

The Sermon on the Mount

*A Thirteen Lesson
Bible Class Study*



*a study of the great sermon given on the mount
by our Teacher, Jesus*

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Introduction

No man has ever delivered as magnificent a lesson as Christ's sermon on the mount. The Christian could spend years studying this sermon, diving deeper and deeper into its vast mine of wisdom and knowledge. Anyone's life would be better by applying the things of which the Lord spoke.

So astounded was his audience that they stated that he taught as one having authority, unlike the scribes who simply reported what God had said. The sermon on the mount is undeniably a work of greatness and a necessity for anyone who desire to live a holy life. This series of lessons will examine the sermon through various categories, in the hope that the lessons of Christ will sink down into the good soil of honest hearts.

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Lesson 1: *Preaching The Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:12-25)*

The fourth chapter of the tax collector's record provides a necessary background to the sermon which this series of lessons will consider. Matthew 4 begins as Jesus is led up to the wilderness by the Spirit to face the temptations of the devil. He overcomes the tempter's wiles by appealing to scripture in each of three cases. "Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him" (verse 11).

Matthew goes on then to tell us about the Lord's early ministry in Galilee, after he heard that John the baptist had been imprisoned. His appearance in Zebulun and Naphtali fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2, concerning this land of darkness. These regions had been ravaged by war while the people were proverbially stupid and ignorant and their course of life was denoted by low morals and poor manners.

The Jewish image employed here of life in a shadow is reminiscent of the effects of an eclipse—the coldness, chills, and darkness. But it was to them that Jesus initially went, revealing his wisdom, not to the rich and powerful of this world, but to the weak and unlearned. Jesus came as the unmatched light (1 John 1:5 and Luke 2:25-32) and illuminated their prison cell of ignorance.

Our historian notes that "From that time, Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (verse 17). Just after the imprisonment of his forerunner, Jesus begins a new phase of his life, taking up the call to conversion himself in earnest. He enlists the services of Peter and Andrew to become fishers of men and then calls James and John next.

The message that Jesus took with him into the synagogues of the Jews was not the ordinary speech of the rabbi or Pharisee, as Matthew explains in verse 23; it was "the gospel of the kingdom." Some confusion has arisen in our day concerning the preaching of Christ: is it Old Testament doctrine or New Testament? Is it binding on us today? Naturally, the subject of divorce and remarriage is at the heart of this manmade quandary. But clearly here, Matthew tells the soft of heart that the sermon on the mount and every other teaching of the Master concerns the kingdom, or the church (Matt. 16:18, Col. 1:13).

In like manner, the beloved physician Luke records these words of Christ: "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it" (Luke 16:16). Jesus's work was not in commenting upon the Law of Moses and adding his own rabbinical interpretation. Instead, he was reciting the law for his monarchy, the kingdom of prophecy and promise (Dan. 2:44).

Because of the miracle he was performing, Christ attained a very large following. It was simply impossible for the common man to ignore what was going on at the hand of this carpenter from Nazareth. But as his message became better known, his following shrank until only the spiritually minded remained. Those devoted to loaves and fishes walked with him no more when he refused to continue feeding their bellies (John 6). The strictness of his morality and boldness of his rebuke also brought the ire of many who had been looking for a different kind of Messiah.

Conclusion

Matthew 4:23 gives the sermon on the mount its great value: it is the law and love of the kingdom expressed by the king himself before he took the throne (Acts 2:29-35). Chapter 7 says that his listeners were astonished at his preaching when he finished because he taught as one having authority and not just a scribe. Like the original audience, we should hang upon every word and apply it like a salve to our lives.

1. Where had Jesus been before he learned that John was in prison? How had he succeeded in this challenge?

2. Where did the Lord go when he learned of John's imprisonment? What had Isaiah said about the people there?

3. According to verse 17, what phrase was the thrust of Jesus's preaching from that time on?

4. According to Mark 9:1, what was the general timeframe for the arrival of this kingdom?

5. Is 1914 a reasonable time to have expected the kingdom to come? Should we still be expecting it to come now? If not, when did it come?

6. Who were the first two apostles enlisted? What was their occupation? What did Jesus promise them?

7. Where did Jesus find his next two apostles? Who were they?

8. Where did Jesus do much of his preaching? Why do you think this is?

9. What action of his was testifying that he had come from above?

10. Did he lose some of this following as he continued to preach and demand true conversion?

Lesson 2: *The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)*

The beatitudes open the great sermon given on the mountain in Matthew 5. The word “beatitudes” comes from the Latin word *beatus* which means “blessed.” Some have made a play on the word to call them the “be-attitudes.” The beatitudes show to us the blessings and responsibilities of being a disciple of Jesus. The Greek term means happy or fortunate. These nine beatitudes truly give the merit of turning one’s life over to God.

The first beatitude states that the poor in spirit are fortunate because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. Poor in spirit does not have to do with depression or discouragement. Rather, one who is poor in spirit simply recognizes the great spiritual need and dependence that he has as a result of his sin (Matt. 11:28-30). He sees clearly and laments the poverty of soul that iniquity leaves behind once it has pillaged the life of a man. Only one who acknowledges his sin can seek to be free of it and so only he can enter the kingdom of God.

The second beatitude promises blessing upon those who mourn for they will be comforted. This mourning goes beyond grieving at the death of a loved one. It is a mourning over the effects of sin and the breaking of the heart of God who died for us (Acts 20:28). James appeals to the soft-hearted to admit their spirits are poor that they might be made rich again (4:8-10). When a person bows his head in a prayer of sorrow and penitence, God is present to put his hand on that one’s shoulder and comfort him with His mercy (Acts 2:38) and the anticipation of heavenly rest (2 Thess. 1:7).

The third beatitude is happiness for the meek who will inherit the earth. Although our world puts great emphasis on serving self and tending pride, the Lord focused upon serving others and tending humility. Meekness does not entail weakness or compromise of belief, but a gentleness and submissive humility to God. God has said that he resists the proud but offers His grace to the humble (James 4:6). The Christian’s inheritance will benefit him in this life and the next (Mark 10:29-30, 1 Tim. 4:7-8).

In the fourth beatitude, Jesus promises to bless those who are desperate for righteousness with fulfillment. The passively interested seeker rarely finds what he says he wants because God is a rewarder of those who *diligently* seek Him (Heb. 11:6). If a person continues his search for righteousness, refusing to settle for anything less (like the social gospel or eastern philosophical religions), he will find his longing for salvation satisfied.

