

# **The Way of the Overcomer**

**Living the Sermon on the Mount**



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**Living the Sermon on the  
Mount**

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# 1

## Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount has been described as “the supreme jewel in the crown of Jesus’ teaching.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps no other passage of Scripture has had such a profound influence upon the world. In it, the Lord Jesus defines Christian character and the true nature of a disciple. He explains what it is to be a Christian and how to bear fruit which is pleasing to God. He addresses our deepest and most fundamental needs and provides the most discerning and effective solutions to the most pressing of life’s problems. He makes known the way of victory in all the storms of life and how to live in ways that bring glory to God.

Embracing the sermon’s simple precepts has enabled the most oppressed, hurting and battered people to become amongst the strongest and most effective of God’s warriors. Victims have become victors; the broken-hearted have become lion-hearted; the most foolish have become the most wise; and the most fearful have become the most brave. Through it, whole communities have been transformed, with even the most barbaric and violent becoming amongst the most civilised and caring.<sup>2</sup> Nothing in all the world surpasses its ability to renew, rebuild, secure and empower.

Its demands, however, are well beyond even the best of us. In and of ourselves, and in our fallen nature, not one of us could hope to measure up to one percent of them. Indeed, without Christ the human heart is “beyond cure” (Jeremiah 17:9). Only those who are ‘born

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<sup>1</sup> Green, M., *The Message of Matthew: The kingdom of heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today, Inter-Varsity Press, UK, p. 88, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Vanuatu: A case study, Appendix.

again' by the Spirit of God (John 3:3-8), and have been given a new nature, can ever know these things fulfilled in them. And with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). Hence, through prayer and the work of Christ in them, the children of God are promised certain progress (Matthew 7:7), along with all the blessings that accompany this. At the same time, they will discover that God's commandments are not burdensome but liberating (1 John 5:3). As Jesus said: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32).

# 2

## The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

*I Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.*

Although often called the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ and delivered in the hearing of the crowds (Matthew 7:28),<sup>3</sup> Jesus gave this address seated, directing His words primarily to a small group. He was not preaching a new moral code for the masses. Rather, he was instructing His disciples, teaching them the true meaning of the Old Testament law, something that could be understood only by His true followers.<sup>4</sup> It was this small band of true followers, however, who went on to turn the world upside down.

Jesus begins with what have become known as the ‘Beatitudes’—from Latin, *beatus* (blessed, happy or fortunate). These focus particularly on what Christians *are*, rather than what they *do*. They

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<sup>3</sup> See also Luke 6:20 and Luke 7:1.

<sup>4</sup> Some hold that Jesus’s ascent of the mountain was intended to parallel Moses’ climb up Mount Sinai to receive the law (Exodus 24:12–13). However, it seems more likely that His purpose was simply to withdraw from the crowds so as to teach His disciples. France comments: “Such retreats to the quiet of the hills for prayer and teaching are a regular feature of Jesus’ ministry. It is ... unlikely that any allusion is here intended to Moses’ ascent of the specific peak of Sinai to receive the law thus portraying Jesus as a new lawgiver like Moses.” France, R.T., *The Gospel According to Matthew: An introduction and commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Inter-Varsity Press, UK, p. 107, 1985; archive.org.

describe the mindset and attitudes of Christ Himself as seen in the people in whom He dwells. Those whose hearts are characterised by the qualities set out in these verses are said to be ‘blessed’ and have great cause to rejoice. In this life they will be overcomers (1 John 5:4). In the life to come, they will enjoy an eternal future far, far better than the paradise Adam lost (John 14:2-3).

3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

The ‘poor in spirit’ are those who know, deep down in their hearts, that they need God. They are like the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14 whose prayers began, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” They are conscious of their own moral bankruptcy, their daily need for forgiveness of sins, and are deeply grateful for their salvation. They have renounced self-righteousness, knowing that, outside of the sanctifying work of Christ, their own righteous acts are worthless (Isaiah 64:6; Philippians 3:8). They sense their dependence on God’s grace alone if they are to grow as Christians and become more fruitful in His service. They do not blame God for their circumstances or the brokenness of the world. Rather, they recognise their own part in these things and how they share in the blame for them. They are emptied of ‘self’ and know that, outside of Christ, they are nothing and have nothing. Particularly, they know that they have no rights before God and that the cross of Christ is their only hope. They are the very opposite of those today who militantly demand their ‘human rights’ and become increasingly resentful when they don’t get what they are fully convinced they deserve.

The poor in spirit are blessed and have reason to rejoice because they have become partakers in and inheritors of the ‘kingdom of heaven’. Having been granted forgiveness of sins, Christ has become their king and His benevolent rule has begun in their lives. He will shepherd them (Psalm 23), watch over them (Matthew 10:29-31), and

teach them His ways (Matthew 11:29). He will live in them by His Spirit, nurture His own righteousness in them and fulfil His glorious purposes in them (Philippians 2:13).<sup>5</sup>

In this life Christians will experience the first fruits of Christ's reign—joy, peace, goodness and love (1 Peter 1:8-9). In the life to come, they will know these to the fullest, when of His “peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7) and His glory fills the earth “as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). As the bride of Christ, they will know unbroken fellowship with Him. “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:2-3). He will heal them of all their wounds and afflictions (Revelation 2:22), and wipe every tear from their eyes (Revelation 21:4). Like jewels, they will shine with the glory of God and, like gold, they will be endowed with the beauty and worth of their saviour (Revelation 21:9-21).

Paradoxically, though spiritually poor, Christians are materially very rich (2 Corinthians 8:9; Luke 12:32-33). While they are not promised prosperity in this life, there is much stored up for them in the life to come. The wealth of this world's most affluent billionaires, the splendour of their most beautiful houses, the wonder of their most treasured artworks, and the prestige of their most famous representatives are just shadows of the wealth, buildings, treasures and honour that await God's people. In the life to come, they will administer true wealth (Luke 16:11), live in the most palatial residences (John 14:2), take charge of real cities (Luke 19:17) and enjoy a paradise more exciting, fulfilling and glorious than the human mind could begin to imagine (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

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<sup>5</sup> One might contrast the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Satan, and their different values and modes of operation. The latter is characterised by fear, threats, manipulation, oppression, turmoil and hatred; the former by security, encouragement, affirmation, kindness, freedom, peace and love.

#### 4 *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Those who are ‘poor in spirit’ are also those who mourn. This is not a reference to grieving following the loss of deceased family or friends, but to the Christian response to the problem of sin. Those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit mourn their sin and are deeply troubled by it. They are also deeply troubled by the sin of those around them (Psalm 119:136). They don’t run after entertainment and joviality, and do not yearn to ‘eat, drink and be merry’. Although not miserable, they are sober, being conscious of spiritual realities and the serious state of the world (Titus 2:1-8). They empathise with Jesus as he weeps near Lazarus’s tomb (John 11:35), lamenting the fallen state of humanity and all its wretchedness. They understand how sin destroys individuals, families and societies, and it distresses them. They mourn people’s failure to honour God. They will never be truly happy until Christ returns and puts an end to sin.

Those who so mourn are blessed and have reason to rejoice because ‘they will be comforted’. In this life they know forgiveness of sins, peace with God and the ‘joy of salvation’. They will, progressively, find greater freedom from the burden of sin, making room in their hearts for the healing love of God and His people. They will know hope displacing despair and love displacing loneliness. In the life to come they will, finally, be liberated from all remaining insecurity, fear, loneliness, guilt and self-rejection. They will be set free to enjoy the most intimate, deep and satisfying relationships. They will know an unbroken peace. They will sense that they have truly ‘come home’, finding their souls in perfect harmony with all that goes on around them. Their hearts will beat with the heartbeat of God’s love. They will know only rich contentment and a never-ending anticipation of more goodness to come. “Everlasting joy will crown

their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isaiah 51:11).

5 *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”*

Poverty of spirit also leads to meekness, an attitude of heart which is God-centred rather than self-centred. The meek are God-conscious, knowing the ‘fear of God’. They know that He is watching their every act, listening to their every word and following their every thought—and they are glad of it (Psalm 139:23-24). They desire to know more of Him and His ways that they might not displease Him. God’s name is precious to them, and the dread of offending it is always before them.

The lives of the meek are characterised by humility—not the belittling, undervaluing or disparaging of self, but a heart attitude which renounces self-promotion. They care little for status and prestige but, instead, focus upon others, their needs and how they might serve them (Philippians 2:5-8). They esteem others and are careful to respect them. They are gentle and at the same time inwardly strong; restrained and at the same time able to assert themselves when required. They are teachable, welcoming the rebuke of the godly. They are patient and self-controlled. They are the most effective in strengthening others, building God’s kingdom and establishing His righteousness on the earth.

In contrast, those who lack meekness have no fear of God. They are consumed with self and are arrogantly assertive. They are proud and boastful, and determined to exalt themselves over others. They are confident in their own abilities. They love power and are experts in manipulation, domination and control. They are dissatisfied and resentful, especially when they don’t get what they want. They are inwardly weak, lacking self-control. They hate criticism and are quick to take offence. They tear down the work of the good and destroy

people, families, communities and nations. Those who are poor in spirit see the seeds of all these things in their own hearts.

The meek are blessed and have reason to rejoice because ‘they will inherit the earth’. Not this cursed world with all its misery, natural disasters, toil, violence and disease. Rather, they will inherit the New Earth which will be even better than the original, perfect and ‘very good’ creation described in Genesis 1 (especially v. 31). “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Jesus promised that “those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). All the resources and opportunities of the New Earth will be given to the meek who will use them wisely, and with great satisfaction and great joy, to the glory of God.

*6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”*

Those who mourn over sin know a continual yearning for righteousness. Just as people feel the need for daily food and drink, so Christians daily crave godliness. They hate their sin because it dishonours God. It spoils their fellowship with Him and robs them of His peace. They are not focussed, primarily, upon their salaries or careers or hobbies. Instead, they are preoccupied with Christ and becoming more like Him. In all the busyness and pressures of life, they still seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness (Matthew 6:33). They love righteousness and it is for this that they pray most fervently. To them, nothing is more important and more joyous than knowing Christ formed in them (Galatians 4:19) and His beautiful life expressed through them (Galatians 2:20). Their souls long for God and His righteousness as deer pant for water (Psalm 42:1).

Such people are blessed and have reason to rejoice because ‘they will be filled’. In this life they will progressively draw closer to God,

knowing more of His presence, His power and His love. They will grow in wisdom and increasingly have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). They will show forth, in ever greater measure, the glorious fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), “shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (Proverbs 4:18).

When Christ returns to the earth, the transformation will be completed and they will be made perfect. They will be filled to the measure with all the fulness of God (Ephesians 3:19) and all the fruit of righteousness—wisdom, knowledge, understanding, maturity, peace, goodness and love. The enfeebling curse of sin will be entirely eradicated, and they will know a wholeness, a well-being and an empowerment which will afford them the capacity to enjoy the very best that life on the New Earth can offer.

*7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

Being ‘poor in spirit’ and mourning their own moral bankruptcy, Christians are acutely aware of their own need for mercy. Consequently, they are quick to show mercy to others. They are compassionate and forgiving, knowing that they are dependent on others for the same. Malice is far from them and they know no desire for revenge. They are concerned for those who bully and abuse them, knowing their plight before God. They love even their enemies.

Although willing to apply ‘tough love’, to speak plainly about injustice and to punish wrongdoing, they do so only for the sake of righteousness. They are assertive when required, but never in pursuit of personal gain.

Being meek, they are conscious of the misery of others and are keen to relieve it. They make it their business to understand the needs of the poor and how to meet them. They do not exploit those over whom they have power. Rather, they defend the weak and vulnerable.

They desire to raise others up. Like God, they pity the lost and desire that they be saved.

The merciful are blessed and have reason to rejoice because ‘they will be shown mercy’. In this life, God will mitigate the consequences of their follies and sins and uphold them in all the trials of life. Even though they walk through the darkest valleys, they need not fear evil (Psalm 23:4). They will walk free from the curse of bitterness and the psychological and physical illnesses associated with it.

On the last day, all will face God’s righteous judgement. Those who have rejected Christ and His ways, and refused others mercy, will forfeit the mercy of God. They will pay the just price for their sin for eternity. Those who, through the work of God’s grace in their hearts, have shown mercy to others will receive God’s mercy. The blood of Christ will avail for them, and they will be acquitted of all their sins.

8 *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*

The pure in heart are without malice, envy and pride.<sup>6</sup> They have renounced selfish ambition and no longer lust after money, sex and power. Nor do they worship things, people or themselves. Like King David, they desire that God’s light would shine upon them so as to identify their faults that they might correct them (Psalm 139:23-24). They are without hypocrisy and guile, hating falsehood and loving truth. God is at the centre of their lives and they seek to be like Him. They love Him and treasure all that is good. They are holy, hating sin and loving purity. They tread carefully lest they offend God’s holiness. The graciousness of their words reflects the beauty of their inward thoughts.

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<sup>6</sup> In the Bible, pride is portrayed as the sin of elevating oneself above others—and even above God—a most grievous form of idolatry. It seeks self-glory rather than God’s glory, placing self at the centre where only God belongs. It is a terrible evil and causes great destruction.

Such people are blessed and have reason to rejoice because ‘they will see God’. There is nothing more exciting, more fulfilling or more wonderful than this. His beauty, wonder, wisdom, knowledge, loveliness, goodness and love are beyond words. As we grow in purity and in God’s likeness, we know greater fellowship with Him. We then start to see glimpses of Him in the world around us—in flowers or landscapes or literature or music. Sometimes God may allow us to peer into heaven and look fleetingly upon His glory.

