



The Sermon on the Mount

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Introduction

It seems to me that the records of the Sermon on the Mount, the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus need to be continually read and reflected upon by any who name the name of Jesus Christ. For here we have the essence of what it means to be Christian. The Sermon is the manifesto of the Lord Jesus to men; here we have in so few words what He really seeks from men and women. The more we ponder His words and seek to live them and feel them in both our mental and external lives, the more profound we realize them to be. And so in this production you have my ponderings from the last 30 years of reading, teaching and trying to live these words.

Despite having read the thoughts of many others on the Sermon, I remain unpersuaded that there is any particular structure which the Lord was following in His presentation. Rather do His thoughts seem to me to lead on naturally from theme to theme in a seamless and natural way. This is quite contrary to the strictures of form analysis which many expositors have sought to impose upon the Sermon. The model prayer is admittedly in a central position within the presentation. The significance of that becomes apparent once we perceive that the clauses of that prayer are to be connected with His teachings in the Sermon both before and after the prayer. I appreciate too the similarities with the Sermon recorded in Luke 6. which is a reduced version of the same basic manifesto. I have therefore taken Matthew 5-7 as the source text, quoting material from Luke where this is necessary.

The material which follows is basically an expansion of the notes I have worked from in giving various talks and series of talks about the Sermon. Video and audio recordings of some of those series, in both English and Russian, are available at www.heaster.org. I'm always open to debate, correction and discussion. Feel free to be in contact. But far beyond the specifics of interpretation of this particular phrase or that specific verse, my prayer and hope is that we as author and reader may together live the life which is and ever was Jesus Christ, and continue to live that life eternally with Him in the final establishment of His Kingdom upon earth.

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 5

5:1 *The mountain*- The article suggests a specific one in mind- perhaps the great mountain Jesus had in mind in 4:8? Jesus taught up a mountain, suggesting that His teaching is accessible to those who make some effort to receive it. The Sermon on the Mount is the equivalent of the giving of the Law, also on a mountain. As God / the Angel gave the law to Moses, so Jesus did to the disciples. The disciples ascending the mount to receive the teaching parallels them with Moses, with the implication they too were to relay it to Israel. Instead of the people being forbidden to come up the mountain, they were allowed to- for by the end of the Sermon we learn that the multitudes were also there (7:28,29) and descended from the mountain (8:1). The Rabbis also *sat* to teach- but they taught always indoors. The similarities and differences are being emphasized to demonstrate how Jesus was in continuity with Jewish culture and yet also radically different. The scene of Ex. 20 is of Moses ascending the mount to receive the Law, the first part of which was the ten commandments. The beatitudes seem to be the New Covenant's equivalent of the ten commandments- see on 5:22. The Lord's sermon quotes or alludes to all of the ten commandments (excluding the Sabbath) and redefines them (5:21,27). The way the Lord makes no comment upon the command to keep the Sabbath is surely significant. Simplistically, one could argue that He was suggesting that His followers would not be bound by the Sabbath commandment. But it was well understood in the first century that priests on duty were free from the Sabbath legislation. The hint could therefore be that the Lord believed that because His obedient listeners were to live their lives as the new priesthood, they were therefore free from Sabbath legislation. The Lord was surely very conscious that John had come to prepare the way for Him, in terms of Isaiah 40. And yet that same prophecy saw the good news being declared to Jerusalem from a mountain (Is. 40:9). Perhaps the Lord was seeking to consciously fulfil this by going up a mountain and proclaiming blessedness and good news to spiritual Jerusalem.

5:2 *Opened His mouth*- As if this struck Matthew, recalling how this manifesto of His teaching first fell from His lips. There may be the implication that what He said was by direct revelation from God.

5:3- see on Mt. 5:43.

Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon, waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

5:4 *Mourn*- Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). The time of God's grace was extended, therefore, to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

Comforted- We noted in chapter 4 that the Lord had in mind the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of comfort to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

5:5 *The meek*- Those humbled by their sins. James, in his commentary on the Sermon, alludes here by saying that God gives grace to the meek, and therefore sinners should cleanse themselves (James 4:6,8-10).

Inherit the earth- Clearly a reference to the promises to Abraham. But it was no good just being a physical descendant of Abraham- humility was the required characteristic. To the Lord, humility was the very *epitome* of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29), as Malachi saw pride as the epitome of wickedness (see the parallelism in Mal. 4:1). There is a telling parallelism in Zeph. 2:3 which equates Yahweh God of Israel with humility: "Seek ye Yahweh... seek meekness".

5:6 Notice how some of the Lord's very first words on opening His ministry were "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.

Thirst after righteousness- The characteristics of the 'blessed' in the first four beatitudes are that they will be spiritually poor (:3), mourning (often used in connection with contrition for sin), humbled, and thirsting to be more righteous than they are. "Righteousness" could mean 'justice' but the term is used by Paul to specifically refer to 'justification from sin'. These descriptions immediately give us all the encouragement that this message of the Kingdom is for me, even me. The next blessing is for the merciful, the forgiving, because they shall obtain mercy- i.e. final cleansing from sin and justification on judgment day. Although of course this is possible even now. See on 5:9 *peacemakers* and on 6:12.

Be filled- S.w. Mt. 14:20 about the 'filling' of the multitude who came to hear the word of Jesus. All the Kingdom blessings have some fulfilment in this life. John's version of this is the record of the Lord saying that the salvation He provides would satisfy those who hungered and thirsted for it (Jn. 6:35).

5:7 Mt. 5:7 = 2 Tim. 1:16. Paul saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

Blessed are the merciful- This is apparently missing in Luke's record. He says instead that the reviled and excluded will be blessed (Lk. 6:22). Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 75 suggests another original text actually read "Happy are they who are excommunicated for they shall receive mercy". There's a clear connection with Ps. 18:25: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With the perfect man, you will show yourself perfect". This verse was clearly in the Lord's mind, and it may shed light on His later challenge to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)- in this case, He would be inviting us to forgive others as God does.

5:8 *Pure in heart*- Heb. *bare lev*, also translated 'broken hearted' in Is. 61:1. A pure heart can also be understood in the context of what happens on repentance and receipt of forgiveness, for Ps. 51:10 uses the term to describe David's position after his repentance and forgiveness (also in Ps. 73:13).

See God- Again the Lord is encouraging the disciples whom He was addressing to see themselves as Moses (see on 5:1), for Moses was held in Judaism as the only one who had seen God (Ex. 33:11).

5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers*- Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 77 suggests another original text actually read "Blessed are they that stumble", and this would fit with our suggestion made on 5:6 that the 'happy' people are those who are spiritually weak but are accepted and forgiven. However, the reference may be to the priesthood, with whom God made a covenant of peace, that they might bring Israel to peace with Him (Num. 25:12; Mal. 2:6). Just as the Lord encouraged the disciples to see themselves as Moses, so He inspires them with the thought that they, the nothing special, secular Jews, could and would take over the work of the priesthood. Rabbi Hillel "exhorted his students to become disciples of Aaron, 'peacelovers and peacemakers' (mAb1:12)" (As quoted in Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 314).

5:10 *Persecute* - 'to drive away' (s.w. Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus. There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as often in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

5:11 Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward... for so persecuted they the prophets" . These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel (Mt. 5:11).

Revile- Quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. Verses 10 and 11 seem to imply that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised.

5:12- see on Mt. 5:7. When Corinth reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Mt. 5:12.

The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Sermon- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

5:13 *The salt of the earth*- Salt inevitably affects, by reason of *what it is*, whatever is next to it. We are lights in a dark world. Lights give light. If the salt doesn't have the influence of salt, it is thrown away. Our poor

record of preaching by personal contact is very worrying when seen in this light. We have hidden behind leaflets and press adverts and giving money. But if we aren't the salt, if we don't show *our* light in our little world; are we in fact the salt or the light of the earth? This unconscious spirituality, this natural witnessing, is the essential reflection of our experience of the Lord Jesus. He didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father.

One characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. We are mistaken if we assume that all those people out there are just waiting for us to come to them with a series of true doctrinal propositions. Virtually nobody is seriously interested- until they meet you and me. We need to create some sort of realization of need in those we mix with. Through our examples and through the way we make our initial approaches to them, we need to plug in to that basic human hunger for their creator. Plenty of other religions do just this- and we ought to be far more 'in there' than many of us are. The language seems to suggest that unless we are not influencing others, then we will be condemned. As in 4:19, the Lord seems to be teaching that some form of outgoing effect upon others, if not evangelism, is part and parcel of following Him. The parable of the light under the bucket in 5:15 teaches the same.

We *are* the salt of the earth. The Lord doesn't say that we ought to be the salt of the earth, or should try to be. Salt with no flavour or influence is pointless, worthless, untrue to what it is intended to be, displeasing to its user, fit only to be thrown out; and so are we, if we fail to witness to others (Lk. 14:35). Likewise, we *are* the light of the world. By the very nature of who we are as in Christ, we are to influence the world around us. We don't just hold the light in our hands; *we* are the light, our whole being, every moment we live. Preaching the light is not therefore something which we occasionally do. Sodium chloride (salt) is inert, meaning it remains unchanged by processes acting upon it and retains its characteristics through whatever. In the same way as the believer is the city set on a hill which cannot be hid, the man who builds on rock, the good tree that must bring forth good fruit, so the Lord seems to be saying again that the essential direction of a believer's life is clear. God sees as either His people or not, and there is no grey area. We don't drop in and out of fellowship with Him. And this should be a comfort to us. We are His. Any salt that lost its saltiness was not true salt, but some imitation (at the time, gypsum was sold by rogue salt traders as salt) or just something which appeared like salt- there is some 'salt' from the Dead Sea area which may have been in the Lord's mind. But the point was, that it was not true salt from the start. The covenant of salt was given to Aaron (Num. 18:19)- so yet again, the Lord is encouraging those secular men to see themselves as a new priesthood.

The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, revolves around "us" [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers not only with "the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

The beatitudes were spoken generally of all believers, but "You are the salt of the earth" was spoken specifically to the disciples. We can understand the 'earth' as the land- of Israel. The Lord pinned His hopes for the whole land of Israel on that band of rather unlikely men, most of them secular, non-religious Jews. It was in their power to change and prepare the whole land for Him. The very metaphor of salt was well chosen- for salt was cheap and common. It was by their very earthliness and humanity that their mission was to succeed, just as was the case for the Lord Himself.

Good- The idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. Lk. 14:34 carries the same idea- if salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use.

Cast out- The same phrase is used about the rejection of the wicked at the last day (Mt. 13:48; Jn. 15:6). The 'treading underfoot by men' would then refer to the faithful having some part to play in the condemnation of the wicked. The idiom may mean that they will be despised by them. Or there could be a literal element to it (Mal. 4:3 "the wicked shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in that day"). It is not for us to thus judge others *now* because we are to do so *then*.

5:14 *A city set on a hill-* The reference is surely to Jerusalem, which was known as the city set on a hill (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: S.P.C.K., 2001) p. 289). The connection between this city and "the light of the world" is clearly drawing from Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem being a light to which the true Israel would rally and the Gentile world would come for enlightenment about the true God (Ps. 132:17 cp. 1 Kings 11:34-36; Is. 2:2; 60:1; 66:20). Jerusalem was the classic external symbol of Israel and Judaism- and the Lord is saying that His largely non-religious, secular Jewish disciples were to be the true Zion for the enlightenment of both Israel and the world. This is similar to His invitation for them to see themselves as Moses, who alone "saw God", and sharing in the persecutions of the prophets. This high calling echoes down to us- we who like to think that we are not amongst God's great heroes, and who prefer to leave the dramatic acts of faith to our leaders and high profile members. But the calling is to each of us, to be of no less significance than them, not to hide behind the grand religious symbols of faith such as the temple and the city of Jerusalem- but to be those things in daily life. Judaism understood the Levitical priesthood as the light of the Jewish and Gentile worlds. The Testament of Levi 14:3 claimed of the priesthood: "For as the heaven is purer in the Lord's sight than the earth, so also be ye, the lights of Israel, (purer) than all the Gentiles [or in another manuscript "ye who are the lights of Israel, shall be as the sun and moon"]". And yet as so often in the Sermon, the Lord applies the language of priesthood to his secular, spiritually poor listeners.

Be hid- Again there appears the idea that if we hide who we are from others, then we are not really Christian. A city on a hill cannot possibly be covered. It is totally public. There must be an element about our discipleship which is likewise absolutely open and obvious to the world. When the Lord returns, it would be strange indeed if our neighbours were shocked to know that we were actually one of His people. The same word is used about the man who 'hid' the talent of the Gospel (Mt. 25:25). The relevance of this emphasis in the first century world was that it was apparently easier to merely quietly assent to Christian teaching, rather than come out in the open about it. The same word is used of how Joseph of Arimathea 'secretly', hiddenly, believed, for fear of the Jews (Jn. 19:38). But in the end, he 'came out', as we all are lead to do by providential circumstance and our own growing conviction of Christ.

All those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise “could not be hid” in His preaching (Lk. 7:24). He was the light of the world, and so are we. In the work of witness, we find ourselves especially united to Him. We are Him to this world, and in a sense, He only shines in this world through us. Witnessing is in a sense for our benefit. Perhaps in answer to the unspoken question 'How can we avoid losing our saltiness?', the Lord replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. The city set on a hill is specifically spoken as being Nazareth, where the Lord had grown up (Lk. 4:29). Jesus must've seen the town from the distance and thought out His teaching over the years before He now publically stated it.

5:15 *Light*- The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The candlestick - The article refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood.

The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing

that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

5:16 *Before men*- These are those "in the house[hold]" (:15), "those who enter" (Lk. 8:16; 11:33). The general public does not seem to glorify God because of good works. 2 Cor. 9:2 seems to understand the verse as meaning that we give light and opportunity for praise to other believers. Paul writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise. I don't mean, of course, in the proud manner of many charity donors, trying to outshine each other before the public's gaze by their 'generosity'. I mean that in the graces of forgiveness, kindness in a myriad modest ways, that we see performed by others, we will find *our* motivation to do likewise. For rightly-performed good works are a light to the world; perhaps it is their very modesty which makes them "*shine* before men". So in this sense we will perceive others' acts of grace and be inspired by them, no matter how discreetly and modestly done they are. For they inevitably shine in a way that gives light to all who are in the (ecclesial) house, so that they too glorify the Father (Mt. 5:16).

It could be that the "men" who glorify God in Heaven are the Angels- the same "men" who lit our candle in the first place (:15). "Men" in the parables who do the 'gathering' of our fruits (Jn. 15:6; Mt. 7:16) represent Angels, who are the ones who will actually do the gathering at the last day (Mt. 13:41; 24:31). This seems to make most sense, and avoids the idea of our doing good works specifically in order to impress men. And men do not glorify God just because they see our good works. But Angels, who lit our candle in the first place, notice how our light is shining out to others "in the house", and glorify God in Heaven ["*is* in Heaven" is unjustified- the idea is that they glorify the Father, in Heaven]. In this interpretation, the "men" are different to those who are "in the house".

5:17 *Fulfill*- The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was "fulfilled". Then, it was "accomplished" (:18), and *ginomai* there is usually used about events being accomplished; the supreme event in view is the cross. The Lord taught that He "came" in order to die; and yet He also "came" in order to "fulfil" the Law (Mt. 5:17). Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself. The Law of Moses was intended to create a perfect man- if it were to be totally obeyed. The Lord Jesus did this- and therefore there was no more need for the Law. Yet the Beatitudes were addressed to those who hungered to be righteous, and who were spiritually poor, having broken God's laws. It was therefore in this context that the Lord Jesus sets before those very people the ultimate good news- that He has come determined to succeed in perfect obedience to the Law, and thus fulfilling it, He would remove its binding nature upon others. Hence the Law was added *until* the Seed should come (Gal. 3:19). This conclusion (in broad terms) was also arrived at by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: S.C.M., 2001 ed.) pp. 74-76. The Lord's total obedience and fulfilling of the Law is therefore further good news for we who have failed both historically and in present life to keep it.

5:18 *Jot... tittle*- Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition

mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed".

5:19 *These least commandments*- See on 'jot and tittle' (:18). Note the connection between breaking "these least commandments" and being "least in the Kingdom". The least in the Kingdom will therefore be those who didn't consider the small things worthy of their attention. But the principle is that by our attitude to that which is "least" we show our appropriacy to receive that which is great (Lk. 16:10 s.w.).

