

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 3

Spiritual Requirements for the Kingdom of Heaven (The Sermon on the Mount)

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Introduction

When the Lord taught His disciples the words which we read in Matthew chapters 5-7 He was on a mountain (Matthew 5:1). Hence, these three chapters are commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Even unsaved people are sometimes familiar with this portion of the Bible, because in this sermon one can find the Golden Rule, the Lord's Prayer (the model prayer which the Lord taught to His disciples) and the Beatitudes (a series of statements beginning with the word "blessed").

The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount

The purpose of the Sermon was to show the Jewish people that they were not fit to enter the kingdom which was announced to be "at hand." The key verse in understanding the purpose of the Sermon is Matthew 5:20—"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." To enter the kingdom, a person must be spiritually qualified.

The Lord's statement in Matthew 5:20 must have shocked the Jews who heard it. The scribes and Pharisees were very religious people. They read and memorized the Scriptures. They prayed and they gave their money to the poor. They tried to keep and obey God's law, especially the Ten Commandments. They seemed to be righteous men, yet the Lord told them that their righteousness was not enough. A righteousness exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was necessary. If a person lacked such righteousness, then he would not be admitted to the kingdom! The Lord's entrance requirements were very strict! We must seek "His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33), because without His righteousness we are in trouble.

Elsewhere in the New Testament we learn of entrance requirements for the kingdom. Consider 1 Corinthians chapter 6. What kind of people are not fit to enter the kingdom (verses 9-10)? Do any of these words describe you? (Compare Romans 3:10.) The possibility of any person being qualified to enter the kingdom look very bleak until we come to verse 11. There we learn that God in His grace has qualified the believing heart. Because of Christ's finished work on the cross we can be justified (declared righteous), sanctified (set apart in Christ) and washed (cleansed and forgiven based on the blood of Christ). "Oh to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be!" In and of ourselves we are totally unfit; in Christ we are qualified to take part in His kingdom. Compare Colossians 1:12.

The Jews were very excited about the prospects of the kingdom. They loved the

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material benefits that it promised them. They had just seen the Lord's healing miracles and they were astounded (Matt. 4:23-25). These material benefits resulted in a great multitude following Him (Matt. 4:25).

This occasion reminds us of John chapter 6 when the Lord's healing miracles (v. 2) and the Lord's feeding miracle (verses 5-14) caused the multitude to want to take Jesus by force and make Him their King (verse 15). The idea of having a King who would eliminate sickness and disease and who would be capable of feeding them was very appealing to them. The problem, however, was that they were not spiritually prepared for such a kingdom. When the Lord Jesus taught that it was necessary for them to have a personal relationship with Him, based on His death, then they lost interest and walked away (John 6, see verses 60-71).

In Matthew 4 the kingdom was announced as being very near (Matt. 4:17 and compare 3:2). Indeed, the King was personally present among them. His healing miracles (Matt. 4:23-25) demonstrated that He was truly the Messiah (compare Isaiah 35:5-6). Great multitudes followed Him because of His healing miracles (Matt. 4:25). In view of these multitudes, the Lord gathered His disciples together to instruct them concerning the spiritual requirements that were necessary for entrance into the kingdom (see Matt. 5:1). It is probably best to understand the term "disciples" in a broader sense, as including many more than the twelve disciples who are later named in Matthew chapter 10. In Matthew 5:1 the term "disciples" is probably a general term for those who followed Christ, similar to the way the term "disciples" is used in John chapter 6 where it included more than the twelve (see verses 60,61,66). "Disciples" even included those who later "went back and walked no more with Him" (v.66). These were unsaved disciples (compare John 6:64-65)! The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to such followers of Christ.

These Jewish followers probably thought: "This is good news! The kingdom is at hand. It's so near it's almost here! The King will soon set up His kingdom and we will be set free from the terrible yoke of the Romans. We will be under Roman rule no more! We will be ruled by the Messiah who will provide us with all that we need (food, etc.), protect us from all enemies and heal us from all diseases! What a blessing it will be to be part of the kingdom which the Old Testament prophets promised long ago!"

Not so fast! There was more to the kingdom than just outward benefits. The heart had to be right with God. The Lord Jesus made it clear that not everyone who said, "Lord, Lord," would enter the kingdom (Matt. 7:21). The main purpose of the Sermon was to set forth the righteousness that was necessary for a person to qualify for entrance into the kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount conveyed a very convicting message to the Jewish people.

This Sermon was of a legal character. Its purpose, like the law, was to convict and

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to condemn. By the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20), that is, by the law I come to know how sinful I am. By the Sermon on the Mount is the knowledge of unrighteousness. By this Sermon the disciples could learn how unrighteous they were and how unfit they were for the kingdom. They could learn that they were spiritually unqualified to enter the kingdom based upon their own righteousness.

The Sermon, in some ways, was even more condemning than the law. The Jew might be able to say, "I've never committed adultery." But Jesus said, "Have you ever lusted after a woman in your heart?" The Jew might be able to say, "I've never murdered anyone." But Jesus said, "Have you been angry with your brother?" See Matthew 5:21 and the verses which follow.

