercy. We find that God is merciful:

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His [mercy] toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."-Psalm 103:11-12

"The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in [mercy]. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works." -Psalm 145:8-9

"The Lord's [mercies] indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness." -Lamentations 3:22-23

"Who is a God like Thee who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger

forever, because He delights in unchanging love." -Micah 7:18

Let's turn to Proverbs for wisdom concerning mercy:

"Do not let [mercy] and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man." -Proverbs 3:3-4

"The merciful man does himself good, but a cruel man does himself harm." -Proverbs 11:17

"He who despises his neighbor sins, but [blessed] is he who is [merciful] to the poor." -Proverbs 14:21

"By [mercy] and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord on keeps away from evil." -Proverbs 16:6

Basically, there are two aspects of biblical mercy:

- [1]- Compassion in administering judgment
- [2]- Relieving sorrows or wants

Often these overlap as well. Have you ever heard someone say when seeing a beggar in the street, "Well, he's getting what he deserves for not working." Or, "He'll just get drunk with any money I'd give him anyway." That individual fails to carry out mercy of both types simultaneously.

God said to Moses in Exodus 33:19b,

"...I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show [mercy] on whom I show [mercy]."

READ> Exodus 34:6-8 and Romans 9:15

And to whom will God be merciful? To those who show mercy.

"And with the [merciful] Thou dost show Thyself [merciful], with the blameless Thou dost show Thyself blameless." -Samuel 22:26

"And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear him." -Luke 1:50 (Quote from Psalm 103:17)

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." -Matthew 6:14-15

"But go and learn what this means, "I desire [mercy] and not sacrifice," for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." -Matthew 9:13 (Jesus Quoting from Hosea 6:6)

"For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings." -Hosea 6:6 [NIV]

This beatitude is a promise of mercy for the merciful. But what of those who show not mercy?

"Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." -James 2:13

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are things you should of done without neglecting the others." -Matthew 23:23

When Jesus preached the SM that Luke preserved, He spoke of mercy in these terms:

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. And do not judge and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned; pardon and you will be pardoned. Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."
-Luke 6:36-38

We receive an immense amount of mercy from God. The mercy we receive is related, in some fashion, to how we treat others. Let's look to a parable Jesus told in Matthew.

READ-> Matthew 18:21-34

The king acted very mercifully to his servant by completely forgiving his debt, when all the servant asked is for more time to pay. The greek word for 10,000 (murias) is where we get our word "myriad" and really describes a large, virtually uncountable number (we might say "millions or billions" today). But when the servant has an opportunity to show mercy on his fellow servant, even though his debt to him is far, far less, he's severe and merciless, throwing the fellow servant in jail. The king heard of this and rescinded his order and threw the merciless servant in jail. This parable gives us a beautiful analogy to our enormous sin debt to God, that Jesus bore. Any debt a fellow man may have to us, is minuscule by comparison. As Matthew 10:8b says:

"...freely you received, freely give."

We also find examples of mercy linked to repentance:

"Be on you guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven time, saying, "I repent," forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" -Luke 17:3-5 (Read also Matthew 18:15-17)

However, mercy shouldn't be handed out in a "tick for tat", legalistic manner; But cheerfully!

"...he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." -Romans 12:8b

"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of [mercy], kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." -Colossians 3:12-13

Mercy is found in wisdom from above in James 3:17.

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

Perhaps the most moving example of mercy is in the actions of the father

to the return of his prodigal son.

READ-> Luke 15:11-32

We Christians, as recipients of Divine mercy, should share the joys of that mercy, not only in our written or spoke words of testimonies, but in our deeds to others. Just because it might not be received well or reciprocated, is not a reason to withhold it.

"But I say to you, do not resist him that is evil; but whosoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." -Matthew 5:39

Jesus, as He hung on a cross said:

"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." -Luke 23:34a

Jesus had mercy on those nailing him to the cross. He knew both His fate, soon to be with the Father in glory, and their fate, if they do not repent and didn't wish to add the sin of His shed blood on their accounts. This act of love goes far beyond human compassion. We need God's active intervention in our human nature to rebuild, even change, it to be like God's Divine nature, as so wonderfully displayed in Jesus, His Son... Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy!

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Matthew 5:8
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"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

The phrase "pure in heart" in the Greek, has some interesting aspects. The Greek word we translate, "pure" is "kathario" (Strong #2513). Kittles TDNT describes it as "unsoiled, clean from guilt, innocent, sincere, unfeigned, upright, virtuous and void of evil." The Greek word from which we translate "heart" is "kardias" (Strong #2588). We again refer to Kittles TDNT and find, "motive or intent, seat of feeling, impulse, affection, desire." Also, "seat of intellect", "inner and mental frame" as well as "conscience." Wading through the above list we can assemble alternate translations conveying the dynamic equivalent like, "upright intentions", "sincere impulses", "intellect void of evil", "inner mental frame, free from guilt", etc.

These definitions are derived from the context the words appear throughout Greek literature. The NT, and it's Hebrew counterpart, the OT, exhorts us to strive for this, "clean conscience". Not in superficial hypocrisy, but from the depth and center of our being.

"Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more." -Deu 10:16

"Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your hearts and will all your soul, in order that you may live." -Deu 30:6

"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart" -Jeremiah 4:4

"Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part, Thou wilt make me know wisdom... Create in me a clean heart O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." -Psalm 51:6, 10

"But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." -1 Timothy 1:5

"Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart." -2 Timothy 2:22

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse you hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double-minded." -James 4:8

Jesus used the example of the Pharisees as an example of the incorrect way to a pure heart.

READ-> Matthew 23:25-28

The phrase, "[he] said in his heart", is a good way to see the usage of "heart" in showing what one really thought or said. It occurs many, many times (See Gen 8:21, 17:17, 27:41 & Exo 4:14 for some examples).

Things from the "heart" are NOT simple emotion. Emotions are primarily referred to by the Greek word, "splanchnon" (Strong #4698). It literally means, "intestines" or "guts"; thus the KJV rendering "bowels" and it's where we get our term, "gut reaction".

READ-> Philipians 1:8, Philemon 1:7 and 1 John 3:17
KJV & NASB (or other newer English translation to compare word usage).

Things from the "heart" are the end product from the interaction and cooperative work of the intellect and the emotions to arrive at the belief one holds or the action one takes. It's the raw emotion, restrained by the mind, and the intellect "softened-up" by the emotions resulting in the refined and defined feelings from the heart.

This beatitude is an allusion to Psalm 24:3-5:

"Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

It is necessary to have a pure heart to have fellowship with the Lord.

"Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart." -Psalm 73:1

"He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend." -Proverbs 22:11

The problem is our hearts are not naturally pure. In fact Jesus names what comes from our hearts in Matthew 15:18-20a:

"But things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things that defile the man."

The problem compounds when we realize this beatitude states the pure in heart shall see God! Even Moses was forbidden to see the face of God.

"But [God] said, "You cannot see my face, for no man can see Me and live!" -Exodus 33:20

When Christ returns, the unbelievers will cry to be hid from His face, as Revelation 6:15-17 says,

"And the kings of the earth and great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;"

Even some Christians will feel shame at His return:

"And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." -1 John 2:28

How may we be saved from this awful fate? Hebrews 12:14 says,

"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

Once we accept Christ as our Savior, the sanctification process begins; that is the changing of the dominance of our "old nature" to conform us to our "new nature" as new creatures in Christ.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things pass away; behold, the new things have come." -2 Cor 5:17

"And put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." -Ephes 4:24

"Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with it's evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him"

-Colossians 3:10

We cannot purify our hearts in our own strength, but must rely on God's grace to bring it about:

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among those who are sanctified." -Acts 20:32

"For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." -John 1:17-18

We, like David, must cry out to God:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way." -Psalm 139: 23-24

And trust in Him alone to perfect us and purify our hearts, even unto His appearing...

"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of

Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ which He will bring about at the proper time" -1 Timothy 6:13-15a

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." -1 Thess 5:23-24

"Now the God of peace who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." -Hebrews 13:20-21

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Matthew 5:9
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"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Jesus used the word, "peacemakers" (In Greek, "eirenopoios", Strong's #1518), which limits the blessing to those who not only wish for peace, or even seek for peace, but for those who make peace. This is the only time this word appears in the NT, but there are other ways to say "peacemaker".

Peter, quoting from Psalm 34:11, said in 1 Peter 3:11,

"And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it."

We see in Hebrews 12:14,

"Pursue peace with all men, and sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

Paul said in Romans:

"So let us pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another." (14:19)

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord." (12:18-19)

James in his letter:

"And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (3:18)

God is a peacemaker:

"Dominion and awe belong to Him who establishes peace in His heights"
-Job 25:2

"He makes peace in your borders..." -Psalms 147:14a

"When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." -Proverbs 16:7

"The One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these." -Isaiah 45:7

One may find it hard to make peace when the other person is wrong. We must remember the beatitude we studied on "meekness" and the "calm acceptance of human injustice" and the beatitude on being "poor in spirit" (humility) and pray for God's power to swallow our pride and make peace regardless, for the glory of God.

Jesus is prophetically called, "The Prince of Peace" in Isaiah 9:6,

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal father, Prince of Peace."

This "Prince of Peace" made peace between God and man by bearing God's wrath for man, being obedient to God's will, and through His Holy Spirit, gives us the power to make peace with one another.

READ-> Ephesians 2:12-22

"And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." -Colossians 1:20

Jesus mentioned elsewhere in the SM expanding on this beatitude:

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven;" -Matthew 5:44-45a

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most-High;" -Luke 6:35a

This brings us to the second part of this beatitude, "shall be called the sons of God." The Greek word for "called" ("kaleo", Strong #2564) means, in this context, giving someone a name which one's actions confirm. (Carson) "Sons of God" goes beyond being a believer, but being an obedient believer.

READ-> Romans 8:12-17, 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 & Gal 3:23-27

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the [power] to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." -John 1:12

"that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." -Phil 2:15

"For all who are being led by the spirit of God, these are sons of God." -Romans 8:14

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." -Galatians 3:26-27

What we see in these verses, are, we allow Christ, through His Spirit, to work in and through us, and our actions manifest His presence in our lives and our sonship with God.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." -Mat 5:16

It's like the son of a renown chef from long line of famous chefs preparing his first meal, in his father's kitchen, using his father's utensils and ingredients as well as carefully following his fathers methods and instructions. That day he will be called chef in the tradition of a family of great chefs; a true son and no longer referred to as simply an "heir". He couldn't of done it without the care and instructions of his father; nor could he of succeeded without the equipment and materials of his father. But the son had to have the desire to achieve and yield to his fathers guidance as well.

As Christians, we are in the stages of learning to prepare meals in the traditions of our Father, in heaven. Are we following His lead or adding our own spices?

This move toward sonship is the purification and/or sanctification we have spoke of previously after we accept Christ as our Savior. Jesus is the peace offering for sin and the way to squelch our part in the general rebellion against God and be reborn in His family. Entreating and allowing His Spirit gives us the power to actually follow His lead in His teachings. He will remake us, by grace, so we can act like a member of that family. Those who believe that Jesus CAN do it, and invite Him TO do it, WILL see it happen. That's "the promise" and "the hope" to "be like Jesus."

It's all grace; simply an undeserved gift of God. The forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, power from His Holy Spirit, direction for spiritual and sanctification; all grace. If an unbeliever reads the Bible or hears a preacher and understands salvation, but rejects it, it's grace he even heard it and had an opportunity to be saved. In fact, it's grace we have the Bible at all. His Word alone contains the Way (of salvation). The devil knows the power in the Scriptures, and has been trying for years to destroy, derail and discredit God's Word. But as Paul says in Romans 8:38-39...

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Try as the devil may, if we heed God's call and accept His gift of salvation, including the promise of sanctification and sonship, nothing can stop it from coming about... except for us and our cooperation. If we accept the salvation from hell (our rightful destination for our part in the rebellion from God), but elect not to cooperate in the process that prepares us for our destination in heaven, we will be as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3:15,

"If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

Saved but suffering the loss of our potential rewards through Christ's work in our lives. But, if we allow God to work in and through us and change us, we will produce fruit (good works) and we shall be rewarded for those works, as found in verse 14:

"If any man's work which has built upon [the foundation of Christ] remains, he shall receive a reward."

And I believe those rewards include the "inheritance" or "full sonship" spoke of in this beatitude.

"See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we shall be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be, we know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." -1 John 3:1-3

The devil, too, is looking for "sons". How can we tell which our father is?

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit." -Matthew 7:16-17

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies." -John 8:44

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice of much a son of hell as yourselves." -Mat 23:15

"[Paul] said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?" -Acts 13:10

"The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." -1 John 3:8-10

We have a champion, in Jesus, who can see us to total victory! Even though...

"...Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." -1 Peter 5:8

We have these...

"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." -James 4:7-8a

"Since then the children share in the flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part in the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;" -Hebrews 2:14

"[Jesus said to Paul in a vision] ...I am sending you, to open their eyes so they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among

those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." -Acts 26:17c-18

And we know the devils fate...

"And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are; and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." -Rev 20:10

We must take care, however, that his fate does not cause us to become confident in ourselves; for we are no match for him. It is Jesus Christ working through us that gives us the victory.

"You are from God, little children, and have overcome them, because greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world." -1 John 4:4

"For whatever is born of God over comes the world; and this is the victory - our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." -1 John 5:4-5

The study of "sons of God" has taken us on a lengthy excursion, but it was necessary, I feel, to understand the concept of "sonship". This term was also used in the OT to refer to those in heaven, who we might call angels.

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them." -Job 1:6

We cannot appreciate the completion of God's grace in our "sonship" until we see Jesus at our resurrection and our bodies are transformed (refer back to 1 John 3:1-3) to like that of angelic beings (Mat 22:30). As the other beatitudes, this one offers a future blessing, being called a son of God in the kingdom of Heaven. The ultimate peace for the obedient peacemaker.

The more we study, the clearer our shortcomings; but we can trust in our heavenly Father, through His Son, Jesus Christ, that with His Holy Spirit working through us, we can look forward towards the hope of victory in this age, and an inheritance in the ages to come! A-men!

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Matthew 5:10-12
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"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

READ]=> Matthew 5:10-12 and Luke 6:22-23 & 26

In this the last "beatitude", we have an additional blessing in Jesus' own commentary on it in vs 11-12 as well as the words Jesus spoke in the sermon in Luke 6:22-23 & 26. These focus the light shed by this beatitude very clearly on what we can expect as His followers. The suffering in this age is dwarfed by the joy in the next, as the other beatitudes pointed out as well; its related to our obedience and service in the current age.

The concept of suffering for being a believer is not new to Jesus, however. Many over time have suffered injustice by men while following the ways of God.

READ-> Psalm 119:81-88, 161-168

"Many are my persecutors and my adversaries, yet I do not turn aside from Thy testimonies." -Psalm 119:157

"Thou, who knowest, O Lord, remember me, take notice of me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do Not, in view of Thy patience, take me away; know that for Thy sake I endure reproach." -Jer 15:15

There was the hope of blessings for those who did not abandon the ways of the Lord in the face of persecution. However, the example of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-25 goes a step farther. Not only enduring troubles which happened to him, but, by faith, Moses was actually able to choose persecution over the sinful pleasures offered by the court of Pharaoh.

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."

It was no secret to the NT writers that to choose Jesus Christ would open them up to harsh treatment and rejection by the world:

[Jesus said] "Remember the word that I said to you, A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."
-John 15:19-20

"And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." -2 Timothy 3:12

"But as [in Isaac's] time, he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also." -Galatians 4:29

"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" -Philippians 1:29

"For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction: and so it came to pass, as you know." -1 Thessalonians 3:4

In verse Mat 5:11 & Luke 6:22 Jesus emphasizes the verbal/mental abuse side of "persecution". "Men hate you", "ostracize you", "cast insults at you", "spurn your name as evil", and "say all kinds of evil against you" can be effectively done without any physical harm. Jesus may be preparing those who are expecting a big fight to beware of those battles much more subtle, but collectively, just as spiritually devastating. Promotions missed due to fellow works marring our character due to their hate of our relationship in Christ. Being discharged from our employment or even being falsely accused of a crime can be much worse in it's effect in our lives than being assaulted.

Jesus added the qualifiers "falsely" and "for My sake" to this blessing. The allegations must not be true, otherwise we are not being persecuted, but accurately convicted of wrongdoings. If one avoids tasks at work to "share the gospel", we earn the label "slouch" and dirty the image of Christ. Like-

wise, persecutions arising from the baseball team we like hardly qualifies. Peter, in his first epistle writes extensively on this.

READ-> 1 Peter 2:19-25, 3:13-17 and 4:12-16

God can take any situation and make it work for His glory. This is especially true with persecutions and tribulations for Jesus's sake. What good could come out of this suffering?

"And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." - 1 Peter 5:10

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He will also deny us" -2 Timothy 2:12

"Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering." - 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5

"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." -Romans 5:3-5

"and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now." -1 Corinthians 4-12-13

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." -James 1:2-4

Persevering, by grace, through tribulation builds us spiritually, through grace. In other words, trouble drives us closer to God, softens our hard hearts toward God and hardens our soft spines against sin. We can experience a piece of Christ's suffering and be blessed with a piece of His reward all the while developing a more intimate relationship with Him. "His grace is sufficient" for all things.

READ -> 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." -2 Cor 4:8-10

READ-> Philippians 3:8-12

Perseverance builds faith; a faith that is confident that nothing or no one can separate us from the love of God.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it

is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." -Romans 8:35-37

Even our Lord, Jesus Christ learned through His sufferings.

"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" -Hebrews 5:8-9

Jesus said in v12, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven." We do not rejoice in the suffering itself, but in the reward to come and our worthiness to suffer as a witness to God.

"and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." -Romans 8:17-18

"and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort." -2 Corinthians 1:5-7

"strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."" -Acts 14:22

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you in prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." -Revelation 2:10

Jesus identifies those suffering persecution for His sake with the prophets of old; "for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (5:12b). Its a blessing in itself to be named among those prophets.

"but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people and on His dwelling place." -2 Chronicles 36:16

"who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men." -1 Thes 2:15

"As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful." -James 5:10-11

Jesus is teaching not only to endure trials, tribulation and persecution, but count it a blessing and rejoice in the prospects that arise out of them.

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven;" -Matthew 5:44-45a

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High;" -Luke 6:35a

What better evidence of God in our lives than to go against human nature, who wants to repay evil with evil, than to bless those responsible and pray for our persecutors; keeping our eyes on Jesus and the hope in His return to take us to our eternal home in heaven! Amen!