And taught - The Lord explained that "the least in the Kingdom of Heaven" would have broken "the least" commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet "the least in the Kingdom" was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the Kingdom (Mt. 11:11; 25:40 "the least of these my brothers"). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding ('teaching men so'). The idea of being called / named / pronounced great or least in the Kingdom suggests differing degrees of reward distributed at judgment day. The idea of being called / named at the day of judgment has just been used in Mt. 5:9 (s.w.). There is thus the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

Called least- The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

Called great- It is Jesus Himself who shall be called great (the same two words used in Lk. 1:32 "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest"). The one who would do and teach supremely would be Jesus. Here, as so often, the Lord makes an oblique reference to Himself (as in mentioning that some seed would bring forth one hundred fold). The fact we teach others to do righteousness will be a factor in our acceptance (Mt. 5:19); although not the only one. Again we see the implication that we are to somehow teach others, to engage with others, in order to be acceptable.

5:20 He asks us to *exceed* the “righteousness” of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). By “righteousness” he refers to their charity, for which they were well known. In addition to tithing ten percent of absolutely everything, they gave a fifth of their income to charity such as widows, orphans, newly-wedded couples etc. In addition they made anonymous gifts in a “quiet room” of the Temple. How does our giving compare to that? And the Lord challenges us that unless we *exceed* that, “ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”. Radical, challenging words- that are hard to re-interpret or get around. And yet surely the answer is that super-abounding (AV 'exceeding') righteousness is only attainable by being justified / counted righteous in Christ. The Lord's challenging statement was surely in order to lead us to the same conclusions reached in Romans 1-8 about being counted righteous when we have no righteousness of our own. For to super-abundantly exceed the technical, points-scoring righteousness of the Pharisees was well nigh impossible.

Enter the Kingdom- A very common idea in the Lord's teaching. But He understood people to be 'entering' the Kingdom right now ("them that are entering", Mt. 23:13). In the same way as judgment is ongoing now, so is condemnation and entry into the Kingdom.

5:21 *You have heard-* Jesus was addressing the illiterate poor. Elsewhere, to the educated and literate, He says that they are aware that "It is *written*". Here He quotes both one of the ten commandments and also the tradition of the elders. We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or “mighty” in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: “Have you not *read*?” (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: “You have *heard*” (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of ‘teachers’ in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

5:21-24 We are all brothers and sisters, each of us adopted into the Divine family, each of us freed slaves, rejoicing in that pure grace. Most times the NT speaks of ‘brothers’, it is in the context of tensions between people (see Mt. 5:21-24, 43-48; 7:1-5; 18:15-35). We can't separate ourselves from our brethren any more than we can from our natural families. Once a brother, we are always a brother. No matter what disappointments and disagreements we may have, we are baptized into not only the Lord Jesus personally, but also into a never ending relationship with each other. We cannot walk away from it.

5:22 *But I say...* Having quoted one of the ten commandments, Jesus implies that His teaching now supercedes them. See on 5:1.

Without a cause- the Greek is always translated elsewhere 'vainly', the idea being 'in vain', 'without an effect'. Anger which doesn't achieve anything positive is wrong. God's anger is creative- e.g. the 'anger' of His judgment through the flood brought about the salvation of the faithful. Anger therefore is not in itself wrong. The motives are all important.

Raca- One of the major themes of the Lord's teaching in the sermon on the mount was the need to respect others; to see the value and meaning of persons. Indeed, it can rightly be said that all sin depersonalizes another person. Sin is almost always against persons. Relentlessly, ruthlessly, the Lord drives deeper, and yet deeper, into the very texture of human personality in demanding that, e.g., we are not even angry with others,

lest we effectively murder them. To say "Raca" to your brother was to commit sin worthy of serious judgment, He taught (Mt. 5:22). "Ra-ca" was the sound made when a man cleared his throat to spit, and it was a term of abuse in earlier Semitic languages. To despise your brother, to disregard his importance as a person, was to be seen as an ultimate sin. In this light we should seek to avoid the many terms of abuse which are so common today: "a right idiot" etc. The Law taught that one should not curse a deaf person. Think what this really means. Surely the essence of it is that we should never be abusive, in any form, to or about anyone, even if it is sure that they will never know or feel our abuse.

Fool- His standards were sometimes unbelievably high. Whoever called his brother a fool (Gk. *more-a* moron, but implying a rebel, an apostate- Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23 LXX) was liable to eternal condemnation by Him. John Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-culture* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003, p.84) claims that the Greek may directly transliterate the Hebrew word *mara* (a rebel or apostate). The fact that calling our brother a 'fool' warrants definite condemnation surely implies of itself that the term meant that the fool would be condemned at judgment day. If we condemn others, even if they are to be condemned, then we shall be condemned. That is the Lord's message. We must remember that in Hebrew thought, to pronounce a curse upon a person was seen as highly meaningful and likely to come about. To declare someone as condemned at the future judgment seat would therefore have had a huge psychological effect upon the person. They would have felt that they really would be condemned. The evil practice of disfellowshipping individuals, implying implicitly and at times explicitly that they have no place in the body of Christ, can have the same effect.

Lev. 19:16-18: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people... thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise (frankly, NIV) rebuke thy neighbour... thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge... but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". The fact this passage is expanded upon so many times in Proverbs would indicate that gossip was as major a problem among the old Israel as it is among the new. But notice the fine psychology of the Spirit here: gossip in the church is related to having a grudge, to hating your neighbour in your heart, to not loving your neighbour as you love yourself (and we are *very* conservative about our own failings). When the Lord spoke about hating your brother being the same as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15), he may well have been thinking of this passage in Leviticus. To hate your brother in your heart, to gossip about him, was and is as bad as murdering him. And this same connection between gossip and murder is made in the prophets (Ez. 22:9 cp. Prov. 26:22). But the Law provided a way out. If you had something against your brother, frankly tell him about his failure, *so that* you would not hate him in your heart. If we don't do this, or try to get someone else to do it, we will end up hating our brother in our heart and we will gossip about him.

In danger of- The Greek doesn't imply a mere possibility, but rather, that such a person will receive the threatened judgment.

The judgment... the council... hell fire- "The council" refers to the Sanhedrin; but you didn't come before them for muttering 'Raca'. The Lord surely meant that such would come before the Heavenly council, of Angels. For this was a well known, Old Testament based idea- that there is a Heavenly council of Angels. And Christ will come with the Angels with Him to judge us. So the rejected will first come before the Lord, then the Angelic council, and then condemnation. It could be argued that calling a brother 'Raca' and being angry at him without a cause would lead to discussion about this at the day of judgment; but not condemnation ['hell fire', Gehenna]. Only pronouncing a brother a 'fool' , i.e. positively condemned and not to enter God's Kingdom, would lead to that condemnation. There appears to be a three stage progression here from judgment / discussion to council (Gk. *sanhedrin*), to condemnation in Gehenna. It could be that the three

ideas are all parallel. But it's tempting to see them rather as a progression, and to note the similarity with the three stage progression of Mt. 18:15-17, where in case of interpersonal conflict there was firstly a private reasoning with the brother, then bringing the church together to discuss the case (cp. the Sanhedrin), and then treating the person as a sinner. However, the surrounding context of Mt. 18:15-17 suggests to me that the Lord spoke all that tongue in cheek and did not intend it to be obeyed literally. For the question of the context is 'If my brother sins against me'. The Lord outlines the three step scenario- and then says that if your brother sins against you, forgive him 70 x 7, that is, even if his repentance seems less than credible, without seeking to test the legitimacy of his repentance. The three stage process was well known in Judaism, and the connection with Mt. 5:22 shows that in the Lord's thinking, it was an attempt to reflect the judgment and condemnation of God in the community of believers today. And that is precisely what the Lord implores us *not* to do (especially in Mt. 7:1). *We* are not to attempt to mimic Heaven's judgment and condemnation in our encounter with our brethren in this life. There are churches and groups who seek to follow Mt. 18:15-17 to the letter, claiming they are being Biblical in their approach. But some more research would indicate that perhaps by doing so they are doing exactly what the Lord did not want us to do, and by doing so may be placing themselves in danger of condemnation.

Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will be justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'Thou fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

5:23 I'd always read this, or perhaps glanced over it, as saying that I shouldn't offer my gift on the altar if *I* had something against my brother, but I should reconcile with him; but seeing *I* have nothing against anyone, well I can just go on in serving the Lord. There may be others who have a problem with me, but then, that is for them to sort out with me. But no. The Lord is saying: 'If your brother has something *against you*; if the fault is *his*... then *you* take the initiative and try to reconcile it, before doing anything else'.

Therefore- The link with :22 is not immediately apparent. The idea seems to be that we should reconcile with our brother in order to avoid the temptation to unwarranted anger with our brother, muttering 'raca' about him, or pronouncing him a condemned fool. If we are unreconciled, even if the situation is our brother's fault because *he* has something against *us*, then we are liable to the temptation to become wrongly aggressive and condemnatory towards him. And this is a significant part of spiritual life- getting ourselves into an environment of thought and situation with others where temptation will not press so strongly upon us. It's easy to leave situations unreconciled, but time does not actually heal them, and the situations lead to temptations towards aggression and judgmental attitudes which may lead to our condemnation.

5:24 Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God with our sacrifices (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all go*

through that process, whether in one night or a longer period. Reconciliation with our brother is required before acceptably meeting God. And yet many if not most die unreconciled with someone. This is one window onto the necessity of the judgment seat- it is for our benefit rather than the Lord's. There we will become reconciled to our brethren as we observe their judgments, realizing why they were as they were, and perceiving our own desperate need for grace. The tough alternative to this suggestion is that those who refuse to reconcile with their brethren in this life shall not therefore meet the Lord acceptably. Now we perhaps understand better what Paul meant when he urged us "as much as lies in *you*" to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18). Given that Christ can come at any moment, or our lives end, there is an urgency in all this. Which lead the Lord to urge us to reconcile "quickly" with our brother at any cost (:25). See on :25 *lest at any time*.

Leave there your gift- The only Old Testament case of an interrupted sacrifice was Cain and Abel. Yahweh told Cain that if he would 'do well', then his sacrifice would be accepted, and Yahweh appears to suggest an animal for Cain to offer (Gen. 4:7)- on this basis I would suggest that the sacrificial meeting was interrupted by Cain murdering Abel. The Lord also may have in view the way that a thief or deceiver could repent by putting things right with his brother *and then* offering a sacrifice (Lev. 6:4-6). The Lord is assuming that we are guilty- and this is part of the hyperbole. If you have a relationship breakdown with your brother, then you are guilty. That's the hyperbole; we are not always guilty, but the Lord is making the point that we simply must do all within our power to reconcile, with a sense of pounding urgency. Refusal to talk to our brethren is absolutely not the right way. The Lord also surely has in mind the teaching that the sacrifice of the wicked is unacceptable (Prov. 15:8; 21:27). Again the hyperbolic point is that we should act as if we are the guilty party in the case of relationship breakdown, and act with urgency to put things right. For time never heals in these cases- the longer the situation continues, the harder it is to ever resolve. Perhaps in turn Paul alludes to these things by urging us to examine ourselves (and his context is to examine our attitude to our brother) before we make the sacrifice at the Lord's table in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:27,28)- 'the Lord's table' was another way of speaking about the altar, thus making the breaking of bread meeting the equivalent of offering sacrifice under the Old Covenant.

5:25- see on Lk. 6:47; Rev. 14:10.

Adversary- The context of the preceding verses imply this is our brother. The Lord recognized there would be satans and personal adversaries within His ecclesia.

Quickly- We must agree with our adversary quickly, for we are on our way to judgment (Mt. 5:25). The call of the Gospel is effectively a call to go to judgment. If we truly perceive this, and our coming need for the utmost grace, we will settle our differences with our brethren- "quickly". The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). This urgency of our approach to preaching is in harmony with the generally urgent call to spiritual life which there is everywhere in the Lord's teaching. He gives the impression that we are living life on a knife edge. He saw men as rushing to their destruction. We are the accused man on the steps of the court, whose case is hopeless. Now is the very last moment for him to settle up with his brother (Mt. 5:25 cp. Lk. 12:58). We're like the unjust steward, with a knife at our throat because all our deceptions have been busted. *Everything* is at risk for the guy. Life in prison, goodbye to wife and kids, poverty... stretch out before him. He *must* get right with his brethren by forgiving them their debts. We can't come before God with our offering, i.e. our request for forgiveness, if our brother has any complaint against us regarding unforgiveness (Mt. 5:23). Forgiving each other is as important as that. As we judge, so we will be judged. Our attitude to the least of the Lord's brethren is our

attitude to Him. There are likely no readers who don't need this exhortation- to ensure that they have genuinely forgiven all their brethren, and that so far as lies within them, they are at peace with all men. At any moment the bridegroom may return... so have your lamp burning well, i.e. be spiritually aware and filled with the Spirit. Put on your wedding garment, the righteousness of Jesus, before it's too late (Mt. 22:11-13). He's just about to come. The judge stands before our door, as James puts it.

While you are in the way- The Lord seems to have in mind Joseph's admonition to his brothers to not fall out whilst in the way together, but to abide under the deep impression of his grace towards them (Gen. 45:24).

Lest at any time- The idea seems to be 'In case he...', or even perhaps stronger, implying 'because he will...'. Surveying the NT usage of the term, it generally seems to imply that 'this will be the case'. The idea is that if you have an adversary and do not reconcile with him, then you will be found guilty. The facts of the case don't come into it- if you are unreconciled, then you are guilty. Thus hyperbole is to reinforce the point made in :24- that reconciliation is so vital. There is of course the unspoken rider, that we must be reconciled "as much as lies in you" (Rom. 12:18). Paul died apparently unreconciled to many brethren- they in Asia had turned away from him personally (note the irony, that they 'turned away'; (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26)), although some of the believers in Asia are addressed positively by the Lord Jesus in the letters of Rev. 2 and 3. But the point of the Lord's hyperbole is that those unreconciled to their brethren will be tempted to get into aggressive and condemnatory attitudes which may well lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom. And therefore He uses this hyperbole- that the unreconciled will be certainly found guilty and condemned, simply because they are unreconciled and have adversaries amongst their brethren.

Deliver you- The implication is that our brother has the power to deliver us to judgment, or not. Again we see how reconciliation is a choice; it is in our power to bring our brother to judgment for certain things, and that process might even lead to his condemnation. But, the metaphor implies, we can *not* be adversarial, reconcile, and therefore our brother will not come to judgment for being unreconciled with us.

Judge... officer... prison- There will be degrees of punishment. For some, the judge will pass them to the officer, who will cast them into prison (i.e. condemnation). For others, the judgment will pass them to the council and from there to hell fire (Mt. 5:21-25). Although the wages of sin will still be death at the judgment, it will be a "sorer punishment" for those under the New Covenant than those under the Old. Because there are, in some way, degrees of sin, there must also be degrees of punishment (2 Chron. 28:13,22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 5:18 note "according to thy estimation"; Judas had a "greater sin" than Pilate, Jn. 19:11). The punishment of the wicked at judgment will somehow take this into account. If the rejected are destroyed together (Mt. 13:30) and yet there are varying degrees of punishment, it follows that the punishment must be on a mental level; and "gnashing of teeth" certainly fits in with this suggestion. The progression judge-officer-prison is similar to judgment-council-Gehenna condemnation in :22. I suggested that this may refer to the stages of the judgment process for the condemned at the last day, with unresolved sin being passed further on to others [Angels?] to consider. I suggested also that perhaps judgment and council may refer to unresolved sins being referred to more serious processes of judgment, out of which we may still emerge 'saved', but have eternally learnt our lesson. The same idea may be here- and even the final 'prison' can be exited, although at great cost to us (although on the other hand, a similar metaphor is used in Mt. 18:34 for the unforgiving debtor who is cast into prison and tormented "until he should pay all that was due". This could be speaking of condemnation). These metaphors may all be speaking about the learning process through which the unreconciled may have to pass at judgment day.

The sense that the day is drawing near should find expression in the love and care we show towards our brethren. The Lord exhorts to agree with our adversary quickly, whilst we are on the way to judgment- and He says this in the context of warning us to be reconciled with our brother (Mt. 5:23,25). In the light of approaching judgment there is an urgency about our need for reconciliation both with our brother and thereby with God (is He the "adversary" in the parable?). See on Lk. 12:57. All this talk about reconciliation is placed in the Lord's opening manifesto of His fundamental values and beliefs. It should have the same prominence in our thinking and action.

