

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was delivered near the beginning of His ministry and it is the longest of Jesus' sermons recorded in the New Testament. It begins with a section commonly referred to as the Beatitudes, meaning 'perfect joy.'

Most of the beatitudes are irrational and contrary to the world's view. The word 'blessed' is used throughout this passage, and it can be accurately replaced with the word 'joyful.' Another synonym that could be utilised is the word 'happy,' as long as we understand this bliss is not due to good luck or chance.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

'Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.' Matthew 5:1-2

Jesus was travelling near the Sea of Galilee and decided to speak to His disciples about what it means to follow Him. He went up on a mountainside and gathered His disciples around Him.

The rest of the crowd appear to have found places along the side of the hill and at the level place near the bottom in order to hear what Jesus taught His closest followers. It was very common practice for teachers to sit down to teach, [Luke 4:20](#) / [Matthew 13:2](#) / [Matthew 23:2](#) / [Matthew 24:3](#).

Please note this is not the same event we have recorded in Luke, on that occasion, Jesus spoke on 'a level place', [Luke 6:17](#).

The exact location where Jesus preached this sermon is unknown, although tradition names the location as a large hill known as Karn Hattin, located near Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee. There is a church nearby to this day called the church of the Beatitudes.

THE BEATITUDES

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

The word 'blessed', simply means happy, [1 Timothy 1:11](#).

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'The blessing is in every case in the present tense, a happiness to be now enjoyed and delighted in. It is not 'Blessed shall be,' but 'Blessed are.'

To be 'poor in spirit' is to feel a deep sense of spiritual poverty. It is to empty ourselves and understand our insignificance in comparison to our Almighty God, [Philippians 2:3-4](#).

To be 'poor in spirit' is to have a state of mind that is lowly and reverent before Him. It is to be full of humility, not pride, [Luke 18:9-14](#).

It is impossible to be ‘poor in spirit’ until we realise our spiritual needs. As long as a person delights in sin, they won’t be ‘poor in spirit,’ and they won’t seek the Saviour since they don’t feel a necessity for Him, **Matthew 9:12**. To be ‘poor in spirit’ is a joyful condition because when we become aware of our sinfulness and hopelessness without God, we will seek the ‘kingdom of heaven’ and find hope therein.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.’ **Matthew 5:4**

In the Greek language, the strongest word for ‘mourn’ is used here. This term indicates a type of mourning that cannot be hidden. The mourning can be physical mourning over a loss, **Genesis 37:34**.

However, the main thrust here is that of spiritual mourning. The blessing here is not upon all who mourn, those with worldly sorrow would be excluded, **2 Corinthians 7:10**.

Those who mourn because of sin and consequently repent are the ones who will be blessed, **James 4:8-10**. Such a person mourns over sin from a tender conscience and broken heart, realising that it’s their own sin which separates them from God spiritually, **Isaiah 59:1-2**.

After we realise our sinfulness, we can be ‘comforted’ by the discovery and acceptance of God’s pardon, made possible by obedience to the saving Gospel, **Romans 1:16 / Romans 6:17**.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.’ **Matthew 5:5**

Those listening to Jesus speak were full of the hope that He, as the Messiah, would lead them to conquest in a physical kingdom that would dominate by force, **Proverbs 16:32**. However, Jesus taught true joy is found in meekness.

The primary meaning of this word is ‘mild’ or ‘gentle.’ Meekness is not another word for weakness, as some mistakenly believe, for genuine meekness is strength under control.

The word ‘meek’ has its origin in the taming or domestication of animals. A wild animal is strong but destructive and of little value when out of control.

However, when a horse, for example, is tamed, it loses none of its power, but its strength is brought under the control of its trainer. It is now a useful animal and can be employed for much good.

The same is true of man. A person who is strong, physically or spiritually, is of little use to the Lord until they submit to Him and allows their strength to be controlled by God’s desires.

A meek person is totally given to the divine will. Such a person does get angry when circumstances warrant it, but they do so in a controlled manner i.e., without sinning, **Ephesians 4:26**.

Moses is a good example of meekness, **Numbers 12:3 / Exodus 32:19-35**, and Jesus Himself is also a good example of meekness, so is Jesus. **Matthew 11:28-30 / John 2:14-22**.

The Christian Courier Website notes the following concerning inheriting the earth.

1. God is the owner of this earth, **Psalm 24:1**.
2. Those who obey Christ become children of God, **Galatians 3:27 / Hebrews 5:9**, and ‘joint-heirs’ with the Lord, **Romans 8:17**.
3. The Father supplies all our needs, **Philippians 4:19**, we therefore enjoy this earth and its blessings more than all others.
4. Mainly, however, our inheritance is spiritual, **Acts 20:32**, we are heirs in the kingdom of Christ, **Ephesians 5:5**, and citizenship in that kingdom is available now on this earth, **John 3:3-5 / Colossians 1:13**.

Finally, we also look for an inheritance that is reserved for us in heaven, **1 Peter 1:4**, because we are aware that the earth will be destroyed when Christ returns, **2 Peter 3:10**.

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It looks as if they would be pushed out of the world but they shall not be, ‘for they shall inherit the earth.’ The wolves devour the sheep, yet there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves, and the sheep, continue to multiply, and to feed in green pastures.’

In other words, the meek shall inherit the earth in the sense that they shall enjoy it more fully while living upon it, **Psalm 37:1 / John 10:10 / Philippians 4:10-13**.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’ **Matthew 5:6**

Jesus declared that those who feel an intense desire for righteousness, that which is right or just, shall obtain it, **John 4:13-14**.

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness is an attitude, a frame of mind, which realises God’s Word, is ‘righteousness’, **Psalm 119:172**. It is the spiritual food that is needed to grow stronger, **Matthew 4:4 / Hebrews 5:13-14 / 1 Peter 2:2**.

What type of person doesn’t get hungry or thirsty physically? The person who is either sick or dead! The same is true spiritually, **Psalm 143:6**.

If a person doesn’t have a strong desire to grow spiritually and feed on God’s Word daily, then they are either spiritually sick or dead, **1 Corinthians 11:30**. May those who desire righteousness do so like a deer pants for water, **Psalm 42:1-2**.

If we yearn to be ‘filled’ and to find true, lasting joy, we must put the kingdom of God first and seek His righteousness, **Matthew 6:33**.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.’ **Matthew 5:7**

To be merciful is to withhold justified punishment; it is to relieve the misery of one who deserves to suffer. The merciful show pity to others and much joy is found therein, **Acts 20:35**.

Humans typically have little difficulty showing mercy toward themselves but may find it challenging to be lenient toward others. However, disciples of the Lord must learn to love their neighbours as they love themselves, even when it comes to granting mercy, **Matthew 22:39 / Luke 10:25-37**.

If we fail to develop this attribute, God will not bestow mercy upon us, **Matthew 6:14-15**. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant also clearly communicates this thought, **Matthew 18:21-35**.

Being merciful is a natural outward expression of an inner hungering after righteousness, **Matthew 7:12**. And such will generally ensure that our personal quest for righteousness will not turn into self-righteousness, **Luke 18:9-14**.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.’ **Matthew 5:8**

The ‘heart’ is the centre of our thinking processes; it is the mind, Biblically speaking, **Proverbs 23:7**. The ‘pure in heart’ are those who are free from evil desires and purposes, their thoughts and speech are pure, **Matthew 12:24**. This is because they meditate on those things in which there is a virtue, **Philippians 4:8**.

Such people experience great joy in seeing God. They will enjoy a closer relationship with God. Of course, they do not see Him physically since He is a Spirit being, **John 4:24**, but they do see Him through faith in Christ, **John 14:8-9**. Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning seeing God.

‘This is true in two ways: 1. The pure in heart shall see God by faith, just as Moses endured, ‘as seeing him who is invisible’, **Hebrews 11:27**. 2. They shall see God and Christ Jesus in the eternal world, **Revelation 22:4 / 1 John 3:2**.’ Clarke, in his commentary, says the following, concerning seeing God.

‘This is a Hebraism, which signifies, possess God, enjoy his felicity: as seeing a thing, was used among the Hebrews for possessing it, **Psalms 16:10.**’

It should be noted that some might appear to be pure by their actions, though their heart is far from such, **Matthew 23:25-28**. Most of the Jews, having their hearts defiled with carnal hopes or self-righteous pride, **Mark 7:1-23**, failed to see God as He revealed Himself in the person of His Son, **John 14:6-9 / Matthew 13:14-17**.

Not only do the ‘pure in heart’ see God, but they shall also see Him ‘as He is’ hereafter, **1 John 3:2**.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.’ **Matthew 5:9**

Peace is generally thought of as the absence of conflict or war, but to the follower of Christ, it is much more. It includes an internal component of contentment, even amid trials, conflict, and persecution, **Romans 5:1-3**. This is the peace from God that surpasses human understanding, **Philippians 4:7**.

Christ is the Prince of Peace, **Isaiah 9:6** and we are rightly considered a ‘peacemaker’ when we seek reconciliation and strive to live peaceably with all, both men and God, **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**.

Followers of Christ are called sons of God because they are most like God in their efforts to reconcile man unto himself. Christians are children of God through faith in Christ, **Galatians 3:26-29**.

A true peacemaker is a person who shares the Gospel of peace with others in hope of fostering spiritual reconciliation, **Ephesians 6:15**.

Christians should always seek external peace to the best of their ability, **Romans 12:18**. But it shouldn’t be acquired at any cost. If peace can be achieved without compromising our convictions, purity of heart, and earnest desire for righteousness, then it must be pursued.

The humble and wise ‘peacemakers’ will be joyful; however, the selfish and foolish ‘peacemakers’, that are lovers of conflict and division within the body of Christ will be miserable.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ **Matthew 5:10**

To be ‘persecuted for righteousness’ sake’ is to suffer at the hands of others for doing right. This is much different than being punished for wrongdoing, **1 Peter 4:12-16**.

It should be realised that in order to maintain peace, we must sometimes suffer persecution. If we are faithful to the Lord, we should expect persecution, **2 Timothy 3:12 / John 15:18-20**.

We should react to persecution as Christ did. He didn’t retaliate but denied Himself, **1 Peter 2:22-23**. He didn’t develop grudges but had a spirit of forgiveness. He didn’t become depressed but grew stronger and closer to His Father.

Those who suffer because of their loyalty to the kingdom of heaven are blessed by being bound more closely to the kingdom for which they suffer just as the poor in spirit, **Matthew 5:3**.

The joy in being persecuted is found when we realise, that we are suffering for the Name of Christ, **Acts 5:41 / Acts 16:22-25**. All who suffer as faithful servants of the Lord should ‘leap for joy’, **Luke 6:23**.

‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’ **Matthew 5:11-12**

Back in **Matthew 5:10**, Jesus told us that people are persecuted for righteousness’ sake but here in **Matthew 5:11**, He tells us that people are persecuted for the sake of Him.

Jesus is telling us that He expects His followers to follow His example of righteous living regardless of the persecuting we may face, **1 Peter 2:21**.

Though Christians should live joyfully here on Earth, their ultimate reward will be ‘in heaven’, **Matthew 19:29 / Matthew 25:46**. Let it always be remembered that the suffering experienced here is nothing in comparison to the bliss God has in store for His faithful children, **Romans 8:18**.

Also, Christians should find comfort and strength in the example of the prophets and the Christ, **1 Peter 2:21-24**.

Understanding that persecution for righteousness’ sake is not a sign of God’s disfavour, **Hebrews 11:32-38**.

Persecution should be embraced, not resisted, as a way to further develop our character through suffering, **James 1:2-4 / Romans 5:3-5**.

It is worthwhile to note there seems to be a logical progression to the beatitudes. After we come to realise our sinfulness, we must empty ourselves of pride and self-sufficiency, i.e., become ‘poor in spirit’, **Matthew 5:3**, and we must ‘mourn,’ **Matthew 5:4**.

This will make it easier for us to submit to God completely and be strong under His control, i.e., ‘meek’, **Matthew 5:5**. Such a person will naturally ‘hunger and thirst after righteousness’ for they realise without God and His spiritual nourishment, they are destitute, **Matthew 5:6**.

To strongly desire to do what is right should lead us to be ‘merciful’ as God was to us, **Matthew 5:7**, and it will also help in the effort to be ‘pure in heart’, **Matthew 5:8**. Anyone who is full of mercy and devoted to purity is highly qualified to be a ‘peacemaker’, **Matthew 5:9**.

However, a person who possesses these attributes of true joy will be hated by the world and will suffer as one ‘persecuted for righteousness’ sake’, **Matthew 5:10-12**.

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

‘You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.’ **Matthew 5:13**

Jesus taught His disciples where true joy is found. The Lord then continued His address to the people, speaking on the subjects of influence and duties.

Jesus metaphorically referred to His followers as ‘the salt of the earth’. What exactly does this mean? To fully comprehend the Messiah’s statement, we must be aware of some qualities that salt possesses.

1. Salt is a flavouring agent.

This is perhaps the most commonly recognised use of salt. Who hasn’t used salt to improve the taste of food that is otherwise bland?

2. Salt is a preserving agent.

Salt that is added to fresh meat will act as a preservative; it will help delay the decay process. The practice of salting meats has been used for years.

3. Salt increases thirst.

Many people like Chinese food, however, after consuming a lot of Chinese food, our bodies will crave fluids for the rest of the evening! The salt contained in Chinese food cheese noticeably increases our thirst.

4. Salt melts ice.

During the winter months, many people use various mixtures of salt to melt ice on roads, driveways, and sidewalks.

5. Salt irritates.

Have you ever been working outside under the hot sun and had sweat running into your eyes? It stings, doesn't it? The salt contained in sweat is an irritant.

6. Salt has destructive power.

We know that certain portions of our roads, due to concrete damage, have been severely damaged by heavy salting over many winters.

Salt is certainly powerful stuff. Using a little bit will melt the ice, but using a lot can ruin an entire road! Too much salt will also harm or kill living things, such as grass, slugs, etc.

Admittedly, although we understand these attributes and usages of salt today, it is likely that the major thrust of Jesus' point pertained to salt as a flavouring agent, note His use of the word 'seasoned' in the verse, **Leviticus 2:13**. Anyone who is striving to follow Jesus will make the world a better place in much the same way that salt helps certain foods taste better. For instance, in **Acts 2:47** the disciples were described as 'praising God and having favour with all the people.' Without a doubt, they added something good to society.

It is possible for salt to lose its flavour. Normally this should not happen, but it will if the salt becomes contaminated with impurities, e.g., dirt.

Jesus is issuing a warning here. A disciple can lose the qualities that make them valuable before God as 'salt' if they aren't careful to remain separate from harmful impurities like sin, **2 Corinthians 6:17**.

If a Christian becomes contaminated with impurity, then they are 'good for nothing' in service to the Lord, at least not until they come back to Him and seek forgiveness on God's terms, **1 John 1:9**. A Christian ought to be pure and kind in thoughts, deeds, and speech, **Colossians 4:6**.

Such a person will have a preserving effect on righteousness and godliness, as salt preserves food and helps prevent spoiling. They will endeavour, like salt, to remove, or melt, any hindrances that could cause others who are searching for Christ to stumble, **Matthew 18:6**.

However, in the process, they, like salt, may irritate some people. Though this isn't their purpose, when we live for God and stand up for His cause, some will undoubtedly be rubbed up the wrong way.

It is also true that followers of the Lord, like salt, have the potential to cause destruction if they come in contact with the wrong things, namely, sin.

Christians should endeavour to destroy sin from their lives, **Hebrews 12:1-2 / 1 Corinthians 10:13**. They should be a force against evil, **Ephesians 6:10-18 / James 4:7**.

Finally, a faithful disciple should also cause others to thirst for righteousness, **Matthew 5:6**, as salt itself causes physical thirst.

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.' **Matthew 5:14-16**

In addition to being 'salt,' Jesus' disciples are also 'light', namely, 'the light of the world.' The purpose of light is to enable people to see. Light provides 1. illumination, 2. guidance, and 3. warning.

Physical lights shine to dispel darkness, and in so doing serve as guides and warnings, e.g., headlights and lighthouses.

Spiritual lights should function in the same manner, **Psalm 119:105 / Proverbs 4:18-19**. God wants the world to see the truth, and our lights, our lives should reveal His truth, **John 8:12 / John 9:5 / Philippians 2:15**. His truth should be clearly seen in our lives just as a city set on a hill is seen from all directions.

Think of the foolishness of lighting a lamp and then hiding its light. The purpose of lighting a lamp is to provide light for people to see. A major purpose in following Christ is to provide spiritual light for others to see.

We mustn't hide under a 'basket' for any reason, whether it is fear, indifference, love of the world, misplaced priorities, etc. Truly, we cannot be a secret disciples of Christ, either the secrecy will destroy the disciple or the disciple will destroy the secrecy.

If we light a lamp and put it under a basket, either the basket will smother the flame and the light will go out, **Matthew 13:22**, or the lamp will ignite the basket, burning it away for the light to be seen by all, **Jeremiah 20:9**. We must let our lights shine.

For whom should we let our lights shine? The world! Why? That they might take notice of us and exalt us? No! That they might observe our good deeds and give glory and honour to the heavenly Father? Yes!

I'm sure you are aware that this is the first time the word 'Father' is used in the New Testament. Note also that He is 'your Father', He is our Father, He is my Father.

While God is known to the patriarchs as 'God Almighty', **Genesis 17:1**, and to the Jews as 'Yahweh', **Exodus 3:13-15**, we know him primarily as 'Our Father', **Luke 11:2**.

Jesus called God, 'Abba' which in Aramaic means Father, **Mark 14:36**, the Holy Spirit calls God, Abba, Father, **Galatians 4:6**, and Christians can call God Abba, Father, **Romans 8:15**.

Christians should desire that others see their good works in order that others will be drawn to God. The good works we do shouldn't all be secrets, otherwise, we are hiding under a basket and not fulfilling our purpose as 'light' for God.

I believe there is a big difference between 'shining your light' and 'letting your light shine.' The glory for good works is to go to the heavenly Father, not the individual!