In this life we behold Him only in part, seeing only dimly. But in the life to come, we shall see fully. With our hearts wholly cleansed by the blood of Christ, and our frames strengthened through having glorified bodies, we will be enabled to approach the throne of God and there gaze upon that which is so sublime and enthralling that earthly men could not see it and live (Exodus 33:20).

9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*

Burning in the heart of the proud is always the question, “Who is the greatest?” In shocking detail, history has recorded the willingness of dictators to sacrifice millions of lives in their determination to settle this matter. The desire to be exalted over others is also seen in school bullies, ruthless businessmen, family feuds and self-seeking politicians. Such people are controlled by jealousy and self-interest. They enjoy battles and revel in conflict. In others, such self-worship is seen in petty jealousies, gossip and sibling rivalry—everything that arises from the false belief that we are better and more deserving than others.

In contrast, those who are meek become peacemakers. They are quick to forgive and do not hold grudges. Where possible, they avoid quarrels. When in the wrong, they are willing to apologise. They maintain control of their tongues and are not easily offended. They

value the image of God in others and promote reconciliation and peace. They are active in resolving disputes, in their homes and communities, and between nations. They would rather be wronged than cause disunity over minor issues. Like their heavenly Father, they love kindness and delight in mercy.

Peacemakers are blessed and have reason to rejoice because ‘they will be called children of God’. One of the most treasured of the Christian’s many privileges is sonship—adoption into the family of God. Even the most exalted of the angels has no status approaching this. In this life God’s children know the comforting witnesses of His Spirit, testifying that they belong to Him and that He is their Father (Romans 8:14, 15). In the life to come the redeemed will share in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 3:2) and enjoy all the respect, esteem and glory that the children of God deserve.

*10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

According to the apostle Paul, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). There are many enemies of God and His people. They are contemptuous of the righteous and hate them (Matthew 24:9). They feel condemned by them and want to silence them (1 John 3:12). The more righteously Christians live, and the more they preach about sin and repentance, the more they will be disliked and opposed (John 7:7). But they are blessed because their reward will be the kingdom of heaven, which far outweighs the price they pay for it (Romans 8:18). While in this life they may be deprived, in the life to come they will be greatly enriched (Revelation 2:9). Like the apostle Paul, they rejoice in “having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

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

When Christians suffer for the sake of Christ they glorify God (John 21:19), an honour of immeasurable value that they will treasure throughout all eternity. Sharing in His sufferings they will also share in His glory (Romans 8:16). There never has been, nor ever will be, a greater privilege than this.

In this life they rest in the knowledge that God will work all things together for their good (Romans 8:28). Hence, when persecuted, they do not become resentful or retaliate. Rather, they glory in their suffering, knowing that this produces ever greater Christian character, leading to ever greater reward (Romans 5:5). Confident that they are safe in the hands of their Saviour (John 6:39-40, Romans 8:37) they rejoice in anticipation of the glory to come, a reward of such magnitude that it cannot be compared with the suffering that precedes it (Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:17).

# 3

## **Salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16)**

In the previous passage Jesus dealt with Christian character. In this section He deals with its fruit. Those who put into practice what He taught in the Beatitudes will become salt and light in the world and will bring much glory to God.

*13A “You are the salt of the earth.”*

Salt (sodium chloride) is a very effective preservative, for example, preventing meat and fish from rotting and keeping them edible for long periods. Similarly, people whose characters reflect Christ’s teaching in the Beatitudes have a purifying effect on society. By living righteously before their peers and speaking out courageously against injustice, Christians restrain moral degeneration. The world’s God-given sense of right and wrong is triggered, and evil can no longer parade openly. The deeds of darkness are forced underground, limiting their influence.

Prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries, many countries openly practised the most dreadful barbarism. Roman emperors were entertained by watching people being tortured and killed. Large crowds rejoiced in seeing gladiators fight each other to the death. Spectacles involving people being caught and eaten by wild beasts were popular. In many parts of the world, human sacrifice (including children) was common, along with cannibalism. In some rituals, the victim’s heart was torn out while he was still alive. The sick were left

to die on the street and unwanted children were abandoned. However, as societies believed the Gospel and embraced the principles taught in the Sermon on the Mount they were transformed. Mercy and compassion replaced cruelty and callousness. Christians led the way in ending slavery, caring for the sick, educating the poor and reforming prisons.<sup>7,8</sup> Laws were passed forbidding barbarism, and Christian revivals contributed significantly to improvements in working conditions and to peaceful political reform. Commenting on the eighteenth-century British evangelical revival Dr J.W. Brady wrote that it “was the true nursing mother of the ... values that have created and sustained Free [Government] Institutions throughout the English-speaking world.”<sup>9</sup> Christians thus become part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

Salt also adds flavour to food and, similarly, Christian endeavours have greatly enriched humanity. Much of the world’s most sublime music, artwork, architecture and literature have been inspired by the Christian faith. Christians also built many of the first schools, hospitals and scientific institutions.<sup>10</sup> Almost all the founders of modern science were Christians, some of whom would write about how their belief in God and creation inspired their scientific work.<sup>11,12</sup> Throughout history Christians have promoted a biblical work ethic, encouraging diligence, education and progress.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, they have taught honesty and responsibility, thus creating an environment in which economies

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<sup>7</sup> Schmidt, A.J., *How Christianity Changed the World*, Zondervan, USA, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> James, S., *How Christianity Transformed the World*, Christian Focus Publications, Scotland, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Brady, J.W., *England: Before and After Wesley: The evangelical revival and social reform*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, p. 13, 1938; archive.org.

<sup>10</sup> Ref. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Stark, R., *For the Glory of God: How monotheism led to reformations, science, witch-hunts and the end of slavery*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> *Evolution, Creation and Science*, ch. 3, barnabas.digital.

<sup>13</sup> Ref. 8, ch. 9.

could flourish. Historian Professor Paul L. Maier concluded that the record of Christianity has shown it to be “the most powerful agent in transforming society for the better”.<sup>14</sup>

*13B “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.”*

In exceedingly graphic language, Jesus emphasises the importance of Christians maintaining their distinctiveness in society. Unless the world can see a difference between itself and the church, Christian profession is worthless. It will have no impact and people will not be interested in the Gospel.

The ‘salt’ that Jesus is referring to probably came from the Dead Sea and was actually a mixture of salts, containing only around 30% sodium chloride. Although this 30% is sufficient for the ‘salt’ to perform its required function, the sodium chloride content can easily be lost. Particularly, exposure to moisture or rainwater can cause this to happen and renders the remaining powder useless.<sup>15</sup> The answer to the question, “How can it be made salty again?” would have been: “It can’t!”

In using this imagery, Jesus stresses the futility of compromised Christianity and makes plain the true condition of those who profess faith but are not really His disciples. There are many examples of people who have watered down and even negated the Bible’s teaching on righteousness. Under their leadership organisations that once operated according to the most Christian principles have come to

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<sup>14</sup> Ref. 7, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Compared with some of the other minerals making up the ‘salt’, sodium chloride is particularly soluble in water. If the ‘salt’ is stored inside in damp conditions, the sodium chloride can leach out. If stored outside, rainwater can preferentially wash out the sodium chloride.

embrace the most unscriptural ideas. Even whole denominations have been hijacked and led astray. Often, it seems, the motive has been to please men or to avoid persecution. But such people have made themselves as worthless as salt that has lost its saltiness. They and their ministries are then fit only to be ‘thrown out and trampled underfoot.’

*14 “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 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. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Foretelling the coming of Christ, Isaiah wrote, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9:2). Ours is a dark, dark world in which there is gross ignorance of God and His ways. People are blind to truth, live in deception and are captives to sin. Even apparently respectable people, if they do not know Christ, cannot please God. Their good deeds are stained with self-righteousness and, deep down, they are worshipping themselves. Others struggle in vain to control their tempers and lusts. Their pride and selfishness destroy their family relationships, leaving them weighed down by guilt and loneliness. They are prisoners of addictions and the misery that accompanies them. They are slaves to depravity and are tormented by shame. They are frustrated and unfulfilled. They have no knowledge of God’s salvation and, as they approach the end of their lives, know only despair.

Into this miserable and desperate world stepped the Son of God as the light. He came to teach truth and righteousness, and to demonstrate these in His own perfect life. He came to undo the work of Satan (1 John 3:8), to set free his captives, to give sight to those he had blinded and to heal the hearts he had broken (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18). He made

known God's salvation, the path of freedom and the way of peace. And as He is the light of the world, so are the people in whom He dwells.

In describing us as 'salt and light', Jesus used the Greek verb, *ἐστε*, (*este*, 'you are') with the emphatic pronoun, *ὑμεῖς*, (*hymeis*, 'you'). This might be translated, "You and you only are ..." Christians and Christians alone are God's salt and light. The spiritual world is one of great contrasts. On the one hand, those who lack Christian character will, ultimately, live utterly futile lives. It will be impossible for them to do any lasting good. On the other hand, those whose hearts reflect Christ's teaching in the Beatitudes will have a great and positive influence on society, shining light into dark places and despairing souls, to the praise of God's glory.

Just as a town on a hill cannot go unnoticed, so the light emanating from the Christian will be evident to all. This is inevitable and will happen quite naturally, for "the path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day" (Proverbs 4:18). It is God's purpose to glorify Himself through the life of His Son in us. As we grow in grace and progress in the Christian life, Christ is increasingly formed in us (Galatians 4:19). Consequently, we shine His light more and more.

It is God's will that Christians be His visible representatives in society, both as individuals and as communities of believers. We are not to be ashamed of our faith or afraid to be different. In humility and love we are to live lives that contrast with those of the people around us, mirroring in our conduct the principles elucidated in the Beatitudes. Whatever our calling—whether a company chairman, a factory worker, a cleaner, or a teacher—we are to demonstrate before men the beauty of the Saviour who indwells us. By our good works and selfless service in the community we are to make known the effectiveness of Christian saltiness and the truth of the Gospel that transformed us. In so doing we, as God's children, will bring glory to our Father in heaven.

# 4

## Jesus and the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-48)

*17 “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. 18 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. 19 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. 20 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.”*

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were steeped in the Old Testament scriptures (the Law and Prophets)—or so it seemed. They studied the Torah intensely, discussed it endlessly and even committed large parts of it to memory. They were meticulous in their obedience to the commandments—or so they claimed. They kept the sabbath strictly, tithed with mathematical precision, adhered fully to the dietary restrictions, prayed and fasted devoutly, and observed the festivals and ceremonies down to the last detail. In these things, like the apostle Paul, they were ‘faultless’ (Philippians 3:4-6).

Yet Jesus often came into sharp conflict with them, denouncing them as vehemently as they denounced Him. He had no interest in their

washing rituals (Matthew 15:1-3, Luke 11:37-41) and sometimes would eat and drink when others were fasting (Matthew 9:14-15). When He healed lepers He would touch them, thus, in the opinion of the Pharisees, making Himself ritually unclean (Matthew 8:2-3). He ate with 'tax collectors and sinners' (Matthew 9:10-13) and allowed a 'sinful woman' to touch Him (Luke 7:36-39). When His disciples picked grain on the sabbath He did not rebuke them (Matthew 12:1-8) and He Himself healed on the sabbath (Luke 13:10-17). He talked of inaugurating an era of 'new wine' that required 'new wineskins' (Matthew 9:17) and taught with authority, leading some to wonder whether He was bringing a 'new teaching' (Mark 1:22-27). So had He come to abolish the Law and the Prophets? "No", He says, "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." In all His teaching and in everything He was and did, He would affirm them; and He would expound their true meaning in all its fullness, dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't'.

From the moment of His conception in Mary's womb, Jesus became the living fulfilment of the Old Testament. From Genesis to Malachi His coming had been foretold and His mission explained. He was the One who would be conceived of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:22-23) and born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:4-6). He would be nailed to a cross (Psalm 22:16) and die for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53:6). He would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10) and one day return to judge the world and reign forever (Psalm 98:9, Isaiah 9:6-7).

He was to fulfil the Old Testament types by becoming the living embodiment of the temple; the Passover Lamb whose blood saved the Israelites from the destroying angel; the tabernacle with all its ceremonies, sacrifices and rituals; the true High Priest who would intercede for His people; God's manna from heaven; and much more.

In His life, death, resurrection and ascension, He perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law, in Himself and on our behalf

(Romans 8:4). By living a sinless life He rendered perfect obedience to the Law so that, united with Him, His people might also be credited with this same righteousness. In His death, He fully satisfied the Law's demand that sin be punished (Romans 3:26). Through His resurrection, and His now living in His people, He empowers them to obey God's laws and live lives that are holy and pleasing to the Lawgiver (Romans 6:4). Having ascended into heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit on His people so that God's laws might be written upon their hearts (Hebrews 10:15-17), engendering a love of them and a desire to keep them.

Jesus's problem with the Jewish leaders was not their acceptance of the authority of the Old Testament scriptures but their failure to interpret and apply them correctly. As He was to make clear in vv. 21-48, they did not understand them and would often twist their meaning to suit themselves. The real sense of the Law and the Prophets was this: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). Yet the Pharisees cared nothing for these things (Matthew 23:23) even to the point of devouring widows' houses (Mark 12:40) and plotting murder (John 12:10). Their commitment was to the letter of the law, not the spirit of the law, and their hearts were far from God (Mark 7:6-7). Despite their encyclopaedic knowledge of the scriptures and their high positions in the religious hierarchy, they were not at all righteous before God. Jesus described them as "whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean" (Matthew 23:27). Their lives were the antithesis of the principles expounded in the Beatitudes.