5:27 Said by them of old time- The Lord seems to avoid saying 'By Moses'. He seems to be stressing that the ten commandments had come down to them in oral form; and He was standing before them actually telling them new commandments. The contrast is 'They said... but I say', rather than 'Moses wrote, but I write...'

5:27-30 This is an allusion to Job. The Lord says that looking on a woman lustfully was the same as actually performing the sin, albeit within the man's heart. This is the language of Job 31:1: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?". Job recognized that if he did so, this would be the same as actually committing the deed. He says he will not look lustfully on a maid because "Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the *workers* of iniquity?" (31:3). Thus Job's understanding that a lustful look in the heart was working iniquity was at the basis of Christ's teaching.

5:28 Looks upon a woman- Bathsheba was "very beautiful to *look upon*" (2 Sam. 11:2). And David did just that. Our Lord surely had his eye on that passage when he spoke about him that "*looketh on* a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already" (Mt. 5:28). Jubilees 4:15,22, a commonly known book in Judaism at the Lord's time, claimed that the sons of God of Gen 6.2 were Angels who fell because they lusted with their eyes after "the daughters of men". As so often in the Bible, wrong ideas are alluded to and corrected. It was not that Angels sinned by lustful looks leading to adultery- this language is reapplied to us as humans.

To lust- Gk. 'to set the heart upon'. The Lord is not speaking about involuntary turning of the eyes to simply look at a woman.

Already- Gk. 'even now'. The suggestion is that the adultery is going to happen in real physical terms, but it happened before God at the time of fantasizing it. It seems to me that the sense of the Greek here implies that an act of actually physically committed fornication will always begin with lust for the act in the heart. This is not to say that sexual fantasy is OK and only actually performing it is sinful. But the sense of 'even now' would appear to mean that this is not what the Lord is teaching here. He is saying that acts of fornication are actually committed ahead of the act- within the human heart. Sexual fantasy about forbidden partners would surely be outlawed by the many NT commands about spiritual mindedness- e.g. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

5:29 Offend- To make to stumble, not to give umbrage. The eye must surely be understood in the context of :28. It could be that the Lord specifically has sexual sin in mind. It is His form of "Flee fornication". Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28.

Pluck it out- The Greek word is every other time translated to save or deliver.

Cast it - The Lord taught that we should cut off those parts of our lives that offend us, and "cast it [away] from you"- because in the end, the whole body of the wicked person will be "cast [away] into hell" (Mt. 5:29-

the same Greek word is used in both places in this same verse). What He's saying surely is that we must recognize those parts of our lives which are worthy of condemnation, and *we* must condemn them now in this life, dissociating our spiritual self from our carnal self as Paul does in Rom. 7- for this is the meaning of the figure of 'casting away'. He has just used the term in 5:13,25, and it is so often used to mean 'cast to condemnation' elsewhere too (Mt. 3:10; 7:19; 13:42,50; 18:30; Lk. 12:49; Jn. 15:6). We are to "cast out" the parts of our lives which offend us, and if we don't, we will be "cast" into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 5:29,30). The word play on "cast" is obviously intentional; the Lord clearly has the idea that we are to self-condemn those things in our lives which are sinful and worthy of condemnation. If we don't, then we will be 'cast out' in our entirety at judgment day. Sin is to be condemned; we either condemn ourselves for it now, or we will be condemned for it then.

Perish- The idea of self condemnation is continued here. If we literally cut off part of our body, it perishes. If we do not, then the whole body will perish in Gehenna, the condemnation of the last day. For God is able to destroy [s.w. to perish] the body in Gehenna (Mt. 10:28). So we are to make perish those parts of our lives which make us sin- i.e. we are to condemn them.

5:30- see on Mt. 7:19.

Right hand- Not just 'your hand'. The right hand was a Hebrew idiom for the power, the thinking, the dominant desire of a man. If it's all taking us the wrong way, we must cut it off- and cast it from us, with no regrets about what we have given up.

Cut it off- Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women. Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work... yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has. He invites the zealous saint to cut off the various limbs of the body (for they *all* cause offence at some time!), so that he might enter the Kingdom. To the Jewish mind, imagining such a scene would have created the impression of priestly action. The sensitive reader is invited to see himself as "the offering and the priest". See on Rom. 12:1.

5:32 *Whosoever*- The Lord has in view the guilty Pharisees of the Hillel school who were twisting Dt. 24:1-4 to mean that one could divorce for any reason so long as a divorce paper was written. Jesus at this point is not addressing the Pharisees but His potential followers. He is probably citing this well known controversy in order to demonstrate how motives behind an action are what are culpable. He is inviting His hearers to consider the motive for divorce and perceive that as all important, rather than the fact of divorce. This is why I suggest the key word in this verse is *logos*, translated "cause". It is the *logos* of fornication which is the

reason for divorce (see on 5:37). The thinking, reasoning, idea of fornication is what leads to divorce. This interpretation makes the Lord's reasoning here flow seamlessly and directly on from His teaching in preceding verses about the root of sexual sin being in the mind. So the Lord is indeed saying that the Hillel school of thought- that divorce was possible for any trivial reason- was wrong. But as always, He moves the focus to a higher and more demanding level. He implies that "fornication" is the Biblical justification for divorce, but He says that actually it is the *logos*, the thought, of fornication which is the problem. And this is in line with what He has just been teaching about the thought and action of fornication being so closely connected.

Causes her- There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. The man who commits adultery causes his ex-wife to commit adultery too, the Lord observed (Mt. 5:32). Her sin remains her sin, but he too is guilty. Prov. 5:15,16 (NIV) teach likewise: that a man should drink the waters of his own well, i.e. take sexual fulfilment from his own wife, otherwise his waters (i.e. the sexuality of his wife) will overflow into the streets for all and sundry. She will turn to other men due to his unfaithfulness. Sin thus has so many aspects.

Whosoever shall marry her...- The 'whosoever' earlier in this verse seems to refer to men who thought they could divorce their wife for any reason and go off with another woman. This view led women into sinful relationships with those men. But perhaps what is in view in this part of the verse is the women who divorced their husbands for any reason- for women in some circles did have the power to divorce in the first century. The man who married such a woman was also committing adultery. The 'whosoever' refers to people who were getting divorced for any reason apart from fornication, and thereby leading both themselves and their new partners into sin.

5:33 *Forswear-* To commit perjury, i.e. lying about something in court. Perjury has a motive- e.g. simply lying about your age to a causal enquirer is not perjury, but it is perjury if you lie about your age in order to get old age retirement benefits. So we see the theme of *motive* being continued. But the Lord takes the matter further. He not only forbids false swearing but swearing at all- as if He foresaw that any oath is likely to end up a false oath, such is the weakness of humanity and our tendency not to be truthful. James 5:12 quotes this and says that "Above all" we should not swear falsely, lest we fall into condemnation. This is strong language. The implication is that if we lie in a human court, that is one thing- but that lie will be tried in the court of Heaven and will lead to condemnation.

5:34 The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us 'swear not at all' (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence.

5:36 *One hair-* Starting with the greatest thing- the throne of God- down to the apparently most insignificant (one hair), the Lord shows that absolutely nothing (great or small) can give any more meaning to human words than the words themselves.

5:37 *Communication-* Gk. *logos*. The contrast is between 'swearing' in words, and having an internal *logos*, a thought behind the words, which is clear and honest. This continues the theme of 5:32 about the *logos* of fornication. We are to pay attention to our *logos* rather than merely the external word and action.

Yes,yes- People had the idea that there was normal language, and then oaths, which ensured that what you were saying was really true. The Lord is teaching that we should operate on only one level of language-absolute truth. We should not think that some areas of our language use can be less honest than others. The demand is for a total influence of God's truth into every aspect of human life and thinking.

Evil- Or, 'the evil one'. Wrong words come *ek*, 'out of', the evil one. Yet the thrust of the Lord's teaching so far in the Sermon has been that wrong words and behaviour come *ek*, out of, the human heart and motivations. This, then, is 'the evil', personified as 'the evil one'. In using this term the Lord was radically redefining the popular conceptions of an external 'evil one' as an external being, teaching that it is the evil *logos* within the human heart which is the real 'evil one'. We note how deeply the Lord's teaching is concerned with internal thought processes. Whatever is more than a simple yes-no way of speaking involves something from 'the evil one'; and we weasel our way with words and meanings only when we are under temptation to be sinful. But that is a deeply internal, psychological situation, deep, deep within the human heart.

5:38 When the Lord Jesus gave His commandments as an elaboration of Moses' Law, that Law was still in force. He didn't say 'When I'm dead, this is how you should behave...'. He was showing us a higher level; but in the interim period until the Law was taken out of the way, He was opening up the *choice* of taking that higher level, even though making use of the concessions which Moses offered would not have been a sin during that period. Thus He spoke of not insisting on "an eye for an eye"; even though in certain rare cases the Law did allow for this. He was saying: 'You can keep Moses' Law, and take an eye for an eye. But there is a higher level: to simply forgive'.

5:39 *Resist not evil-* The Greek term for resisting evil occurs only in Eph. 6:13. We are in this life to arm ourselves spiritually, so that we may be able to resist in the evil day. If Paul is alluding to this part of the Sermon, the point would be that we are not to resist evil in this life, because our time to ultimately resist it will be in the last day. Then, along with the Lord Himself, we will resist and overcome evil through the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Rom. 13:2 is likely another allusion to "resist not evil"- if we "resist" [s.w.] Governments whom God has put in power, then we are resisting God. This means that Paul fully understood that the 'powers that be' are indeed "evil", but they are not to be proactively 'resisted' by those in Christ. The time for that will come, but is not now. We are, however, to "resist the devil" (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Surely "resist not evil" is in view. We are to resist sin within us, but not evil in its political form around us. Again, as so often in the Bible, we see that the focus for our spiritual struggle is within rather than without. As always in the Sermon, the example of Jesus was the making of the word into flesh. James 5:6 seems to make this point, by pointing out that Jesus did not and in a sense does not resist evil done against Him: "You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. He doesn't resist you". And yet He will judge this behaviour- not now, but at the last day.

Turn to him the other- The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15). When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through

both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

5:40 It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it (Mt. 5:40). The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

Sue at law- A rather liberal translation of the single Greek word *krino*. The idea is quite simply of judging. We can be wrongly judged by others without them taking us to court. The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgments and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life.

5:41 The Lord's high value of persons is reflected in how He taught His followers to not resist evil. A poor man had only two garments- an outer one, and an inner one (Dt. 24:10-13). Underneath that, he was naked. Yet the Lord taught that if you had your outer garment unjustly taken from you, then offer your abuser your undercloth. Offer him, in all seriousness, to take it off you, and leave you standing next to him arrystarkus. This would have turned the table. The abuser would be the one left ashamed, as he surely wouldn't do this. And thus the *dignity of the abused person was left intact at the end*. This was the Lord's desire. Likewise, Roman soldiers were allowed to impress a Jew to carry their pack for a mile, but they were liable to punishment if they made him carry it two miles. To offer to carry it the second mile would almost always be turned down by the abusive soldier. And again, at the end of the exchange, he would be the one humiliated, and the Lord's follower, even though abused, would remain with head up and dignity intact.

5:42 *Borrow*- The Greek strictly means to borrow for interest. Seeing this was illegal under the Law of Moses, the Lord is saying that we should just lend- but not for interest. We would all soon bankrupt if we read this as it stands in many English translations. Or it could be that the Lord was aware that He was talking to extremely poor people who had so little to lend that it was not as hard for them to take Him seriously on this point as it is for those who have so much more.

5:43 The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms "'poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in 1st century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who

taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. So the Lord even within Matthew 5, and certainly within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

5:44 Love... do good... bless... pray- Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... despitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out- excommunicate]- The Sermon was given to the disciples (5:1,2). The terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The language is not to applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

5:45 See on Mt. 6:26.

Children of your Father- Jesus juxtaposed ideas in a radical way. He spoke of drinking His blood; and of a Samaritan who was good, a spiritual hero. It was impossible for Jews to associate the term 'Samaritan' and the concept of being spiritually an example. And so the stark, radical challenge of the Lord's words must be allowed to come down into the 21st century too. Lk. 6:35 has Jesus speaking of "children of the Most High" and yet Mt. 5:45 has "children of your father". What did Jesus actually say? Perhaps: "Children of *abba*, daddy, the Most High". He juxtaposed His shocking idea of *abba* with the exalted title "the Most High". The Most High was in fact as close as *abba*, daddy, father.

Just because the Father gives His sun and rain to all without discrimination, we likewise should love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the imperative of creation. We noted on 5:44 that our prayer and goodness to our enemies is in order to lead them to repentance and salvation. This is surely one motive behind the way God sends rain and sunshine upon the evil as well as the good. His goodness to them is intended to lead them to repentance. Only at the day of judgment will He execute judgment against them, and that is to be our perspective too. See on 5:39 *resist not evil*.

Makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust- God consciously makes the sun rise each day- it isn't part of a kind of perpetual motion machine. Hence the force

of His promises in the prophets that in the same way as He consciously maintains the solar system, so He will maintain His Israel. Ps. 104 is full of such examples: "He waters the hills... causes the grass to grow... makes darkness (consciously, each night)... the young lions... seek their meat from God... send forth Your Spirit (Angel), they are created" (not just by the reproductive system). There are important implications following from these ideas with regard to our faith in prayer. It seems to me that our belief that the world is going on inevitably by clockwork is one of the things which militates against faith. To give a simple example: we may need to catch a certain train which is to leave at 9 a.m. We wake up late at 8:30 a.m. and find it hard to have faith in our (all too hasty) prayer that we will get it, because we are accustomed to trains leaving on time. But if we have the necessary faith to believe that each individual action in life is the work of God, then it is not so hard to believe that God will make the action of that train leaving occur at 9:30 a.m. rather than at 9 a.m. when He normally makes it leave. The whole of creation keeps on going as a result of God having a heart that bleeds for people. "If he causes his heart to return unto himself", the whole of creation would simply cease (Job 34:14 RVmg.). His spirit is His heart and mind, as well as physical power. Creation is kept going not by clockwork, but by the conscious outpouring of His Spirit toward us. In times of depression we need to remember this; that the very fact the world is still going, the planet still moves, atoms stay in their place and all matter still exists... is proof that the God who has a heart that bleeds for us is still there, with His heart going out to us His creation. And the spirit of the Father must be in us His children.

5:46 *Love them which love you*- We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *unloving*.

Reward- The idea is of wages. Whilst salvation itself is a free gift, in contrast to the wages paid by sin, this is not to say that there will not be some element of reward / wages / eternal recognition of our spiritual achievements in this life. The preceding verses have spoken of prayer and blessing for our abusers. This kind of attitude will be eternally rewarded. Not least if we see those we prayed for, those we blessed and forgave without their repentance, eternally with us in God's Kingdom. The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works.

Publicans- As demonstrated by the account of Zacchaeus, these were the most friendless people in society. Rejected by family, they were unloved by about everyone. The only person who would salute / greet them was a fellow publican (:47). The implication is that publicans [tax collectors] were loved only by themselves. Loving those who love us is little better than the selfish self-love of the lonely publican. Matthew was a publican and he surely had himself very much in view as he recounted this teaching of the Lord.

5:47 *Salute*- See on *publicans* in 5:46.

More- Gk. 'to super-abound'. This is a word characteristic of the new life in Christ. As God makes His grace *abound* to us, *we* are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to 'abound' in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve

properly motivated by God's abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

5:48 See on 5:7.

We are either seen as absolutely perfect, or totally wicked, due to God's imputation of righteousness or evil to us (Ps. 37:37). There is no third way. The pure in heart see God, their righteousness (to God) exceeds that of the Pharisees, no part of their body offends them or they pluck it out; they are perfect as their Father is (Mt. 5:8,20,29,48). Every one of the faithful will have a body even now completely full of light, with no part dark (Lk. 11:36); we will walk, even as the Lord walked (1 Jn. 2:6). These impossible standards were surely designed by the Lord to force us towards a real faith in the imputed righteousness which we can glory in; that the Father really does see us as this righteous. Men have risen up to this. David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity (2 Sam. 22:21-24). He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way.