The fifth beatitude deeds mercy to the merciful. God will not forgive a man who will not show mercy to another (Matt. 6:14-15). So much do we require God’s mercy for our sins that we should stand ever ready to forgive a brother his relatively minor trespass.

The sixth beatitude is the blessing of seeing God for the pure in heart. He must have a single-minded purity of disposition so that evil is abhorred (James 4:8). The pure in heart see God at work in their lives in blessing and bearing fruit. They also possess a hope of being with God in eternity (1 Thess. 4:17, John 14:1-6).

The seventh beatitude promises peacemakers will be called sons of God. We must first make peace with God by obeying the gospel of his son (Eph. 2:14-18). Then we should be interested also in being at peace with others (Heb. 12:14, Rom. 12:18) and helping them to find their own peace with God.

The eighth beatitude promises the kingdom to those who suffer persecution for the cause. Paul contended that all genuine saints would be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12) and Peter added that we must suffer it meekly (1 Peter 4:12-16).

Conclusion

The ninth beatitude also involves persecution and the false accusations of enemies. Jesus promises a reward in heaven if we endure as the prophets did. So, also Peter admonished us to suffer persecution with a good conscience that the railer might be ashamed (1 Peter 3:13-17).

1. Does being poor in spirit mean that you should be constantly depressed and discouraged? If not, what does it mean?
2. What offer does Jesus make to the poor in spirit in Matthew 11:28-30? Have you ever needed to take him up on this offer?
3. Can the kingdom of heaven be attained without becoming poor in spirit? Why or why not?
4. Does mourning the loss of a loved one cover the obligation given in the second beatitude?
5. Consider the Pharisee and tax collector of Luke 18:9-14: how did each of them reflect this beatitude? Did one go down to his house comforted?
6. Which is a synonym for meekness: a. weakness b. quitter c. milquetoast d. humble
7. What does Jesus say in their inheritance?
8. Will a half-hearted search for truth yield much fruit? What will?
9. How many times should I be willing to forgive someone—up to seven times? What is the implication of Matthew 6:12?
10. Is purity of heart satisfied simply by attending every worship service (Heb. 4:11-13)?
11. What is Jesus's promise to the pure of heart? When and where will it come to pass?
12. Which should we value *more*: peace with men or peace with God?
13. Is it possible for a *genuine* Christian to escape persecution all his life?
14. Where is our reward waiting?

Lesson 3: *Righteousness (Matthew 5:13-20)*

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, said Jesus to his audience. Evidently, the effort of the scribes and Pharisees was insufficient to meet the Lord's approval.

What was their shortcoming? In many ways, they zealously observed the law of Moses, and yet, they overlooked the weightier matters and principles upon which it was founded. In Matthew 15, they accused the disciples of Christ for neglecting to wash their hands before eating bread. This tradition was enacted to ensure that the law was not broken, but was not part of the law itself. The Lord's reply on this occasion shows why their righteousness was insufficient. It had become their habit to transgress the direct command of God concerning the care of elderly parents by an insincere loophole of their own making. Jesus labeled them hypocrites for this.

In Matthew 23, he aimed at their version of righteousness again, condemning their habit of taking honorary religious titles and wearing special vestments. Their long prayers were not intended to speak to God but to impress men. Their oaths contained another loophole that allowed them to lie under certain circumstances.

The scribes and Pharisees were very particular about tithing, even down to insignificant herbs, but when it came to principles like justice and mercy and faith, they were quite avaricious. While their pots and hands were washed clean, in reality, they were full of extortion and self-indulgence. On the outside, men saw them as righteous, but inside they were really full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Their brand of righteousness did not meet God's approval at all.

And so Jesus calls on his disciples to nurture a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:3-4).

Jesus instructs them on righteousness with two parables. First, he encourages them to become the salt of the earth and to season the world around them with grace. If their savor should fail as the Pharisees and scribes, it would be worth nothing at all. Second, they should also endeavor to become the light of the world and to illuminate the darkness with Christ reflected in their lives and words.

Jesus and Paul both faced the accusation that they were the enemies of the law of Moses and both rejected the claim. Jesus's mission was not to destroy but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He was to close the loop that they formed as the objective of the law to those who believe, the Messiah. The law of Moses remained in effect until Jesus had fulfilled all God's will concerning Him (John 17:4). Breaking the commandments of God caused one to be excluded from the heavenly kingdom. The so-called righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees allowed for many laws to be bent or broken in the interest of self-indulgence and greed. The teaching of Christ proved that such loopholes were imaginary and that God would judge those who exploited them.

People striving to live righteous lives according to the word of God are always easy to distinguish from the rest. They exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, rather than those of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-26) and are more concerned with the interests of others than themselves. Pride, however, is not a part of their righteousness at all. Unlike the scribes and Pharisees, those who meet Christ's approval always give God the glory.

Conclusion

It was not the Pharisees' circumspect keeping of the law that cost them, as some teach. It was that they selfishly neglected the weightier matters of the law by blurring distinctions between right and wrong and creating a wide gulf of gray areas of interpretation.

1. Whose brand of righteousness does Jesus insult?
2. What matters of the law did they overlook in their quest for righteousness?
3. What “loophole” did they come up with regarding their parents in Matthew 15?
4. Did Jesus find fault with the fact that they tithed everything strictly according to the Law?
5. What does Jesus mean when he tells his followers to be the salt of the earth?
6. What does it mean to be the light of the world?
7. How were the Pharisees failing in these ways?
8. Did Jesus destroy the Law of Moses on the cross? Why or why not?
9. How can one generally distinguish a person trying to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?
10. What are the fruits of the Spirit?
11. Were the Pharisees and scribes condemned because they worked hard to keep the law as perfectly as they could?

Lesson 4: *You Have Heard...Murder (Matthew 5:21-26)*

In this passage, Jesus begins a series of statements that bear some similarity. Each begins, “You have heard that it was said...” to indicate the teaching of the Law of Moses that the Hebrews were giving and receiving in this era. Each statement turns upon the Lord’s comment, “But I say to you...” in which he reveals to them the doctrine of his reign (Matt. 4:23, Luke 16:16).