The apostle Paul wrote: "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger" (Romans 2:7-8). Later in the same letter he wrote: "If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live"

(Romans 8:13). Although people are not saved *by* works, there is no salvation *without* works. We are and can only be justified “by faith apart from the works of the law” (Romans 3:28) because in and of ourselves we have nothing we can present to God to win his favour. Outside of Christ, our own righteousness amounts to no more than filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). But a confession of faith which is not accompanied by works has no value and does not save (James 2:14-26).

Those who have true faith are born again (John 3:3) and “cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God” (1 John 3:9). Sin is no longer their master (Romans 6:14). Rather, grace now reigns in them to ensure righteousness and eternal life (Romans 5:21). They now belong to Christ and will inevitably bear good fruit to God (Romans 7:4). If there is no evidence of repentance and good works in a person’s life, there is no reason to believe that they are saved. The Pharisees and teachers of the law had neither true faith nor true righteousness and would not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus gave six examples of how the Jewish leaders misunderstood and perverted the true meaning of the Law. He introduced each by quoting a typical saying that might be heard from them. He then explained the commandment’s real purpose, correcting their misapplication of it. His intention was not to contradict or replace the Old Testament’s teaching in any way, but to clarify it.<sup>16</sup> The Jewish leaders sought to restrict the Law to a narrow, literal interpretation, leading to a superficial, outward conformity to its requirements. Jesus corrected this by emphasising its true meaning as something that applied to the heart—to motives, attitudes, desires and inward thoughts. Only by loving our neighbour as ourselves would we fulfil it (Romans 13:9-10). As the One who wrote the Law, He spoke with

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<sup>16</sup> Stott, J.R.W., *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, The Bible Speaks Today, Inter-Varsity Press, UK, p. 77, 1978.

absolute authority, beginning each refutation with the words, “But I tell you ...”

*21 “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.’ 22 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.”*

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were concerned with condemning only the physical act of murder. But Jesus was just as concerned with the heart conditions that give rise to murder, such as anger, jealousy and hatred. Unless we are addressing these, we have no more righteousness than the Pharisees and no more reason than them to think that we will escape the fires of hell.

There is, of course, such a thing as ‘righteous anger’. Sometimes we hear of an atrocity, a crime against humanity or some other wrong or injustice, and our spirits erupt in indignation—and it is good that they do so. We are made in the image of God, and we are reacting as God does. Such a response is clean, controlled and without malice. It is the counterpart of love.

Unrighteous anger is quite different. Its source is pride, as the offence taken does not arise out of concern for God, or His name, or a principle of righteousness, or people, but self. The root cause of the problem is idolatry. We make gods of ourselves and consider others to be less worthy than us. When people wrong us, we feel insulted and robbed of the respect (or worship) we think we merit. “How dare he do that to *me*?” we ask. (We wouldn’t be so cross if he had done it to someone else.) Similarly, when someone has something that we want, it can be an affront to our pride. “I deserve this at least as much as

him,” we think. It seems to us a great injustice and we become resentful.

Murder is the fullest expression of unrighteous anger, the ultimate harm that we can inflict on those we have come to hate. But there are other, more subtle alternatives. Insults such as ‘raca’ (‘blockhead’) or ‘you fool’ can be quite effective as a means of denigrating others. When we speak or think like this, or gossip maliciously, or despise others in our hearts, we commit murder inwardly. Many people do not see this as very serious, but Jesus did—indeed, so serious that it puts people in danger of the ‘fire of hell’. As the apostle John wrote: “Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him” (1 John 3:15).

*23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. 25 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. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”*

The state of our relationships with others says much about the state of our relationship with God. We will be right with Him only inasmuch as we are right with our fellow man. If someone has a just grievance against us and we have failed to rectify this, our fellowship with God will suffer and the value of our Christian service will be undermined—perhaps even to the point of becoming worthless.

Jesus stresses the urgency and seriousness of this matter and makes clear that this teaching applies to every single one of us.<sup>17</sup> Reconciliation is not optional, and we must not delay in apologising when we know we need to, or in making restitution when we know we should. If we do, we may pay a very high price. God is a perfect father who disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). He can and will (to a degree) withdraw His hand of protection, exposing us to the perils of this life and the attacks of the enemy. Admitting our faults to those we have wronged may cost us only our pride; but the failure to do so could cost us our job or our marriage or our health—or more. Jesus gives us a clear warning: Put things right now!

27 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’*  
28 *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*

Here again, the Jewish leaders restricted the meaning of the law to just physical actions, in this case the act of adultery. But Jesus makes clear that the requirements of the law go much deeper than this. Looking at someone inappropriately or viewing pornography or engaging in sexual fantasy are also wrong because they emanate from the same underlying evil in the heart. Again, it is this that Jesus is so keen for us to address.

Lust and love are opposites. Love is about giving—of oneself to another. Lust is about taking—for oneself from another. We sometimes hear a man say of a woman, “I want to have her.” Such desires reflect a hunger for self-gratification which has little regard for the needs or feelings of the other. Godly sex is as described in the marriage liturgy

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<sup>17</sup> In v. 23 He changes from using the second-person plural to the second-person singular, emphasising that His teaching here applies to everyone, including His disciples and all Christians.

in the Book of Common Prayer: “With my body, I thee worship [honour].”

When we engage in sexual activity, we must be careful to ask, ‘What is the motive behind this?’ and ‘What is being celebrated in it?’ Amnon, King David’s son, was consumed by sexual desire for his half-sister Tamar. But it was driven by lust, not love. He forced himself upon her and, afterwards, hated her (2 Samuel 13:1–19). Andy Koornstra wrote of how his own homosexual desires arose out of envy.<sup>18</sup> Jackie Perrie said of her lesbian partners, “they lusted after me. I loved *it*, never *them*.”<sup>19</sup>

Lust is deeply corrupting, nurturing the malice that lurks deep within the heart. It dishonours the image of God in the other person and is fuelled by pride. It is nothing less than the worship of evil. Love nurtures goodness, enabling the heart of Christ to be formed in us. It honours the image of God in the other person and is fuelled by humility. The worship of God is central to it. According to the Bible, only within the commitment of heterosexual marriage can sexual love be pure and free from sexual lust. This doesn’t mean that marriage automatically makes sexual relations godly—it doesn’t. But outside of marriage there is an insufficient foundation for righteous sex. Only when practiced by a man and his wife can this be learnt.

Jesus made clear that the yearning for sexually immoral experiences does not come from the body but the spirit (Mark 7:21–23). The desire to view pornography does not originate in the brain; nor is it the result of genetic or evolutionary processes. Its source is, again, idolatry and self-worship in the heart. This is seen perhaps most clearly in rape and other forms of sexual abuse where the motive is the love of power or the desire to humiliate. By robbing the victim of her

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<sup>18</sup> Koornstra, A., *Homosexuality—Getting Free, Staying Free*, Destiny Image, Pennsylvania, USA, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Perrie, J.H., *Gay Girl, Good God: The story of who I was and who God has always been*, B & H Publishing, USA, p. 52, 2018.

dignity, the perpetrator exalts himself over her and makes a god of himself. His worth, he asserts, is such that another can be sacrificed in his honour. Such acts are no less than the celebration and worship of evil. Frighteningly, ‘just’ looking at another lustfully, or engaging in sexual fantasy, or demanding more of one’s wife than she is comfortable with, is the seedbed of all this.

The Tenth Commandment reads, “You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.” To covet means to jealously desire what another has, for example their possessions, relationships, looks or status. What we choose to focus our eyes on can either feed or starve our tendency to covet. Also, since pride is the root cause of covetousness, growing in humility will be amongst the most effective ways in which we can fight these sins.

*29 “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. 30 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.”*

Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote, “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery ... I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5: 19-21).

Again, both Jesus and Paul taught that salvation is by faith (John 5:24, Romans 3:22). We are not to put our hope in ourselves but solely in Christ. He has promised that those who believe on Him will never hunger and never thirst (John 6:35). This means that they will never lack the grace they need to continue in their Christian walk and ultimately remain faithful and obedient to the end. By His Spirit Jesus

comes to live in the believer, to uphold him and to keep him in the way of salvation (John 6:37-40)—and this is necessary because “without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

By using the most graphic of idioms—gouging out eyes and cutting off hands—Jesus warns His disciples (and us) of the very real dangers of flirting with sin. The principle that sin leads to death (Romans 8:13), and ultimately an eternity in hell, applies universally to all people, whether they are Christians or not. (See also Galatians 6:8.) Sin must therefore be avoided at all costs.

In these matters, Scripture presents us with two parallel truths which are equally true, equally important and must carry equal weight in our thinking: (A) Without godliness there is no salvation (Matthew 5:20); (B) God’s grace working in true believers will be sufficient to ensure this godliness (Romans 5:21). He will make them “more than conquerors in Christ” (Romans 8:37) and, where they still fall short, cover their sin by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). To the question, ‘Can I live a sinful life and believe that I’m saved?’ we answer with (A). To the question, ‘Need I worry that things will get too much for me and I won’t make the grade?’ we answer with (B).

In His wisdom God has chosen to use means to accomplish His purposes in us and the command to take steps to avoid sin is one of these. Wherever possible, we must cut out of our lives all sources of temptation. Each one of us knows our own weaknesses and what situations might cause us to fall. We are not literally to dismember ourselves; but we are to steer clear of the neighbour who wants an affair, or films with sexual content, or anything else that stimulates us in a wrong way.

It is necessary to avoid sin that we might finally be saved. Hence God will sometimes resort to the most severe discipline to prevent His children straying from the path of godliness. This may include illness and, failing that, even death (1 Corinthians 11:27–32).

31 *“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”* (NIV 1984)

Jesus begins by summarising another way in which the Jewish leaders twisted and misapplied Scripture, this time with respect to marriage. Their problem was that they failed to allow one part of the Old Testament to interpret and shed light on another. Here they omitted to read what it had to say about divorce in the context of what it had to say about marriage. On this point Jesus corrected them more fully in Matthew 19:3-9. God’s intention for marriage was that it should be a lifelong commitment of one man to one woman. The Pharisees and teachers of the law set aside this principle and focused instead on what really interested them—the grounds and procedure for divorce. In their thinking Moses had given them a *right* to divorce (Matthew 19:7), whereas He had, in fact, granted them only a *concession*. Divorce should be a last resort and something to be avoided if at all possible (Matthew 19:8).

Some rabbis taught that it was permissible for a man to divorce his wife “for any and every reason” (Matthew 19:3). Deuteronomy 24:1 allowed for divorce if a woman was discovered to have “something indecent about her”, and they interpreted this as meaning anything that was displeasing to her husband. Their tradition held that this would include spoiling his food or appearing less attractive than another woman.<sup>20</sup> All that was necessary, they said, was to formalise the process by giving the woman a certificate of divorce. Jesus disagreed and made clear that “anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual

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<sup>20</sup> The Talmud, the Mishnah in Gittin 9:10. This can be found in: [\*The Mishnah\*](#), Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and brief explanatory notes by Danby, H., Oxford University Press, UK, [p. 321](#), 1933; [archive.org](#).

immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9).

Simply issuing a certificate of divorce does not, in God’s eyes, break the marriage bond. Only sexual immorality does this. So, in the absence of this, if a man casts off his wife and takes another, he commits adultery. If he casts off his wife but does not take another woman, he will cause her to become an adulteress if she remarries. Similarly, the man who marries her will be committing adultery.<sup>21</sup> This emphasises the seriousness of marriage and the gravity of breaking marriage vows. Marriage is not to be entered into “unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God.”<sup>22</sup>

The Pharisees and teachers of the law cared nothing for the plight of the women they cast off, or the children they effectively made fatherless. In this they, again, showed no understanding of, or interest in, the real meaning of the law: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).

*33 “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.’ 34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem,*

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<sup>21</sup> Based on 1 Corinthians 7:15, some argue that desertion also provides grounds for remarriage. They say that Paul is teaching here that, if one spouse permanently separates from the other, the deserted party is free not only to file for divorce but also to remarry. This, they say, is what Paul means by a person not being “bound” in such circumstances. But given Jesus’ statement in Matthew 5:32, this would seem to stretch Paul’s words beyond their intent. Here Jesus actually considers the case of a deserted woman and states clearly that her desertion does not free her to remarry without this being adultery. Only if her husband goes on to take another woman is she free to remarry. Similarly, only if the wife takes another man is the husband free to remarry.

<sup>22</sup> [A Form of Solemnization of](#) Matrimony (Alternative Services: Series One); churchofengland.org.

*for it is the city of the Great King. 36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 37 All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

Jesus’s intention here cannot have been to forbid all oathtaking, as this would contradict the Old Testament which clearly allowed it<sup>23</sup> (albeit only in regard to serious matters). In fact, the New Testament records that He Himself made a statement on oath (Matthew 26:63-64). Similarly, the apostle Paul would call on God to attest to the truth of what he was saying (2 Corinthians 1:23; Romans 9:1) and, on one occasion, took a vow (Acts 18:18). Rather, Jesus was, again, seeking to show how the Jewish leaders adhered only to the letter of the Law, and in a way that did violence to the spirit of the Law. In this case their hypocrisy had led them to pervert the principles of honesty and transparency. (See also Matthew 23:16-22.)