God makes concessions to human weakness; He sets an ideal standard, but will accept us achieving a lower level. "Be ye therefore perfect, *as* your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is proof enough of this. The standard is clear: absolute perfection. But our lower attainment is accepted, by grace. If God accepts our obvious failure to attain an ideal standard, we should be inspired to accept this in others. Daily Israel were taught this; for they were to offer totally unblemished animals. And yet there was no totally unblemished animal. We need to recognize that God sets an ultimately high standard, but is prepared to accept our achievement of a lower standard- i.e. God makes concessions. We all disobey the same commandments of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Yet we have a firm hope in salvation. Therefore obedience to commandments is not the only necessity for salvation. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) goes unfulfilled by each of us- as far as our own obedience is concerned. It is possible to disobey Christ's commandments every day and be saved. If this statement is false, then salvation is only possible if we attain God's moral perfection, which is impossible. If disobedience to Christ's commands is tolerable by God (on account of our faith in the atonement), how can *we* decide *which* of those commandments we will tolerate being broken by our brethren, and which of them we will disfellowship for? If we cannot recognize degrees of sin, it is difficult to pronounce some commands to be more important than others.

There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. On "Be ye therefore perfect", Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message. Relatively late in his career Paul could comment: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect" (Phil. 3:12), alluding to the Lord's bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. And yet we must compare "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" with "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect..." (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is 'perfect', and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not "already perfect", he admitted.

The Lord's manifesto as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount was structured and set up by Him in some ways as a 'new law' as opposed to the old law of Moses. And yet His law likewise proves impossible to keep. We cannot be perfect as our Father is. To a man and to a woman, we would admit that we cannot fully forgive our enemies from our hearts. And so, according to the Lord's law, we each stand unforgiven. We are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, or risk forfeiting the Kingdom because of our love of this world's goods (Mk. 10:17-22). An angry thought is murder, a passing lustful look becomes adultery- all mortal sins, which catch each of us within their net. Why was this? Surely yet again, the Lord wished to convict us of our guilt before Him, our inabilities, our desperation... so that we could come to appreciate the wonder of His character and His saving grace. For He was the one and only embodiment of His own teaching, to the point that the person who fulfilled all His teaching was in fact He Himself- and no other man. In knowing Him, we thus know our own desperation, and yet we likewise know- because we know Him- the certainty of our salvation by grace. Further, it becomes apparent that the Lord accepted with open arms those who were so very far from the ideals He laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. He convicted them of their guilt in such a way that with joy and peace they ran to His grace.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Take heed*- Gk. 'to hold the mind towards'. Again and again, the Lord's emphasis is upon the innermost functioning of the mind and thought processes. For to be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity.

Before men, to be seen of them- The same Greek phrase is used in Mt. 23:5 about the Pharisees doing all their works motivated by this desire to be seen of men. What we do *unseen* by men is therefore the litmus test of our love and Christianity. We should almost have an obsession about doing good works unseen by men- we must "take heed", consciously set our mind, to do unseen acts of kindness to others. Because the "reward" , the nature of our eternity, will depend on these things.

Reward- Salvation is by grace, but the 'reward' will be in terms of how the *nature* of our eternal existence reflects good things done in this life. The Greek word for 'reward' is quite common in the Sermon, and the first usage of it suggests that the reward is given in Heaven right now (Mt. 5:12 "great *is* your reward in Heaven", s.w. Jn. 4:36 "he that reaps receives wages / reward, and gathers fruit unto life eternal"; Mt. 5:46; 6:1,2,5,16). Yet the Lord comes from Heaven to give us the rewards after we have been resurrected at the last day (Mt. 20:8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12). So if we will be given an eternal reward for our works, it follows that there is a recompense for us noted in the books of Heaven at the very point we do the good deed. But there will be no such recompense for things which are openly seen of men, or anything which is consciously done so as to be seen by men. In the reality of life, the hardest thing about good deeds is when we sense nobody appreciates us, that we are holding the fort alone, that we have no recognition. On one hand, recognition for labour is hugely important to our basic psychological makeup- and employers have all come to realize that. It is only by appreciating the principle of eternal blessing for being *unrecognized* that we can live the way Jesus asks of us. It is my observation in the life of believers that often the Lord's most zealous servants are marginalized, falsely accused, rejected from churches etc. The Lord's teaching here makes perfect sense of that phenomenon. He wants them to continue their service in a way which will be eternally recognized, and He wants to ensure their motives for their good works are not in order to be seen of men. Therefore He allows them to be marginalized. So that their works may be totally sincere, and receive an eternal recognition. It is also the case that when serving others, we reflect that nobody realized all the host of planning and frustrations which went into one good deed. A plan to visit someone in hospital may involve struggles with public transport, getting lost on the way, forgetting our telephone, being late home which meant we missed something important... and so forth. It is all those good deeds which others don't see. They 'see' only that we spent 15 minutes in a hospital visiting someone. But those other components to the good deed of the 15 minutes are all carefully logged with the Lord.

6:2 *Sound a trumpet*- The reference may be to the bronze collection 'trumpet' into which the wealthy loudly poured large numbers of pennies. Remember that Jesus was addressing His sermon to the illiterate and desperately poor. There was little likelihood they would ever do this. So we are to understand the Lord as making a warning out of those wealthy people- to all of us, in whatever context, great or small, to not advertise our kindnesses, and to not be motivated to it by the thought of what others would think of it.

That they may have glory of men - Perhaps the emphasis is upon "they". Our good works are to be so that "men" give glory to *God* (Mt. 5:16). To have any intention of attracting glory to ourselves is therefore to play God. For all glory is to go to Him.

Have their reward- The Greek translated "have" means both to receive fully, and intransitively, 'to keep away'. They get their full reward now, so they are keeping themselves away from any future reward at the last day.

6:2,3 Mt. 6:2,3 = 1 Tim. 4:8. The implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 ("they have their reward") as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

6:3 *Do alms*- Jesus was addressing the very poorest in society. And yet He assumed they would do some good and show some generosity to others. We can too easily dismiss Bible teaching about generosity and assume it applies to the rich, or at least, not to me. Yet the Lord's implication is that every single person can give and be generous in some way. The Lord speaks here of "*when*" you give, rather than *if* you give. He took giving to others in need as being a basic, intrinsic part of life in Him.

Your left hand- There had developed a strong Jewish tradition that the right hand side of a man was his spiritual side, and the left hand side was the equivalent of the New Testament 'devil'. The Lord Jesus referred to this understanding when He warned: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Mt. 6:3)- implying that the good deeds of the spiritual man would be misused by the 'devil', e.g. in using them as grounds for spiritual pride.

Let not... know- The idea perhaps is that our good deeds should not be done consciously, we hardly know ourselves that we are doing them. The Lord taught just the same when He portrayed the faithful at the last day almost arguing back with their Lord before His judgment seat, totally denying they had done the good deeds which He was now rewarding them for ("when did we see You...", Mt. 25:39).

6:4 *Your Father who sees in secret Himself shall reward you openly* - as if God is especially manifest in Christ when we stand before him in judgment to receive our rewards openly. Our prayers "in secret" will be 'rewarded' "openly"; but the language of 'open reward' is used by the Lord in reference to the judgment: "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his father with his angels; and then he shall reward [s.w.] every man" (Mt. 16:27). In that day the workers will be 'rewarded' for their work (s.w. Mt. 20:8; Rom. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12); yet Mt. 6:4-6 says they will be rewarded for their prayers. Prayer will only ultimately be answered when the Lord returns; hence Mt. 6:4-6 leads on to the Lord's prayer, with its emphasis upon requesting the coming of the Kingdom, forgiveness etc rather than petty human requests. Here again we see a connection between prayer and the final judgment.

In secret- So secret, according to our suggestion on 6:3, that we ourselves are not even fully conscious of them. There is repeated emphasis that what is in secret, concealed from view, will be openly rewarded (Mt. 6:6,18; Lk. 12:2). The day of judgment will be a judging of the secret things (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). Absolutely nothing that is now hid shall not then be made open- this is a considerable theme in the Lord's teaching (Mt. 10:26; Mk. 4:22; Lk. 8:17; 12:2). The Lord's own journey to die at Jerusalem was done 'in secret'- as so often, He spoke His teaching to Himself (Jn. 7:10). The need for a sense of significance, reward and recognition to be attached to our works is basic to the structure of human personality. We're not asked to deny this, to live as if we are more or less than human. We're asked instead to realize that the day for that shall come, but it is not now, nor are we to seek it now from the eyes of men.

Openly- The public dimension to the judgment process will mean that somehow in a moment we will know 'the secret things' of each other. Only with that basis of understanding could believers who appear to differ in this life live eternally together.

6:5 *Seen of men*- The same Greek word is occurs in 6:16,18 (AV "to appear"). Doing spiritual things for the sake of external appearance was clearly a particular concern of the Lord Jesus. Church life inevitably leads to temptations in this area- mixing with the same people regularly, with families intermarrying over the years,

appearance becomes a great temptation. But having this as a motivation for any act of spirituality is so abhorrent to the Lord.

6:6 *Shut your door*- The Lord taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. Take Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage. In the time of Elisha we read that when a problem arose, the people concerned went indoors and shut the door. Going inside and shutting the door is associated with prayer, both by the Lord (Mt. 6:6) and Elisha himself (2 Kings 4:33). The other instances of shutting the door don't involve prayer, but they involve obediently doing something in faith- the woman shut the door upon her sons and poured out the oil in faith; she shut the door upon her sick son (2 Kings 4:5,21). Perhaps the implication is that what she did in faith and hope was read by God as prayer, even though she didn't apparently verbalize anything. The widow woman shut the door and started to pour out the oil into the vessels (2 Kings 4:5); the way the Lord alludes to this implies that she prayed before she started pouring, and yet she was sure already that it would happen (Mt. 6:6). This should inspire a spirit of soberness in our prayers.

Your Father- We should be saying and expressing things to God which are our most intense, essential, personal feelings. We cannot, therefore, easily use trite, stock phrases in our personal prayers. Note the grammatically needless repetition of the personal pronoun in Mt. 6:6: "You, when *you* pray, enter into *your* closet, and when *you* have shut *your* door, pray to *your* Father, which is in secret; and *your* Father who sees in secret shall reward *you* openly". Likewise when reading the Psalms, especially 71, note how many times David addresses God with the personal pronoun: thee, thy, thou... it really is a personal relationship.

6:7 *Vain repetitions*- We will not use "vain repetitions" (Mt. 6:7); the Greek means literally 'to stutter / stammer with the *logos*'. We know what the man with a chronic stammer is trying to say before he actually finishes saying it. To hear him saying the same syllables again and again is a frustration for us. It's a telling way of putting it. God knows our need before we ask (Mt. 6:8). Say it, if we have to be explicit, and mean what we ask. And leave it there. 'Don't keep stammering on in your prayers' is to be connected with what comes a bit later: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)... but seek (i.e. pray for, Is. 55:16) the Kingdom of God, and His (imputed) righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:31-33). We are not merely to believe that what we ask for we will receive. Note how again the word *logos* occurs; we commented several times in chapter 5 that this is a core idea in the Sermon. Our innermost thought and intention is of the essence.

6:8 *Your Father knows*- This gives a profound insight into the purpose of prayer. Prayer is not in order to inform God of human need. He knows all things, and He knows every human need. So if prayer is not in order to inform God of anything, what is it for? Ultimately, it is for our benefit. Keeping on and on repeating our perceived needs, repeating them vainly, as if we are endlessly stuttering, is actually a form of selfishness. Prayer is to be about dialogue with God, sharing life with Him, confession, sharing thoughts. An analysis of David's prayers as recorded in the book of Psalms shows that only about 5% of the verses are requests for anything material. The rest is simply talking with God. The idea of prayer as a mindless repetition of specific needs, in the belief that the more times we state them, the more likely God is to respond- is the very opposite of the kind of prayer which God intends. The Lord's model prayer which He goes on to give features only one request for anything material- and that is simply a request that God gives us enough food for today.

Things you have need of- The hope of the future Kingdom means that we will not now be materialistic. It will give us strength against materialism. And the model prayer was given by Jesus in the context of His comment on how some tend to always be asking God for material things. The Lord teaches that the paramount thing we should request is the coming of the Kingdom, and our forgiveness so that we might partake in it. *This* is the request we should be making- for "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of... after *this* manner therefore pray ye..." (Mt. 6:9,10). Later in Mt. 6 the Lord repeats the same words: "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things... seek ye first his Kingdom" (Mt. 6:32-34 RV). The structure of the Lord's prayer reflects this- for the first and only request in it is a seeking for the coming of His Kingdom. The RV of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: " Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg). Having warned against materialism, the Lord bids His men to "rather seek ye the Kingdom of God... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:31,32) in the place of seeking for material things. The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34).

Before you ask- The Kingdom prophecy that "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24) is applied to us *now* (Mt. 6:8)- as if answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life.

6:9 *This manner-* The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

Our Father- The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father". Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers. "Give us this day *our* daily bread" may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

Who is in Heaven- A feature of Biblical prayers is the way they start with some reference to God, often involving several clauses. We are to firstly visualize Him there. This is to be connected with the idea of lifting the eyes to Heaven at the start of a prayer (Ps. 121:1; 123:1; Ez. 23:27; Dan. 4:34; Lk. 16:23; 18:13; Jn. 11:41; 17:1). "God *is in Heaven*, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few (more often translated "little")" (Ecc. 5:2). Ezra, Nehemiah and Solomon all start their major prayers with a reference to the fact that God really *is* there in Heaven. The fact that God is a material, corporeal being is vital here. The very fact God has a spatial location, in Heaven, with Christ at His right hand, indicates of itself that God is a physical rather than purely spiritual being. The fact Christ really is there, seated at God's right hand interceding for us, was a concept which filled Paul's thinking (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2 cp. 1 Pet. 3:22).

“*Hallowed / sanctified be Your name*” uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom.

6:10 *Kingdom come*- Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come Thy Kingdom, done Thy will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are “a colony of Heaven” in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide.

Your will be done- Again uses an aorist which demands a one time fulfilment- in the sense of 'May Your will come about...'. The will of God is often associated with His ultimate plan of salvation (e.g. Eph. 1:5-12; Col. 1:20). It has been pointed out that "Hallowed be Your Name" is (grammatically) a request for action, rather than simply an expression of praise. Jesus prayed this in Gethsemane and it cost Him His life. We know from the Old Testament that God in fact "hallows" His own Name (Ez. 20:41; 28:25; 36:22,23; 38:16; 39:27). By asking God to "hallow" or sanctify / realize that Name in our lives, we are definitely praying in accordance with His will. He wishes to do this- and so He will surely do this in our lives if we ask Him. All the principles connected with His Name will be articulated in our lives and experience for sure if we pray for this- for we will be praying according to His revealed will in His word. And the ultimate fulfilment of all this will be in final coming of the Kingdom. But see on 7:21.

In interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, we need to look for similar phrases within the Sermon in order to grasp the sense the Lord was seeking to develop. And we have just such a connection of thought here when we observe that the Sermon concludes with an appeal to 'do the will of My Father' (7:21; and the theme continues in the Lord's teaching, e.g. Mt. 12:50; 21:31; Lk. 12:47). We are praying therefore not only for Christ's return when the literal coming of the Kingdom on earth will mean that God's will shall be done on earth. We are asking for the principles of God's rulership / Kingdom over men (as outlined in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) to be manifested in our lives; and for strength to do God's will on earth here and now. In probing deeper how the Lord understood the Father's will, we find the term specifically and repeatedly linked with the salvation of persons, supremely enabled through the Lord's death (Mt. 18:14; Jn. 6:39,40; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:5). We would therefore be justified in seeing this request for the Kingdom to come and [in parallel] God's will to be done as a request for the successful spreading of the Gospel worldwide (see note on "in earth" below). The coming of the Kingdom and the doing of God's will are in parallel- the coming of the Kingship of God in human life means that humans do God's will as taught by the Lord in the Sermon. Of course, the final physical coming of the Kingdom is also in view, but that is the final manifestation of the process which is now ongoing in human hearts. This more internal, spiritual interpretation of the coming of

the Kingdom would be in line with the rest of the Sermon, which emphasizes the rule of Divine principles in the deepest parts of the human heart.

This phrase occurs verbatim on the Lord's lips when He Himself prayed in Gethsemane "Your will be done" (Mt. 26:42). So often we find the Lord Himself being the embodiment of His own teaching in the Sermon. The difficulty with which the Lord said those words shows how hard it is to really pray 'the Lord's prayer'. The way it can be rattled off so quickly is tragic.