Yes, it is pleasing to God for people to see our good works, but only if we aren't performing them to receive personal glory, **Matthew 6:1-18**.

In the same way, salt isn't to draw attention to itself but emphasise the natural flavour of the food. Salt shouldn't cover up or overpower the taste of food and neither should a light draw attention and honour to itself.

After all, people don't praise the streetlights that protect them from thieves and assault, but they do praise the city administration which furnishes the lights! God is the giver of light and every perfect gift, **James 1:17**.

We are nothing, except His servants. May we remember that and continually seek to direct praise to Him and not ourselves. To do such shows a thankful, humble spirit on our part. Such an attitude pleases God.

How can we be the light of the world, when Jesus is the light of the world? **John 8:12 / John 9:5**. An illustration may be useful to answer this question.

The moon which shines in the night sky, actually doesn't give off any light, it only reflects the light from the sun. In the same manner, we are to reflect the light of Christ in the world, as we walk in the light of God, **1 John 1:5-7**.

The primary idea of **Matthew 5:13-16** is that Jesus' disciples should have a great positive influence on those they come in contact with. This influence will never materialise if Christians are content to hide in saltshakers or under baskets. You cannot be a secret disciple!

NOT TO DESTROY BUT TO FULFIL

‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.’
Matthew 5:17

After finishing up His comments on the beatitudes and the importance of His disciples using their influence for good, Jesus begins a lengthy section of discourse on the principles of righteousness. This general theme spans from **Matthew 5:17-7:12**.

This verse is a preface for the rest of the chapter. It was intended to prevent a misunderstanding of the things Jesus was about to say. Our Lord plainly affirmed that His purpose in coming to Earth was not to destroy ‘but to fulfil’, **Romans 8:4**.

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘To show that he never meant to abrogate the law, our Lord Jesus has embodied all its commands in his own life. In his own person there was a nature which was perfectly conformed to the law of God; and as was his nature such was his life.’

To destroy the law would have been to tear it down or demolish it, Jesus didn't come to do that. He came to fulfil the Old Testament prophetically and typically, **Romans 10:4 / Galatians 3:23-25 / Luke 24:44**.

A major purpose of the law was to bring the Hebrew people to Jesus, that is, to prepare them for the coming of the Messiah, **Galatians 3:24-25**. That purpose would not be accomplished if Jesus destroyed the law.

‘For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.’ Matthew 5:18

Jesus basically says, it would be easier for the universe to disappear than for the love of God not to complete it's mission. Jesus' meaning is this, the law of Moses will be in force and nothing will be removed from it, 1. until all is fulfilled or 2. until the world ends.

Jesus refers to the ‘smallest letter’, which corresponds to the English letter ‘i,’ and the least stroke of a pen’, which is the smallest marking to distinguish letters, e.g., the difference between the letters ‘c’ and ‘e’.

For Jesus to say that not even the smallest detail of the law would be removed until all is fulfilled is to indicate His belief in word-for-word inspiration.

It is to say that every letter contained in the Old Testament was there because God wanted it there. Nothing was written that didn't belong, and none of it would be taken away until all was fulfilled, **Deuteronomy 4:2 / John 5:39-40**.

‘Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’ Matthew 5:19

It would be a mistake to understand Jesus to be implying that we may deliberately disregard any of God's commandments and still enter into the kingdom of heaven, as one of the 'least'.

It is important to observe that Jesus was referring to the Old Testament when He mentioned 'the least of these commandments'.

The Lord certainly had the Pharisees in mind when He made this comment, **Matthew 23:3 / Acts 23:6 / Acts 26:5 / Philippians 3:5**. They were guilty of dividing the commandments of God into 'lesser' and 'greater' ones, and they taught that the 'lesser' ones were trivial or insignificant and could thereby be disregarded without danger, **Matthew 22:36 / Matthew 23:23**.

Essentially, they would 'lose' or 'break' what they considered to be the lesser requirements of the law, that is, they would not teach such as being an obligation, **Matthew 15:3-6**. In so doing, the Pharisees were the ones 'destroying' the law, not Jesus.

This disposition to distinguish the importance of the various laws of God was a dangerous one. Those who practised it under the Law of Moses would be inclined to carry the same attitude into the kingdom of Christ when it was established.

Even when such a person obeyed the Gospel to enter the kingdom, their attitude toward God's Word would render them 'least' in the kingdom, **Matthew 5:3**.

For us today, Jesus is saying that those who attempt to rank the commandments of God under the New Covenant by order of importance are treading on dangerous ground.

It's not our place to attempt to categorise the Biblical topics that are 'salvation matters' and the ones that aren't, on the basis of our own opinions, **Romans 14:1-6**.

This isn't to say that we should ignore the distinctions that the Scriptures describe regarding certain matters of importance, **Matthew 22:37-40 / Matthew 23:23 / Mark 16:16**, but we shouldn't go beyond the clear declarations of God's Word, attempting to classify the relative importance of miscellaneous commands, **1 Corinthians 4:6**.

We noted that the disposition that attempts to distinguish the importance of the various laws of God was a dangerous one. Those with this mentality under the Law of Moses would be inclined to carry the same attitude into the kingdom of Christ when it was established.

Even when such a person obeyed the Gospel to enter the kingdom, their improper attitude toward God's Word would render them 'least' in the kingdom, **Matthew 5:19**.

On the other hand, those who highly regarded God's law under the early dispensation would carry over the same respect for His Word into the Christian age.

Those who faithfully 'do' and 'teach' the commands of God, even the 'least' of them, will thus be regarded as 'great' in the kingdom, **Acts 20:27**. Greatness in the kingdom of heaven is measured by devotion to all matters of God's law, both the great and seemingly lesser obligations.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT EXCEEDS

'For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.' **Matthew 5:20**

I believe this is the key verse for the Sermon on the Mount. It contains the central idea, or view, for the entire sermon. A large portion of the sermon, especially from this point on, is a development of what true righteousness is in the kingdom of heaven, as opposed to righteousness under the Law of Moses and the Pharisees' interpretation thereof.

The primary difference that will be seen in the following verses is that the Law of Moses regulated civil conduct and dealt with obvious actions of an individual, while the laws of the kingdom of Christ are given to the individual to regulate their inner spiritual condition and motives of conduct.

Jesus declared that a person's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees if they hope to go to heaven, **Matthew 3:7 / Luke 18:9-14**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'The religion of the Pharisees, hence their righteousness, consisted of externals, ceremonials, rituals, liturgies, and formalities of many kinds, with little or no attention being paid to the condition of the heart. Christ flatly denounced such a concept and indicated that no one could be saved in such a state as that of the typical Pharisee of his day.'

The righteousness of the religious leaders was outward only, **Isaiah 64:6 / Matthew 23:13-33**, but Jesus' disciples must have spiritual righteousness that grows out of love for God and for man.

It must not be self-righteousness or ceremonial righteousness but true moral righteousness, a righteousness that is genuine both privately and publicly, **Luke 18:9-14**.

MURDER BEGINS IN THE HEART

'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.' **Matthew 5:21-22**

After our Lord stressed the importance of His followers being truly righteous, He continued His Sermon on the Mount, addressing a variety of subjects that His audience was well acquainted with.

Jesus' use of the phrase, 'you have heard', is accurate since the common people generally didn't have access to a copy of the Old Testament for personal reading, they heard the law read and interpreted by the religious leaders.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus repeatedly says, 'you have heard', indicating that what the people were being taught and the way these Old Testament verses were being interpreted by their teachers, were not accurate.

The way they were being interpreted often led to confusion and in more cases than not, division between the rabbis and the people as a whole.

It should be noted that Jesus doesn't take away anything from the Old Testament while addressing the topics in this chapter, **Matthew 5:18**, but He does add His own teaching to it.

Jesus quotes from the Old Testaments Scriptures, **Exodus 20:13 / Deuteronomy 5:17** which said, 'you shall not murder'.

In the Old Testament murder was punishable by death, **Exodus 21:12**, but by the time Jesus came on the scene, the leaders had messed with this law to such an extent that if anyone committed murder, they wouldn't be punished with death but simply be brought to judgement and be spared the death penalty.

However, He supplemented that teaching by declaring mental murder, i.e., unwarranted anger, to also be wrong and cause for judgment.

He puts anger at the same level of sin as murder, anyone who has murderous thoughts in their heart against their fellow brother or sister is considered in the eyes of Jesus to be a murderer.

Jesus used the phrase, ‘but I say to you’, to create a strong contrast between what they had heard of old and His authoritative declarations, **Matthew 7:28-29**.

The Lord isn’t doing anything inappropriate here by presenting laws that go beyond explicit Old Testament revelation. Moses announced that the new Lawgiver would speak the words of God and that His words must be heard and obeyed, **Deuteronomy 18:15-20 / Acts 3:22-23**.

Jesus is doing such on this occasion and preparing His disciples for the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. Even though Jesus’ teachings here go beyond the Old Testament revelation, such did not become binding until His death, i.e., when the Old Law was fulfilled, **Colossians 2:14 / Hebrews 9:16-18**.

Also, nothing that Jesus spoke about in this chapter, or anywhere else, contradicted the Old Law in any way. Thus, even if a Jew immediately started living by the principles Jesus taught, i.e., before they were binding, he wouldn’t be violating the Old Testament.

In this text, Jesus separates the sin of anger without cause into three categories. Anger that is unwarranted and not righteous.

1. Silent anger, a person who is angry with their brother but keeps quiet or his anger to himself.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘So Jesus forbids for ever the anger which broods, the anger which will not forget, the anger which refuses to be pacified, the anger which seeks revenge.’

2. Harsh speech, a person whose anger finds expression in labelling someone with harsh words such as ‘Raca’, meaning ‘empty head’ or ‘good for nothing’, **2 Samuel 6:20**.

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Raca is an almost untranslatable word, because it describes a tone of voice more than anything else. Its whole accent is the accent of contempt. It is the word of one who despises another with an arrogant contempt.’

3. Bitter rebuke, a person whose anger finds expression by rebuking someone with bitter words such as ‘fool’. Calling someone a fool is an attack against their character.

Admittedly, in our culture, this may not seem as bad as calling someone a ‘good for nothing,’ but some translators believe that the word used here for ‘fool’ expresses strong feelings of contempt, like wishing the worst upon someone or condemning them verbally.

Jesus plainly teaches that to be angry without cause makes us guilty. He shows the seriousness of the sin by showing the three respective methods of judgment.

First, punishment by the regular Hebrew court, then condemnation by the ‘council’, i.e., the Sanhedrin or highest Hebrew court, and finally the divine punishment of ‘hell fire’, **Matthew 5:29-30 / Matthew 18:9 / Mark 9:43-47 / Matthew 23:15 / Matthew 23:33**.

Here we see Jesus explaining the consequences of anger, the anger grows into hatred which then grows into the action of murder. And notice that Jesus says if ‘anyone is angry with their brother or sister will be subject to judgment.’

Sin has its stages, and God takes note of it from its inception in the heart. Our soul is in danger long before our feelings bear the fruits of violence and murder, **Genesis 4:5-8**.

True righteousness originates from the inside, and Jesus' teachings go beyond the external actions and into the heart, **Leviticus 19:18**. Most murderers won't murder without a motive, and the spirit that excludes hatred and unrighteous anger will make committing the act of murder impossible.

Getting angry is not inherently sinful, **Psalm 7:11 / Ephesians 4:26**, nor is the use of the word 'fool', **Matthew 23:17-19**. Anger, appropriately expressed in response to rebelliousness against God's will, is righteous indignation, **Mark 3:5 / Mark 11:15-17**.

But, anger in response to personal mistreatment is entirely different and dangerous, **James 1:19-20**. We must make sure our words are always carefully chosen from a heart filled with love that seeks the best interests of others, **Ephesians 4:15**.

If words flow from our mouth that are abusive and injurious, beware, for the fire of hell approaches, **James 3:3-12**. We all need to be all so careful of the words we use, especially towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we truly understood the consequences of Jesus' words here I believe we all would be a little more careful in what we say, **James 3:9**.

The way Christians speak to each other is embarrassing at times, especially if they don't agree with some Bible Scripture, it's amazing when someone receives 'a letter' condemning a person to hell and it's usually signed, 'in Christian love.'

I mean when people receive this kind of correspondence, you can almost feel the anger and hatred in the words of the one who sent it, these people need to listen to Jesus' words here and be careful.

PURSUING RECONCILIATION

'Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.' **Matthew 5:23-24**

Our Lord, after forbidding anger without just cause, proceeds to set forth a proper course for reconciliation. The Israelites considered offering a gift on the altar to be the highest act of worship.

Although Christians don't offer gifts to God on a physical altar today, don't think for a moment that this passage is irrelevant to us.

Jesus gave instructions that if someone is offering a gift to God and remembers that they have offended their brother, they should stop and come back to make their offering later. As important as worship is, Jesus the Christ teaches that pursuing reconciliation with our brother should take priority.

Carefully note the wording the Lord uses here, 'your brother has something against you.' Clearly, we are the offending party! Either we have sinned against our brother in some way or they believe that you have. We have the responsibility to go to them if we believe that they are angry with us about something.

It doesn't matter if their reasoning is valid or if they are justified in being upset with us. What matters is that they are offended and both parties involved should work toward immediate reconciliation, **Romans 12:18**. Of course, they too have a responsibility to come to you if they are offended, **Matthew 18:15**.

I've often heard Christians say that they have a problem with a brother or sister so they will refuse to participate in the Lord's Supper.

However, this is a misconception because they fail to realise that worship is more just participating in the Lord's Supper. Jesus demands that people sort their differences out before they come to worship.

Angry feelings must be attended to quickly since they can easily lead to sin, in words and deeds. Thus, we must lay aside our anger the same day to prevent Satan from taking advantage of the opportunity, **Ephesians 4:26-27**. This anger must be set aside in a genuine attempt at reconciliation.

Truly, offering a gift to God is very important, but reconciliation takes precedence over it and all other duties and acts of worship. The greatest gift offered to God will not be accepted if it is made by someone who isn't willing to try to be reconciled to their brother. A proper relationship with our fellow man is more important than worship itself.

We cannot love God and hold a grudge against our brother simultaneously, **1 John 4:20-21**. This is the case because we are made in the image of God, **Genesis 1:26-27**, and we cannot hate someone made in God's image and still love God.

'Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.' **Matthew 5:25-26**

The implication here is that we have done something wrong, our adversary has a case against us. In such circumstances, we should try to make friends quickly and defuse the situation by agreeing with them; we should try to be reconciled. Otherwise, we are likely to end up in prison!

The word, 'adversary' is a word used by the accuser in a lawsuit and implies in the context that it's better to settle any disputes as quickly as you can before it ends up going to court where the judge will get involved and exercise the law against one of them by that time it's usually too late for reconciliation, because either party may find themselves in prison.

A 'penny' was a small, insignificant copper coin. After the debtor was put into prison he was held there until the debt was paid, but if he couldn't pay the debt, he would stay in prison until he died.

Jesus' warning against lawsuits is clear, but we could easily avoid all these problems if we simply went and settled matters between ourselves first.

Jesus' meaning here is simple: if we wrong someone and don't do everything, we can to reconcile with them, we will be judged and punished, perhaps by civil government, but definitely by God, ultimately, **Matthew 18:34**.

We must love our fellow man! We must take our brothers or sisters to court, **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**. We must seek to 'live peaceably with all men' to the best of our ability, **Romans 12:18**. We must pursue reconciliation. If not, we will get what we deserve!

ADULTERY BEGINS IN THE HEART

'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' **Matthew 5:27-28**

Our Lord began by referring to the seventh commandment, **Exodus 20:14**. The Old Law punished the physical act of sin but didn't reach any further. Jesus again goes to the root of the problem, the heart, **Job 31:1**, as He did with the prior subject pertaining to anger and murder.

For a person to lust after someone else is to commit sin. Let it be understood that lust isn't just desire, but unlawful or illicit desire. Thus, it's impossible for someone to lust after his or her spouse since there is nothing sinful about those desires. Sexual desire isn't intrinsically wrong.

Sexual desire is God-given and natural, **Genesis 1:28**. However, it must be fulfilled in the only authorised relationship for such, marriage, **Hebrews 13:4**.

For our eyes to see an attractive person doesn't automatically mean that we've lusted. However, to focus our thoughts on that individual and have illicit thoughts or fantasies is to be guilty of committing adultery in our hearts.

Someone once said, 'you can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you certainly can prevent them from nesting in your hair', how true!

In like manner, there's nothing we can do to prevent some temptations, but we can always keep them from having a resting place in your heart! It should also be noted that there is a difference between a look of lust and a look of admiration or affection.

For instance, there is nothing wrong with fathers gazing admiringly upon their daughters who have grown to maturity, but they should not desire them sexually. It is possible to recognise physical beauty without lusting in our hearts.

Jesus' teaching in this passage is difficult for many, especially men. Even if a person doesn't physically commit adultery, they still stand guilty before God if they merely have the desire to commit the act. If they stare and wish they could gratify their lust, they have sinned.

Truly, it is impossible for one to actively commit physical adultery without first committing the sin in his heart. Hence, the physical act includes the mental and can be shown to be a more serious transgression, **Matthew 19:9**. Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

'Jesus, though tempted in all ways, **Hebrews 4:15**, endured such temptations but did not yield to such sin. He was able to see women as other than objects for His gratification. "He was tempted in all points as we are, but desire was expelled by the mighty power of a pure love to which every woman was a daughter, a sister, or a betrothed: a sacred object of tender respect.'

Our Lord's teaching here clearly shows that we can commit a sin within the confines of our minds. God has always expected His followers to physically abstain from adultery, but to be truly righteous is to develop a mindset that doesn't even desire those things that are unlawful.

If we are able to remove lustful thoughts from our hearts, the physical act of adultery will no longer be a problem. King David would not have committed adultery with Bathsheba if he hadn't seen her and lusted after her, **2 Samuel 11**.