First, they had been taught all along that murder was wrong. This is the most basic crime known to man, as old as Cain and Abel. The punishment in the law of Moses followed the precept of an eye for an eye: death for death. Murder violated the sixth commandment of the decalogue.

But Jesus set the tone for the legislation of his kingdom early on in this passage. Not only the outward expression of murder was wrong, but the inward emotion that led to it was also forbidden. Surely, this extreme a case of hatred and passion did as much spiritual damage as murder did physical harm. Jesus sought to snuff out this heinous sin by attacking it at the root. By appealing for calm and forbearance, he hoped to make murder rare. While human courts punish obvious crimes, God will judge the heart of even its inner thoughts (Heb. 4:12).

The Lord says that while the murderer would be dragged before an earthly judge, the man with hatred in his heart would be in just as much peril with the heavenly jurist: whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment. Anger is a natural emotion and is profitable when directed at sin. But so often, anger is without any justifiable cause and simply eats away at the soul of the one bearing the grudge. Paul wrote: “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26-27).

We guard against unreasonable anger by tending to a forbearing and patient attitude (1 Cor. 13:4). We are always willing to consider the interests of others (Phil. 2:3) and forgive as Christ forgave us (Col. 2:12-14, Matt. 6:12). We must go out of our ways to think the best of people in any situation and not assume the worst at the slightest provocation.

There is a great danger inherent in anger. If allowed to stew, it will eventually boil over into rage and sin. Therefore, the apostle advises us to deal with our anger before the day even finishes. Anger allowed to fester over night will spread like cancer or gangrene.

On the mount, Jesus also condemned the very common practice of angry name-calling. “Raca!” means literally “empty-head” and finds any number of modern equivalents in abusive language, both profane and simply insulting. Such angry words are sufficient to condemn the soul to hell fire.

When a brother offends you, the Lord teaches you to go to your brother and attempt to resolve the dispute quickly (Matt. 18:15). Anger felt so deeply and passionately is bound to interfere with spiritual duties and so it should be worked out lest it hinder one’s prayers. The offending brother will hopefully be as open to resolution as the offended, that all might be pure and worship God in a brotherly and unimpaired manner.

It is best to make friends out of our enemies by seeking their best and never returning evil for evil (Rom. 12:17-21). Vengeance, child of anger, belongs only to God and never to man.

Near the close of the New Testament canon, John reminds us of Jesus’s doctrine: “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). Of course, hatred is not literally murder, but practically, the effects work out to be far worse. While no body may perish, the soul of the one with hatred in his heart is as good as dead. Heaven is not open to anyone who would harbor hatred for a brother.

Some brethren are easier to love than others. It is important to remember that every brother dwells in Christ and Christ in him, so we cannot hate the one for whom Christ also died.

1. How do each of the ensuing statements in this chapter begin? What does this indicate?

2. What transition phrase does Jesus employ each time? What does this imply?

3. What does Luke 16:16 have to say about whether this is Old Testament doctrine or New Testament doctrine that Jesus is delivering?

4. What was the world's first case of murder? Which Mosaic commandment was later enacted against murder?

5. What sin did Jesus see beneath the surface of physical murder, though?

6. Is anger always sinful? What should we do with our anger?

7. How do we guard our souls against falling into this emotion?

8. Of what is "Raca!" an example? Is this still applicable today?

9. What should we do when a brother offends us?

10. To whom does vengeance belong?

11. Can hatred cost a man his soul?

Lesson 5: *You Have Heard...Adultery (Matthew 5:27-30)*

The seventh commandment of the law of Moses was pretty straightforward: “You shall not commit adultery.” Later, the penalty for doing it anyway was laid down and death was its sentence (Deut. 22:21). From the beginning, God has been very serious about preventing adultery in mankind.

In the garden, He created a male and a female and told them to cleave to one another and become one flesh, to procreate and multiply the human race. There was no danger of adultery in the garden, for Adam and Eve had only each other. Although we live in a crowded world now, the basic sentiment should remain the same. When a man and woman are married, they should have only each other. The distractions of other men and other women should be considered carefully and the cleaving together ought to be permanent and secure.

On the mount, Jesus upheld the Mosaic command of absolute monogamy. But he strengthened the teaching they commonly heard for inclusion in his new covenant and law by asserting that mere lust itself was a sin.

“Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Jesus recognized that, although the act was not executed, the thought upon the mind was a powerful infection and a sign of disloyalty, both to the rightful mate and to the God who saves us and consecrates us.

Even if the adultery never literally takes place, the inclination is there and the devil has begun pulling the strings. Evil thoughts are as much evidence of growing apostasy as evil deeds, for as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

Many of us must fight a serious battle with temptation to commit lust, especially when society so carelessly flaunts standards of modest attire and conduct. However, when we place ourselves in situations and locations that temptation is likely to appear, we have again already played into the tempter’s hand. Appearing at the beach or public swimming pool, reading certain magazines and going to R-rated movies will likely place a man or woman in the direct line of enticement. Little wonder then when he or she is overcome. While we are not ignorant of the wiles of the devil, we often behave naively.

Paul told us to bring “every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Sometimes our thoughts become like wild horses that we must lasso and gather into a pen. Often, they continue to buck and seek to escape and so we must work them all the harder until we gain control and tame them.

The strategy of wisdom in this undertaking is revealed in Proverbs 16:3: “Commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts will be established.” Idle hands may be the devil’s workshop, but busy hands give him no place to work his charms.

To this end, Jesus teaches figuratively on the mount that we should cast away an offending eye or limb rather than perish in hellfire bodily. His endorsement is of self-discipline, not self-mutilation. We should not be satisfied by saying “I lusted, but at least, I did not actually commit adultery.” Many argue this in a hope of some twisted form of righteousness, but the Lord is not satisfied with it at all. Instead, we must do all we can to avoid the temptation and overcome it when it must appear.

The end of those who fall into adultery, whether literal or in the heart only, is to be cast into hell. God’s final judgment upon unrepentant sinners, those who claimed some allegiance or submission to the adversary is real and torturous. Therefore, we labor diligently to escape this ruin.

It must also be noted that one who purposely or negligently causes lust will also bear the responsibility of being a stumbling block (Matt. 18:6-7). We must take care!

