



THE TEACHINGS

The SIX TEACHINGS OF JESUS

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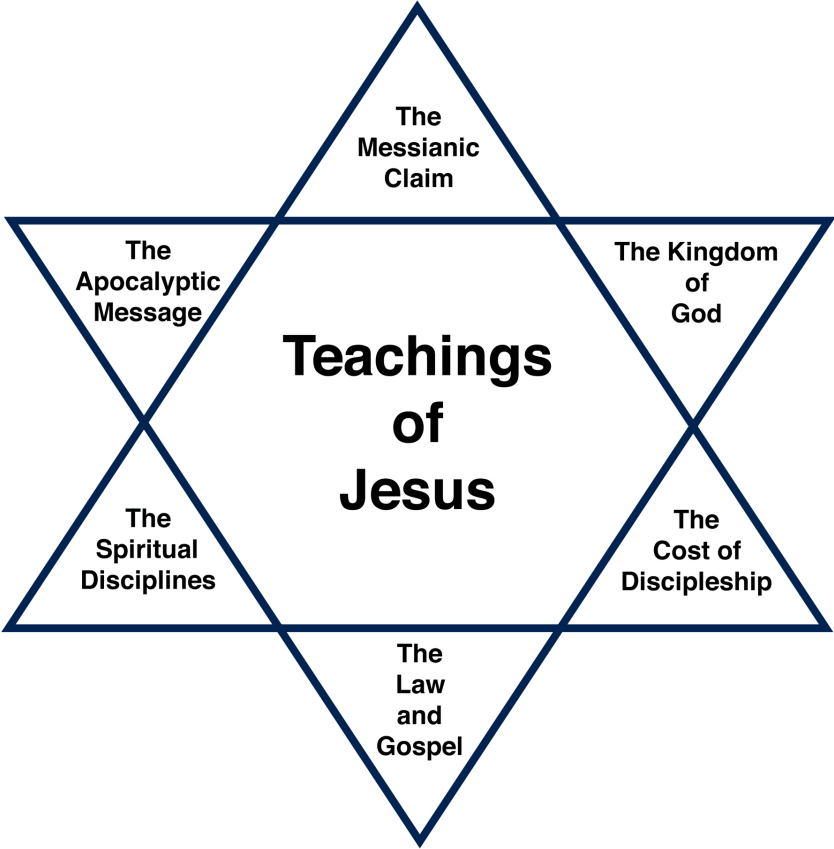
Dedicated to my Wife
Barbara Ann (Russell) Reuteler



St. Catherine's on Mt. Sinai in Egypt is the oldest continuously operating monastery and home to one of the largest collections of Coptic manuscripts and priceless paintings, such as this painting of Jesus, which I have placed on the cover.

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INTRODUCTION

The teachings of Jesus have always fascinated me. While the essence of his teachings can be found in *The Sermon on the Mount* in chapters 5 to 7 of the *Gospel of Matthew*, there are valuable teachings to be found in *all the Gospels*, in *The Book of Acts*, and even in the *Book of Revelation*.¹ I have worked through all of these books searching for the Teachings of Jesus.

I found six of Jesus' teachings. They are his Messianic Claim, the Kingdom of God, the Cost of Discipleship, the Law and Gospel, the Spiritual Disciplines, and the Apocalyptic Message.

The New Testament is a companion to this book. It will be necessary to read the Scripture passages before reading my comments or commentary on those passages. This book is not Scripture, but it is a meager attempt to interpret Scripture. In the *Appendices*, I have placed some documents or graphics as an additional way of looking at some of the topics raised in the *Six Teachings of Jesus*. There may be more than six categories of Jesus' teachings, but these are the six categories that have leaped out at me.

Why is it important to study the teachings of Jesus? In my opinion, these six categories of his teachings should be studied first. We should read the Bible backwards, starting with Jesus and interpreting everything else from our understanding of Jesus. This means of course that parts of the *Book of Revelation* will need to be read first, since Jesus calls the seven churches to account for the way in which they have reflected his light, or put it out.

This book is intended to be a six week study. There is a companion, or workbook, to aid the reader in probing more deeply into the *Teachings of Jesus*. The workbook will assist the reader in identifying and understanding the six teachings of Jesus. It will also lead the reader in responding to the six teachings of Jesus.

¹ See my book, *The Messengers*, and, *The Explosion of Faith*. The first book is a study of the four Gospels and the second is a Study of the Book of Acts.

The study could be expanded to an eight week study by spending two weeks each on chapters five and six.

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| Chapter Five: | The Spiritual Disciplines: | pages 61-69 |
| | The Bonhoeffer Quote: | pages 69-76 |
| Chapter Six | The Apocalyptic Message: | pages 77-89 |
| | Letters to the Churches: | pages 89-100 |

At the end of each chapter, I will attempt to put the main point in a brief statement of each of the *Six Teachings of Jesus*. This is my own opinion, but I have drawn my conclusions by reading all the teachings of Jesus. Let me know what you think!

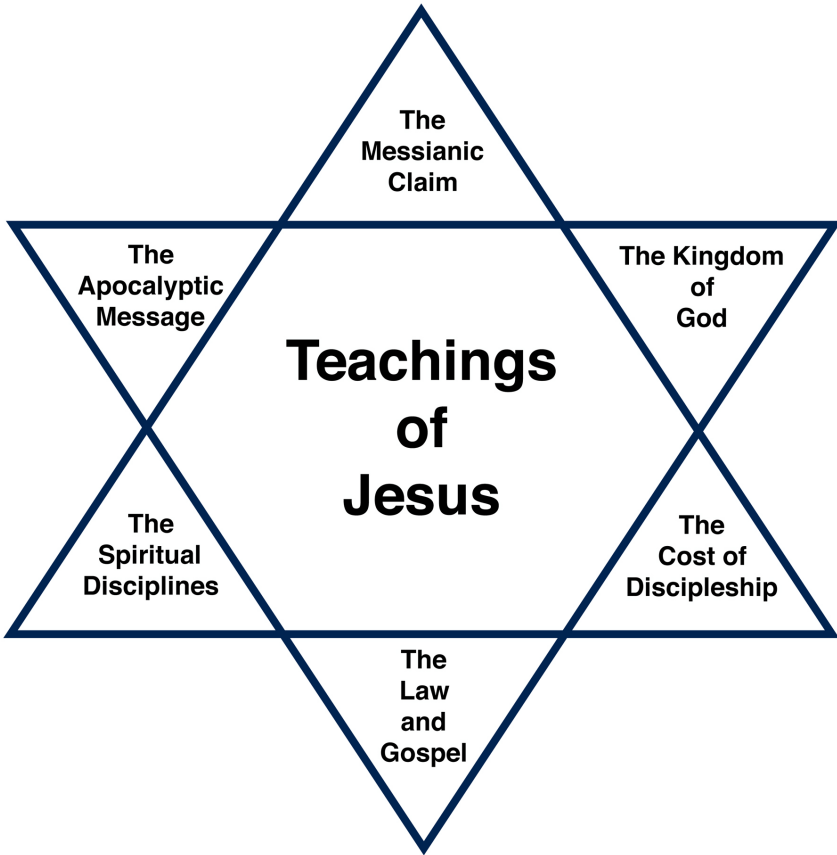
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“Jesus is LORD”

Romans 10:9

1

THE MESSIANIC CLAIM



THE MESSIANIC CLAIM

*My kingdom is not of this world.
If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews.
But now my kingdom is from another place.*

John 18:36 (NRSV)

1. In Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30)

The Synagogue in Nazareth was not the first place, in which Jesus preached, but it was in his own hometown and that provided him with some difficulty. Synagogue worship consisted of the following three parts: (1) prayers, (2) Scripture, and (3) teaching. In the reading of Scripture, a priest, if present, was expected to read from the Law, but anyone was welcome to read from the Prophets. Visitors were frequently asked, and on this special day, Jesus participated by reading from Isaiah 61:1-2 (and 58:6). After he finished reading, he sat down, as was the custom, to teach. In his teaching he claimed to have fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah. While Isaiah was referring to the liberation of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, Jesus taught that he was about to liberate all people from the captivity of sin. This means that he was claiming to be the Messiah and that the proof was in what he was about to do. This in itself did not alienate him from his listeners. People expected a Messiah, but on their own terms. They expected the Messiah to relate only to the Jews.

It was obvious to Jesus that everyone wanted to see some sign or miracle, and so he quoted the proverb: "Doctor, cure yourself!" In contrast to this proverb, he quoted another: "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." These two proverbs are joined together in the Gospel of Thomas, where they read: "No prophet is acceptable in his village; no physician heals those who know him." Apparently Jesus was unable to perform the same kind of miracles in Nazareth, which he performed in Capernaum, and he attributes his failure to their lack of faith. Luke has not mentioned any of Jesus' ministry in Capernaum, and so we can only conclude that this incident in Nazareth is out of chronological order, or else that Luke has not recorded everything Jesus did. Mark 6:1-4 seems to indicate a

different chronological order, for he has Jesus involved in ministry prior to the incident in Nazareth.

The two illustrations Jesus uses from the Old Testament make the congregation angry. The first is a reference to Elijah, who provided a never-failing meal and oil for the widow from Zarephath near Sidon (1 Kings 17:8-24), and the second is a reference to the way in which Elisha healed Naaman the Leper from Syria (2 Kings 5:1-27). Not only does Jesus imply that they experience no miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith, but that the Gentiles do experience miracles through their faith and that God moves among those who are open to Him. This alienates the people of Nazareth enough to want to kill him, but he moves through the middle of the crowd safely.

2. To John the Baptist

The Messengers from John (Matthew 11:2-19)

After John was imprisoned by Herod Antipas, (the younger son of Herod the Great), he sent some of his own disciples to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah. He seems to have had doubts about Jesus, doubts, which were prompted by a different understanding of what the Messiah was supposed to do. Jesus did not fit into the *judgmental* role that John expected. John was the last of the Old Testament type prophets, a kind of latter-day Elijah. In fact Malachi 4:5 predicts such a person, not as a literal return of Elijah, but as a prophet like Elijah. Jesus saw John as more than a prophet, one who prepared the way for his own coming; and yet, the least in the Kingdom of God will be greater than John (11:11). This was not a criticism of John the Baptist, but a way of stressing the radical character of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus had a high regard for John, but John still represents a different generation. He answers John's disciples by giving them a list of the signs of the Kingdom, which were: (1) the blind see, (2) the lame walk, (3) the leper is cleansed, (4) the deaf hear, (5) the dead are raised, and (6) the poor are vindicated. The old expectation was that the Kingdom would be taken by violence and force, but Jesus proclaims its establishment by justice and love. Therefore a warning is necessary. Jesus advises caution so that they will not be led astray. John's response of fasting was fitting, but so was Jesus' response of feasting. The old has passed, and the new has begun.

The Messianic Question (Luke 7:18-35)

John sends two of his disciples to ask the Messianic Question, which according to Luke 7:19 is: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Jesus’ response in Luke 7:22 is: “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.” These are the signs of the Kingdom and its King.

Following Jesus’ answer there is a shift of emphasis to who John is. He is more than a prophet; he is the *forerunner* of the Messiah. Jesus’ reference in verse 27 to Malachi 3:1 confirms this. Because he belongs to the old age, he is less than those who belong to the new age. In the transition people have difficulty identifying with either age. In the case of John, the Pharisees and Lawyers think of him as being possessed by a demon; and in the case of Jesus, they accuse him of being a glutton, drunkard, and friend to tax collectors and sinners. Through John we have moved beyond the prophets, and in Jesus the prophetic message has been fulfilled. He is the Messiah, the Anointed King of the New Age.

3. In Caesarea Philippi

Peter’s Confession (Mark 8:27-33)

Caesarea Philippi was not only located outside of Galilee, it was also a center of pagan worship. Philip, the son of Herod the Great, built it in honor of Caesar and himself. One can still see evidence of its pagan past by visiting the area today.

It was on the way to Caesarea Philippi that Jesus asked his disciples whom they thought he was. Peter replied, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but Peter’s understanding was less than complete. Jesus acknowledged that he was the *Messiah* (Hebrew) or the *Christ* (Greek), which means, “anointed king.”

Following his acceptance of Peter’s confession, Jesus began to define what it would mean. The Messiah would have to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. This was not part of the Jewish Messianic expectation. The idea of a suffering Messiah could be found in Isaiah 53, but the concept of a triumphant Messiah, found in Isaiah 11, caught

on more easily. For Jesus, the suffering preceded the triumph, and so he began the first of three predictions of his suffering and death, which can be found in Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33f. He saw Peter's words as a continuation of Satan's temptation. Nothing personal was meant by his scathing remark to Peter. Peter was still to become the leader of the Church, but he had a great deal to learn.

In Mark 8:31, Jesus refers to himself as the *Son of Man*. This was the way in which he usually referred to himself. The Son of Man was an image he took from Daniel 7:13-14 and refers to a heavenly figure at the end time, who comes as God's representative to act in the final judgment. No one else calls Jesus the Son of Man, but he uses the title many times to describe himself. He may be trying to reinterpret the disciples' mistaken concept of the Messiah.