The Pharisees and teachers of the law taught that not all oaths were equally binding. For example, according to them, swearing by the temple meant less than swearing by the gold of the temple (Matthew 23:16). What was important, they said, was the formula used—the form of words—and only oaths made ‘to the Lord’ were of the category that was absolutely inviolable. Hendriksen draws out the sense of v. 33 more clearly by using an alternative word order: “You shall not break your oath, but shall keep the oaths you have sworn *to the Lord*.”<sup>24</sup> To the Jewish leaders, bending the truth or breaking promises was permissible so long as you hadn’t sworn using words that explicitly invoked God or His name. To them, what mattered was

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Deuteronomy 6:13; Leviticus 19:12

<sup>24</sup> Hendriksen, W., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, pp. 306–308, 1974; [archive.org](http://archive.org). Other translations are in accord with this including the New American Standard Bible, Christian Standard Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Berean Literal Bible etc.

the outward formulation of the oath. In reality, all oaths should be made *to the Lord* (Deuteronomy 6:13) and are therefore all equally binding.

Lacking righteousness, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had no fear of God—no awareness of His Holiness and how their behaviour and deceitful ways offended this. No one who is becoming pure in heart and has begun to behold the beauty of God would dream of besmirching His glory by deceiving people or by failing to honour their commitments—whether they have sworn an oath or not. Nor would they dishonour Him by treating so flippantly His creations—heaven, earth and Jerusalem—or by rendering their words meaningless by calling on something over which they have no control.

In Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, Queen Gertrude doubts the genuineness of a woman's overly dramatic declarations of love for her husband. "The lady doth protest [insist] too much," she says. When people assert, again and again, that something is true, it undermines their credibility. A sign of an honest person is that their testimony is generally brief and to the point. Their reputation goes before them and people know they can be trusted. Great Britain was once a country where truthfulness and integrity were highly prized. Hence the Latin motto of the London Stock Exchange: *Dictum meum pactum* (My word is my bond).

Although oathtaking is not prohibited—enabling, for example, a witness to swear on the Bible in a courtroom<sup>25</sup>—it is a very serious business as it can bring judgement upon the one who swears rashly. The apostle James warned: "Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple 'Yes' or 'No.' Otherwise you will be condemned" (James 5:12).

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<sup>25</sup> Typically, one swears to give truthful testimony having placed a hand on the Bible. This act symbolises a solemn, binding promise made before God—a form of oath *to the Lord*.

38 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’*  
39 *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.* 40 *And if anyone*  
*wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.* 41  
*If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.* 42 *Give*  
*to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants*  
*to borrow from you.”*

The phrase, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth’ appears twice in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20). It is intended to teach that punishment should be proportional to the crime. If someone attacks you and you lose an eye, justice will not be served if your attacker is made to suffer the loss of an eye and an ear. It was a principle intended for a law court, providing a judge with guidance when considering a case and deciding upon the sentence. To the Pharisees and teachers of law, however, it was something that could be applied to personal relationships and provided them with a right to revenge. It taught, they said, that people were entitled to retaliate when wronged—perhaps even commanded to do so. But such an interpretation did not reflect the heart of God or the spirit of the law. Limiting retribution to ‘like for like’ implied the opposite. The sanctioning of vengeance also flew in the face of another even more important commandment: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

One of our ugliest sins is pride, the self-worship that causes us to consider ourselves better and more deserving than others. It leads to our being offended by ‘evil people’ whose behaviour and attitudes make clear that they see themselves as superior to us. They bully us, or patronise us, or speak to us disrespectfully, or use us in some way. It can be particularly galling when the person is in authority over us as

there is little we can do about it. Someone might say, “He thinks he’s so big” or “That man gets my goat”. We find some people ‘arrogant’, while others ‘rub us up the wrong way’. “I just don’t like him” we say. We hear of ‘clashes of personality’ and of employees who ‘can’t work together’. These are all manifestations of the sin of pride, reactions to those whose behaviour is self-exalting and belittling of others.

Our natural reaction is to despise such ‘evil people’, those who make gods of themselves in these ways—despite the fact that we all do it. “I’ll show him,” we say, and plot how we might “bring him down a peg or two”. But Jesus rebukes us and says, “Do not resist an evil person”. We are to ‘consider others better than ourselves’ (Philippians 2:3) meaning that our attitude towards them—the way we think about them, speak to them and treat them—should be as if they *are* better than us (whether we believe they really are or not). Particularly, we should be willing to serve them as if they have greater worth and merit greater honour than ourselves (John 13:5; 13:14-15). This does not mean that we treat their sin lightly or that we cannot correct or rebuke them (Matthew 18:15-17; James 5:19-20)—but this must be done with due humility and love.

Instead of ‘resisting evil people’ we are to ‘turn the other cheek’—but not literally! ‘Turning the other cheek’ is a response of the heart. We forsake all desire to retaliate, preferring to be wronged rather than to wrong others. When people are rude to us, we respond with politeness. When they are contemptuous, we respond with respect. When they criticise us, we respond with humility. When they cheat us or treat us unjustly, we forgive. We should follow our Master: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). When people sin against us it provides us with opportunities to practice this, enabling us to grow in humility. The more we do this, the more pride is driven from our hearts. We then

make room for God's Spirit and His love to take residence there instead.

'Turning the other cheek', however, does not mean that we can't protect ourselves when attacked. If someone intends us serious physical harm, we are permitted to defend ourselves. It's OK to hit back—but only in self-defence. If we find ourselves in the winning position, we are not to press our advantage so as to 'teach them a lesson'. Similarly, it is not wrong to protest our innocence when we are falsely accused—but the motive must be right. Defending our reputation is not something that should be done primarily for personal reasons. Rather it should be done for the sake of the Gospel, the good of others, and the integrity of our witness—so that the message of Christ is not discredited. When Jesus was accused before Pilate and Herod, and only personal vindication was at stake, He remained silent (Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:8-10). When someone was ordered to strike the apostle Paul, he objected, pointing out the hypocrisy of the action (Acts 23:2-3).

Again, if someone sues us without cause it is not forbidden for us to defend ourselves in a courtroom. Nor are we called to be doormats or people so weak that anybody can abuse or exploit us at will (Matthew 18:15-17; John 18:22-23; Acts 23:3). Rather, in vv. 40-42 Jesus is again teaching principles which address heart attitudes.

We live in a 'rights culture' where people are told that they are entitled to an education, equality, justice and a fulfilled life. Some university courses have been dubbed 'Grievance studies'. In these, students are encouraged to become angry and rebel if they don't get what they're taught they deserve. Similarly, in personal relationships, we are told that we must learn how to be assertive and 'stand up for ourselves'. We are owed respect, we're told, and must ensure we get it. We must demand our 'rights'. But not according to Jesus. "Blessed are the meek," he says—those whose minds are focussed on God and

His purposes, and His royal law found in Scripture: “Love your neighbour as yourself” (James 2:8).

Being meek, however, does not mean being weak, and Jesus’s command not to resist an evil person does not mean we should not resist evil. We are not forbidden to fight against injustice or defend the vulnerable or even seek to vindicate ourselves. What is at issue here is the motive behind such actions. If it is retaliatory, arising from pride, it is sinful. If it is driven by love, a desire for justice and the protection of others, it is rightful.

While v. 40 is passive, v. 41 is active: “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.” At the time Israel was under Roman occupation and subject to Roman law. This allowed a soldier needing assistance to compel a civilian to carry a load a certain distance. An example of this is seen in the passage where Simon of Cyrene is forced to carry Christ’s cross (Matthew 27:32). Going two miles instead of the required one is, again, an attitude of heart. Instead of becoming resentful when we feel used, we respond with goodwill and bless those who seek to exploit us. ‘Going the extra mile’ is a common phrase in the English language and is derived from this teaching. It refers to a spirit of generosity, where we willingly do more than is required of us. It is done entirely for others, not for ourselves. Forbearance is another example of it, where we deal patiently with those who are difficult, or take additional time to gently persuade the obdurate.

In v. 42 we are not being instructed to give indiscriminately, for example, to beggars who will simply use what we give them to buy alcohol or drugs. Nor should we lend foolishly to anyone and everyone who asks us. Rather, this verse is again dealing with heart attitudes. The Pharisees’ interpretation of “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” encouraged their followers to focus on justice and ‘self’. Jesus encouraged His followers to focus on mercy and the needs of others. Acts of generosity and wise giving will then follow.

All this is the outworking of meekness, the greatest example of which is seen in Jesus on the cross. Having been interrogated, flogged and abused by Roman soldiers, He was so weak that He couldn't carry His cross (Matthew 27:32). Then, having been crucified, He endured the wrath of God, something so terrible that He sweated blood just thinking about it (Luke 22:44). After hours of this torment, His mental faculties appeared to fail Him as he could no longer remember why He was there. "My God, my God," he cried, "why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:47; Psalm 22:1)<sup>26</sup> When all strength had left Him, at His most stressed, disorientated and in immense pain, what was His reaction? Anger? Malice? Self-pity? No. Simply an innocent question. When His heart was tested and squeezed to the ultimate, nothing of 'self' was to be found there.

*43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 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. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

To the Jewish leaders, to 'love one's neighbour' meant to love one's kith and kin, those to whom they were close. Hence, they would 'love

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<sup>26</sup> Macleod asks, "... is it the why of incomprehension, as if he doesn't understand why he's here? Has he forgotten the eternal covenant? Perhaps. His mind, as a human mind, could not be focused on all the facts at the same time, and for the moment the pain, the divine anger, and the fear of eternal perdition (the cross being God's last word) occupy all his thoughts." Macleod, D., [Why have you forsaken me?](#) *Desiring God*, 3 April 2015; [desiringgod.org](#).

those who loved them' and 'greet those who greeted them'. There would in this, of course, be much personal benefit, with each reciprocating the others' goodwill. But to restrict the meaning of 'neighbour' in this way was, again, a serious perversion of the Law. Worse still was teaching people to hate their enemies. God had said: "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it" (Exodus 23:4-5). And, again, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink" (Proverbs 25:21). Even Job, writing before the Law had been given, knew that rejoicing over his enemy's misfortune or cursing him would be sinful (Job 31:29-30). Jesus made clear who is meant by 'my neighbour' by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Although the Samaritans were the enemies of the Jews, the Jews were still to love them.

It may be objected that, in some parts of the Bible, hatred and condemnation of God's enemies are explicit and even commended. King David, for example, declared: "Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies" (Psalm 139:21-22). Similarly, he prays: "For the curses and lies they utter, consume them in your wrath, consume them till they are no more. Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules over Jacob" (Psalm 59:13).

When considering passages such as these we must first remember that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). When David spoke these words, it was really the Holy Spirit speaking through him (Acts 1:16). In fact, the Bible explicitly states that God also hates the wicked (Psalm 5:5 and Psalm 11:5). In the imprecatory Psalms, the writers are railing against the enemies of God and

righteousness, calling for divine justice rather than expressing a desire for personal vengeance.<sup>27</sup> As sinners ourselves we have no right to judge other sinners (John 8:7). Only Christ, who through His perfect life on Earth demonstrated the perfect righteousness of God, is authorised to do this (John 5:22–27).

How, then, do we reconcile this with the Bible’s teaching that God loves His enemies and commands us to do the same (Psalm 145:9; Luke 6:35–36)? The answer is not hard to find: “Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55:7). In His great love, God desires that all be saved (1 Timothy 2:3–4; 2 Peter 3:9) and in this hope He provides for them, including sunshine and rain. But if they will not repent and persist in evil, He is equally committed to judging them. Those who reject God and the salvation He offers, and remain determined to live sinful lives, put themselves outside of His love. They make themselves despicable to Him and fit only for His wrath. Whole nations can be found in this position, such as those which God commanded the Israelites to destroy (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:1–2).

Here, again, we meet with two parallel truths which are equally true, equally important and must carry equal weight in our thinking: (A) God’s perfect holiness makes sin so utterly abhorrent to Him that He must pour out His wrath upon it. (B) God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

God hates sin with the same intensity that He loves the sinner. We see this, for example, when Christ wept over Jerusalem. He fervently desired the salvation of the Jews. “Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” he cried,

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<sup>27</sup> For a particularly helpful explanation of the imprecatory Psalms see Lloyd-Jones, D.M., Exposition of Romans 11:7–8, *Romans*, vol. 11, ch. 6, Banner of Truth, 1999; preached 6 November 1964; also available on audio: [mljtrust.org/sermons/book-of-romans/psalms-2](http://mljtrust.org/sermons/book-of-romans/psalms-2).

“you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings”. Despite their persistent rejection of Him, He still loved them and desperately wanted them to return to Him that He might bless them. But they were not willing and therefore His judgement would not be held back: “Look, your house is left to you desolate.” He would destroy Jerusalem and its inhabitants, and in the most violent way (Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 19:41-44).

God will not compromise either His justice or His love and, for the sake of His glory, He is absolutely committed to demonstrating this. We see this supremely at the cross, where what His justice demanded (atonement for sin) His love provided (the sacrifice of His Son).<sup>28</sup> God is glorified in both mercy and wrath (Romans 9:17-23). In those who believe in His Son, He will be glorified in their salvation. In those who reject His Son, He will be glorified in their judgement in Hell.