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The Beatitudes in Review
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In closing this study of the Beatitudes in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, I would like to restate them in the light of the expanded definitions for key words and various Scripture verses we encountered in our studies.

(Remember, "Blessed" is defined as, "privileged recipient of divine favor." [BAG Lexicon])

[1]- Blessed are those who realize their inability to improve their own spiritual condition, for the Kingdom of Heaven awaits these humble ones.

[2]- Blessed are those who express their deep sorrow over anxiety in awareness of their sin, as well as sin in general, for they will find joy in the sin-free Kingdom of Heaven.

[3]- Blessed are those who calmly accept their fate, be it unjust, in this world, for they shall rule in the next (i.e.- the Kingdom of Heaven).

[4]- Blessed are those who crave righteousness and diligently seek it; for they will find it in abundance in the Kingdom of Heaven.

[5]- Blessed are those who have compassion in their judgment of others and seek to relieve their sorrows and wants, their own sorrows and wants will be relieved and they themselves will receive compassion in their own judgment and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

[6]- Blessed are those with upright and sincere motives, void of evil and being free from guilt, for they will not be ashamed in the presence of God and enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

[7]- Blessed are those who count their own desires of lesser importance in hopes of bringing about peace with all, for they will be proclaimed the true heirs in the Kingdom of Heaven.

[8]- Blessed are those who are downtrodden for living out My (Jesus') words for they will be highly exalted, receiving great rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We must remember these are not laws, the "Eight Commandments", as it were, of the New Testament. They are an accurate description of the "norms" of the Kingdom. Nor are they "formulas" or methods to "get in" the Kingdom of Heaven, but a description of those who will. These "norms" are totally against our human "me/mine first" nature in which we exalt ourselves and our desires above all. After studying these Beatitudes, I realize more the ever, in no uncertain terms, I do not have the "right stuff" to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But I'm a born again believer in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, my Savior and Messiah. It's His sacrifice at the cross that saved me from the wrath of God for my sins. Is this a conflict in doctrine?

Not at all. Belief in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior does save us from an eternal separation from God. It is a gift of God; something we could never earn. Once "saved" from condemnation, we must grow in a relationship with God, using His life changing power found in His Holy Spirit to conform us to a new and holy nature; like those found in Heaven. Once we confess Jesus as our Savior, we have His power to live every moment like He would have us live it. We, unlike the lost world, have no excuse. But God is patient and loves us so, that He will forgive our stumbling along the way. He provides His grace and power to transform us to a Christ-like child of God, a true son with a, complete reward, a full inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The question is this: Do we want to receive a full reward from our Lord for living a life He exhorts us to live, or will we be content just "getting in," taking advantage of His mercy and free gift of salvation.

Let's pray:

Lord God, our heavenly Father and Savior, we love You and thank You for Your wonderful plan of salvation to an undeserving and rebellious race. We call upon Your mercy and grace to help us. We cannot, in our own flesh, ever hope to achieve these "norms" of Your Kingdom. We wish to mature in spirit to actually live out these Beatitudes as norms in our lives. We wish to be full partakers in the joys You have fore-ordained for those who live out Your Word in obedient service to You and our fellow man. Lord, to put it simply, we need You working in us to obey You. Please search our hearts and bring to light anything that may hinder our movement toward You. We pray in the name of Jesus, Your Son, Amen.

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Matthew 5:13
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Immediately after Jesus lays out the "norms" of the kingdom through the Beatitudes, He gives examples of practical applications through illustrative metaphors. In the first part of the verse, He states that our task as Christians is to be a mediating force for good in the world.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." -Matthew 5:13

Let find the Biblical significance of "salt." In Leviticus, we see it is commanded by God to be used in food offerings:

"Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you should season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt." (Leviticus 2:13)

We also see a reference to a "Covenant of Salt" between God and Israel:

"All the offerings of the holy gifts, which the sons of Israel offers the Lord, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord to you and your descendants with you." (Numbers 18:19)

"Do you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the rule over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?"
(2 Chronicles 13:5)

By these usages of salt we can see a picture of a solemn oath with God, and when we acknowledge Jesus as our Savior, we too, as Christians, make a "Covenant of Salt," which Jesus exhorts us to live out in this sermon. Let's look in 2nd Kings to see this "salt" in action:

READ: 2 Kings 2:19-22

The LORD purified the spring with salt. Our influence in the world today could have that same "freshening" effect. The newspapers and television are packed with news of evil deeds. It lifts the heart to hear of good deeds. Helping an elderly person get an item in the market place that's a bit out of their reach is salting a situation. I'm reminded of James 1:27...

"This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." (James 1:27)

The effect of our salt can improve a situation by making it more palatable.

"Can something tasteless be eaten without salt, or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" (Job 6:6)

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how to respond to each person." (Colossians 4:6)

Our salt can also be unsavory and spoil our witness for the Lord.

"If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless." (James 1:26)

This is what Jesus is referring to in the next part of the verse:

"...but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It's good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men." (Matthew 5:13b)

"Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It's useless either for the soil or the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 14:34-35)

"Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50)

I feel many have mistakenly interpreted these verses to point to a loss of one's salvation after "backsliding" or turning from the Lord. In keeping with the analogy set forth by Jesus, and in light of the other Biblical usage of "salt," salt is NOT salvation, but, service for the Lord. If we sin before the world, we lose our witness as a Christian. Especially those who have made the Lord's service an occupation. Within the last several years, we have seen several "televangelists" lose their ministries due to sin. Once lost, how can we regain it again? We can't. Our witness and service is "cast out" and out

positions and activities in our church is lost. We are made out as typical examples of hypocritical Christians and are "trampled under foot by men" of the world. We can be forgiven by God (as 1 John 1:9 and Hosea 14:1-2 point out) but our service is now tarnished before the world.

If we follow our Lord's direction, our words and actions can do much good. A "living witness" is worth more than a thousand words. But that's a double-edge sword. One bad example may have more effect than many good ones. This is why we must prayerfully seek to put on the full armor of God...

"Therefore, take up the full armor, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." (Ephesians 6:13)

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Matthew 5:14-16
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Jesus' second metaphor has His followers being light in darkness. If salt is our witness, light is our carrying out that witness in a dark world. In the context of the metaphor itself, light is the substance that defines depths of darkness. Darkness is dark with or without light; but it's the light by contrast that exposes the darkness thus making it known. The brighter the light, the darker the dark.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." -Matthew 5:14-16

Light metaphorically denotes God, good, truth, understanding, etc. Let us examine some Scripture for these usages:

"Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but have the light of life.'" -John 8:12

"You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of your presence." -Psalms 90:8 [NIV]

"For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it should come to light." -Mark 4:22

"For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light." -Psalms 36:9 [NIV]

"You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light." -Psalms 18:28 [NIV]

The Lord created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. He no doubt could of created it in no time at all and wasn't actually tired when He rested. He must of had some illustrations in mind with the creation process. We take note of the first day of creation:

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness." -Genesis 1:3-4

In this initial act of creation, God established the metaphor of light being good, and furthermore separated the light from the darkness, which, we notice He did not call good. This contrast and separation is a very basic, fundamental teaching throughout Scripture. We are exhorted to maintain the distinction between the two, and the followers of God are not to "walk in darkness"...

"I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness." -John 12:46

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" -Isaiah 5:20

"for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;" -1 Thessalonians 5:5

"For anyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. But he who practices truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." -John 3:20-21

"for you were formerly darkness, but know you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light." -Ephesians 5:8

Jesus said in John 9:5...

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

But, Jesus went to the Father who is in heaven; who is the light now?

"For thus the Lord has commanded us, `I have placed you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth'" -Acts 13:47

"Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world," -Philippians 2:15

"You are the light of the world..." -Matthew 5:14

We are not light in ourselves but as quoted above we are "light in the Lord (Eph 5:8). Our lives should be reflective of the light of Christ found in all believers. The end of verse 14 says, "...A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." If we construct our lives as to hide in the valleys, we won't be seen living for the Lord. However, if we built on a hill, and let the light shine, we cannot be hidden.

In the next verse, Jesus illustrates the absurdity of hiding our "light"...

"Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a peck-measure, but on a lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house." (v14)

"And He was saying to them, `A lamp is not brought to be put under a peck-measure, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand?'" -Mark 4:21

"Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light." -Luke 8:16

"No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in the cellar, nor under a peck-measure, but on the lampstand, in order that those who enter may see the light." -Luke 11:33

The whole point of lighting a lamp is to give off light to be seen by others. In today's terms, we wouldn't turn on our desk lamp and then throw a blanket over it! Nor would we put it under the desk. We would put it out so the room would be illuminated as much as possible. So should it be with our Christian life; our Christian witness to Jesus in our life.

Note the choice of the word house as the place the light is used. It gives a sense of intimacy. Not lighting a single lamp and standing on a mountain in an attempt to light the valley, but in a single house, providing light for those in our immediate area. It pictures the proper perspective we should seek to help others. The valley does get illuminated from the collect light from those lamps burning in each house. What a wonderful portrait of the collective power, yet, personal touch of God in the lives of people.

In the last verse in this metaphor, Jesus teaches what the light represents in this illustration and what the ultimate outcome of the shining of that light.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (verse 16)

Our light is to shine so the end result is that recipient of that light ends up glorifying God. We must take the responsibility of the "positioning" of our light very seriously, because, by implication, we can shine our light wrongly, thus limiting the glory God receives from our light. We could actually shine our light as to cause people to not glorify God. We must be careful not to shine our light in people's eyes (so to speak), nor should we aim it, concentrating it in one part of the room, while dimming it in another. We must tastefully shine it in every situation so God, our Father, is seen reflected in His sons. In many cases, our light won't be accepted, no matter how we shine it, but Jesus is asking us to be shrewd and do the best we can. Remember Jesus' parable of the unjust steward?

READ: Luke 16:1-8

"And his master praised the unrighteous steward because he acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light." -Luke 16:8

Not that the master approved of the steward's unjust means, but he admired his cleverness. When we shine our light, we can pray to God for wisdom and use our resources shrewdly to obtain the desired outcome; namely the giving of glory to God by those who receive our light.

So, just what IS our Light?

Our salt is more or less keeping ourselves pure as to be able to serve our Lord. Light is that actual service. And we find Jesus defines light in verse 16 as "good works." Peter conveys Jesus' teachings in his epistle:

"Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good

deeds [or works], as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation." -1 Peter 2:12

Let us look at these words a bit closer in hopes of better understanding what "works" are considered "good." The Greek word translated "good" is "kalos" (Strong's #2570) means more than "morally pure"; it adds to it the characteristics of being desirable as well. "Beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy" (TDNT/Thayer). The Greek used for "works" is "ergon" (Strong's #2041) and simply means, "an act, deed or thing done that takes effort" (TDNT/Thayer).

So we are to "shine our light", "in such a way" (in other words "position it") so as to obtain the desired effect. That effect is praising of God due to His obvious inspiration and participation in any act or deed done, due to it's attractive and admirable qualities.

Perhaps the best way to understand the biblical meaning of "works" is to see other examples in Scripture of the word "ergon" (which, in the proper tense is, "erga").

"Now when John in prison heard the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples." -Matthew 11:2

"The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them." -Matthew 23:2-3 (also v.5)

"But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me." -John 5:36

"They answered Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.'" -John 8:39

READ: John 3:19-21, 10:37-42, 14:10-12

"...that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." -Acts 26:20b

READ: James 2:14-26

"What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?... Even so faith if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." -James 2:14, 17

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Matthew 5:17-20
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READ> Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus is about to enter the section in His sermon correcting the then current teachings on various points in the Law. But before doing so, He reveals His position on "the Law and the Prophets" (the Jewish terminology for the Scriptures, which encompasses the five books of Moses and the writings of the Prophets, i.e. Isaiah, Daniel, etc.). We saw as we studied the Bea-

titudes, Jesus' teachings were not new, but found in the said Scriptures. However, many of His interpretations and applications clashed with the traditions held in that day.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill." -Matthew 5:17

This is the first declaration of Jesus' link to Old Testament prophecy. What starts out to be a routine "disclaimer" by a preacher accused of misleading teachings, turns into an announcement that He is the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets! The Greek word (pleroo [play-ro-o] Strong's #4137) translated "fulfill" has a few important implications. Jesus is not going to abolish the Law, but, is in actuality living under it (e.g.- Gal 4:4) and fully living it out. Not like so many of the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees who were experts at circumventing it (e.g.- Mat 23:1-36). Also, Jesus is implying that He is who the Law and the Prophets prophesied to come; namely the Messiah! (See Mat 1:22, 2:15, 2:23, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, etc. & Isaiah 53 as but a few examples of many Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus)

It's common in Jesus' teachings to see several "layers" of implications. This is most noted in His parables.

READ> Matthew 13:10-17

Those who had "ears to hear" were amazed at the teachings of Jesus (e.g.- Mt 7:28-29, 22:33, Mk 1:22, 10:24, Lk 2:47, 4:32). Those whose hearts were darkened with evil thoughts heard only His claim to uphold the Law and sought to catch Him by that very Law (e.g.- Mk 12:13, Lk 11:53-54).

"And the chief priests heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for all the multitude was astonished at His teaching." -Mark 11:18

One thought made clear though hindsight is that Jesus is God; the second person in the Trinity. Let's read 2 Timothy 3:16...

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;"

Not only was He living by the Law, and He was the end result prophesied by the Law. He, as God, inspired it! What divine patients it must of taken to deal with those who cross-examined Him by His own words! And the good news is He passed the tests; first by Satan (Mat 4:1-11, paralleled in Lk 4:1-13 & Mk 1:12-13), then by men (Mat Chapter 12 and many others...). If anybody had the authority to teach on the Law, it was He. John, in his gospel, calls Jesus the "Word" (logos, [log-os] Strong's #3056), the physical embodiment of God's word; hence the phrase, "the Living Word."

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."
-John 1:1-3

What better teacher of the Word, than the Word Himself! Jesus pointed out the Scriptures point to Him in John 5:39...

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me."

Jesus simplified the whole "Law and the Prophets", that's to say in our terms, the whole Old Testament, down to two "commandments".

READ: Matthew 22:36-40

"Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." -Matthew 7:12

Thus Jesus did not come to abolish the Scriptures; nor did He come to update or change them; but clarify their intentions from the beginning through His life, death and resurrection.

Jesus then goes on to state in verse 18 that not only has He not come to abolish the Law (vr. 17) but the Scriptures will be fulfilled in their entirety, down to the smallest detail:

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." -Matthew 5:18

"But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of the letter of the Law to fail." -Luke 16:17

This is the first appearance of the phrase, Truly (or "Verily" [KJV]) I say to you"; a signature saying of Jesus that appears some 68 times in the New Testament. Actually, the Greek word which is translated "truly" is "amen" (Strong's #281), which is from a Hebrew word, " `amen" (Strong's #0543) and is, you guessed it, the same word we say in English, "amen". The use of "truly" is to show the position of "amen" in conjunction with "I say to you" denotes that what proceeds is important and true and should be received as such. "Amen" used at the end of a statement is an affirmation of truth and it's fulfillment. Thus it is common for a congregation to respond with "amen" at the end of a Scripture reading or in agreement with a speaker of the Word.

Jesus emphatically reaffirms His support of the Scriptures in this verse by two complimentary, yet contrasting ways. The first is in a "macro" scale; saying that the "heavens and earth shall pass away" rather than the Law be forsaken. This paints a picturesque vision on the greatness of the Scriptures; greater in magnitude than the physical universe which is more likely to dissolve than the Scriptures to not be fulfilled. Jesus used this same phrase to describe the permanency of His own words:

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away." -Matthew 24:35 (paralleled in Mark 13:31 & Luke 21:33)

This, by inference, equates Jesus' words with Scripture! This may not seem much to us Christians today, but, to the people of Jesus' time, a new prophet with words of authority was mighty big news!

"The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." -Matthew 7:28-29

The second way Jesus supports the Scriptures is in a "micro" scale; saying not the "smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law" (The KJV renders, "one jot or one tittle..."). The Greek word behind "smallest letter" is "iota" (i-o'-ta, Strong #2503) which is the smallest Greek letter, we would call "i". It presumably refers to the 10th letter in the Hebrew alphabet

which but a (`) apostrophe. The Greek word behind "stroke" is "keraia" (ker-ah'-yah, Strong's #2762) which means "little horn." It presumably refers to the little hooks or horns that differentiate Hebrew letters the very closely resemble each other [both defs from TDNT]. Jesus is saying in essence, the least important (as men view it) nor the most subtle differences will pass way until all is accomplished! This verse is a might strong endorsement of the Law and the prophets.

What is "all" and when will it be accomplished? Well, in light of the context, I would say "all" is the whole Law and the prophets; that is the Old Testament. Since Christ equates His words with Scripture, and various New Testament writers considered their work inspired by the Holy Spirit (e.g.- 1 Cor 2:12-13, Eph 3:1-17, 2 Pe 3:15, etc.), we can say "all" includes the whole Bible. So, the Bible is "valid" until it is completed. And according to John in Revelation, that will be after the old heaven and earth are destroyed and the new heaven and earth are created (Rev 21:1-22:17). This is not to say that the word of God ever becomes invalid, but, the Scriptures have a set purpose and will work until it is finished.

"So shall My word be which goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." -Isaiah 55:11

Jesus continues His support of the Law in verse 19:

"Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." -Matthew 5:19

There are several implications in this verse. First, we know we should follow in deeds the whole Law and not annul or set aside any part of it:

"Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it." -Deuteronomy 12:3

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all." -James 2:10

"`Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, `Amen'." -Deuteronomy 27:26

But those who annuls the least of these commandments and so teaches others may be called least in the kingdom, but are still in the kingdom. This may refer to true believers who have their "little white sins" which they can somehow justify, but it's OK in their case. Jesus is saying the Scriptures are so true, that all circumvention of the commandments contained in it, no matter how small will be judged.

Notice it is not simply one who annuls the least of His commandments, but those who teach that practice as well. Now this isn't limited only to those who teach classes in sinning. One who annuls is teaching others to annul by his example, without need of a single word from his mouth! These words pierce us parents doubly deep.