If he hadn't committed adultery, then he wouldn't have murdered Uriah, **2 Samuel 11:14-16**. Much evil could have been prevented had David simply turned away after spotting Bathsheba for the first time!

It's easy to see how idleness and immodesty led to David's lust and unrighteous actions. If we keep busy doing what is right and dressing ourselves modestly, such will go a long way toward preventing lustful thoughts from harbouring in our minds or the minds of others!

May we endeavour to develop hearts that are pure, **Matthew 5:8**. May we meditate upon those things that are noble, pure, and virtuous, **Philippians 4:8**. May we be distinct from the world and not possess ‘eyes full of adultery’, **2 Peter 2:14**.

May we, like Job, make a covenant with our eyes, and decide not to look intently upon others lustfully, **Job 31:1**. If we can keep adulterous thoughts out of our hearts, physical infidelity will never be a problem.

PLUCK IT OUT OR CUT IT OFF

‘If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.’ **Matthew 5:29-30**

The words of our Lord are certainly challenging in this passage, though He never intended for them to be interpreted and implemented literally.

Self-mutilation is not advocated by these verses. This truth is easily confirmed by showing that God wants us to care for our bodies to the best of our ability, **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**.

To mutilate our body doesn’t bring glory to the Almighty. Additionally, to literally pluck out an eye, or two, will not cure our struggle with sin.

The problem ultimately resides in the heart, the mind, not in the organ of sight. We can be guilty of lust whether we have two, one, or no functional eyes!

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Mutilation will not serve the purpose; it may prevent the outward act, but it will not extinguish desire.’

Jesus’ point is in emphasising the far greater worth of our spirit over our physical body. He exhorts us to do whatever it takes to keep from sinning. No physical sacrifice is too great! Truly, it is better to give up even the dearest and most precious things in this life, than to lose our soul in hell.

In a sense, as faithful disciples, we must blind ourselves by choosing not to look with lustful eyes, **Matthew 5:28**, we must put to death the lust of the flesh, **Colossians 3:5** / **1 John 2:15-17**.

The thought expressed by Jesus in **Matthew 5:30** is similar to that of the previous verse. The only difference is that here He refers to cutting off a hand, as opposed to plucking out an eye.

Again, the problem doesn’t lie in the physical hand itself. The hand takes orders from the head. If we use our hands in sinful ways, to steal, for instance, having one less hand will not resolve the problem.

Only a fool would refuse to sacrifice a hobby, a job, a dream, a relationship, or anything else that would cause their eternal home in heaven to be lost. Don’t be a fool! Although many things on this Earth have value, none can compare to your priceless soul.

SENDING AWAY AND REMARRIAGE

‘It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.’ Matthew 5:31-32

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He briefly mentioned the subject of divorce and remarriage. However, He had much more to say about this important topic in **Matthew 19:3-12 / Mark 10:9-12**, which we will deal with when we get to that chapter. For now, we are strictly going to look at Jesus’ comments on this subject as found in **Matthew 5**.

A few translations have led to a total misunderstanding of what Jesus means in these verses, hence why its important to note the Greek word for ‘divorce’, which is ‘apoluo’ which means ‘send away’ and the Greek word for ‘certificate of divorce’, which is ‘apostasion’.

The Hebrew word for ‘put away’ is ‘shalach’ which means to send away, or out. And the Hebrew word for ‘certificate or bill or decree of divorce’ is ‘kriythuwth’ which means a cutting, of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce.

Clearly, there are two separate words used to describe two separate actions. Just as there is a legal way to get married, there is also a legal way to get a divorce, **Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8**.

There is a huge difference between sending away and divorce, they are not the same action but two separate actions, **Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8**.

Notice how this text should read.

‘It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces ‘apoluo’ his wife must give her a certificate of divorce ‘apostasion.’’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces ‘apoluo’ his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced ‘apoluo’ woman commits adultery.’

Jesus said when the man who marries the woman who was ‘put away’ and the woman who is ‘put away’ remarries, they commit adultery, why? because they aren’t in a legal, official situation where they are free to contract new relationships, they are still legally married.

The Jews thought they could just go ahead and ‘put away’ their wives for any old reason, but Jesus says, if they’re going to ‘put away’ their wives, they better make it legal, they better give her a ‘certificate of divorce,’ **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**.

Otherwise, whenever any of them marry again, they will be committing adultery and they know what the penalty is, stoning to death, **Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25 / John 8:5**.

Today, marital unfaithfulness doesn’t necessary mean the end of the marriage, but in Bible times it did because the person doing the martial unfaithfulness was put to death by stoning. Hence a certificate of divorce isn’t required when someone’s partner is dead, **1 Corinthians 7:39**.

If a man ever gave his wife the ‘certificate of divorce’, then he had some obligations to their wife, he had to return the dowry, he had to provide for his wife if they ‘sent them away’, **Genesis 29:18-27 / Genesis 34:11-12 / Exodus 21:10-11 / Exodus 22:16-17 / 1 Samuel 18:25 / 1 Kings 9:16 / Hosea 3:2**.

This was the Jews’ loophole, they ‘put them away’ without the official ‘divorce’. This is what shocked the disciples later, **Matthew 19:10**.

If there is a legal divorce, then the husband would be required to return the dowry. Whatever price he received from the father for the girl that he married would have to be returned. It shocked them in a society where women had no rights because they didn’t have to think of that, **Exodus 21:10**.

They could just send their wives away for any old cause as far as they were concerned. Now Jesus says, no, they can’t do that, they have to respect their wives. They have taken her into their home, they have married her and they can’t just dismiss her.

When we read the original Greek word and we replace the word ‘divorce,’ in these verses, with the proper word which should be used, ‘apoulo’ that is ‘send away’ we discover that Jesus wasn’t emphasising divorce as we understand it today.

He was emphasising the way the Jews were just sending their wives away, without making it legal, without giving them the ‘certificate of divorce’, the ‘apostasion’, **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, because without this certificate of divorce the women couldn’t get married again.

BEING PEOPLE OF OUR WORD

‘Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfil to the Lord the vows you have made.’ But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.’ **Matthew 5:33-37**

After finishing His thoughts on the subject of divorce and remarriage, our Lord stressed the importance of being people of our word. Jesus begins these comments by referencing **Leviticus 19:12** and **Deuteronomy 23:21-23**. In this passage, to ‘swear’ is to utter an oath, it is to appeal to a higher being or thing in order to attest to the truthfulness of our words. Under the Old Law, making oaths was acceptable, though swearing falsely was never viewed favourably.

Over the centuries, the Jewish people had developed the idea that an oath wasn’t binding unless the name of God appeared in it. They would therefore use various oaths to suit their purpose of adding weight to their statements or promises, but they wouldn’t feel obligated to keep such an oath if they had not explicitly sworn to God, **Exodus 20:7**. The Jews had other strange rules regarding which oaths were binding and which ones weren’t, **Matthew 23:16-22**. When Jesus said in ‘do not swear at all’, His meaning was this: do not swear at all in the manner I am about to illustrate. Do not make oaths that you don’t intend to keep, **Numbers 30:2**.

Do not think that we can word a promise in a special way and in so doing make it void or meaningless. A false oath is always false, whether it is explicitly made in the name of Deity or not.

To swear by ‘heaven’ or ‘the earth’ or by ‘Jerusalem’, in an effort to make an oath that didn’t have to be kept was wrong since all of the statements ultimately refer back to God anyway.

Heaven is ‘God’s throne’, **Isaiah 66:1-2**, the earth is ‘His footstool’, **Acts 7:49**, and Jerusalem is ‘the city of the great King’, **Psalms 48:2**.

It didn’t really matter if God’s Name was explicitly mentioned! A person’s word was to be their bond! Those who thought they could speak oaths in a certain way and not be required to fulfil them were only fooling themselves, much like some today who make an agreement but later deny the validity of such because they had their ‘fingers crossed’, or some other such childish nonsense.

Jesus’ example in **Matthew 5:36** is distinct from the previous illustrations He has offered. ‘And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.’

We can indeed change our hair colour today, but this isn’t our Lord’s point. He seems to be declaring that it isn’t wise to swear by our own life since we have no inherent control over such, **James 5:12**.

Jesus' concluding point is a powerful one. Instead of making oaths, we would be better off simply living in such a way that whatever we state will be accepted as the truth.

Our character and life should confirm the truthfulness of our words so that no oath is necessary. A righteous person should be content making a sincere affirmation or denial of any statement, and others should be satisfied to take such a statement at face value.

Many who study this passage naturally reflect upon certain oaths that are commonly made today, and they wonder, is it wrong to affirm a judicial oath, for example, or exchange marital vows? I believe the answer is 'no'. Allow me to explain why.

It is common in wedding ceremonies for couples to pledge their love and faithfulness to each other, but these vows simply explain the extent of the 'yes, I will be your husband or wife' affirmation. Marriage vows are promises that don't require us to swear or make an oath upon a higher being or thing.

In a judicial setting, however, there are times when one is required to swear or make an oath. Although such should not be necessary for a Christian, it appears that complying with such isn't wrong. Jesus, Himself answered under oath before the Sanhedrin, **Matthew 26:63-64**.

Were His words any more truthful under oath? Of course not, but Jesus didn't resist the authority of the high priest in this regard. Thus, it would be difficult to conclude that we should resist the authority of our government in judicial proceedings.

Paul also made oaths on certain occasions. They seem to centre around the notion that God was a witness to the truthfulness of the apostle's statements, **Romans 1:9 / 2 Corinthians 1:23**. Therefore, it would seem to be acceptable for one to use such language today for emphasis.

The examples of Jesus and Paul strongly indicate that the words of the Lord in **Matthew 5:33-37** should not be interpreted in an absolute sense. The thrust of the teaching is to correct the abuses of oaths common among men, **Matthew 23:16-22**, not to forbid every type of oath.

Ultimately, God wants us to be a person of our word. Our word should be our bond. We shouldn't feel a need to voluntarily make an oath. We shouldn't feel a need to say, 'I promise'. A simple 'yes' or 'no' ought to be sufficient, **James 5:12**.

When we affirm that we will do something, do it! Stick by our word regardless of the cost to ourselves, **Psalms 15:4**. The only exception to this would be if our words would end up forcing us to commit sin. In that case, we should break our word and seek forgiveness for making such a foolish promise, to begin with.

Furthermore, when we don't want to do something, or simply cannot then declare such. Don't say 'maybe' when we know the answer is 'no'.

Don't say 'yes' when we don't mean it. When we give our word, regardless of the situation, people are listening and watch to see if we mean what we say.

It is difficult to trust a person when their words don't harmonise with their actions. It is better to say nothing than to lie, **Matthew 12:36-37**, but the best course of action by far is to speak the truth plainly and be a man or woman of our word.

'You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' **Matthew 5:38**

This law was just because the punishment fit the crime, **Exodus 21:24**. It is likely this law was to be applied judicially and not personally by the one wronged, lest it be perceived as an act of vengeance, **Leviticus 19:18**. Although the Old Law's teaching on this subject was clear, Jesus had a new revelation to share.

The Jews twisted the teaching of the Old Testament law on this matter, they basically took these principles and applied them to their everyday relationships.

The ‘eye for an eye’ was a civil law of the Old Testament where the people had the authority to punish offenders, but the punishment must fit the crime, **Exodus 21:23-24**.

The retaliation law that was given to Israel was more compassionate than the law that existed previous to the giving of the law to Israel. In reference to this law, Jesus stated that love should succeed over the will to retaliate against our neighbour, **Leviticus 24:19-20**.

The principle of the law would be that the death penalty would be given to those who voluntarily murdered another person. If someone voluntarily took the life of another, he had his right to life taken from him, **Deuteronomy 19:21**. This law made accusers think twice before slanderously accusing one of a deed for which he had no evidence. We have to remember that the law of the land before God gave his instructions were really bad.

If you kill my child, I will kill all your children, your wife, your brothers, your whole generation! If you knock out my tooth or eye, I will knock out all of yours and kill you also.

Here in Matthew, Jesus is teaching against the concept of retaliation. What Jesus was condemning was the Pharisees’ misapplication of the principle of this law. They were using the principle as a justification for personal revenge. They misunderstood the principle of the law.

That principle is that there is a punishment for the violation of law, and the punishment must match the crime. In other words, the death penalty wouldn’t be given to one who told a lie.

GOING THE SECOND MILE

‘But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.’ **Matthew 5:39-41**

1. Jesus shares an example of non-resistance to personal insults, **Matthew 5:39**.

Rather than resist an insult, such as a facial slap, **2 Corinthians 11:20**, we should meekly endure it and suffer another rather than resisting evil with evil, **Proverbs 15:1**. It’s better to suffer ill-treatment than to resist or retaliate against those who would persecute us, **1 Peter 2:18-20**.

2. We see an example of non-resistance to judicial injustice, **Matthew 5:40 / Exodus 22:26 / Deuteronomy 24:13**.

Disciples need to remember that physical things such as clothing are replaceable and truly insignificant in the big picture. Wasting precious time fighting over matters such as these isn’t helpful for the follower of Christ, rather, it is a hindrance.

3. Jesus gives an example of non-resistance to government oppression, **Matthew 5:41 / Romans 13:1**.

On that day, the Roman soldiers had the authority to require a person to carry their baggage or armour one mile, **Luke 23:26**. The Jews had mile markers along the roadsides, and they would typically drop the baggage after the first mile. Jesus commands a willingness to go two miles! Imagine the soldier’s surprise! The individual is obviously not thinking about their ‘rights’.

They aren’t harbouring hateful thoughts toward the soldier for ‘making’ them carry the soldier’s load. They are willing to cheerfully comply and serve.

The meaning for us is that we should perform beyond the call of duty. We should do more than what is expected. Truly, love begins where duty ends.

‘Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.’ Matthew 5:42

If someone is in need and asks for help, we should not refuse to give what we can, **Luke 6:29-30 / Romans 12:21**. The disciples shouldn’t retaliate by withholding from those who would ask of them, **Deuteronomy 15:8-10 / Galatians 6:10 / James 2:14-17**.

The disciples must willingly give when compelled by those who would demand of them according to law, **Luke 6:29-30**.

Jesus’ words in this section are perhaps best understood as general principles of non-resistance and not as absolute commands to always be applied literally, just as **Matthew 5:29-30** are not to be applied literally.

After all, did the Lord really intend that evildoers be free to slap or insult us over and over again? Are we always to give to those who ask of us, turning no one away? The answer is no, **John 18:20-23 / 2 Thessalonians 3:10**.

Jesus’ point is that small injuries or offences are to be gracefully passed over. If someone slaps us, we’ve been insulted, but it’s not an assault on our life. We shouldn’t feel humiliated but should rejoice in the opportunity to return good for evil, **Matthew 5:10-12**, assuming that we didn’t deserve the slap.

To let someone, have your coat or other possession or to go with them two miles is to show in attitude, word, and deed that you are not filled with covetousness or hatred but with a spirit of love.

This is the type of righteousness Christ expects of His disciples, **Romans 12:17-21**. This type of response will have the best chance of touching the hearts of others for the Lord.

To insist on every individual right or to retaliate against every personal injury is to dispute continually with all men. Such actions describe one filled with selfish pride, not humility, **Matthew 5:3-5**. This type of response glorifies Satan, not God!

Wrongdoing that is committed against Christians originates from Satan but Christians must resist the temptations of Satan, **James 4:7**.

However, be careful not to misapply this passage. Jesus never said not to restrain the murderer’s hand. He never said not to oppose the wicked tyrant. And, He never intended for our behaviour to encourage greed or laziness in others.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.’ Matthew 5:43-45

The law commanding love for our neighbour is found in **Leviticus 19:18**, but the law to hate our enemies is not found explicitly in God’s Word.

However, the Hebrews were forbidden to make peace with the people of Canaan, **Exodus 34:11-16 / Deuteronomy 7:1-6**, and the bloody wars which were waged by God’s own command inevitably taught them to hate their enemies. This was even the feeling of their most pious men, **2 Kings 13:19**.

In contrast, Jesus desires His disciples to practice love rather than revenge. He wants us to have a selfless concern for the ultimate good of others, **Luke 7:27-36 / Luke 10:25-37**.

He wants us to love our enemies, not in an emotional sense which would be impossible, but in the sense that we seek what is in their best interest.

It's in this manner that we can and must love our enemies. Jesus' life perfectly illustrated this principle of righteousness, **Luke 10:25-37 / Acts 7:60 / 1 Samuel 24:13**.

We love our enemies when we bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. These things are not possible if hatred resides in our hearts. Even if these activities don't change them, they will help us develop love like God's.

Truly, this is how we should properly respond to persecution. This should deepen our sense of awe concerning divine love.

Imagine how putting into practice Jesus' teaching would affect the world we're living in now. Imagine a world where good was returned for evil! What if we practised what Jesus did?

1. Don't curse your offender that's the worldly thing to do.

When we get struck, we want to retaliate, when we get wounded, we want to wound back. And it's so easy to rationalise, it's so easy to justify your offence and to want to hurt back. Most people in life think you survive by hurting back, you slap me, and I'll slap you back harder, **Romans 12:14**.

2. Don't curse your offender if someone hurts you.

The first thing you want to do is shout at them to God. Do we have any record of Jesus cursing when He was wounded? **1 Peter 2:23**.

Do you want to let your enemy have it? The Bible says no! Do what Jesus did, let God have it. Just hand over the whole situation to God and trust Him with it, if you need to talk out your pain, talk it out with God, don't curse your offender.

3. Don't nurse your pain.

How does holding onto it change the past or repair broken relationships? Why do you want your enemy to pay for something that Jesus has already paid for?

If the blood of Jesus has satisfied God for their sin, why are you still not satisfied? You see, the cross has invalidated all justification for holding a grudge, **Ephesians 2:16**.

That doesn't mean you still can't hate, it means you don't have a right to. You have no right because of the righteousness of the cross of Jesus to be holding onto a grudge with anybody. We have got sufficient motivation to let go of bitterness.

The struggle to forgive is the struggle of the will and to soften your will, you have to do some serious business at the cross. Forgiveness is hard but so was Calvary and that's our model, **Ephesians 4:32 / Colossians 3:13**.