In earth as... in Heaven- Gk. *epi* the earth, as the will of God is now done in (Gk. *en*) Heaven. *Epi* in this context has the sense of being spread throughout; whereas *en* more simply and directly means "in". Is there a hint here that we are to be praying for the success of the geographical spreading of the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the earth? Not just knowledge of that Gospel, but people actually submitting to God's Kingship and living by Kingdom principles; not just baptisms but transformed lives. By doing God's will as it is now done in Heaven, we are developing outposts of God's Heavenly Kingdom here on earth, and this will come to term in the return of Christ and the more physical establishment of the Kingdom on the planet, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in every fibre of earthly existence.

6:11 *Give us this day our daily bread-* This has long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God

for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us in Mt. 6:11.

6:12 *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*- Probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves. See on Lk. 24:47. Note that around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that of burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that "O ye gods, give me the things which are owing to me". And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

As *we*... The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"*Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us*" (Lk.) again uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

6:13 *Lead us*- The Greek *eisphero* definitely means to lead inward. The internal process of temptation is in view here, as explained specifically by James 1:13-15- which may be a specific comment on this part of the Sermon. Much of James is an expansion upon the Sermon. Whilst the process of temptation is internal (and note how internal processes are the great theme of the Sermon), God is capable of leading a person in the process. The dynamics in the upward and downward spirals are ultimately of God.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one- This can only really come true when we are changed into divine nature; for only then will we be freed /delivered [aorist- once, finally, for all time] from the 'devil' of sin. The word for trial / temptation is *peirasmōs*, and I have never been entirely satisfied that we can reconcile the Lord's words here with the fact that God does not tempt any man (James 1:13-15). However, I feel happier with the idea that the Lord may specifically be bidding us pray for deliverance from the latter day holocaust to come upon the saints. The Lord Jesus can keep us from "the hour of trial [*peirasmōs*] which is coming on the whole world" (Rev. 3:10). When the disciples were bidden pray that they enter not into temptation (Mk. 14:38- *peirasmōs* again), they were being asked to pray the model prayer with passionate concentration and meaning. Yet those men in Gethsemane were and are representative of the latter day saints who are bidden pray that they may escape "all those things" , the hour of trial / *peirasmōs* which is coming, and to stand acceptably before the Son of man at His coming. We ought to be praying fervently for this deliverance; but I wonder how many of us are? For the days of the final tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect- i.e., for the sake of their prayers (Mk. 13:19,20). The final tribulation of the last days will be the supreme struggle between the flesh and spirit, between the believer and the world, between Christ and the Biblical 'devil'; and we are to pray that we will be delivered victorious from that struggle. Thus "Lead us not into 'the test'" (Mt. 6:13) could in this context be understood as a plea to save us from entering into the time of final tribulation- just as the Lord specifically exhorts us to pray to be delivered from that time. The implication would be that the final time of testing will be so severe that indeed the elect will scarcely be saved. It seems to me that none of us have the urgent sense of the time of testing ahead which we should have; how many are praying daily to be spared it? How many are in actual denial that it will ever come, even though it's clear enough in Scripture?

We must pray not to be led into temptation (Mt. 6:13); but when we fall into such temptation (s.w.), count it all joy, James says (1:2). The exercise of praying not to experience those temptations was for our spiritual benefit, and God is willing that it should be so.

Deliver us from evil- Surely alluded to in 2 Pet. 2:9 "The Lord knows how to *deliver* the Godly out of temptations". Evil and temptation are thereby paralleled.

The Lord Jesus based this part of His prayer on Old Testament passages like 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 25:22; 26:11; 31:8; 34:22; 69:18; 78:35,42; 140:1 and Prov. 2:12; 6:24, which ask for 'deliverance' from evil *people*, sin, distress, tribulation etc. here on earth. Not one of those passages speaks of deliverance from a personal, superhuman Satan. Esther's prayer in Es. 4:19 LXX is very similar – "Deliver us from the hand of the evildoer", but that 'evildoer' was Haman, not any personal, superhuman Satan. Even if we insist upon reading 'the evil one', "the evil one" in the Old Testament was always "the evil man in Israel" (Dt. 17:12; 19:19; 22:21–24 cp. 1 Cor. 5:13) – never a superhuman being. And there may be another allusion by the Lord to Gen. 48:16, where God is called the One "who has redeemed me from all evil". As the Old Testament 'word made flesh', the thinking of the Lord Jesus was constantly reflective of Old Testament passages; but in every case here, the passages He alluded to were *not* concerning a superhuman Devil figure. God 'delivers from' "every trouble" (Ps. 54:7), persecutors and enemies (Ps. 142:6; 69:14) – but as Ernst Lohmeyer notes, "There is no instance of the [orthodox understanding of the] Devil being called 'the evil one' in the Old Testament or in the Jewish writings".

It's also been observed that every aspect of the Lord's prayer can be interpreted with reference to the future coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer for deliverance from evil, the time of testing (Gk.), would then tally well with the Lord's exhortation to pray that we may be delivered from the final time of evil coming on the earth (Lk. 21:36). Another insight into this petition is that God does in fact lead men in a

downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. “Why do you make us err from your ways?” was the lament of Israel to their God in Is. 63:17. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord would be urging us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral. His conversation in Gethsemane, both with the disciples and with His Father, had many points of contact with the text of the Lord’s Prayer. “Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation” (Mt. 26:41) would perhaps be His equivalent of “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”.

For Yours...- The sense of ‘for’ is definitely ‘because...’, but it could simply be with reference to the entire preceding prayer. Or it could particularly be with reference to the preceding request: “Deliver us from evil”. In any case, the question arises: Why should God answer the prayer, be it the entire prayer or the specific request for deliverance from evil, because the Kingdom, power and glory is God’s? The idea may be that because the Kingdom we seek now to be part of, and to eternally live in, is God’s, therefore it follows that He earnestly desires to grant it to us His children. And we plead that He hears our requests, especially for deliverance from temptation and evil, because surely He wants to give us His glorious Kingdom. Because the Kingdom is *His*, all glory is to Him, and He wants to see us giving Him glory; because He has all power- therefore we ask Him to give us the requests we have made, because they are all intended to achieve glory to Him and to ensure our entry into His Kingdom. Another angle of exposition would be to consider that we ask for deliverance from temptation and sin because we know that God has rulership (“Kingdom”) and power over all- given His unlimited physical and spiritual power, we ask Him to use it to answer our requests. This reasoning of course assumes that all that has preceded in the prayer is in order for us to enter the Kingdom and to see His glory worked out. Any requests for merely human benefit and advantage cannot be concluded with such an argument- that we ask God to hear this *because* the Kingdom, power and glory is His.

For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever- This is the appropriate conclusion to a prayer that asks for the establishment of that Kingdom. Whilst commenting upon the Lord's prayer, it is worth pointing out that the Lord repeated the essence of each phrase at various points during His life. When facing His ultimate struggle when facing up to the cross, He asked that the Father's Name would be glorified (Jn. 12:28)- quoting His own words from His model prayer. It hurt and cost Him so much to pray that prayer- the prayer we may have known for so many years that we can pray it almost at no cost. But to truly ask for the Father's will to be done is in fact a commitment to the way of the cross (Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:7-10; Mk. 14:36). So let us pray the prayer- but putting meaning into the words.

Amen- Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance". Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. But He did so because He wanted us to realize that if our spirit is united with God’s, then our words to God are in a sense God talking to Himself; hence we say ‘Amen’ to our own words, when ‘amen’ was usually a confirmation of God’s words. Jn. 16:26 fits in here, where in the context of speaking of the unity of the believers with the Father and with Himself, the Lord says that He will not need to pray for the believer, but God Himself will hear the believer. I take this to mean that Jesus foresaw that the time would come when our prayer would be His prayer. It’s not so much that He prays for us, but rather prays with us and even through us.

6:14 Mt. 6:14 = Eph. 4:32. Jesus said: "If you forgive, you'll be forgiven". Paul subtly changes the tenses: "You've been forgiven already, so forgive". It's as if Paul is saying: "Think carefully about Mt. 6:14. Don't think it means 'If you do this, I'll do that for you'. No. God has forgiven you. But that forgiveness is conditional on the fact that in the future you will forgive people. If you don't, then that forgiveness you've already been given is cancelled. This is what Jesus really had in mind'. This would suggest a very very close analysis of those simple words of Jesus, using all the logic and knowledge of Biblical principles which Paul had. Note that the command to forgive our debtors when we pray (Mt. 6:14) is applied by Paul to the need to forgive those who sin against us in the ecclesia (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

For if you forgive- The Lord guessed that His teaching to ask for forgiveness "as" we forgive others would be radical and hard to accept. The Lord's teaching in the prayer ["as we forgive"] was clear enough, but He repeats it twice (also in :15), so that there be no possible difficulty in interpretation. He rarely spells things out this specifically and with such immediate repetition. The vital, eternally vital need to forgive others is underlined. And the Lord repeats this teaching later in His teaching, with the further detail that unless we forgive others "from your hearts", we will not be forgiven (Mt. 18:35; also in Mk. 11:25). This chronic and urgent need to forgive others, aware that *how* we forgive them is the basis of *how* God will forgive us, leads to the question of whether we should forgive others without their repentance. If we first demand specific repentance, then this is the basis upon which we are asking to be judged; and we all, surely, sin without repentance, sometimes because at the time we do not perceive the sinfulness of our behaviour.

6:16 *Hypocrites... disfigure their faces-* There is a semantic connection between these words. A *hupokrites* was a play actor, one who wore a mask. These hypocrites create false faces for themselves, that is the idea- their disfigured faces are but as a mask. The Greek for "disfigure" occurs only five times in the NT, once here- and twice in the next few verses, 6:19,20, where the Lord warns that external material wealth 'corrupts', destroys itself, or is disfigured. By disfiguring their faces, they were destroying their faces, destroying themselves because they wanted to appear other than they were.

Appear unto men- s.w. 6:5, also in Mt. 23:27,28. To act in a way so as to spiritually impress men is especially distasteful to the Lord. The issue of what other churches, ecclesias or individuals will think of us is not to pay any part in our decision making and action. We are living, thinking and deciding in the loving gaze of the Father and Son. The wonder of that should mean that all fear of human criticism or desire for human approval plays absolutely no role.

6:18 *Which is in secret-* Gk. 'the One who is in secret / hidden'. The hiddenness of God is in the sense that He specifically looks at the hidden man of the heart (1 Pet. 3:4). This is the sphere in which He operates and sees.

Openly- Who we will eternally be in the Kingdom, is who we were secretly in this life. What we think about as we fall asleep, as we travel, walk down streets... this is the essence of the life in Christ. The change of nature we will experience at the Lord's return will simply be a physical manifestation of who we are in spirit in this life. We will be made manifest [s.w.], declared openly, at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13). This means that we will be preserved as we spiritually are in this life. This means that the development of our spiritual person is of paramount importance, because that is how we shall eternally be. The Lord goes right on to warn against materialism (:19,20). But that is in the context of the paramount need for the development of spiritual mindedness. It is petty materialism which is the greatest enemy of this development- the cares of this life and the attainment of material wealth are what crowd out spiritual thinking. The treasure, the most

important thing in our life, is our “heart”, our thinking (6:21; “the good treasure of the heart”, 12:35). Building up spirituality is placed in opposition to building up material wealth.

6:19 *Lay not up*- see on 6:18 “openly”.

Rust corrupts- James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord’s idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn’t rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God’s eyes.

Break through- Literally, ‘dig through’. Relevant to the earth houses of the very poorest people. The Lord’s return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that ‘thieves’ is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it.

Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it’s fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren’t rich, therefore we aren’t materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we’re not doing too badly; that really, we don’t care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture’s like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we’re OK in this area. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break (Gk. dig) through and steal” (Mt. 6:19) was spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord wasn’t only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud-walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this ‘laying up’ mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands. See on Lk. 12:33.

6:20 *Lay up*- The idea is of incremental growth. It’s as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.

6:21 *There*- Gk. ‘to there’. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on ‘laying up’, wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. ‘Laying up’ means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; ‘to where’ they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

6:22 *Single*- Healthy. This observation about single-mindedness follows on from the Lord’s teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single-eyed in our giving (Mt. 6:22 s.w.- this is one of James’ many allusions to the sermon on the mount). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. ‘simple’ in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light (Mt. 6:22). In daily work, in

private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace, and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated "simplicity" which is related to the word translated "single" here in Mt. 6:22. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor. Consider how the word is translated:

- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "the *simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated 'simple'), then the whole body is full of light (Mt. 6:22)- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not 'simple' or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

6:23 *Evil eye*- This was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited- towards God. Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... 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... how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean". A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to

God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

6:24 *Serve two masters*- It would be too simplistic to interpret this as meaning that we are either totally serving the Lord, or not serving Him. Paul seems to have thought a lot about this verse because he refers to it several times in Romans, basing his entire Romans chapter 6 around the idea that we do not serve sin as a Master (Rom. 6:6). But he goes straight on to lament that in reality, he does serve "the law of sin" with his flesh, but "I myself" serve the law of God (Rom. 7:25). And he concludes the letter by warning that some do not serve the Lord Jesus (Rom. 16:18). Perhaps Paul is writing partly in response to confusion about the Lord's words- for we keep on sinning, yet He taught we can only serve Him alone. And his perspective is that we ourselves as believers are totally devoted to Him as our only Lord and Master. But the flesh, which we do not identify as the real self of the believer, continues to serve the sin principle.

Hate the one- The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19). James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15). The man who found the treasure in the field, or the pearl of great price, sold *all* that he had, in order to obtain it. If he had sold any less, he wouldn't have raised the required price. These mini-parables are Christ's comment on the Law's requirement that God's people love Him with *all* their heart and soul, realizing the logic of devotion. Samuel pleaded with Israel: " Serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things [i.e. idols]" (1 Sam. 12:20,21). If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road. If we are God's people, we will flee from the false teacher (Jn. 10:5). If we do anything other than this, we reflect our basic attitude to God's truth.

Hate... love- Because Israel were in covenant with God, *therefore* they were not to make covenants with the other nations, and marriage is mentioned as an example of this (Ex. 34:10,12). In his repetition of this part of the law in Deuteronomy, Moses gave even more repeated emphasis to the fact that our covenant with God precludes any covenant relationship with anyone else: "Thou shalt make no covenant with them... neither shalt thou make marriages with them... for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all (other) people that are on the face of the earth. The Lord ...set his love upon you ...chose you... because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers... the Lord hath brought you out (of the world) with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen... know therefore that the Lord thy God, he God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments... and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments..." (Dt. 7:2-11). The wonder of our relationship with Yahweh is stated time and again. To marry back into Egypt, the house of bondmen from which we have been redeemed, is to despise the covenant, to reverse the redemptive work which God has wrought with us. In this context of marriage out of the Faith, we read that God will destroy "him that hateth Him", and repay him to his face. On the other hand, not marrying Gentiles was part of *loving* God (Josh. 23:12,13). So according to Moses, whoever married a Gentile was effectively hating God. It is possible that the Lord had this in mind when He taught that we either serve God and hate the world, or we love the world and hate God (Mt. 6:24). This isn't, of course, how we see it. We would like to think that there is a third way; a way in which we can love God and yet also love someone in the world. Yet effectively, in God's eyes, this is hating Him. Doubtless many Israelites thought Moses was going too heavy in saying that those who married Gentiles were hating God.

And the new Israel may be tempted to likewise respond to the new covenant's insistence that our love of God means a thorough rejection of this world. Whoever even *wishes* to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Hold to- There are only two masters whom we completely serve; we hold to either mammon, or God (Mt. 6:24). The idea of "holding to" in Greek implies holding *against* something else; the result of holding to God is that we are against everything else. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mt. 12:30)- rather than being passively indifferent. Men reacted to the Lord in ultimately one of two ways- they either truly believed on Him, or supported the Jews in murdering Him (Jn. 11:45,46). Those who apparently believed on Him but kept it quiet were forced by the cross and resurrection to make their commitment one way or the other [and serious reflection on the memorials of these things in bread and wine leads us to the same decision]. So much for the philosophy of balance! The Hebrew word for vacillate (translated "dissemble" in AV) also means to go astray; indecision and indifference are effectively decisions against God's way. The Hebrew language often reflects God's characteristics and attitudes.

Despise- The Greek word is usually used elsewhere about despising other believers (Mt. 18:10; 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:10). Loving God involves loving our brother, and despising our brethren means we do not love God but rather despise Him.