"but whoever cause one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea." -Matthew 18:6

We Christians must live our lives so we are not a stumbling block for others. We may, at times, give up our liberty for the best interest of others (e.g.- 1 Cor 10:23). This is not necessarily an easy thing to do. It takes the power of God in us to hammer the flesh into submission. Paul likens this battle with the flesh to an athletic competition:

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we [compete for] an imperishable [wreath]. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." -1 Corinthians 9:24-27

The Word of God sometimes cuts deep when exposing sin. What we do when sin is exposed may be more important than the sin itself. We know Jesus paid for our sins (Luke 24:44-48) and we need but confess them and ask forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10). However, we may try to rationalize our sin, like the Pharisees (Luke 10:25-37). We could also feel sorry for ourselves, like Judas (Mat. 27:2-5) who hung himself rather than reap the fruit of his betrayal. Or we can be like Peter, who after denying Jesus wept bitterly (Mat 28:75), but knew the love of God and was joyous at Jesus' return (e.g.- John 21:7).

But Jesus' power in our lives goes far beyond picking up the broken pieces of our sinful lives. He can lead us down a path of righteousness and keep us from such failures. He breaks the bonds of sin and exhorts us to follow His example and His teachings and provides us with His Holy Spirit to be an influence for good in our lives. His Spirit is superior to the influence of the flesh and we need but call upon Him to see us past any temptation. His Spirit can change our bad habits and sin tendencies into holiness. And with this holiness, we can live a victorious life, every day! It's all a matter of faith and obedience. Do we want to obey God and do we believe God has given us the power to obey God?

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy..."
- Jude 1:24

"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised." -Hebrews 10:35-36

Let's return from that excursion to the last verse (20) in this section:

"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

The traditional amplification of this passage, is, the Pharisees knew not Christ as their Savior. Therefore they were not righteous in the Eyes of God. While this is true, Jesus had not imparted the means of salvation explicitly at this time. More likely, it was a commentary on their hypocrisy, something He deals with in this very sermon (e.g.- Mat 6:1-6, 6:16-18, 7:1-5, 7:15-20).

The scribes of the Law and the Pharisees were the religious elite; thought to be pure and consecrated to service of the Lord. At first we may think this an impossible task (as the disciples did in Mat 19:16-26). However, let us read what Jesus thought of these elite ones.

READ: Matthew 23:1-36, Luke 11:37-54

"The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them." -Matthew 23:2-3

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte (or convert); and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." -Matthew 23:15

This in and of itself can be a whole series of studies; but let us look at the general theme in relation to our text in Mat 5:17-20. Jesus did not support throwing out the scribes and Pharisees. Actually, we see in Mat 23:2-3, He exhorts the crowd to do what they teach; while chastising the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy in not following their own words. I think what Jesus would of preferred if they would of repented and followed Him so they could perform their duties properly. Jesus was not criticizing the Scriptures, just those self-proclaimed leaders who themselves pompously rose above the Scriptures; an act they accused Him of.

We also see in Mat 23:15, those religious elite would go to great lengths to make a convert. Then, after they would disciple them in their hypocritical ways, would end up making them twice as bad as themselves. How can we fulfill the "Great Commission" and "teach them all that I commanded you" (Mat 28:20) if we do not follow His commandments ourselves? We will only proceed to have disciples even farther from the truth than we are. Did not Jesus say in Matthew 10:24-25...

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he becomes as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they call the head of the household Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!"

In Review:

In these four verses, Jesus answers the charges of subverting the Scriptures by saying no. In fact, Jesus supports the Scriptures to the smallest details. And whoever teaches different is least in the kingdom. Jesus says He is in actuality fulfilling the Scriptures. Living them out to the fullest and is in reality the One prophesied by them. Whoever lives out these Scriptures and teaches others to do so, is great in the kingdom. It is the scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders and His accusers who are actually circumventing the Scriptures. We have a choice to make as Christians. Will we be scribes and Pharisees, talking a good game, but, playing lousy; or will we seek God's power in living out the Word, as Jesus Christ did His entire life. It's up to us.

"And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be saved?' And looking upon them Jesus said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" - Matthew 19:26

Lord God, our heavenly Father, we love you and wish to serve our Savior by living out your Word. Jesus knew the problems we face when He said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mat 26:41). We need Your power in our lives to overcome that weakness. Thank You for Your promises to help us. Build in our hearts a fortress of faith; full of love and obedience to Your Word. We ask and pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Teaching From the Law

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Immediately after Jesus' sweeping endorsement of the Scriptures, He begins to correct misconceptions about the Law and bless us with real life applications, illustrating the spirit of the Law in all its purity and truth. We note that His teachings do not apply the Law to salvation, but rather a guideline for a relationship between our attitudes and our actions in life as well as the judgment incurred as a result of those actions. The pharisees took pride in their following of the Law and thus earned heaven. This was a far cry from Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes on being "poor in spirit." Jesus was teaching, in essence, the Law goes far beyond the "letter" of Pharisaical traditions to a level of righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees.

READ: Matthew 5:21-26

Jesus used a format for these teachings that has essentially three parts:

- [1]- You have heard... [Scripture and/or tradition]
- [2]- But I say...[His amplification]
- [3]- [His application]

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Matthew 5:21-22

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In the first segment, Jesus teaches from the Law about murder saying:

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the [judgment]. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be [liable to the judgment]; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." -Matthew 5:21-22

The Greek word behind "judgment" is "krisis" (Strong's #2920) means distinction, discrimination, judgment, decision, award, court, ect. (various lexicons used). The NASB chose to use "court", probably because of the latter use of the Greek word "sunedrion" (English: Sanhedron, Strong's #4892) translated "supreme court", giving a smooth flow from court to supreme court to fiery hell. The problem is the Greek phrase, "ta krisei" almost without exception refers to THE judgment, as in Judgment Day; a day we will all face (Mat 12:36 Rom 14:10, etc.) One who is a murderer will be guilty in that day of Judgment. This was a well known, universally accepted fact in Jesus' day and is true. However, Jesus takes it a step further in v22 and adds one who hates his brother is guilty as well in that day of Judgment. Hate, basically, is the root cause of murder, so Jesus thus goes beyond the letter of the Law to its spirit or inspiration.

But Jesus goes even farther. Merely calling our brother, "raca" (Aramaic, roughly equivalent to "Empty headed.") would have us guilty before the highest court. The use of the word "sunedrion" in a proper name sense

could refer to the Sanhedron, the highest court in Israel. However, the word in itself means, "a sitting together, gathering, etc". Let's look at Matthew 12:41-42 (or Luke 11:31-32):

"The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

Note we have the use of "the judgment;" the very same Greek phrase found in our current study verses, Matthew 5:21-22. Also we see a "gathering or assembly" of witnesses against that generation (the Greek word for "condemn" is "katakrimo" (Strong's #2632) and means "to place in a guilty light by contrast"; thus my use of "witnesses"). This most supreme court will gather at The Judgment.

Back to our text; Jesus goes even beyond saying we will be guilty in the day of Judgment for calling our brother, "Empty Headed." He says if we call our brother, "fool" we are guilty enough for the fires of hell itself! As a side note, I think it would be unreasonably legalistic to differentiate between "Raca (Empty-Headed)" and "fool" and say one is in danger before the supreme court, but the other is worse and deserving of hell (as the KJV and NIV imply). I think Jesus was using a style of teaching that used several parallel examples to illustrate a point.

READ: James 3:2-5, 2:20-26 and Hebrews 11

With all that in mind, Jesus is in essence saying:

"Yes, those who murder are in danger of the Judgment at the end of this age, but those who hate their brother are as well. By simply calling your brother, "empty-headed," puts you in danger in the Judgment. In fact calling your brother a fool makes you guilty enough for hell!"

These exceptionally strong words must of convicted many who would never kill a brother, but, would insult him even to the point of hatred while demanding justice and punishment of such a killer. We see a similar incident in the Gospel of John.

READ: John 8:1-11

Jesus wasn't condoning the woman's behavior as appropriate. In fact, He admonished her to "go and sin no more." What behavior was going unadressed by the crowd was there was a man caught with her that was not brought to justice as well.

"But if you show partiality you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." -James 2:9

"You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike." -Deuteronomy 1:17a

[Deu 16:19, Acts 10:34-35, Rom 2:4, many others...]

As mentioned in our last section, the whole Law hangs on two commandments; Love God with our all, and love others as ourselves. Hate and anger with our brothers/sisters breaks this, thus we are guilty of all.

"For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." -James 2:10

Sometimes we Christians fail to realize how deep and how heavy our sin really is. It's through these teachings we can see just how short we fall from the holiness of God. We can see why some people run from God and reject religion as a way to hide from this awesome millstone around their necks. But teachings like these ever more illustrate the love and mercy of God; the beauty and splendor of the gift of salvation! We could never pay nor earn it on our own. We simply dig ourselves deeper in debt. Jesus paid it all at the cross! He died once for many, as prophesied by Caiaphas in John 11:49-52 and explained in Hebrews (i.e.-Heb 9:24-28) and typified by this verse from 1 Peter:

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;" -1 Peter 3:18

Praise the Lord we have a Savior, a Advocate, a Champion who took the hit for us; and not for us alone but anyone who confesses He is Lord shall be saved as well. Saved from what? Saved from The Judgment. However, we Christians will still face a judgment of our own before that Advocate and Savior based on our deeds as Christians.

"For we must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." -2 Corinthians 5:10

Jesus' teachings are essential as a guide to sanctification through His Spirit working to conform us to the holiness of God. His absolute standards are our absolute goal and by His grace, we can stand before our King and hear:

"Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master." - Matthew 25:21

Lord God, our Heavenly Father and Savior. We love and thank you for your salvation. Only you could offer such a wonderful plan. No respect for position or fame; learned or simple; race or nationality. Thank you Lord Jesus for bearing my (our) sin. It's a load I had no hope in bearing myself. I (we) ask you to search our minds and souls and prune out the thorns and renew your Spirit within us to be your sons and daughters, walking in your ways, obeying your commandments. Keep us blameless in the day of judgment before your throne. It's only through Your grace in our lives that we can hope to live as you would have us. In Jesus name we pray. A-men.

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Matthew 5:23-26
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We know these verses are related to the previous verses on Jesus' teachings on murder for two reasons. First, we have the three-step format previously mentioned. Matthew 5:21 was the "You have heard..." portion of this section and verse 21 was the "But I say..." portion. Verses 23 to 26 are the real applications of the spirit of the law on murder. Second, we know by the

use of the qualifiers, "if" (Greek: ean, Strong #1437) and "therefore" (Greek: oun, Strong #3767). Jesus is saying in essence, "Keeping in mind what I just said, consider these..." Both are hypothetical, but very possible scenarios used to further illustrate in common terms the application of Jesus' teachings.

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." -Matthew 5:23-24

The first pictures a man in the solemn act of offering a sacrifice at the altar of God. At the altar he remembers his brother, that's to say, fellow believer, has something against him. Notice Jesus does not qualify it by informing whether the complaint was justified or not. Jesus says this is so important that he is to leave in the middle of this solemn act and go reconcile himself to his brother, then return to present the offering. Jesus is applying the Law of Murder to include anger, name calling and even skirmishes between Christians. These attributes, which may seem minor to us, are major to God, for He, in His Almighty Wisdom, knows the short and long term damage these sins cause. These attitudes ultimately effect even our relationship with God. Thus, it's imperative to immediately amend these breaches in trust between brothers, no matter whose fault it is, even if our service to God is interrupted in the process. That is how God views the importance of Christians loving one another. This also gives us a yardstick for measuring how pleased God would be with our Christian fellowship. On to the next verse:

"Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown in prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent. -Matthew 5:25-26

"For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to settle with him, in order that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the constable, and the constable throw you in prison. I say to you, you shall not get out of there until you have paid the very last cent." -Luke 12:58-59

The second situation again conveys hast in reconciliation, only this time with an opponent. It would have been easy to justify reconciliation only with our brothers if Jesus would have stopped at verse 24. Verse 25 exhorts us to reconcile with our enemies as well (Jesus continues this thought later on in Mat 5:43-48). This verse "raises" the stakes from the abstract concept of spiritual separation from fellowship with God for not reconciling with our Christian brother, to something a bit more tangible; imprisonment for failure to reconcile with our opponent.

We must be careful not to "spiritualize" this verse and possibly miss the point. While it is true if we fail to reconcile ourselves to God through the saving grace of Jesus Christ, we risk the danger of punishment on the Day of Judgment. However, the context has this verse nestled in the mist of teachings about our attitudes toward out fellow man. Rather, I think the meaning is this; Not only are we to use our Christian liberty to reconcile with our Christian brother, but, that spirit of reconciliation extends to our enemies as well. Failure to reconcile effects our relationship with God, and failure to reconcile with our opponents may lead to us suffering at his hand.

Verse 26 in essence says, "And if you refuse to attempt reconciliation and suffer at you opponents hand, don't expect God to bail you out."

"...Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides." -Mark 4:24, Matthew 7:2 and Luke 6:38

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." - Matthew 6:14-15 [Also see Matthew 18:15-35 & 25:24-30]

I'm not suggesting we compromise our faith for peace sake. Let us take the example of Daniel in Daniel chapter 6 and his three friends in chapter 5. They sought to be of service to the king in all respect. But when it came time to follow the kings command and pray to the statue, they did not fight or complain. They simply trusted God and did not pray. Daniel who was high in the government did not protest the law forbidding prayer to any other god except the king's. He didn't challenge the rule in a public spectacle of prey to his God. He simply and quietly prayed to his God in heaven, in his room. Note in both cases, they were persecuted for their faith, but they also received the tremendous blessing of God's intercession and protection, both resulting in the king's praising God (an application of the principle we saw in Matthew 5:16).

God knows we can not be reconciled to all people, but:

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take you own revenge, but leave room for the wrath of God." -Romans 12:18-19a

If we really try to reconcile with those who have something against us, regardless of who is at fault, we will be blessed; even if persecuted:

"But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;" -1 Peter 3:14-15 [See also James 1:2-4 and Matthew 5:10-12]

If we do not try, however, we may suffer anyway, and lose the blessing for enduring for the Lord:

"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right, rather for doing what is wrong." -1 Peter 3:17

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Matthew 5:27-30
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Jesus' next subject in teaching from the Law is on adultery:

"You have heard it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." -Matthew 5:27-28

We recognize it is in the same "You have heard... But I say..." format (with His application to follow in verses 29 & 30). This teaching also takes the interpretation past a shallow, legalistic view to the deep underlying spirit of the Law.

Jesus again quotes from the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:14 (repeated again by Moses in Deuteronomy 5:18). The graveness of adultery is conveyed by the punishment prescribed by God for breakers of that law:

READ: Leviticus 20:3-21

"If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." -Leviticus 20:3

The words of Solomon solemnly warns about adultery:

READ: Proverbs 6:20-35

"The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; he who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out." -Proverbs 6:32-33

In these days of rampant divorces and broken families as well as various sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS, one can easily see that these biblical quotes speak ever more loudly today. But Jesus goes beyond the fornicative qualities of adultery, to what takes place in the heart of one who looks at a woman for the express purpose of covetously desiring her for his own. Sexual purposes is implied, but, lusting for status which may be given by having a beautiful woman would qualify as well. There are no "harmless sexual fantasies" in the hearts and minds of Christians.

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" -Job 31:1

"Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her catch you with her eyelids" -Proverbs 6:25

"having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed" -2 Peter 2:14

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." -1 John 2:16

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished [finished], it brings forth death." -James 1:14-15

Jesus' amplification on the law of adultery confirms the above Scripture dispelling any legalistic interpretation which would allow one to "look but don't touch". Pornography is sin as well as "swimsuit issues" in sports magazines; anything that would promote lust. Jesus is protecting a woman from becoming merely a object of pleasure to be enjoyed by an admirer. Husbands should look closely at this for we fall guilty as well if we look at our wives as objects of pleasure. Paul gives a good picture of the depth of our commitment to our wives:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave

Himself up for her; that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church" -Ephesians 5:25-29

May I add, though this may address men in general, the teachings of Jesus on adultery apply to women who look at men with lust in their heart as well. Sadly, our modern society has succeeded in spreading what was a predominantly male problem, to women as well.

Jesus uses the next two verses to graphically portray the absolute need to take whatever steps necessary to separate ourselves from this sin:

"And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it away from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell."
-Matthew 5:29-30

This advice shouldn't be taken in a literal sense, for, even with no eyes, one can still lust in one's mind and heart. I think we see an exaggeration to illustrate the seriousness of flirting with sin.

READ: Matthew 18:6-9 and Mark 9:41-48

We see other such examples of graphic terms, such as "death of the body or flesh" used to alert us of the serious need to flee from sin.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." -Romans 6:6
[KJV]

"for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."
-Romans 8:13

"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." -Galatians 5:24

"Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come" -Colossians 3:5-6

"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it. For what has a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? -Luke 9:24-25

Sin is nothing to fool with. It leads to death (James 1:15). Death of a relationship, death of a job, death of one's body or death of one's soul. If one had a problem with drunkenness, for example, one should never allow one's self to be in a situation in which alcohol was easily available. If it means changing jobs, ceasing friendships, or moving to another town, it's better to lose those earthly comforts than compromise or even lose your heavenly ones.

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strifes, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." -Galatians 5:19-21

Jesus in these first two expositions on the Law reveals the depth and holiness of God; well past the conventional views of righteousness, and leaves for those who wish to accept it, the perfect example to follow.

Lord we fall so short of Your righteousness; praise Your Name You have very long arms to reach down to lift us up! We confess our absolute inability to live according to Your standards on our own and ask for Your help and the power to change and grow in the Spirit toward Your Holiness. We love and thank You in Jesus name, Amen.

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Matthew 5:31-32
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Jesus segues from teaching on adultery to divorce. Jesus quotes from the Law (Deu 24:1) as the Pharisees applied it. With but one sentence, He cuts through centuries of rationalization and circumvention done by those who sought to divorce their wives for the reason of their choosing, turning the blame on them, and exposes the sole acceptable reason in the eyes of the One who gave the Law.

"And it was said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of dismissal'; but I say to you that everyone that divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." -Matthew 5:31-32 [Also Luke 16:18]

Let us first look at Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

READ: Deuteronomy 24:1-4

The actual subject of this passage is, if a man divorces his wife, and she marries another, and he divorces her, she cannot remarry the first. Now, we can look inside this command and ask what criteria are given as the premise for this divorce in the first place. Let's re-look at verse 1a:

"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce..." -Deu 24:1a

The reason for the divorce is not simply that her has not found favor in his eyes (in other words, he doesn't like her), but that he has found an indecency (uncleanness [KJV], lit. from Hebrew, "indecent thing") in her. Most likely this means in the consummation of their wedding, the husband has found she is not a virgin, which implies she was with another man (We can see this applied by Joseph to Mary in Matthew 1:19).

READ: Deu 22:13-21

The Pharisees, experts and bending the rules, perverted the Law to obtain "legal" divorces for virtually any reason that a woman displeased him. One in particular, tested Jesus about this very concept.