Peter's Confession (Luke 9:18-22)

Since there seems to be confusion as to who Jesus is, Jesus asks his own disciples if they know. They replied that others were equating him with a risen John the Baptist, Elijah, or some other prophet. When Jesus pressed them further, Peter replied that he believed him to be the Messiah.

Jesus told him not to tell anyone because he feared that it would not be understood. His reference to himself as the "Son of Man" indicates that he is trying to remove the *political* connotation from the Jewish concept of the Messiah. Jesus took his reference to the "Son of Man" from Daniel 7:9-22, who will suffer, die, but be raised again. No one had this kind of a concept of the Messiah.

Luke differs from Mark in that he supposes that this confession took place on Israelite soil. Mark, on the other hand, locates it in Caesarea Philippi, which would have been on pagan soil.

Peter's Confession (Matthew 16:13-20)

This is the turning point of the Gospel. From here on in, the shadow of the cross begins to rise. It is very interesting that Peter makes his profession in Caesarea Philippi, a Gentile community. This community got its name from Philip the Tetrarch, who changed its name from Paneas to Caesarea Philippi to honor Augustus Caesar and himself. He added his own name to distinguish the city from other

communities named after the emperor. It was the site of the pagan shrine to the Greek god, Pan, and lies outside of the bounds of Jewish Palestine.

In this setting Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, and they tell him that some people are saying that he is John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. As we have seen in Matthew 14:2, Herod Antipas thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others thought that Jesus might be the prophet Elijah, as predicted in Malachi 4:2; but John the Baptist has been identified as Elijah, although he denies it (John 1:21). Some thought that he was Jeremiah, not because it was predicted, but because Jeremiah talked about the establishment of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-40), which Jesus did indeed come to establish. There never was however any suggestion that Jeremiah would return from the dead.

Peter speaks for all the disciples when he professes that Jesus is none of these, that he is the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the Living God. Jesus admits it, and states that the Holy Spirit prompted Peter to make his profession. What follows, is a little play on words as Jesus gives Simon the name of *Peter*. The Aramaic name is *Cephas*, and the Greek name is *Petros*. They both mean *rock* or *stone*. He is to become the rock or foundation stone of the Church (Ekklesia). Church, as it is used here, is referring to the community of faith rather than an ecclesiastical organization. That the powers of death will not prevail against it is a sign that the Church will be on the offensive. Other translations of the Bible refer to the powers of death as a fortress with gates, which lock in death and lock out any potential rescue. In Matthew 12:29, Jesus tells Peter that the domain of Satan has been plundered by himself; and in Matthew 16:18, he suggests that in the future it will be plundered by the Church.

Peter is also told that he will hold the keys of the Kingdom. This echoes the words of Isaiah 22:22, where authority is turned over to Eliakim. A similar authority is to be given to Peter, but it is not a power to withhold the Good News of the Kingdom from anyone. He is given the power and authority to proclaim the Gospel (Kerygma) and formulate Christian teaching (Didache). It does not mean that God binds himself to what Peter says, but that Peter will do these things in accord with the will of Christ. Neither the naming of Peter as the Rock

nor the bestowing upon him the keys makes him the first pope. He does however become the first apostolic witness to the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Matthew has taken the above account from Mark 8:27—9:1, but he has added the discussion about the Church and Peter’s role in it.

4. In Jesus High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26)

The theme of this prayer is *GLORY* and it can be divided neatly into three parts—for himself, for his disciples, and for the church.

The Prayer for Himself (John 17:1-5)

Parts of this prayer are obviously the work of John. Jesus would not pray as he does in verse three. This is John’s definition of eternal life. Jesus’ purpose for coming into the world was indeed to give eternal life to believers, but this does not make up the essence of his prayer for himself. He has finished his work and expects to be glorified.

Prayer for the Disciples (John 17:6-19)

As Jesus ascends to heaven, he intends to leave the disciples in the world; hence, this prayer is vital to their survival. They will face the full onslaught of evil, and Jesus does not intend to prevent it; instead, he prays that they might experience his joy, be led by his truth, and experience his victory.

Only one—Judas—will be lost, and that fulfills Scripture. It is not that God decided that one had to be lost, but he knew human nature well and still does. He desires all to be saved, but he knows that many will take the wide path, which leads to destruction.

When Jesus prays for their sanctification, he is asking God to set them apart for his divine mission, even as he himself has been set apart. Such “setting apart” will involve a foundation in God’s Word, which is Truth. Divine Revelation and Sanctification cannot be separated. Those who have received the Revelation are set apart to share it with others. As Christ is the Light of the World, so are his disciples.

Prayer for Future Believers—the Church (John 17:20-26)

The prayer for those who will believe (the Future Church) through the disciples' word or message is also a prayer for the unity of the future Church. Jesus prays that this church might find the same unity that exists between the Father and the Son, and that it might express divine love and fulfill the mission to which God has called it. The mission is to call everyone to believe, have faith, and be reconciled to God. In this way everyone will be glorified, even as Jesus himself has been glorified.

5. In The I Am Sayings

Jesus as the Bread of Life (John 6:35)

The crowd followed him to Capernaum, where he spoke in the Synagogue. He knew that they were only impressed by his ability to give them bread and that the desire to make him king was related to the Roman oppression. He saw a deeper oppression and promised them spiritual deliverance from sin. In John 6:35, he claimed to be the bread of life, which would give them eternal life. This was the first of the seven "I AM" sayings, which they took literally.

Jesus as the Light of Life (John 8:12 and 9:5)

This is a continuation of Jesus' teaching during the Feast of Tabernacles. On the eighth day of this feast the four great golden candelabra were lit in the Court of Women, which symbolized the pillar of fire by which God guided his people through the desert (Exodus 13:21). The "I AM" which Jesus uses is part of the divine name (Exodus 3:14), and his use of it was considered as blasphemy (8:58-59).

Jesus as the Gate (John 10:1-9)

The first six verses of chapter 10 make up John's only Parable, or should we say Allegory. In an Allegory there is much more symbolism. The Gatekeeper is not identifiable, but the Door is Jesus. The Shepherd served as a door to protect the sheep from danger. Thieves and Robbers were messianic pretenders with temporal ambitions.

Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:10-15)

The hireling symbolized false teachers and the wolf symbolized Roman persecutors. The Good Shepherd had the best interests of the sheep at heart. John 10:10 tells us Jesus' reason for calling us into his fold—to give us *abundant life*. For this he lays down his life, something thieves and robbers, hirelings and wolves, would never do.

Jesus as the Resurrection (John 10:20-27)

Lazarus represents every believer who loves Jesus and is loved by Jesus. All who believe will be raised to new life in the present and to eternal life in the future. This is the message of the fifth and almost perfect sign. The perfect sign of course will be Jesus' own resurrection, which will redefine the meaning of the Passover itself. The Raising of Lazarus supports the fifth claim of Jesus to be the Resurrection and the Life.

Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:5-14)

We are told in this passage that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the only way to know God; and apart from him, there is no salvation. Christians believe that God is known through the person, words, and works of Jesus; but our faith in him must be linked with love, which leads us to obeying his commandments and teachings. Those who come to know him will experience his presence, peace, eternal life, and answers to their prayers. Praying in Jesus name means much more than repeating his name at the end of a prayer. Our wills must conform to his, and that assures answers to our prayers. This does not mean immediate answers, but God will accomplish his will, no matter how long it may take. We are to pray according to his will and consistently with his teachings. This discussion is continued in John 15:7, where prayer is tied in with one's very relationship with Jesus.

Jesus as the Vine (John 15:1-6)

The image of the vine had been used to describe Israel, but Israel fell short of fulfilling God's purpose. Jesus claims *that* fulfillment for himself and for his followers. If they are to bear fruit, they will have to be connected to the vine; otherwise, they will dry up and will be fit for nothing but burning. This is not a discussion about salvation and so the fire mentioned does not symbolize hell. Jesus is talking about bearing

fruit, such as that mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. If they abide in him, they will find his kind of joy (15:11).

| THE SEVEN “I AM” SAYINGS |
|---|
| 1. I AM the Bread of Life (6:35) |
| 2. I AM the Light of the World (8:12; 9:5) |
| 3. I AM the Gate (10:7, 9) |
| 4. I AM the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14) |
| 5. I AM the Resurrection and the Life (11:25) |
| 6. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6) |
| 7. I AM the Vine (15:1, 5) |

6. To Pilate

Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15:1-5)

In the morning, the Sanhedrin confirmed the illegal decision it had made the night before; and since it could not carry out the execution, sent Jesus on to Pilate. Pilate, who normally lived in Caesarea, happened to be in Jerusalem. According to Luke, noticing that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate referred him to Herod. Nothing is said of Jesus’ appearance before Herod in the Gospel of Mark.

Pilate’s jurisdiction was Judea. The charge made against Jesus was that of political insurrection, and so Pilate asked him if he claimed to be a King, specifically of the Jews. Jesus’ answer in Mark 15:2 was ambiguous, but it is generally believed that he said, “Yes.”

Jesus before Pilate (Matthew 27:11-26)

Pilate was the Roman Governor of Judea and Samaria from 26 to 36 C.E. His official headquarters was located in Caesarea. He just happened to be in Jerusalem at the time, and so they brought Jesus before him. The name of his Jerusalem residence was the *Praetorium*.

Pilate’s question in Matthew 27:11 was strictly political. Not being convinced that he was dangerous, he presented an even more

dangerous man to the crowd—Jesus Barabbas. The name itself is ironical. *Jesus bar Abbas* means “Jesus, son of the Father.” Tradition suggests that Barabbas was an insurgent or revolutionary. Perhaps Pilate hoped that the crowd would release Jesus instead of Barabbas, but he was wrong.

Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5 13-25)

When the charge was presented to Pilate, it had to be translated into political terms. Instead of blasphemy it became insurrection and treason. Pilate seems to have seen through what they were trying to do. He did ask Jesus if he were a King, but he took Jesus’ evasive answer as a negative. Actually there had been a double charge, that of calling himself a King and encouraging others not to pay tribute to Caesar. Pilate never seemed to have taken the secondary charge seriously, for Jesus was known to have taught the people to pay Caesar what he was due (Luke 20:25). Pilate tried his best to set Jesus free.

The pressure from the crowd became too great, and Pilate yielded by setting free Barabbas, a convicted insurrectionist; but not before he turned Jesus over to Herod Antipas. He did this because he recognized that Jesus was a Galilean, and Herod ruled over that territory.

Jesus before Pilate (John 18:28-40)

(6:00 a.m.)

Jesus is sent to Pilate in the Praetorium (the Governor’s residence) because the Sanhedrin cannot carry out the death penalty. The dialogue, which takes place between Jesus and Pilate, revolves around Jesus’ kingship. Does Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah really challenge the kingship of Caesar? In answer to Pilate’s question, Jesus only claims to rule a spiritual kingdom. This is beyond Pilate’s comprehension.

Jesus connects his kingdom to truth, something Pilate would never have done. Pilate would have made the connection to power. Secular royalty has a difficult time seeing the necessity of relating its authority to truth. This is further illustrated in Pilate’s desire to deal with the problem by offering the crowd the opportunity to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. Pilate recognized the innocence of Jesus three

times (18:38; 19:4; and 19:6), but desired popularity over truth.² Barabbas was no ordinary robber. He was a *bandit-patriot*. Barabbas, not Jesus, was guilty of the charge of insurrection. Perhaps that is why the crowd favored him over Jesus, whose claim to kingship was not of this world. The crowd saw more hope for Israel in Barabbas than in Jesus. The people preferred a political revolutionary to a spiritual king.

7. The Teachings of Paul

The Proper Response Of Faith (Romans 10:5-13)

God's children are made up of all who respond to his Grace by Faith. Paul makes a distinction between "faith-righteousness" and "legal-righteousness." The *accent* in "legal-righteousness" is on human activity; but in the case of "faith-righteousness" the *accent* is on trust in divine activity. There is no distinction. Jew and Gentile stand on the same ground. Both must respond in faith. The key baptismal confession is given in Romans 10:9, which excludes faith in or worship of all other gods. Calling Jesus Christ *Lord* is the irreducible essence of what it means to become a Christian, and this was the minimum required by those submitting themselves for baptism.

The discussion about bringing Christ down from heaven or up from the abyss is taken from Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where the point is made that God's commandment is written in the heart and only requires the appropriate response. The same is true for Christ. One does not have to climb into heaven or descend into the abyss to reach him. He is in our heart and on our lips, and all we need to do is to respond by trusting him. For Christians the supreme gift of God is not the Law, but Jesus Christ. This gift is given to Jew and Gentile alike. No distinction is made and all who call upon the Lord will be saved.

Life in Christ (Philippians 2:5-11)

Paul calls upon the Philippians to set aside all human arrogance and begin to live and work and think like Christ. The heart of his advice is expressed in an early Christian hymn, which he quotes. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the hymn:

² Luke records this same threefold statement of Jesus' innocence (Luke 23:4, 14, and 22).