Mammon- When the Lord spoke of the impossibility of serving two masters, He personified the one as "Mammon", the antithesis of God. He goes on to define what he meant: "Therefore... take no *thought* for your life... which of you by *taking thought*... why *take ye thought* for raiment... therefore take no *thought* saying, What shall we eat?... seek ye first the Kingdom of God... take therefore no *thought* for the morrow" (Mt. 6:24,25,27,28,31,33,34). Clearly the Lord saw "Mammon", this personified anti-God, as an attitude of *mind*. He had the same view of 'Satan' as we do: a personification of sin in the human mind. He also saw seeking "the Kingdom of God" as somehow parallel with serving God rather than mammon. We would wish there were some third category, God, mammon and something in between; as we may idly speculate that it would suit us if there were three categories at judgement day, accepted, rejected, and something else. But both then and now, this very minute, this isn't the case. A deep down recognition of this will have its effect practically. If we are serving God, let's not give anything to mammon, let's not play games, juggling and using brinkmanship.

There is fair evidence that in God's eyes, our attitude to materialism is the epitome of our spirituality. The Lord places before us only two possible roads: the service of God, or that of mammon (Aramaic for riches / wealth, Mt. 6:24). We would rather expect Him to have said: service of God or the flesh. Indeed, this is the choice that is elsewhere placed before us in the NT. However, the Lord evidently saw "mammon" as the epitome of all the flesh stands for. It is probably the view of many of us that while we have many areas of spiritual weakness, materialism is not one of them. But according to the Lord, if we are reading Him rightly, our attitude to the flesh generally is reflected in our attitude to wealth. This is why the Bible does have a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality.

Mt. 6:24 = Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word. Paul sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

6:25 Mt. 6:25 = Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters;

only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

Therefore- Because our hearts can only be in one place, either with God or not, we should especially beware of materialism. For this more than anything else can lead us to hate God and to despise Him- because it takes our hearts away from Him.

Take no thought- The Sermon is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk. 12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life.

Is not the life more than food, and the body than clothing?- This continues the theme outlined above. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the present life and body; and the Greek for "more"

is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

6:26 *Behold*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

The birds of the air... He feeds them- As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns- These words are repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26); , then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at 6:25 and elsewhere that the Sermon is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

Your Heavenly Father feeds them- God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. "If God so clothe the grass of the field. . . shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Better than- Quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing

the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

6:27 Taking thought- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence (see on 6:25).

Add- The same word occurs in 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

Stature- The Greek can mean 'age' as well as referring to our body. No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

6:28 Thought for clothing- The allusion is surely to how God provided food, drink and clothing which didn't wear out for the Israelites on their wilderness journey (Dt. 8:4), just as He will for those who have crossed the Red Sea in baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

Clothing- Again, it seems likely that the Lord intended us to refocus from material to spiritual. For later in Matthew we read of Him emphasizing the ultimate importance of having the right 'clothing' [s.w. "wedding garment"] to enter God's Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 22:11,12). On a simply practical level, it's my observation that many believers find spirituality hard because their minds are too taken up with making money- to fund the buying of branded, designer clothing. In our generation as never before, the price range of clothing is as never before. It is rather beyond me why in a brotherhood of need, it seems perfectly acceptable to not buy good second hand clothing and pay ten or more times the price for new clothing with the right brand name on it. But maybe that's just me.

Consider- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. The same idea, although a different word, as the Greek for "Behold" in 6:26. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

How they grow- The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

Toil... spin- As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The later appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

6:29 *In... glory... clothed-* It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here- plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

Solomon- The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer (Mt. 6:29,30). This reference to Solomon in Matt. 6:29 is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. He goes on to warn against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes (Matt. 6:31) - all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow...sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But" , says Jesus, " seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33) - clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was Christ alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

6:30 *If God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you?-* The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. See on Mt. 6:26. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the

true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us “all things”? The Lord brought out the point in Mt. 6:30: If God so clothes the grass... how much more will He clothe us, therefore, don't worry! “Clothe” translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi-* to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes... although they do not spin them or work for them (Mt. 6:29). Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be ‘thrown into the fire’... a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be ‘thrown into the fire’, how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a newborn baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

Cast into the oven- We have noted that the idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

You of little faith- The word is used another three times in Matthew (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In each case it refers specifically to a lack of faith in the saving power of Jesus. The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

6:31 *Eat... drink... clothed* - The three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them.

Clothed- God will provide, but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous

begging bread at any time in his long and varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

6:32 *Gentiles seek*- God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to 1st century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding nature of God's grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. Mt. 6:32 goes on to imply that the difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a 'first principle' this really is.

Seek- Parallel with 'thinking' anxiously in :31. Again it is the overall direction of our hearts, to where our seeking is set, our mental life and thinking, which is the issue. Rather than individual acts of spiritual failure or success.

Knows that you have need- God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

All these things- *Hapas*, 'all', means strictly 'each and every one of'. God knows every single human need relating to eating, drinking, clothing and existing. And He knows better than we do our greatest need- to eat and drink of that bread and blood which gives eternal life, and to be clothed with His nature.

6:33 *Seek first*- Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :31,32. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

The Kingdom- I noted under 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

His righteousness- The Sermon was intended for those who earnestly wished to be righteous but felt unable to attain it as they wished (see on Mt. 5:6). Yet we should continue 'seeking' it. And Paul takes the thought further by declaring that if we really seek to be righteous, then we will become "in Christ" and believe in God's offer of imputed righteousness.

All these things- Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verse 32- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on 6:31.

Shall be added- The only other usage of the word in Matthew is just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height (6:27).

6:34 *For tomorrow-* The only other occurrence of the Greek word in Matthew is a few verses earlier in :30. God provides for the grass which "tomorrow" will be cast into the fire. We observed under 6:30 that this is the language of condemnation. If God even keeps alive and provides for those who shall be condemned, and the things of the animal and plant creation which live for only a day or so, how much more will He care for us. The "tomorrow" which is in view is therefore the ultimate 'tomorrow'- of the coming of Christ. We are to take no anxious thought for the outcome of that day if we know that in our hearts we are seeking the things of the Kingdom above all. In the same spirit, Paul taught that all who wholeheartedly love the Lord's appearing shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). We should not be full of worried thought about our possible rejection on that day, but rather the overall thinking of our mind should be positively full of the things of the Kingdom. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" could be read as meaning 'Yes there will be evil for some on that day, but don't waste your thoughts worrying about that. If your heart is for the Kingdom of God, you are secure. Don't worry about it'. Although this is the ultimate sense of 'tomorrow' which the Lord has in mind, His words can be understood on a quite simple literal level too. We are to live one day at a time without worrying about the future, because quite simply- God will provide. Each day has its own problems, and don't worry about them ahead of time. Rather focus your thinking and mental energy upon the things of God's Kingdom. This is exactly in the spirit of the command in the Lord's model prayer to ask for enough food only for today (6:11). Living like this is of course seen by the world as irresponsible. But it is not irresponsible if we do so with a firm faith that God is responsible for our tomorrows.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 7

7:1 *Judge not*- For Paul, one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (Mt. 7:1-5). The commentary of James on this part of the Sermon is interesting: "Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". I suggest under 7:24 that James considers the Sermon to be "the perfect law". The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

DIGRESSION: Judge Not (Mt. 7:1)

Any religious individual or community, Christian believers included, will be tempted to morally and doctrinally retreat on issue after issue, until they come to a point where they cannot tell right from wrong; firstly, in the behaviour and belief of others, and then finally, in their own lives. The road to this position often involves the claim that we must not judge, and therefore we cannot label any behaviour or belief as right or wrong. This attitude arises from a faulty understanding of 'judging'. It may seem hard for the new convert to believe that such a clouding of right and wrong is possible; and yet Biblical and present Christian experience confirms that this is a major problem for us all.

Even the most basic reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Greek *krino* (usually translated "judge") is used in more than one way. The same is true of the idea of 'judgment' in many languages. Thus in English, "judgment" refers both to the process of deciding / judging a case, and also to the final judgment of condemnation. We read that the Father judges no one (Jn. 5:22); but (evidently in another sense), He does judge (Jn. 8:50). Christ did not come to judge (Jn. 8:15), but in another way He did (Jn. 5:30; 8:16,26). Paul tells the Corinthians to judge nothing, and then scolds them for not judging each other (1 Cor. 4:5 cp. 6:1-3). *Krino* (to "judge") can simply mean to make a decision, or think something through (Acts 20:16; 26:8; 27:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 7:37; 2 Cor. 2:1; Tit. 3:12). And because of this, we are encouraged to "judge" situations according to God's word and principles; thus 'judging' can mean forming an opinion based on correct interpretation of the word (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore judging or opinion forming on any other basis is 'judging after the flesh', and this is wrong (Lk. 12:57; Jn. 8:15); judging rightly is part of our basis of acceptability with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:43). It is a shameful thing if we can't judge our brethren (1 Cor. 5:12). "Judge not" must be understood in this context.

Judging Our Brethren

With this understanding of 'judging', it is inevitable that we need to apply our 'judgment' to other people, especially within the ecclesia. The decision to baptize Lydia into the fellowship of the one body involved

'judging' her "to be faithful" (Acts 16:15). James was faced with the problem of deciding how far the conscience of some Jewish brethren should be imposed on the Gentile converts. He reasoned from Biblical principles, and then gave his "sentence" (Greek *krino*), his judgment- that they need not be circumcised (Acts 15:19). The elders of the Jerusalem ecclesia "ordained" (*krino*), they 'judged', some ecclesial principles for the Gentile ecclesias (Acts 16:14; 21:25). They didn't read "judge not" as meaning they couldn't ordain anything. It is evident from all this that there is nothing wrong with 'judging' our brethren in the sense of forming an opinion about their behaviour or doctrine, and acting appropriately. Paul reasons that disputes between brethren ought to be settled by other brethren in the ecclesia judging between them, rather than resorting to the judiciary of the world (1 Cor. 6:1-3).

Paul reprimands the Corinth ecclesia for not doing this. It is quite possible that they justified going to law with the excuse that 'Well, *we* can't judge our brother, you know'. Paul is saying: 'If you were spiritually mature, you would realize that you can judge your brother, indeed it's a shameful state of affairs if you lack the maturity to be able to do it'. In the same context, Paul rebukes Corinth for not separating from the incestuous brother, and he says that although he is not physically present, his judgment is that the brother should be separated from; and he implies that they should already have made the same judgment (1 Cor. 5:3).

Don't Condemn

And yet, almost in designed contrast, just a few verses earlier Paul has warned his Corinthians not to judge each other, because Christ will be the judge at the last day (1 Cor. 4:3-5). This is one of Paul's many almost unconscious allusions back to his Lord's words in the Gospels; this time to Mt. 7:1: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" at the judgment. Likewise, 1 Cor. 11:31,32 looks back to the same verse; and again interprets 'judging' as condemning. We will all be judged (2 Cor. 5:10); yet if we do not judge, we will not be judged. Evidently, 'judge' is being used in the sense of 'condemn'. If we don't condemn others, we will not be condemned. It can't mean don't judge in the sense of don't form an opinion, don't analyze; because we will all be judged in this sense. If we don't judge / analyze/ form an opinion of others, this won't save us from the process of judgment at Christ's return. But if we don't condemn, this will save us from condemnation. The context of Mt. 7 confirms this; judging others is paralleled with confidently proclaiming that our brother is blind (7:4)- a common Biblical description of those condemned by God (Lk. 6:39; Jn. 9:39; Rom. 2:19; 2 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 3:17).

But there is an inspired commentary on the 'Sermon' of Mt. 5-7. Any good commentary on James will list the copious links between James and Mt. 5-7. The comment on Mt. 7:1 is in James 4:11,12: "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother... there is one lawgiver (judge)... who art thou that judgest another?". 'Speaking evil' here doesn't refer to slander; it is parallel with condemning. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:3-5, we must not judge each other in the sense of condemning, because Christ is the judge; we must not anticipate the outcome of the judgment. But it is inevitable that we must 'judge' each other in the sense of some amount of analysis and opinion-forming concerning doctrine and behaviour. Indeed, at least from my own self-observation, it would be impossible for the Lord to forbid us to 'judge' each other in this sense; it's an inevitable function of the human condition. It would be rather like condemning sneezing. We see and hear things, and inevitably we make a judgment concerning them. But we must "judge righteous judgment", judgment moulded by the word, but not anticipate the outcome of the final judgment.

It seems that the following context of Mt. 7:1 ("judge not...") concerns judging in the sense of condemning. And the allusions to "judge not" in James and 1 Cor. also seem to read it as forbidding us to condemn. When the Lord repeated His theme of "judge not" in Lk. 6:37, He seems to have underlined exactly what He meant by not judging: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; (i.e.) condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned".

Either He meant 'don't judge in any sense', or 'don't condemn'. We have seen that He could not have meant 'don't judge in any sense', because He asks us to judge in this way. So He meant 'don't condemn'; and because He then goes on to say this explicitly ("condemn not"), it seems logical to read this as Him underlining the point, perhaps clarifying what had perhaps been misunderstood when He earlier said " Don't judge" in Mt. 7:1. So He was saying: 'Don't judge, what I mean is, don't condemn' ⁽¹⁾.

Self-examination

With this understanding of 'judging', we arrive at a telling interpretation of 1 Cor. 11:31,32: "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged... should not be condemned with the world". The context is of self-examination at the breaking of bread. If, in the light of our reflection on the Lord's cross, we arrive at that level of spiritual contrition where we know ourselves to be worthy of condemnation, we will not be condemned at the judgment. In this sense, our confrontation with Christ in His time of dying should provoke in us a small foretaste of the judgment to come.

We must judge / condemn ourselves, but not others. Paul 'judged' the incestuous brother as worthy of separation from, he 'judged' Lydia to be in a position whereby she could enter fellowship through baptism. Yet Paul could make these decisions without 'judging' in the way in which Mt. 7:1 condemns. Paul scolded the Corinthians for their refusal to 'judge' as he judged. It seems the same rebuke is increasingly called for in the Christian community. If we cannot judge each other at all, the whole concept of ecclesial discipline must be dispensed with. The need to 'judge righteously' is destroyed by a refusal to judge at all. Yet we must not condemn- anyone. In this sense, "Judge not". For example, even though we know baptism is essential for salvation, it is not for us to label *anyone* as certain to be condemned at the judgment.

Note

(1) It is often maintained that "judge not" refers to not judging motives. If we are not to judge motives, but we are to 'judge' in some sense, this would mean that we must judge the outward works of men. And yet Biblical and human analysis reveals that outward behaviour is often not a reflection of inner motive (e.g. Samson's marriage, Jud. 14:4). To judge outward behaviour without considering motives is almost pointless. There are countless cases of where the same action may be right or wrong depending on motive. Thus both David and Uzziah acted as the High Priest, but only Uzziah was condemned for it; David refused to choose his punishment as God asked him, preferring to leave it to God, whereas when Ahaz did something similar, he was condemned for it; Rahab's lie is commended as an act of faith, whilst other lies are sins; Samuel and Eli both had the same experience of their children being apostate and them being criticized for it, but only Eli is condemned for this. For a first century Christian to still keep parts of the Law of Moses was in some a reflection of their lack of full spirituality; whilst others did this in order not to offend other believers, and thereby showed a superior spirituality. The *motive* was all important to how the outward behaviour should be judged. The commands to discipline weak brethren nearly all involve an element of judging motives; thus false teachers suggest false doctrine because their motive is leadership (Acts 20:30); those who would not work because they claimed the second coming was imminent were in fact "busybodies", their motivation was not genuine, *and the Thessalonians were told to recognize them as such*, and "them that are such" should be reproved (2 Thess. 3:12); we should take note of those who "serve their own belly" by creating division (Rom. 16:17,18); and ecclesial elders should be appointed whose inner attitudes are right (Tit. 1:7). Indeed, one of the themes of Titus is the need for a sound mind, which should be evident in those the ecclesia chose to be elders (1:9,10,15; 2:2,5-7,12,15; 3:1,3,5,10 Gk.) This all demonstrates that there is a place for 'judging' motives, especially in ecclesial life.

7:2 Judgment you judge- The "judgment" is of condemnation- every one of the 28 occurrences of the Greek word refer to "damnation" or "condemnation". The 'judging' which is prohibited in :1 is therefore of condemning others.

With what measure you measure- This verse begins with "For". Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

7:3 Why do you behold- This continues the context about judging from verses 1 and 2. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 4- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

The splinter- Literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity... these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really register.