1. From what did Jesus quote as he began this part of his speech in verse 27?

2. What was the penalty for adultery under that code?

3. What is the ultimate penalty for adultery under the law of Christ? Cite another passage to prove your answer.

4. What is happening in the heart of a man who merely looks at a woman to lust after her? What is lust?

5. Why is this so important to Jesus?

6. Is it possible for a man to look at a woman, find her beautiful and *not* commit lust?

7. How do we sometimes place ourselves in the line of fire regarding this temptation?

8. What does Proverbs 16:3 have to say about overcoming this problem?

9. What did Jesus mean by teaching us to cast away offending eyes and limbs?

10. What is the end of those who commit adultery, physically or only in the heart?

11. What is the end of someone who purposely or negligently becomes a stumbling block?

Lesson 6: *You Have Heard...Remarriage (Matthew 5:31-32)*

No passage of scripture or subject has aroused more controversy in Christianity than Jesus's command regarding divorce and remarriage in Matthew 5. Because of it, the king of England split the Catholic church and formed his own sect.

The modern Roman church has gotten around the Lord's edict by creating the process of annulment, which is just the Catholic word for divorce. The papacy feels that calling a rose a carnation will make it so, but can God be fooled?

Of course, Protestant denominations are no better, for God's rule is bent and misshapen in pulpits across the land. Does anyone continue to stand for what the Christ plainly said here?

The answer is yes, but the stalwart are a dwindling breed. Few outside the churches of Christ will take a stand upon these verses and now, many among us are folding to the pressure of the devil as well. Because our country is so smitten with divorce, it is difficult to convert people whose current marriages may not fit this mold. So we break the mold and create a new one. False teachers in Christ's church are more creative than the Catholics but their end is no different—loosing where God has not loosed and dooming themselves and their followers to destruction.

In verse 31, Jesus introduces the subject by calling to mind, not the original marital compact from Eden, but the Mosaic allowance of divorce. In Eden, the law was one man for one woman for life with one exception. In Matthew 19, Jesus upholds this original ideal as binding in his kingdom as well, reminding us that divorce never entered into the mind of God and that he hates this putting away (Mal. 2:16). The Mosaic allowance was instituted in Deuteronomy 24, probably to protect women from hasty divorces and violence (Mal. 2:16). If a man were to put away his wife for a cause short of sexual infidelity under that previous law, he was required to give her a certificate of divorce so that she could prove her freedom. Of course, the original Eden ideal was still violated when one man and one woman did not make it through life together. The exception for dissolving a marriage over adultery existed then, too, for the adulterer was to be executed, thus ending the union (Rom. 7:2)

But in verse 32, Jesus hints at his later blatant appeal to Eden by tightening the marriage law once more and removing the Mosaic allowance for divorce for any cause. No longer would such divorces be permitted in the kingdom. The Mosaic allowance had been instituted because of the hardness of men's hearts and God would no longer wink at any such sin.

This part of the sermon teaches that it is a spouse's free option to put away his mate if she has committed adultery against him. He does not have to divorce her, but he may choose to if he feels that he cannot continue with her.

Contrariwise, if someone divorces his spouse for a cause short of unchastity (like burning the toast or running up the credit card bills), he makes himself a stumbling block to her and is a cause for her sin if she falls into a new sexual relationship later (1 Cor. 7:2-3). She will still bear her guilt but he will also be recognized as a prime cause of that iniquity.

Likewise, a man will be guilty of adultery if he marries a woman who was put away by another man.

Most states in America now practice no-fault divorce, but from the beginning of God's creation, it has not been so. Short of death, only adultery is grounds to dissolve a marriage and make the chaste partner free to remarry. The spouse who is guilty of adultery is nowhere given authority to marry again.

It is easy to see why this is the least popular of Christ's doctrines, but equally clear as to its importance to the health of society and especially the church. If it were preached and upheld, our divorce rate would plummet and children would be raised by both parents again.

1. What church was formed in England when the pope would not give the king a divorce?
2. What does the Catholic church use in an attempt to get around the Bible on this matter?
3. Are there false teachers currently at work among churches of Christ who seek to lead saints and prospects astray after loose doctrines on this subject? What could be one reason?
4. Did the allowance for no-fault divorces come from Eden? Why were they permitted?
5. What was the law concerning marriage in Eden?
6. What is God's opinion of divorce?
7. What was the penalty for adultery under the law of Moses?
8. Did Jesus ordain the Mosaic allowance to continue in his kingdom?
9. What two options does a man have regarding an unfaithful spouse?
10. If he puts her away for adultery and she marries again, is it her original husband's fault?
11. Is a man free to divorce his wife for a cause short of sexual infidelity?
12. What is a man called who married a woman who was put away by another man?

Lesson 7: *You Have Heard...Swearing (Matthew 5:33-37)*

Swearing and cursing are not the same thing, although we often use the terms interchangeably. Mark 14:71 says that Peter “began to curse, and to swear.” Peter did both of these things and it will surprise a few to learn that God did one of them himself. Swearing is synonymous with making a vow or promise while cursing is the use of foul or malicious language. God swore but of course, He never cursed.

Hebrews 6:13 tell us that since God “could swear by none greater, he swore by Himself. This reference relates to God’s promise to father Abraham and confronts us with a dilemma. Did God do something which he forbids his people to do? Is God like the father who tells his children not to say cuss words, but does so himself?

When Jesus was tried by the high priest in Matthew 26:63, Caiaphas “adjured” him to state his identity. “Adjure” is defined as “to cause to swear, to lay under the obligation of an oath.” The priest ordered him to swear about his divinity and Jesus answered him under an oath just as one would in a modern court of law. Did Jesus do what he forbade in the sermon on the mount, thus sinning?

In Revelation 10:5-6, we have an angel swearing by God without reproof. Paul swore in 2 Corinthians 1:23 as he called God as a witness upon his word. Is there a double standard here, a contradiction in texts, or is the Lord’s command misunderstood?

The first part of Matthew 5:33 proscribes “forswearing” or “swearing falsely.” Jesus appeals to Leviticus 9:12, Num. 30:2, and Deut. 23:21 which condemn a certain kind of swearing, but not every kind. Only perjury is outlawed by those passages.

But the Pharisees had made a mockery of these commands, as we learn in Matthew 23:16-22. They taught that one’s oaths were only binding if he swore by certain things. A promise sworn on the temple could be neglected while only one sworn on the gold there was binding. Jesus cast these hypocrisies in the light of godly honesty and proclaimed that all promises are binding. The Pharisees had come up with a religious method of lying, making duplicity part of their faith. Swearing by anything obligated one to perform his oath and keep his word. Jesus was condemning forswearing—swearing with no intention of faithfulness—in both places. James teaches the same thing concerning false oaths (5:12). Our word should be our bond no matter what.