One might ask how a loving God or any of His children could ever be happy knowing that people are suffering eternal punishment. The answer is that there will be nothing left in them that is pitiable. As with a rotting, stinking, disease-infested animal corpse, the only fit place for them will be the fire. God has made every provision for the salvation of all who want it. He has provided a perfect solution that cannot fail, and all who reach out to Christ are promised it (John 6:35-40). But salvation is only on offer as a complete package. We cannot have salvation from the penalty of sin without salvation from the practice of sin. If people don’t want this, and prefer to hold on to their sin, God will be entirely justified in ensuring they face the consequences—and according to Jesus they certainly will.

Plummer wrote: “To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is divine.”<sup>29</sup> As God’s

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<sup>28</sup> See also Romans 3:26.

<sup>29</sup> Plummer, A., *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*. Elliot Stock, London, p. 89, 1910; archive.org. Cited by Stott in ref. 16, p. 122.

children we are not called simply to be ‘moral’ or ‘good-natured’. We are called to be perfect like our heavenly Father, and therefore perfect in love. If we simply love those who love us, we will be no better than the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who in turn were no better than the tax collectors and pagans they so vehemently despised. No, we must learn to love our enemies. Only then will we fulfil the Law (Romans 13:10). By God’s grace, we must, deep down in our hearts, oust every negative feeling we have for them and then desire without reservation the very best for them. Then the heart of our Father will be found in us and, along with a hatred of sin, true love will be birthed in us.

# 5

## Giving, prayer and fasting (Matthew 6:1-18)

In the previous sections Jesus dealt with Christian character and its fruit. He now turns to the daily practice of godliness. Here, as in the rest of the chapter, emphasis is repeatedly placed on the fatherhood of God. Christians do not journey alone, but in the presence of their loving heavenly Father who cares for His children and greatly desires to reward them.

*1 “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.”*

Earlier, Jesus had encouraged His disciples to do good deeds in sight of others (Matthew 5:16). Now He appears to say the opposite: that we should do our good deeds out of sight of others. The apparent contradiction is easily resolved when we consider the context and essential theme of the sermon—the intentions of our hearts. Hendriksen’s translation is again helpful: “Take care that you do not practice your righteousness before people, to attract their attention ...”<sup>30</sup> In other words, our motive must not be to gain honour for ourselves.

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<sup>30</sup> Ref. 24, p. 319.

In everything we do we need to ask ourselves who it is we are really serving and who it is that will really be glorified in it. In Matthew 5:16 the context is serving so as to glorify our Father—which is good. Here it is serving so as to glorify ourselves—which is sinful. We are to practice the former and avoid the latter, otherwise we will have no reward. A helpful way to evaluate our motives is to ask ourselves whom we are seeking to please—God or men? It is right to live so as to gain the approval of God and wrong to live for the approval of men (Galatians 1:10). We should all yearn to hear Christ’s commendation on the day of judgement: “Well done my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).

There is a sense in which it is right to seek the approval of others. Children should want to please their parents—but only inasmuch as their parents’ authority aligns with God’s commands. Christian employees should serve their employers in ways that gain their respect—but only to point to the work of God’s grace in them. In more Christian cultures, public opinion can reflect godly principles and Christians must demonstrate respect for these.

Ironically those who care most for the praise of God and least for the praise of men will often find themselves among those who are most respected by their peers (1 Samuel 2:30; Luke 2:52). They will also be those whose good works result in the most praise for their Father; and they will be those who receive the greatest rewards from their Father in the life to come.

*2 “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. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 5 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. 6 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.”*

Despite being God-incarnate, Jesus did not seek the praise of men. Rather, He came in His Father’s name, seeking to glorify His Father only (John 5:41-43). He said: “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me” (John 8:54). There is an inviolable principle which applies universally to all created beings: “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12); and from the moment of His incarnation, His taking a created body, the uncreated Son of God also submitted Himself to this. He humbled Himself more than all others and was therefore exalted above all others (Philippians 2:5-11).<sup>31</sup>

The Jewish leaders, however, were woefully ignorant of this principle. Their focus was upon themselves. They wanted to be worshiped and, hence, they sought the praise of men rather than God (John 5:44). Much of what they did was designed to impress others that they might be honoured by them. Their financial giving and praying were as public as they could make them, that they might maximise their self-exaltation. But, as Jesus made clear, they were hypocrites, people who appeared virtuous on the outside, but were entirely self-seeking on the inside. Their reward would be only in this life and only from men; and they would receive only judgement from God in the age to come (Mark 12:40).

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<sup>31</sup> N.B. Philippians 2:9: “*Therefore* God exalted him to the highest place ...” (italics added). Through this it was demonstrated that Christ, who is the exact representation of God’s being (Hebrews 1:3), occupies the highest place *by merit*—to the eternal glory of God.

God loves His children and wants, with all His heart, to bless them—and He has the power to do it. He is able to pour glory and honour upon us to a degree we cannot begin to imagine—and it will be enjoyed for eternity. But this will only be conferred according to the principle: “Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Therefore, for God, our growing in humility is a high priority.

While Christians should be known for their service in the community, their financial giving and times of personal prayer should be done in secret. This is necessary to avoid the temptation to do these things so as to be honoured among men, a folly which leads to pride and the forfeiting of reward from God.

God promises great rewards to His faithful servants (primarily for the life to come) and it is a good thing to desire these and work for them. It sustains us in this life (Matthew 5:10-12) and leads to greater purity (1 John 3:3). It is a holy desire which brings us closer to God (Hebrews 11:24-26; Exodus 33:11). It is also God’s holy will.

*7 “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

Pagans feel the need to gain the attention of their gods lest they be forgotten, an example being the worshipers in 1 Kings 18:26-29. They “called on the name of Baal from morning till noon ... danced around the altar they had made ... shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears ... and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice.” Pagans have no father/son relationship with the gods they serve. They pray with their mouths rather than their hearts, and their focus is on themselves and what they are doing rather than on God.

But Christians will never be forgotten by their Father and they do not need to clamour for His attention. He carefully watches over the fate of every sparrow. How much more, then, does He know His children and their every need. Even the hairs on our heads are numbered (Matthew 10:29-31). We pray to the One who cares more for us than we care for ourselves. As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explained: “He desires to bless us very much more than we desire to be blessed. He has a view of us, He has a plan and a programme for us, He has an ambition for us, I say it with reverence, which transcends our highest thought and imagination.”<sup>32</sup>

Given that God knows what we need and what we should pray for far better than us, we might ask, why pray at all? There are, no doubt, many reasons. It keeps us focused upon Him and His priorities for us. It reminds us of our dependence upon Him. It enables us to cast our anxieties upon Him and keeps us in the way of peace. But there is a greater and more wonderful reason: It is God’s will that His purposes be achieved through means which glorify Him (e.g. Genesis 22:16-18), and when prayer is offered in faith it is honouring to Him. When Christians believe and act on God’s promises they acknowledge that He is faithful and can be trusted (Romans 4:19-21; Hebrews 11:11). This pleases Him (Hebrews 11:6) and He “is not ashamed to be called their God” (Hebrews 11:16). God has bestowed upon His children the privilege of sharing in the work of Christ in building His kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:9), and part of this work is prayer. Through the Spirit of Christ in us, we join with Him in loving, yearning and interceding for all that which is right and good—to the glory of God.

9 *“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done, on*

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<sup>32</sup> Lloyd-Jones, D.M., *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd ed., Inter-Varsity Press, UK, vol. 2, p. 30, 1976; preached 1959.

*earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ 14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

Here we find some of the most precious words in Scripture, and a priceless insight into Jesus’s teaching on prayer. What follows is known as the Lord’s Prayer, probably better termed, the Model Prayer. It provides a model or pattern, guiding us as to what our prayers should focus on and how they should be structured. The first three petitions relate to God and His glory, and the second three to us and our needs.<sup>33</sup>

By using the first-person plural (our, us and we), Jesus teaches the importance of corporate prayer. When Christians walk closely with God, committed to His ways and in unity with one another, they are granted considerable spiritual authority (Matthew 18:18-20). We should not neglect this. At the same time, He reminds us that we pray to the One who is our Father. After He had made atonement for sin and had risen from the dead, Jesus explained what He had thereby secured in terms of our true status before God. He said: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). Christians (and only Christians) have the same relationship to God as Jesus has. God is not just our Father in a general sense (for example, as our creator) but as fully as He is the Father of His only begotten Son.

As our Father, God longs to hear from us and He will certainly answer our prayers. Unlike earthly fathers who fail us, make mistakes and can even be cruel, He is our heavenly Father who is perfect in

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<sup>33</sup> There are six petitions if we understand “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one” to be just one.

wisdom and love. He will always act in our best interests and will never withhold anything which is for our good. We should never allow fear to hinder our drawing near to Him. This filial familiarity, however, should not be taken too far as He is “in heaven”, in glory and exalted far above all others. God is holy and we should not approach Him casually but with ‘holy fear’, that is, with due reverence and awe. And since He presides over the earth from his heavenly throne, we may pray to Him confidently, knowing He has the power to grant whatever we ask.

“Hallowed be your name” is the first of the petitions and the number one priority. God’s ‘name’ refers to Him, His nature, His purposes and all that He represents—holiness, wisdom, goodness and love. To ‘hallow’ means to venerate, to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of something. Particularly of God, it means to ‘set apart as holy’. Hence, to ‘hallow God’s name’ is to revere Him and all that He is and does. It should be our most cherished desire that He should be honoured—remembered, respected, blessed, exalted, feared, served and loved—both in our own personal lives, private and public, and in the lives of those around us. God’s name is hallowed as we worship Him, in speech and in song; make Him and His glory known; show compassion to the needy; give of our time and money; live honestly; and walk humbly and righteously before Him. It is a prayer that the greatest commandment would be fulfilled in us: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” is a prayer that, again, puts God (and not man) at the centre, along with His purposes and His will. In heaven, God’s kingdom is fully established and the whole angelic realm is committed to fulfilling all that His heart desires. He is obeyed fully and His will is done in every detail—amidst great rejoicing by all the heavenly host. Sin is not tolerated and, when Satan rebelled, judgement was swift (Ezekiel

28:12-17; Isaiah 14:12–15; Revelation 12:7-9; Luke 10:18). Not so on Earth, where many still serve the kingdom of darkness. But as the Gospel is preached and believed, God’s kingdom advances, being established progressively as people repent of their sin and God begins to reign in their hearts (Matthew 13:33). When significant numbers receive Christ, whole communities are transformed, as God’s laws and ways become embedded in people’s attitudes and outlooks. Families are strengthened, societies become more cohesive, crime reduces, trust grows, a godly work ethic prevails and economies flourish.

But despite this testimony many still reject the Gospel. The apostle Paul warned: “There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Praying for the coming of God’s kingdom and living holy lives, Christians also hasten the day of Christ’s return, when all sin will finally be eradicated, and He will reign on earth as fully as He does now in heaven (2 Peter 3:12-13).

In order to pray effectively, we need to learn to hear God’s voice and know His leading. We can then pray for those things that are upon His heart rather than upon our own hearts. Jesus said, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7). We are not to dream of how we would like things to be and then pray for these—however spiritual such aspirations may seem. Rather, we must be people who know the will of God (Ephesians 5:17) that we might have prayer lives that reflect God’s agendas rather than our own.

Praying, “Give us today our daily bread” reminds us that the food that sustains us, and indeed all our material needs, come from God. Even in developed nations with all their technology, it is foolish to take

these for granted. All manner of natural disasters could lead to shortages of food and other essentials. A large volcanic eruption could spew large amounts of dust and gas into the stratosphere, leading to reduced sunshine and widespread crop failures. This actually happened in 1816 following the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia and resulted in significant famine across Europe. A serious pandemic could disrupt supply chains, preventing food and medical supplies reaching distribution centres and shops. Wars have been known to cause mass starvation and still do. All this should teach us to remember the One who ultimately provides our sustenance, the shirts on our backs and the shoes on our feet.

The sense here in v. 11 is dependence on God on a day-to-day basis. Although God is not restricted in the ways He provides for His people and their work in His service, He often supplies just what is required for the immediate future. This keeps us focussed sharply on Him! ‘Bread’ indicates that we are to pray for needs rather than luxuries (Proverbs 30:8-9), contrary to the proponents of the prosperity gospel.

Since we sin daily, we need to ask for God’s forgiveness daily. We should keep short accounts, allowing no delay in putting things right. Confession must also be uncompromising. We must leave nothing hidden and acknowledge the full extent of our sin (Psalm 32:5). We must admit the whole truth of what we have done, said or thought and accept full responsibility for it. We can then know freedom from guilt (Psalm 103:12), ongoing fellowship with God (1 John 1:9) and His power to live more rightly (Psalm 66:18).

#### **A minister’s testimony**

“[A] lady came with her husband for prayer because they were having difficulty conceiving a child. I felt prompted to ask if she had ever had an abortion. She was obviously shocked by my question. For the fact that she had fallen pregnant by another man

as a teenager and her parents had helped her get an abortion was a very dark secret which no one else knew about. But having an abortion is taking the life of another human being, a serious sin that was still on her slate. She was able to bring it out into the open and receive God's forgiveness. ... amazingly, once she had been delivered of the spirit of death from her womb, she was very soon able to conceive.”

Horrobin, P., *Discover Healing and Freedom*, Sovereign World, UK, p. 57, 2021.

Whatever sin we may commit, it puts us in debt primarily to God (Psalm 51:4). The debt that He forgives us is more than we could ever repay, and far greater than any debt owed to us (Matthew 18:21-35). Despite this, we often find ourselves holding grudges, refusing to forgive those who sin against us. If we persist in this, Jesus says, our Father will not forgive us.