To see how condemning the Sermon is, consider the following personal questions:

1. Have you ever been guilty of sinful anger? (5:22)
2. Have you ever looked at a woman to lust after her? (5:28)
3. Have you measured up to God's perfect standard? (5:48)
4. Do you ever worry? (6:25-34)
5. Do you always put God first? (6:33)
6. Are you ever oblivious to your own faults? (7:1-5)
7. Do you always live according to the rule of Matthew 7:12?

An honest Jew would have to admit this: "Lord, I fail to measure up to the righteousness that you require. I am spiritually bankrupt (compare Matt. 5:3). I am totally unfit and unworthy to enter Your kingdom. Lord, be merciful unto me, an unrighteous sinner." Such a Jew is learning that he lacks the righteousness that is required and therefore he must seek HIS righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to Jews who had followed Christ and who had seen His astounding healing miracles. They had been told by John the Baptist and by the Lord Himself that the kingdom promised by all the prophets was near at hand. The Lord, in this Sermon, set forth the kind of righteousness that was required in order to be fit to enter the kingdom. The Sermon was legal in character and condemnatory in effect. Though the gospel is not revealed in this Sermon, the Lord did make it clear that the solution for those who lack the needed righteousness is found, not in self righteousness, but in His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Thus we have the first beatitude (Matt. 5:3) showing the blessedness of the person who recognizes his own spiritual bankruptcy.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

The Beatitudes reveal God's formula for happiness. Inner character is the key. The motto of the Stony Brook School in Long Island, NY is this: "Character Before Career." The key is not what a person pretends to be on the outside (Matt. 7:21-

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23), but what the person really is on the inside. The first Beatitude is of utmost importance (Matt. 5:3). To be a person of character one must first recognize how poor and needy he really is. "But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer" (Psalm 40:17).

There are many beatitudes found elsewhere in the Bible. See for example Psalm 1:1; 32:1; 40:4; 112:1; 119:1-2 and 128:1. See also Jeremiah 17:5-8. In Deuteronomy 28 we have the blessedness of the man who obeys God and the awful consequences of disobedience (note the repetition of the words "Blessed" and "Cursed"). See especially Deuteronomy 28:1-2 and 28:15.

Let us take a brief look at each of the Beatitudes:

Introduction to the Beatitudes

There are nine Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5.

The Beatitudes describe the spiritual character of those who are subjects of Christ's kingdom. If I am a part of Christ's kingdom, then what should my conduct and character be like? That question is answered in these verses.

The first thing we observe about the subjects of Christ's kingdom is that they are happy. "Blessed are they." "Happy are they." Their condition is a blest condition, a happy state. They are not cursed by God; they do not live under God's frown; rather they bask under the sunshine of God's smile. These are people who are happy. These are people who can rejoice and be exceedingly glad, as we are told in verse 12.

Happiness is a byproduct of being in a right relationship with the King. Most people seek after happiness but they do not find it. They are greatly disappointed. There are a few, however, who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and they are the happy ones, because happiness is a byproduct of seeking God and doing His will.

Verse 3—Blessed are the poor in spirit.

These are those who are spiritually poor, which is actually true of every human on earth. The problem is that most people do not recognize their poverty. Verse 3 describes those who recognize how spiritually poor they really are. They are bankrupt. Their poverty is extreme. "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling." Recognizing one's poverty is the opposite of being self reliant, relying on self. It is the opposite mind set of the one who says, "I am rich and in need of nothing." No, the humble subject of the kingdom says, "I am poor and in need of everything." He says, "Oh wretched man that I am. There is nothing in me which commends itself to God. I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth

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no good thing." I don't have what I need; I don't have what it takes. I'm lacking. I'm in great need." How happy is the person who says, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me" (Psalm 40:17). How happy is the person who says, "Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I am poor and needy" (Psalm 86:1). How happy is the person who says, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6). How happy is the man who has the right estimate of himself, who recognizes his poverty, who recognizes the plague of his own heart. Only the person who is poor and needy will recognize how rich and sufficient the King really is.

Verse 4—Blessed are they that mourn.

This sounds like quite a contradiction. How can the sad be joyful? How can the mourners, those stricken with grief, be so happy? To mourn means to feel intense grief and sorrow. It involves emotional suffering, to be grieved, to be hurt on the inside, to mourn. "Mourn" is similar to the word "lament," which means to grieve strongly, to mourn aloud. We have the book of Lamentations in which Jeremiah mourned over the city of Jerusalem which was in ruins because of the people's sin. When we think of mourning we often think of people in great sorrow because of the death of a loved one.

When the Lord said, "Happy are those who mourn," what was He referring to? What did He mean? What are the citizens of the kingdom mourning about? What are they grieved about? What causes them such inward pain and suffering? We read, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30). What is it that grieves Him and brings pain and sorrow to Him? What is it, more than anything else, that should grieve the child of God? What, more than anything else, should cause us to mourn?