The difference between saying “I swear” and “I promise” is only semantic. The same intent should be present no matter what. The disciple of Christ should be a man of his word, one that people can trust. It should never be suspected that he is making a promise with his fingers crossed, so that he can have an excuse for breaking his word later.

Paul teaches in Colossians 3:9 that we must not lie to one another because we have put off the man of sin who does such evil. We should likewise be careful not to make promises that we cannot keep. We should be certain and diligent to do all we promise.

There is little good we can find in Herod, but when he vowed to give Herodias’s daughter anything she wanted, he was a man of his word, though it pained him to decapitate John the baptist that day (Mark 6:23).

Many people use the phrase “I swear to God” as an exclamatory phrase denoting anger or frustration. In fact, their sin is using God’s name vainly, for He is far from the mind of one who lets his emotions overcome him this way. This phrase hurts the heart of a saint who holds the name of God with reverence.

Sometimes promises seem easy until it is time to fulfill them and the temptation is to wiggle one’s way out of them. Some declare bankruptcy just to get out of paying debts and this is a form of forswearing. Many people perjure themselves to escape the consequences of an error.

1. What does the King James word “forswearing” mean?

2. What are some occasions in which it is tempting to swear falsely?

3. What is the difference between cursing and swearing?

4. Did God or Jesus ever swear? Did they sin?

5. What kind of swearing was outlawed in the Old Testament?

6. Which religious sect had mocked these commands? How did they do so?

7. What should we mean when we say “I promise ...”?

8. What happens to the reputation and influence of a Christian who fails to keep his word?

9. What should we be sure of before making promises?

10. What promises have we made to God by becoming Christians?

Lesson 8: *You Have Heard... Turn the Other Cheek (Matthew 5:38-42)*

The Old Testament law prescribed a form of justice wherein the punishment fit the crime. Moses described it as “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” The objective of this law was not to sacrifice a second appendage but to preserve the first by causing a man in the passion of a moment to consider that every injury he inflicts on his neighbor will return on his own head.

But out of this rule, the scribes inferred that seeking revenge was proper and that man was sinlessly entitled to it. And so a law intended to prevent thoughtless vengeance was twisted to warrant it. However, under the Mosaic code, there was the sanction by law of an avenger of blood (Deut. 19:11-13). This was a scenario in which a man pursued a murderer who fled into a protected city of refuge. The elders of the city were required to deliver him to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may be punished by death. This individual pursuit of vengeance was a divinely sanctioned and carefully regulated form of justice. The new covenant, epitomized here on the mount, made no provision for even this individual pursuit of vengeance.

Jesus does not command total passivity in every perilous situation. Some have objected to this doctrine that it would require us to watch idly as our children were murdered, our wives raped and our own bodies beaten. But Jesus does not prohibit self-defense but vigilantism, the individual seeking to exact vengeance from one who wrongs him. He uses three examples:

First, there is the universal insult of slapping another’s face. Instead of escalating the dispute by retaliation, the disciple should seek to conclude it peacefully. The Lord provides the example himself: when he was smitten, he breathed a mild reproof to his assailant though he could have struck him dead instantly (John 18:22). Turning the other cheek involves giving the sinner an opportunity to repent and proving to him that you will not share in his violence. This does not mean that Christians must be whipping boys and milquetoasts, nor that we must forfeit our rights and possessions as humans and citizens. Even the apostle Paul, when beaten, made a stand for his self-preservation (Acts 16:35-39). When the honor of Christ demands it, we must observe the commandment to turn the other cheek, rather than seeking vengeance.

Second, Jesus points out the case of judicial injustice. When one sues to take away our cheaper inner garment, offer him the more expensive outer garment, too. Under the old law, a creditor was not allowed to retain another’s cloak under any circumstances (Exod. 22:26-27). Jesus implores us to be ready to give up even that which cannot be taken by law. This case does not forbid us from appealing to the law, nor seeking civil justice, but cautions us against fighting for a material possession and losing a spiritual one. We are reminded that Paul made his appeal to Caesar when his freedom was threatened (Acts 25:11). While we may defend ourselves in a suit, we should never seek vengeance in frivolous counter suits of equally low merit. We should always be willing to suffer wrongs in cases of persecution.

Third, Jesus brings up the frequent custom of the hated Roman government in empowering its couriers to impress men and horses to carry their packs for a mile along the way. When Jesus tells us to go two instead, he requires a cheerful compliance with the demands of a tyrannical government rather than rebellion. He even encourages us to go the extra distance that the suffering might be borne personally and willingly, as he did on the cross. Then, when oppressed by governors as he was, we can pray for their forgiveness due to their ignorance and their blood will not be upon us. This attitude is the opposite of the boiling anger that results from oppression and gives rise to vengeance.

Finally, he turns to a positive example and teaches that we should be willing to share with those in need. Instead of selfishness and vengeance, we should be concerned with liberality and generosity.

1. What was the standard in the Law of Moses concerning justice for crime?

2. Was the individual entitled to avenge shed blood under certain circumstances?

3. Does the Lord's command in verse 39 require us to watch idly as a criminal brutalizes our families and robs our homes? If so, why? If not, why not?

4. Would this passage prohibit me from striking an intruder in my home? Would it prohibit me from finding the intruder two weeks later in his home and striking him there?

5. What is the best way to respond to a slap in the face, either literal or a spoken insult?

6. What did Jesus do when his crucifiers slapped him?

7. When someone sues us in a malicious and frivolous manner, should we respond in kind? How should we respond?

8. When Paul was threatened with loss by a judgment, did he simply roll over and accept it?

9. What do we prove by going the extra mile with someone who compelled us to go the first?

10. What should our reaction be to a brother who asks to borrow something from us? Could there be any restrictions on lending at all?

11. According to Romans 12:17-21, what should be our goal toward all men?

Lesson 9: *You Have Heard...Hate Your Enemy (Matthew 5:43-48)*

The Lord's audience had been taught from their youth to hate their enemies. Although this sounds strange, it has a basis in the fact that the Israelites of old had to wage war to take the promised land and remove its idolatry. Jesus quotes Leviticus 19:18 which commands loving one's neighbor but takes the phrase on hatred from no scriptural quotation. Rather this is what had been taught.