The context here is not salvation. The repeated use of ‘Father’ makes clear that Jesus is talking to those who have already been saved and have become God’s children—people who through faith in Christ have already “crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24). Rather, Jesus is talking about prayer and the need to maintain right relationships with one another that we might live under God’s blessing. The key word in v. 12 is ‘as’: “Forgive us our debts, *as* we also have forgiven our debtors.” In other words, “Forgive us our sins *to the same degree* that we forgive others.” We will have God’s ear and know His answers to our prayers only to the extent that we show mercy to others. Spurgeon comments: “This enforces Christian action by

limiting the power of prayer according to our obedience to the command to forgive.”<sup>34</sup>

Between “lead us not into temptation” and “deliver us from the evil one” Jesus used the conjunction ‘but’ rather than ‘and’. This suggests that the two phrases, one positive and one negative, together constitute just one petition. They are two sides of the same coin, one reinforcing the other.<sup>35</sup>

The spiritual realm, comprising both good and evil, is more real than the physical. In our Christian walk we do not battle primarily against flesh and blood but against evil spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12). While we should not live in fear of these, we should remain conscious of their considerable power. The whole world is under Satan’s control (1 John 5:19) and he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). The danger is real, and we must pray that we will not be caught off guard. We must not be found sleeping (Matthew 26:40-41); rather, we must be prepared so that, when the day of evil comes, and the battle has been fought, we are found still standing (Ephesians 6:13). Trials are good for us (James 1:2-5); but we must not be overcome by them as it is “the one who stands firm to the end who will be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

The good news is that Jesus has infinitely more power than Satan and is ultimately in control (Matthew 28:18). So, again, we have here two parallel truths that are equally true and equally important: (A) It is necessary to pray that we will not succumb to the devil and the pressures he can bring to bear. (B) We may be confident that God will answer this prayer and that we will, despite frequent stumbling, finally overcome and be received into glory (John 16:33; Romans 8:31-39).

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<sup>34</sup> Spurgeon, C.H., *The Gospel of the Kingdom: A popular exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew*, The Baker and Taylor Co., New York, p. 69, 1893; [archive.org](http://archive.org).

<sup>35</sup> Ref. 24, p. 336.

Jesus then returns to the theme of forgiveness. Calvin comments: “God will not be affected by our prayers if we do not in turn show ourselves ready to give pardon, if any have hurt us. . . . this exhortation should soften us, and make us agreeable to remit offences.”<sup>36</sup> When we are ill, or come under spiritual attack, or face a financial crisis, or contend with some other desperate circumstance, we will receive God’s help only inasmuch as we forgive those who have wronged us. Many Christians cry out to God about their pain, depression, humiliation, insecurities, fears and addictions, and their prayers seem to have only a limited effect. Sometimes the reason is that they are harbouring bitterness toward others.

Why does God allow us to be so very deeply hurt and then insist that we forgive? The answer is that He is our Father and desires only the best for us. The reason we find it so hard to forgive is our pride, and it is this that God wants to deal with. The more seriously people wrong us, the greater the insult we feel. The malice which lurks deep within our hearts can then no longer be hidden. Unleashed, it rises to the surface—like a spitting, venomous snake—ready to strike and exact revenge on the one who dared to treat us so badly. Only by shedding pride and letting go of this malice is it possible to forgive. And when we do this, we find freedom from our worst sins—hatred, resentment, lust, envy and covetousness—and we emerge as gold (Job 23:10; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

Forgiveness is a decision, not a feeling—feelings (and particularly compassion for the wrongdoer) come later. We resolve to cancel the debt they owe us. We declare in our hearts that they can walk away free, at peace with us and we renounce all right to revenge. We do not demand that they first right the wrong they have done to us (even if this were possible). Rather, we must forgive freely and

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<sup>36</sup> Calvin, J., *A Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Saint Andrew Press Translation, Edinburgh, vol. 1, p. 214, 1972; archive.org.

unconditionally. And when we do this we begin to realise the extent to which we need to be forgiven by others.

It is sometimes said that we should only forgive if those who have sinned against us accept their fault and ask for forgiveness. This is a serious error. While it is true that true reconciliation is only possible when the wrongdoer repents, full forgiveness is still possible *and* required of us. This is the forgiveness that Jesus showed on the cross when He forgave those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Vengeance belongs to God, not men (Romans 12:9), and Jesus, as man on Earth, set the example we must follow.

While forgiving others is very much in our interests—freeing us from many an affliction—it is impossible to do this selfishly. We can only forgive by letting go of self; and as we do, our hearts make space for God. We then begin to feel His love for those who have wronged us. Instead of being angry with them, we pity them and desire only that they may receive God’s mercy. We also come to know His healing love in us, dispelling our pain and bringing us peace. We move from being victims to being victors. The strongest and most fearless people—those who experience the love of God most fully—are often those who have had cause to forgive the most.

### **Lucy’s story**

“I once had a very dear friend who was more like a sibling than a friend to me. But one day she started a rumor about me. The rumor was not only false; it was one of the most painful things I’ve ever experienced. In one moment I lost my bosom buddy as well as my reputation. The situation lasted for about three years ... . As much as I felt I was the one wronged, holding on to the pain was not

making me healthy or happy. ... It is hard to explain how I felt; I just remember shaking with anger every time I saw my friend. I would feel the frustration and could barely speak. It was at this point that I knew forgiveness was hard ... [but] I felt strengthened by the Lord and slowly the weight of anger started to fall. Eventually I was able to give the Lord my expectation for an apology, and in exchange I received strength to choose joy even when things were not going my way. ... The decision to forgive healed me. I am not quite sure how it benefited my friend, but I know that the peace and healing within brought back joy and an abundance of strength to withstand hardships. Today I know for sure that forgiveness is a gift that actually benefits me the giver. By God's grace, I practice it quite frequently, I love reaping the benefits."

Chaves, L.A., A story of forgiveness, C.S. Lewis Institute, 21 February 2023; [cslewisinstitute.org](https://cslewisinstitute.org).

### **Linda's story**

Linda had been sexually abused by her father throughout her childhood. Consequently, as an adult, she became depressed and suicidal, and eventually ended up in a psychiatric hospital. She testified: "... it was Jesus who enabled me to forgive in my heart. Gradually I learned to take the pain and negative emotion to Him each time I felt it, and little by little He enabled me to forgive, and to receive His comfort where I needed it. ... I can truthfully say that my life is completely different today. I have an inner security and strength that comes from having allowed God into my deepest place of pain, and to have His way in that place. I no longer suffer with the fears that were once so debilitating, am free of all psychiatric medication, ... am in paid employment, and free to

fully enter into life with my family and friends in a way that I never thought could be possible. I am so thankful and give Him all the praise all the glory and all the honour.”

Horrobin, P., *Forgiveness—God’s Master Key: Pray the most powerful prayer on Earth*, Sovereign World, UK, pp. 87-89, 2008.

16 “*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. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 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.*”

Although fasting is not commanded, Jesus here assumes it, just as He assumes that Christians will give and pray: “*when you give to the needy*” (v. 3); “*when you pray*” (v. 5); “*when you fast*” (v. 16). There are many examples of fasting in Scripture and there are different reasons for it. Generally, we fast to demonstrate that we are serious in seeking God. “The man who prays with fasting is giving heaven notice that he is truly in earnest”.<sup>37</sup> In the days of Nehemiah, “the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads. ... They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors” (Nehemiah 9:1-2). In their poverty of spirit and their mourning of their sin, they fervently sought God’s grace with fasting that they might repent and live rightly before Him.

Fasting draws us closer to God, enabling us to hear His voice, see things better from His perspective and understand His purposes more clearly. It may be that we have a specific need, require guidance or

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<sup>37</sup> Wallis, A., *God’s Chosen Fast: A spiritual and practical guide to fasting*, Christian Literature Crusade, USA, p. 42, 1968; archive.org.

empowerment, or we're facing danger. We might fast so as to humble ourselves and acknowledge more fully our dependence on God. Sometimes a situation can become so intractable (or so desperate), and the forces of evil so strong, there is no other way to victory.

However, as with giving and prayer, Jesus warns of the dangers of fasting so as to gain the praise of men. If we do this we will have no reward from our Father. But if we fast before God, desiring to exclude all else in our seeking of Him, we will be greatly rewarded.

# 6

## **The pursuit of wealth (Matthew 6:19-34)**

*19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

In the first century, wealthy people might amass various desirable commodities: fine clothing made from expensive fabrics; exotic spices for cooking or burning as incense; jewellery and other luxury items made from gold or silver. Clothing was often damaged by moths, and foodstuffs might be eaten by rats, mice or insects. Goods made from gemstones and precious metals might be stolen. Today, recessions can lead to stock market crashes, redundancies and house reposessions. In contrast, treasures laid up in heaven never fade and are eternally secure. They also have much more value, will give much more joy and will never lose their appeal.

Heavenly treasures are stored up for us as we selflessly serve God and our fellow man, giving of ourselves, our time and our money; as we pray; as we fast; as we become more holy; as the love of Christ is formed in us; and as we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. The apostle Paul wrote that our suffering for the kingdom of God cannot be compared with the glory that will be given to us (Romans 8:18). This statement is absolutely remarkable. When one considers,

for example, the extreme agony of the martyrs who were burnt at the stake, and then reflects on how insignificant this is compared to their reward in heaven, one begins to realize just how great that reward must be.

It is not wrong to have possessions, particularly if we have worked hard for them; but those who give themselves primarily to acquiring them become increasingly worldly. They are in danger of becoming like the church at Laodicea, of whom Jesus said, “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). But the hearts of those whose focus is upon Christian service and the life to come are already with God in heaven. Such people are blessed, esteemed, rich, full of light and clothed with the beauty of Christ Himself.

*22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 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! 24 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.”*

The apostle John warned about ‘the lust of the eyes’ (1 John 2:16). The Greek word here translated ‘lust’ is ἐπιθυμία (*epithymia*, ‘desire’). It refers to what the eyes see and the heart longs for but is not of God—worldly riches, material possessions, status, power, fornication and all other such idols. ἐπιθυμία can also refer to godly desires, depending on the context. For example, in Luke 22:15 Jesus used this same word when He said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Similarly, the use of our eyes can be godly or ungodly. Looks can be generous, compassionate and encouraging, blessing

those to whom they are directed. They can also be selfish, threatening, intrusive, belittling or contemptuous, cursing those to whom they are directed.

In Proverbs 4:23 we read, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” and one of the ways we do this is by careful use of our eyes. Gazing enviously at magnificent houses, expensive cars or fine jewellery turns people towards materialism, filling their hearts with darkness. It erodes compassion, and fosters greed and selfish ambition. When we give ourselves to these things, evil spirits can enter through the eyes, enabling demonic strongholds to be established. Watching violent films or viewing pornography similarly invites demonisation. The more the sin is committed, the more power the evil spirits will have to fuel addictions and control behaviour. Alternatively, using our eyes reverently, to behold God’s glory as seen in His creation, to read the Bible, or to alert us to the needs of others, fills us with light. We will then know more and more of the Holy Spirit, empowering us to be the upright and joyful people we were made to be.

The plight of those who misuse their eyes is serious and the associated dangers grave. Such people become unable to discern good from evil and lose the freedom to choose how they live. Of them the old maxim is true: ‘Sow a thought (or look), reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.’

Whatever we serve will become our master, whether it be God (who liberates) or money (which enslaves). It is not wrong to be a successful businessman or pursue a lucrative career (if this is one’s calling and one uses the earnings wisely and to the glory of God). But when making money becomes an idol the result is spiritual ruin. It will be a snare to both the person and those close to them (Judges 8:27). There can be no room for compromise here as it is simply impossible to keep a foot in both camps.

25 *“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? 26 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? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 30 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? 31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

By introducing this passage with the word ‘Therefore’ Jesus makes clear that He is continuing His teaching about the relationship between the Christian and money.

It is not that money is unimportant or that we are meant, somehow, to live without it. Jesus and His disciples took with them a money bag (John 13:29), and it is not sinful for Christians to save, or take out pensions or insurance policies. God knows that we need food and clothing, and it is not wrong for us to make provision for these (Proverbs 6:6-8). However, if our hearts are to be completely detached from the love of money we must refuse to worry about it. Indeed, when we do so we commit the sin of unbelief. Our Father has promised to provide for us and we must trust Him to do so; otherwise concerns

about bodily needs will distract us from our primary responsibilities which are spiritual.

This does not mean that Christians will never know hardship. In times of persecution, for example, they may face hunger or even homelessness. Rather, Jesus is speaking here of the general case where, on day-to-day basis, we must trust in God's provision and resist the tendency to become entangled in worldly thinking. We may then focus unwaveringly on building His kingdom and establishing His righteousness—in our own hearts and in the hearts of those to whom we minister.

# 7

## **Wrongful and rightful judging (Matthew 7:1-6)**

*1 “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

There is good judging and bad judging. Referring to the teaching of the Jewish leaders, Jesus warned his disciples, “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matthew 16:6). We are to be discerning about teachers, particularly by making judgements about their fruit—the fruit of their teaching and the fruit seen in their personal lives (Matthew 7:15-20). The apostle Paul exhorted the Galatians, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently” (Galatians 6:1). He did not say that judging and correcting ungodly behaviour is wrong, only that it should be done gently. Similarly, we are to scrutinise people’s character before appointing them to positions of responsibility in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Judging, however, is wrong when it is judgemental—that is when it is condemning of the person and self-exalting. The former reflects a harsh and unmerciful spirit; the latter is self-worship where we regard ourselves as superior to others. Such attitudes are very harmful and tear people and churches apart. They spring from pride and a failure to recognise the depth of our own sin. The antidote to judging is to

consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Then we will build people up. And as we stop judging others, we begin to see how we too are part of the problem and how we too need the forbearance of others.