Read James 4:8-10. Those of us who are the subjects of Christ's kingdom mourn over sin. It grieves our heart. We hate it. We cannot practice it and be happy. Sin causes us inner grief and pain and suffering. It is horrible. It bothers us so much. If sin doesn't bother us and make us miserable, something is wrong. Sin in our nation and in high places should bother us. Sin, so often paraded around in the media, should bother us. Sin that we see in others should bother us. But how much more should sin both us that lurks in our own heart, our own sin that hurts those we love the most, our own sin that damages our testimony to a lost and dying world. The child of God should be constantly broken over his sinfulness "We laugh at the world's crude and immoral jokes even though we do not retell them; we are entertained by a sin even though we do not indulge in it; we smile at ungodly talk even though we do not repeat the words. We joke about divorce, make light of brutality, are intrigued by sexual immorality. We rejoice when we should be mourning; we laugh when we should be crying" (John MacArthur, *Commentary on Matthew*). Be afflicted and mourn and weep! Those who do so will be comforted.

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Believers do all their mourning in this life; they will be comforted in the next life (Luke 16:25). For unbelievers, today's grief is only a foretaste of eternal sorrow.

Verse 5—Blessed are the meek.

What does it mean to be meek? Some of the dictionary definitions fall far short of the true meaning of this word. One definition given is "deficient in spirit and courage" (lacking in courage). This definition indicates that a meek person is not courageous. Another faulty definition is: "not violent or strong" (lacking strength). This would mean that meekness is equivalent to weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth. We need to allow the Lord Jesus to define this word, not the dictionary, because we are told that Jesus was "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). If we understand what the King was like, we will understand what meekness really is.

Was the King weak? Ask anyone who was present when Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple if Jesus was weak! This one Man drove out a whole group of men. He turned over their tables. He turned over their chairs. No one dared to resist Him. No one dared to get in his way. They quickly cleared out. This was certainly not a display of weakness.

In Numbers 12:3 Moses was described as the meekest man in all the earth. When we think of Moses, do we think of weakness? I would not want to be near him when he righteously got upset at the sin of the people and started smashing tablets of stone! This was righteous indignation.

Meekness is not weakness; it is strength under control, power under control. Think of a wild stallion, a very strong horse that needs to be broken. The skilled cowboy lassoes him and brings him into the corral. He then jumps on his back and tries to ride him, but the horse is so strong he kicks and jumps and bucks and throws his rider off. The cowboy is persistent and does not give up. He gets thrown off the powerful beast several more times. But the last time he's able to hang on for dear life, even though the horse jumps and kicks and bucks like crazy. Finally the horse calms down and stops fighting. His will has been broken. He submits to the bit and bridle. He's willing to do whatever his rider says. The powerful horse is just as strong as he ever was, but his strength is now under control.

The King wants to control our passions. Happy is the person who lets Him do so. Happy is the person who lets the Lord hold the reins. Happy is the person who stops going his own stubborn ways, who stops fighting against God and stops kicking against the pricks, stops insisting that his way is best! Happy is the person who says, "Lord, my life is yours to control. Lead me. Teach me. Show me Thy way." Blessed are the meek. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the

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meek will he teach his way" (Psalm 25:9). "The meek person is gentle and mild in his own cause, though he may be a lion in God's cause or in defending others" (William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 1216). The meek person is not strong in defending himself, but he gives his all to defend God and His truth.

Verse 6—Blessed are they who hunger and thirst.

Most of us have never experienced intense hunger and thirst or lacked food and water because we live in a country where we bathe in luxury and we normally have plenty. I've never been deprived of such necessities myself, but I remember an experience while on the wrestling team at Wesleyan University. We had especially difficult workouts. Our coach really pushed us. We would do pushups and sit ups and rope climbing and all kinds of calisthenics, to say nothing of the wrestling itself. You who have wrestled know that just three minutes of wrestling can be totally exhausting. One day we were at it for much longer than three minutes. I don't know how much sweat I lost in that workout but I know I was dehydrated. At the end of that workout, there was only one thing in the world that I cared about. I had to get to that drinking fountain. I had a thirst! And I really believe that if five strong men had held me back and said, "We are not going to let you have a drink unless you give each one of us a hundred dollars," I probably would have paid them. Why? I had to have water. That's the point. When you really hunger and thirst for something, you have to have it. You are not satisfied until you get it.

The subjects of God's kingdom must have righteousness. They must live right in a wrong world. They've got to do right, no matter what the cost. They've got to please the King no matter what it takes. They have a passion for righteousness. Matthew 6:33—Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness! They don't have righteousness of their own. They are bankrupt! But they have to have God's righteousness. And it must not be a phoney religious righteousness that is not real (see Matthew 5:20).

If I am going to hunger and thirst after righteousness, then I must hunger and thirst after God's Word. See 2 Tim. 3:16. There is no other place to find instruction in righteousness! I must have a hunger for God's truth. I've got to have it! This means that I've got to have God's Word and I've got to be in God's Word, so that I can be instructed in God's righteous ways.