In Deuteronomy 7:15-16, God commands the Hebrews to destroy their enemies without pity, lest they fall into the heathen snare. David spoke of his enemies, the enemies of God, with similar passion in Psalm 139:21-22: "Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate you? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies." The Septuagint (Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures) uses the same word (μισεω) in Psalm 139 and Matthew 5 to denote hatred.

So, although some level of hatred toward one's enemies was permissible under the law of Moses, such would not be the case in the law of Christ. Why the change? Christ's kingdom would differ significantly from David's. The Lord's kingdom is not of this world with an earthly headquarters and the need to legislate civil codes as well as religious. The enemies of God then were to be hated and removed, but now the goal of the just is to win their enemies to the truth and bring them to repentance. The perfect hatred of the Old Testament changed to the perfect love of the new (verse 48).

Jesus recognized that great persecution and opposition would face whatever disciples he could make in his three year ministry (2 Tim. 3:12). He prepared them to endure the taunts of the Jews and Romans by forewarning them about what was to come. Their enemies would curse them, hate them, use them and persecute them. To all this abuse, the disciples were encouraged to return blessing, goodness and prayer rather than retribution or evil.

The children of God are to walk in his footsteps and his path leads them to do good even to the evil and unjust. That is the great distinction in action between saints and sinners. Something wonderful is proven to the world when Christians do good to those who have spitefully mistreated them. Even the sinners can do good for their own families, but to show mercy to an enemy is peculiar and proof of a higher calling in life.

It is by this strange practice, which makes little sense to the uncircumcised of heart, that the love of God is perfected in the peaceful heart of a true disciple. A certain scribe came near to the kingdom of God when he confessed this to be true. He recognized that to love one's neighbor was "more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33).

Christians have a special responsibility in the world that most people would not assume. That is to be the one seeking peace and reconciliation, the one not satisfied with hatred, bitterness and division. They are to seek it in the assembly (Php. 2:1-4, Eph. 4:1-6) and even with those outside the body of Christ. We must be patient in tribulation and bear the stripes that Paul bore.

The apostle teaches us not to repay evil for evil but to have regard for good things with all men. It should be our goal to benefit mankind, not injure it. When we have an enemy, it should be our goal to make him an ally by virtue of the gospel: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). Sometimes our enemies will make it impossible but to the extent of our ability and opportunity, we must strive to be the peacemaker. Paul quotes the twenty-fifth chapter of the proverbs, admonishing us to feed an enemy, for such will heap coals of fire on his head. This is not to destroy him, but to make him uncomfortably guilty over persecuting such a good person. This will make him rethink his position of hatred. If you overcome his prejudice and win his friendship, you have overcome evil with good.

1. Were there circumstances under which the Hebrews were to hate their enemies?
2. Were the Hebrews free to hate anyone they chose as they saw fit?
3. What is the difference (in this lesson) between David's kingdom and Christ's?
4. What warning did Paul offer to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12?
5. What did Jesus warn his disciples would happen to them at the hands of their enemies?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
6. Rather than retribution and hatred, what were the saints to return to this abuse?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
7. What is proven when a Christian does good to an enemy rather than abusing him?
8. What confession made Jesus recognize a scribe was not far from the kingdom of heaven?
9. Does compromise play a part in attaining peace? What type of compromise?
10. What should be our ultimate goal regarding our enemies?
11. Do we accomplish this better by abusing them or blessing them?
12. What is the objective of heaping coals of fire on an enemy's head?
13. How does evil overcome good in these situations?

Lesson 10: *Hypocrisy (Matthew 6:1-18)*

Few things are as damaging to the cause of Christ as the occasional hypocrisy among His disciples. A single failure in any principle of Christianity gives the devil the opportunity to engender scorn and mocking among the unconverted.

Jesus warned his followers many times about falling into hypocrisy and pointed out examples of hypocritical living whenever he saw them. In this passage, he uses prayer, fasting and alms giving to illustrate a different twist on hypocrisy: doing good things for bad reasons.

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them.” Giving to those in need or extending mercy to someone is a highly admirable act, but doing it so that others will see you and be impressed with your piety taints the action. One is seeking to receive the praise of men and that is all he will get; God is unimpressed with this worldly pursuit. Jesus warns against self-promotion, admonishing his disciples to do their good without fanfare. Making a large production out of a charitable deed ruins it because the focus becomes self rather than neighbor and God. Although no one may ever know what we have done, God knows and that is all that really matters.

Next, Jesus finds fault with the prayer habits of certain people. It is not that they pray too infrequently, but that their prayers are also rehearsed productions meant to draw the affection of men, rather than speak honestly and humbly to God. Instead of keeping private supplications between subject and God, the hypocrites sought out the street corners so that others might see them and hear them and be awed. Jesus says that when they receive the praise of men, they have all the reward they should expect. God is unimpressed. He counsels us to seek the Lord in private and God will reward us openly. Additionally, he warns about falling into the habit of the heathen who sought their false gods with many vain repetitions. Elijah and Paul met such groups in their labors. Today, many practice the same thing—speaking vain repetitions rather than heartfelt sentiments of the needful moment. Heathen think they will be heard for big and many words, but God does not need such insincere embellishment.

Jesus offers to us a model prayer next. This is not a prayer we should repeat over and over—that was just condemned—but is a form for what and how we should speak to our Creator. We address him reverently as citizens of his kingdom and petition his hand for our needs, both spiritual and material.

In verses 14 and 15, Jesus comments upon one part of the prayer, forgiveness. He warns that we must be willing to forgive men who trespass against us if we hope to receive God’s mercy. This is a condition of God’s grace—our own willingness to show grace to others.

Finally, he mentions fasting, a practice only popular today for the wrong reasons. Jesus marked the hypocrites who, when fasting, graphically displayed their anguish so that people would be impressed with their conviction and sacrifice. They ceased to be interested in the benefit of fasting, save as it increased their standing among the populace. The Lord commands that fasters conceal the effects of their hunger by caring even more for their physical appearance than usual. Although men will not praise you, God will reward you openly.

The examples of hypocrisy Jesus uses are not what we generally think of. Each of them involves doing a basically good thing, but for the wrong reasons. Whether it be prayer, giving or fasting, we should be doing it only for God and not to attract the praise of our fellow men.