When we judge in a wrong way, we bring judgement on ourselves. Just as we are forgiven to the same degree that we forgive others (Matthew 6:12), so we will know God's judgement to the same degree that we judge others. Again, the context here is not salvation but the way our heavenly Father deals with us for our own good. God chastens His children (Hebrews 12:6) and we will know this chastening if we fail to repent of a judgemental spirit. As Lloyd-Jones put it, "If you want to avoid chastisement in this life ... judge not, except you judge yourself first."<sup>38</sup> This may be seen in sicknesses of the soul—depression, anxiety, fear, self-rejection and self-pity—or in humiliation, or disappointment, or in an inability to deal with besetting sin, or in a myriad of other afflictions. But as we repent of this heinous and enfeebling sin we will come, more and more, to enjoy God's blessing and the liberating infilling of the Holy Spirit. We may then know the security of being loved by God and walk in the peace and joy of the Lord.

As those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, we are acceptable to God—and therefore acceptable to others and acceptable to ourselves. Many, however, do not live with this sense of acceptance. Instead, they are plagued by self-rejection and constantly worry about what others think of them. Sometimes the root cause is that we are refusing to accept others as they are. But when we repent of this, we come to know the peace of self-acceptance—and, at the same time, discover that others are much more acceptable than we thought!

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<sup>38</sup> Ref. 32, p. 182.

### **Author's testimony**

Some years ago, I can remember being plagued by concerns about what a particular person thought of me. I was furious with myself. I thought, "I've turned forty and have I still not grown up enough to stop worrying about such things?" But I was powerless to control how I felt. Then God showed me the real issue: I was judging this person. When I stopped, the problem went away. Again and again I have had similar experiences. Sometimes, when people mistreat me—belittle me, manipulate me or use me—I can find myself struggling to cope with my feelings towards them (and myself). I then make a conscious effort to push all judgemental thoughts away and, very quickly, I find myself walking much freer.

*3 "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? 4 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? 5 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."*

We will be effective in helping others repent of their sin only to the extent that we repent of our tendency to be judgemental. A self-righteous spirit is such a gross sin, and such an impediment to ministry, that Jesus compares it to a plank which utterly obscures vision, making it impossible to treat the eye of another. Preachers who sit in judgement over their congregations and counsellors who regard themselves as better than their counselees will be of little help to those to whom they minister—however gifted they might appear. They will be ineffective because they are hypocrites: their words do not spring

from a desire to bless others (as they claim), but a desire to condemn them for the sake of their own self-exaltation. But those who humble themselves before others will know God's wisdom and the very words of Christ to encourage and strengthen their fellow believers. They will find themselves "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), healing wounds, building up, and equipping others to minister the grace of God too.

*6 "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."*

Having told us not to judge in a wrong way, Jesus now tells us to judge in a right way. Some people are so hardened by sin that they have completely excluded themselves from grace. As such, they are unteachable and beyond repentance (Matthew 12:31-32; Hebrews 6:4-6; 1 John 5:16). They are variously described in Scripture as 'dogs',<sup>39</sup> 'pigs',<sup>40</sup> 'vipers' (Luke 3:7), 'swallowers of vomit' (2 Peter 2:22), 'whitewashed tombs' and 'full of everything unclean' (Matthew 23:27-28). Of such people Jesus said, "Leave them; they are blind guides" (Matthew 15:14). It is unfitting and even dangerous to seek to correct them or preach the Gospel to them. (See also Proverbs 9:7-8.)

God is patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Such is His desire that people be saved, He gave the ultimate—His Son—that it might be made possible. But God will not be patient forever. When people persist in their rejection of Him, there comes a time when His patience comes to

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<sup>39</sup> The dogs here referred to would not have been beloved pets but filthy and dangerous pests that roamed streets and foraged on rubbish heaps. They were loathed (Revelation 22:15).

<sup>40</sup> Similarly, pigs were considered unclean, even suitable receptacles for evil spirits (Matthew 8:28-34).

an end and He brings judgement (Genesis 6:3; Amos 4:1-12). Prior to the Flood, sin had reached such a level that “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). Consequently, God destroyed all of mankind except Noah and his family. Such was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, He rained down burning sulphur upon them (Genesis 19:24). Jesus told a parable about a fig tree that bore no fruit: if, despite being fertilised, it continued to be fruitless, it would be cut down (Luke 13:6-9). On one occasion, when He went to pick fruit from a fig tree and found none, Jesus cursed it. He said, “May you never bear fruit again!” and immediately the tree withered (Matthew 21:18-22). Refusing the Word of God and Christ’s command to repent is, indeed, a dangerous decision and from which there may be no turning back.

But who are these people who have been finally cut off from God? They are not those who are worried about their salvation. Nor are they people who some might consider ‘the worst of sinners’—such as violent men and blasphemers—as this would include the apostle Paul before his conversion (1 Timothy 1:12-16). Nor are they necessarily the sexually immoral, thieves, drunkards, slanderers or swindlers. Many such people have believed the Gospel, turned from their sin and been saved (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Rather, they are those who have finally and irrevocably rejected Christ and have no conscience about it. They have heard the Gospel and the Holy Spirit has spoken to them and confirmed its truth; but they have chosen to believe the lies of Satan instead, and have called the Holy Spirit evil and a liar (Mark 3:28-30; John 3:33; 1 John 5:10).

How are we to recognise such people? It must be possible because we are not to pray for them (1 John 5:16). Ultimately it can only be through discernment given by the Holy Spirit. We see Jesus and the apostle Paul using this discernment. When dealing with Herod, whose primary interest was to be entertained by miraculous signs, Jesus had nothing to say to him (Luke 23:9). When dealing with Pontius Pilate,

who despite all his faults still had some interest in justice, He spoke the truth to him (John 18:33-38). When the apostle Paul preached the Gospel in Pisidian Antioch the Jewish leaders contradicted the message and heaped abuse on him. Consequently, he left them and turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-46; see also Acts 18:5-6).

But in social situations, how are we to relate to these ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’? In the same way that Jesus related to Judas Iscariot. Right to the end He treated him as one would a friend. At the Last Supper He dipped bread into a dish and gave it to him (John 13:26) which, in Jewish culture, was a strong statement of goodwill.

# 8

## **Encouragements and warnings (Matthew 7:7-29)**

*7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 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!”*

At this point, Jesus begins to draw His great sermon to an end. He had presented perhaps the most radical and challenging teaching His disciples had ever heard. They must have wondered, ‘How can we ever understand it?’ and ‘How will we ever be able to put it into practice?’ We might ask the same! The answer is that we will be given the wisdom to understand it and the power to practice it through prayer—and Jesus asserts, in the clearest possible way, the certainty that God will answer these prayers.

The promise, “Ask and it will be given to you ... for everyone who asks receives” is not an invitation to pray for anything we want. The context is what Jesus has been saying beginning in Matthew 5:1. In Luke the same promise is given more specifically in the context of the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11:9). These are God’s priorities, the ‘good gifts’ he wants to give us, and it is when we pray for these that we can be sure God will grant our requests.

Grasping the principles taught in the Sermon on the Mount and applying them to our daily lives is the most difficult (and the most rewarding) task we will ever undertake—and it will last a lifetime. We will need to come to God, again and again, to ask for help, to seek the counsel and empowering of the Holy Spirit, and to petition our Father to open the doors of understanding and grace.

In the original Greek text the words, ‘asks’, ‘seeks’ and ‘knocks’ are in the present continuous and might therefore be translated ‘keeps asking’, ‘keeps seeking’ and ‘keeps knocking’. Hence, Jesus is emphasising the need for persistence. (See also Luke 11:5-13 and Luke 18:1-8.) This can be tough, especially when, sometimes, we must persist over not just weeks or months but years. For this reason He gives us additional encouragement by making clear that God *wants* to answer these prayers and *wants* to give us more of the Holy Spirit’s power to make this possible (Luke 11:13). Indeed, He desires to do this much more than we desire him to. If imperfect, sinful fathers delight in giving good things to their children, how much more our perfect heavenly Father.

*12 “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”*

The key word here is “So”. It indicates that what Jesus is about to say follows from all He has been saying, beginning with the Beatitudes. He is now going to remind us of the central theme of the sermon—the true meaning of the Law and the Prophets. This is that we should do to others what we would have them do to us, that we should ‘Love our neighbour as ourselves’. About this ‘golden rule’ Ryle comments: “It does not merely forbid all petty malice and revenge, all cheating and overreaching: it does much more. It settles a hundred difficult points, which in a world like this are continually arising between man and

man. It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases.”<sup>41</sup>

Only by applying the principles expounded in the Sermon on the Mount will we be able to do this. Only by becoming poor in spirit and mourning our sin will we ever become meek. Only by becoming meek will we ever hunger and thirst after righteousness. Only by hungering and thirsting after righteousness will we ever become pure in heart. Only by becoming pure in heart will we ever truly love others. Only by loving others will our lives glorify God. Only by glorifying God will we hear, on the last day, Christ’s blessed commendation: “Well done my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

*13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

Everyone desires to have eternal life—but most will be disappointed. The problem is that, for many, the way is unacceptable. It requires that we look the Sermon on the Mount fully in the face and acknowledge the extent to which we fail to live up to it. Most are too proud to do this. It requires that we accept the shed blood of Christ as the only atonement that can be made for our failure. Most refuse to believe this. It necessitates that we agree to Christ dwelling within us that the Sermon on the Mount might be fulfilled in us. Most do not want this. It demands that we enter through a gate which leads only down the narrow way of godliness—and this will lead to persecution. Most will not have this. Instead, they are determined to enter by another way (Luke 13:24), one which allows them the freedom to hold on to their

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<sup>41</sup> Ryle, J.C., *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Matthew*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, p. 66, 1896; archive.org. Cited by Stott, ref. 16, p. 191.

sin, hold on to self, lead a comfortable life, believe what they will and behave as they wish. But such a way does not exist.

*15 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”*

False prophets have always been around and they are around today. Sometimes very little discernment is needed to identify them as they teach that which is plainly a perversion of Scripture. Others, however, are more subtle—and some are very subtle indeed. Some are revered Bible teachers in ‘sound’ evangelical churches. They look the part; they are gifted speakers; they seem to know the Bible and preach well. God may even speak through them, just as He spoke through the godless Caiaphas when, by the Holy Spirit, he prophesied that Christ would die for the Jewish nation (John 11:49-52). Luther opines that a preacher “through his office, word and sacrament ... brings you to faith, saves you from the devil’s power and from eternal death, and leads you to heaven and eternal life ... and yet he may still be himself an unbelieving, bad man.”<sup>42</sup> Referring to the day of judgement, Lloyd-Jones comments: “We shall find men who have been lauded and praised as preachers outside the Kingdom. They said the right things,

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<sup>42</sup> Luther, M., *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, Lutheran Publication Society, Philadelphia, pp. 475-476, tr. 1892, first published in German 1532; archive.org.

and said them marvellously; but they never had the life and truth within them.”<sup>43</sup>

It is, however, possible to recognise them and we do this by considering their fruit—the fruit seen in their personal lives (their character) and the fruit of their ministries. It can take time to evaluate these but, if we are discerning, little by little the reality will dawn upon us. We need to watch carefully to see what comes out of their hearts, particularly when they are under pressure. How do they respond to criticism? How do they behave when they are tired? Do they make the right decisions when it’s going to be costly for them? Do they protect themselves at the expense of the sheep? Do they bite the sheep? And what of their ministry? We need to listen carefully to what they say for “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6:45). After they have preached, are people full of praise for them or for God? Do they draw people after themselves or point people to Christ? Do they talk about sin, righteousness and the judgement to come? Does their preaching strengthen people that they might draw nearer to God, grow in holiness and become more fruitful in His service? Or do they simply give an interesting address—one that leaves people with a ‘good feeling’?

To be discerning in these matters, we must be walking closely with God that we might listen out for and hear His voice—that we might know His gentle leading, and sense when the Holy Spirit is telling us that something isn’t right. Through godly living and a consistent prayer life, we come to know God (John 14:23), His heart (Jeremiah 24:7) and gain the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). We can then discern whether God is speaking through those who seek to teach us.

*21 “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*

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<sup>43</sup> Ref. 32, p. 268.

*heaven. 22 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?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

King Saul spoke and acted under the supernatural anointing of the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 10:6,10; 1 Samuel 11:16); yet he was not a godly man (1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Samuel 13:14). He had no love for his people and shamelessly exploited them (1 Samuel 8:9-18). Nevertheless, he was appointed and empowered by God—but to bring judgement more than blessing.

There are many people today who, on the surface, appear to be Christians but are not. Some of them have prominent ministries, preaching and teaching. Some perform miraculous signs, in some cases by the power of Satan (Mark 13:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10) and in other cases by the power of the Holy Spirit—an example being Judas Iscariot. Lloyd-Jones comments: “Our Lord may give power to a man, and yet the man himself may be lost. ... people may even drive out devils in Christ’s name and yet be outside the kingdom.”<sup>44</sup> Calvin agrees that such people can be genuinely performing miracles in Christ’s name, “under His strength, His auspices, command and direction”.<sup>45</sup> Chrysostom understands them to be people who have faith without works—and are therefore unsaved (James 2:14-17)—but nevertheless have been given these powers by Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Such ministers sometimes have considerable followings; but they are really serving themselves (Luke 6:46). They say much and do much, but on the day of judgement Jesus will reveal the true state of

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<sup>44</sup> Ref. 32, p. 269.