Verse 7—Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are those who show mercy. The ones who show mercy will obtain mercy. There is only one way to learn how to show mercy, and that is to learn from the God of all mercy. God found us in our miserable, sinful, wretched state, and He

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showed mercy. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Tit. 3:5). God who is rich in mercy did not give us what we deserved. We deserve His furious wrath, His full judgment. We deserve eternity in the lake of fire, to be forever banished from God's presence. God in mercy doesn't give us what we deserve; God in grace gives us what we don't deserve.

At a recent Bible conference I greeted a brother from Michigan in the morning, and said, "How are you doing?" He answered, "Far better than I deserve." No matter how terribly we might be doing, no matter how much pain or suffering we might be going through, we are doing better than we deserve, because we deserve far worse. God has been so merciful to us. In our miserable state, God has shown such amazing sympathy and kindness. So also we should be merciful to others. See Matthew 5:44 where the Lord instructs us to love and do good to those who don't deserve our kindness at all.

See Matthew 5:45. If God gave men what they deserved, He would not send His warming sunlight to bless people. Instead, He would scorch them with intense burning heat. And instead of life-giving rain He would rain down upon them fire and brimstone. That is what men deserve, but God is merciful.

Romans 12 speaks of loving our enemies and overcoming evil with good. Mercy involves showing a heart of compassion to others, even to those who don't really deserve it at all.

Verse 8—Blessed are the pure in heart.

God looks not on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). The heart is the key. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. Jesus spoke of the hypocritical people of His day who tried to put on a good outward show: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." It is possible for a person to publicly lead in prayer, and the prayer sounds so good and so reverent; however, that person's heart may be far from God. We may fool everyone in the congregation, but we do not fool the One we are praying to. The King wants full ownership of the heart. The hymnwriter, Charles Wesley, wrote, "O for a heart to praise my God...A heart resigned, submissive, meek, my great Redeemer's throne; Where only Christ is heard to speak, where Jesus reigns alone; a heart in every thought renewed, and full of love divine, perfect and right and pure and good, a copy, Lord, of Thine!" The heart is the key: a heart that is right, a heart that is pure. Is your heart right with God?

See Psalm 24:3-4. Do any of us measure up to this kind of cleanness and purity? I'm so thankful for the work done by my Saviour on Calvary's cross which made

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it possible for me to have clean hands and a pure heart. Jesus said to His disciples, "Ye are clean," and I thank God that is also true of me because of His finished work on Calvary's cross.

But even as a cleansed and purified child of God, I still at times sin and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Thank God for 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The King demands that we keep our hearts pure.

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). I'm so thankful that in Christ I am holy and set apart, and this is true only because of His grace.

Verse 9—Blessed are the peacemakers.

How do you describe yourself? Are you a peacemaker or a trouble maker? Happy are the peacemakers.

The King has been called by Isaiah, "The Prince of Peace," and we know that there will be no true peace on earth until He returns.

With nuclear war looming before us on the horizon, and with nuclear summits taking place, some of our leaders are saying, "Let's be peacemakers. Here's our solution. Let's all get rid of our nuclear weapons." It sounds good. It would be great if everyone would do it, but is this realistic? Our enemies are just laughing to themselves at how naive we really are.

It reminds me of the story of the lady who tried to make peace with a crocodile. Her sad story is actually recorded as a song: "She sailed away on a bright and sunny day on the back of a crocodile. You see, said she, he's as tame as tame can be, I'll ride him down the Nile. The crock winked his eye as she waved them all goodby, wearing a happy smile. At the end of the ride, the lady was inside and the smile on the crocodile." She was all for peace and for peaceful co-existence, but he wasn't.

If we lay down our weapons we are not making peace; we are just giving a huge advantage to our enemies and making war more likely, because usually the enemy will not attack unless he thinks he can win.

So in a sinful world, peace comes through military victory and through military strength. But when it comes to living with individuals, God wants us to be peacemakers (see Romans 12:18; 1 Pet. 3:11).

What is the best way we can be peacemakers? "The way of peace they have not

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known" (Rom. 3:17). We need to make known to them the way of peace. We need to show them how they can have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). See 2 Cor. 5:20. The unsaved are at odds with God; they are enemies of God; they are at war with God. We need to show them how they can be reconciled to God, how they can be at peace.

Soul winners are peacemakers. May God help us to help others come to know the way of peace.

Verses 10-12-Blessed are they who are persecuted.

Those who belong to the King are hated by those who know Him not (John 15:19-20; 2 Timothy 3:12). The world is not a friend to God and the world is not a friend to God's people.

No one ever said the Christian life is easy. If you really follow the King with all your heart, there's a cost involved. Your closest loved ones and family members may not understand. Your friends may think you are crazy. Your neighbors may consider you odd. Your classmates may not understand. Your faith in Christ may create great friction between you and your co-workers. But Jesus Christ understands and He expects nothing less than wholehearted allegiance to Him and to His cause, no matter what the cost. Are we willing to suffer the loss of all things that we hold dear so that we can hold Him dear?