The cross doesn't make forgiveness easy, but it does make it possible. Love your enemies, do good to them, feed them when they are hungry, give them clothes when they are cold, and visit them when they are sick.

God bestows blessings abundantly upon all, both the good and evil, yes, even our enemies. He makes His sun rise and He sends rain, **Matthew 5:45**.

Does it not seem incredible that a Being would be so generous, even to those who hate Him or deny His existence? It sounds unbelievable from man's perspective, but that is the depth of God's love, **John 3:16 / Romans 5:8 / Ephesians 3:18**. Let us imitate His type of benevolence, **Luke 6:35**.

‘If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ Matthew 5:46-48

If we only love those who return our love, how are we any better than the tax collectors? Tax collectors were not highly regarded in Jesus’ day for several reasons.

1. The Jews, being a subjugated people, paid taxes to the Romans, and this made the taxes especially distasteful, **Luke 18:9-14**.
 2. The Jews who worked as tax collectors for the Romans were considered by their brethren to be traitors, **Matthew 9:9-17**.
 3. The men who would work in such a position were often guilty of fraud or extortion, **Luke 19:7-8**.
- Jesus’ point is that our religion is worth little if it doesn’t lead us to a higher love than that which is shown by worldly men, **Proverbs 24:17**.

Our love should not be restricted simply to those who are like us. We should greet everyone in a kind manner, seeking opportunities to do good for all, **Galatians 6:10**.

If we greet or salute only our friends, how are we better than pagans who do the same? The Jew is very cordial to his fellow Jew. Jesus, however, commands that genuine kindness be shown to all men, even those who are not fellow Jews.

BE PERFECT

‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect’. Matthew 5:48 AV

Can we be perfect like God? This question can we be perfect like God is based on the verse from the ‘Authorized Version’, where the first four words suggest that ‘perfection’ is a goal which we are urged to attain.

The later revisions, however, offer us renderings in which the language isn’t only much plainer and therefore easier to understand, but which also reveal that the verse relates to an imperative, to something that is to be obeyed and is therefore much more daunting!

The Revised Standard Version, for example, reads, ‘You, therefore, must be perfect, as you’re heavenly Father is perfect’.

In other words, what we are facing isn’t a request or an exhortation, but a command that is as plain as any other command found in the Word of God.

Can we possibly obey this command, or is it a demand that is too exacting? Does it impose upon us an unrealistic standard? In short, is this something we can never realise this side of Heaven? Or, is it perhaps not meant to be taken seriously?

I suspect that we are inclined to take the latter view! Whenever we encounter difficult verses, we are likely to tell ourselves that they aren’t meant to be taken literally and then we hurry on to look at something in the Scriptures that is less demanding!

IDEALISTIC? OR PERFECTIONIST?

Not surprisingly, **Matthew 5:48** has prompted a wide range of interpretations and explanations. At one extreme there is the ‘idealistic’ explanation of those who tell us, ‘it is not to be taken seriously’, whilst, at the other extreme, there is the view of those who teach that believers are required to attain a state of ‘sinless perfection’, in which they don’t and even can’t commit sin.

I’m sure most of us have met people who have claimed that they have reached a stage in their spiritual growth when they never sin. And, of course, the notion is utterly ridiculous!

It is summarily dismissed by the apostle John in **1 John 1:8** and **1 John 1:10**. You will, however, find that the response, that the ‘sinless perfectionists’ make to this argument is erroneously based on **1 John 3:9**.

But, when they use this verse, they fail to recognise that the words ‘cannot sin’, in the Greek text, represent the ‘aorist tense’, which is the tense that describes something that is ‘ongoing, continuing, or incomplete’.

The N.I.V. renders this verse a bit better, ‘No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.’ For this reason, some translations read, like the N.I.V. ‘he cannot keep on sinning’.

In other words, the child of God doesn’t habitually sin. Whilst he may be exposed to temptation and may even fall, he doesn’t continue to commit the same sin over and over again. Sin isn’t his normal way of life. He doesn’t practice sin. He doesn’t live in sin.

And what is more, when he realises that he has been ‘caught in a sin’, to use Paul’s words in **Galatians 6:1**, he knows that, because he is sincerely repentant, he may seek the forgiveness that is always available, **1 John 1:9**.

1. TWO IMPORTANT WORDS

Look carefully at what the Lord says. He doesn’t say, ‘You must be sinless as God in heaven is sinless’, because, at that time, He wasn’t discussing either sin or sinlessness.

There are two words in the verse that are supremely important, the words ‘Father’ and ‘perfect’, and we need to look at them in that order.

1. THE WORD ‘FATHER’

This is the more important of the two because ‘Father’ is the word which immediately speaks to us of relationship. What Jesus tells us in **Matthew 5:48**, rests on the principle that every new relationship brings new responsibility. Test this statement! Examine it from whatever angle you please. Consider it in connection with any human relationship into which we may possibly enter, and you will find that the principle remains true and unshakeable.

In the ‘Sermon on the Mount’, Jesus has been speaking to His disciples about their relationship to the heavenly Father. He has said, in effect, ‘God is your Father, and because this is so, it follows that you bear the responsibility of children, to be like your Father’.

Notice, that He says, ‘as your heavenly Father’, or ‘like your heavenly Father’. He presents the Father as our model, our example. Now, this is the essence of true worship. It has been said that ‘the sum of true religion is to imitate the God whom we worship’.

This is why Paul wrote, ‘Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children’. **Ephesians 5:1**.

2. THE WORD ‘PERFECT’

There are four New Testament words which have been translated by this word, and, unfortunately, we often make the mistake of failing to understand its true, biblical meaning.

How often have you heard it said, ‘There is nothing perfect in this world!’ Such expressions have become almost proverbial, and we are inclined to accept them as though they express an infallible truth, which they do not!

There are things in this world which are ‘perfect’ in the sense that they can’t be improved upon. And there are certain matters in which we may become perfect if we have the desire.

Think about the meaning of that word. We all know the meaning that we attach to it today. The modern definition of ‘perfect’ means, ‘without flaws or faults’. But, when the New Testament was written, the word had a quite different meaning.

In **Matthew 5:48**, ‘perfect’ is the translation of the Greek word ‘teleios’, and means, ‘full-grown, mature, or complete.’ Sometimes it means ‘an end’.

1. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking about eternal life? **Matthew 19:16-22**. He had done so very much and was admirable in so many ways, but he was conscious of a lack in his life. Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect...’ **Matthew 16:21**. In other words, ‘If you wish to be complete...’

Referring to teachers and teaching, **James 3:2** uses the same word when it reads, ‘We all make mistakes, but if anyone makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man’. This means being fully mature in this respect.

2. **1 Corinthians 2:6** reads, ‘yet among the mature (Greek- ‘perfect’) we do impart wisdom.’

Other passages to look at are **Hebrews 5:9**, where the writer says, ‘once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him’.

And **1 Corinthians 14:20**, ‘Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults’, and, especially, **1 Corinthians 13:10** ‘But when the perfect comes...’ The word, again, is ‘teleios’, ‘the complete’.

In all of these passages the word ‘perfect’ doesn’t mean, ‘perfect’ in the sense of ‘sinless’, but means ‘fully-grown, mature, or complete’, so, with this in mind, let’s return to **Matthew 5:48**, and look at it in its original context.

THE VERSE IN ITS PROPER SETTING

You will notice, I am sure, that Jesus speaks these words found in **Matthew 5:48**, as He deals with the Christian law of forgiveness. He is speaking about love, and we must, once again, pay special attention to the name He uses for God.

It’s the name ‘Father’. He is saying that as a Father, God is our example, our model in the exercise of love, and as His children, we must be complete, full-grown, and mature, in this aspect of our own character.

He is saying, in effect, ‘it is easy for you to love those who love you! But for you who call God, ‘Father’, the standard is much higher. I say that, because of the love of your Father, and with His help, you must not only love your friends but also those who even hate you.’

‘And when you have reached the point where you can love those who are unkind to you, or speak evil about you or treat you badly, you will, in this aspect of your character, be like your heavenly Father. You will have become spiritually mature. Perfect!’

You see, then, that the principle presented by the Lord Jesus in **Matthew 5:48**, applies to every possible aspect of human life. But, here it is expressed in connection with the great law of love. To love only those who love us is to be imperfect in love. But to love those who do not love us in return is to be perfect in love.

In conclusion, we need to remember that when we read such words of the Lord Jesus, we mustn’t turn away from them as though they have no message for our time, or as though they demand that we attempt the impossible. It’s fatal at any time, to read His words and then say, ‘this is demanding perfection from me and perfection is impossible’.

We should read the New Testament scriptures with this fact fixed in our minds, the Lord, Jesus, always means what He says! And He never demands the impossible!

INTRODUCTION

‘Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ‘So, when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.’ **Matthew 6:1-4**

DOING GOOD TO PLEASE GOD

Our Saviour here teaches the general principle that man must not engage in acts of ‘righteousness’ in order to receive the attention and praise of other men. This truth is applied to three actions in this chapter: charitable deeds, praying and fasting.

These were three major areas in which the Pharisees of Jesus’ day clearly manifested their hypocrisy and impure motives. True followers of the Lord must exceed their type of righteousness, **Matthew 5:20**.

Jesus declares that those who perform acts of righteousness in order to obtain praise from men will receive just that, the praise of men, **Matthew 6:2 / Matthew 6:5 / Matthew 6:16**.

They won’t enjoy any spiritual benefit from the heavenly Father for those actions, though they could have. God will only reward acts of righteousness that result from proper motives.

A good example of a person doing a charitable deed with a proper motive can be seen in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, **Luke 10:25-37**. The Samaritan acted benevolently toward the man in need. Of course, had there been an audience when the priest or Levite went by, the man in need probably would have received help sooner!

Here Jesus speaks about the genuine and eternal reward in heaven, on the one hand, there is ‘blowing your own trumpet’, so to speak, this speaks of the reward being short-lived, uncertain, and unsatisfying reward of popular applause or approval.

Some believe that this practice of ‘sounding a trumpet’, **Matthew 6:2**, before doing a charitable deed was literally practised, others understand the reference figuratively.

In either case, the hypocrites of today don’t blow literal trumpets to foretell their acts of benevolence, yet they certainly do use methods to call attention to their generosity that they might receive personal glory.

Notice Jesus uses the word ‘when’, not if, **Matthew 6:3**. When we do good for someone else, ‘our left hand shouldn’t know what the right hand is doing’, **Matthew 6:3**. The idea here is that a Christian’s generosity should be a natural part of their life.

It should come so spontaneously, and with so little thought, that one part of the body should almost be able to engage in it without the other parts knowing. This figure of speech clearly forbids us from boasting about personal acts of goodness.

The Christian should always have respect for the greater. Christians shouldn’t give for public display, ‘look at what I’m doing’ so to speak but their giving should be as private as possible in order that our motives for giving be kept pure.

The statement doesn’t demand that good works be done secretly or that they cannot be made known by others, **Mark 12:41-44 / Acts 4:32-37 / 2 Corinthians 8:1-5**. Jesus is not forbidding the publicity of good works, He is forbidding the attitude that desires publicity.

Are we certain Jesus isn’t teaching us to do all good deeds secretly? Yes, even though the next verse mentions good deeds being done in secret and rewarded openly, **Matthew 6:4**. If we conclude that all good deeds must be done secretly, then we will contradict what our Lord taught earlier in **Matthew 5:16**.

A Christian’s goal in life should be to work in such a way that others will not see them but their good deeds. That’s what the focus should be on, the good deed, not the mortal man or woman doing good. This is the difference between ‘letting our light shine’ and ‘shining our light,’ **Matthew 5:16**.

It’s worth noting that there are essential requirements for secrecy in this area of righteousness. Secrecy in giving personal aid and assistance to helpless or unfortunate people is commanded by Christ and has these obvious qualities to commend it.

1. It assures the purity of motive in the heart of the giver by removing the temptation to hypocrisy.
2. It protects and honours the privacy of the recipient, a privacy that is crucial to their recovery and restoration.
3. It protects the benefactor from receiving a load of call upon his generosity.
4. It provides a decent basis for the development of true love and friendship between the helper and the person helped.
5. It honours this specific commandment of Christ, and, to the Christian, this is the most important of all, **Romans 12:6-8**.

In what ways can we give? We can give our time, our energy, our ears, our finances, food, water, shelter etc.

How does giving help us in terms of evangelism? Giving helps because when we give, we’re demonstrating Christ-likeness, we’re pointing people to Jesus through our giving and when we do it secretly, we’re helping prevent boasting in ourselves. This is one reason why giving is a gift, it’s not just the ability to give but the ability to give secretly.

Ultimately, we must desire that the praise be given to God for good works accomplished and not to ourselves, **Matthew 5:16**. We shouldn't rob God of the glory that is rightfully His by focusing our praise upon the creation rather than the Creator, and we shouldn't rob ourselves of the 'reward' that Almighty God has in store for us when we seek His approval rather than the glory of men, **Matthew 6:4**.

HOW TO AND HOW NOT TO PRAY

'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.' **Matthew 6:5-8**

Many passages in the New Testament emphasise the importance and necessity of prayer for all Christians. However, Jesus addresses the subject with the most depth, giving practical advice on how to pray and how not to pray.

Jesus expects His disciples to pray, such is clear by His use of the word 'when', not 'if,' **Matthew 6:5-6**. Jesus is emphasising the need to be 'sincere' in prayer. Those who pray to be seen by men, as those who do charitable deeds with the same motive, have no reward from the heavenly Father, **Matthew 6:5**.

Hypocrites or pretenders are often diligent to exercise their 'religiousness' in the most obvious way in order to gain the acclaim of others. These individuals are full of pride and lovers of themselves. Such does not please the Lord, **Luke 18:10-14** / **James 4:6** / **Matthew 23** / **2 Timothy 3:2-9**.

Going into a room and closing the door to pray, **Matthew 6:6**, suggests that Jesus is stressing the advantage of solitude in prayer. We can more easily develop sincerity in prayer privately.

Generally, there will be fewer distractions and disturbances since we can better control the environment when isolated from others. The essence of prayer is seeking after God, and it is undoubtedly easier to seek Him out in solitude because the temptation to pray to be seen by men is removed.

God rewards those who petition Him in a proper spirit by granting their requests that are made in accordance with His will, **1 John 5:14-15**. We mustn't conclude that Jesus is here prohibiting public prayer.

The New Testament authorises Christians to engage in public prayer, **Acts 2:42** / **1 Timothy 2:8** / **James 5:16**, although it should be noted that Christ seemed to pray more often when He was alone, **Matthew 14:23** / **Matthew 26:36-46** / **Mark 1:35** / **Luke 5:16** / **Luke 6:12** / **Luke 9:18**.

Our Lord underscores the need for 'simplicity' in prayer, **Ecclesiastes 5:2**. We must avoid using meaningless, mechanical phrases. The pagans were often guilty of such, **1 Kings 18:26** / **Acts 19:34**.

Note that Jesus doesn't condemn repetition in prayer, He condemns 'babbling' which is a vain repetition, **Matthew 6:7-8**. A prayer can be repetitive and still be meaningful, **Matthew 26:44**. Offering thanks for food at every meal could turn into vain repetition, but not if we are truly grateful and mindful of the fact that God is the One who gives all things.

The beauty of the Lord's model prayer, which we will consider shortly, is its simplicity. It is less than sixty words in Greek. If we follow Christ's example, our public prayers will be shorter and our private prayers will be longer.

To have God as our Father is to have the 'security' of knowing that our prayers are heard, thus, vain repetition is unnecessary. Our needs are known even before the first petition is uttered, **Matthew 6:8**.

Consequently, some wonder why prayer is necessary. It cannot be said that God is ignorant and in need of being informed, nor is He reluctant that we need to persuade Him. It appears that God imparts His gifts in response to our eagerness to receive them, **Luke 11:5-13 / James 4:2**.

Even if this weren't the case, we should pray simply because we are commanded to do so, **1 Thessalonians 5:17**. Since such is physically impossible, perhaps the meaning is that God expects His children to have a mindset that continually seeks to be in tune with Him. If such is correct, then to 'pray without ceasing' is to be mindful always of the Lord and His will in our everyday decisions and activities.

It's to communicate with the Lord silently and informally throughout our day, offering brief words of thanks and praise as well as confessing shortcomings and expressing petitions. These brief prayers can and should be offered regularly as we go about our business.

Let me hasten to state that I am not advocating that all of our prayers be brief, isolated thoughts. I believe it is wise to also make a custom of offering more in-depth prayers at certain times during the day. Daniel is an excellent example of this, **Daniel 6:10**.

God must be approached with confidence, not doubting, in prayer, **Hebrews 4:16 / James 1:5-8**. Even if we feel inadequate to express ourselves fully before God, we can be comforted in the realisation that God knows our hearts, **Romans 8:26-27**.

Patience and persistence are also required, **Luke 18:1-8**. It must be remembered that the Father 'is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think', **Ephesians 3:20**.

There's nothing more terrifying when a person becomes a Christian and they don't know how to pray, they don't know what to say or how to say it, they don't where to begin and where to end.

This is to be expected, after all, Jesus' own disciples didn't know how to pray, even though they had heard and seen many people pray. But there must have been something about the way Jesus prayed and the words He used that encouraged the disciples to want to learn, **Luke 11:1**.

'This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.' **Matthew 6:9-13**

In addition to the principles of prayer that Jesus shared with His disciples, He also offered an example for them to consider and learn from.

There are a few religious groups who repeat this prayer every time they meet together, but Jesus never intended for these words to be recited week in and week out. If He wanted this prayer to be recited, then this would go against everything He taught earlier about vain repetition in prayer, **Matthew 6:7**.

Notice that Jesus' didn't tell them they were to use these exact words, He said this is HOW we should pray, we should pray in this manner, **Matthew 6:9**. We would call it a model prayer because the prayer itself reminds us of what our prayers should be about.

When Jesus prayed, He always addressed the heavenly Father, **Matthew 6:9**, and He did so in a reverent manner, **Psalms 145:1 / Mark 14:36**.