READ: Matthew 19:3-9 and Mark 10:2-12

Jesus defends the seriousness and sanctity of marriage as being instituted by God, therefore, no one has authority to break what God has joined. He again corrects the erroneous interpretation of Deu 24:1 and restates that adultery as the only legitimate reason for divorce. This Pharisee would of done well to read Malachi 2:13-16...

READ: Malachi 2:13-16

God requires the woman to be chaste, but also requires the husband to be fair in his application of Deu 24:1.

Adultery within a marriage is the supreme act of defiance, defilement and rejection of his/her spouse. It defiles the union and vows of marriage. God likens His relationship with His people to a marriage. Following other "gods" is called "harlotry" and "adultery" in some of God's strongest language found in His Word.

READ: Jeremiah 3:1-10

"And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also." -Jeremiah 3:8

READ: Ezekiel 16:22-43

"Thus says the Lord God, 'Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness was uncovered though your harlotries with your lovers and all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols... Thus I shall judge you, like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy.'" -Ezekiel 16:36, 38

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy to God." -James 4:4

So, does that mean we should divorce our spouse if they betray our covenant of marriage? Although it would be lawful to do so, consider the next few verses of Jeremiah 3:1-10, starting at verse 11:

READ: Jeremiah 3:11-14

"'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the Lord; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the Lord; 'I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God and have scattered your favors to the strangers under every tree (i.e.- harlotry with idols) and you have not obeyed My voice,' declares the Lord." -Jeremiah 3:12-13

"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." -James 2:13

"'Be on guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," forgive him.' And the apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'" -Luke 17:3-5

However, we must remember adultery is a grave sin; a sin unto death. We may be witnessing a glimpse of God's judgment. in the form of AIDS and other deadly diseases associated with promiscuity. Perhaps the most chilling evidence of God's hate for adultery is, saved or not, adulterers will not enter the Kingdom of God:

READ: Galatians 5:19-21

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God." -1 Corinthians 6:9-10

"and nothing unclean and no one who practices abominations and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." -Revelation 21:27

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven." -Matthew 7:21

This is not to say this is saying God will "divorce" us from our salvation...

"It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us: if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself." -2 Timothy 2:11-13

If I may amplify this verse:

"If we died with Him [repenting believers], we will live with Him [we will go to heaven]; if we endure [seek to live righteously], we shall also reign with Him [we will take part in His kingdom of heaven]; if we deny Him [we reject His commandments and live unrighteously], He also will deny us [He will deny us authority and limit our access in the kingdom of heaven]; if we are faithless [if we backslide completely and lose faith], He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself [we are still saved, as His word cannot be overturned and His promises are sure]."

If God must walk away from the non-believers and limit His relationship with His brides, due to their unfaithfulness, sometimes we must separate from our unfaithful spouses. This is why it's imperative to heed Paul's advise in marrying only other Christians in 2 Corinthians 6:14...

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" -2 Corinthians 2:14

Now, if we find ourselves saved after we have married, and our spouse is an unbeliever, we are not to divorce, but live our lives as such to witness to our spouse of the love and grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:10-17

"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and

respectful behavior." -1 Peter 3:1-2

God likens his relationship with His people in the Old Testament as a marriage. Jesus, being God, calls His people in the same fashion.

READ: John 3:27-30 and Revelation 19-7-9

"...and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you." -Isaiah 62:5b

We wouldn't want, by blackmail, to bind our spouse to us, would we? Would we not want them to freely choose us bound only by love and respect? So does our Lord jealously desire our faithfulness, not by law or threats, but by our free choice to love, trust and obey Him.

In a closing note on divorce in marriage, take courage those of us who are currently divorced (or married to a previously divorced spouse); our Lord's crucifixion covers all our sins. Paul delivers the good news of Christ's liberation from the Law in Romans.

READ: Romans 7:1-6

"But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." -Romans 7:6

Praise God whose redemptive plan has length and width to cover ALL who heed His call and seek Him out! Are you wed to the Lamb in a marriage that can never be broken?

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." -Romans 8:38-39

Amen, and Amen!

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Matthew 5:33-37
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Jesus continues to abolish mis-taught Law which has become traditional with the religious elite. These verses concern vows and oaths. We have seen in other lessons that Jesus is not seeking to change the Law, but scrape off the tarnish that has been added over the years, and reveal it's purity in spirit. But beginning with these verses and continuing with the next two study lessons, it appears Jesus is altering, if not out right reversing the Law. However, as we study our verses in this lesson, I think we will find Jesus is basically saying, "If you can't do it right, with the proper attitude, don't do it at all."

READ: Matthew 5:33-37

In verse 33, Jesus is summarizing a point about vows and oaths from several places in the Scriptures:

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord

will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." -Exodus 20:7 [NKJV]

"You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:11-12

"If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." -Numbers 30:2 [All of chapter 30 deals with vows and oaths]

READ: Deu 23:21-23, Ecc 5:2-6 and Zec 8:16-17

We notice in no case vows or oaths are mandated. In fact, we read in Deuteronomy 23:22:

"However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin."

What is mandated is truth and follow through.

"Is better that you should not vow than you should vow and not pay."
-Ecclesiastes 5:5

This is why Jesus, in His "But I say to you" portion of this teaching, exhorts us not to use oaths. Knowing the evil hearts and weak spirit of man, He is trying to save us unnecessary sin, and tarnish our witness to God. Oaths and vows to God are so solemn that even if one foolishly pronounces an oath he was unknowingly unable to keep, or was wrong to do, he is still held accountable.

"Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil, in any matter one might carelessly swear about, even though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it, he will be guilty." -Leviticus 5:4 [NIV]

This was not the main thrust of His teaching, however. Let's read another time Jesus spoke in more detail on this matter.

READ: Matthew 23:16-22 and Re-read Matthew 5:34-36

Reading and listening to commentaries on these verses (Carson, Moris, Poole, Gustine) as well as some passages from the Jewish "Oral Law" contained in the Mishnah, one can gain insight to what Jesus is referring. The scribes and Pharisees would carefully choose the wording of their oaths and vows so they could opt out of fulfilling them. For example: If one swore by Jerusalem, it could be ignored. But if one swore toward Jerusalem, it was binding. Another was if one swore by heaven or earth it wasn't binding, but if one invoked God's name, it was. Jesus is, in essence, saying in verse 34 that it is binding if you swear by heaven or earth. Even though you didn't mention God's name in your oath, heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool (Isaiah 66:1). And whether you swear to or by Jerusalem, it is the Messiah's city (Psalm 48:2). We also shouldn't swear by ourselves or our own abilities, as it says in v.36 as we "cannot make one hair white or black."

We, in living a Christ-like life, should have no need of oaths to convince others we are truthful. As verse 37 suggests, our "yes" should mean just that; and our no's should mean no. Before we answer we must be sure we are able do what we offer, understand all the ramifications associated with it and actually follow through on it. Our brethren, the unsaved and our child-

ren are watch us for hypocrisy. The "Evil One" would have us build legalistic loopholes into our commitments and tarnish the purity of God, as we are His ambassadors on earth:

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us;" -2 Corinthians 5:20a

I think "rationalization" is the main cause of this type of violation within the Church today. Ask anyone who has sworn to start or follow a fitness program, stop smoking or some other bad habit, do better in school by studying more, spend more time in prayer or reading the Bible, etc. For the most part, they will have a reason justifying their failure to follow through. Jesus is saying don't invoke an oath and add sin on top of things. Pray for wisdom to make sure what we are contemplating is His will for us and prayerfully plan it out. We must lean on His Spirit within us (as we can't make our hair white or black, remember?) and do it (or stop doing it) and mean it.

Does this mean we must never swear oaths? Well, not really. God Himself has sworn oaths/vows.

READ: Hebrews 6:13-18

Jesus took an oath before the high priest that He was the Christ.

READ: Matthew 26:63-65

Paul readily swore by God to make a point.

READ: Philippians 1:8, Romans 1:9-10

From time to time, we may be asked to take an oath to affirm what we say is true, such as in court. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as what we say is true. To forbid oaths altogether, based on Jesus words here is to be too legalistic and miss the point. To put it simply, if asked to swear to an oath to confirm our words, we can. But, our words shouldn't offer an oath as means to gain respect or manipulate the hearer and limit our liability. Just as bad as lying is to lead one to draw a false conclusion or make an incorrect assumption by the trickery of our words.

Did Jesus change the course of the Scriptures? Though He has authority to do so, I would say no. To serve the Lord is a privilege. This is seen from the prophets of old to the angels in Revelation. But, if one fails in that service to a certain point which God has ordained, he/she, can lose that privilege. Classic example is that of King Saul (See Samuel Chapter 15). Men in their continual failure to adhere to the spirit of the Law, corrupted the Sabbath, festivals and sacrifices wearying God. All these point to God beyond the letter of their observances. And the Son is confirming what the Father has said in Isaiah.

READ: Isaiah 1:11-15

As stated at the beginning, Jesus, being well acquainted with our weakness, is merely seeking to save us yet more sin and keep His Father's name pure. Let's end this study on Mat 5:33-37 with a verse from James who heeded the teachings of Jesus and echoed them repeatedly in his epistle:

"But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that

you may not fall under judgment." -James 5:12

Lord God,

We praise you for your faithfulness in your oaths to us. We thank You our salvation does not hinge on us keeping ours. Fill us with the desire for truth and the strength to keep it. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 5:38-42
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The next two teachings are very closely related. In fact, in His sermon in Luke, Jesus intermingles them together. We will read at them together, but look at them individually as well.

Read: Luke 6:27-36, Matthew 5:38-42 & 5:43-48

In Matthew 5:38, Jesus quotes from Exodus 21:23-25 which pronounces punishment that equals the crime.

"But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. -[NKJV]"

This law is considered tough by some, while not tough enough by others. However, true justice is just for the injurer as well as the injured. Though someone might wish for the life of the one who injures the hand of his family member, an equal injury was the maximum penalty. Many times a fine could be substituted, if the parties agreed [See our study on ABORTION to further explore these verses and mercies under the law].

There were other verses that reiterated the "eye for an eye" theme in justice:

Read: Leviticus 24:17-22 & Deuteronomy 19:18-20

"And if a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so shall it be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth,; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him." -Leviticus 24:19-20

"[As for a false witness] ...you shall do to him just as he has intended to do to his brother." -Deuteronomy 19:19

Jesus knew the teachings of the day called for heavy judgment upon those who broke the Law. In his "But I tell you" portion of this teaching, He reminds us not to take vengeance for being wronged. Verse 39a says:

"But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil;"

This goes beyond, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord" to a higher level of benevolence and non-resistance. But, as with previous teachings of Jesus, this concept is nothing new...

"You shall not take any vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." - Leviticus 19:18

"As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out if the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my [David] hand shall not be against you [Saul]" -1 Samuel 24:13

"Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, or exulted when evil befell him? No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse." -Job 31:29-30

"Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the Lord, and He will save you." -Proverbs 20:22

"Do not say. "Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work." -Proverbs 24:29

Read: Romans 12:17-21

"Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" -1 Corinthians 6:7

"See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men." -1 Thessalonians 5:15

"To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead;" -1 Peter 3:8-9a

My employment allows me to listen to radio programs while traveling about, and I'm hearing an alarming message by some "Christians" calling for arms. There are militias being formed throughout the nation to "defend our God-given rights." Frankly, what I see in the Scriptures is a call to suffer loss of our "rights" and live like Jesus; and, if the Lord wills, die like Him as well.

Jesus proceeds, in the latter part of vs 39 through vs 42 to give us 4 examples of compliance with the spirit of the law quoted in vs 38.

"but whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 5:39b

To be slapped in the face was (and still is) more an emotional attack than physically one.

"They have gaped at me with their mouth, they have slapped me on the cheek with contempt;" -Job 16:10

"Let him give his cheeks to the one who strikes him, and be full of reproach." -Lamentations 3:30 [NKJV]

If we have trouble complying with this verse, we have more pride than we may have realized.

Jesus is giving imagery of being insulted or reproached without retaliation. Jesus also gives a witness in His life to this teaching by living it out, ultimately to His own death.

"I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out my beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and

spitting." -Isaiah 50:6

"Then they spat in His face and beat him with their fists; and other slapped Him," -Matthew 26:67

Read: 1 Peter 2:21-23

Jesus' next example deals with those who would use laws to take personal property.

"And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also." -Matthew 5:40

In Jesus' first example, we saw non-resistance when assaulted. In His next He teaches non-resistance in matters of material loss. The Greek work behind "sue" is krino (krin'-no, Strong #2919) and has to do with judging and going before a judge (see Mat 7:1-2, for example). Rather than fight back, Jesus exhorts us to give not only what they seek of us, but more beyond! If we have a hard time swallowing this one, we may be more attached to our possessions than we'd like to admit. Jesus, who basically had no property other than the clothes on His back, would give that as well.

His next example exhorts us to a sacrifice of time and talents without expectation of recompense regardless of our desires in the matter, again, giving more than what was demanded.

"And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two." -Matthew 5:41

The first three deal with non-resistance in the face of injustice (touching base with the 3rd Beatitude, Mat 5:5. Remember the "calm acceptance of fate?"). Even going beyond what is demanded; that is a mark of true Believers. That's the way of Christianity. Doing good even in the midst of evil. Jesus prepares us for His last example. If we are to comply with helping those who demand, defraud and coerce us, how much more those who ask us.

"Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." -Matthew 5:42

This is found in the Law and echoed by the Disciples:

"...you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks." -Deuteronomy 15:7b-8

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:6-9 & 1 John 3:16-18

Put it all together and you have this: Yes, an eye for an eye, but for those who waive their rights to adjudication and endure injustice and give of themselves to the very ones persecuting them, they exhibit the traits of Jesus Christ, who endured the cross and will inherit the earth in the kingdom of heaven!

Read 1 Peter 3:13-18

The true victory is not to allow ourselves to be "spotted by the world" in seeking revenge in judgment to those who wronged us, but show mercy which "scores higher" than judgment.

"Thus has the Lord of hosts said, `Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother;'" -Zechariah 7:9

"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." -James 2:13

A good example is found in Joseph. When his betrothed Mary turns up with child, he could of had her stoned (Deu 22:20-21). However, Matthew records in chapter 1, verse 19:

"Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly." [NKJV]

Joseph is called a just man (righteous man, [NASB]) which shows in his not seeking to execute the Law to it's fullest. God said in Genesis 2:17 the day man ate from the tree of good and evil, he would surely die. When Adam and Eve ate from it, God could of struck them dead right there and would have been totally justified in His judgment. But, He showed mercy by delaying His judgment and gave man a chance to come to Him for forgiveness. God did pour out His pronouncement of death on our advocate, Jesus Christ. He died so we could live! Why would sinless God chose to suffer for our sins?

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you." -John 15:13-14

"God presented [Jesus] as the one who would turn aside His wrath, taking away sin, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished- He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be the Just and One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." - Romans 3:25-26 [NIV]

O Lord God...

We thank You for Your love. We are thankful You delayed judgment in our lives long enough to find Jesus. We thank You Jesus for your sacrifice that made us right with the Father again. You died that we might live! We pray that Your love would fill us with a love for others even as You loved us. Change our hearts, O God, so we can do what you command and return love for hate. Soften our stiff necks and hearts... expose our pride... and make us like Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 5:43-48
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Read: Luke 6:27-36, Matthew 5:38-42 & 5:43-48

As mentioned with the previous lesson, the verses listed above are tightly united in spirit and we continue to consider them together as we move on to study our Lord's words in Matthew 5:43-48. Jesus quotes from the Law (Leviticus 19:18) but tacks on what was erroneously believed by many at that time.

"You have heard it said, `You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'" -Matthew 5:43

Loving your neighbor is a very basic premise on which, along with loving

God make up the basis for all the Scriptures:

Read: Matthew 22:35-39 (Mark 12:28-34)

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law" -Romans 13:10

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" -Galatians 5:13-14

"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." -James 3:8-9

The questions are who is my neighbor and does it apply to my enemies? The Scripture Jesus is drawing from could be interpreted to apply only to sons of Abraham (and today, Christians).

"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:18

The meaning of both the Hebrew (reya' [ray'-ah], Strong's #07462) and the Greek (plesion [play-see'-on], Strong's #4139) mean "friend or companion". However, they go beyond that to include others in the area [Thayer's Greek- "where two are concerned, the other", BDBG Hebrew- "Fellow-citizen" and "another person"]. A neighbor in a physical sense could be an enemy in spirit. The verse as Jesus delivered it was probably received with the more narrow friendly neighbor in mind.

We have the blessing of the Scriptures to which we can turn to the future teachings of Jesus and use them to enrich our understanding of Jesus' earlier teachings. Let us turn "ahead" and read Luke 10:25-37.

Read: Luke 10:25-37

Here are a few observations we can draw from this direct definition by example of a neighbor, from God Himself. 1)- The men were strangers. No kinship in play here. In fact the third was not of Israel. 2)- The first two men should have helped the hurt man by virtue of their priesthood. They knew God's Law and should have been after God's own heart. 3)- The man who did help was of a race stereotyped by the Jews to be undesirable. Yet it was he who took care of the needs of the injured man without expectation of repayment. In fact, his commitment was open-ended, promising to repay the innkeeper if the expenses were more than he gave him. 4)- Jesus commands all to do likewise!

Back to our text and onward to verse 44. Jesus' "But I say to you..." exhorts to love and pray for our enemies. As we might by now come to expect, Jesus' corrections are rooted in Scripture:

"If you meet your enemy's ox, or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him." -Exodus 23:4-5

"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you." -Proverbs 25:21-22

Read: Psalms 35:11-14, 1 Samuel 24:17-20 & Proverbs 24:17-18

(Also see last lesson, bottom of page 64 and beginning of page 65 for more verses along these lines)

Jesus left the perfect example for His Disciples by praying for those who were crucifying Him:

"But Jesus was saying, `Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'" -Luke 23:34

Stephen repeated this prayer as he was being stoned to death:

"And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, `Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, `Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' And having said this, he fell asleep." -Acts 7:59-60

The Scriptures penned after Jesus left, continuing His teachings:

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not." -Romans 12:14

"Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."-Romans 12:21

Jesus could of just commanded we do verse 44, but in verse 45, He explains the rationale behind it.