And if I suffer the loss of all things, how can I be blessed? How can I be happy? How can I rejoice? The King says, "Great is your reward in heaven." The King's servants are not underpaid, and should not feel sorry for themselves. They are members of the greatest army ever assembled, the army of the Lord of hosts. "Endure (suffer) hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

The Similitudes (Matthew 5:13-16)

Following the beatitudes are the similitudes in Matthew 5:13-16. A similitude is a comparison, a resemblance, a correspondence. The Lord Jesus used two metaphors. In the first He compared His believers to salt; in the second He compared His believers to light.

Salt in Bible times was very important. Not only was it used to make foods taste better, but it had another purpose. (Today we have the benefits of refrigeration to keep foods from spoiling, and we also have freezers which can keep foods in a frozen condition for a long time.) In Bible times salt was used to keep food items from becoming corrupt and spoiled. The salt did not prevent them from spoiling,

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but it would slow the process. In this corrupt world, how are believers like salt? In your classroom in school or at your place at work, how can you be salty? When a believer has a godly walk, the unsaved people around him will sometimes watch their language and be careful about the kind of stories they tell. If the believer had not been there, they would not have been so restrained. There is coming a future day when God's believers will be suddenly removed from the earth, and with the "salt" gone, the world will be unrestrained in the direction of evil and lawlessness (2 Thess. 2: 6-7).

The believer is also compared to light (Matt. 5: 14-16). Where do we get our light from (John 8: 12)? As we are in a very dark and wicked world, what are we to do (Phil. 2: 15)? We are like the moon whose light is not its own, but is reflected from a bright sun. Our light is reflected from another kind of Sun (Malachi 4: 2), the Son of God (see 2 Cor. 4: 3-7). In Matthew 5: 15 believers are warned about hiding their light. How is this done? Compare 1 Thessalonians 5: 19 and Ephesians 4: 30.

"But I Say Unto You" (Matthew 5: 17-48)

In Matthew 5: 17-48, the Lord Jesus took the law to another level. It is not enough to have outward righteousness (outward conformity to the law), but there must be inner righteousness coming from a heart that is pure. The law itself is very convicting, but the law as interpreted by the Lord Jesus is even more so.

In Matthew 6: 21 the Lord Jesus mentions the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill (murder)!" Now a person could read this commandment and say, "When it comes to this commandment, I am righteous. I have never murdered anyone! I have never terminated the life of any human being! I have never broken this command! When it comes to the sixth commandment, I am perfectly innocent!"

The Lord, however, carries this command one step further. The outward act of murder is preceded by the inner act of anger and hatred (Matt. 5: 22). How many of us could say, "I have never hated anyone. I have never been angry with anyone. I have never wished that some person would disappear or drop dead"? Most of us, if we were honest, would have to plead guilty.

In Matthew 5: 27 we have another of the Ten Commandments. A married person could say, "I have never committed adultery. I may have thought about it, but I've never done it. I have not broken this commandment. I am righteous." But how many men have never committed spiritual adultery in their hearts (Matt. 5: 28)?

A missionary related a true incident that took place when he was an unsaved student in high school. For some reason, one of the students had a Bible in the cafeteria, even though he was not a Christian. The table was full of male high

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school students. The young man with the Bible had it opened to Matthew 5: 28 and he was showing it to everyone at the table. One of them made this very true observation: "This condemns everyone of us!" They were ready at that point for someone to come along with the gospel message! However, no believer was near the scene. Thankfully one of those students later heard the gospel from a godly campus missionary (Donald Fullerton) while a student at Princeton University, and passed from death unto life and dedicated his life to serving the Lord on the mission field.

It is one thing to love your neighbor (Matt. 5:43). That can be a challenging assignment even when you have a good neighbor. The old sinful nature is not inclined to love others; it is quite content to live selfishly and to ignore the interests and concerns of others. Here the Lord Jesus shocked his audience by commanding them to love even their enemies (Matt. 5:44), just as God is very kind to those who are His enemies (Matt. 5:45). How amazing it is that God loved us even when we were ungodly sinners (Rom. 5:6,8), and even when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:10)!

Doing the Right Thing for the Wrong Reason (Matthew 6:1-18)

In Matthew 6:1-18 we read about three kinds of good works: giving alms (giving to the poor and needy), praying, and fasting (putting aside food and physical necessities for a time so that a person can give himself to spiritual concerns).

These things are all good. There's nothing wrong with prayer or giving money or putting spiritual needs ahead of physical needs. But all of these things can be done for the wrong reason. It's not just what you do that counts, but why you do it! Why did the religious Jews do these things (see verse 5)? _____

A religious Jew might say, "I'm righteous because I pray and fast and give alms" (see Luke 18:9-12). The Lord not only sees what we do, but also He sees why we do it! Thus these people would have to honestly say, "I'm unrighteous because I have done the right thing for the wrong reason!"