[Who] though he was in the form of GOD
Did not count it robbery
To be equal with God

But emptied himself,
Taking the form of a servant,
Coming into existence in the likeness of men;

And being found in human form
He humbled himself
And became obedient to the point of death

Therefore God has highly exalted him
And bestowed on him the name
Which is above every name,

That at Jesus' name
Every knee should bow—
In heaven and on earth and under the earth—

And every tongue confess
“Jesus Christ is Lord”
To the glory of God the Father.

The above hymn appears in verses 6-11 and consists of two halves. The first half (6-8) begins with his equality with God and descends to the low point of his death on the cross. The second half of the hymn (9-11) celebrates the dramatic act of God in exalting him as the sovereign of the universe. Behind this exaltation lies the resurrection, which crowns him King of kings and Lord of lords. In the midst of the darkness of this world, such Christians will shine like stars (2:15).

The hymn is not to be systematically analyzed, but simply to be sung in praise of Jesus as Lord. If the Philippians, and all other Christians, will focus their minds on Christ alone, they will be set free from all pettiness and division, for they will have comprehended the grace of God, which has been revealed in the humble but exalted Christ.

The Supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23)

In addressing the problems of the Christians in Colossae, Paul begins with a hymn, which stresses the supremacy of Christ. In this

hymn, Christ is lifted up as the image of God, the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world. As the very agent of creation, he also is to be considered the agent of the new creation; hence, mystic visions and ascetic regulations are unnecessary.

Paul's Message of Transformation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)

This is a beautiful message about reconciliation, transformation, and friendship with God. The love of God compels us (5:14) and the presence of Christ transforms us (5:17). This message of God's friendship is open to everyone, and now is the time to respond to it (See 2 Corinthians 6:2).

Conclusion

Jesus claims to be the Jewish Messiah, but he insists that his own disciples do not yet understand his claim. Jesus also claims that his Kingdom is not yet operating in this world. Messiah means "anointed king." Jesus refers to himself seven times as "I AM" This is how God answered Moses, when asked to identify himself. Jesus did not only claim himself to be the Jewish Messiah, but he also claimed to be the Son of Man and "The LORD." The Roman Emperors were considered to be "Lords." In claiming himself to be LORD and King he faced opposition from both the Jews and the Romans. Jesus was aware of this, and predicted his death three times. His resurrection on Sunday morning confirmed his Messianic claim.

But was Jesus God? This might be the wrong question. Jesus claims to be one with God. He also claims to speak for God. We consider him to be the Word of God. Paul understands Jesus as being the very image of God. The right question might be: Was God revealed perfectly in and through Jesus? My answer would be, "YES"

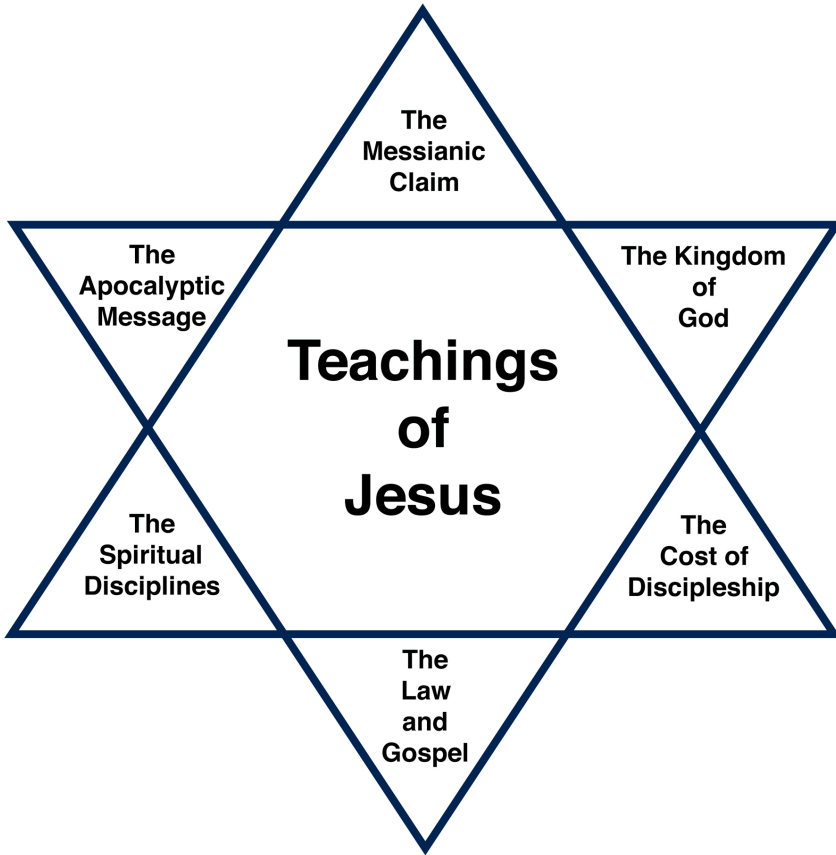
***Jesus is the Messiah (the Anointed King),
the True Revelation of God,
the Light of the World***

*With what can we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable will we use for it?
It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground,
is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;
yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes
the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.*

Mark 4:30-32

2

THE KINGDOM OF GOD



THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*The person who puts the Kingdom of God first will have some troubles,
but the person who puts the Kingdom of God second
will have nothing but troubles.*

Anonymous

1. Jesus First Message about the Kingdom

The Message of Jesus (Mark 1:14-15)

According to Mark, Jesus did not begin his public ministry until after the arrest of John the Baptist. This would make John a true forerunner of the Messiah. *Repent and believe the Gospel* is the heart of Jesus' message and everything that follows in the Gospel of Mark is an expansion of that proclamation.

The Message of Jesus (Matthew 4:12-17)

Following the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus initiated his ministry in the Galilee. Why did he wait for the imprisonment of John to begin his ministry? No answer is given. Their messages had been the same. (Compare Matthew 3:2 with Matthew 4:17.) There might have been a disagreement in how they would carry out their messages. Jesus made friends with sinners and the religious outcasts. This would have been abhorrent to John, who proclaimed a message of doom to sinners. In spite of this, there is no reason to suppose that Jesus and John had any major disagreements. Perhaps it was the circumstance of John's arrest that forced Jesus to begin his public ministry alone, but why does he choose to do that in the Galilee? According to Matthew he was doing this to fulfill Scripture (Matthew 4:14-16). Isaiah 9:2 predicts that the Galilee would be the place where the Messiah would begin his work. This is with good reason. The Galilee lies in the North, and when Israel fell, it was the Galilee, which fell first. Since the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali (the Galilee) were the first to fall, they would also be the first to see the Light of God's deliverance.

The Message of Jesus (Luke 4:38-44)

Instead of working among those who have little faith, Jesus now goes to Capernaum, which becomes his headquarters for his Mission in

the Galilee. He is able to cast out demons and heal the sick, including Peter's mother-in-law. The crowds flock to him, but he retreats to reevaluate what he is doing, and decides to move on to other towns. His primary task is not that of healing, but of proclaiming the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God.

Jesus' ability to exorcise the demons seems to inaugurate his ministry. He has the power to destroy the demonic completely, but he only exorcises it from people. The demons recognize who he is and fear their own demise. Even though they cry out, "You are the Son of God!" he silences them. It is too soon for this announcement to be made; and besides, the demons are not the ones commissioned to proclaim it to the world. Even Jesus' own disciples will have to keep it a secret until they fully understand what it means.

2. Seven Parables on the Kingdom in Matthew

Parables (Matthew 13:1-3a)

Of the five major sections in the Gospel of Matthew, this is the only one told specifically to the crowd. In this chapter Jesus tells seven parables about the Kingdom of God to a crowd at the Galilean lakeside. The crowd was so large that he had to sit in a boat (13:1-2).

A parable is a story told to make *one* spiritual or moral truth. It differs from an allegory, where every detail must be analyzed and decoded. In a parable the details are not that important. The early church turned the first two parables, the Seed and the Soil and the Wheat and the Weeds, into allegories. They required something Jesus rarely gave—an interpretation.

The reason for telling parables is confusing. Jesus assures the disciples that they will understand, but unbelievers will not. Parables are not instruments of evangelism, but a kind of inside language. That most people may hear the story but miss the point is a fulfillment of Isaiah 6:9-10. Another reference to the fulfillment of prophecy is Matthew 13:34-35, where the quotation is taken from Psalm 78:2. Since the author of this Psalm is Asaph, and Asaph according to 1 Chronicles 25:2, was considered to be a prophet, Matthew is not incorrect in quoting him as one of the prophets.

Those who do understand, insists Jesus in Matthew 13:10-17, will repent and become part of the Kingdom. The final imagery of the householder has to do with the disciple's ability to connect the Old Testament tradition, based on the Law and Prophets, with Jesus' new proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

The primary purpose of this teaching section is to define, or sort out just who the true disciples of the Kingdom of God are.

The Seed and the Soil (Matthew 13:3b-9) (13:18-23)

That the disciples did not understand this parable is astounding. The seed (the Word of God) is the same, but the various kinds of soil (the hearts of people) are different. The path, the rocky ground, the thorns, and the good soil refer to the various kinds of people who come in contact with the Gospel: the casual, the shallow, the worldly, and the responsive.

The main point made of this parable is that the disciple should sow the message of the Kingdom of God with assurance. Not everyone will accept it, but some will. The latter explanation of the parable shifts to the slightly different meaning of the fruitfulness of the good man (soil). One should ignore the questionable farming methods of sowing before plowing, or even before the land has been cleared. These have nothing to do with the main points of the parable, which are encouragement and fruitfulness.

The Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30) (13:36-43)

This parable follows closely on the heels of the seed and the soil. The disciple is to be encouraged by it to carry on the work of the Kingdom faithfully in spite of how difficult it is to eliminate evil. God allows good and evil to exist together until the close of history; and if that is the case, then the Church will have to do the same.

This does not mean that the Church should not exercise discipline on itself. The field is not the Church, but the world. When the Church does exercise discipline, it should not, at the same time, judge. The Son of Man will do the judging at the end of history. It is not the Church's task.

The Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

Although the beginnings of the Kingdom are small, those beginnings will grow into enormous results. This does not mean that the Kingdom will grow slowly, like seeds grow into trees. Jesus is contrasting the smallness of a seed with the largeness of the tree. He preached the sudden breaking in of the Kingdom, and his followers expected it to happen quickly.

The Leaven (Matthew 13:33)

Working in a hidden way, the Kingdom will penetrate a person's life giving it a new quality.

The Treasure in the Field (Matthew 13:44)

A true disciple will respond with wholehearted dedication to Jesus' message. Such a person would be willing to give up everything for the privilege of obtaining the treasure (the Kingdom of God). That secrecy is involved, is not significant. This is a parable, not an allegory.

The Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46)

In comparing the Kingdom to other claims, the true disciple recognizes how much more the Kingdom of God is worth and is willing to give up those claims to be part of it.

The Fisherman's Net (Matthew 13:47-52)

This parable has some similarity to the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. God and his angels will carry out the final judgment. We do not have to exercise judgment. It is not our task.

There is a natural progression in these seven parables of the Kingdom. One might sum them up as follows: (1) The Seed and the Soil: Individuals respond differently to the Word's invitation. (2) The Wheat and the Weeds: Citizen's of the Kingdom live among the people of the world, growing together until God's final harvest or judgment. (3) The Mustard Seed: The Kingdom begins insignificantly, but its greatness will be revealed. (4) The Leaven: The Kingdom penetrates our lives with purpose and meaning. (5) The Treasure in the Field: The Kingdom possesses a hidden attraction. (6) The Pearl of Great Price: The Kingdom demands the abandonment of all other values. (7) The

Fisherman's Net: The Kingdom will be fully established with the final separation of the unrighteous from the righteous.

3. Other Parables on the Kingdom in Matthew

The Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

The owner of the field, not the disgruntled workers, illustrates Matthew's point, that God bestows grace upon us. The workers are hired at five different hours (6:00, 9:00, Noon, 3:00, and 5:00), and each agrees to go to work in the field for a fair wage, which was one denarius (a day's wages for a common worker).

Payment could have been by the hour, for there were smaller denominations of money available; but this parable does not have economic justice as its focus. It runs counter to our sense of fairness when considered in that way. The point is that God deals with us with his standard of grace and not according to our standard of merit. The attitude of the workers is similar to that of the elder son in the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus is trying to get them and us to welcome people into the Kingdom of God.

The Marriage Feast (Matthew 22:1-14)

The marriage feast symbolizes the messianic (royal) invitation to Israel, who rejected it. The invitation has two stages: (1) the announcement, and (2) the final urging to come. Weak excuses were given, and so the King sent his troops in to destroy those who were invited. This destruction might be a historical reference to the Roman troops entering Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

Others are compelled to attend the feast, but even after they arrive, they are inspected; and those without *a wedding garment* are cast out. There can be no excuse for not wearing it. The host always provided the wedding garment. Those who refused to wear it insulted the host. The wedding garment symbolizes *righteousness*, and those who reject it are those who think that they can believe without expressing their faith through works. The way into the Kingdom is still narrow, even though the invitation is inclusive.