<sup>45</sup> Ref. 36, p. 240.

<sup>46</sup> Chrysostom, J., Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily XXIV; in Schaff, P., ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, The Sage Digital Library, vol. 10, pp. 364-365; archive.org.

their hearts and they will be condemned. Ryle comments: “The hopes of many, who were thought great Christians while they lived, will be utterly confounded [i.e. disappointed].”<sup>47</sup> It is not that these people started well and then departed from the narrow way. Rather, they were *never* part of Christ’s church and were *never* known by Him (1 John 2:19).

Jesus did not say that there are only a few people like this. He said there are many. Such people are generally very difficult to deal with because they are convinced that they are Christians and are doing important work for God. Again, it can take time to identify them. In his farewell to the Ephesians the apostle Paul warned, “Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Yet, at that time, even he did not know who they were.

How are we to distinguish between true and false ministers? The answer, again, is to look at their fruit—the fruit of their personal lives and the fruit coming from their ministries. Each of us should also examine ourselves to ensure that we will not be among those who hear the terrible words, “Away from me, you evildoers!” Are we doing the will of the Father? Are we on the narrow way? Are we repenting of our sin? Are we bearing fruit to God? Do we have a relationship with Christ?

False ministries thrive because people lack the discernment to see through them, often confusing gifts with maturity; and people lack this discernment because their own Christian lives are so shallow. It can also work the other way round. Ministries which are of God and needed for the strengthening of the church can be rejected.

One might ask why God would allow false teachers into the church and why He would enable non-Christians to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is sometimes said that we get the leaders we

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<sup>47</sup> Ref. 41, p. 70.

deserve—and it is true. It seems that sometimes God places godless people in prominent positions in churches so as to discipline worldly Christians, just as He appointed Saul King over Israel. Also, it seems that it is God's will that the church matures and learns to distinguish good from evil through being tested in this way, through having to wrestle with these issues and seek God for discernment. Only by consistently applying the Sermon on the Mount to our personal lives—and thereby growing in the knowledge of God and His ways—will we be able to do this. Only then will false ministers find no place in the church and true ministers be given the respect they deserve.

*24 “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. 25 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. 26 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. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

This parable is both an encouragement and a warning. To those who daily seek to grow in obedience to Christ, it brings great peace. Whatever life throws at them, and however the forces of evil attack them, they will not be overcome. They may stumble, but, ultimately, God will give them the victory. They will press on in the faith, continue to serve God and bring Him much glory. Then, in the fullness of time, they will receive the crown of life (James 1:12). Conversely, those who fail to practice Christ's teaching are in grave danger. When trials come—when they lose their job or their health, or become bankrupt, or are falsely accused, or lose a loved one—they will be overwhelmed. Some then become workaholics or alcoholics or turn to drugs or other addictive behaviours. Family break-up often follows. Defenceless

against the attacks of the Evil One, they will be unable to hold out against persecution or temptation. Some fall into adultery or other serious sin. Doubts begin to dominate their thinking and many leave the faith altogether.

In order to be victorious in life and in the battle against evil spiritual forces we must put in place the breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:10-14). To do this we must first understand what righteousness is, and it is this that Jesus explains so thoroughly in the Sermon on the Mount. We must then build our lives on this foundation, digging deep so as to ensure the foundation is solid rock (Luke 6:48). We will then be equipped with “weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left” (2 Corinthians 6:7).

Evil spirits have much more power than us, but we can neutralise this and defeat them through godliness (Romans 12:21). When we ‘turn the other cheek’ we cover our hearts with armour which deflects the spear thrusts associated with hurtful words, manipulation and betrayal. When people seek to exploit us and we ‘go the extra mile’, we shield ourselves from the shame of abuse. When we refrain from judging others, we protect ourselves from the accuser of God’s people (Revelation 12:10) and the hammer blows of self-condemnation and self-rejection. When we show mercy to others, we put ourselves under the empowering mercy of God. Then, when we stumble or make mistakes, the forces of evil will have no lever upon us. When we love our enemies and do good to them we heap burning coals on their heads—along with the evil spirits behind their actions (Romans 12:20-21). All this may seem impossibly difficult; but it is not because He who is in us (Christ) is greater than he who is in the world (Satan) (1 John 4:4). We can be overcomers through Christ’s work in us.

*28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

The Pharisees and teachers of the law had no fear of God, no knowledge of Him, no humility and no wisdom (Proverbs 9:10; 11:2). Consequently, they had no understanding of sin, its effect on people's lives, or its remedy. Since they themselves lacked righteousness, their preaching had no power to teach people the ways of God or change lives—and many of their hearers knew it. In contrast, Jesus had demonstrated that He perfectly understood our fundamental spiritual needs and the root causes of the problems with which we all struggle—and that He had the answers.

He is the Wisdom of God (Colossians 2:3) and being the Word of God (John 1:1,14) He spoke the very words of God. Living in Him, the Father was making known His eternal, life-giving truths (John 14:10). The prophets before Christ had introduced their proclamations with the words, "This is what the Lord says ..." But He asserted, "*I* say to you ..." and commanded us, "Put into practice these teachings of *mine*." He demanded that we serve *Him* and be willing to be persecuted for *His* sake.

He came into the world to bring grace and truth (John 1:17), and no greater grace and no greater truths have ever been revealed than those in the Sermon on the Mount. Through these we can become overcomers (1 John 5:4-5), escape the corruption of the world and come to partake in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Whether we have been a victim of childhood abuse or domestic violence or betrayal by a marriage partner—or, like the prodigal son, know that we have ruined our lives through our own wilful sin—we may find the freedom and victory that Jesus promises His true disciples (John 8:31-32). Weakness will be turned into strength, the timid made bold, the foolish made wise and the godless made godly (Hebrews 11). Empowered by righteousness, we can defeat the devil, build the kingdom of God and, in so doing, bring glory to the One who redeemed us. Then, one day, we will hear from Him those precious words: "Well done my good and

faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21) and enter into our glorious eternal future for which He laid down His life (John 10:10).

# APPENDIX

## Vanuatu: A case study

Vanuatu is a group of islands in the South Pacific Ocean, formerly known as the New Hebrides. Prior to the arrival of the Christian missionaries the islanders were barbaric, violent and often embroiled in tribal warfare. Cannibalism was also common. Professor James Falconer described the inhabitants of one of the islands known as Aneityum:

“The islanders were ... called the Papuan, with curly hair, dark skin and forbidding features. They ... had long been under the tyrannous dominion of savagery. Society was a Dead Sea of pollution. Crimes of all degrees were of constant occurrence. Selfishness, treachery, inhumanity were characteristic faults. Falsehood abounded, theft was considered honorable, licentiousness prevailed everywhere. There was no thought of love. War was continuous. A member of one tribe dared not venture beyond the confines of his own territory for fear of being killed. Life had no value. Blood flowed every day. A man was never seen without his club and spear. Women were in slavery, and did not know enough to resent it. Brutality was their daily wage. The awful habit of strangling the widow on the death of her husband was firmly rooted in the islands. Every woman wore round her neck a stout cord so arranged that a moderate pull would effect strangulation. Infants had no rights. The tenure of the child's life rested with the option of the father. ... Most hideous of all was the cannibalism that prevailed. All victims

killed or taken in war were considered the lawful booty of the victor, and there were authentic tales of shipwrecked crews that were kept in life only to await the time of some cannibal feast.”<sup>48</sup>

It was to this same island that John Geddie came as a Christian missionary in 1848 with his wife, Charlotte. The message he brought transformed the people and, by the early twentieth century, had led to widespread conversions across the other islands. By the mid-twentieth century, the churches were led largely by people drawn from the indigenous population and Christianity had become deeply rooted in the culture.

Once the missionaries had learnt the language they began producing a translation of the Bible. The Gospel of Matthew was the first entire portion of Scripture to be printed, and Geddie’s teaching emphasised the principles taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Particularly, he taught the people to ‘turn the other cheek’, to be peacemakers and to love their enemies. He wrote: “I urged them, when they met their enemies, to exercise Christian forbearance, to display nothing but gentleness and kindness, and when reviled not to revile again.”<sup>49</sup>

As early as 1850 Geddie’s ministry was bearing remarkable fruit. A serious dispute had arisen between the natives involving some of the Christian converts (the ‘Christian party’), and a meeting was organised with a chief in an attempt to resolve it. Geddie recorded in his diary:

“On my return home, I found the leaders of the Christian party assembled and waiting for me. ... I asked what they had resolved on themselves. Waihit, in the name of the others, said, ‘Our word

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<sup>48</sup> Falconer, J.W., *John Geddie: Hero of the New Hebrides*, Board of Foreign Missions Presbyterian Church in Canada, Toronto, pp. 37–38, c. 1915; archive.org.

<sup>49</sup> Patterson, G., *Missionary Life Among the Cannibals: The life of the Rev. John Geddie*, James Campbell, Toronto, p. 254, 1882; archive.org.

is peace; we know that it is wicked to fight, and we are not afraid to die for the cause of God.’ Such a statement, especially from the lips of a man who, but a little more than a year before, was one of our greatest opposers, I felt to be more than an ample recompense for all the trials, anxieties, and labours which I have endured since my connection with this Mission. I began to feel for the first time, with some degree of confidence, that a sacred flame had been enkindled in this dark island.”<sup>50</sup>

At the meeting with the chief, the Christians showed remarkable restraint and maturity. Geddie continued:

“The chief then commenced a harangue at the highest pitch of his voice, and in a very angry tone. He told the Christian party, in a very ostentatious manner, that he had designed to punish them ... . He next went over a long list of grievances ... . He went on in this strain for nearly two hours, except when interrupted by the representative of the other party, to repel false charges, answer accusations, give explanations, etc. The Christian party exercised the utmost moderation and forbearance, whilst their enemies said all that they had to say against them. After the chief’s speech was finished, the meeting broke up, and the better-disposed of the heathen party joined some of our people in a fishing excursion, while the others left, apparently mortified that the affair had ended so quietly.”<sup>51</sup>

Before the arrival of the missionaries, revenge was considered a sacred duty and the native language had no word for forgiveness.<sup>52</sup> Now there

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<sup>50</sup> Ref. 49, pp. 253-254.

<sup>51</sup> Ref. 49, pp. 254-255.

<sup>52</sup> Ref. 49, p. 127.

were remarkable cases of personal reconciliation. “Old grudges were forgiven, old feuds vanished.”<sup>53</sup> Geddie recorded:

“Mr. Inglis arrived yesterday and brought an influential chief, Iata, formerly a great warrior and notorious cannibal. He met in the house of God today a man named Nimtiwan, of a similar character. The last time they met was on the field of battle. I wondered how they would act now, and, oh, how delighted I was to see these two men come to the house of God with their arms round each other!”<sup>54</sup>

As increasing numbers of people were converted society changed. Christian chiefs met together and passed a law prohibiting the sale of women to foreigners. It was the first statute law that had ever been passed on the island and reflected a Christian view of women and slavery.<sup>55</sup> Geddie recorded:

“In fact a complete transformation was taking place. The gifts of Christian civilization abounded everywhere. Neat houses replaced the old huts, new occupations, new interests, were started, war ceased, the gates of peace were swung wider and wider. Safety increased so that voyagers could go from port to port unarmed. ... Nothing surprised the natives of [neighbouring islands] Tanna and Futuna more than the peace which prevails throughout this island, as in their own lands it is not safe for a person to venture beyond the boundaries of his own district.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ref. 48, p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> Ref. 48, p. 70.

<sup>55</sup> Ref. 48, pp. 76-77.

<sup>56</sup> Ref. 48, pp. 77-78.

Christian converts became peacemakers and beseeched their countrymen to give up savage ways and to dwell together in peace and love.<sup>57</sup> One chief, Nohoat, became a peacemaker and, on one occasion, at significant risk to himself, negotiated a peace between two districts thus averting a war. Despite being shot at, when asked later if he was afraid, he replied: “No. I knew I was going on a good errand, and I believed God would protect me.”<sup>58</sup>

Today, the legacy of Geddie’s work remains and Christians in Vanuatu are at the forefront of government, education and health care. Professor Matthew Clarke commented:

“Since Independence, the role of the Christian Churches has remained significant across Vanuatu. While the Churches lent this new nation its first national leaders, they have continued to operate as the local leaders in the provision of education, health, advocacy and support for youth and women. Moreover, they have provided a ‘home’ for much social and political development within the Church buildings themselves. ... Just as the original missionaries in Vanuatu focused on establishing schools and health posts, contemporary Christian Churches continue to focus on providing health care and education services across Vanuatu. ... Health clinics run by Churches can be found in regional and remote communities where the distance to Government run health clinics are too distant to be practical as well as in urban locations where Government run health clinics are too crowded. There are many examples across Vanuatu of such health ministry, including the provision by the

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<sup>57</sup> Ref. 49, p. 259.

<sup>58</sup> Ref. 48, p. 82.

Presbyterian Church of eye care and dental treatment to isolated communities.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Clarke, M., [Christianity and the shaping of Vanuatu's social and political development](#), *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* **28**(1):24-41, February 2015.

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