The Single Eye (Matthew 6:22-23)

1. There is a concern that we have complicated the Christian life and we desperately need to get back to the simplicity that is in Christ. As one brother said, "God wants us to remain simple. Keep it simple. The believer is to have a simple faith in the Lord, a simple love for the Lord and a simple love for the Word of God and doing what is right." It's so easy to complicate things and lose that simplicity.

2. There is a concern that our lives have become so busy with so many things that

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we have lost our focus, and we have taken our eyes off the one thing that is most important. God wants us to have a single eye.

3. There is a concern that our devotion has been divided between the things of heaven and the things of earth, and often we are serving two or more masters. We want to serve the Lord, but in reality we are serving all kinds of other things, and He only has a fraction of our devotion. As the hymn says, "Rise up O Men of God, be done with lesser things, give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of Kings!"

Matthew 6:22—"The lamp of the body is the eye."

Picture yourself deep in the woods in a little cabin. It's nighttime, and completely dark; there is no electricity in the cabin, so you light a small oil lamp. The entire room is suddenly illuminated. Apart from that one lamp, there would be nothing but darkness.

The lamp of the body is the eye. The eye is the only channel of light we possess. Think of the room you are in right now. There is probably ample light, either from sunlight coming through the window or from artificial light. But in spite of all this light, natural and artificial, if it were not for our eyes, we would be in total darkness. The eye is the only channel of light we possess.

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23)

An evil eye is an eye that is not single. If we understand what "single" means then we will know what "evil" means. By definition, an evil eye is an eye that is not single.

What does this word single mean? The word basically means simple or single.

Trench says, "It would be quite impossible to improve on 'single' by which our translators have rendered it, because it comes from a verb haploo which means expand, or that which is spread out, and thus without folds or wrinkles."

Another Greek Lexicon says that the word means single, the opposite of diploos which means twofold. It doesn't mean double, it means single.

The single eye refers to single-minded devotion; single, undivided loyalty. The single eye refers to a single, fixed vision or goal, a singleness of purpose. The opposite of a single-eyed person is a double-minded person (James 1:8). The single eye is fixed on Christ alone, and thus the body is filled with light.

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Keep in mind, when we speak of a single eye, we are referring, not to our physical eye, but to the eye of the heart (compare Eph. 1:18).

The heart is the eye of the soul and that eye is to be single. God wants us to remain simple in faith and singular in focus.

This is illustrated by the context before and following. The Lord taught that where your treasure is, that is where your heart is (verse 19-21). Where is your heart? Where is your eye? What do you focus upon? What do you value the most?

He also taught that we cannot serve two masters (verse 24). A master demands your wholehearted devotion, your complete, undivided service. Two masters complicate everything. Compare Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22.

Consider 2 Corinthians 11:3. Paul was greatly concerned that what happened to Eve would happen to the Corinthians. How simple it was for Eve. Walk with God, enjoy God, obey God, delight herself in God.

How complex the devil made it. "Eve, God is keeping certain things from you. You're missing out on certain things. If you eat this fruit, your eyes can be opened and you'll be like God." He complicated the whole thing and took Eve away from that simple life that she had. The devil wants to do the same thing to us today.

Kelly Sensenig spoke of the simple life in this way:

The simple life is a life of sincere devotion or commitment to Christ. God wants His beloved and blood-bought children to live out a simple life of devotion and dedication of Christ and His truth. The simple life involves uncomplicated Christian living for Christ, which is free from hypocrisy and deceit. It's a life of sincerity and devotion directed toward Jesus Christ who is to be the Master of our lives. When we live the simple life we can remain singular in focus and keep things in proper perspective....We lose our spiritual equilibrium when we lose sight of what is most important or what really matters in life. Generally speaking, the simple uncomplicated things of life relate to such things as loving God (Mark 12:30), possessing faith in God (Mark 11:22), worshiping God (John 4:23-24; Ps. 5:1-3), walking with God (Gen. 5:22,24; 6:9; Psalm 42:1), sitting at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:39-42), maintaining proper distinctions and priorities in life (Matt. 6:24,33), forgetting the past (Phil. 3:13), living the Christ life (Phil. 1:21; 3:10,14), looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2), following Jesus (Luke 14:26), obeying God's Word (John 14:15; James 1:22-23), living a holy life (1 Pet. 1:14-15) and doing what is honorable in the Lord's sight (1 Cor. 10:31). In other words, God's people are to learn

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the secret of living according to God's basic plan and do what is right out of sincerity and genuineness.

"If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His Word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord."

An Olympic athlete has a single eye, a single focus. His eye is on one thing and one thing only. Suppose you were questioning an Olympic athlete:

Why do you lift weights? I'm going for the gold!
Why are you so careful about your diet? I'm going for the gold!
Why do you get up so early in the morning? I'm going for the gold!
Why do you train for hours a day, year after year? I'm going for the gold!
Why don't you do many of the things that young people your own age often do?
I'm going for the gold!

The athlete has a single eye.

What about the believer?