The Question about Marriage (Matthew 22:23-33)

After the Pharisees had their turn, the Sadducees proposed a question concerning the general resurrection, which they rejected, since it was not supported in the Torah (the first five books of the Law). Some scholars believe that Exodus 3:6 is a reference to the general resurrection. The verse names God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom had already died. If this is a reference, it is somewhat vague.

The Sadducees propose what was probably the standard skeptical question: “What about Levirate marriage?” Levirate marriage had to do with a man’s responsibility to his brother’s widow. He was supposed to marry her. But, the Sadducees inquire, what happens if she runs through seven men? Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus’ answer is that there will not be any marital relationships in the resurrection. Men and women will live like angels.

4. The Parables of the Kingdom in Mark

Mark is not as interested in parables as Matthew and Luke. In contrast to Matthew’s fifteen and Luke’s nineteen, Mark only includes four. The theme of Mark is action, and so instead, he uses eighteen miracles to express Jesus’ activity.

The Four Soils (Mark 4:1-20)

A parable is a story to illustrate a teaching, but this parable seems to have a slightly different purpose. Its point is to explain why Jesus’ teaching was not successful. The explanation given in verses 13-20 represents a later development of the church to explain why everyone has not accepted Jesus’ teachings.

The sower is represented as one of the apostolic preachers and the Word is the Gospel about Jesus Christ. Those who are good soil not only hear and believe, but also bear fruit. Verses 10-12 indicate that the truth made plain in a parable is a riddle to those who do not yet believe. A faith relationship is required, and without it, the whole message appears as foolishness. Jesus compares his use of parables to the commission received by Isaiah to preach to people who not only will not listen but will be openly hostile. It takes faith to continue such a ministry.

The Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26-29)

The point of this parable is that the emerging Kingdom is a divine act. It is not accomplished by human toil. Therefore we must be patient. God will establish it in his own time.

The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-34)

The Kingdom of God grows gradually and naturally. It does not emerge suddenly and dramatically. Its final establishment may be dramatic, but that is not the way it grows.

5. The Parables on the Kingdom in Luke

The Parable of the Soils (Luke 8:4-15)

The seed represents the Word of God, which is planted in various kinds of soil (people). There is the seed that fell on the path and is constantly walked over, where birds devour the seeds. The birds represent the devil, who takes the words out of people's hearts. Secondly there is the seed that fell on the rocky soil, in which the Word begins to grow, but soon withers away because it cannot take root. There is no depth. Next there is the thorny soil, which represents people's fascination with the cares, riches and pleasures of this world. The Word is choked out. Finally there is the good soil, in which the Word not only takes root, but matures and bears much fruit.

Parables such as these, reveal and conceal the Kingdom of God. Since parables will increase as Luke continues with Jesus ministry, it might help to stop for a moment to define just what a parable is and to contrast it with allegory and metaphor. A parable is a picture story that conveys *one* thought. One cannot take every element of the story too seriously. While an allegory has a similar purpose to a parable, every element of an allegory has meaning and must be carefully interpreted. The Parable of the Soils comes very close to an allegory, but most of Jesus' parables do not. A metaphor is a figure of speech. Jesus' parables go far beyond that.

Parables of the Kingdom (Luke 13:18-21)

These two parables teach us that the Kingdom has small beginnings and big endings. It may seem to grow slowly, but it is indeed growing.

The Kingdom is in Your Midst (Luke 17:20-21)

When Jesus says that the Kingdom will come without any dramatic signs, he is talking about his own inauguration of it. It has come in his ministry. There are signs of its coming, but these signs are not as dramatic as they will be in his second coming.

While there is a difference of opinion as to whether Jesus meant the “Kingdom of God is within you” or the “Kingdom of God is among you,” it is clear that it has come in Jesus himself. It is only *within* those who allow Jesus to rule over them.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of God is breaking into our world. We can accept it or reject it. We are free to do either one. Those who accept the Kingdom of God will face difficulties, but those who reject the Kingdom of God will face even greater difficulties. Jesus claims that nothing is as valuable as the Kingdom of God.

The difficulty for the church is to recognize who’s inside and who’s outside of the Kingdom of God. It might just be that those who are inside now may be outside in the future, and those that are outside now may eventually find themselves inside the Kingdom of God. God and his angels will carry out the final judgment. The Church does not have to exercise judgment. It is not its task. Jesus’ advice for the church is, “Don’t judge. God is a better judge.”

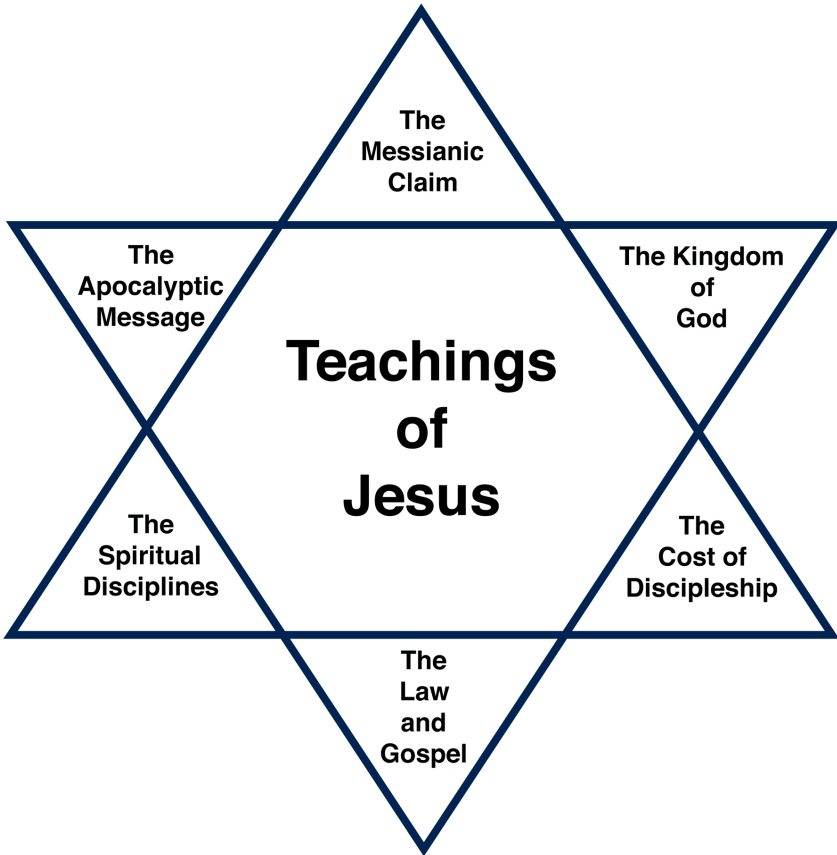
*The Kingdom of God surrounds us,
and is available to all who repent and believe.*

*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me.*

Mark 8:34

3

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP



THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

And Jesus said to them,
“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Mark 1:17

1. The Beatitudes according to Matthew

Introduction (Matthew 5:1-2)

Technically what follows is not taken from one sermon; rather, it represents the teachings of Jesus taken from many sermons or teaching situations. Jesus traditionally retreated into the mountains in order to escape the crowds. This seems to be the case here. He did not go into a mountain to gain a better vantage point, but to withdraw from the crowds. He sat down, as was the custom of Jewish teachers, and he shared with his disciples his vision of the Kingdom of God. Matthew’s version is an extension of what we find in the Gospel of Luke, where the sermon is on the plain to a great crowd.

The beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)

The first major section is called the Beatitudes, which are eight descriptions of that which brings happiness or blessedness.

The Poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:3)

The poor in Spirit are not those who are spiritually weak, but those who, like the Psalmist (Psalm 34), does not live out of his own resources, but relies upon God alone. Poverty of Spirit is best described as humility (Isaiah 66:2).

Those Who Mourn (Matthew 5:4)

Those who mourn are not simply grieving over the loss of a loved one, but bewail the present state of affairs in the world. They long for the coming of the Kingdom of God, in which they will find their comfort.

The Meek (Matthew 5:5)

Both Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus have been described as meek, and so *meekness* cannot be equated with *weakness*. It would be

better to say that the meek are *gentle*. This beatitude is not new with Jesus, but was already described in Psalm 37:11.

The Righteous (Matthew 5:6)

The emphasis is clearly on those who hunger and thirst for (seek) righteousness. Matthew 6:33, confirms this and places it at the center of the Christian life.

The Merciful (Matthew 5:7)

Mercy is only available to those who express mercy, and those who express it find that mercy blesses those who express it and those who receive it. No one has expressed this double joy, that is experienced by the merciful, like Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*. (Act 4, Scene 1)

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

The Pure in Heart (Matthew 5:8)

Purity of heart means “single-minded.” Those who seek God with all their hearts are pure in heart. They shall not be disappointed. They shall see him.

The Peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)

It is not that peacemakers become the children of God, but that the children of God are quite naturally peacemakers. To be the children of God is to be involved in what God is doing and God is involved in peacemaking.

Unfortunately the English language lacks a word for peace. Biblical peace is more than the absence of conflict. It has to do with

harmony and wellbeing. This is why so many people use the Hebrew word *Shalom* to talk about the Biblical concept of peace.

The Persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12)

Persecution is not a sign of God’s disfavor, but a sign that his people are walking in the shoes of the prophets. They have reason to rejoice, even though they do not seek persecution.

The beatitudes are not moral laws, but eschatological promises. At the same time that they are promises about God’s coming Kingdom, they are also instructions on how to live the Christian life now.

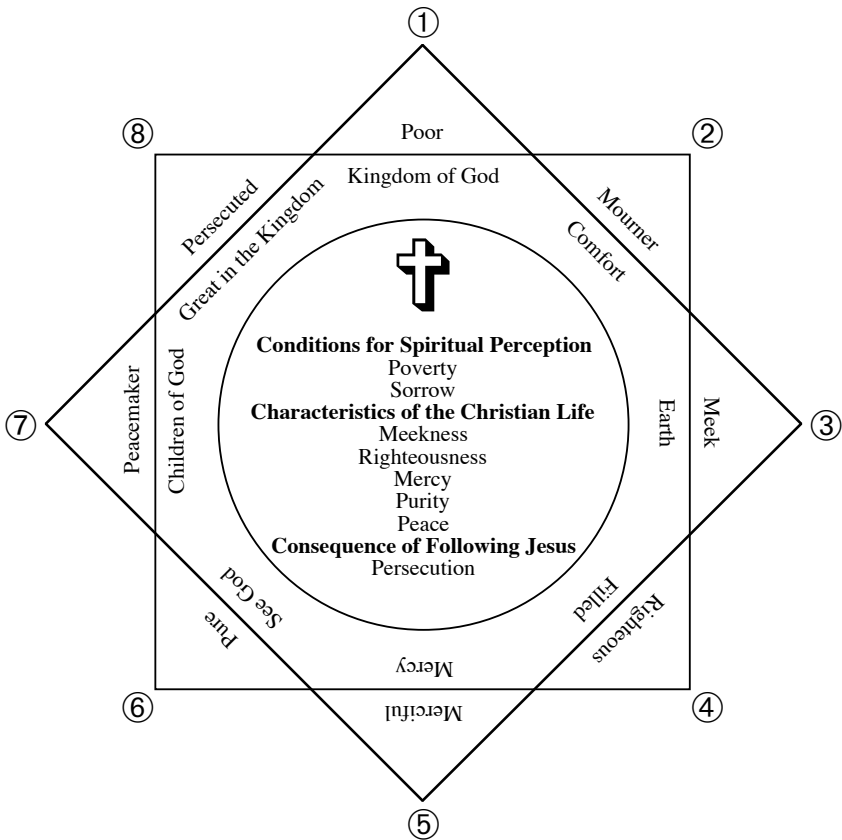


CHART OF THE BEATITUDES

2. The Beatitudes according to Luke

The Beatitudes and Woes (Luke 6:17-26)

Luke has both beatitudes and woes. Matthew only includes the beatitudes, but he also gives the beatitudes spiritual interpretation, which Luke does not do. Luke talks not about the poor in spirit, but about the poor, the hungry, those who mourn, and the persecuted. Luke shows a more intense bias for the poor of the land than does Matthew.

The woes are for the rich, the full, those who laugh, and those who never have to face persecution for their faith. Luke shares with us a contrast between those who follow Jesus and those who do not.

3. The Tasks of Discipleship

Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16)

Israel had been given the task of being a Light to the Nations. Christians, as the New Israel, are to fulfill this ancient covenant (Isaiah 42:6). In addition to the image of light, salt is used. Not to fulfill this task is to act foolishly against God and one's own interests. Salt and Light exist to be used, and when they are not used, they are worthless.