God is our Father and we are His children. Many times, Jesus got into trouble with the religious leaders because He called God, His Father. This is all about our relationship with God and so, when we pray, it's always good to begin our prayer by recognising who He is and who we are in relation to Him.

The word 'hallowed', **Matthew 6:9**, is similar to the word 'holy,' which means to be separate for God's purpose, to be dedicated to Him. Remember that God is a Holy God and His name is holy and He deserves our respect because He is in heaven.

It's here we see the balance of our relationship with the Lord, yes, He is our Father, but He is also to be hallowed by us, kept holy, we must respect Him when we're speaking to Him in prayer.

God's Name should be considered holy, it is not common or something to be treated lightly. When we address the Father in prayer, we should be as respectful as possible.

After all, we're not just speaking to anybody but to the Almighty, the only true and living God! If we give respect and honour to our earthly father, how much more should we give to God!

Jesus told them to pray that God's kingdom come, **Matthew 6:10**. At the time these instructions were given to the disciples, the kingdom of God hadn't yet come, **Matthew 16:18-19 / Mark 9:1 / Acts 2**.

The kingdom of God has come, and Christ is now reigning, **Colossians 1:13 / 1 Corinthians 15:24-25**. Instead, we should pray that the kingdom is enlarged.

The disciples were to pray that men would accept the kingdom reign of Jesus in the sense that the will of the Father be done on earth as it is done in heaven, **Matthew 6:10**.

As the will of the Father is done in the hearts of men and women on earth as it is done in heaven, then the kingdom comes. Jesus here asks the disciples to pray that people accept the heavenly kingdom's reign in order that they accept His kingship that was yet to come.

The words, 'Your will be done' is a petition of the present, **Matthew 6:10**. This has everything to do with the will of God and our prayers need to be in accordance with the will of God.

To offer such a prayer is to commit ourselves to the doing of God's will as well as to the teaching of that will to others and encouraging them to also submit to it.

This is essentially a prayer for the spread of the Gospel and obedience to it. We should pray that God's will be done everywhere, at all times, and by all beings.

The whole point of this is basically praying that those in the world who don't have Christ will accept what God has done for them and come to be obedient to Him and His will, and so, enjoy the benefits of living in God's kingdom.

Notice also that God is the focal point in the prayer, we start by praising Him, for who He is, whilst recognising His holiness and then we pray that God's deepest desires and will for mankind, will be established on earth, just as it has been established in heaven. To know what the Lord's will is, we need to study His Word, **Romans 12:1-2**, and spend time with mature Christians.

Notice how we've moved from the focus of being on God to ourselves in **Matthew 6:11**. Notice that He speaks our our daily needs.

In the A.A. they have a saying which says, 'keep it in the day,' which basically means take one day at a time. I think that's good advice because this is what Jesus says over and over again, **Matthew 6:28-34**.

Notice our daily needs are the basic requirements for life, food, clothing and drink. When the Israelites were in the desert God provided Manna 'daily', **Exodus 16:21**.

The petition for 'daily bread', **Matthew 6:11**, isn't for milk and honey, the symbols of luxury, but for bread that will be sufficient for this day, **Exodus 16:12-31**.

God will supply all necessary daily needs if we seek His kingdom first, **Matthew 6:25-33 / Philippians 4:19**. Of course, we must realise that there is a difference between our wants and our needs. We must be careful not to let prosperity interfere with thankfulness for daily needs, **Proverbs 30:8-9**.

None of us has a promise that we'll be here tomorrow that's why we have to learn to live and rely on God 'one day at a time', as Lina Martell once sang.

God is the one who is the giver of all blessings and He's the one who will take care of our needs, but we need to learn to put our trust in God to provide what we need today, even though there may be times when we can't see what will happen tomorrow, **1 Timothy 6:7**.

Jesus uses the word 'debts' here in **Matthew 6:12**, in a spiritual way. Our sins are like spiritual debts to God, **Matthew 18:21-35**. Jesus elaborates upon this thought immediately after the close of this model prayer.

It's difficult enough to pray for forgiveness when our hearts are broken because we know we've hurt God with our actions or thoughts, but it's even more difficult to forgive those who have hurt us, especially if they are Christians who should know better.

But notice the condition that Jesus places upon our prayer for forgiveness, He says we can only ask for forgiveness when we have also shown forgiveness toward others, **Matthew 6:12**. In other words, we can't expect God to forgive us, if we're not willing to forgive others.

Now we can fight and try and justify our unforgiveness to others but notice that Jesus stresses this point again in **Matthew 6:14-15**. It never ceases to amaze me that people hold on to grudges for years, I was speaking to someone recently who was telling me about a brother really offending him many years ago and he still has the emails to prove it!

We need to remember that we have all sinned against each other at one time or another and we need forgiveness as much as the next person.

Do we really believe that God will forgive us if we're holding people's sins against them? Yes, it's hard, yes, we can't forget, as God can forget, but we must forgive, otherwise, there's no forgiveness for us.

Jesus is also teaching us here that we need to admit that we sin, and we too need forgiveness and so when we become Christians confessing our sins to God is really important, otherwise, no forgiveness will be available to us, **1 John 1:8-10**.

Jesus made this request of the Father, 'Do not lead us into temptation', **Matthew 6:13**. This request may seem somewhat troubling in light of **James 1:13**. Why would anyone pray that the Father does not lead him or her into temptation if God does not tempt anyone in the first place?

The solution is that this phrase could be translated, as 'Do not lead us into trials'. There are plenty of trials to deal with in life without us praying for anymore! Of course, when trials are present, we learn to face them joyfully, **James 1:2-4**.

Jesus isn't saying that God will lead us into temptation, **James 1:13**, but what He is saying is that we need to ask God for deliverance from temptation, in order to help us with our weaknesses, and to strengthen us against the works of the devil. If we want to resist the devil so that he flees from us, we need to stay close to God and submit to His ways, **James 4:7-10**.

Many people misinterpret **1 Corinthians 10:13**. Yes, we all get tempted, yes, God won't allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but He doesn't provide a way of escape from the temptation.

The Greek text in **1 Corinthians 10:13**, implies that God will give you the strength to endure the temptation, in other words, God will be with you and help you through that temptation.

Next is an element of prayer that is rarely heard publicly, 'deliver us from the evil one' or keep us from evil, **Matthew 6:13 / Luke 22:31-32**. Prayers for forgiveness are heard regularly, but not for the prevention of sin.

Faithful disciples of Christ should pray to be delivered from the evil one, they should pray to be able to escape the severe temptations that the devil may present to them. The second half of this verse highlights the fact that our prayers and life should always praise God.

Prayer is critical in the life of the Christian and the 'Lord's Prayer' or maybe we should call the 'disciple's prayer', after all, He's teaching them how to pray, and we see the example of how to pray.

A parallel to this section of text can be found in **Luke 11:1-4**. Therein Jesus' disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray. The Lord then proceeds to utter a prayer very similar to the one Matthew records. The fact that Jesus responds to His disciples' requests implies that we can learn how to pray.

It isn't a gift that is possessed by some and not by others but a talent in which we may grow and develop. One of the greatest needs in growing as Christians are to learn to be more prayerful.

To do such will teach greater dependence upon God and cause all to be more introspective. Our Father wants us to be prayerful people, He wants us to be sincere and feel secure in the prayers we offer to Him.

May we always be mindful of the beauty of simplicity when it comes to talking to Him, as well as the benefits of seclusion. Let's strive to recognise God's awesome nature in our prayers as well as His plan for our lives.

May we appreciate the providence of God which sustains us on a daily basis and utter prayers that reflect our reliance both physically and spiritually upon Him. Let's strive to manifest a gracious disposition to others as we endeavour to more fully comprehend our own personal need for forgiveness.

We must remember who God is, we must remember that He is a Holy God, and speak to Him with the uttermost respect, we must remember that our prayers need to be in accordance with His will, and He is desperate for His will to be carried out here on earth.

Take one day at a time and trust God to provide our daily needs, not our daily greeds, ask God to help us to forgive others whilst we ask God to forgive us, and finally ask Him to help us through those temptations which the devil sends our way.

FORGIVENESS

'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.' Matthew 6:14-15

Here are the terms and conditions for forgiveness. We must be willing to forgive others, as we received forgiveness from God at our baptism, **Acts 2:38**.

Having a forgiving spirit identifies us as possessing the nature of God who forgives, **Ephesians 4:32 / Colossians 3:13**. If we cannot forgive our people, then certainly we aren't of the nature of God, and thus, not a candidate for heaven, **Matthew 9:2-6 / Matthew 18:21-35 / Luke 17:3-4 / James 2:13**.

When I was younger I was made to apologise to my brother for something I hadn't done. Needless to say, I wasn't very happy about it but as my parents left me no other choice, I had to apologise. I remember afterwards my brother just smiling and mocking me because he knew I didn't do anything wrong against him.

Being accused of something you haven't done isn't a pleasant experience but when it comes to sin, we're all guilty. You don't have to look very far to see all the evil which is in our world, it's all over our newspapers and television screens.

Sadly, when it comes to sin many people are in the habit of comparing their sins with others. However, we can't compare our sin with others and say, 'at least I'm not a murderer, I only stole some sweets from the shop'. 'At least I'm not an adulterer, I only told a lie', **Romans 3:10**.

No! God has no standard of sin, in His eyes, sin is sin and we're all just as bad as one another, no matter what sin we commit, **Romans 3:23**.

God asks us to look deep within ourselves and admit our guilt because if we don't admit guilt we can't accept forgiveness, **1 John 1:8-10**. Anyone who says they aren't guilty can't accept forgiveness because forgiveness is only for guilty people!

In other words, you can't forgive innocent people if there's nothing to forgive! As long as we insist on our innocence we can never accept forgiveness at the hand of God.

So God insists that we admit our guilt because He wants so much to forgive us and because He wants so much to live with us in loving fellowship, **Isaiah 59:1-3**. But there can be no loving fellowship unless our rebellion against God is dealt with and it cannot be dealt with unless we admit sin exists.

The Bible insists that Christ died for every one of us and that He died to rescue us from sin, **John 3:16 / 1 John 2:2**. Christ comes confronting us with our sin and tells us, that He is the way out! **John 14:6**.

Instead of shutting God out of our lives, we must let Him work with us and in us to deliver us from the power of sin that's much too strong for us. When we admit our own sinfulness, we will readily be able to forgive others as God has forgiven us.

Stott, says the following.

'Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offences of others, it proves that we have minimized our own.'

The cross doesn't make forgiveness easy, but it does make it possible, **Luke 23:34**. We must learn to root out any bitterness we have towards others, **Ephesians 4:26-27 / Ephesians 4:31 / Hebrews 12:14-15**. We must learn to bless those who hurt us, **Romans 12:14**. We must forgive others as God forgave us, **Matthew 6:12 / Matthew 6:13-14**.

FASTING IF APPROPRIATE

'When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' **Matthew 6:16-18**

Our Lord begins by saying 'when you fast', not 'if you fast', **Matthew 6:16**. He implies that His disciples will practice fasting, i.e., abstaining from food and perhaps fluids for an extended period of time.

The hypocrites in Jesus' day made sure they looked like they were fasting by purposely neglecting to wash their faces and anoint their heads, **Matthew 6:17-18**. They wanted to appear miserable so everyone would know what they were 'enduring'.

Those who fast in this manner are not pleasing the Lord, and they won't derive any spiritual blessings from such, **Matthew 6:16**. It is best to conceal our fasting, **Matthew 6:17-18**, if possible since the act is intended for self-abasement, not the cultivation of pride.

Much can be learned about fasting by analysing Bible examples of it. There appear to be both physical and spiritual reasons for fasting. Please reflect upon the following reasons.

1. When a friend or loved one is sick, fasting is appropriate.

David ended up fasting for a week in that context for his child who was ill, **2 Samuel 12:15-16 / Psalm 35:13**.

2. When a friend or loved one has died, fasting is appropriate.

At the death of King Saul and his sons, the people fasted, **1 Samuel 31:13**.

3. When we desire to seek the Lord and His blessings, fasting is appropriate.

The first reference to fasting is in the Book of Judges, **Judges 20:26**. The last reference to fasting in the Book of the prophet Zechariah and devout Jews fasted, **Zechariah 8:19**.

Most of the fasting was undertaken voluntarily and was not undertaken at the command of God but devout Jews undertook to fast for at least two reasons.

Not for health reasons, but,

1. Because they believed it was a way of attracting the attention of God. If they fasted, they thought that God noticed them.

2. Because they thought that, if they fasted, God would be prepared to do something about the situation that had caused them to fast.

If you think about this second reason, you will see that if a man thought his fasting had influenced God to act, it was very easy for him to imagine that he, personally, was someone special!

The reality, although, through the centuries, the Jew, especially after the Babylonian Captivity, introduced fasts for a whole range of reasons, but only one fast was specifically commanded by God, and that was the fast associated with the Day of Atonement, the most important and solemn Day in their religious Year, **Leviticus 16:29**.

In **Leviticus 16:29**, the expression, 'deny yourselves' or 'afflict your souls' is the expression for fasting, and this was the only fast that the Jews observed faithfully every year.

When we examine the New Testament, it surprises some people to find that the Lord only mentioned fasting twice, **Matthew 6:16-18 / Mark 2:18-22**.

Notice that both passages above, record Jesus' response to the practice of that time. But also, notice, although about 16 times He says, 'it was said by those of old time.... but I say to you', Jesus doesn't use these words because this kind of fasting about which He was speaking wasn't covered by the Mosaic Law, but because it was something that the people had taken on themselves in the old law.

In **Acts 13:1-3**, Luke records that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on the First Missionary Journey, with prayer and fasting, they fasted in connection with the appointment of Elders, in the congregations that they established during that journey.

Please note that the whole church didn't fast, it was only those mentioned in **Acts 13:1** 'Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul.'

In **1 Corinthians 7:1-5** Paul mentions sexual fasting but neither here nor anywhere else, does he impose it as a command. In **2 Corinthians 6:5**, and **2 Corinthians 11:27**, he refers to what he suffered for the sake of the Gospel and speaks of times when he went without food. But this wasn't because he was 'fasting', but because he had no food to eat!

There are times in life when we are in need of spiritual renewal or special help and guidance. Such times require a deeper focus that fasting can help provide.

For example, consider the following, **2 Chronicles 20:1-3 / Esther 4:3 / Esther 4:16 / Acts 10:30 / Acts 13:1-3.**

4. When we are grieving over some calamity, fasting is appropriate.

In **Ezra 10:6** it is recorded that Ezra ‘ate no bread and drank no water, for he mourned because of the guilt of those in captivity.’ **Nehemiah 1:2-7 / Daniel 6:18-28.**

5. When we are repenting of sin, fasting is appropriate.

Jonah records the penitence of the Ninevites after Jonah preached to them, **Jonah 3:5 / Jonah 3:10 / Acts 9:9.**

I don’t claim that the items on this list are exhaustive or mutually exclusive, though I do believe they cover the primary reasons why those of old fasted.

All of these reasons are still relevant for us today and those seeking to do God’s will should still fast at appropriate times, **Matthew 9:14-15.** Fasting should be considered an aid to meditation and prayer, **Matthew 17:21 / 1 Corinthians 7:5.**

However, since the New Testament doesn’t regulate the frequency or duration of fasting, such must be left up to each individual. We have no right to bind or create laws where the Lord has not, but we most certainly should stress the importance of fasting for those who are physically able to participate in such.

The answer to the question, should a Christian fast? is, therefore, ‘yes! If they want to!’ but remember that fasting, like ‘bodily exercise’ may do a little good, but ‘godliness is profitable for all things!’ **1 Timothy 4:8.**

TREASURES IN HEAVEN

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’ **Matthew 6:19-21**

A topical study of the Gospels reveals that Jesus spoke on the subject of money or materialism often. He evidently considered the love of money and material things to be a serious problem that needed to be addressed continually, **1 Timothy 6:10.** We haven’t changed much in the last 2000 years, the problem remains today.

In the first century, the idea of a secure bank was unknown, and the safest way to keep their money was to bury it, **Joshua 7:21 / Matthew 25:18.** However, doing such would subject the money, which was composed of metal, to rust and corrosion, **Matthew 6:20-21.**

They could choose to keep their treasure above ground but then took the risk of having it stolen by a thief breaking in, **Matthew 6:19.** In actuality, the Greek words here literally indicate that the ‘thieves dig through.’

This statement is accurate since houses of that day were frequently made of loose stone or sun-dried bricks. It was easier for a thief to dig through the wall than attempt to break through a more secure door.

Thus, there really was no absolute way to protect their physical treasures. Any of them could be stolen, metal was subject to corrosion, and clothing could be destroyed by moths.

To ‘treasure’ something is to love that object more than anything else. To ‘treasure’ the things of this world are foolish because they are both uncertain and temporary.

Happiness may be found in such ‘treasures’ for a while, but not true, lasting joy. These verses don’t teach that it is sinful to be materially rich in the present world. To be rich is dangerous, but not sinful, **Matthew 19:23-24.**

However, this passage does teach that we must ‘possess’ whatever material goods we are blessed with and not vice versa. To possess a large amount of money or resources isn’t wrong, but to love those things and consider them to be a ‘treasure’ is to fall into Satan’s trap, **1 Timothy 6:7-10 / Luke 12:15 / Hebrews 13:5**.

Anyone with such a mentality will hoard these possessions to harm others and himself. Instead, those who are rich should be careful to remember that they can only trust in God and not in themselves or their earthly treasure. Let them do much good with the things the Lord has entrusted them with, **1 Timothy 6:17-19**.

Jesus makes a strong case for laying up treasure in heaven while exposing the folly of hoarding earthly treasure by contrasting the corrupting forces of this world with the security of heaven, **Matthew 6:20-21**.

To practice righteousness to be seen by God and to bring glory to His name is to make a deposit in God’s heavenly ‘bank.’ There is great security in knowing that such treasures cannot be stolen or damaged. The riches of heaven are eternally secure for the person who continues to treasure them.