We have an example of hypocrisy in action in the book of Galatians. Things were fine between the Jews and Gentiles in Antioch until certain men came down from Jerusalem. Then Peter and Barnabas withdrew themselves from their Gentile brethren and refused even to eat with them. Their change of heart was due to the appearance they wanted to put on for these “men from James.”

1. Jesus exposes a different twist on hypocrisy in this passage. What is it?
2. What does Jesus mean by sounding a trumpet before doing a charitable deed?
3. When do we see examples of this nowadays?
4. But what good is a charitable deed if no one sees it?
5. What was wrong with the prayer habits of the hypocrites?
6. How public should our private prayers be?
7. Is the model prayer of chapter 6 something to be repeated over and over? What is it?
8. What does Jesus offer parenthetically as a condition of God's grace, or forgiveness?
9. How did the hypocrites ruin their habit of fasting?
10. How did Peter and Barnabas act like hypocrites when in Antioch? Why?
11. What lesson did Paul teach him (Rom. 12:9).

Lesson 11: *Treasure in Heaven* (*Matthew 6:19-34*)

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit, the things of the spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:5-8).

So wrote the apostle Paul, in upholding the deeper doctrine of Christ given on the mount in Matthew 6. Modern science divides the human brain into right and left halves, but long ago, the Holy Spirit pointed out that each mind must follow one of two paths—spiritual or carnal.

Greed, covetousness and the longing to be rich in this life are not new impulses but they have gained an unprecedented degree of acceptability in the last 25 years. Family, faith and country are all deemed inferior to the pursuit of the dollar. But Christianity, a 2000 year old belief system, has always demanded a distinction in its disciples.

In his letters to the seven churches of Asia, the Lord makes this distinction clear and practical, using two of the churches as examples of this thinking. To Smyrna, he wrote, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)” (Rev. 2:9). The saints in Smyrna appeared poor and weak to the world but Jesus recognized a deeper, spiritual bounty according to the will of the Holy Spirit. However, he wrote the church in Laodicea, “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire” (Rev. 3:17-18). The disciples in Laodicea were looking at things according to the flesh and did not see that their spirits were destitute.

For this reason, Jesus instructs us to lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth where it is vulnerable to destruction. The earth and all its elements are reserved for annihilation, but heaven is a secure repository of spiritual capital. More importantly, he reminds us that our heart resides always with what we treasure most. A man addicted to financial gain is bound to worship at the idol of the dollar while a man given to piety and sacrifice is sure to take his citizenship in heaven seriously.

According to Paul, covetousness is a form of idolatry (Col. 3:5, Eph. 5:3) which John says we should flee (I John 5:21). When men become lovers of self rather than lovers of God, covetousness is always going to be a problem. The material pursuit becomes a god and Jehovah is forced from his throne in the heart of man. God will not share man’s affection and worship; Jesus indicates that man must choose one or the other, God or mammon.

Humans are a species given to worry and despair. Sometimes this concern can become so great that doubt creeps like ivy over one’s faith. Jesus directs the attention of his audience to the fields where they can see the birds and flowers and witness how God takes care of them. He promises to provide the same for the needs of man if he will be seek first the kingdom of God.

Worry is paralyzing to some people. Their fear renders them useless and sedentary. While the Lord does not promise to fulfill our every want and whim, he does promise that God’s elect will never starve nor freeze. While we may not be arrayed in the finest garments nor abide in the biggest house, God will see to it that His own have their true needs met.

Paul wrote Timothy that money is a root of all kinds of evil and that many go astray from the truth in its pursuit (1 Tim. 6:10). Those who have wealth are cautioned to use it to the glory of God, trusting still in God who gives gifts to men rather than riches which are uncertain. Wealth can often be a source of great pride and can render a man unconverted if he places his heart in the hands of them. They must be willing to share and rich in good works, “storing up a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:19).

1. What two types of mind does Paul say a man can have?

2. What type of wealth did the Christians at Smyrna possess?

3. What did Jesus tell the saints at Laodicea to do with their poverty? What does this mean?

4. Why is it foolish to lay up treasure only on earth?

5. How does one lay up treasure in heaven?

6. Where does Jesus claim our hearts will always reside? Where should our hearts then be?

7. Will the devil be satisfied if we only give him a little of our service? Will God be satisfied with sharing his throne with someone or something else?

8. Is it sinful to have savings accounts or to prepare for retirement? Why, or why not?

9. What is the Lord's lesson as he points to the birds and flowers?

10. According to verse 30, what does excessive worry indicate about man's trust?

11. What should be our first priority and main objective in life?

Lesson 12: *The Golden Rule* (*Matthew 7:1-12*)

Among the most misquoted and misapplied passages of scripture are two found in this section of the great sermon. “Judge not,” sinners cry when children of God reprove their iniquity. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” we teach our children, though not exactly as the Lord said.

The seventh chapter of Matthew begins with a discussion of hypocrisy and the amazing ability of a man to see clearly the faults of his neighbor while being completely blind to his own shortcomings. Jesus instructs all who will listen that we should not be too quick to condemn others, especially if we are mired in some sin ourselves. That is hypocrisy, the wickedness Christ exposes everywhere he sees it. He reminds us that if we are unmerciful to men, God will not be merciful with us.

Hypocritical judgment is the only brand of the species condemned in Matthew 7. The Bible shows clearly that sin is easily defined and deserving of rebuke, that the sinner might escape its clutches and be saved instead of lost. The comfortable sinner often will reply by misapplying verse 1 and neglecting verses 2-5. The homosexual argues that the preacher cannot judge him to be in a lost condition. The adulterer, drunkard and infidel do likewise. But this passage is not the safe haven and oasis of tolerance sinners think it is. Consider verse 5: Jesus commands us to clean up our acts so that we “will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” If one is living a holy life and striving to uphold the principles of the Bible, he will have unimpaired vision and be qualified to aid another with his problem.

Judging sinful things to be sinful and stating that the homosexual or adulterer is currently unfit as such for salvation is nowhere condemned in this passage, unless the one making the reproof is doing so hypocritically (Rom. 2:1). That is no permission for the righteous man to become haughty and judgmental—to mock gleefully the downfall of another. But it is an obligation for him to do the hard task of reproof that sin with love and the hope of divine reconciliation through the blood of Jesus.