4. Discipleship and the Cross

Discipleship and the Cross (Mark 8:34–9:1)

Jesus also calls his disciples—past and present—to join him in bearing the cross of suffering. This chapter concludes with the remark that the current generation will see him return with the holy angels. Did Jesus expect the end of history to come in his own time? The Church certainly expected an early return (1 Corinthians 7:26-31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

It is remarkable that this saying of Jesus, which was not fulfilled, was included in the Gospel. Those who felt that the prediction was fulfilled looked for that fulfillment in one of four possibilities: (1) the transfiguration of Jesus, (2) the resurrection of Jesus, (3) the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or (4) the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The fourth possibility comes closest to fulfilling the prediction, but a fifth possibility exists. Jesus was simply wrong. The end did not come within the generation of his twelve disciples, as he expected. Albert Schweitzer suggested this fifth conclusion.

Jesus talks about Discipleship (Luke 9:23-27)

Not only was Jesus ready to suffer and die, he also expected his followers to be ready. This does not mean that they should seek death. The inclusion of taking up the cross *daily* might have been an effort to discourage martyrdom in the early Church; nevertheless, every disciple must set the right priorities. What good would it do to gain the world, but lose one's soul (life).

The final reference that some of them would not taste death before seeing the Kingdom of God does not refer to the end of history, but to the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. Could this be the transfiguration or the resurrection? No one knows for sure. What is meant is that they will see evidence of the coming Kingdom before they die and they will know that their discipleship has not been in vain.

The First Prediction of the Cross (Matthew 16:21-28)

This is the first prediction by Jesus of his upcoming death. The other three are found in Matthew 17:22-23; 20:17-19; and 26:1-2. Both the death and resurrection of Jesus took the disciples by complete surprise; and even though Jesus tried to prepare them for both, they did not seem to hear him. When Peter did hear him, he thought that Jesus misunderstood his role as the Messiah. Jesus however pointed out that he is the Messiah in the sense of Isaiah 53, which describes the Messiah as a suffering servant. Not only does Jesus see a cross in his future, but in the future of every disciple as well. This does not mean that he expects crucifixion for every disciple, but he does expect every disciple to voluntarily take up the stigma attached to the cross. Disciples are to share in Jesus sufferings.

The Good News in all of this is that beyond the cross, God will have the last word, for he will raise Jesus—and all future disciples—from the dead. Matthew 16:28, suggests that this will happen before many of Jesus' disciples have died. What does this mean? It certainly cannot be referring to the end of history, for Jesus rejected any such prediction of that (Acts 1:6-7). He must be talking about their vision of him after he *rose* from the dead, or their experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. These events will be God's confirmation of his Kingdom, even if that Kingdom still must exist within the context of worldly kingdoms.

5. Mission of the Twelve

Missionary Instructions (Matthew 10:1–11:1)

Commissioning the Twelve (10:1-4). Twelve apostles are commissioned. The number twelve was no accident. There were twelve tribes in the past, and according to Matthew 19:28, they anticipated twelve judges in the last day. The term *apostle* meant “one commissioned by the King to fulfill a mission in his name and with his authority.” The term was probably not used prior to the resurrection, and then it referred primarily to eyewitnesses of the resurrection, although it was not restricted to them. The lists of the twelve vary, but Matthew’s is as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Simon [Peter] | Thomas |
| Andrew | Matthew [Levi] |
| James [Son of Zebedee] | James [Son of Alphaeus] |
| John [Son of Zebedee] | Thadaeus [Lebbaeus] |
| Philip | Simon [the Cananaean] |
| Bartholomew | Judas [Iscariot] |

There is some confusion in this passage over the terms *apostle* and *disciple*. The twelve were not generally called *apostles* until after the resurrection. At this point in time it would be more correct to refer to them as *disciples*. The term *disciple* has the connotation of a learner or follower; whereas, an apostle connotes one who is sent on a mission. While the twelve are indeed sent on a mission, they are still learning what that mission is. They are apprentices to Jesus; and during their apprenticeship, their mission will be limited.

The Mission of the Twelve (Matthew 10:5-15)

The twelve were to go first to the Jews (Matthew 10:5) and were warned not to go to the Samaritans and Gentiles. According to Matthew 15:24, Jesus saw the mission to the lost sheep of Israel, the disobedient Jews, as being primary. He did recognize and commend the faith he found among Samaritans and Gentiles, but the mission to them had to wait until the time was right. In Matthew 28:19, following his resurrection, the time was right.

The twelve were to announce the nearness of the Kingdom of God as their primary message (Matthew 10:7), which was the same as the

message of John the Baptist and Jesus, and they were to perform the same signs (Matthew 10:8) of the breaking in of the Kingdom, which consisted of (1) healing the sick, (2) raising the dead, (3) cleansing lepers, and (4) casting out demons.

They had to travel light, and to this extent they became models for the first circuit riders, even though they used no horses. They took no baggage, no money, and were expected to survive on the generosity of those who would receive their message. They were to go directly to those who were *worthy*, which means *receptive to them*. While they were to extend freedom to others to accept or reject both them and their Lord, they were also to recognize the seriousness of such rejection. It could only be compared to Sodom and Gomorrah's rejection in Abraham's time.

When they encountered such rejection, they were to shake the dust off their feet. This idea came from the Jewish practice of shaking the dust off their feet whenever they returned home from traveling through Gentile lands. They did not want to defile their native land with dust from pagan lands. Houses where they were not received were to be considered heathen and unclean. God's people would certainly have responded to God's message, and those who did not, could only be considered heathen.

The Perils Involved in Missions (Matthew 10:16–11:1).

What follows is a series of teachings concerning the perils of missionary work. Persecution will inevitably follow, but God will enable his missionaries to speak with the help of the Spirit (Matthew 10:19-20). These verses were designed to encourage God's missionaries. They were never intended to give excuses to pastors to preach without adequate preparation.

A particularly troublesome verse has to do with Jesus' promise that the Son of Man (the Messiah) would come before they had finished fulfilling his mission. Albert Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was mistaken. Some have suggested that this verse is not an authentic saying of Jesus, but others have felt that this prediction had to be fulfilled in some unknown manner. If the latter is the case, it might be a reference to the resurrection of Jesus or the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The primary point Jesus is making however is that his disciples

will also have to suffer (Matthew 10:24-25). The obligation is to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:17), and all who confess Jesus will be accepted and those who deny him will be rejected (Matthew 10:32-33).

Responses to Christ will even divide the family, which was the center of Jewish faith and life. While Christians must obey the commandment, which requires that they “honor their father and mother,” they must first honor their “heavenly father.” Primary allegiance goes to God.

6. The Mission of the Seventy

The Sending Out Luke (10:1-12).

The number 70, or in some cases 72, could refer to the number of non-Jewish nations thought to exist. It is more likely to refer to Moses’ choosing of the 70 in Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25, a practice that ultimately led to the formation of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court. The Sanhedrin also consisted of 70 members. By choosing 70 people to help him, Jesus imitates Moses.

This story most certainly symbolizes the later mission of the Church. Every town and place was to be evangelized, even though the laborers were few. Disciples were to go out in pairs, traveling light, and when rejected, move on to other places. They were to salute no one on the road. This simply meant that they were not to get bogged down in the complexities of oriental greetings. Their mission was urgent. They were to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were to tie social concern and evangelism together.

The Woes on Palestine (Luke 10:13-16).

A warning is given here that the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon, had they seen and heard Jesus, would have repented long ago. Jewish cities, such as Chorazin and Bethsaida, had the privilege of seeing him and hearing him; therefore, their unresponsiveness will bring them to a fate similar to that of Sodom.

Of all the cities that should have been responsive, Capernaum leads the list. Capernaum is where Jesus made his headquarters, and

where most of his teachings were heard and miracles performed. Its people are without excuse, and so their fate is Hades.³

The Return of the Seventy (Luke 10:17-24).

When the 70 return, they confess that Jesus truly is the Lord. In his name they have had great success in casting out demons. In this they see the ultimate defeat of Satan himself (Revelation 12:7-10).

Jesus cautions them, and tells them that they should rejoice not in their success, but in the fact that their names have been written in Heaven. They have seen and heard what prophets and kings desired to see and hear. What a privilege?

7. The Great Commission

All four of the Gospels have their Great Commission, but Mark's is part of what has been called the Longer Ending (Mark 16:15-16). All of these Great Commissions have the common theme of proclaiming Jesus' call to repent and believe in the Good News of God's Kingdom, which of course includes his own resurrection as the Messianic King. The Apostles are commissioned to continue what Jesus has started. They will be his physical body in the world.

The Epilogues (Mark 16:9-20)

What follows creates one of the major textual problems of the New Testament. The longer ending is not present in the codices *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*, the oldest New Testament manuscripts. Four other less important manuscripts contain a shorter ending, and so that leaves us with two epilogues.

The longer epilogue summarizes Jesus' appearances to the two walking to Emmaus, to the eleven, and his giving of the great commission. Unlike Matthew, the Great Commission is not set in Galilee. These summaries are followed with the account of his Ascension. The shorter ending is but a summary of their faithfulness in spreading the Good News of eternal salvation to the ends of the earth.

³ The place of the dead: Hades (Greek) and Sheol (Hebrew)

What happened, and why does Mark come to such an abrupt conclusion? Three possibilities exist. First, the ending was mutilated and could not be restored. What exists now might be two attempts, on the part of others, to summarize his ending. The second possibility might be that Mark never had a chance to finish his Gospel. Persecution might have stopped him. A third possibility might be that he did indeed finish his Gospel, but had no intention of saying more. Although Jesus told his disciples in Mark 14:28 that he would see them in Galilee after his resurrection, Mark does not describe any such appearance. Perhaps Mark believed that Jesus was talking about the Parousia, or his second coming, which had not yet taken place. This would mean that he ended his Gospel while the followers of Jesus were still living in expectation of the second coming, which he believed would take place in Galilee. This of course goes against the tradition that Jesus would return to Jerusalem. Of the three possibilities, the first sounds the most convincing.

Even though everyone seems to agree that Mark did not write either of the endings, early scholars agreed that in spite of grammatical and theological peculiarities, they were consistent with Mark's work; hence, they were included in the New Testament canon. They were probably inserted in the middle of the second century.

The signs to follow Jesus' disciples must be mentioned. They are five in number: exorcism, speaking in tongues, snake handling, drinking of poison, and healing. According to Acts 8:7; 2:4; 28:3-5; and 28:8 all of these are fulfilled in the New Testament Church except for the drinking of poison.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

Not every one of the eleven remaining disciples had an easy time believing. Thomas' doubt is well known, but not mentioned by Matthew. Perhaps others also had doubts. There is nothing wrong with doubt as long as it is *creative* and motivates one to continue the search for truth.

The name of the mountain, where they met with Jesus is not named. Four mountains have been mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. They are the Mount of Temptation, the Sermon on the Mount, the Mount of Transfiguration, and now the Mount of the Great

Commission. Jesus, like Moses before him, gives direction to God's people from a mountain somewhere in Galilee, but the name of the mountain is less important than the directions Jesus gave from the mountain.

The commissioning includes three tasks: (1) To make disciples of people from all nations, (2) To baptize people from all nations, and (3) To teach people from all nations. The most Jewish of the four Gospels, closes with an opening to people from every nation on earth.

The Trinitarian formula, which suggests baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may reflect the later liturgical experiences of the early Church, but the ideas that lie behind it most certainly belong to Jesus.

The closing is accompanied with the promise of God's unceasing, though invisible, presence. The promise of his presence was made in the beginning when the announcement was made in Matthew 1:23 that Jesus would be called *Emmanuel*, which means "God is with us." That presence will accompany his people to the end of history and beyond, right on into eternity.

The Commissioning of the Disciples (Luke 24:36-49)

This passages resembles Matthew 28:16-20 and John 20:19-23. The main difference is Matthew's locating of the event in Galilee. It is possible that the commissioning was done on several occasions. The main point here is that Jesus is indeed alive, which is proven by his eating boiled fish.

All of the above has been talked about in Scripture, identified here as the Law, Prophets, and Psalms. Actually, the Psalms were not yet officially adopted as Scripture, but they were in common use. Jesus is the fulfiller and interpreter of Scripture, and his resurrection is God's way of moving the world in a new direction, which requires a worldwide missionary effort.

Sunday Evening (John 20:19-23)

By Sunday evening the disciples were afraid, and so they gathered behind locked doors. Jesus appeared in the midst of them, and said, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19) He revealed his hands and side to them as proof that he was indeed the one who had been crucified and

was now risen. Three concise statements are made to them, which reveal what he expects of them. They are sent (John 20:21); empowered (John 20:22); and told that forgiveness depends upon their faithfulness (John 20:23). It is no minor mission that has been entrusted to them. This is the Great Commission in the Gospel of John.

The Purpose of the Gospel (John 20:30-31)

The above three events build to the climax of the Gospel of John. The story is told that the reader might believe—not simply know about—and gain life in the name of Jesus. JESUS IS THE CHRIST, in whom everyone can believe and find a rich and fulfilling life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. He may not reign fully now, but in the future, he will rule forever and ever. Much more could be said, but John is convinced that he has shared enough to lead everyone to faith.

8. Discipleship and the Family

The Would-be Disciples (Matthew 8:18-22)

When some would-be disciples approached Jesus concerning following him, he called for an immediate response. Discipleship was so urgent that they had to give priority to it over home and family obligations.