‘The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ‘No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.’ **Matthew 6:22-24**

Jesus focused on ‘treasures’, i.e., whatever is most important to our ‘heart’, **Matthew 6:19-21**. It is foolish to store up earthly treasures for they do not last, but heavenly treasures are eternal.

In **Matthew 6:22-24**, He also addresses this theme. We cannot serve earthly riches and God simultaneously, **Matthew 6:24**. There can only be one master in a person’s life.

If we make physical riches our master, then we have chosen a treasure that will not last. If we make God Almighty our master, then we have wisely chosen an everlasting treasure.

What does Jesus mean when He speaks of good eyes, bad eyes, darkness, and light? **Matthew 6:22-23**. Understanding His point isn’t nearly as difficult when we observe that Jesus is contrasting earthly and heavenly treasures in the verses both immediately before and after. Thus, it’s reasonable to suggest that He is still addressing this theme in these verses in the middle.

The eye allows images, that is light inside the body, **Matthew 6:22**. Our body will be ‘full of light’ if our eye is ‘good’, i.e., healthy, and allows us to see things clearly and in proper perspective.

The person with such good spiritual ‘eyesight’ sees money as a tool to help further the Lord’s work and not as something to lavish upon themselves.

But, if our eye is ‘bad’, i.e., not healthy, then our body will be ‘full of darkness’, **Matthew 6:23**. We will not see things clearly or in a proper perspective, physically or spiritually.

It’s entirely possible for us to start with a healthy ‘eye,’ but it can become dimmer and dimmer until it is full of the evils of materialism and immorality.

In reference to serving two masters, **Matthew 5:24**, it should be remembered that God is a jealous God, **Exodus 20:5**. Just as no right-thinking husband will accept a rival for the affections of his wife, so God will accept no rival for our affections.

If a person loves anyone or anything more than they love God, then that person is not a true disciple, **Luke 14:26-33**. They are serving another ‘master.’ Also, it should be recognised that a person doesn’t necessarily love what or whom they claim, they love that to which they give foremost devotion and attention, **Matthew 19:21**.

Jesus contrasts ‘God’ with ‘money’, i.e., riches, **Matthew 6:24**. It’s impossible to serve these two masters simultaneously because the only way to obey the one is to disobey the other! If we love and treasure physical things, then we will not serve God with all our hearts, **Mark 12:30-31**.

God will not accept just part of our service but demands that we love Him supremely, **James 4:4 / 1 John 2:15**. However, the devil will gladly accept only a portion of our service, for he knows that in getting a part of it, he is truly getting all of it.

The primary thrust here seems to be pointing out the danger of self-deception. A person might falsely reason that they can serve riches as long as they are serving God by means of certain formalities. Jesus says that such isn't possible.

We're either with God or against Him, there is no middle ground, **Matthew 12:30**. Where is our treasure? If we answer that question honestly, we'll know who our master is!

DO NOT WORRY

'Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 'And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' **Matthew 6:25-34**

As we enter this part section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we find that He addresses the subject of worry in a most powerful way. Jesus' use of the word 'therefore' indicates that He is drawing a conclusion from His thoughts in **Matthew 6:19-24**, namely, that we must live for God and not for the world. We must trust God and not physical riches.

When Jesus stated, 'do not worry about your life,' **Matthew 6:25**, He wasn't making a suggestion, He was giving a command that we ought to obey. Jesus wouldn't command us not to worry, if it wasn't possible.

Worry is a pain we inflict upon ourselves that does not have to be there. Are you like me? You could break the commandment not worry, several times before you even get out of bed in the morning, **Matthew 6:25 / Philippians 4:6**.

If we are spiritually perceptive, we will realise that life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing, **Matthew 6:25**. After all, earthly riches can provide food and clothing, but only God can give life and a body. Since God is the giver of both life and body, certainly He is capable of sustaining the one and covering the other. Jesus strengthens His argument by referring to the 'birds of the air', **Matthew 6:25**. They never plant, they never harvest, and they never stockpile for later. They don't 'treasure' earthly things as man does, yet God takes care of them and provides for all their needs!

Surely, He will do the same for us since we are 'of more value than they', **Matthew 6:25**. We are of more value than the birds and other animals because we are made in God's image and because of our potential to serve. Jesus wants us to trust in God's providence. God will feed us before He feeds His birds!

Because of the previous facts, He has mentioned, Jesus asks what good does it do to worry? **Matthew 6:27**. Worrying is useless and nothing productive is accomplished by it. It can't make us one inch taller, it can't make us live one day longer, but it can shorten our lives.

Worrying has never been prescribed as a solution to a problem! Imagine a doctor recommending worrying to solve our ulcer! Imagine a preacher rebuking us for neglecting to engage in our daily worrying. Imagine a teacher urging their students to go home and worry about the test.

What good is it going to do us to worry? We are inflicting ourselves with a pain that is absolutely useless and does not help us one iota. Life is so much more than what we worry about, and worry indicates that I am allowing the external to dominate the eternal on my priority list.

If I'm counting on God not to change His mind on Judgement Day about my salvation, **Romans 8:1**, why do I live like He's going to change His mind tomorrow about what I need? We act like we believe in a God that can provide salvation, but nothing else.

Despite the fact, that He gives testimony through nature, that He can provide, **Matthew 6:26 / Matthew 6:28**. In the months ahead we will see the grass grow, the birds fly, the flowers bloom and the trees bud.

The Bible says we are in the hands of God, He opens up His hands and provides every living thing with what it needs, and we are in good hands with God, **Psalm 145:16**.

We should put forth the effort to dress modestly, but there is no need to worry about attire. The lilies of the field are some of the most beautiful things on Earth, yet they do not worry or work at it, God 'clothes' them, **Matthew 6:28-29**. If God clothes the lilies which neither labour nor spin and if He clothes them more beautifully than Solomon in all his glory, then, how much more will He clothe His people? **Matthew 6:30**. Worry betrays a false view of human beings as if we were only machines that need to be fuelled and lubricated.

We are bombarded daily with adverts that intentionally create anxiety, with the message that we are nothing more than complex machines which require maintenance.

They tell us we need new clothes, we need a new brand of mobile phone, we need a new home, we need a new car, we need a different shaped tea bag. And if we buy these things and take care of our machine, we might get a few more miles out of it.

Jesus is here to tell us that we are more than that, we are more than just a machine to be maintained. He says that kind of orientation is absurdly unworthy of what a human being really is and He is calling us to a higher ambition. The problem with worry is it makes us forget the promises of God.

Trusting God to meet our needs doesn't mean we don't have to work, working is one way God gives us the ability to provide, He gives us the ability to work, **Romans 8:32**.

It doesn't mean we ignore other people's needs, when we see a need we shouldn't say, 'Trust in God, He'll meet our needs', God could be meeting that need through our generosity.

Worrying is unnecessary for the person who has faith that fully relies upon and trusts God! Who will deny that God has made the fields and flowers beautiful? If the Lord does that for something that will be burned up as fuel in an oven, will He not provide for His children's needs even better?

Jesus begins summarising, stating that we ought not to worry about the necessities of life. God's care for the flowers and birds, **Matthew 6:28-29**, should teach us to expect that He will show more interest in providing for those who have been fashioned for eternity, **Matthew 6:31**. After all, God gave His Son for us, why would He withhold the necessities of life? **Romans 8:31-32**.

Worrying is unbecoming of true disciples. It's perhaps to be expected that those who are not believers in God would have life's necessities as their main interest, but Jesus tells His followers that they have a heavenly Father who will provide these things for them, and they are to trust Him to provide.

This is the case because He is both knowledgeable of our needs and able to supply them. Jesus also shows worry to be destructive. Worry robs us of our spiritual values and encourages us to focus on things in this world.

An example of this can be seen in **Luke 10:38-42**. Martha was more concerned about being a good host, rather than learning as a disciple, her worrying wasn't good. Today, many still allow worry to interfere with being the kind of disciples that God would have them to be.

What makes a pagan? **Matthew 6:32**. A pagan looks for life in the external, instead of the eternal. The pagan might be the politest, kindest, decent person we have ever met but, he's a pagan and he's looking for life in all the wrong places. And if we are trying to find life in the external, we will worry.

If a person seeks only the material things of life, they will likely find them, but they cannot expect the spiritual. However, if a person seeks that which is spiritual, then they can expect both. That is a wonderful promise from God!

Notice, Jesus didn't say 'Stop seeking,' **Matthew 6:33**. That's not the issue, the issue is, what are we going to seek this week? He tells us the thing we should want most and that is God's kingdom and doing what God wants. We will worry tomorrow, not because our problems are too big, but because our goals are too small.

We were meant for more than just preserving the body beautiful; we were created to enjoy and to promote the Rulership of God in the world. If that is our priority, we can see that goal, which is truly worthy of what a human being really is. We can seek that goal no matter what happens.

Illness can come and we can still seek the goal of enjoying and promoting the kingdom of God. We can lose our job or a loved one through a divorce or death, an investment can go wrong. But nothing can happen to us tomorrow that can keep us from the goal that is worthy of who we really are.

Jesus didn't say, we won't have problems, but He did say that every day has its own troubles, **Matthew 6:34**. God knows what we need and God is faithful, God will see to it that we have everything we need to put His kingdom first. God's going to make sure everything we need to be what He's designed us to be and to pursue what He wants us to pursue, we will have.

Jesus said, 'seek first the kingdom of God,' **Matthew 6:34**. Literally, this means we are to 'keep on seeking'. To seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness is to endeavour to live a godly, obedient life at any cost, a life that glorifies God in the church, **Ephesians 3:21**, which is His kingdom, **Matthew 16:18-19**.

To accomplish this is to live by the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as the rest of the New Testament. To be worried about matters of life implies that we don't trust God completely. If we don't trust God fully, then our treasures are on the Earth and our master is money, **Matthew 6:19-24**.

Such a person may be seeking the kingdom partially, but such is not sufficient. God doesn't want to hold second or third place, or even lower, in our lives. He expects that we make Him our number one priority! **Mark 12:30**.

The fact is that all of our worrying will not give us control of tomorrow, it will only make us miserable today, **Matthew 6:34**. It's foolish to attempt to anticipate tomorrow's troubles today and to try to bear them today. As we noted earlier, much of our unhappiness arises from the dread of that which never comes to pass.

If there is one thing we should start tomorrow, it should be to improve our prayer lives. The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement. Can you imagine what would happen if we spent more time praying instead of worrying?

We would have much less to worry about. We can't control tomorrow, politicians can't control tomorrow, our friends and family can't control tomorrow but God can.

It should be noted that there is a big difference between worrying about the future and preparing for it to the best of our ability. All are to be good stewards of God's entrusted blessings, but none should worry about tomorrow if they are doing their best to serve God faithfully today.

God will always listen to any of our problems and by improving our prayer lives we are recognizing that it's God that controls tomorrow, not us. When we pray, we receive the greatest cure for worry, we experience the touch of the eternal. God is going to respond to our prayers when we talk to Him about our concerns.

He will do something about that concern if it's in accordance with His will and He is going to send us a peace that cannot be explained away.

When we pray, God sends us a peace that we simply cannot understand because it's beyond our understanding. God protects us from unnecessary worry, when we turn the worry over to Him and leave that worry with Him, **Philippians 4:6-7**.

The word 'worry' is used repeatedly in this context, and if God is truly our Master, then there is no need to have anxiety or doubt regarding anything, God will take care of us, **Romans 8:28**.

The worrier doubts and is double-minded, such a person is unstable and lacking in faith, **James 1:6-8**. Such a person fails to realise the benefits and peace of mind that come from relying upon God and not upon physical riches or ourselves, **Philippians 4:6-7**.

I find it interesting that the Greek word for 'worry' is the word, 'merimnao' which basically means distraction. Read through **Matthew 6:25-34** again but instead of reading the word 'worry' replace it with the word 'distraction'. When you do this, I believe this puts a whole new perspective on what Jesus is teaching us here.

He's saying we shouldn't allow ourselves to get distracted by the everyday needs of our lives, God will take care of them for us. He doesn't want us to get distracted, but He wants us to stay focused on serving God in His kingdom and continue to seek His righteousness.

The same idea is found in **1 Peter 5:7**. 'Peter literally says, 'cast all our distractions upon God, because God won't be distracted from meeting your needs.'

Perhaps this is what Peter had in mind because the word 'worry' or 'anxiety' is the Greek word 'merimna' and it means 'distraction'. Peter and Jesus are both saying, don't let your basic everyday needs distract you from seeking God's kingdom today.

Turn your worries over to God, **1 Peter 5:7**, means to let go of it, let God take care of our distractions because He's not going to get distracted from meeting your needs.

We will still have those things on our mind, but when we give them to God, we won't be controlled by our anxieties because we trust God to take care of them for us. We might as well give our worries over to Someone who can do something about tomorrow because we can't.

Do you know that doctors are prescribing more and more drugs for anxiety than any other illness? Do you know that the single most common sin that will steal our joy is the sin of worry? Worry is the fine we pay when we look for life in all the wrong places.

When we look for life in things that weren't intended to give life, worry will be the tragic, yet inevitable result. We're all created by God to need something to live for, something to give meaning to our existence and something to set our hearts upon.

Is worry a problem in your life? This next part examines what Jesus taught about worrying and offers some practical suggestions for overcoming it. There are many enemies of the mind, but worry may be the most destructive.

Some have compared worry to a rocking chair, it gives us something to do but does not get us anywhere! Worry has also been likened to an old man with a bent head, carrying a load of feathers which he thinks are led.

Worrying is a serious problem in the 21st century. If we allow it, worry can destroy us by slowly taking over our minds and bodies! People worry about most anything and everything. For instance, people worry about things that have already happened.

Such is pointless since the past cannot be changed. One should learn from the past, seek forgiveness on God's terms when sin has been committed, and move on, that's what the apostle Paul did, **Philippians 3:13**.

People also worry about things that will inevitably happen. Many fear growing older or dying, but again, such is futile. Rather than worrying about these matters, it would be better to simply prepare for them to the best of our ability.

We must remember that death is not the end, **Hebrews 9:27**, and that there are blessings to be had in old age, **2 Corinthians 4:16**. Additionally, people worry about things that will never happen. The fact that most of our fears will never come to pass should help us understand the futility of worrying.

Mark Twain once said, 'I have worried over a great many things in life, the most of which never happened'.

Finally, people worry about things that God has already taken care of. In **Mark 16:3**, the women who went to anoint Jesus' body early Sunday morning expressed concern over who would move the stone away from the tomb. As it turned out, God had already taken care of the matter.

Can we trust God to provide our daily needs like food, drink and clothes? **Matthew 6:31**. Didn't God supply food every day for His people in the wilderness? **Exodus 16:4**.

Didn't God supply water for His people to drink in the wilderness? **Exodus 17:6**. Didn't God miraculously preserve their clothes and shoes for forty years? **Deuteronomy 29:5**.

How often does He share His compassion with us? Every day, every morning, **Lamentations 3:22-23**. When Jesus taught the people how to pray, He told them to pray for their daily bread, **Matthew 6:11**.

How many times have we missed today's blessings by worrying about tomorrow's possibilities? Worrying is a sin because it makes us miss today's grace. God gave us food today, He gave us clothes today, He gave us friends today and a place to worship today. Are we missing our reason to rejoice today because of something that might happen tomorrow?

Don't let tomorrow keep us from living today fully, **Psalms 118:24**. We've got today to hug our kids or kiss our wife or husband. We've got today to give someone a smile.

We've got today to make a new friend or do something for an elderly person. We've got today to read our Bibles and get down on our knees to worship God.

Jesus says, don't let food, drink, clothes or even tomorrow distract us from serving God today because He'll take care of those things for us.

I don't know what will come to each and every one of us tomorrow. I don't know what distractions will come our way, but I do know that when worry knocks, we don't have to let it in, we can let faith in instead. Wouldn't it make more sense to give our worries and our life over to Someone who can control tomorrow?

INTRODUCTION

'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay

no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. ‘ Matthew 7:1-5

JUDGING OTHERS

Jesus here teaches against the legalistic judging that the Pharisees were practising, their self-righteous legal system of doctrine moved them to be critical of others who didn’t agree with them on every point of their theology.

The word ‘judge’ used here is the Greek word, ‘krino’ which is used in places like, **John 12:48 / Acts 17:31 / 2 Timothy 4:1.**

The use of the word, ‘judge’ therefore is speaking about the kind of judging that speaks of someone’s salvation, or the lack of it, in others. Christians shouldn’t practice this kind of judging, after all, not even Christ did this while He was on earth, **John 12:47.**

The problem with judging someone in terms of their salvation is sinful because God is the judge and He knows people’s hearts and motives better than anyone, and He has a date set for this kind of judging, **1 Corinthians 4:4-5.** Luke tells us that we shouldn’t judge or condemn but ‘forgive’, why? **Luke 6:37.** Because we have been forgiven and we need forgiveness as much as the next person and who are we to withhold forgiveness from others, when we needed it so much ourselves? **Luke 6:37 / Matthew 18:21-35.**

Luke tells us to ‘give’, **Luke 6:38.** It’s the nature of godly people to behave as God. God is a giver, and so, His people should give. Those who love their brothers and sisters in Christ don’t stand in judgment over them.

The thrust of what Jesus states here is that we will be dealt with in final judgment by God in the same manner by which we treat our fellow man, **James 2:12-13.**

Therefore, when we measure mercy to others, God will in turn measure mercy to us, **Luke 6:38.** That’s the biggest problem with this kind of judging, it’s judging with condemnation attached. In other words, they become the judge, juror and jailor.