In further response to those who cry, “Don’t judge me!,” Jesus remarks in verse 6 that the righteous should not cast their pearls before swine. We *must* make the discernment in these cases, lest we be torn to pieces by such swine. People doing evil are headed to condemnation and it is our duty to warn them (Ezek. 3:19, Eph. 4:15). But if they are intent upon remaining in the mire of iniquity, continual efforts at reproof will be of no benefit and may only influence them toward violence and hatred. They become more likely to resent and attack the one who lovingly rebukes them. Christ makes no demand here that we beat our heads against the wall, trying to convert those who want to trample us underfoot.

Jesus turns his attention, on the other hand, to those who are open to the gospel and desire to hear it. If they diligently search for the truth, and are not satisfied with anything less, they will find it. Often, men search for the truth, but become satisfied with a more palatable error like Calvinism or the social gospel or humanism. They lost their diligence short of the goal.

God is the giver of this good thing, His grace, and for this reason, we should also be helpers of men and sharers of blessings. An earthly father is benevolent to his own fleshy son and likewise will God shower blessing upon his children by the adoption of faith. The Creator’s benevolence institutes the golden rule.

The common rendering of this passage is worded in the opposite order that Jesus used. He first told us to consider what we would like men to do in our interest. Having established that we would desire good things be done for us and no evil done to us, we are then compelled to act in the same manner.

All the Law and the Prophets pointed to this circumcision and perfection of heart.

1. Under what circumstances do we most often hear Matthew 7:1 quoted these days?
2. Does this passage absolutely condemn all judging? Why or why not?
3. According to John 7:24, what should shape the way we make such judgments?
4. What should I do before rebuking my brother's drinking?
5. What does Paul say is the case with one who judges hypocritically (Rom. 2:1-3)?
6. How can we decide if certain people fit the mold of a swine? What are our criteria?
7. What can happen if a Christian continues trying to reach such a swine?
8. Will God prosper the search of a man diligently seeking the truth who is not satisfied with impostors like Calvinism and the social gospel? How (Rom. 1:16)?
9. Is there a dark side to God, on which he works evil against mankind (James 1:16-17)?
10. How does the golden rule affect the way you do things in these situations: on the road, at the store, witnessing sin in a brother, dealing with a sick neighbor.

Lesson 13: *The Narrow Way* (*Matthew 7:13-29*)

The last two verses of chapter seven provide the conclusion of this great sermon. The audience that day marveled as this teaching ended because Jesus taught, not as the scribes, but as possessing the authority behind his words. This was not just another rabbi.

Chapter seven makes their conclusion inevitable. He maps out the road to heaven and describes who will enter it and who cannot. Only one with authority could mark those paths and establish them so clearly. He makes four comparisons which expose most every false doctrine taught since.

First, he describes the two possible life paths from which all men must choose. There is the narrow and difficult way which leads to life that few will select and the broad gate that ends in destruction which will be chosen by the majority. Jesus counsels us to choose the narrow road less traveled that we may be preserved in eternity. That road is less traveled than the broad for many reasons, including the enticement and indulgence of sin, relative ease because no self-control, diligence or reasoning is required.

Second, Jesus compares good and bad trees, telling us that we can discern between the two by examining their fruits. This part has special interest in identifying false teachers who conceal their malice in the false attire of piety.

Third, Jesus contrasts the professing Christian from the practicing Christian. One may profess he has faith and even fool all the world, but Jesus is able to see through such pretense if the heart is not truly in it. The apostle Paul exposed the tendency of some to magnify their good works while love was not the motivation (1 Cor. 13); Jesus does likewise. Many teach that a sinner's prayer alone will save a man, but Jesus teaches the opposite. Not everyone who calls his name will be saved, but those who call and do the will of God will be forgiven their sins. Here, the Lord's words remind us of James, who counseled against being only a hearer of the word and not a doer. The doctrine of salvation by faith only is exposed here as false and devilish. While we can neither be saved by works alone, it is clear that only the obedient will be reconciled to the Father.

Fourth, he makes the memorable contrast between two men building houses. Those who obey the doctrine of Christ are like a man who constructs his house upon a solid rock so that no storm or flood can overwhelm it. Those who reject Christ are like a man who built his house on the sand and when the rain and wind came, it was obliterated. "And great was its fall."

This final passage of scripture provides both valuable new teaching and an important conclusion to the entire sermon. We learn exactly why his words matter so much—they are the words of eternal life and no man can be saved without them. We learn that neither idle faith nor faithless works will save us. We learn how to examine ourselves to make sure we are traveling the narrow road of self-discipline, producing the fruits of the Spirit, doing the will of the Father and building our faith upon the solid words of truth.

No one knows how long it took Jesus to recite these words, but it was not a long sermon by any reasonable estimate. Still, no one has ever improved upon the simplicity and boldness of these commands. These words will lead a man to obey Jesus and become his disciple.

The Christ did not teach like the rabbis, Pharisees or scribes. They all felt their own power but still had to admit a higher authority who made the original law upon which they were commenting. Jesus taught as one possessing the absolute authority of legislator, judge and executive. The words he spoke here form the gospel of the kingdom, the beginning of the *Magna Charta* of his theocracy. We stand with that audience amazed at his insight.

From the darkness of Naphtali and Zebulun, we rejoice that we have been counted fortunate to bask in the light of the gospel, revealed on the mountain nearly 2000 years ago.

1. List four things Jesus says about the gate he prefers men choose:
a. b. c. d.

2. List three things he says about the other gate men may select:
a. b. c.

3. Consider 1 Peter 3:18-22: how many were saved in Noah's day? What connection might there be between them and the admonition of verse 21 to be immersed, or saved through water?

4. How can we discern a false teacher from a true one?

5. In the New Testament, elders are given the responsibility of pastoring the local flock among them. What is their obligation regarding such wolves in sheep's clothing (Acts 20:28-31, Rom. 16:17-18)?

6. Will everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" in a confession of belief be admitted into heaven?

7. Locate the New Testament passage which teaches that man is saved by faith *only*.

8. Locate the passage which teaches that man can be saved by his own meritorious works.

9. Which type of person did Jesus liken to the man who built his house on a rock?

10. How does rain and wind fall upon the faith of every man?

11. Which type of person did Jesus liken to the man who built his house on the sand?

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