"in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:45a

Jesus, again, touches bases with the Beatitudes. In Matthew 5:9, peacemakers are the sons of God. We saw being a "son" was more than birth, but acting the part as well (please refer to the lesson on that Beatitude to refresh your memory, if need be). "For", as He continued in the rest of the verse, "He causes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." This suggests that giving blessings to enemies is a higher level of goodness. Jesus gives examples of this in verses 46 and 47:

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" -Matthew 5:46-47

The Gentiles and tax-gatherers were despised by the Jews, in particular, the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus is admonishing them (and us) for thinking of themselves as righteous for treating "nice" people nice or taking care of our family and friends. He is saying that they are no better than the Gentiles or tax collectors if that's their idea of righteousness. Even those people do that to each other. If we are to act as sons of God, we are to do as He does, and He gives blessings to the evil and the good.

Let's take a side road for a moment. Jesus has identified Himself with sinners, tax-collectors and the like. If God saved only the good, that wouldn't glorify His righteousness as much as saving sinners. One could say that

the "righteous" almost earned their salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9 states clearly it's a gift from God, not earned. How much more is God's mercy shown on saving sinners. And not only saving them, but changing them from what they were to sons of God, acting like God and doing good! That's the next verse in Ephesians, verse 10! Those once rebellious, now serving a living God whose love is displayed by His giving His unmerited favor on the undeserving.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." -Ephesians 2:8-10

Jesus ends His teaching on the law (verses 21-47) with this conclusion:

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
-Matthew 5:48

Jesus had the ability to pack more profoundness per square inch of text than anyone else in history! This last verse alone is enough to send us to God's feet asking for mercy. How can we possibly be perfect as God? Well I don't think that's exactly what verse 48 means. After looking at other Scripture, and the Greek word behind the word, "perfect" (teleioo [tel-i-o'-o], Strong's #5048) and it's Hebrew counter part and Greek synonym (Strong's numbers: 08552 and 2675), one can find it means: complete, whole, sound, upright, restore, mend, make perfect, finish, complete, fulfill, etc... If I may have license to paraphrase:

"Be the complete, righteous person you can be, as your heavenly Father is the complete, righteous person He can be."

The above does not diminish one iota the awesome task at hand in living the "kingdom life," just puts it in proper perspective. We still need the power of the Holy Spirit of God living throughout every facet of our lives to accomplish it. We can understand there is a standard that God wants us to strive for:

"Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless [perfect, KJV]" -Genesis 17:16

"For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate [sanctify, KJV] yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." -Leviticus 11:44a (19:2 & 20:26)

"You shall be blameless [perfect, KJV] before the Lord your God." -Deuteronomy 18:13

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless [perfect, KJV], upright, fearing God and turning away from evil." -Job 1:1

"Mark the blameless [perfect, KJV] man, and behold the upright; for the man of peace will have posterity." -Psalms 37:37

"A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained [perfect, KJV], will be like his teacher." -Luke 6:40

"Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete [perfect, KJV], be comforted,

be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." -2 Corinthians 13:11

"And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete [perfect, KJV] in Christ." -Colossians 1:28 (also, 4:12)

"And let all endurance have it's perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." -James 1:4

"but be like the Holy One who calls you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" - 1 Peter 1:15-16

"And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." -1 John 3:3

Jesus' teachings in the Law lifts up God to even higher heights of holiness and righteousness. He expose those who would cheat with legality of words to get around the Law. This cheapens the Law and dims the bright purity of God's Word. We should seek the "spirit" or inspiration within the Law to find God's will and submit to it regardless of the cost. For nothing can pale the glory that awaits those who are the "pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Lord God, our heavenly Father and Savior,

Thank you for your Word. Work in us a higher place for it's truths in our hearts. Thank you for personally coming down here and setting straight on the mis-conceptions of your Law and pointing us in the right direction. But Lord we need more still. Fill us with your Spirit of Truth and make us perfect, even as You are perfect. May we fulfill the Law in loving You with are all, others as ourselves. Amen

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Matthew 5:17-48
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Review of Jesus' Teachings on the Law

Read: Matthew 5:17-48

Jesus answered His critics by upholding the Law they claimed He relaxed. In fact, He advocated a much higher standard derived from adhering to the spirit of the Law, not merely attempting to satisfy the superficial requirements of the letter. They perverted the Law by interpreting it to suit their needs. We Christians must take care we do not become the "modern day Pharisees" and interpret the Scriptures to suit our needs. The Law exposes sin and our need for a Savior; let's not discount that need by rationalizing our actions, or sweeping them under a rug.

By being true to the spirit of the Law, Jesus exposes the unrighteousness of His accusers, and gains credibility among those in the crowds with, "ears to hear and eyes to see." After gaining this respect, Jesus begins to move from direct teaching on the Law, to sermonize on righteous living. This should serve as a model for preachers and teachers alike. Before giving advice and instruction, they should "test >their< spirit"- 1 John 4:1 [Remember, the Greek word for -spirit- means, "inspiration"] by displaying their

commitment to God's Holy Spirit in their understanding and implementing the precepts contained in Scripture. Of course, no one can be as Jesus, but, He should be the model and humility reveal our failure to meet that standard. Isn't it great Jesus paid it all? Amen!

In verses 17-20, Jesus answers the charges He was altering the Law and the Prophets (Hebrew term for the Scriptures). Jesus counters with His claim to fulfill them! We saw this in three ways: He was...

- 1)- Sinless, living blameless under them.
- 2)- The Messiah, the One they prophesied.
- 3)- Their Inspiration, as a member of the Trinity.

In fact, Jesus gave hearty endorsement of their immutability outlasting heaven and earth until all is accomplished and chastising those who would change even the most minute part of them. He had the scribes and Pharisees in mind and said one must be -even better- than them to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus then began to quote Scripture and give the correct interpretation and application:

Verses 21-26: Anger at a brother qualified one for judgment, as well as murder. In fact, calling one a fool was guilt enough for hell! If one chooses to go to court with a brother, rather than reconcile, they are subject to the judgment of the court and it's punishments. Better to take a loss if need be and settle before court then risk losing big, all because of a hard heart.

Verses 27-30: He who thinks lustfully on a woman is guilty of adultery and take whatever expedient action is needed, to prevent sin.

Verses 31-32: Fornication is the only valid reason for divorce. Re-marriage after a invalid divorce by the "innocent" party is adultery as well. This even included the new spouse to that "innocent" party as well! God places an extremely high value of that marriage vow.

Verses 33-37: Do not bring about unnecessary sin on oneself by swearing an oath which then gives opportunity for failure. Do not try to get around commitments, nor arrange our words with so called, "tap doors" for us to get out of at a later date. Better not to swear and just let your yes be yes and do what was said. Any more than that is inspired from the Evil One; the father of lies.

Verses 38-42: Rather than demand justice, be wronged, allow harassment, give of ourselves and our resources when pressed. Help the oppressor.

Verses 43-47: The supreme example of love is not only loving your friends, but loving your enemies and praying for your oppressors as God Himself gives blessings to the evil and the good.

Verse 48: Be the best we can be in the same way, God is the best He can be! Best is not defined by us as we see it, but as God sees we should be.

These brief summaries cannot even begin convey what we have learned in the detailed studies in previous sections, and I would urge all to revisit them often for memory refreshing. The Word of God is so wonderfully rich, there is more to learn each time we read it!

Lord God,

We thank you for your Word. It chips away at our hearts of stony pride and softens them with humility in seeing our own sin. The process causes us to appreciate the good news of Your grace in Jesus Christ ever the more. May we live out that gospel and become what You'd like us to be. Thank you for the power of Your Spirit, for without it, this task would be hopeless. Be with us as we go on in Your Son's great sermon, giving us eyes to see and ears to hear with a willing heart to change to conform to the criteria You unfold before us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 6:1-8
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Jesus Teaches on Righteous Living

Read: Matthew 6:1-18

Jesus next chunk of teaching is on hypocrisy. Jesus states the teaching in verse one and spends the next 17 clarifying it in three areas; charity, prayer and fasting. For each He gives us incorrect applications of the principle, then contrasts it with a correct ones. In each case, rewards from heaven are at stake for proper action with the proper motives. We might deduce that from the sheer size of Jesus' elaboration on this one verse, that these errors are important to avoid.

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven."
-Matthew 6:1

The motive of righteous action is called into question. Is our motive to gain respect, admiration or even pity from people? Do we plan our good works so we just happen to be noticed? The first example is in giving to the needy (almsgiving).

When therefore, you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." -Matthew 6:2

Read Matthew 23:5-7

This scene of trumpeting brings out a chuckle, but we still see these things today. Telethons for foundations parade their major contributors across stage who make speeches of their company's sacrifice to raise money for the cause of helping others in need. I've heard stories of church expansion buildings, named after for donor's honor. Even as far as members donating money to 'buy' a certain seats in the church auditorium (see James 2:1-5). This touches bases with a earlier verse in the Sermon, Matthew 5:16...

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven."

We should not seek glory for giving what God has given to us. We should give in a way, that glorifies Him, and Him alone. How? Jesus shows us in the next couple of verses:

"But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." -Matthew 6:3-4

We are to do so in secret, so as to take us out of the picture, leaving God the glory. And the word picture Jesus paints of our stealthiness in giving is one hand doesn't know what the other is doing. Think of it this way. If you were to give a surprise party for a friend, and called them up an announced you were working on this party for them, what kind of surprise would it be for them? Trumpeting our giving alms belittles the ones receiving the help. Secrecy has the added bonus of respecting the very ones being helped.

In the end of verse 4, God promises to repay those who give in secret. It's just like God to repay us for giving what He has given us. He's the one doing all the work, we are just His gloves... It's like giving a Pulitzer prize to the book, instead of the author! What a great and generous God, God is!

"He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed." -Proverbs 19:17

If I may back-track for a moment to verse 1, some Christians thrive from ridicule as to think their works are suffering for the Gospel. So they make sure they are observed and even go as far as sparking the flame of controversy, inviting persecution. This brings to mind the words of Peter:

"and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." -1 Peter 3:16-17

Jesus' next example teaches the exact same principle, but substitutes prayer for alms.

"And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly, they have their reward in full. But you when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." -Matthew 6:5-8

By praying in private it proves to God He is the sole focus of our prayers. God's generosity is shown in that He will repay us for recognizing Him as God, even though His is whether we acknowledge Him or not!

Jesus lingers a bit in the area of prayer and gives us yet another 'do and don't' on prayer.

"And when you pray, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him." -Matthew 6:7-8

Read: 1 Kings 18:24-29 and Romans 8:26-27

Jesus is teaching it's not the length of our prayers that "impress" God, being God, already knows what we need for the situation we're in. It's the sincerity of the heart in prayer.

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Jesus even goes on to give us a model prayer. Sincerity is emphasized in verses 14-15, linking our own forgiveness with our forgiving others. [We will take a look at the Lord's Prayer and verses 14 & 15 in detail by themselves]

Jesus' last example substitutes giving alms and prayer with fasting. Fasting, that is abstaining from taking food, is not as common as it was in times past. It was part of routine rituals for the Jews. Today, we hear of fasting during Lent in memory of our Lord's suffering and death. Also, during eventful circumstances, one may fast in association with prayer for particular focus in seeking guidance from God. In fact, "fasting & prayer" pops up together often.

"Now it came about when I heard these words [about Jerusalem's broken walls & gates], I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." -Nehemiah 1:4

"So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes."- Daniel 9:3

"So Jesus said to them, `This kind [of demon] can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.'" -Mark 9:29 [NKJV]

"and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day." -Luke 2:37 [NKJV]

"And when they have appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." -Acts 14:23

[Also Psalms 35:13, Luke 5:33, Acts 10:30, Acts 13:3, 1 Cor 7:5]

The thrust of His teaching is not against fasting, praying and charity, but against hypocrisy and empty rituals. We looked at this earlier in these studies and saw God through the prophets, spoke of this before.

Read: Isaiah 1:13-15 and Amos 5:21-24

This hypocrisy eventually brought down Israel, ending the sacrifices, sabbath and festivals instituted by the Lord because He deemed them unworthy. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13 in Mark 7:6-8...

"Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, `This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' Neglecting the commandments of God, you hold to the traditions of men."

We must seek the Lord honestly giving, praying and fasting in secret is proof of sincerity and will be a vehicle for God's blessings. Praise the Lord who is so generous to us, His children... Amen!

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Matthew 6:9-15
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Our Lord's Prayer and Forgiveness

Read: Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:1-4

Jesus gives us an example of how to pray. This prayer is perhaps the most famous passage of Scripture known to man. Many, many studies, sermons and books are dedicated to these verses. I would like to concentrate, however, with the one aspect that Jesus Himself emphasizes in His comments following the prayer. And that is on forgiveness. Verse 12 says:

"and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

This sentence reveals a couple of things in what it says, as well as what it >does not< say as well. First of all, it does not read:

"forgive us our debts in the same manner as we forgive others."

Though that concept will be introduced by Jesus in verses 14 and 15, that is not what the prayer says. If I may amplify the verse a bit...

"We have forgiven those who owe to us; so we, without hypocrisy, now ask You, to Whom we owe, to forgive us."

Remember, this prayer pops up in the middle of Jesus' teachings on hypocrisy. It reflects the proper attitude in humility and obedience. This touches bases with the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:7...

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

In both cases, forgiveness and mercy are given as fruit in having a heart like God... NOT given in a legalistic, tic for tat manner. If we say in our hearts, "Well, I don't want to forgive Joe or Jane, but, I better, because if I don't forgive them, God won't forgive me," we may be doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Realizing the tremendous forgiveness we receive from God for our sin debt, we Christians should be only all too happy to share that forgiveness in our sphere of influence. It would be a wonderful witness to the Spirit of God in our lives, as it stands in direct conflict with the world which teaches revenge.

Forgiving others in the same manner God forgave us is very important to God and Jesus taught a long and graphic parable on this very subject.

Read: Matthew 18:21-35

Love and forgiveness is at the very core of Christianity. It's not that forgiving others merits the forgiveness of our sins, but is evidence that God is indeed working in our lives and His love is in us. Those of us with hard, begrudging hearts need to release that hate to God for disposal; perhaps even re-think what it is to be a followers of Christ. Jesus tell us in verses 14-15 that if we don't have this type of forgiving heart, God will not forgive us, for we could not have accepted Jesus' sacrifice for our sins and receive God forgiveness, and yet not forgive others for their wrongs against us, which are minuscule by comparison.

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, you heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." -Matthew 6:14-15

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your

transgressions." -Mark 11:25

"And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon and you will be pardoned... By your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return," -Luke 6:37-38

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." -Luke 17:3-4

"And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."- Ephesians 4:32

"bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." -Colossians 3:13

"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." -James 2:13

"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." -1 John 3:10

Read: Matthew 7:20-23

It's not what we confess with our tongue that shows we are believers, saved from the Judgment, but what is in our hearts and how we live it that is the true witness of our belief in God. As Jesus points out in John:

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." -John 14:15

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." -John 15:12

Back to verse 12. By putting a request for forgiveness of sins in His example prayer, Jesus is saying we -can- be forgiven! There are many who go through life wondering if God will forgive them. Many think they must inflict suffering on themselves or deprive themselves to gain forgiveness. Jesus shows we need but ask! What a wonderful God!

"And listen to the supplications of Thy servant and of Thy people Israel, when they pray toward this [temple]; hear Thou from Thy dwelling place, from heaven; hear Thou and forgive." -2 Chronicles 6:21

"For Thou, Lord art good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in loving-kindness to all who call upon Thee." -Psalm 86:5

[Jesus said as He appeared to Paul] "I am sending you to open [the Gentiles'] eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me" - Acts 26:17b-18

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" -Ephesians 1:7

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." -1 John 1:9

"I am writing you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." -1 John 2:12

Isaiah prophesied the mechanism in which God sent Jesus to bear our sins and pay our price.

"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed." -Isaiah 53:5

Lord... forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. May we gladly share the forgiveness You so gladly shared with us. We pray for those who are unsure of their forgiveness to receive assurance and confidence by understanding Your promises in Your Word. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 6:19-24
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Our Allegiance to Material Wealth and Its Effect on Our World View:

In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus teaches in His Great Sermon, on the proper relationship we should have with material wealth and its effect on our perception of the world and God. Jesus starts out by laying the first of three precepts:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." -Mat 6:19-20

The "treasures" spoke of here are those things we would hold most dear. Also the Greek word `thesauros' (Strong's #2344) speaks of precious items put away, or stored up. In fact, depending on the context, it can mean the actual place as well, as in our word treasury. The quest for material wealth is an obvious target of this teaching, but, also, and maybe even more importantly, those deep, hidden things we cherish. Jesus is saying not to seek after and store up things of this world as our most "treasured" things. Do our inner most desires and dreams point to things found in this world which are destined, ultimately, to corrode and be destroyed along with this earth?

"And [the Lord] shall be the stability of your times, A wealth of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is his treasure." -Isaiah 33:6

"Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys." -Luke 12:33

Jesus exhorts us to store our treasure in heaven, where they will escape the destruction of this world and last into the next one.

"Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death." -Proverbs 11:4

"Set your mind on the things above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."
-Colossians 3:2-4

Read Matthew 19:16-26, Luke 12:16-21 and James 5:1-6

How do we store up riches in heaven?

"Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." -Luke 6:35

"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." -Mark 9:42 (Mat 10:41-42)

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward." -Hebrews 11:23-25

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." -Matthew 16:27

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he how does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality." -Colossians 3:23-25

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done." - Revelation 22:12

"Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward." -2 John 1:8

We find that rewards are given out for various acts of service to the Lord from suffering persecution to simply giving a cup of cold water to one in need; each according to ones deeds. We also find that we can lose those treasures stored in heaven by our deeds as well. It's true, in heaven, no one can steal them, nor will they rot or be eaten. If our rewards are lost, we have no one to blame but ourselves. However, Jesus can keep us to that day of judgment, if we follow His lead:

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy" -Jude 1:24

To do so takes our commitment to follow Jesus.

"where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." -Matthew 6:21

If we treasure the things of this world over the next, our reward will be in this world (see the verses just previous to these: 6:2, 6:5, 6:16). If our job, house, car, jewelry, electronics, etc. get in the way of our service to the Lord, they will get our attention rather than God.

"But people who want to get rich keep falling into temptation. They are trapped by many stupid and harmful desires which drown them in destruction and ruin. Certainly, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people who have set their hearts on getting rich have wandered away from the Christian faith and have caused themselves a lot of grief. But you, man of God, must avoid these things. Pursue what God approves of: a godly life, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness." -1 Timothy 6:9-11 [GOD'S WORD]

The next precept is found in verses 22 and 23:

"The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" - Matthew 6:22-23

This is a metaphor for what we can call our perception. Whether we admit it or not, we see the world slanted by our personal biases. If we read a particular book, we may tend to like it more if it deals on a subject we wish to read. And the more we read we on that subject, the more we can tell if it is accurate, even if it contains information new to us. However, if we dislike that subject, or don't care to learn, we can get little, even any information out of that book. Our attitude and commitment to truth shade our vision, so to speak. This is exactly what this passage is talking about.