Luke also adds a parable, **Luke 6:39**, which basically means, that those who are spiritually dead can’t lead anyone onto a spiritual life, because both are spiritually blind. No one can lead above and beyond his own spiritual stature, **Luke 6:40.**

Those who disciple others will lead them to be like themselves. If the teacher is spiritually blind, the student will become like his teacher, spiritually blind too, **John 13:16 / John 15:20.**

We must always look at others with an attitude of love, otherwise, legalism moves us to be critical and unmerciful in judgment concerning another’s beliefs and life. God will severely judge those who harbour such attitudes toward our fellow man, **Matthew 18:21-35.**

‘You’re judging me!’ is a common response uttered by many today whose toes are stepped on by the truth. The implication is that no one has the right to draw attention to a fault in their life. Although some forms of judging are prohibited by Scripture, there are other types that we are commanded to engage in.

The Bible is a beautiful book, isn’t it? It contains the wonderful message of God’s love for us. Part of the beauty of God’s Word is its simplicity. In my Bible, the New Testament is only about 250 pages long! Yet, I’ve seen commentaries written by men that consume the same amount of space in only discussing one New Testament book!

We tend to make things unnecessarily complicated, but, in general, God doesn’t do this. God has given us His inspired, revealed will and we can understand it if we diligently desire to do so.

But, at the same time, we need to realise that there are a few things in the Bible that are somewhat difficult to comprehend. Peter acknowledges this very thing concerning Paul's letters, **2 Peter 3:16**.

Essentially, he says that those who are unstable and untaught will twist the Scriptures to their own destruction when they encounter a passage that is difficult to understand! That is, they misuse these difficult passages by teaching error, and they will suffer the loss of their souls as a result.

What should we do when we encounter a passage of Scripture that is difficult for us to understand? We should be very careful, careful to study the verses completely in context and careful to consider all other passages on the same topic.

If we do this, we can have some confidence that we are not twisting the Scriptures to our own destruction. We must always remember that if we come to a conclusion that is contrary to clear Biblical teaching elsewhere, then we've made a mistake and our conclusion, whatever it may be, is invalid.

I wrote all that to help prepare us for analysing one difficult passage in the New Testament, however, I don't believe that Jesus intended His words to be difficult to understand.

For some people these words are difficult. Many incorrectly believe that these verses teach us that it's absolutely wrong to judge others. This is simply not true, it is not always wrong to judge others.

Jesus is laying down a general principle here, but He isn't limiting all types of judging. How do we know? Well, the Scriptures authorise certain actions that simply cannot be done without humans exercising judgment upon others.

Let me give you a few examples to think about.

1. Consider our judicial system.

God has given authority to civil governments to make judgments, **Romans 13:1-7**, and we are to obey our leaders unless they instruct us to go against the Lord's ways, **Acts 5:29**.

2. Consider the church.

The body of Christ has the responsibility to exercise judgment on those who walk disorderly. The judgment to be exercised is that of discipline or withdrawal of fellowship. Numerous passages support this truth, **Matthew 18:15-20 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 / 1 Corinthians 5**.

3. Look at the immediate context.

We are not to cast our pearls before swine, **Matthew 7:6**. But, how can we obey this command without making some judgments? Jesus warns His followers to beware of false teachers, **Matthew 7:15**.

However, if we could never make judgments about individuals, then how could it ever be determined who is a false teacher and who isn't?

4. The title of this lesson proves that judging others is not always wrong.

The title comes from **John 7:24**, which is a direct quote from the Lord Himself! Jesus instructs us in that verse to judge with righteous judgment, and we will consider exactly what that means shortly.

But, for now, it should be exceedingly clear that God requires us to make certain types of judgments, and thus **Matthew 7:1**, must not be interpreted as an absolute prohibition against all types of judging.

If this doesn't mean that all types of human judging are wrong, then what type of judging is Jesus speaking against here? I believe the Lord is speaking against judging that is unmerciful, hypocritical, or vengeful.

Let's consider these three aspects one at a time.

1. We must not judge unmercifully.

If we aren't merciful to humans in our dealings with them, then they are not likely to be merciful to us, **Matthew 7:2**. The way they judge us will be a reflection of the way we have judged them.

Remember Haman? He was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, **Esther 7**. What Solomon said truly applies to the realm of human judging, **Ecclesiastes 10:8**.

And, even more importantly, eventually, we will all be judged by God Himself, and He will take into consideration the way we have judged others. If we are merciful, He will be merciful to us.

If we are cold, unloving, and unforgiving toward others, God will treat us similarly, **Matthew 5:7 / James 2:13 / Matthew 18:21-35**. Jesus has little use for followers with harsh, bitter, and fault-finding spirits.

2. We must not judge hypocritically.

This seems to be the fundamental thrust of **Matthew 7:3-5**. Jesus uses the term 'hypocrite' for those who judge others and do not examine themselves first. They are in no position to judge others or assist them when they suffer from an even greater problem!

Both parties described have a problem with sin, depicted by the speck and plank in their eyes, **Matthew 7:3-4**.

Common sense tells us that both need to remove the foreign objects, that is sin from their eyes, that is life.

The plank of wood in our own eye expresses the hypocritical mistake of the legalistic judge who considers themselves righteous while judging the faults of another in comparison to their own self-righteousness.

Their system of religion moves them to be judgmental of small matters in the lives of others who don't conform to their regimented beliefs, while at the same time there is a major flaw in their own life.

This is basically a picture of a person who ignores his own grievous sins while trying to correct the relatively minor shortcomings of another.

The speck of dust and the plank represent the inequality between that which is tiny, insignificant, almost invisible, and that which is obvious, flagrant, and obtrusive.

The legal system of judgment by which the faultfinder lives makes it impossible for them to be an objective judge of others. In order for us to correctly evaluate others, we must first recognise our own sinful state, **Galatians 6:1**.

Don't miss this important point here, just because someone has a speck of dust in their eye, doesn't mean they can ignore it, Jesus says it still needs to be removed, and this is done by admitting that we have faults, and we need forgiveness, **1 John 1:8-10**.

Christians mustn't allow sin to reside in their lives even to a small degree. When a person has successfully overcome a problem with a particular sin, they will then be in a better position to assist someone else with a similar problem.

Those who are no longer in sin will be better able to 'see clearly' and assist others, **Matthew 7:5**. Jesus isn't condemning this type of judging but encouraging it.

Paul elaborates upon this thought in **Galatians 6:1**. It is not wrong to realise that a brother or sister has a problem with sin. It's not wrong to confront them and help them overcome it.

However, if we are burdened with the same sin ourselves, or perhaps one even more heinous, then we aren't going to be able to do them much good. Often, humans engage in hypocritical judging without even being aware of it.

I'm reminded of the true story I read about two well-known preachers of the past. One of the men admired the other very greatly and had an opportunity to meet him one day. The admired preacher answered the door with a cigar in his mouth.

The other preacher was aghast, he couldn't believe it! He bluntly asked, 'how can you, a man of God, smoke that?' In response, the other preacher pulled the cigar from his mouth, put his finger on his visitor's rather inflated stomach, smiled and said, 'the same way as you, a man of God, could be that fat'.

What can we learn from these two men? Humans are often blind to their own vices. Both of these men had a problem, namely, they were not taking care of their bodies as they should, **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**.

We must be good stewards of our physical bodies just as we are of our time and other resources. We should take care of our bodies to the best of our ability.

Being significantly overweight and smoking are both provably bad for our health. We should try to help one another overcome problems like these. But, let us be careful not to judge others hypocritically.

These men were guilty of it and so are we sometimes. Even great men like David have been guilty of it! **2 Samuel 11 / 2 Samuel 12:1-7**. Let us be exceedingly careful in our efforts to avoid hypocritical judgment.

3. We must not judge vengefully.

Although it isn't mentioned explicitly in this passage, Jesus seems to also be condemning judgment that is vengeful. Embedded in the Greek word for 'judge' in **Matthew 7:1**, is the idea of condemning someone and even sentencing them.

We don't have the right to do this as individuals, even if we have been wronged by someone, **Romans 12:19**. God is the ultimate judge. He has reserved the right of vengeance for Himself.

So far, we've seen that there is a wrong kind of judging. When we judge without mercy, when we judge hypocritically, or when we judge vengefully, we are not being pleasing to God. But what about the right kind of judging?

John 7:24 instructs us to 'judge with righteous judgment'. How can we know if our judgment is righteous? I believe the key to judging righteously is found in our attitude.

We must have a good attitude in order to judge righteously, an attitude that manifests several characteristics. Some of these characteristics have already been indirectly mentioned, but now let's examine them more closely.

1. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of love.

Our love should be seen at all times, but especially when we are confronting someone regarding sin in their life, **John 13:35**.

2. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of consideration and compassion.

Paul wrote about being humble toward one another, valuing them more than we do ourselves. To put their interests first, in **Philippians 2:3-4**. Peter wrote about being sympathetic towards each other, to love one another, to be compassionate and humble, in **1 Peter 3:8**.

To correct someone in sin should not be a joyful privilege but a serious duty, **James 5:19-20**. We should feel compassion for a brother or sister who is overtaken in sin, we should not rejoice in their shortcomings or think ourselves superior. If we aren't humble and spiritually minded, **Galatians 6:1**, then we aren't well equipped to help someone else overcome their sins.

3. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of forgiveness.

May we never forget that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', **Romans 3:23**. That would include you and me. When we identify sin in the life of someone else, we cannot do it from the perspective of perfection, none of us are sinless.

Instead, as Christians, we should be addressing sin in the life of someone else from the perspective of having been forgiven an exceedingly large debt ourselves, **Matthew 18:21-35**.

4. To judge righteously, one must have an attitude of self-examination.

This point has already been addressed earlier, though it can be supplemented well with two passages, **2 Corinthians 13:5 / Romans 2:21**.

When we are loving, considerate, compassionate, and willing to forgive others and examine ourselves, then we're ready to use the Word of God to judge others, not according to appearances, but righteously. We can only do this by examining fruit, **Matthew 7:20**.

When examining the actions and words of others, we must ask, are these actions and words in harmony with the Bible? This is how judgments should be made, not according to my personal likes or dislikes, but according to the Scriptures. We should be making judgments like this all the time.

Even as write, you should be examining my words and judging whether or not I speak the truth. This is a good thing, **Acts 17:11**. Let it also be observed on this point that we must be exceedingly careful in judging a person's intentions since we don't know the hearts of men like God does, **Romans 8:27-29**.

Caution is always in order in this regard. If the Bible is the standard we use for judging, and we use it correctly with a proper heart, then we will not go wrong, because in essence, we are merely passing down the judgment that God has already given! **Psalm 119:172**.

Righteous judgment can only be based upon the Word of God! For example, if we know that a person is engaging in sexual immorality and we go to them humbly and tell them that they are sinning and need to repent, they might respond by saying, 'we're judging them and that I have no right to do so', but, they're wrong.

We're merely passing down God's judgment that He has made known through His word. We shouldn't be there addressing this person if we're not interested in trying to help them.

We shouldn't be there if we don't love them and their soul. We shouldn't be there if we ourselves are not right before God. If we're a hypocrite or if our motives are improper, the chances of them repenting is very unlikely.

The same could be said for any sin, not just sexual immorality. If we know that a person is teaching false doctrine, if we know that a person is using profanity, if we know that a person is walking disorderly, etc., then we have a responsibility to help them.

Our own life needs to be right first and then, with God's Word and a proper attitude, we can help others. But we can only judge them by their fruits with the Word of God, for this is what we ourselves will be judged by, **John 12:48**.

There is a right way to judge and a wrong way. It is only when we have a 'clear vision,' a proper, helpful attitude, all the facts in perspective, and a knowledge of God's Word that a just and correct judgment on any issue can be made.

Why would judging our brothers and sisters condemningly damage our outreach efforts? It gives the impression that some are more 'righteous' than others, it gives the impression that others need 'more' forgiveness than others, **Romans 3:10 / Romans 3:23**.

Let us abstain from improper judgment and practice righteous judgment as God expects us to and let us be wise enough to receive it gracefully from others.

DOGS AND PIGS

‘Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.’ Matthew 7:6

In the first century, dogs and pigs were considered to be unclean animals, they were not domesticated and were sometimes fierce. The connection of this verse to the previous ones is not obvious.

Jesus had been speaking about judging in **Matthew 7:1-5**. Perhaps Jesus is now trying to prevent His disciples from drawing the false conclusion that all judging is wrong.

The Lord commands that holy things are not be given to dogs, and pearls are not be thrown before pigs. Obviously, in order to obey this command, some judging is necessary, but what does Jesus mean by these statements?

Let’s first state what we know His prohibition does not mean.

1. He does not mean that there are some who should not have the opportunity to hear the Gospel.

The Gospel message is for all, God wants all to come to the knowledge of the truth, **Mark 16:15 / 1 Timothy 2:4**.

2. He does not mean that we are to predetermine which individuals would be good prospects for conversion.

Who would have ever known that Saul of Tarsus, the great persecutor of the church, would be an ideal prospect for Christianity, **Acts 9**.

3, He does not mean that we are to have a self-righteous attitude and withhold the Gospel from those who aren’t ‘righteous’ like us.

We are to esteem others as better than ourselves and look out for their best interests, **Philippians 2:3-4**.

Now that we’ve mentioned some common misconceptions in this passage, let’s talk about what Jesus does mean in this verse. Quite simply, Jesus is warning us that certain things cannot be given to some individuals or types of persons.

Specifically, He means that we should be wise in our attempts to preach to individuals who thrust the Gospel away and reject it. The most holy things ought not to be offered indiscriminately to all persons, the dogs and swine refer to people who are mean and vicious and who have no desire to apprehend spiritual things.

When the precious spiritual truths of love and mercy are extended toward the ruthless and hard-hearted, they are received with criticism and mockery. How someone receives the pearls of truth determines his true nature.

Once a vicious nature is discovered, then it’s useless to offer opportunity by continual preaching and teaching the precious truths to the one who continually rejects such.

When we encounter individuals, who don’t want anything to do with the Gospel, we should ‘shake the dust off our feet,’ **Matthew 10:14**, and go to those who want it. We can’t do this without making a judgment!

It is a foolish waste of precious time to try to force the Gospel on those who resist it, for they don’t understand the beauty or value of it, and persistent presentation of it only provokes their anger! Nevertheless, in order to determine whether or not one actually will reject the Gospel, they must first be given a chance to hear it.

To judge anyone on the basis of physical appearances or habits and conclude that they would not be interested in the Gospel is premature judgment and wrong!

Let us strive for a humble attitude as we preach God’s saving Gospel to all but let us also cherish and respect the preciousness of it by not forcing it upon those who reject it and are unappreciative of our efforts, **Acts 17:32**, i.e., the dogs and pigs of our day. For New Testament examples of this, **Matthew 21:23-27 / Acts 13:42-52 / Acts 19:9**.

Although we are not to judge vengefully, unmercifully, or hypocritically toward our fellow man, there must be some discerning of character based upon the evidence at hand, **Matthew 7:20**. May God give us wisdom in this regard!

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. ‘Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!’ Matthew 7:7-11

There is a progression here of one’s intensity by which we seek God’s help. By faith, one must seek God according to His will. As opposed to the self-righteous hearts of dogs who continually reject all righteousness, the humble-hearted must intensify their dependence on God for direction in life. We need to believe that God will provide.

Our Lord is again teaching on the subject of prayer in this context. Asking is making a request with our voice, seeking is the act of pursuing someone or something, and knocking is an effort to open and pass through an obstacle.

All three of these verbs are continuous in Greek, i.e., one must continue to ask, seek, and knock, and they seem to be communicating the same basic idea in a progressive manner.

When we pray to the heavenly Father, we must do so seriously, not vainly. Prayer is not to be an empty ritual. To pray correctly, we must not only ‘ask’ for a blessing, but we must also faithfully ‘knock’ and ‘seek’ for the fulfilment of our request, **Luke 18:1-8**.

Prayer isn’t an opportunity to make requests for things we aren’t willing to work for or are too lazy to sincerely pray for again if the petition is not immediately answered in the affirmative!

Prayers that are pleasing to God are offered from the heart zealously. When a person puts little heart or passion into their prayers, should they really expect God to put much heart into answering them?

We must continue to ask, seek, and knock according to the Lord’s will, and He will bless us. This is a promise of God, and He is faithful to keep His word!

Let me hasten to state that although there are no explicit restrictions placed upon this teaching here, the rest of the New Testament does establish some parameters, **Matthew 6:14-15 / James 1:6-7 / James 4:3 / 1 Peter 3:7 / 1 John 3:22 / 1 John 5:14**.

I believe one proper application of this verse is that those who are genuinely seeking the truth are going to find it. I do not believe that there is anyone who has lived or will live, who sincerely desired to know the truth, who did not have an opportunity to come in contact with it, **Acts 10**. No one can truly believe in this promise unless they have great faith in the providence of God.

Jesus illustrates the willingness of God to care for His children. An earthly father wouldn’t mock his son’s request for help by giving a stone or a serpent, **Matthew 7:9-10**, neither would God do such a thing in the spiritual realm, **Matthew 7:11**.

It’s the rule with God to answer prayer but how and when He answers is His choice. His wise answers are often not the answers we feel we should have.

Bread and fish were common foods for the peasants of Galilee. Human parents ‘give good gifts’ to their children to the best of their ability because they love them, that is, they wouldn’t give them a stone instead of bread or a serpent instead of fish, **Matthew 7:11**.

But, how much more will God the Creator, whose love and ability to give are infinitely beyond any earthly parent, ‘give good things to those who ask Him!’. **Matthew 7:11**.

Jesus is comparing human parents, who are ‘evil’, with God Almighty who is perfectly good and righteous in every way. Have you considered that God’s love for you is even greater than your parents’ love for you? This truth must be remembered when petitions are offered to the Lord and not answered as we think they should be.

Our prayers should always centre around the fact that God knows best and He has our best interests in mind, regardless of how He answers.

To illustrate that God can be trusted to respond to our prayers, Jesus tells the parable of the friend who calls at midnight, **Luke 11:5-13**.

Hospitality was of paramount importance in the biblical world, and when a guest arrived, even unexpected, even at midnight, there was no question that hospitality must be extended.

So, when the man in the story finds himself without enough bread for his guest, he goes to a friend and asks to borrow some, even though he must wake up his friend’s entire household.

Hearers today might empathize with the woken-up friend and think that the midnight caller is pushing the limits of friendship, **Luke 11:7**.