Consider not- James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

7:4 To your brother- Remember that the Sermon was spoken to the disciples. The Lord is foreseeing how things would tend to go in the life of His collective people. There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. Christ's parables often have an element of unreality in them to highlight how His attitudes are unusual (e.g. the employer who pays all his men the same wages for different hours of work). And these unusual attitudes of His reflect the sensitivity of Jesus. But in this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out

our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, it's presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story. Perhaps He intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can... See on Mt. 13:28.

Pull out- S.w. 'cast out' in :5. The word is elsewhere used about the casting out of the rejected in condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). It is also used about casting out from church (3 Jn. 10) and synagogue and society (Acts 13:50; Jn. 9:34; Lk. 6:22). In Luke's account of the Lord's presentation of the material, he uses the same word for "cast out" from religious association (Lk. 6:22) as he does just a few verses later for this 'casting out' of splinters (Lk. 6:42). The casting out is therefore a judgmental condemning of others- and that is the connection with the preceding context of Mt. 7:1-3. In practice, this involved religious disfellowship. Christ's people are to associate with each other in fellowship because they are convinced that by grace, they in the body of Christ shall share eternity together. To 'cast out' from fellowship someone is therefore to effectively 'cast them out' in condemnation. The same word is used in both senses. The Lord's parable is most insightful- because He observes that actually to do this is a natural tendency for His followers, and they will justify it in terms of thinking they are doing it out of concern. And yet their attempt to do this is in fact the plank in their own eye. That judgmentalism is in fact a far worse failing than any fault they have observed in their brother. And this all flows directly and seamlessly on from the Lord's point blank statement that He will condemn those who condemn others (Mt. 7:1). The practice and upholding of the wicked practice of disfellowship therefore appears to be an issue upon which our eternity may be staked. We must pay any price, including social death and being cut off from communities and families we have known and loved, in order to avoid doing this.

Behold- An invitation to try to actually see the plank in your own eye. The plank is there exactly because you have tried to 'cast out' your brother, having heard the Lord's teaching about the need for a "single eye" (Mt. 6:22) and deciding that your brother's eye is defective. The plank is your judgmentalism. And that is what is so hard to perceive.

7:5 Hypocrite- Usually on the Lord's lips with reference to the Pharisees whom the Lord clearly detested and whom the rank and file disciples whom He was addressing likewise despised. But the Lord is saying that their critical, condemnatory attitude to each other would make them no different to the Pharisees.

First- The Greek *proton* suggests that the following clause is of ultimate, supreme importance; it's not simply a chronological statement that 'first do this, then do that'.

Cast out- We are to condemn ourselves firstly, recognizing our major blindness, and then with the humility of spirit elicited by this, we will have crystal clear vision with which to assist others.

See clearly- The Greek *dia-blepo* is related to the verb *blepo* in :3 ("why do you *behold / see* the splinter..."). The judgmental believer sees the splinter in his brother's eye and wants to condemn him for it, but the one who has repented of his judgmentalism and removed that plank from his spiritual vision will see through

(‘through’ is really the sense of *dia*). The translation “see clearly” doesn’t seem to me to have much to commend it. The one who has repented of the plank of his judgmentalism will see through casting out / condemning the splinter in his brother’s eye. “Then” you will see through casting out the splinter from his eye- *tote* more comfortably carries the sense of ‘right then’. The moment you repent of your condemnatory judgmentalism, you immediately see through condemning your brother’s weakness. And so the Lord has powerfully enforced His principle which He began with at the start of this section- do not condemn. And through this profound parable of casting out splinters and planks, He has brought us to see through our brother’s splinter. But the only way you can do that is to cast out / condemn your own condemnatory attitudes. It is often claimed that those who have committed what some would see as ‘major’ sins feel unable to judge others for their sins, and this is seen as a weakness. But actually, we are all major sinners. Those who have repented or matured into softer, non-condemnatory attitudes are mature, and not ‘weak’ as they are portrayed by their hard line brethren.

7:5,6 If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to “cast out” the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to “cast [out]” our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for “cast out” in 7:5 (*ek-ballo*) and “cast” in 7:6 (*ballo*) are related. Clearly verse 6 belongs in the section about judging which begins in :1. The idea of being “cast out” is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be “cast out” and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be “cast out” into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be “cast out” into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be “cast out” at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor. 11:31). But we are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would’ve confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren’t food but stones. They just wouldn’t have appreciated them. This isn’t any justification for hypocrisy; it’s simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to “pearls”; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

7:6 *Give not-* We are to judge, but not to condemn (7:1). Clearly this verse 6 requires us to show discernment.

The holy unto the dogs- Hagios, “the holy”, could be translated ‘the holy ones’, the saints. They were not to be thrown out to the dogs- i.e. to be condemned. This command not to condemn would then fit in seamlessly with the teaching of the preceding verses. The dogs which were on the edge of the city are associated with condemnation in both Jewish thought and Biblically (Ps. 59:6,14; Rev. 22:15). We are not to condemn, to throw the saints out to the dogs.

Neither cast- Ballo, related to *ekballo* ("cast out") in :5. I have noted several times that 'casting out' is used in the Lord's thought for condemnation.

Your pearls- Pearls represent the believers. The 12 pearls of Rev. 21:21 represent the 12 disciples. The Lord Jesus in His work with us is "seeking goodly pearls" (Mt. 13:45). The pearls are 'ours' in the sense that all that are Christ's are ours, as He makes explicit in John 17. His pearls are our brethren.

Before pigs, lest they trample them- Trampling by pigs was another Jewish figure of condemnation, of rejection into the Gentile world. Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord used the figure of trampling [s.w.] to describe condemnation and rejection (Mt. 5:13). To trample under foot meant to despise and specifically, to reject (s.w. Heb. 10:29 "trodden underfoot the Son of God"). Again the point is being made- don't condemn your brethren and treat them as mere worldlings, or even worse, those who shall be rejected from God's Kingdom. To refuse to fellowship them is treating them just like that.

Turn again and rend you- If we condemn our brethren, as it were casting them out to the pigs- those same pigs will turn on us and rend us- i.e., *we* will share the same condemnation which we gave our brethren. And thus the point of 7:1 is repeated- if you condemn, you shall be condemned. The same word translated "rend" is used by the Lord in Mt. 9:17 about how the wine of the new covenant will "burst" or destroy the old wineskins and the wine will run out from them. The bursting or rending of the wineskins is a picture of destruction and condemnation. The pigs of condemnation to whom we consigned our brethren will turn again and trample *us* underfoot. Therefore- do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. This interpretation of verse 6 fits snugly into the context of the preceding verses. Any attempt to make it apply to not offering the Gospel to "pigs" in case we get hurt by them would seem out of context- and contrary to the spirit of taking the Gospel to all men without discrimination, and never holding back in sharing the Gospel from fear that we might get beat up for it.

7:7 Ask and it shall be given- The connections within the Sermon surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit". The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfill his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of

receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

Seek... find- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12;). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?

The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. Not long previously in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

Find- See on 7:14.

Knock... opened- This again is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren, in the context of :6), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev.

3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

7:8 *Asks... receives... seeks... finds... knocks... opened*- Note that the first two clauses are in the present tense. If we ask and seek for spiritual things, we shall receive them. But the metaphor of knocking and opening I suggested on 7:7 has a specific reference to seeking salvation at the last day. Hence the Lord uses the future tense. His repetition of what He has said in 7:7 is to drive home the wonder of it all. That if we ask for salvation, for ourselves as well as opportunities for others to have it, for the extension of God's Kingdom and glory- we really will receive it.

Ask... receive- The other couplets use the same Greek words as in 7:7 (seek... find; knock... opened). 'Ask' is the same Greek word, but *lambano* is used for 'receive' rather than *didomi* ("given", 7:7). The words 'ask... receive' are to be found again in Jn. 16:24, where the Lord says that in the era of the comforter, whatever is asked for in His Name will be received. This would not be the only time that the Sermon appears to look ahead to the promises of the Comforter era- see on Mt. 5:4. James 4:3 continues James' commentary on the Sermon by saying that his readership asked and did not receive (same Greek words) because they asked for the wrong things from the wrong motives. He was correcting the impression some had taken that the Lord was offering a blank cheque for anything. Our commentary so far has shown that the Lord is promising salvation and the things connected with the extension of His Kingdom principles in our lives and those of others.

7:9 *What man is there of you*- The Lord was addressing the disciples in Matthew's record of the Sermon. We can imagine Him looking around at each of them.

Ask... give- The same words as in 7:7. The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

Bread... stone- The point has been made that loaves of bread looked like stones, just as there were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes (7:10). This surely played a part in the Lord's temptation to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread (Mt. 4:3). The similarity of the Aramaic words for bread and stone would have strengthened the connection. The simple message is that God will not play a cruel trick on us- because He is our loving Father. The Lord sensed human scepticism about God's simple offer of salvation. It is simply there- for all who will trust Him in a simple, child-like way. Perhaps the stone is to be connected with how the same word is used for the millstone of condemnation in Mk. 9:42 and Rev. 18:21, and "the stone of stumbling" in 1 Pet. 2:8. If we seek the bread of the Kingdom (a common Jewish concept at the time, Lk. 14:15), God will not condemn us. Note how the Lord spoke of salvation and relation with Him as "the children's bread" (Mt. 15:26), the bread of salvation given (*didomi* as in Mt. 7:7) freely (Jn. 6:32). The Lord saw to the essence of human fear- of Divine condemnation, that instead of the

children's bread we would be given the stone of condemnation. One reason for the crucifixion was in order to try to openly persuade the world of God's grace- that it is for real. The Lord's teaching here signals one of man's greatest difficulties: to believe in God's grace. To accept His desire and passion to save us. The *giving* of bread to us by Jesus at the breaking of bread (*lambano* again, as in 7:8) is surely an acted parable of His utter commitment to indeed give us the bread we seek above all things (Mt. 26:26).

Ask bread- Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same words to teach us to do just this: "Give us this day our daily bread". So He clearly intends us to see ourselves as the hungry little child, asking his daddy for bread. And surely God will not disappoint. The prayer will be answered.

7:10 *A fish... a serpent-* Lk. 11:11 labours the point: "If he ask a fish, will he *for a fish* give him a serpent?". The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

7:11 *If you then, being evil-* This record of the Sermon was addressed to the disciples. Did the Lord consider them to 'be evil'? The only other time we encounter the phrase "being evil" is again on the Lord's lips and again in Matthew: "O generation of vipers, how can you, *being evil*, speak good things?" (Mt. 12:34). He may have the sense that 'Even the worst Pharisees have a soft spot for their little boys and would never play a cruel trick on them- so do you think God will do that to you?'. The sentence opens with the particle *ei*, and it would be justifiable to translate this 'Whether' or 'Even if' instead of "if". Even if they were as evil as the very worst sinners, they would still give their child bread rather than a stone. The logic is very powerful. If we believe God is basically good, then seeing even wicked people would not play a cruel trick on their kiddies, how much more would God not do that to us His beloved children, whom we address as "Our Father"?

Know how to give- Now the Lord moves beyond simply teaching that God will give us daily bread and salvation if we ask. He alludes here to how a father, even a man who is otherwise evil, has an intuitive sense as to what present his child would like. Paul Tournier's insightful book *The Meaning of Gifts* demonstrates that the desire to give gifts is psychologically part of 'love'. God knows what ultimately we would love so much. And yet, as the James 4:3 allusion demonstrates, it is not material things in this life which are in view here. God knows us and He knows all our possible futures, our eternal possibilities throughout His Kingdom. And He will surely give us that. He has created for us the most wonderful things to lavish upon us. To think that in any sense God is a 'hard man' is to tragically misunderstand. That persuasion only really comes from a lack of basic faith in Him and His grace.

Give good gifts- The emphasis upon "good" continues the laboured addressing of our fear that God just might not be 'good' and we might get a serpent rather than a fish from Him. The point is laboured because it is such a powerful array of step logic- if it's not all a cruel trick, then it is all wonderfully true. The parallel record

speaks of "the Holy Spirit" instead of "good gifts", and there is a clear connection with Eph. 4:8: "He gave gifts unto men", referring to the Holy Spirit. All the Greek words there are used here in Mt. 7:11,12. On one level, there is a prediction of the Comforter, as elsewhere in the Sermon (see on 7:8). And yet the principle appears to be clearly that in general terms, God will not only give us daily bread and future salvation, but so much more besides- in spiritual terms. Whilst the form of manifestation of Spiritual gifts has changed since the first century, the principle remains- that God will give His Spirit to those who are poor in spirit and who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Your Father- Many times the idea of "Your father which is in heaven" is used in the context of faith in prayer being answered (Mt. 7:11; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 14:13; James 1:5,6,17 etc.). It's as if the reality of God actually existing in Heaven in a personal form should be a powerful focus for our prayers.

Good things- Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). These passages therefore teach that having spiritual fruit is associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognizance of the fact the righteous have prayed: 2 Kings 19:20; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

7:12 Therefore- The reason why we should do to others as we would like them to do to us flow straight on from :11. But what is the connection of thought? Perhaps the Lord is changing tack here and introducing His concluding summary for the Sermon, which is about 'doing' what He has been teaching. The same Greek for 'do' here in :12 is translated 'bring forth' or 'do' in the distinct seven fold exhortation to 'do' which we find in 7:17,18,19,21,22,24,26. The Greek *oun* translated "therefore" is of wide meaning, and could just as comfortably introduce a new section rather than conclude the section about judging which began in 7:1. It can have the sense of 'truly' or 'certainly', as if introducing a major truth.

That men should do to you- This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermon. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we can understand His comment: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

It may be that the context of judgment, so clearly established in the preceding 11 verses, is not out of the Lord's mind in His use of the word *oun*, "Therefore...". If we condemn others, if we drag them before God's judgment because we refuse to forgive them, then we must consider: Do I want others to do that to me? For we have all sinned and upset others to the point some struggle to forgive us. As we judge others, then we shall be judged likewise. If we really hope they have to answer for their sin against us, then perhaps they will have to. And would you like others to take you to the Divine court for your sins?

7:13 *Enter in*- The context is quite clear that the Lord means 'enter into the Kingdom' (Mt. 18:3; 19:24; Lk. 18:25). But the question is, whether the Lord speaks of entering into the Kingdom at the last day, or in some sense, in this life. Luke's record of this statement of the Lord is in Lk. 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate: for many... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able". This favours a 'last day' interpretation, for we know from the parable of the foolish girls that some will seek to enter at the time of the Lord's return and be unable to. Some other usages of the phrase 'enter in' imply the same (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; 25:10; Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:19; 4:6; Rev. 22:14). However, John's equivalent of this phrase speaks of the believer 'entering in' to a relationship and salvation with the Lord right now (Jn. 10:9). And other words of the Lord speak of 'entering in' to "life" right now (Mt. 18:3,8,9; 19:17). The guests enter in to the Messianic banquet now, before the Master comes, Mt. 22:12; the Scribes stopped men entering the Kingdom right now, Mt. 23:13; by birth of water and spirit we enter the Kingdom, Jn. 3:5; the Gentiles enter in every time one is converted (Rom. 11:25); a promise is given us of entering the promised rest, but we who believe do right now 'enter in' to that rest (Heb. 4:1,3). And yet we are to labour in order to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:11). The rich man must shed the load of his wealth and enter in- now (Mt. 19:23,24). For judgment day is too late to shed the load of wealth. We can therefore conclude that by following the Lord's teaching now, we enter into His Kingdom; insofar as His Kingship is exercised over us, we are His Kingdom, those whom He is King over. The outcome of the judgment day is not therefore some terrible unknown to us if we are in our hearts and lives clearly under His Kingship in this life. Our passage into the future Kingdom of God on earth will be a seamless continuation of our present experience.

The narrow gate - The Greek could imply 'made narrow'. The Lord repeats the term in :14, emphasizing how narrow is the entrance. The contrast is with the wide gate and broad road. The idea of two gates facing a man was surely an allusion to the gates of Jerusalem, which had a main gate, through which camels could pass, and the small gate through which only pedestrians could enter. This leads me to favour the traditional interpretation of entering through into the Kingdom through the eye of a needle (Mt. 19:24; Lk. 18:25)- the rich must unload their camels of all their wealth and squeeze through the small needle gate. The narrowness of the gate is because it is so hard for people to give up their materialism. They desire spirituality, to enter in, but not without their present attachment to wealth. Remember the Lord was primarily and initially addressing the poor. The desire for wealth, and especially mental concern about it, is the main reason why people do not grasp the way to the Kingdom. That needs some sober reflection, because our natural assumption is that warnings against materialism do not apply to *me*. Whenever we find ourselves making such an assumption, that Biblical warnings do not apply to us, we need to really ensure that we are thinking straight and that our self-deceiving flesh is not kidding us that we simply don't have to take the Lord at His word.