We may have heard about a "Christian world view." That's to say, we, as Christians, look at world history and current events through the "corrective lens" provided by God in His Holy Spirit and through reading His Word. The non-Christian and the Christian out of fellowship with God, are blinded by Satan and see things colored and shaded by the Father of Lies.

"...to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." -Acts 26:18 (Also see Isa 42:6-7, 16, 2 Kings 6:17, Psalms 119:18, John 10:21)

The Christian walking with God has a clear, focused eye through which the light of truth can shine and fill our souls. However, the unbeliever and wayward Christian have their vision clouded and distorted by Satan. This is why a secular media reports news events with a anti-Christian slant. This is why violence and promiscuity is in demand from movie and TV viewers. There are millions in various stages of blindness... and if we are not careful, we Christians can have our vision be slowly shaded and obstructed by the world and its god, the devil. We must constantly seek Gods correction in pray and through His Word. We must edify and correct each other to keep our vision pure.

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." -James 1:5

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." -James 5:16

In summing up this sub-section, Jesus ends with a third precept which ties in with the first two, and stands on its own as well:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve

God and mammon." -Matthew 6:24

Mammon is the transliteration into English of the Greek word, `mammonas' (Strong #3126) and is unrighteous wealth personified. It stands in contrast to pious principles of the pauper Jesus. Note Jesus is not condemning riches per say, but warns of serving mammon. Worldly wealth has snares that entrap one so by seducing one with its plush privileges. Maintenance of those luxuries becomes ones primary goal, and soon even God takes back seat to wealth. (Reread 1Timothy 6:9-11 above). Paul was able to over come the lure of wealth saying he could "take it or leave it"...

"Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstance I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." -Philippians 4:12-13

However, his friend, Demas, did not endure as Paul:

"Make every effort to come to me soon for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica;" -2 Timothy 4:9-10a

In thinking about serving two master, can a lawyer be both the defender and the prosecutor? He will either use the confidence with his client to convict him or use his knowledge of the evidence to acquit him. Can one play both sides of the chess board? And so on. The two masters concept is not limited to wealth, though, this is the example in this case.

"He who is not with Me is against me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters." -Matthew 12:30 (Luke 11:23)

"For he who is not against us is for us." -Mark 9:40 (Luke 9:50)

This means if we are a doctor, we must be as a doctor unto Christ. A lawyer, the same. A truck driver, congressman, teacher, preacher, salesman, clerk, it makes no difference. We serve Jesus Christ, our Savior in our work, at home, and abroad. We trust our homes to Him, our finances, our families to Him; yea even our lives. At no time can anything mean more or take precedence in that relationship. And if we serve Him, He will guide us in those other endeavors, surpassing our own expectations. With clear vision, and the light of His Holy Spirit, we can have a correct world view and see things as they really are, and be able to see where they should go.

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of the God abides forever." -1 John 2:15-17

Lord, our prayer is to serve You and only You. We know we are weak, that's not an excuse, but it is true. Teach us to love the Truth and go toward the Light and leave the darkness behind. Open our eyes and give us sight and the will to do right. In Jesus name... Amen

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Matthew 6:24-34

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In the latter portions of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount differs from the earlier portions in that less "ground" is covered in "more space." The Beatitudes packed a mighty potent punch, so to speak. If you recall, whole lessons were written on one verse. As we near the end, Jesus spends more time on the subjects He broaches with clear and detailed examples. He was wise as well as profound. He knew the people could only handle so much at one time. He also repeated this sermon in other forms (as we see in Luke). In light of our studies, it's sure a blessing to have written copy of His sermons... at least for me once or twice is not enough!

READ: Matthew 6:24-34 and Luke 12:22-31

Though we covered verse 24 last time, we see by the begin phrase of verse 25, the following verses pertain to the concepts in the preceding verses. Actually, verses 25, 33-34 contain the teachings and verses 26-32 are the reasons that validate the teachings.

"For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?... But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of it's own." -Matthew 6:25, 33-34

Remember verse 24, about serving two masters; you will love one and hate the other. If we serve our life, we will raise its importance over serving God. Remember the Devil's tempting of Jesus and His response:

"After He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.' But He answered and said, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.''" -Matthew 4:2-4

"For the kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." -Romans 14:17

"Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal." -John 6:27

Also READ: Luke 12:15-21

Besides, if we really believe in God as God, we should not have a second thought about these things, right? Well, we are not the only ones of "little faith..."

READ: Matthew 8:24-26, 14:28-31 and 16:8-10

Jesus validates this teaching with basically three ideas:

1)- Look how God takes care of things in nature, and we are more important to God than it. (Mat 6:26, 28-30 Also see: Mat 10:29-32, Luke 12:24

2)- Do not worry and solely trust in our abilities to care for ourselves.

(Mat 6:27 & Luke 12:25. Also see: Luke 11:40-42, Phil 4:6-7, Mat 5:36)

3)- The non-believers act like that, you are to be different. (Mat 6:32. Also see: Mat 20:25-28, Mat 6:7, 2 Cor 6:17, Eph 4:17-19)

Jesus exhorts us to "seek first the kingdom of God" and, as the previous examples illustrates, God will surely supply your needs. He knows exactly what we need and His heavenly wisdom is untarnished by fleshly covetousness.

"... for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."
-Matthew 6:32b

"... your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him." -Matthew 6:8b

"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." -Romans 8:26-27

Jesus ends this teaching with an interesting concept that many may use and not know that it came from the Bible. In verse 34 Jesus says not to worry about tomorrows' evils, as today has plenty of it's own to keep us busy. Many weight loss and drug addiction programs take it "one day at a time." If someone should lose 100 lbs., that may be a seemingly impossible goal to concentrate on. But, if you lose it one pound at a time, it's less intimidating and more realizable. I won't eat it, shoot it, smoke it, read it, gamble it, steal it today. I'll worry about tomorrow, tomorrow. The devil like to blow things up bigger and uglier than in real life if it will help tear you down. This little precept, when followed, gives the devil one less tool to work with to disrupt our walk with God and in His service.

I'd like to end this with an excursion down a side road that came apparent when reading this text in the light of some current trends in thought. In particular, it's the "Animal Rights" and "Earth" movements. It's very simply stated in Gen 1:26-30, 2:15 humanity has dominion over the earth and it's creatures. This is not to say we can rape, pillage and plunder the earth's spoils. With power comes responsibility. After all, it is God creation.

I am referring to an inherent right of the earth or an animal over mankind. Humans are a special creation like no plant or animal, being in the image of God. Jesus underscores this, not only as true, but as prove of God's faithfulness in His provision for our needs (see vrs 26 & 30).

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. There fore do not fear; you are worth more than many sparrows." -Matthew 10:26

We it comes to Humanity's welfare, animals play a subordinate role. But, least we lose respect for God's creations, as He says in Mat 10:29b, not one will die without the Father knowing it. Or as "GOD'S WORD" puts it:

"Not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's permission."
-Matthew 10:29 [GOD'S WORD]

Lord, we thank you for your blessings. Our memories are short and when times get tough, we start doubting. You reveal yourself in your Creation. The

sun faithfully raises and sets and the seasons faithfully pass. Yet you are more faithful than these. Your promises last forever, long after this earth is but a memory. We confess our utter dependence on You. Forgive our arrogance and self-reliance. Forgive our slothfulness as well. Continue to be the true light that provides and leads down the narrow path to life. In Jesus name, Amen.

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Matthew 7:1
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"Do not judge lest you be judged." -Matthew 7:1

This is often quoted to restrain one from commenting on the doings of another. But to accurately determine the range of meanings intended by Jesus, we must look into the Greek and Hebrew words behind our English word "judge." Reading other Scripture verses on this subject, also yield the proper context by which we can apply these definitions. Once we "plugging" these values back in the verse, we will find a sweeping, yet specific application that if we embrace and act on these precepts, our attitude to others will never be the same.

The Greek word "krino (kree'-no, Strong #2919) has a range of meanings, very similar to our word "judge". It's basic meaning is "to separate". When we "judge", we "separate" fact from fiction for truth, ripe fruit from rotten to eat, good buys from bad buys to purchase, as well as the guilty and innocent. Depending on the variables contained in the context, the meaning grows in complexity (See listing).

The Hebrew Scriptures have several words we translate "judge." The most common and "equivalent" to our Greek is "shaphat" (sha-fat, Strong #8199, see listing). Because of the subtleties in their range of their meanings, we also translate them -plead, correct, reason and even pray.

"Come now, and let us -reason together-' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow'" -Isaiah 1:18a

"How painful are honest words! But what does your -argument- prove?" -Job 6:25

"For whom the Lord loves He -reproves-, even as a father, the son in whom he delights." -Proverbs 3:12

"...Because the Lord has a case against His people; even with Israel He will -dispute-." -Micah 6:2

"Open your mouth, -judge- righteously, and -defend- the rights of the afflicted and needy." -Proverbs 31:9 (Note: two different Hebrew words, but are related showing the aspects of "judge".)

"...they -judge- ['plead' in NASB] not the -cause-, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not -judge- ['defend' in NASB]." Jeremiah 5:28b [KJV]

"I know the Lord will maintain -the cause of- the afflicted, and justice for the poor." -Psalm 140:12

"If one man sins against another, God will -mediate- for him; but if a man sins against the Lord, who can -intercede- for him?" -1 Samuel 2:25a

"[If] My people who are called by My name humble themselves and -pray-, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." -2 Chronicles 7:14

This is why it's important to at least touch bases with the original languages the Scriptures were written in. It is very difficult if not impossible to carry the full range and force of the Greek and Hebrew into English. We can see now that in 2 Chronicles 7:14 the "prayer" is one of repentance, -judging and reasoning out- sin and neglect to God's commandments before God. It doesn't change the meaning, just makes it clearer and richer than before.

So, is Jesus making a blanket statement not to judge at all? Well, several of the above verses show God's anger and judgment for <not> judging. The call is to judge properly.

"Then I [Moses] charged your judges at that time, saying, 'Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's.'" -Deuteronomy 1:16-17a

[Paul said to the High Priest] "And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" -Acts 23:3b

Solomon saw the heavy burden of responsibility in being a ruler over Israel and asked God for an understanding heart to judge God's people.

READ: 1 Kings 3:5-14

God was pleased with Solomon's response to God's offer; putting worldly treasures and pleasures behind the importance of properly serving the Lord. He was living out Matthew 6:33 centuries before Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Paul spoke against Christians seeking out judgment from heathen courts in matters the Church could handle.

READ: 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

"I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" -1 Corinthians 6:5-7

Among other things, Paul suggests it better to be wronged than participate in godless, unrighteous judgment. Paul is very vocal about judging. In 1 Corinthians, he calls for self-judgment (in this case, examination) to avoid God's judgment (in this case, punishment).

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

"But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world." -1 Corinthians 11:30-32

Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul says he doesn't judge himself and may, at

first, seems like he later contradicted himself.

"But to me it is a very small thing that I should be [judged] by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even [judge] myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who [judges] me is the Lord." -1 Corinthians 4:3-5

In reconciling these apparent "contradictions" we begin to see what Jesus means. Our "judgment" is to be just, consistent and not by our standards, but the Lord's. In the first verse, "judge ourselves rightly" is saying "if we judge ourselves by the correct standards, which is to say, the Lord's standards", then the Lord doesn't have to judge us. And in the second verse, Paul doesn't judge himself by his own standards; because in his eyes there is nothing wrong. And just because his conscience is clear that doesn't mean he is truly sinless. He is judged by the just standards of God to which we all fall short (he says in his letter to the Romans 3:10-11, and declares about himself in 7:23-25).

Knowing where we stand in the shadow of God's judgment, how can we therefore may our own judgment over others? Let's read from Romans again as Paul writes on this in chapter 14.

READ: Romans 14

"But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God... So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God." -Romans 14:10,11

"Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or new moon or a Sabbath day- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." -Colossians 2:16-17

We must not judge in ourselves, but with God's Spirit as our Guide. Jesus, the Son of God, said He didn't judge by His will, but by the Father's:

"I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." -John 5:30

"You people judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and He who has sent Me." -John 8:15-16

"And if anyone hears My sayings, and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings has One who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak." -John 12:47-49

Jesus didn't speak a railing judgment for those who didn't believe; but He did speak strong words for those who claimed to be God's people but did not obey God's words:

"`For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.' Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things, and said to Him, `We are not blind too, are we?'

Jesus said to them, `If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, "We see." your sin remains.'" -John 9:39-41 (See also Matthew 23)

Those Pharisees judge Jesus according to their interpretation of how they thought the Messiah would act and what they thought he would do. What we Jesus say to His Church today? Inter-denominational battles from name-calling to out and out murder and war. Some, claiming to be the elect of God, pass spiteful judgment against their brethren, for ceremonial matters having no barring on the cause of Christ (Col 2:16-17). Bragging that they are the real believers (1 Cor 3:1-5), holding there doctrine to be superior (Mat 15:1-11). Acidic demeaning sarcasm from the lips of those who claim such a high view of Scripture; "physician, heal thyself..."

"So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." -James 3:5-6

"With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." James 3:9-10

By contrast, Love between the Brethren is the will of our Lord and Savior.

READ: John 17:20-23, 1 John 4:7-21, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Matthew 7:15-23

The judgment Jesus commands against is the judgment we make in the flesh without God. It's a snap judgment. It's a judgment based on personal bias. It's a judgment that changes with the people involved. It's a judgment that's harsh and enjoyed by the judge. It's a judgment that can be bribed. It's an arbitrary judgment. It's a judgment of hate and prejudice (prejudgment).

"You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord." -Leviticus 19:15

"Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor?" -James 4:11-12

Lord,

Renew your people, and soften our hard hearts. Forgive us for our petty, judging minds. Fill us with love; for our Brethren, for the homeless and helpless, for the lost of Your world, for the blind and the lame. May forgiveness, mercy and compassion rule in our hearts. Help us to silence our wagging tongues and to seek you in prayer for every decision we must make. Thank you for your faithfulness even in the face of our faithlessness. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 7:1-6 Cont.

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With our enlightened understanding of the work "Judge" and its boundaries, let us move onward to Jesus' exhortations and warnings for improper judgment.

READ: Matthew 7:1-2

"And do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned." -Luke 6:37

The obvious warning is clear; as we judge others, so shall we be judged. This is seen in the justice received by Adonibezek in the beginning of the Book of Judges, verse 1-7:

"But Adoni-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. And Adoni-bezek said, 'Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.'" -Judges 1:6-7a

This is the subject of the second chapter of Romans:

"Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things." -Romans 2:1-2

However, there is a positive exhortation that may be lost if we do not have the proper definition of "judge." Remember in the last lesson we saw "judge" could be translated as "plea" and "defend?" We could say, "Do not plea the case of the downtrodden, and your case won't be pled." In fact then next verse bursts open the flood gates with:

"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you." -Matthew 7:2

[Jesus said:] "Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you; and more shall be given you besides." -Mark 4:24

"Give, and it will be given you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." -Luke 6:38

If our standard is harsh judgment, hatred, prejudice, unkind words and the like, we will receive that and then some (Mark 4:24). But, if we are merciful, forgiving, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, etc., we will receive that in return.

"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." -James 2:12

"In dealing with faithful people You are faithful, with innocent people You are innocent, with pure people You are pure. In dealing with devious people You are clever." -Psalm 18:25-26 [GOD'S WORD]

"...those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it." -Job 4:8

"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." -2 Corinthians 9:6

"Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." -Matthew 7:12

God is revealing His formula for those who wish forgiveness; forgive and be forgiven. However, in a sin-cursed world, those we show kindness to, may not show it back. In that case, are we to give them what they've given us? This question brings us back to the beginning chapters of these studies on the Beatitudes.

READ: The eight paraphrases of the beatitudes in "The Beatitudes: In Review" and Matthew 5:10-12

We are not to harshly judge -especially- if we are harshly judged. Only then we can truly shine for Jesus.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." -Matthew 5:16

Let us look at another example of judgment that Jesus gave us. First in the Parable of the Coins (minas or talents in Matthew 25:14-30).

READ: Luke 19:12-27

"`Sir, here is your [coin]; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.' His master replied, `I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'" -Luke 19:20-22 [NIV]

The master used the attitude of the servant to reflect his judgment. In reality the master wasn't a hard man. It was the heart of the servant coloring his perception of his master (thus being called "wicked servant" by his master). Even so, the master did not contest the servant's judgment of him, but, using the standards his servant imposed on him, the master said if that's how you perceive me, and you were to serve me under those presuppositions, then you should of put the money in the bank and he could of, at the very least, received interest on his investment. The master judged his servant fairly on his level. And to turn it up a notch, the more you have been "given," the more is expected...

"And the slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of flogging, will receive but a few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." -Luke 12:47-48

We Christians have been given the Bible, chock full of the precepts of conduct, ethics, love and the will of the God of heaven. We have no excuse. But instead, we look at our brother or even worse, the unbelievers, and point out fingers and say, "Sin! Sinner!" We >MUST< clean our own house and put it in order and then, in fear and love, reach out and offer our life for others. Which leads us to the next few verses:

READ: Matthew 7:3-5

"And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brothers' eye." -Luke 6:41-42

There are a few ways this metaphor can be applied, but consider this: Doesn't a speck, which is almost invisible to us on the outside, look like a log from the perspective of the one with the speck? Our eyes water, flinch and in many cases is accompanied by irritating pain. If it floats across the lens portion of our eye, it look like this big dark hunk of wood. It's from this disabling position Jesus is saying some of us are pointing our fingers at our brother and offering our service to remove his speck. We are in no condition to safely and accurately help him.

Also, since a speck is a log by our perspective in our own eyes, I maintain that those specks we notice wrong in others, are logs in our own. Example, one who has trouble with his or her own temper, will notice and even be irritated when someone else gets angry. Or, one may complain about the "loose" dressing tastes of one, while really being jealous of their looks and only too willing to dress the same if they look like that. I'm not saying it's OK to get mad, or dress immodestly, but, we must use these opportunities to check out our own hearts first. And only when we have removed our log, proceed with the correct attitude of love, immersed in prayer for God's guidance and His will in the situation.