Jesus' reference to himself in Matthew 8:20, as the *Son of Man*, points beyond his mere humanity (Daniel 7:13-14). He has the authority to call people away from their homes and family obligations.

The man's father was not yet dead. He just wanted to be excused until after his father's death so that he would be free of family obligations. Jesus was not willing to excuse him. Discipleship demands commitment beyond all other obligations, including family responsibilities.

Discipleship and the Family (Matthew 10:34-37)

Responses to Christ will even divide the family, which was the center of Jewish faith and life. While Christians must obey the commandment, which requires that they “honor their father and mother,” they must first honor their “heavenly father.” Primary allegiance goes to God.

Discipleship and the Family (Luke 9:57-62)

Two men express a willingness to become a disciple, but they want to take care of family obligations first, such as taking care of an aging father, or saying goodbye to one's family. All this may seem harsh, but Jesus' point is that nothing can stand in the way of discipleship, not even family obligations.

On Excuses (Luke 14:15-24)

These verses signify how people react to God's invitation in Jesus Christ. Some people will consider all kinds of worldly involvements as more important than the Kingdom of God. That is why they use weak excuses such as having purchased a field, or some oxen, or they have just gotten married.

Their answer to the invitation is not, "I cannot," but "I will not." What Luke is trying to lift up here with Jesus' teaching is that the Jews have rejected his message; therefore, the message will be taken to the Gentiles, who will accept it.

Conclusion

Discipleship may cost us as much as it cost Jesus. The martyrs can give testimony to the ultimate price of fulfilling one's discipleship. Knowing the cost, Jesus gives the invitation. He doesn't accept excuses, even though they may seem legitimate. Our obligation to the Kingdom of God is more important than our obligation to our family.

While the Good News of the Kingdom of God is to be offered first to the Jews, it is not limited to them. All four Gospels have a Great Commission.

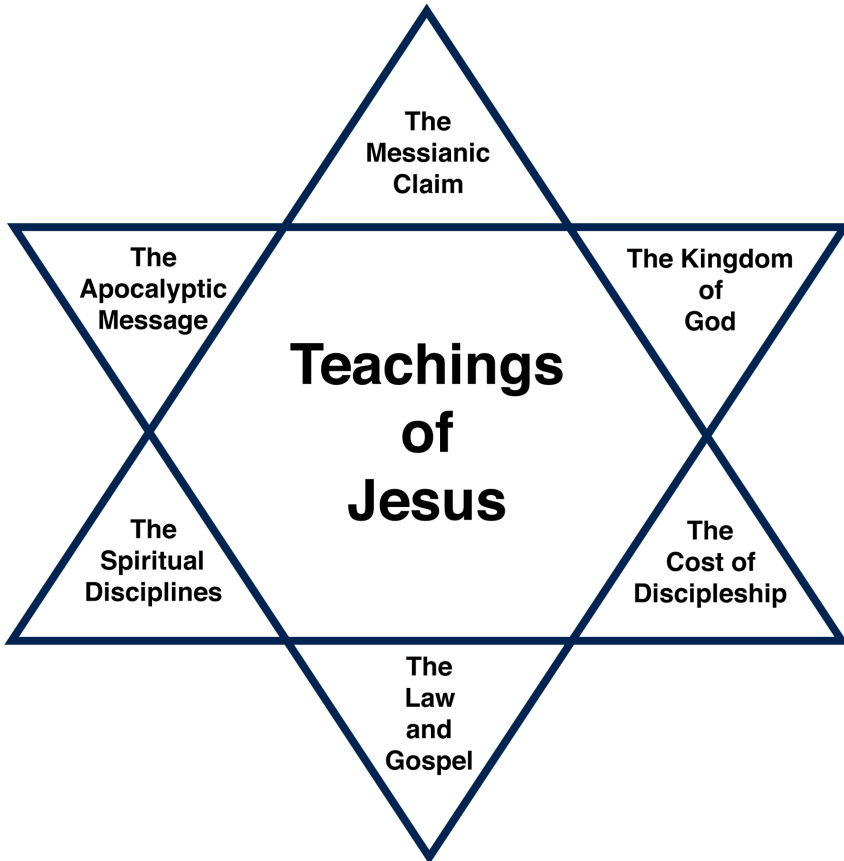
***We are to proceed as Salt and Light,
trusting in God's Grace and Judgment.***

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 4:30-32

4

THE LAW AND GOSPEL



THE LAW AND GOSPEL

*The law indeed was given through Moses;
grace and **truth came through Jesus Christ.***

John 1:17

*The only man who has the right to say
that he is justified by grace alone
is the man who has left all to follow Christ.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

1. From the Sermon on the Mount

The Permanence of the Law (Matthew 5:17-20)

The Law (the first five books of the Old Testament) was made clear in the prophets and fulfilled in Christ. God's purpose was not to do away with the Law, but to make it clear and fulfill it through Love. There is no relaxation in the fulfillment of the Law. God's children are to surpass the Scribes and Pharisees in their zeal for fulfilling the Law. This is not accomplished by obeying the *letter* of the Law. It is accomplished only by living according to the *spirit* of the Law.

The Meaning of the Law (5:21-48)

Five statements illustrate the meaning of the Law. They give the Law an inward and spiritual dimension, which was precisely what Jeremiah predicted for the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

1. Murder and Anger (5:21-26)

The Law regulates murder, but God is concerned with anger. The intent of the Law (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17) against murder is fulfilled only as we learn how to deal constructively with anger. Both God and Jesus expressed anger, and we, being made in the divine image, will express anger too. Anger must never focus on hurting other persons. We can constrain people without intentionally hurting them. This Law is fulfilled when we make friends with our adversaries.

2. Adultery and Lust (5:27-30)

The Law regulates adultery, but God is concerned about lust. The intent of the Law against adultery (Exodus 20:14 Deuteronomy 5:18) is fulfilled only as we learn how to deal with lust. Lust may be present, but that is no reason to give in to it. We fulfill this Law by not allowing it to dominate us. Human relationships are more important than our getting what we lust after.

3. Divorce, Remarriage, and Faithfulness (5:31-32)

The Law permits divorce, but God is concerned with faithfulness. Matthew's comment is less radical than Mark's (Mark 10:2-9), but Mark gives the divine purpose for marriage, which is that "two shall become one flesh." Matthew deals with this later (Matthew 19:3-9).

Some scholars think that Matthew permits divorce and remarriage when one party has committed adultery, but the Law also called for the stoning of the guilty party, in which case divorce would not be necessary. Jesus does not seem to allow for divorce under any circumstances, and he suggests that remarriage involves other people in the adulterous relationship.

4. Swearing Oaths, and the Truth (5:33-37)

The Law demands binding oaths, but God is concerned with truth. In the ninth commandment (Exodus 20:16), we are always to speak the truth when bearing witness. *Swearing* and *oaths* should not be necessary among God's people. We do not need to add to the force of our words by appeal to God or anything God has created. James 5:12 makes clear that our words, without the need for *swearing* and *oaths*, are committed to *truth* and can be trusted.

5. Retaliation and Love (5:38-48)

The Law permits revenge, but God seeks a people who will love their enemies. The ancient Law requiring an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus 21:23-25) was actually an improvement over the tribal law that existed previously. According to tribal law a single offense permitted the wholesale destruction of the offending tribe; but this new law limited retaliation to getting even. The two examples concerning the right cheek and the cloak both have to do with exceptions to what was expected. The blow on the right cheek was

considered an insult, and to give up the cloak was to give up the more expensive garment, which served as protection against the elements and was used as bedding for the night.

While many may agree that the individual should encounter evil with grace, there is much disagreement when it comes to discussing how the State should confront evil. What must be remembered is that we are not talking about nonresistance as the fulfillment of the Law, but Love. Love is not to be equated with nonresistance, nor is love to be divorced from force.

The way to fulfill the Law—any law—is through love. This involves the performance of a positive good in the face of evil. It is to do the unexpected. Evil is to be overcome by Grace. This is the reversal of the old pattern that suggested love for the friend and hatred for the enemy. Most Jewish scholars note that the Old Testament does not command hatred of the enemy. Some of the Psalmists do call upon God to bring judgment down upon Israel's enemies, but the Old Testament contains no direct command to hate them. Such an appeal has turned up in the Dead Sea Scrolls, however; and so it may well be this tradition to which Jesus is referring. God's way of love is to become the standard.

The final call to perfection could be a call to maturity and completeness, or it could connote peace and wholeness. If it is the latter, then we are all called to share in God's reconciling work (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). To be perfect is to confront evil with mercy. In the end Jesus is not against the Law. He is only against some rabbinic interpretations of it, which have not gone far enough. When it is carried out to its proper end, the Law is fulfilled through the power of Love. Hence Jesus is calling his people to make the shift from the love of power to the power of love. We are being called to the high ideal of perfect love.

2. Law and Gospel

Law and Gospel (Luke 16:14-17)

The era of the Law and Prophets continued up to John the Baptist's time; after which, the era of the Kingdom of God began. The beginning of the Kingdom however does not mean the end of the Law. It only

means that the Law is sharpened with new insight. An illustration concerning divorce follows.

Divorce and Adultery (Luke 16:18)

The point is painfully clear. Divorce followed by remarriage is defined as adultery. Jesus sharpens the law on divorce and adultery, but he also makes the man more responsible. According to Jewish Law adultery was something a woman committed against her husband or one man against another, but now it is something a man commits against a woman as well.

Marriage, Divorce, and Celibacy (Matthew 19:1-12)

The Pharisees decided to test Jesus by asking him his opinion about divorce. There was disagreement within Judaism concerning this matter. Some, mainly the followers of Hillel, believed a man had a right to divorce his wife for any reason; others, the followers of Shammai, believed that he could only do so within carefully defined restrictions. With whom would Jesus agree? Jesus avoided the dilemma and pushed them back to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. God's intention in creation stated that marriage was to be a permanent union between husband and wife.

The Mosaic Law represented a lowering of the ideal, but even the permission to divorce one's wife because of adultery would be a lowering of the ideal. Jesus tends to set aside all reasons for divorce. Mark 10:11 is an earlier version of Jesus' teachings. It is believed that the church was not able to live up to it, and so Matthew 19:9 is a modification of Jesus' teaching to make it easier to apply to everyday life. Even remarriage was considered to be adultery.

The teachings of Jesus on this subject are hard, and it is difficult to know whether we should treat them as a new law, which prohibits divorce. The early church did not understand them as a new law, but it did begin to see celibacy as somehow being holier than marriage. The Lutheran Reformation reversed this tendency. Holiness is not a question of remaining single or getting married, but of living out God's intention for human life. If one marries, according to Jesus, the proper intention is to form a permanent union.

The Question about the Resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33)

After the Pharisees had their turn, the Sadducees proposed a question concerning the general resurrection, which they rejected, since it was not supported in the Torah (the first five books of the Law). Some scholars believe that Exodus 3:6 is a reference to the general resurrection. The verse names God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom had already died. If this is a reference, it is somewhat vague.

The Sadducees propose what was probably the standard skeptical question: “What about Levirate marriage?” Levirate marriage had to do with a man’s responsibility to his brother’s widow. He was supposed to marry her. But, the Sadducees inquire, what happens if she runs through seven men? Whose wife will she be in the resurrection? Jesus’ answer is that there will not be any marital relationships in the resurrection. Men and women will live like angels.

3. The Great Commandment

The Question about the Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28-34)

Finally we have a sincere scribe who asks Jesus how to sum up the 613 laws. Jesus ties Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 in a threefold statement about worshiping one God, loving him with all one’s heart, and loving the neighbor as oneself. The scribe agrees that this is better than burnt offerings and sacrifices, and Jesus affirms him by telling him that he is not far from the Kingdom. This stopped all questioning.

Jesus’ reply was really quite orthodox and in line with the teachings of the prophets. In fact he was not even the first one to put these commandments together. Other examples can be found in Judaism, one being the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. What is different about what Jesus does is the interpretation he gives it, especially the interpretation he gives of the neighbor. We are not to look for someone who might be acceptable as our neighbor, but we are to be a good neighbor. That is how we would want others to love us.

The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40)

The Pharisees and Sadducees join together to ask Jesus which commandment is the greatest of them all. An expert lawyer,

representing them, puts this question straight to him. The joining together of the commandment to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5) with the commandment to love the neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) was not new, but the deeper definitions of love and the neighbor were. Love did lie in the heart of the Old Testament, but its proper definition had to wait for Jesus. The same can be said of the neighbor.

A Question about Eternal Life (A Lawyer) (Luke 10:25-37)

The first question begins with an inquiry into eternal life and ends up being a question on how to define one's neighbor. In Luke's Gospel the man who asks the question is a Lawyer. In Jewish terms, he would have been a Scribe, whose job it was to study and interpret the Law. Since Gentile readers would be more familiar with *Lawyer*, Luke uses a word they would understand.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan was Jesus' answer to the Lawyer's question, which was: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" With the help of Jesus' follow up question, the Lawyer answered his own question. The answer was to love God and one's neighbor.