Why do you wake up early to have devotions? I'm going to please God!
Why do you open God's Word? I'm going to please God!
Why are you temperate in all things? I'm going to please God!
Why do you run the race and not turn to the left or to the right? I'm going to please God!
Why do you eat? Drink? Do whatever you do? I'm going to please God and do all to the glory of God!

The believer is to have a single eye, a single focus.

Worry (Matthew 6:25-34)

Someone might say, "I'm righteous because I believe in God." But in Matthew 6:25-34 the Lord Jesus taught about a problem that we all have. "If you really believe in God, then why do you worry? Do you really trust God?" What did Jesus say about their faith in verse 30? _____ How many of us could say, "I never have a problem with worry! All last year I never worried, not even once!" The Lord's teaching on worry is very convicting!

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To Judge or Not to Judge (Matthew 7:1-5)

Matthew 7:1

Judge not! Stop judging! Don't be judging! If you don't stop judging, then you will be judged. The one judging will be judged.

Matthew 7:2

Here is the principle: According to how you judge others is how you will be judged. This is a sobering principle. The standard of judgment you apply to others will be likewise applied to you. If you judge severely, you will be judged severely. If you judge without mercy, you will be judged without mercy. If you are quick to find faults in others, God will be quick to find faults in you.

Matthew 7:3

A "mote" is a speck, a small particle of wood or straw, a tiny bit of wood such as might fly into the eye.

A "beam" is a large plank of wood, a beam which supports the roof of a building. Obviously such a huge beam could never be lodged in a person's eye. The Lord gave an impossible (and somewhat funny) illustration to get across His point.

What was His point? We are so good at spotting little tiny faults in others, but we are so blind to the enormous faults of our own. I'm all concerned about that little splinter in my brother's eye, when I have a beam in my own eye that is hundreds of times bigger! Someone once said that faults are like headlights on a car; those of others always seem more glaring than our own.

Matthew 7:4

What a fool! Here he is trying to help his brother when he is the one in desperate need of help. What he should really do is call the telephone company and have them come and remove the beam out of his own eye so that they can then use it as a telephone pole!

Removing a speck or a tiny particle is a very delicate operation that requires clear sight. Would you want your eye doctor to operate on your eye if he had a 15 foot beam sticking out of his own eye? He would probably knock you out just trying to get close enough to you to help.

Matthew 7:5

Notice that God does want us to help our brother. He does want us to see the

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faults of others so that we may be able to help; however, but we need to be able to “see clearly.” Before we can help our brother, we must take care of our own problems. David was all concerned about a fault that another man had, but whose fault did he overlook (2 Samuel 12:1-7)? _____

The reason we can spot sin so easily in others is because we are so used to it in ourselves (Rom. 2:1). In condemning others we condemn ourselves because we do the very same things!

Grandpa was sleeping in his chair one day. His grandchildren found some very ancient, very putrid limburger cheese, and gently stroked some of it on Grandpa’s mustache. When Grandpa awoke he sniffed and grumbled, “This room stinks!” He went into the kitchen and said, “and the kitchen stinks.” He went outdoors and met Mr. Smith his neighbor and rudely remarked, “and you stink too!” Finally he shouted, “the whole world stinks.” The trouble, however, was right under Grandpa’s own nose. All he needed to do was “clean his own nose” and everything else would become sweet again. This is a good lesson for all who are sour, bitter, critical and faultfinding.

We are not to judge with a condemning attitude. We are not to hypocritically judge others while at the same time having enormous sins and faults of our own. We are not to judge with a “holier than thou” attitude, a self-righteous attitude that doesn’t try to help the other person, but which tries to make ourselves look better than the other person.

[Note: To say that believers should never judge and make discerning decisions is certainly not the teaching of this passage. Indeed, in this same chapter Christ taught that we are to make intelligent judgments with respect to whether or not a person is a false prophet (verses 15-20). We are to judge false prophets by their fruit. Numerous passages teach that believers need to make righteous judgments. See Romans 16:17; 1 John 4:1; 1 Cor. 6:1-6; etc.]

Being Fruit Inspectors (Matthew 7:15-20)

If a person claims to be an apple tree, then we have every right to say, “Show me your apples!” If he can never show any apples, then you might question whether he really is an apple tree.

Someone once said, “If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be any evidence to convict you?” Could a worn, well used Bible be brought forth as evidence? Could any person testify that you spoke to him about the Lord and were concerned for his soul?

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A Mere Profession or An Actual Possession? (Matthew 7:21-23)

There is a great difference between professing Christ and possessing Christ. The Bible makes a clear distinction between those who merely profess Christ and those who actually possess Christ! Not everyone who *claims* to be saved is really saved! Not everyone who "names the name of Christ" (2 Timothy 2:19) is really a Christian! Not everyone who *says* he is born again is truly born again!

Definitions: A person who professes Christ is a person who claims to be a Christian and says that he is a Christian. With his mouth he tells others that he is saved, but whether or not he is really saved is another question. A person who possesses Christ is a person who has truly received the Lord Jesus as Saviour (John 1:12) and this person is described in 1 John 5:12--"He that hath (has) the Son hath (has) life." Christ lives in this person's heart (Galatians 2:20--"Christ liveth in me").