"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted." -Galatians 6:10

"And if your brother sins, go reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."- Matthew 18:15

"`And if [your brother] sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," forgive him.' And the apostles said to the Lord, `Increase out faith!'" -Luke 17:4-5

READ: Matthew 18:21-35

The last verse in this judgment section may at first seem out of place; even a contradiction:

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before the swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." -Matthew 7:6

We are not to judge, but, we must judge one "a dog" or "a pig" in order not to throw our pearls! First, this confirms we are to make discerning decisions, but, again, it's important whose criteria we use in that judgment. Let's get some help from the Scriptures:

"He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, and he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. Do not reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you, reprove a wise man, and he will be still wiser, teach a righteous man, and he will increase his learning." -Proverbs 9:7-9

"Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words." -Proverbs 23:9

"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him." -Proverb 26:4

"Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly." -Proverbs 26:11 [Actually, see Proverbs 26:3-28]

READ: Matthew 22:1-14

"And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet. Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city." -Matthew 10:14-15

READ: 2 Peter and Jude for a profile of false-prophets and the dangers of dealing with them.

Jesus, who taught openly to all people of all races virtually everywhere he went was silent before Herod at His trial and said but a few words before Pilot and the Sandhedrion. Jesus taught openly, yes, but His disciples -followed- Him. He didn't make them, nor by tricky manipulations deceived them into following. Many saw His miracles, but not all believed. Those who chose to listen saw a man pour His life and wisdom into their lives with all patients and love. This is our Great Commission: "Go therefore and make -disciples- of all nations...teach them to -observe all that I commanded you-." We must remove our logs of hypocrisy and observe all as we teach all.

"But I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." -1 Corinthians 9:27

This section on judging informs us of the danger in judging unfairly, but, exhorts us to judge ourselves and others with several levels of meaning and exactness which drive us to our knees in fear and frustration and cry out for grace and wisdom. When we hear how we cannot live the Christian life apart from Christ, we can understand a bit more what is meant. We must develop a close and open relationship with God in order to draw upon His strength and guidance to live a victorious life in the service of God and our fellow man.

Lord,

We see the more we study how inadequate we are in your service. We can't live it, let alone teach it without your direct intervention in our lives. Thank you for Jesus. Not only the wonderful plan of salvation that lifted the burden of sins price, but also the burden of sins cost. We cry out to you, O Lord, train us to discern, and keep us from judging and bringing condemnation to our own heads. Give us wisdom to know swine from your elect. Help us remove our logs and lead us and we have the occasion and privilege of helping others, in all meekness and love. All these things are utterly impossible with you Lord, and we thank and praise You for Your promise never to abandon us. O, what patients You must have. May be learn of Your ways. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 7:7-11
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The last section on "judging" may have prompted us to ask God for wisdom in our judgments. The very next verse, Jesus exhorts us to do just that:

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened." -Matthew 7:7-11 (Luke 11:9-10)

Jesus is giving us a conditional promise. We will receive, but, we must ask. The implied negative form of this statement is, "If you don't ask, you won't receive." Now, that's not saying we have to think to ask for every single thing, and if we overlook something, we're out. It's impossible to know, let alone remember, to ask God for all we need from Him. There are reassuring verses like:

"...your Father knows what you need, before you ask it." -Matthew 6:8b

"...for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." -Romans 8:26b-27

However, there are particular items and events in our lives that we should specifically bring before God for His wisdom, direction and provision. We are all too aware of these situations and may have even begun to formulate plans and solutions. Sometimes, at the other end of the spectrum, we may not have a clue as to an answer to our predicament. In either case, we are exhorted not to worry (Mat 6:25-34) but trust in the living God for His help.

"Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is His name, call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." -Jeremiah 33:2-3

"But [Jesus] said, `The things impossible with men are possible with God.'" -Luke 18:27

There is also implied spirit of kinetic persistence. The words, "ask", "seek" and "knock" are verbs of action anticipating a response. We don't sit on our hands, as it were, and wait for God to do everything for us and assume, since He is God, He knows what we need and He'll do it when He's ready. God is encouraging us to enter the process in prayer and conversation with Him on the business at hand.

Read: Luke 18:1-8 and Luke 11:5-10

It says in verse 8, "For everyone who asks receives..." However, there are many verses that point to a proper attitude in asking that assures an answer and the lack of it prevents an answer.

"Lord, You have heard the -desire of the humble- ;You will prepare their hearts; You will cause Your ear to hear" -Psalm 10:17 [NKJV]

"The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who -call upon Him in truth-. He will fulfill the desire -of those who fear Him-; He also will hear their cry and save them." -Psalm 145:18-19 [NKJV]

"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to

you. And you will seek Me and find Me, -when you search for me with all your heart-." -Jeremiah 29:12-13 [NKJV]

[Jesus said,] "And all things you ask in prayer, -believing-, you shall receive." -Matthew 21:22 {Also Read Mark 11:23-24}

"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him -ask in faith without any doubting-, for one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord" -James 1:5-7

"And without -faith- it is impossible to please Him, -for he who comes to God must believe that He is-, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." -Hebrews 11:6

"-If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you-, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." -John 15:7

"and whatever we ask we receive from Him, -because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight-." -1 John 3:22

"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything -according to His will-, He will hear us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." - 1 John 5:14-15

"If you ask Me anything -in My name-, I will do it." -John 14:14

"Until now you have asked for nothing -in My name-; ask, and you will receive, -that your joy may be made full-." -John 16:24

"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in his thoughts." -Psalm 10:4 [KJV]

Seems like 90% of Christianity is attitude; if you ask with upright, righteous motives, you -will- receive. If we judge with the right attitude, we will find mercy. We sow what we reap; either good or bad.

Jesus demonstrates in verse 9-11, how the Father is willing and waiting to give blessing to His children:

Read Matthew 7:9-11 and Luke 11:11-13

Even Christian walking with the Lord are -evil-, compared to Him. And if we know how to give gifts to our children, how much more can God do, being all perfect and all knowing. Also implied is the negative opposite of verses 9 and 10:

"If he [out of ignorance] asks for a stone/snake, wouldn't we give him a loaf/fish"

We come to God in faith and confidence He has the desire and ability to provide the perfect solution for any need we may have; even if it's due to our own sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, God didn't kill them, but promised a Deliverer (Gen 3:15). David, in His judgment of his sin with the census of Israel, trusted God to punish him directly, rather than trust himself to choose war with his enemies (2 Sam 24:13-25). The Bible is full of His mercies and blessings; -sending rain on the just and the unjust.-

Lord,

We thank you for your desire to bless us. We pray for a faith that pleases you. A heart filled with love and obedience to a God who's love for us is beautifully shown in the cross. Remove the sin that keeps us from the joy of being in your presence. Keep us in love with you, O Lord. Keep us from fainting in our pursuits of the Kingdom life, in the service of our King and our Brethren. Build in our soul the precepts contained in Your Word and let us shine in righteousness with humility and the proper attitude toward all. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 7:12
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"Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." -Matthew 7:12

This is, in a sentence, the summation of Jesus' teaching on righteous living in "The Sermon on the Mount." It is also, as He states, the summation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This concept has been stated before in another form in terms of loving our neighbor. We looked in detail at this in the section "Jesus Teachings on the Law", specifically Matthew 5:43-48.

(Please refer to that section to refresh yourselves on "loving our neighbor.")

After reading the historical perspective provided by Morris, Carson and Edershiem, I'm convinced Jesus phrased this verse to correct the Pharisees who held a slightly different saying, phrased in the negative:

For example, "What you hate, do not do to any one" (Tob. 4:15). The great Jewish Rabbi Hillel said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary thereof" (Shab. 31a) -[from "The Gospel According to Matthew" by Leon Morris, p. 172 in footnotes]

On the glance these two teachings seem similar enough. However, the Rabbis teaching is fulfilled by >not< doing wrong to another. In fact, if you did nothing at all, you would be in accord with this teaching. Jesus' summation of the Scriptures would not settle for this attitude. He says >Do< to others, as you would have them do to you. We must actively seek to help others, not simply avoid harming them. That is a -big- difference over the Rabbis teaching which would allow for one to be selfish and be considered righteous under the Law. This is another example of Jesus charge in Mark 7:1-16 and Matthew 15:1-20.

"...Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, `This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men,' neglecting the commandment of God, you hold the traditions of men." -Mark 7:6-8

How shall we follow this commandment of Jesus? Let's again search the Scriptures for the answers. In Luke, Jesus put it this way:

"But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate

you, bless those that curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either. Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way. -Luke 6:27-31

There are many other exhortations in Scripture on how to live. Here are but a few:

"[God] has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." -Micah 6:8

"And to love [God] with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." -Mark 12:33

"Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." Romans 13:7-8

"Thus has the Lord of hosts said, `Dispense true justice, and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother;" -Zechariah 7:9

"If a man does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, does not commit robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry, and covers the naked with clothing, if he does not lend money on interest or take increase, if he keeps his hand from iniquity, and executes true justice between man and man, if he walks in My statutes and My ordinances so as to deal faithfully--he is righteous and will surely live,' declares the Lord God." -Ezekiel 18:7-9

Lord,

Your words are just; your teachings true. Work in our hearts this simple commandment which will exhort us to fulfill your whole Law. Thank you for your patience with our resistance. May it be an example we can follow with others. Loving ones neighbor is hard in times of being wronged by them. But we can call upon Your Spirit, living in those who are true believers, to help us to do so. Thank you for your gracious gift of grace and we pray in the name of He who gave Himself for us, Jesus Christ... Amen.

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Matthew 7:13-14
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Jesus concludes His The Sermon on the Mount, with a series of warnings: Do not take the easy way which falls short of the mark; Be wise to false leaders and how they measure their righteousness; Be aware of the consequences for failing to respond to these His words.

The first of these warnings is found in Matthew 7:13-14...

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who

find it." -Matthew 7:13-14

It should be plainly evident in today's society, with its ever widening acceptance of perversion and its sharp criticism of moral purity, these verses speak clearly the way of the Lord is uncommon and exclusive. Those who seek the Lord will be harassed in that pursuit.

"Indeed, for Your sake I have endured insults. Humiliation has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my own brothers, a foreigner to my mother's sons. Indeed, devotion for Your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult You have fallen on me." -Psalm 69:7-9 [GOD'S WORD] (Actually, read all of Psalm 69)

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." -Matthew 24:9

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, `If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.'" -Matthew 16:24-25

READ => Matthew 10:16-22

The metaphor of a "straight and narrow path" is used to describe the tight reign we must have on our lives while following God's lead. If we "wander" we can find ourselves in big trouble. In fact, if it were up to us, we would most assuredly fall off the edge.

"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." -Proverbs 14:12

"Thus says the Lord, `Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, "We will not walk in it." And I set watchmen over you, saying, "Listen to the sound of the trumpet!" But they said, "We will not listen.'" -Jeremiah 6:16-17

"The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." -Psalm 14:2-3

"And Jesus said to him, `Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." -Mark 10:18

Thank the Lord He has promised to show us this way...

"I will lead the blind by the way they do not know, in paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do, and I will not leave them undone." -Isaiah 42:16

"Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, `This is the way; walk in it.'" -Isaiah 30:20-21 [NIV]

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble

in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." -Matthew 11:29-30

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." -John 10:11 (Also see The 23rd Psalm)

We are to resist temptation to follow the easy, worldly way. No matter how we may think to ourselves, "I'll be careful not to stumble and fall, it won't happen to me..." Do not be deceived, IT WILL! God has mapped a path to life for us and has promised to faithfully lead us. If He thought we could walk with one eye on the world, and one on Him, He would of told us. Jesus in vivid word pictures described cutting off one of your hands to avoid sin, rather than perishing with two (Mat 5:30). You cannot serve God and wealth; you must choose one, or you choose the other (Mat 6:24). We must be careful of distractions that rob from the growth of the seeds of salvation in our lives (Mat 13:3-23). There is NO room for compromise. It is, indeed a straight and narrow path.

"Keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil." -Proverbs 4:26-27 [KJV]

As for the many on that broad road headed for destruction? God wishes for them to turn back to His path and live!

"`Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life. Because he has considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he has committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord God. `Therefore, repent and live.'" -Ezekiel 18:27-32

I'd like to take a moment to look at a couple of words in these verses. The first is the Greek word behind our English "destruction." It is "apoleia" (Pronounced, ap-o'-li-a, Strong's #684) which is a very strong term for utter destruction, perishing and ruination (Thayer/TDNT). There is no room for being spared. A modern picture might be something as strong as a baby being run over by a steamroller; no chance of getting through the experience unharmed. By contrast, the word used for "life" is "zoe" (Pronounced, dzo-ay', Strong's #2222) which is more than simply being alive. It speaks of a quality of life; living it to it's fullness with great joy (Thayer/TDNT).

I fear we can read these remaining verses and apply them only to those who are unbelievers. That would remove the need to apply these verses to our lives. After all, if we're saved, what could we worry about? We should remeber the judgment seat of Christ at which we can lose our rewards ("treasure, crowns, inheritance", etc.) depending on our behavior and service in this life (SEE FOOTNOTE #1)! Even though saved (from hell), we can feel loss in heaven (1 Cor 3:11-15)! And using the tone of Jesus' words in these two verses, those losses could be great! No supposed "benefits" offered by taking the "wide, easy road" would be worth the loss! Jesus uses very strong, descriptive language so we will not be deceived. And in the next section, Jesus also warns of following "false prophets" whose teachings could only lead to this destruction.

Be cautious, but be not discouraged. We have an Advocate in Jesus Christ who has the power to keep us until His return... if we follow His lead! Hallelujah!

"Now to Him that is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen! -Jude 1:24-25

[FOOTNOTE #1] This concept, while being spurned by some, has a rich backing in Scripture: 1 John 2:28, Rom 14:10-12, 2 Cor 5:8-11, 1 Cor 3:11-15, Rev 22:12-14, Jer 17:10, Mat 16:27, Ps 62:12, Eph 6:5-9, 1 Pet 1:17, Rev 21:4 and others. Also, if we look to Rev 2 & 3, we can see Jesus warning of future losses due to behavior in life. An this to His Elect who He also praises for there works in the beginning of each letter to each Church.

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Matthew 7:15-20
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The next several verses warn of false teachers and provides guidance on how to properly judge a teacher false or true. I use the word teacher rather than prophet for a few reasons. Today, its generally accepted, we no longer have prophets, in the traditional Biblical sense. A prophet was a man (or woman) who spoke for God on earth. This could be foretelling future events and clarifying things known. Some prophets (like Samuel, Nathan and Daniel) proclaimed God's will before Kings. Others warned the general public of pending judgment from God (Jonah, for example). A "prophet" today would still proclaim God's truths, but, we have The Bible through which these "proclamations" can be "strained" (The Brerens did this to Paul; using the Hebrew Scriptures to check on his teachings Acts 17:10-12). This is why I would call modern day prophets: teachers, preachers, etc.

Some may say I'm watering down the office (or calling). But, actually what I wish to do is spread out the warning God gives to His "prophets" to speak HIS truth, not their own and hold ALL who speak in God's name accountable:

"`Therefore,' declares the Lord, `I am against the prophets who steal from one another's words supposedly from Me. Yes,' declares the Lord, `I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declares, "The Lord declares"" -Jeremiah 23:30-31 [NIV]

"But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded Him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die." -Deuteronomy 18:20

"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment." -James 3:1

Jesus gives us a guide by which we can test those who seek to lead us to make sure their way is God's way and save us the heartache of being led astray. Jesus said in Matthew 24:5,

"For many will come in My name, saying, `I am the Christ,' and will mislead many."

Traditionally, it's take to mean that these will say that THEY are Christ, and mislead many. But, I maintain that based on the first part of the sentence, which says they come in Jesus' name, these false prophets proclaim

Jesus is Christ, and come in His name, and mislead many! That's a big difference from proclaiming to be Christ and coming in His name, "confessing" Him to be God, and being false prophets. How can we be sure our leaders are not in this last category? Let us look at Jesus words:

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits." -Matthew 7:15-20

Right off the start, Jesus warns us not to use visual scrutiny to judge a prophet false. They may look the look, talk the talk, and even walk the walk.

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds." -2 Corinthians 11:13-15

We are to look at their fruits. Our fruits will be the result of what we say and do. If we are Christians, our fruits should contain the works of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.

READ: Galatians 5:16-26

"For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth." -Ephesians 5:9

"A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words, and the deeds of a man's hands will return to him." -Proverbs 12:14

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." -James 3:17-18

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." -Matthew 5:16

"By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." -John 15:8

How we live is matched up with what we say. And when they match, fruit is born. When we speak of God, and act as God says we should act, a good witness is born, whose fruit all can enjoy. (Example: God gives abundantly to both the good and the evil, so should we, etc) Jesus also teaches that conversely, a son of the evil one, brings forth only evil. Good fruit comes from a good tree, bad fruit from a bad. In fact in verses 16 and 18, Jesus says that good trees -cannot- bear bad fruit and bad trees -cannot- bear good fruit.

"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of what fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I

say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." -Matthew 12:33-37 (Also see Luke 6:43-45)

The above was delivered to the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day. This continues to be true today for teachers and preachers of the Word as well as Christians in general. If we claim to follow Jesus Christ and claim Him as our Master, we must do as He has done. It is our purpose, yea, even our command to "bring forth fruit":

"You did not choose Me, but I choose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain..." -John 15:16

"For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;" - Colossians 1:9-10

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." -Ephesians 2:10

"They answered [Jesus] and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.'" -John 8:39

"But when [John, the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father (See John 8:39)"; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'" -Matthew 3:7-10

This last verse cited has John the Baptist announcing to the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees the same thing Jesus says in verse 19 of our text: "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." In fact the bearing of fruit is used to point out the weeds from the wheat; for both plants look the same until the fruit is produced, and the weeds became evident by their lack of fruit (Matthew 13:26) and are cut down and burned (Matthew 13:30).

This is also true in the light/dark contrast in John 3:20-21:

"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

Also see in these variations on this theme:

"Now in the morning, when He returned to the city, He became hungry. An seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, 'No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.' And at once the fig tree withered." -Matthew 21:18-19

"Therefore the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it." -Matthew 21:43

God is not quick and harsh in requiring fruit from His people. Jesus intercedes on our behalf giving us patient care and many chances:

READ: Luke 13:1-9

In fact God works with us so we can produce an abundance of fruit and not be "burned" in defeat:

READ: John 15:1-15

Lord,

We pray for "eyes to see and ears to hear" and discern the grapes from the thorns; the good fruit from the bad fruit. We pray we don't fall into the hands of false teachers, but wait on your true teacher and preachers of your true Word. Thank you for your Bible. It gives us a standard by which to measure your workers. But, if we have the wrong interpretations from your Word, we will only confirm those wrong as right. Grant us true understanding and discernment in these studies of your great Sermon, and see the light and accept your truth and apply to our lives; even today. We pray for our leaders and ask your blessing and guidance in their service to you and your people. Only because of your faithfulness is this possible, and we pray in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior's name. Amen.