For the Lawyer this raised a second question concerning the definition of his neighbor. This was the wrong question, and so Jesus illustrated his point with a Parable. Everyone in the Parable seems to be going from Jerusalem down to Jericho, a city 17 miles away and 3,300 feet lower in elevation. Jerusalem is 2,500 feet above sea level while Jericho is 800 feet below sea level. Half way down this route stands the ruins of the Inn of the Good Samaritan, a building dating back to Roman times. This is not the Inn of Jesus' story. We must remember that Jesus is illustrating his point with a story, which is not necessarily related to actual places. He of course does relate his story to commonly known practices.

Jericho was the home of many of the priests who served in the Temple, and so we know that the Priest and Levite were not on their way to perform priestly duties. In his parable, Jesus points to Priests and Levites (lay associates), who represent the highest religious leadership, who walk right on by. This is disappointing because, of all people, we would expect them to help.

The Samaritan, a foreigner not expected to show sympathy to a Jew, stops and helps. The oil and wine he pours on the wounds were

the only medication known at the time. Not only does the Samaritan help, but, he seems to expect nothing in return. After helping the wounded man, he just disappears.

In the end Jesus asked the Lawyer a different question. “Which of these three,” he says, “do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The answer was then obvious. It was the man who showed mercy. The crucial question is not, “Who is my neighbor?” but “To whom will I be a neighbor?” This is the route to eternal life and the fulfillment of the Great Commandments to love God and the neighbor.

4. Fasting

Fasting or Feasting? (Matthew 9:16-17)

When questioned as to why he feasted while John fasted, Jesus indicated that the time of fasting would come. This was an indirect reference to his impending death. For the time being, however, it was a time for feasting. The Kingdom had been inaugurated in him, and that called for celebration.

Two parables illustrate conflict between the Old and New Kingdoms. A new patch could not be put on an old garment, nor could new wine be poured into old wineskins. Something new has come, and the old is no longer adequate. God is doing a new thing, and the old Jewish customs will be shattered, as the new breaks forth.

The Question of Fasting (Mark 2:18-22)

Fasting was common in Jewish Religion. That neither Jesus nor his disciples fasted raised some serious criticism, but Jesus answers it by making sharp distinctions between Judaism and his message of the Kingdom of God. He was proclaiming something new, something that needed to be celebrated. The present time was a time for rejoicing, not fasting. When the early Church fasted it did so as a memorial to his death; but if he is indeed risen, fasting is just as inappropriate today as it was then.

Jesus' Attitude towards Fasting (Luke 5:33-39)

The Scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for not taking up their own practice of fasting twice a week. He defended himself by stating

that a new era had begun in which it was inappropriate to fast. The comparison he makes is with guests mourning at a wedding. Joy would be a more appropriate attitude than fasting. Fasting will have to wait until those days between his death and resurrection.

Two illustrations are used to describe the tension between the old and the new. No one patches an old garment with a piece from a new garment, and no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Verse 39 is a bit of irony. It describes the unbelievable attitude of the conservatives who hang on to the old when the new has come. How can one mourn when there is reason to rejoice?

5. The Sabbath

Jesus and the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–3:6)

In addition to blasphemy, Jesus gets accused of violating the commandment on the Sabbath. The problem was that so many rules grew up around the proper observance of the Sabbath that the true meaning of the Sabbath got lost. The purpose of the Sabbath was for: (1) physical rest, and (2) spiritual nourishment.

Jesus is accused of violating the Sabbath in two ways. The first is for threshing grain (2:23-28) and the second is for healing (3:1-6). Neither is justified. The intention of the Sabbath was never to prevent people from eating, nor was it to prevent the sick from being healed. The intent was physical rest and spiritual nourishment. The Pharisees however took these as serious violations of the Law of Moses, and joined forces with an unlikely ally—the Herodians. The Herodians were Jews who favored the Herodian dynasty, which in turn supported Rome. These Pharisees must have feared political fallout from Jesus' claims and teachings. They were right to fear such fallout, but they were wrong to seek his death.

Jesus makes a mistake in illustrating his point with the story of David and his rebels. Abiathar was not the high priest at the time. It was Ahimelech. 1 Samuel 21:1-6 tells the story and names the high priest. How can this be explained? It might be a scribal error, but then again, Jesus might have misquoted 1 Samuel 21:1.

The Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14)

Jesus violated the Sabbath Law by picking and eating grain and by healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Although the Sabbath was the most sacred and distinctive of all Jewish institutions, the Rabbis did permit its violation in life-threatening emergencies. The difficulty with the two Sabbath violations in this chapter is that they were not emergencies. Jesus' disciples were not starving to death, and the man with a withered hand could have waited until the next day.

The point being made by Jesus is that compassion is more important than legalism, and if David could get away with eating the sacred bread in the Temple (1 Samuel 21:1-6), surely the Messiah (Jesus himself), could pick and eat some grain on the Sabbath. After all, he is greater than the temple, and he is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Pharisees would have considered both these claims the ultimate blasphemy.

Jesus' Attitude towards the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11)

Jesus and his disciples ate some grain on the Sabbath. This angered the Scribes and Pharisees, who were concerned about keeping the Law and saw the Law concerning the Sabbath as one of the most important Laws. Jesus rejects their legalism by reminding them that David himself ate the bread of the presence, which only the priests normally ate. Luke carefully omits the mistaken reference to Abiathar as the High Priest of the time.

A second apparent violation of the Sabbath takes place when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand. Healing on the Sabbath was permitted if the illness was life threatening. Jesus claimed that the Sabbath was the time to do good. While the Scribes and Pharisees would have agreed, Jesus went beyond their concept of doing good. For him failing to do good when one had an opportunity to do so was in itself an evil. This was not the case for the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was trying to show them that Scripture does not adhere to their rigorous legalism.

Conclusion

One thing is clear. Jesus does not reject the Law of Moses, but he does reinterpret the Law. Jesus interpretation of the Law is not easier to

follow than the old interpretation. When one compares the Law of Jesus with the Law of Moses, one finds Jesus' interpretation much more difficult. Jesus is concerned not with the letter of the Law, but its intention. This is illustrated in Jesus' interpretation of marriage and divorce. There were two opinions. Hillel believed a man had a right to divorce his wife for any reason. Shammai believed that a man could only divorce his wife for a good reason, such as adultery. In both cases the woman is accused of adultery. Jesus teaches that if a man marries again, he commits adultery and he causes the woman to commit adultery with him. Jesus seems to reject divorce and remarriage and calls for a perfect union between husband and wife.

Jesus goes to the Law of Moses to identify the two greatest commandments. We are to love God and be a good neighbor. Jesus refuses to define the neighbor; instead, he teaches us how to be good neighbors. This puts Jesus in conflict with those who want to obey the letter of the Law without realizing that they are missing the intention of the Law.

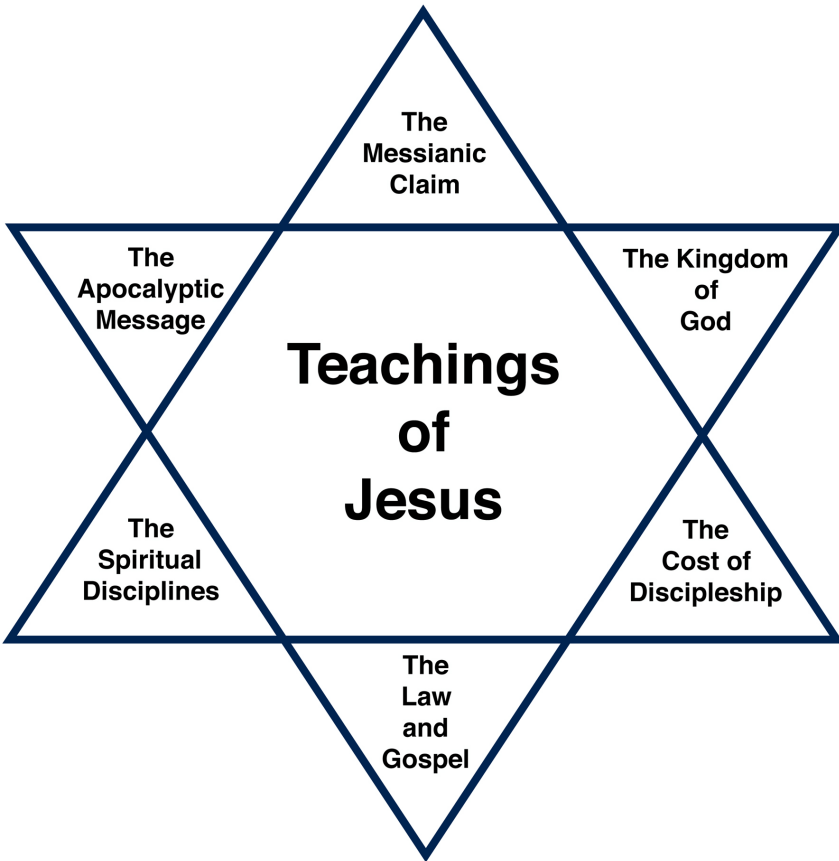
***The Law can only be fulfilled through the power of love;
hence we are being called to the high ideal of perfect love.***

*In the morning, while it was still very dark,
He got up and went out to a deserted place,
and there he prayed.*

Mark 1:35

5

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

*Man wants to travel to the moon. That is not far enough
He must first travel to the depths of his own soul.*

Charles de Gaulle

1. The Sermon on the Mount

Religious Observances (Matthew 6:1-18)

While the latter part of Matthew 5 deals with how the New Kingdom compares with the teaching of the scribes, the beginning of Matthew 6 contrasts the New Kingdom with the teaching of the Pharisees. The main point is that what really counts is the motive, whether we are talking about the commandments (the Law) or religious observances. To give (alms), to pray, and to fast must all be done in secret. These were the three pillars of Jewish religious observance, which carry over into the New Kingdom with a new interpretation.

We are most familiar with the Lord's Prayer, which contains seven petitions. The first three have to do with God's name, God's Kingdom, and God's Will. The final four have to do with human needs, such as daily bread, forgiveness, temptation, and deliverance from evil.

The Opening Invocation. (6:9) "Our Father..."

The Three Petitions to God. (6:9-10)

1. Hallowed be your name
2. Your Kingdom come
3. Your will be done

The Four Petitions for Human Need. (6:11-13)

1. Daily Bread
2. Forgiveness
3. Temptation
4. Deliverance from the evil one

The Doxology. This was not part of the original text. It was something the early Church used in worship. The emphasis was on the coming of God's Kingdom.

The only petition that is difficult to understand is the one asking for deliverance from temptation. The word *temptation* could be translated “tribulation.” It is a petition asking God for strength in the time of persecution and tribulation, which will come just prior to the end of history. The Lord’s Prayer looks towards God’s future Kingdom, and for this reason, we call it an eschatological prayer.

Material Possessions (Matthew 6:19-34)

What follows is a collection of the sayings of Jesus that call his disciples away from anxiety over money, possessions, and common everyday needs, such as food, drink, and clothing.

The passage about light (6:22-23) does not seem to fit. Perhaps it was placed in the midst of these teachings to illustrate what disciples, who were set free from such anxieties, would be like. They would be light in the darkness. The Gospel of Thomas, found in 1945, helps to make clear the intent. “Within a man of light there is light and he lights the whole world. When he does not shine, there is darkness.” Those who seek the Kingdom of God first in their lives (6:33) are set free of all these anxieties, and they are light, which illuminates the whole world.

Two other confusing words used in older translations are *mammon* (6:24) and *cubit* (6:27), which in the newer translations are rendered *wealth* or *money* and *a single hour*. Since a cubit refers to the distance between one’s elbow and the tip of one’s finger, it hardly makes any sense to talk about adding a cubit to one’s life, but it does make sense to talk about adding a cubit to one’s property, just as it makes sense to talk about adding a day to one’s life. The newer translations focus on the latter, thinking that this would be easier for us to understand today.

Attitudes towards Others and God (Matthew 7:1-12)

Towards Others (Matthew 7:1-6). We are not to judge others. The reason is because we cannot see clearly enough, and so judgment belongs to God alone. Any attempt to judge others will turn in on ourselves. This will become obvious to us as we take the log out of our own eye. Instead of enabling us to judge, this act will render us unwilling to pass judgment.

The reference to dogs and pigs in verse six has to do with the receptivity of Gentiles, and not, as the early church supposed, sinners. The early church used this verse to withhold the Lord's Supper from those it judged as unworthy. The point being made here is that timing is important. We must deal with others according to their capacity to receive our message. Holy things cannot be forced on people.

Towards God (Matthew 7:7-11). We are to pray constantly. God is more ready to answer our prayers than we are to pray. This does not mean that he will fulfill every request, but he will indeed answer every prayer. We do not always know what is best for us, but he does and he answers our prayers accordingly. We should never give up praying.

The Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). Our attitude towards others and God should be controlled by the Golden Rule. This was not new. The Golden Rule had been known within Judaism, and many other religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, for centuries. It was even present in Greek and Roman moral teachings, but Jesus gave it new depth when he made a positive command out of it. Other versions of the Golden Rule had always put it into a negative form.