But in the culture of the biblical world, it is the woken-up friend who is behaving badly. The ability of his friend to provide hospitality, and thus his honour, is at stake.

Jesus says that the man will eventually respond to his friend’s request, not because he is a friend, but because of his friend’s shamelessness, **Luke 11:8**.

His friend displays no shame in asking for help to meet the requirements of hospitality. The woken-up friend would incur dishonour if he failed to help his neighbour in this essential obligation. So, he will respond because of social pressure at the very least.

Jesus’ parable implies that if it is so among friends with their mixed motives and self-interest, how much more so with God who wants to give us what is good and life-giving, and who is invested in keeping God’s name holy.

The discourse in Luke comes later in Jesus’ ministry and nearer to Pentecost than does the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew occurs. Therefore, Jesus can be more specific with reference to the needs of His disciples.

From the passage here, it’s clear that God’s children shouldn’t hesitate to pray to the Father for the measure of the Holy Spirit which has been promised to baptised believers, **Acts 2:38**, and who is a guarantee of our inheritance, **Ephesians 1:13**.

Luke says that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask, **Luke 11:13**. When this statement in Matthew it is to be considered with **Luke 11:13**, as both Matthew and Luke are stating that one receives the good things that result from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Father’s very best gift. He’s the gift of Himself to dwell with us and within us forever, **Acts 2:38**.

The Lord doesn’t just give good gifts, He gives the greatest gifts, **James 1:17**. As we ask, seek, and knock, let us never view prayer as striving to conquer God’s reluctance but rather as the act of laying hold of His willingness, **Ephesians 3:20-21**.

THE GOLDEN RULE

‘So, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.’
Matthew 7:12

Throughout the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has specified many moral duties. He now proceeds to close this portion of His lesson by setting forth a general principle, often referred to as the Golden Rule.

‘Do also to them’ is often referred to as the Golden Rule, **Matthew 7:12 / Luke 6:31**. This is the principle of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Jesus shows that this simple principle which summarises all the Law and the Prophets say about how we should treat others, **Matthew 7:12**. This is a fundamental principle of the Christian life that manifests one’s relationship both with his fellow brother in Christ, as well as non-Christians.

This isn’t a selfish motivation for being kind to others, but a mental check by which we can continually guard our behaviour in relation to others. This fundamental principle is the foundation upon which is built all that God would have us do in our relationships with others, **Romans 13:8-10 / Galatians 5:14**.

If the way, we go about sharing the Gospel with others is a reflection of what God has done in our lives, what does this tell us about how we should share the Gospel with others?

We need to remember how the Gospel was shared with us, with love, patience, compassion and understanding of where the other person is at, **2 Timothy 2:23-26**.

This principle that Jesus sets forth touches every aspect of our life and is the best moral rule we can live by. It far exceeds its declaration in the negative sense, that is, ‘do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you,’ which was taught by men such as Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, and Hillel.

The rule, as stated by Jesus, is supreme in that it requires doing good to others and not merely refraining from doing them harm. It is not always easy to see things from another’s perspective, but one should always try to do so and then direct his conduct accordingly.

This verse is certainly an appropriate conclusion to any instruction on moral duties because of its exceedingly broad scope. Interestingly enough, Jesus comments that this principle is really nothing more than a summary of the Old Testament!

A person who is practising the Golden Rule will not murder, lust, commit adultery, divorce unscripturally, make false promises, hate others, judge unrighteously, etc, **Matthew 5:17-48**.

For a Hebrew of Jesus’ day to faithfully obey the Golden Rule was for them to live obediently under the Mosaic law. In so doing, they would exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, **Matthew 5:20**.

But, what about today? Let us consider some practical examples of how the Golden Rule should be applied in various circumstances of life.

1. We want to be able to trust in and confide in a friend.

Thus, we should be trustworthy and never betray something told to us in confidence, **Proverbs 10:9 / Proverbs 27:6**.

2. We do not want to be misquoted.

Thus, we will be very careful not to misquote another person or take out of context what they have said or written, **Genesis 2:15 / Genesis 3:2 / Matthew 4:1-11**.

3. We would like for others to give us the benefit of the doubt.

Thus, we must be inclined to believe the best about others and give them the benefit of the doubt, **1 Corinthians 13:5**.

4. We don’t like for anyone to hurt our feelings, mock, or ridicule us.

Thus, we will be very careful not to do such to others, **Matthew 22:39 / Luke 6:31-36**.

5. We like for our friends and family to show an interest in what we’re interested in.

Thus, we will genuinely reciprocate that behaviour, even though their interests may be unimportant to us otherwise, **Philippians 2:3-4**.

6. We should treat every woman with the same respect we would want other men to give to our wives, **Ephesians 5:25-29**.

7. We do not want others to listen to us with the idea of catching us in a mistake.

Thus, we will not listen to others with that kind of critical attitude, **Psalms 31:14**.

8. We should be as sympathetic to someone mourning the loss of a loved one as we would wish others to be sympathetic toward us in those circumstances, **Romans 12:15**.

9. We should show the same interest in saving a lost soul as we would want them to show us if we were lost, **Luke 15:1-10**.

10. When necessary, we will correct and rebuke others in a way in which we would want to be corrected or rebuked, **Ephesians 4:15 / 1 Peter 3:15**.

We could go on and on, for certainly there are an infinite number of applications for the Golden Rule in everyday life. There are numerous topics that we haven't even mentioned in regard to this principle.

Take some time to really think about how we would like or expect to be treated, and then make sure we're living up to our own standards in the way we behave toward others. It's not enough to simply avoid doing something wrong or harmful to another. We must also desire to do that which is good for them! **James 4:17**.

THE NARROW AND WIDE GATES

'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.' **Matthew 7:15-20**

Because the way requires humility that is combined with suffering and persecution, few will enter the gate into heaven, **Luke 13:24 / Acts 14:22**. This gate is wide and many will enter the gate to condemnation into hell, which is the way of indifference, self-righteousness, laziness and hypocrisy.

The fact that Jesus here states that it is wide assumed that most people will be lost. Most people who live upon the face of the earth will choose not to obey God. People must enter through the narrow gate, which implies the road will be difficult, not many will find it but the reward will be worth it.

Such things as self-denial, the forgiveness of others, commitment, meekness, rejection of the pursuit of wealth as the main goal of life, and countless other basic Scriptural principles are opposed to the natural man whose baser instincts propel him constantly in the direction of the wide gate and the broad way.

Only those who are truly spiritual, who have set their minds upon the things in heaven, shall enter and negotiate the straitened way that leads to life and we must remember that God will keep on saving men until the fullness of His purpose is achieved, **Romans 11:25**.

Luke's account happens later in Jesus' ministry, but Luke clearly tells us that only a few are saved, **Luke 13:22-24**.

This question stimulated Jesus' teaching concerning the narrow gate. It's a fact of historical significance.

Throughout history, few people are obedient in comparison to the population of the world. As in the few eight souls who were saved in Noah's ark, so few who will be obedient to the gospel at any one time in history, **1 Peter 3:20-21**.

We must enter the gate purposely, **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**.

The gate is narrow, not because it's the fault of God, but because of the unwillingness of people to submit to the will of God. People make the gate narrow because of their own rebellion against God and they will not be able to enter because they are either trapped by their love of the world or are caught in the deception of their own devised religions.

Many religious people cannot enter because they have tried to make their own gate through which to enter. Since they have convinced themselves that their gate is the right gate, they will not seek to enter the true gate, **John 14:6 / Acts 4:12**.

If we know that many souls will be lost, what should this teach us about our evangelism efforts? Are we as concerned as Abraham was over those souls who lived in Sodom? **Genesis 18:22-32**. Are we as concerned as Paul was over his fellow Jews? **Romans 9:1-5**.

There should be a sense of urgency. We quarrel and fight over issues and the focus ends up being taken away from the lost and put on ourselves.

We must remember that every single soul is important to God and we should be going out of our way to help them seek Him through the narrow way.

TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS

‘Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.’ **Matthew 7:15-20**

The term ‘prophets’ technically only includes those who claim inspiration, though practically speaking it would include any teacher who claims to be delivering a message from deity, either directly via inspiration or indirectly via the Scriptures, **Deuteronomy 18:15-22**.

Consequently, Jesus’ warning should be considered as potentially applicable to any who claims to teach God’s ways to anyone, myself included.

A false teacher should be characterised as one whose teachings do not harmonise with God’s Word and as one who is unwilling to repent of their erroneous views when brought to their attention.

Although there are many teachers with an outward demeanour of innocence and gentleness, Jesus says that some of them are ravenous wolves inwardly, **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**.

Jesus warned that many false teachers would come, **Matthew 24:4-5 / Matthew 24:11 / Matthew 24:24**, as does the other writers of the New Testament, **1 Peter 2:1-3 / 1 John 4:1-6 / Jude 1:4**. This is one reason elders are to be appointed to shepherd the flock and guard them against false teachers, **Acts 20:28-29**.

They will devour many souls, leading themselves and others down the pathway to destruction, **2 Peter 2:1-3**. But, how can one distinguish between a sheep and a wolf in sheep’s clothing, since their appearance is essentially the same? **Matthew 7:15**.

The answer is simple, we must examine their ‘fruit’! **Matthew 7:16 / Matthew 7:20**. We must examine their actions and their teachings carefully and determine if such is in harmony with God’s Word or not.

We must make judgments of this sort all the time. Even at this very moment, you should be examining my words and judging whether or not I am writing the truth, **Acts 17:11**.

It's entirely possible to have a good tree and a bad tree that look nearly identical in trunk, limbs, and leaves, yet they differ in the quality of fruit they produce, **Matthew 7:17-18**.

It would be unwise to interpret Jesus' statement in **Matthew 7:18** in an absolute way. Surely there are good trees physically that may occasionally produce a bad piece of fruit. Likewise, it would seem reasonable to suggest that a bad tree might occasionally produce a good piece of fruit.

This is why we must be 'fruit inspectors.' And, when one inspects 'fruit,' we must use God's standard for determining what is good, **Galatians 5:22-23**.

Eventually, the hypocrisy of all false teachers will be exposed by those who observe them carefully. Such must be true because, as the Lord declared, 'a bad tree bears bad fruit', **Matthew 7:19** / **Like 6:43-45**.

Jesus' point should be viewed as a general truth. Good trees are the ones that generally produce good fruit. If a tree is producing a quantity of bad fruit, then that tree itself cannot be good. The same is true with people.

The Scriptures teach elsewhere that the duty of man is to fear God and obey Him, **Ecclesiastes 12:13**. Fulfilling this duty is synonymous with bearing good fruit. If we aren't fulfilling the duty for which we were created, God will eventually throw us into the eternal fire.

God calls us to be fruit inspectors. While we have no right to sentence and condemn others, **Matthew 7:1-5**, we are to discern or judge whether or not a person is a false teacher.

We should not blindly accept or support any spiritual idea or religious person. We must carefully test the fruit and hold fast to that which is good, **1 Thessalonians 5:21**.

And, may we realise that others are examining the fruit we produce! If we're a 'good tree', keep producing for the Lord! If we're a 'bad tree', repent while we still can, for the axe of God's judgment and the fire of His wrath are approaching! **Matthew 7:19** / **Matthew 3:10** / **Luke 3:9-17**.

TRUE AND FALSE DISCIPLES

'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one 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 drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'
Matthew 7:21-23

I wonder how many people are going to come up before the Lord's counter, expecting to get into heaven even though they are not truly prepared.

Many feel they are right with God, but they make sincere yet big mistakes in their life choices, expecting God to make an exception for them. Jesus, as He neared the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, delivered some hard words relating to this theme.

Jesus spoke the truth plainly, didn't He? It's not enough just to cry out, 'Lord, Lord!' **Matthew 7:21-22** / **Luke 6:46**.

The idea of saying, Lord twice gives us the impression these people would beg and plead with Jesus. We must do the will of the heavenly Father if we hope to be saved! **Matthew 7:21**.

These verses clearly disprove the notion of salvation by faith only, though many denominations teach such. We must obey the will of the heavenly Father to the best of our ability, **Luke 6:46**.

There are ‘many’, **Matthew 7:23**, who will try to rationalise their way into heaven by listing certain accomplishments or acts of service, but it won’t work. The problem ultimately is that the Lord doesn’t know them!

Even though they have done some good deeds, they are guilty of practising sinful behaviour, ‘lawlessness’! They are not right before God in taking the broad path that leads to destruction, **Matthew 7:13**. They feel that they deserve salvation for certain acts of service, even though they haven’t genuinely been obedient.

Notice Jesus didn’t say they actually did prophesy in His name and in His name drive out demons and in His name perform many miracles. He said, this is what they claimed, **Matthew 7:22 / Acts 19:13-16 / 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11**. Many religious people believe in Jesus and have the appearance of righteousness but will end up in hell, even though they feel they should not receive condemnation.

Let it be understood that to prophesy, cast out demons, or do many wonders does not excuse anyone from obeying God’s revealed will! As important as these actions may appear to people, to do these things doesn’t necessarily mean that they are producing good fruit, to obey God is to produce good fruit! **Matthew 7:18-19**.

When we stand before God’s throne in judgment, the stakes are of an eternal nature. Those who are sincere but wrong won’t make it into the heavenly abode. We must do everything within our power to ensure that we are not of that number! We must believe and obey God’s word today! **Matthew 7:21 / Luke 6:46**.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

‘Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.’ **Matthew 7:24-27**

Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. He made sure His audience understood the meaning by explaining it.

After all of the teachings in the sermon, it was important that the people understood that simply listening to His words was not enough.

In Luke’s account of this parable Jesus begins by asking the question, ‘Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?’ **Luke 6:46**.

Human nature is such that most who heard His powerful words that day would walk away impressed but not changed, most would hear but not do.

Thus, Jesus challenged His listeners to action. He wants all to be wise men who hear and do, such can be described as building our ‘house on the rock’.

That’s the real point which Jesus is driving home. We cannot just say we are Christians or be a part of the church or read the Bible and then not do what the Word of God says, **John 13:17 / Luke 6:47 / James 1:22**. This kind of life will not stand up against the problems that come our way in life.

In the area of Palestine, there were low valleys and gullies that had been exposed to water from rain and storms. During heavy rainfall, these became swollen rivers that washed away everything in their paths. The Jordan river was one which often was swollen especially in the wintertime, as the snow melted from the mountains.

Notice that Jesus mentions rains, floods, and winds, which suggest oppositions from above, beneath, and all around, **Luke 6:48-49**. The stability of the wise man's house was due to the fact that it was built, not upon 'a rock,' but upon 'THE rock'! **Matthew 7:25 / Luke 6:48**.

Who or what is the rock? The rock is nothing more nor less than 'these words of mine,' namely, the words of Christ, **Matthew 7:24 / Matthew 7:26 / Luke 6:47 / Luke 6:49**.

Only the life founded upon and guided by the principles of Christ shall stand. His teaching is the rock, all else is shifting sand.

It should be noted that the difference between these two builders is not in their craftsmanship or the quality of materials used. It can be assumed that both men do their best in building their 'house'. However, the difference is that one chose their foundation wisely, while the other was careless, **Luke 6:48** makes this point clear.

A foolish builder would build his house without thinking about what kind of foundation there was. He might have liked the way the building site looked. Perhaps he decided to ignore the warnings of people who had experienced the past floods.

That's how we live our lives if we don't live them according to the Word of God. We just do what feels right at the time. We don't listen to warnings or we ignore God's wisdom, **Proverbs 14:12**.

Sand is always moving, always shifting, always changing and it's unstable, **Matthew 7:26-27**. Many people believe that because they belong to a certain religious group their house would stand.

Some think if they build on their good deeds, their house will stand. Some think if they build on their righteousness, their house will stand. Some build on their own wisdom and understanding and believe their house will stand.

There are many people who build their lives on shifting sand. They may listen to sermons and Bible classes, but they don't live according to what the Bible says.

The wise builder, on the other hand, carefully plans his house. He investigates the building site to make sure that it will sustain his building.

He judges the soil and elevation to make sure that there are no flood hazards. He will listen to the warnings of those who know the area. He builds with confidence and knows his building will last.

In like manner, anyone who builds their character, i.e., their 'house', by hearing and doing what Jesus teaches will stand approved of God on the Day of Judgment, their house will not 'fall', **1 Corinthians 3:11 / Matthew 10:22**.

As the hymn writer says, 'On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand.' **Psalm 62:6**.

We can live our lives with confidence when we live according to the Word of God, but we must remember, it's not just about listening to the Word of God or talking about the Word of God but it's about doing! It's about putting the Word of God into practice in our lives, **James 1:22-25 / John 14:23-24**.

Everyone who hears the Word of God is building a house. The one who hears God's Word but doesn't do what it says is like a foolish builder who builds his house on sand. That house will be crushed in a storm, **Matthew 7:27 / Luke 6:49**.

The one who hears the Word of God and obeys it is like a wise man that builds his house on solid rock, **Matthew 7:24-25 / Luke 6:47-48**. That house will stand up to any storm. Wise people build their faith on the foundation of God's Word. This faith stands strong against the storms of life.

Jesus ended, not with words of comfort, but with words of tragedy, 'it fell with a great crash,' **Matthew 7:24 / Luke 6:9**. Even a single lost soul is a terrible waste in the eyes of God.

How can Jesus' teaching about the wise and foolish builders help us in our outreach efforts? It's short, simple and straight to the point. We meet lots of people with different religious backgrounds but sadly many are built on sand. We can use this example of Jesus to help them build a solid foundation on truth.

‘When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.’ Matthew 7:28-29

The people were amazed at Jesus’ teaching because ‘He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes’. Jesus didn’t quote rabbis to establish the things He was speaking, which was the common practice of the day. Instead, He merely spoke the truth.

How great a loss it would be for any Christians to never hear or study the Sermon on the Mount! But there is an even greater loss and that is to fail to obey the truths contained therein once they are heard! May we always endeavour to be diligent hearers and faithful doers of God’s Word! **James 1:22-25.**