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Matthew 7:21-23
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Beware of the False Prophets:
Their Judgment Criteria

In the last section, we looked at Jesus' exhortations to beware of false prophets and judge them by the "fruit" they produce. We also took a look at the Biblical usage of fruit and found it to be what comes when we allow God to work in our lives and follow His lead. Non-believers haven't any (as in the parable of "The Wheat and Tares") and evil "trees" can never bare good fruit.

In these verses, Jesus states some criteria that are thought by many to be "good works", but are not. We will also look to other times Jesus spoke on the real fruit of salvation. Let's begin by reading our verses:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" -Matthew 7:21-23

This first verse is quite profound. Simple confession of Jesus as Lord does not guarantee one a place inside the kingdom. James understood this as he wrote his letter:

READ: James2:14-26

"What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?... You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" -James 2:14, 19-20

It's not that we "work" our faith or salvation. But, once "saved" our "faith" should yield good fruit, or "works." Paul also echoed this:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." -Ephesians 2:8-10

The "fruit", or "works" is the result and proof that God's "seed took root and grew." The unbelievers bring forth evil fruit; the saved, but disobedient bring forth little or no fruit. However, those believing and walking in obedience and humility bring forth much good fruit (remember the parable of "The Sower?" Mat 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-12 and Luke 8:4-10). It's the old saying, "the proof is in the pudding".

Notice the signs used in verse 22, by those rationalizing their entrance in the kingdom: prophesying, casting out demons, and performing of miracles. One would think they would be pretty good indicators of holiness and the acceptance of God. But Jesus says, "I never knew you..." This is a severe warning to those in a ministry for the Lord. And not just to clergy of those "other" denominations. Don't gauge success as an indication of your personal relationship with the Lord. He just may be blessing your ministry >in spite< of you.

Actually, Jesus speaks poorly of those seeking "signs" for direction. Let's look at Mark 8:11-12...

"And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven to test Him. An sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, `Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given it." -Mark 8:11-12

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and no sign will be given it, except the sign of Jonah." -Matthew 16:4

"Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." -John 4:48

In fact Jesus warns of signs and wonders as agents of false prophets to fool many to follow them:

"for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray." -Mark 13:22 also Matthew 24:24

Ok then, just what -are- the proper criteria to judge fruit? Well, in the last section we mentioned the "fruit of the Spirit" working in our lives. You may want to briefly review that again. Also the Scriptures have several examples of judgment of "fruit." John the Baptist required "fruit" to prove the repentance of those coming to be baptized. We read Matthew's account in the last section. Luke included a bit more and has John articulating just what was "fruit" for some:

READ Luke 3:1-14

"And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?" And he would answer and say to them, 'Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise.' And some tax-gathers also came to be baptized, and they said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.'" And some soldiers were questioning him, saying, 'And what about us, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.'" -Luke 3:10-14

Notice, John didn't command limbs be cut off, money be collected, or grand sacrifices be offered. Just simple, practical "works," tailored to each of their particular circumstances, to live out the Scriptures' teaching. These are truly works of repentance and everyone must start at the beginning, each according to his/her current condition. But is there more as we grow toward Jesus in the light of His grace and by His Spirit? Let's see what Jesus said:

"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." -Mark 9:41

"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." -Matthew 10:42

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High;" -Luke 6:35

"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour in your lap, For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." -Luke 6:38

"If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace. be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." -James 2:16-17

James continues in his letter to demonstrate this is not a new concept, but it applied to Abraham as well:

READ James 2:21-26

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the alter? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;" -James 2:21-22

It's not that the actual act of offering up Isaac is what saved him. In fact both James and Paul state, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (James 2:23, Romans 4:3 and Genesis 15:6). It's precisely because of his faith being real, he could do that "work" of offering his son as a sacrifice to God, following the command of the Lord. You'll notice that God didn't need to have him actually kill Isaac, and He stopped him from doing so. But the fact he would, and gave a "fruitful" demonstration of it, confirmed outwardly, what faith Abraham had inwardly.

Rather than a battle of faith vs works, we should, by faith, doing the good works, the Lord as prepared for us to do (Eph 2:10). This is the type of works, or "fruit", that is used in judging false prophets, teachers and preachers, etc. Being "inspired" by other spirits, they lack the motivation and the power of God's Spirit to do good. Ultimately, our confession of faith in Jesus Christ as our Messiah and King will be tested by our works:

"I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to the results of his deeds." -Jeremiah 17:10

READ Matthew 25:31-46

A couple of things particularly stuck out in my mind. Notice, -both- the sheep and the goats are surprised at the criteria used in this judgment. Each expected a different judgment, but in the end, their works pointed out who really believed. Also, notice what the works were. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, befriending a stranger, visiting the sick and imprisoned... very basic, but, also, very rich in mercy and self-sacrifice; just like our Lord.

Did you notice that prophesying, healings and miracles, etc are missing? As seen in our verses in the SM, these acts are not considered "works," but gifts from God, as with our salvation. For example, Paul did not consider his preaching a rewardable work as such:

"Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed me." -2 Corinthians 9:16-17

Yet Paul writes that his "reward" is that he could give up his rights to things due him, as a preacher, so as to be a better witness to the truth he proclaimed (See vs 1-23 for the whole context). His voluntary sacrifices were "good works" that demonstrated the faith from within. Paul is saying, as long as we speak the truth, speaking the truth in and of itself isn't fruit. How we live it out so as to lend credibility to our witness in particular by taking less to give others more.

The underlying lesson here is a serious condemnation of hypocrisy. If Jesus ever was angry with anyone, it was the religious elite of the day. The so called guardians of the Sacred Scriptures. The very people you'd think were the holiest, Jesus named as "vipers" and "hypocrites" (See Mat 23). We Christians who believe and teach from God's Word are the new guardians of the Sacred Scriptures and as such are vulnerable to the same hypocrisy. The Scribes and Pharisees sought to kill Jesus (Luke 22:2, Mat 26:4, John 7:1, etc.) and false teachers/preachers/prophets' lives contradict what the Scriptures say and seek only for themselves (Micah 3:11, Jer 23:14, 2 Tim 4:3, Col 2:8, Rom 16:17-18, 2 Pet 2:1-3, 18-19, Acts 20:29-30, Col 2:8, etc.). They Look like sheep on the outside, but inside they are wolves:

"For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." -Romans 16:18

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. There for it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds." -2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Love is the key. Outward love to show the inward love of God a true believer feels. Love is ONLY from God and is the true good fruit of the Holy Spirit.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." -1 John 4:7-8

"Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." -Ephesians 5:1-2

In fact you may have all the spiritual training there is and preach and teach, reading all there is to read; but without love...

READ Corinthians 13

Jesus says, in Matthew 7:16, "You shall know them by their fruits..." If they have not love in the words and deeds, they are NOT from God. By the way, how is our fruit? Mine's lookin' a bit shabby, as I look at it through these eyes opened by God with these Scriptures verses; I pray yours is ripe and bursting open with the sweet love of God...

Living the Christian life, to the glory of God may, at times, seem too hard, yea, even impossible. But take courage and be of good cheer as I quote these verses, yet again, as we see a true simplicity that comes with faith in God and not in ourselves to save:

"And... the disciples... said, 'Then who can be saved?' And looking upon them Jesus said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" -Matthew 19:25-26

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give your rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." -Matthew 11:28-30

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen." -Jude 1:24

Lord... so many times we fall so short of the mark as set by You and lived out perfectly by Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Forgive us, strengthen us, lead us and love us, Lord. It's only through your love for us that can save us and change us to be like Jesus. Thank you for your patience as well stumble along, and may love be the tell-tale mark in our lives that we are of God. By your grace, and through your love, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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Matthew 7:24-27
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Jesus ends His Sermon on the Mount with a powerful word-picture outlining the two fates of those hearing His words this day. A promise of hope and

success for those who heed His words; and a warning of utter disaster for those who ignore His words. Take notice there isn't any middle ground:

READ: Matthew 7:24-27 (and Luke 7:47-49)

Let us look at a few key phrases. Jesus says the one who not simply hears His words, but >acts< on them will prevail. Notice in verse 26, the one whose house falls hears, but does NOT act. To simply hear and understand the teachings of the kingdom is not enough. One must seek to implement them. James echoes this clearly in his letter:

READ: James 1:22-25

James adds that the one who "looks intently at the perfect law... and abides by it... this man shall be blessed in what he does." Casual attention yields failure, but serious commitment yields positive results. In fact, it's really a one-way proposition. One isn't hanging in the balance, deciding which to choose. There is only one choice. We are in utter failure, unless we cling to, and climb on Jesus' "lifeline."

"`Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, `Amen.'" -Deuteronomy 27:26

"...blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it." -Luke 11:28b

"Jesus answered and said to him, `If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make our abode with him.'" -John 14:23

"For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." -Matthew 12:50

Are we back to a "works salvation?" No. Jesus is teaching "belief" in Him is not simply admitting He is God and He bore out sin debt. True faith will also follow Him. It's not faith OR works, but faith THAT works! To not embrace Jesus' teachings is not to embrace Jesus.

READ: John 6:53-58

In the above passage, Jesus uses a "cannibalistic" metaphor to drive home a strong point, using strong symbolism. Cannibals believe you are "who" you eat. Jesus is saying we must zealously soak up ALL there is about Him and seek to do what He says, for in it, there is life (vs 68).

True "works" salvation teaches you must DO then RECEIVE. Jesus GIVES and then we DO by His power and through His grace. I happy God is a loving, generous and merciful God; aren't you! Amen!

Another concept conveyed in our text is building on a solid foundation. The foundation which is rock, is laid when we hear Jesus words and act on them. Anything OTHER than that is sand. Not only is this saying Jesus is the only way, but there is only one way to follow Him. And if you, even as a believer in Christ, don't walk in His way, it's like building on sand, and the results of which we will look at shortly. We MUST make sure the Gospel we hear (and speak) is His Gospel, pointing to the direction He pointed. He does not point to a way to squeak by; a "fire escape from hell," so to speak. But a life changing new direction which starts from and leads to Him. Doing as He did. Speaking as He spoke. Acting like He acted. By accepting Christ as

our Savior, we are swearing allegiance, if you will, to Him as King and thus submissive to His will and decree. If this "surrender" sounds scary, be comforted by Jesus words:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My load is light." -Matthew 11:29-30

Anything less than this total commitment is laying a foundation on shaky ground. If we do not have a rock solid trust in Jesus, how can we be sure which way to turn when we are tempted and tried in the course of life? Faith and submission to God's lead is ESSENTIAL to "finish the course" and "win the race" of life.

And temptations and trial WILL happen. This is another truth taught by our Scripture passage in this section. We notice that the "rains descended", "the floods came," and "the winds blew" on -both- houses. Whether we prepare or not, these trial will come. God, in His love and mercy, has warned us before hand and given us the necessary preparations to be ready and able to withstand.

Again notice the finality. The house that was built on the proper foundation survived. The house on the poor foundation fell, and "great was it's fall!" Perhaps the "greatness" was due to unexpectedness. Maybe the person thought they built it fine and when it fell, it was made worse by the this false security. Some of most devastating blows come from areas we thought was secure. Jesus teachings guarantees against this 100%. His teaching is true and clearly leads one on solid ground. It's a simple choice of following or not. Doing or not. No gray, shady area. This may be why many people shy away from Jesus' teachings, figuring ignorance yields an excuse. Jesus teaches in this verse, the rains WILL come regardless. Jesus teaches a sure-fire way to be prepared. If our "house" falls, we have only ourselves to blame.

One more thought on this. Note that trials and temptations are pictured as rain, wind, and floods. All common events. Many times it those ordinary things in our lives that eventually do us in. It's like the tale of the frog in a pot. If the flame is low enough, you can boil the frog to death without him even knowing it. We shouldn't only look and prepare for cataclysmic events, but, keeping our eyes on Jesus and His teaching, seek His direction and correction throughout our entire life in everything we do. Nothing is too big for Jesus; this is true. But nothing is too small or mundane either! Thank you Lord for your interest to help us in all things!

The last thing I'd like to point out deals with the ideal of the proper foundation. Jesus Christ is our foundation both with His salvation from death of our souls by His atoning death and is His power to change lives and give faithful direction toward a victorious life. Let's look at some Scripture that speaks about this foundation.

"Therefore thus says the Lord God, `Behold, I am lying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed. And I will make Justice the measuring line, and righteousness the level; the hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the secret place.'" -Isaiah 28:16-17

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than

the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." -1 Corinthians 3:10-11

"having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together in growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in Spirit." -Ephesians 2:20-22

"Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." -1 Timothy 6:18-19

"Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows who are His,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.'" -2 Timothy 2:19

"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God," -Hebrews 6:1

Notice these verses teach Christ as the foundation that good works and spiritual growth are built on. Our salvation in and through Jesus Christ our God and Lord, is the rock solid base on which we ARE to build. And we need not grope around looking for bricks. The Scriptures are running over with parables, stories and teachings on how to grow in the proper ways. Probably the most jammed packed section of Scripture with this in mind IS the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord did not >merely< come to redeem us. He came to see us to the finish: His only creatures created in HIS image. We fell, He restored. And His restoration won't stop until we ARE like Him. There is only ONE way we can fail. If we do NOT set Jesus as our cornerstone and build on it, with His power and grace, they way He leads us.

The startling reality of this section which ends the Sermon on the Mount is there are only two types of people that came away from this Sermon. Those that accepted and pursued Jesus, and everyone else. Those who accept and pursue the Kingdom of God and its righteousness will find it. Everyone else will fall short. There will be those saved by grace, but will see their house they spend a life to build, go up in flames (1 Cor 3:10-15). How sad... and what makes it worse, it need not have been that way. Jesus Christ has shown the way to the fullest richest afterlife possible, we but have to follow! And not even in our strength, but in His! It couldn't be simpler. That's why it's called the Gospel (Good News)!

But if your anything like me (and I pray your not), you've probably be convicted by the Holy Spirit of God many times throughout this study of things you need to change in your life to more closely follow Jesus. But this is NOT an occasion for sadness, but joy!

READ: Hebrews 12:3-11

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." -Hebrews 12:5b-6 (Quoting from Proverbs 3:11-12)

God does not love us because of how we perform, but performance comes out of love. God loved us so much it nailed Him to a cross. Our love for and through Him should cause us to live the life He gave us for Him. Let us take

a moment to tell God we love Him and re-commit ourselves to live for Him and yield to His yoke in search and expectation of His return and His Kingdom...

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Matthew 7:28-29
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"The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." -Matthew 7:28-29

Though these words technically are not part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it seems appropriate to end our studies with them. Jesus words cut to the quick; directly addressing the real issues of being a child of God. This was apparently a departure from the teachings of the Pharisees. See some of these other comments in the NT:

"And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom, and these miraculous powers?'" -Matthew 13:54

"And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" -Luke 4:22

"And some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him. The officers therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, 'Why did you not bring Him?' The officers answered, 'Never did a man speak the way this man speaks.'" -John 8:44-46

Of course, anytime when light shines in darkness, your going to get some resistance from the status quo. The key is to "shine our light" so that the recipients have no course but to accept or reject the message in and of itself. We do not wish to give anyone an "excuse" to refuse, do to bad judgments on the part of the messenger. As written in 1 Peter:

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." -1 Peter 3:15-17

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." -Matthew 5:16

How could Jesus (on the written page) speak so direct and blunt about sin and hypocrisy, yet His words be described as "gracious?" It must be the love that those words were spoken in, that is all too hard to transcribe into text. But those in the above quotes bare witness to that love and care. Even with His perfect delivery, many still rejected and even sought to kill Him. How could it be? Jesus explains in John:

"For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought

in God." -John 3:20-21

Jesus spoke and acted perfectly... and they killed Him. If some rejected Him, they will reject us. Our prayer should be that we are as Jesus in our ministry. AND we must use God's standards, not our to judge our actions.

"The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, 'How has this man become learned, having never been educated?' Jesus therefore answered them, and said, 'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but he who is seeking the glory of the One who sent him, he is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.'" -John 7:15-18

"He must increase, I must decrease." -John 3:3

The religious elite couldn't stand to give up their "glory" for anyone, and Jesus spoke directly to this.

READ: Matthew 23:1-36

We risk being the Neo (new) Pharisees. We must not take our service to the Lord "personal." What I mean by that is, we live for God's glory. Be it in sickness or in health; for good or for bad; rich or for poorer; leading many to the Lord, or planing "seeds" and seeing none harvested; being rewarded for our work in this life, or reviled here, and wait for the next. It's the Lord's work, we're but His hands. Our job is to keep them clean and faithful, all by His grace and for His glory. Not ours.

Samuel was upset because the people did not heed his words and called for a king. The Lord reminded him it wasn't he they were rejecting, it was the Lord.

"But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them.'" -1 Samuel 8:6-7

But on the other hand, when things go great, we want to make sure we don't take undue credit as well. Remember Nebuchadnezzar? He may be a rather extreme example, but, an example none-the-less:

Read: Daniel 4:30-37

All of the above reiterates Jesus' words:

"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.: -Matthew 12:30

We can be true disciples of Jesus and seek to do His will and follow His words, or we will be hypocrites, like the Pharisees who, rather than repenting, in their pride sought to remove the light that exposed their darkness. This sermon can't help but expose darkness in our lives. We should thank God for His reprove, for it shows He loves us, and confess our wrongs. He will forgive. And seek to implement any changes in our lives, so we can be more like Jesus. He is our ONLY true example.

Likewise, this sermon also encourages in the ways we are like Him as well.

We should cherish those positive changes the Lord has made in our life and come closer to the "light" of Jesus' words, so it may be seen as being wrought in God. Only He has the power to change us (remember Jude 24?).

Lord,

Thank You for your Words and specifically, this sermon. May it drive us closer to You, and not away from You. Increase our faith. Keep us humble and meek. Comfort us as we mourn. Give us a hunger to seek righteousness. Give us a merciful heart. Keep us pure. Make we bring peace with us, wherever we go. Give us a love for our fellow man. Bless us with true wisdom, and keep us from foolishness. Give us joy in our sorrows. Courage in persecutions. Thank you for all these things in advance and in abundance. In Jesus Name, Amen.

"Jesus said, `I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."- John 14:6

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever, Amen." -Jude 24-25

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All Scripture quoted is from the "New American Standard Bible" [NASB],
unless denoted. This concludes this Study on the Sermon on the Mount.
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