The problem with the people in Matthew 7:21-23 is that they never had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Note His words, "I never knew you" (verse 23).

Notes for Further Study

Matthew 6:9-13. This is known as the Lord's prayer, but this label can be misleading. It was the prayer that the Lord taught to His disciples as a model prayer (they were to pray "after this manner," verse 9). It was not a prayer that Jesus prayed Himself. It is obvious that Jesus Himself could never have prayed the words in verse 12 (a sinless Man has no need to pray for forgiveness). If you want to read the Lord's prayer, that is, the prayer that the Lord prayed Himself, then see John chapter 17.

Matthew 6:14-15. The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount was to show the Jewish people the kind of righteousness that was required in order to enter the kingdom (see Matt. 5:20). An unforgiving spirit would indicate that the person was not qualified to enter the kingdom.

Matthew 7:6. If you share spiritual truth with the unsaved, it's of no profit and will not be appreciated or valued. This is because those who do not have the Spirit of God cannot understand spiritual truth (compare 1 Cor. 2:14). Obviously we should share gospel truth with the unsaved, as we have opportunity (Rom. 1:16). The structure of Matthew 7:6 is probably a chiasmus (inverse parallelism), meaning that it is the pigs that trample, and it is the dogs that tear.

Matthew 7:11. This is an important verse on the doctrine of human depravity. It teaches us that people are evil, even though they may do good things. Most

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people today think that because a person does good, he must be a good person. The Lord Jesus did not teach this. He taught that an evil person may do good things (be a good father, a good husband, lend a helping hand, etc.).

Matthew 7:12. The golden rule is actually a restatement of the second greatest commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." If you love your neighbor in this way, then what you want done to yourself, you will be willing to do for others. Notice the similarity between this verse and Matthew 22:39-40 with respect to the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:15-20. The following question was raised:

"A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit" (v.18). How do we understand this in light of the fact that a believer has two natures, and that believers do, at certain times, bring forth bad fruit (the works of the flesh, etc.). Even Reformed men who insist that a believer is totally transformed by regeneration and as a result has no old nature, even they would admit that believer can sin and does sin. Would not the sinning believer be an example of a good tree bringing forth bad fruit?

The following answer was supplied by James Ventilato:

15-But beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but within are ravening wolves. 16-By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather a bunch of grapes from thorns, or from thistles figs? 17-So every good tree produces good fruits [i.e., that which demonstrates that it is a good tree], but the worthless tree produces bad fruits [i.e., that which demonstrates that it is a worthless tree]. 18-A good tree cannot produce bad fruits [i.e., a good tree cannot produce that which would demonstrate it is a worthless tree], nor a worthless tree produce good fruits [i.e., a worthless tree cannot produce that which would demonstrate it is a good tree]. 19-Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. 20-By their fruits then surely ye shall know them.

Now keep in mind that in this particular passage our Lord is speaking specifically of "false prophets," who mislead, reveal false doctrine and prophecies, who point away from God and the truth. And by contrast and implication, He speaks of true prophets of God. But the principle of the passage, I believe, may be applicable to true believers and false professors in general.

With that in mind, let me restate the passage again:

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15-But beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but within are ravening wolves. 16-By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather a bunch of grapes from thorns, or from thistles figs? 17-So every good tree [every true prophet of God] produces good fruits [i.e., that which demonstrates that they are of God], but the worthless tree [the false prophet] produces bad fruits [i.e., that which demonstrates that he is not of God]. 18-A good tree [a true prophet of God] cannot produce bad fruits [i.e., a true prophet of God cannot produce that which would demonstrate he is not of God or that he is a false prophet], nor a worthless tree [a false prophet] produce good fruits [i.e., a false prophet cannot produce that which would demonstrate he is of God or that he is a true prophet of God]. 19-Every tree not producing good fruit [demonstrating that one is indeed of God] is cut down and cast into the fire. 20-By their fruits then surely ye shall know them.

I think the difficulty arises because we tend to think of the "fruits" (whether good or bad) as isolated or individual acts or works, when we should be seeing them, in this context, as signifying that which unequivocally demonstrates the real nature and source of the thing or person. As such, "bad fruits" does not refer merely to falling into sin by a believer, or imbibing or propounding some false doctrine by a believer (which, sadly, such things may and do occur in genuine believers).

In the case of a true believer vs. a false professor (as opposed to the narrower case of a true prophet of God and a false prophet), "bad fruits" or that which demonstrates that one is not of God, would include such things as wallowing in sin, being at ease and comfortable with sin, and apostasy from the faith. Any and all of which demonstrates that one is not of God. And "good fruits" are that which demonstrates that one is truly of God, which, among other things, would include being grieved by sin and repenting when we do fall into sin, and faith not perishing (that is, being kept by the power of God through faith).

Note, by the way, that in verse 11, just a few verses earlier, our Lord refers to His disciples as "evil" (recognizing their sinful nature which produces evil) and yet truly of God ("your Father who is in the heavens").