The way- Surely the Lord at this stage in His ministry had in mind the way that John the Baptist had come to prepare a "way" for Him (Mt. 3:3). By admitting that this way would only be found by a minority of Israel, the Lord was perhaps tacitly recognizing that John's attempt to prepare a way over which the King of glory could come to Jerusalem had not succeeded.

That leads- Apago is used another 14 times in the New Testament. Ten of these specifically refer to being 'lead away to death', the majority referring to the leading away of the Lord Jesus to death on the cross. 7:14 contrasts being lead to destruction with being lead to life; but the way to life is through the death of the cross. We either bear our iniquities and their result (Lev. 19:8), or we bear the cross of the Lord Jesus. It's a burden either way. The Lord played on this fact when He spoke of there being two roads, one which *leads* to death, and the other to life (Mt. 7:13,14). The Greek word translated 'lead' is in fact part of an idiom: to be led is an idiom for 'to be put to death' (cp. Jn. 18:13; 21:18). Indeed, the very word translated "lead" in Mt. 7:14 is rendered "be put to death" (Acts 12:19). So, we're led out to death either way, as the criminal made his 'last walk' to the cross. We're either led out and put to death for the sake of eternal life, or for eternal death. The logic is glaring. The Hebrew of Ps. 139:24 reveals a telling play on words which makes the same point: "Wicked way" is rendered in the AVmg. as 'way of pain'; the way of wickedness is itself the way of pain.

Destruction- The Greek is used another 19 times in the New Testament, nearly always with reference to condemnation at the last day. We are making the choice now- condemnation, or the path to the cross, to death, and thence to eternal life. The essence of the future judgment is before us daily; "we make the answer now".

Many- The same word used about the "many" who were now listening to Him teach (Mt. 4:25; 8:1). Surely He was saying that the Kingdom road is not found by many. And yet we compare this with the promise that Abraham's seed will become many. Compared to the wonder of salvation, we are indeed "many", but relative to the many who do not respond, we are a minority.

7:14 Narrow is the way- "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19 NIV). The road of the wise is described as a highway in Proverbs 16:17 too; and the way of the wicked is also strewn with difficult obstacles in Proverbs 22:5; "Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths" (2:15). There is probably a designed contrast between this and the way the Lord described the road to the Kingdom as made narrow, and the way to death as a wide, broad highway (Mt. 7:13,14); the Proverbs seem to say the opposite. The answer may be that Proverbs is presenting God's viewpoint; in ultimate reality, the way to the Kingdom is wide and clear and easier, better marked, than the road to death. But the Lord turned all this round, because He appreciated that from *our* perspective, this wouldn't be the case. We will think that the way to the Kingdom is made narrow (Gk.) and hard, restricted; whilst the road to death seems so wide and obviously right. The Lord Jesus based many of His parables on the Proverbs, and His words concerning the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to the Kingdom (Mt. 7:13,14) are surely based on the frequent descriptions of the ways / great way to life, and that to death, which Proverbs so often mentions. The road / way of life which we are on is really leading somewhere. "The way of the wicked" is opposed to the way of him "that followeth after righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9 cp. seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, Mt. 5:47).

Few- See on "many" in 7:13. We find another contrast between the few and the many when we read that only "few" will be chosen from the many who are called (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). The implication seems to be that out of the "many" who were then listening to the Lord's teaching ("many" in 7:13 is s.w. Mt. 4:25; 8:1), only a minority would enter into life. There seems fair Biblical reason to think that the community of God's people are a minority in the world, and yet within them, only a minority will finally choose the way of salvation. This helps make sense of why all the faithful lament the weak spiritual state of the church communities surrounding them. And recognizing that this is a general principle shields us from the disillusion which arises from having started out believing that the majority of our community are genuine believers. We have no option but to assume they will be saved, for we cannot condemn any individual; but on the other hand, we are

to recognize that on a statistical level, only a few of those within the community will be saved. The majority of those who were 'baptized' in the Red Sea did not make it to God's Kingdom, and this fact is used in 1 Cor. 10 and Hebrews 3 and 4 to warn us not to assume that the ratio will be much higher in the Christian community.

Find it- This is clearly to be connected with the Lord's teaching a few verses earlier that whoever seeks will find (Mt. 7:7,8). He is balancing out the statistical difficulty of salvation with the fact that those who want to be there just have to ask- and they will be. The promise that whoever seeks / asks will find / receive is not a blank cheque about material things, but rather is a promise of entry into the Kingdom. All those who truly love the Lord's appearing will enter the Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1,8). It is so simple that it is hard to believe- those who truly seek to be in the Kingdom, will find a place therein. Note how the Lord here speaks of finding the way that leads to life, elsewhere He speaks of finding life (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). This is typical of the now / but not yet teaching of the New Testament. We have the eternal life in the sense that we are living that kind of life which we shall eternally live, we have entered the way to life; but we are still mortal and await the physical change to immortality.

7:15 *Beware-* Clearly the prohibition against judging others in the sense of condemning them (7:1) doesn't mean that we can't form a valid opinion about someone's genuineness as a teacher.

False prophets- Pseudo-prophetes means that these people are not spiritual at all, they are faking it, pseudo-prophets. To be such a fake, a *pseudo*, is not the same as being a believer who has failed in behaviour at times or who has some Biblical interpretations which we don't personally agree with.

Come to you- The Greek phrase likely means 'Appear to you'.

In sheep's clothing- Dressed as if they are Jesus?

But inwardly- Given our inability to judge the inner thoughts of others, and the clear prohibition against judging to condemnation in the context (7:1), perhaps this is the Lord's comment upon them, and is not meant to be an invitation to us to claim to read the inward thoughts of others? However the next verse goes on to say that we can observe their fruits, and it is by their fruits that *we* are to discern them. But the Lord discerns them by their inward thoughts, which are visible to Him. Thereby His position on these false prophets becomes our position too- but we arrive there by different routes. We are to observe their fruits, whereas He looks upon their hearts. The Lord uses the same word several times to tell the Pharisees that *inwardly* or 'within' they are full of unspirituality (Mt. 23:25,27,28; Lk. 11:39). This suggests that His warning against "false prophets" is a warning against the Jewish leadership. But He uses the language of 'prophets' because this fits in with the Old Testament theme of false and true prophets. Just as the people had to discern between those two groups, so now, in an era when there were no more prophets in the Old Testament sense, God's people had to beware of imposters like the Pharisees. They were false prophets, false speakers of God's word, in that they had effectively elevated their interpretations of God's word [the *halakah*] to the same level as God's actual inspired word.

Ravening- The Greek word is always translated elsewhere as 'extortioner'. The Pharisees are clearly in view here, and yet the Pharisee of Lk. 18:11 thanked God with the same word, that he was not an 'extortioner' (Lk. 18:11). The Pharisee didn't see his own sin. The Lord saw their hearts and saw that they were extortioners, but they thanked God that they were not. This is an essay in the blindness of humans to their own sins, and in our need to see ourselves as the Lord sees us, with His eyes and from His perspective. This is the essence of self-examination. The motive of the Pharisees / false prophets was clearly financial gain. This is pinpointed

by the Lord as the fundamental reason for their false prophecies, for their external appearance of spirituality- it was because they wanted cash out of people. This was and is clearly deeply upsetting to the Lord.

Wolves- We've seen that these false prophets were specifically the Pharisees in the Lord's immediate context. When He warns the disciples that He is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves (Mt. 10:16), He is clearly alluding to His teaching here- that the Pharisees appear as sheep, but are as wolves. The implication could be that there would be fake disciples of Jesus, and that the real opposition to the work of the disciples would be the wolves of the Pharisees (see on 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*). This clearly happened after the Lord's death, where the Judaist plot to destroy Paul's preaching of Christianity involved Judaist 'false brethren in Christ' entering in to the flock as wolves (Gal. 2:4). In Jn. 10:12, the Lord speaks of how He as the good shepherd would give His life fighting the wolf so that the sheep might be saved; the implication is that the wolf killed Him. His death was at the hands of the Jewish leadership. Wolves don't usually kill men. This is an element of unreality to highlight the point- that legalism may not appear too bad nor too ultimately dangerous; but in fact it is, and was what led to the death of God's Son. Paul's warning that wolves would enter the flock (Acts 20:29) likewise came true in the Judaist false teachers who entered in to the ecclesias and destroyed so much, both spiritually and doctrinally. I have shown elsewhere that the roots of the false thinking which led to later false doctrines such as the Trinity actually began in Judaist ideas which entered Christianity. From our standpoint today, we can take the point that the major enemy of the Gospel will be legalism and posturing religious leaders.

7:16 You shall know them- Perhaps the emphasis was upon the "you". The Lord knows the evil hearts of these people- but we can't see their hearts, and so *we* shall know them by their external fruits.

By their fruits- The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

Grapes of thorns- The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach.

And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs of thistles- Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publically on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn in 7:1. He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.

7:17,18 This appears to belabour the point made in the preceding verses. But the Lord so wishes to drive the point home- that fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analyzed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

7:19 *Is hewn down*- The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4). The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire is surely referring to the words of Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

7:20 The belaboured repetition of the point (see on 7:17,18) is surely because we will have a strong temptation to undervalue spiritual fruit, and to seek to judge others in terms of their traditions, culture and specific interpretations- rather than by their fruit.

7:21 *Lord, Lord*- Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom ("in that day", :22). The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The

acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

Does the will- Allowing the Sermon to interpret itself, we see an obvious connection with our prayer asking "Your will be done" (Mt. 6:10). If that request was just asking for God to do His will, it would be easy to pray and also somewhat meaningless. But the connection with Mt. 7:21 means that we are asking that *we* do God's will. And doing His will is difficult, slow progress, building on a rock- as the rest of Matthew 7 records. The Lord's prayer in Gethsemane demonstrates the difficulty of praying for the Father's will to be done in our lives- prayed there with sweat like drops of blood (Mt. 26:42). So we are to pray for strength to do God's will, for spiritual strength to live obediently to the principles of the Sermon. 1 Jn. 5:14 encourages us that if we ask for anything "according to [*kata*] His will, He hears us". But asking *kata* His will could just as well be translated 'in order to fulfill'. If we want strength to do His will in practice, He will give it to us. And His will is expressed here in Matthew 5-7 quite clearly.

The will of My Father in Heaven- This is a fairly common phrase with the Lord (Mt. 12:50; 18:14; John's equivalent seems to be 'to do the will of Him that sent Me', Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38,39,40). The idea seems to be that we on earth can do the will of Him who is in one sense so far away from us, "in Heaven"; and thereby collapse that distance between us.

7:22 *Many-* The Greek often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

Will say to Me- Judgment will be a process, with the rejected initially protesting, seeking to change the Lord's mind- and then slinking away in shame. Nobody will be passive in that day. The only thing important will be acceptance at His hand and a place in the Kingdom. We will come to that position either by loving obedience to His ways in this life- or all too late, in condemnation. The logic is powerful- we must chose that desire for the Kingdom life *now* as the dominant emotion, overarching all our emotions, decision making and formation of our deepest desires.

Lord, Lord- Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day.

Prophesied... When we consider the Lord's teaching of Mt. 7:22,23 and 25:42-44 together, He's saying that those rejected at the day of judgment will be so on account of their *omissions*- hence their surprise, and anger because they knew that they had *done* good works; they thought that what they had *committed* was morally acceptable to God, and this would usher them into the Kingdom. But their sins of *omission* cost them the Kingdom. The mention of prophesying must be seen in the context of the Lord's warning in 7:15 about *false* prophets. To claim to have spoken / prophesied in His Name (cp. 'in sheep's clothing', appearing as Jesus) implies these people had considered themselves followers of Jesus in this life.

Cast out demons... done many wonderful works- The possession of Holy Spirit gifts which enabled healings and miracles to be performed was no guarantee of final acceptance at the last day. Pentecostal theology needs

to take note of this- for the power to do miracles is simply not any guarantee of salvation, as they wrongly suppose. And we who live in an era when the miraculous gifts have been withdrawn can still take a powerful lesson- no matter how dramatically we may be a channel for God's activity in the lives of others, this is irrelevant to our final salvation. The essence of the life in Christ, the life of the Kingdom, is internal spiritual mindedness. The contrast is between 'doing' wonderful works and 'doing' (the same Greek word is used in :21) the will of the Father. The language of 'doing the Father's will' is used about the Lord's life and final death on the cross. To be as Him, to give our deepest life as He did, is not the same as doing external works for others.

7:23 Profess- The Lord will "profess" to them that He doesn't know them and they must depart from Him; but Strong understands the Greek to mean 'to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent'. The Lord will be agreeing with them, that they are worthy of condemnation. They will have condemned themselves, and the Lord will simply confirm this to them in His final verdict. If we are ashamed of Him now, we will be ashamed from before Him then (1 Jn. 2:28), and He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). Every time we are asked to stand up for Him and His words in the eyes of men, we are as it were living out our future judgment.

Never knew- "Many" will be rejected at the judgment seat because they don't *know* the Lord Jesus Christ; they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they have experienced answered prayer, done miracles, worked for their Lord etc. (Mt. 7:22,23; 1 Cor. 13). They will have built a spiritual house, but on sand. It isn't difficult to be a good Christian outwardly. But to *know* the Lord Jesus? That's another question. The Greek for "never" means literally 'never at any time'. The course of their lives was such that there had never been a time when He 'knew' them. We rather expect Him to say '*You never knew Me*'. But He says that *He never knew them-* because the whole idea of 'knowing' Him is mutual. Insofar as we know Him (in a relational sense), He knows us- and vice versa. We really need to ask whether we are praying to Jesus, talking to Him, 'knowing' Him...

Depart- Mt. 7:23 = 2 Tim. 2:19. Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

You that work iniquity- And yet they have just protested all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage (see on "ravening wolves", 7:15). In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him. Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them (:22)- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

7:24 Sayings- Logos suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders (Mt. 7:24-27). One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you'.

And does them- An echo of :21, he who *does* the will of the Father. The parallel is thus made between the will of the Father, and "these sayings of Mine" in the Sermon. Yet in the Lord's own case, the doing of the

Father's will meant the death of the cross. This finally was and is the outcome of living in accordance with the Sermon. This is what it leads to. The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "Hear *and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: "But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22). James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom". "But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermon on the Mount (see on 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

Will liken him- As in :27, "shall be likened unto". The future tenses imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is* likened", present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

Built his house upon a rock- This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind).

Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: "What is your dominant desire?". Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel Lk. 6:48 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

His house- Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day (Mt. 7:21,22).

7:25 The rain descended and the floods came- The allusion is clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do the will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting

with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

Came- The same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

The winds- The disciples surely recalled the Lord's teaching when they were on the sea of Galilee with winds blowing so strongly that they were going to drown (s.w. Mt. 8:26; 14:24; Jn. 6:18 s.w. 'blow'). Those incidents they would've understood as a foretaste of judgment and condemnation- out of which they were saved only by the presence and grace of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the winds refer here to the Angels who will play a major part in our judgment process; for God makes His Angels winds (Ps. 104:4).

Beat upon- The Greek for 'to beat upon' is used seven other times in the NT- and always about falling down at the feet of the Lord Jesus. We either do that in our desperation today, or His judgment shall fall upon us in the last day. There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44).

Fell not- The same house stood before and after judgment. See on 7:24 "his house". The same word is used of how we desperate sinners in this life fall down before Jesus in confession that we have sinned and we dearly wish to do something about that debt (Mt. 16:26). We either do that, or we shall fall down in condemnation at the last day, with the same realization (Mt. 18:26). Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

Founded- Surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

7:26 Built his house- The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10; Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

7:27 The floods came...- The Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

Great was the fall- A common figure for condemnation (Mt. 15:14; Acts 5:5; Rom. 11:11,22; 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:8,12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). Condemnation will be tragic- "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the

certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

7:28 The people- Although the Lord started teaching only His disciples, leaving the multitude at the bottom of the mountain (Mt. 5:1), clearly many of them came up to hear Him over the course of His discourse- for in Mt. 8:1 we learn that the multitudes returned from up the mountain.

Amazed- The sense of reality commented upon in :27 left the people with utter astonishment. Never before nor since have the eternal issues of existence been stated so clearly and compellingly.

7:29 Authority- It was exactly because the Lord Jesus had the power to give or take eternity that He had this authority which the people sensed.

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