While Jesus saw the Golden Rule as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets, it can also be seen as a general rule for behavior or as practical advice on how to succeed in the world.

The Demands Of The Kingdom (Matthew 7:13-29)

The Narrow Gate and Way (Matthew 7:13-14). There are two gates and two ways. The gate that leads into God's Kingdom is narrow, and only a few will choose it. The gate that leads away from God's Kingdom is broad, and many will choose it. The former is unpopular and hard; while, the latter is popular and easy. The Kingdom of God demands the restricted gate and the road less traveled, but only a minority will choose them.

In teaching about the Narrow Gate and Way, Jesus is simply drawing upon some Old Testament images found in Deuteronomy 11:26-29, Joshua 24:15, and Jeremiah 21:8. Jesus' description of the two ways makes clear to us that he is in no way trying to avoid the strictness of the Law and the Prophets. In fact the Sermon on the

Mount reminds us of how much more difficult it is to follow Jesus than it is to follow Moses.

The Necessity of Good Works (Matthew 7:15-23). Since false prophets (wolves) appear in sheep's clothing (confessing Jesus as Lord), they represent a very real danger. How does one recognize them? As a tree bears good fruit, true disciples bear good works. They can be known by their good fruit. They do the will of their heavenly Father.

None of this means that we save ourselves by our good works. This passage is not a rejection of Justification by Grace through Faith; rather, it affirms the necessary fruit of faith. Faith produces the fruit of good works, or it is not authentic faith. To call Jesus Lord is to submit to his reign.

The Wise and Foolish Builders (Matthew 7:24-27). This is a final warning to take the narrow gate leading to the way of life and to bear the good fruit of works in harmony with the Kingdom of God. All this will adequately prepare us for the final judgment and establishment of God's Kingdom. To go through the wide gate, taking the popular way, and bearing evil fruit, inconsistent with the Kingdom, leads to judgment and destruction.

This is a typical eschatological parable, reminding us of the consequences of our decisions. If we take the wrong way, or build on the wrong foundation, all that we can expect is the collapse of our lives and society. Faith causes us to take the right way and build on the right foundation. This means that faith is both a decision and a gift. The decision is based on a revelation from God. We do not dream up the wisdom that is expressed in this eschatological parable, but we must respond to it.

Conclusion (Matthew 7:28-29). The Sermon on the Mount ends with the phrase: "Now when Jesus had finished saying these things..." The next four collections of Jesus' teachings will end as does Matthew 7:28. (See 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; and 26:1) This ending adds impact to Jesus' authority. What is unique about Jesus is that he did not have to appeal to other authorities. His person and words rang with authority within themselves, and this astounded the crowds.

What might be puzzling here is the mere mention of the crowds. The Sermon on the Mount began with Jesus instructing his disciples. Nothing is said about any crowd until the end. Did the crowds find him and join in, or is Matthew simply suggesting that what was true for the disciples, is true for everyone who would follow Jesus. Certainly these teachings were spread to the crowds, who then responded to them with astonishment.

2. The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:27-49)

What follows is a collection of Jesus' sayings, which were delivered in various places. Matthew expanded the collection in the Sermon on the Mount. Luke's collection is probably more accurate. Keeping the mountain as a place for prayer and visions, Luke has Jesus teaching on the plain.

The Golden Rules (Luke 6:27-36)

The primary principle is found in Luke 6:27, where Christians are told to love their enemies. Their enemies are those who persecute them. Two examples are given. Christians love their enemies by resisting the urge to retaliate and by going the second mile with a readiness to give and be helpful to the enemy.

All of the above is summed up in Luke 6:31, which we call the Golden Rule. This was indeed a revolutionary idea. It was the rejection of the principle of mutuality, where one only loves those who will return their love. Christians act without the hope of an earthly reward, but they do, of course, hope in the heavenly reward. They believe that by loving their enemies, they will be loved by God.

Christian Behavior (Luke 6:37-45)

How we treat others is how we can expect to be treated by God. Disciples of Christ are therefore people (1) who do not judge, (2) who see clearly, and (3) who bear fruit. Their hearts are in right relationship with God.

The Two House Builders (Luke 6:46-49)

Like Matthew, Luke has Jesus telling a parable about two house builders. The parables are slightly different. Luke keeps in mind his Gentile audience, who would not be familiar with the torrential rains of

Palestine. Instead they would be familiar with the swelling of some important river in some non-Palestinian urban setting.

In spite of the differences, the teaching of Jesus is the same. His words are to be obeyed. When we depart from them, we build our lives on shaky foundations, which will bring them crashing down.

Questions about Prayer (The Disciples) (Luke 11:1-13)

Apparently other teachers taught their disciples (pupils) how to pray, and so the twelve disciples ask Jesus to do the same for them. Perhaps they noticed how he constantly withdrew to pray. Jesus responds to their request with the Lord's Prayer.

Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is closer to the original words of Jesus than Matthew's. The address *Father* is easy to misunderstand. It is not a formal but personal address. The Aramaic word was *Abba*, which is similar to our "daddy." This would have been offensive to pious Jews, who considered the name *Yahweh* so sacred that they substituted the more generic term *Adonai* for it. *Adonai* however was still a formal term and lacked the intimacy of *Abba*.

The petition calling for the Kingdom to come in this world is a recognition that the future Kingdom is being established now. What is most difficult to understand about this prayer is the choice of sins, debts, or trespasses in the petition concerning forgiveness. Debts might have been the choice in a culture in which money was seen as the key value. Trespasses might have been chosen in a society in which property was viewed as most important. I prefer Luke's use of "sins" because what Jesus has in mind is the path to faith. Without a willingness to forgive, one cannot be forgiven. We are not talking about money or property, but sin, even if our modern culture prefers to ignore the word.

Jesus illustrates God's willingness to answer prayer with a story that seems to say the opposite. It would be a mistake to equate God with the man who was awakened from his sleep. Jesus' point is that God would be much more willing to help than was this man. He is eager to answer prayers, but his answers are better than our requests. We do not always ask for that which is good for us, but he only wants to give us good gifts. When we unconsciously ask for serpents and scorpions, he purposely gives us fish and eggs. It is not God who is

negligent in prayer. We need to learn how to pray, and Jesus has given us a model prayer. The prayer is not to be memorized, but prayed. Every word teaches us how to pray for the right things.

3. On Giving

Miletus (Acts 20:35)

Paul did not want to stop in Ephesus because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem to observe the Day of Pentecost. Going to Ephesus would have involved changing ships in Miletus and the possibility of more riots in Ephesus over his presence. Both of these things would have delayed his departure for Jerusalem, where he wanted to deliver an offering to the poor (Romans 15:25-32); therefore, he sent a letter to the elders in Ephesus, asking them to meet him in Miletus. There, on the seashore, he told them that he would never see them again. He closed his sermon with the only words of Jesus written outside of the four Gospels and the Book of Revelation: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (20:35) They were all very sad. They knelt down and prayed together, and then they hugged and kissed one another as he left them.

4. Bonhoeffer’s Criticism of Cultural Christianity⁴

I’d like to finish this chapter on Jesus’ teachings of the spiritual disciplines by quoting a long passage from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer comments on some of the same passages in the *Sermon on the Mount*. He also deals with some of the same secret disciplines that we have seen in Jesus’ teachings on the spiritual disciplines. Bonhoeffer begins with the problem of cheap grace and concludes with the necessity of practicing the secret disciplines. Throughout his commentary, he deals with some practical applications for the Church, such as baptism and membership.

Cheap and Costly Grace

*Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church.
We are fighting to-day for costly grace.*

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), p. 43ff. (First published in 1937)

Cheap Grace. This is what we mean by cheap grace, the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs. Cheap grace is not the kind of forgiveness of sin which frees us from the toils of sin. Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly Grace. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "Ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

How Costly Grace became Cheap Grace

As Christianity spread, and the Church became more secularized, this realization of the costliness of grace gradually faded. The world was Christianized, and grace became its common property.

Luther had said that grace alone can save; his followers took up his doctrine and repeated it word for word. But they left out its invariable corollary, the obligation of discipleship.

The justification of the sinner in the world degenerated into the justification of sin and the world. Costly grace was turned into cheap grace without discipleship.

We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ.

We justified the world, and condemned as heretics those who tried to follow Christ. The result was that a nation became Christian and Lutheran, but at the cost of true discipleship.

But do we also realize that this cheap grace has turned back upon us like a boomerang? The price we are having to pay to-day in the shape of the collapse of the organized Church is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low a cost. We gave away the word and sacraments wholesale, we baptized, confirmed, and absolved a whole nation unasked and without condition. Our humanitarian sentiment made us give that which was holy to the scornful and unbelieving. We poured forth unending streams of grace. But the call to follow Jesus in the narrow way was hardly ever heard.

Baptism Into the Body of Christ

The gift of baptism is the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is Christ himself dwelling in the hearts of the faithful (2 Corinthians 3:17; Romans 8:9-11, 14ff; Ephesians 3:16f). The baptized are the house where the Holy Spirit has made his dwelling.

Baptism is similarly a public event, for it is the means whereby members are grafted on to the visible body of Christ (Galatians 3:27 f; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

When we join the Church we step out of the world, our work and family, taking our stand visibly in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. We take this step alone. But we recover what we have surrendered—brothers, sisters, houses, and fields. Those who have been baptized live in the visible community of Christ.

Baptism and the gifts it confers are characterized by a certain finality. The baptism of Christ can never be repeated.

This element of finality in baptism throws significant light on the question of infant baptism. The problem is not whether infant baptism is baptism at all, but that the final and unrepeatable character of infant baptism necessitates certain restrictions in its use. It was certainly not a sign of a healthy church life in the second and third century when believing Christians deferred their baptism until they reached old age or were on their death beds, but all the same it shows a clear insight into the nature of baptismal grace, an insight which we sadly lack to-day. As far as infant baptism is concerned, it must be insisted that the sacrament should be administered only where there is a firm faith present which remembers Christ's deed of salvation wrought for us once and for all. That can only happen in a living Christian community. To baptize infants without a Church is not only an abuse of the sacrament, it betokens a disgusting frivolity in dealing with the souls of the children themselves. For baptism can never be repeated.

Membership in the Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has taken upon him. It is in fact the Church. Jesus Christ is at once himself and his Church (I Corinthians 12:12). Since the first Whit Sunday the Life of Christ has been perpetuated on earth in the form of his Body, the Church. Here is his body, crucified and risen, here is the humanity he took upon him. To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the Church, a member of the Body of Christ (Gal. 3:28); 1 Corinthians 12:13). To be in Christ therefore means to be in the Church. But if we are in the Church we are verily and bodily in Christ. Now we perceive the whole wealth of meaning which lies behind the idea of the Body of Christ.

Since the ascension, Christ's place on earth has been taken by his Body, the Church. The Church is the real presence of Christ. Once we have realized this truth we are well on the way to recovering an aspect of the Church's being which has been sadly neglected in the past. We

should think of the Church not as an institution, but as a person, though of course a person in a unique sense.

The Secret Disciplines

The Hidden Righteousness (Matthew 6:1-4). Our activity must be visible, but never be done for the sake of making it visible. “Let your light so shine before men” (5:16) and yet: Take care that you hide it! There is a pointed contrast between chapters 5 and 6. That which is visible must also be hidden.

How is this paradox to be resolved? The first question to ask is: From whom are we to hide the visibility of our discipleship? Certainly not from other men, for we are told to let them see our light. No. We are to hide it from *ourselves*. Our task is simply to keep on following, looking only to our Leader who goes on before, taking no notice of ourselves or of what we are doing. We must be unaware of our own righteousness, and see it only in so far as we look unto Jesus; then it will seem not extraordinary, but quite ordinary and natural.

The Hiddenness of Prayer (Matthew 6:5-8). It matters little what form of prayer we adopt or how many words we use, what matters is the faith which lays hold on God and touches the heart of the Father who knew us long before we came to him.

Genuine prayer...is always the prayer of a child to a Father. Hence it is never given to self-display, whether before God, ourselves, or other people. If God were ignorant of our needs, we should have to think out beforehand how we should tell him about them, what we should tell him, and whether we should tell him or not. Thus faith, which is the mainspring of Christian prayer, excludes all reflection and premeditation.

The child asks of the Father whom he knows. Thus the essence of Christian prayer is not general adoration, but definite, concrete petition. The right way to approach God is to stretch out our hands and ask of One who we know has the heart of a Father.

True prayer is done in secret, but this does not rule out the fellowship of prayer altogether, however clearly we may be aware of its dangers.

True prayer does not depend either on the individual or the whole body of the faithful, but solely upon the knowledge that our heavenly Father knows our needs. That makes God the sole object of our prayers, and frees us from a false confidence in our own prayerful efforts.

Jesus told his disciples not only how to pray, but also what to pray. The Lord's Prayer is not merely that pattern prayer, it is the way Christians must pray.

The Hiddenness of the Devout Life (Matthew 6:16-18). By practicing abstemiousness we show the world how different the Christian life is from its own. If there is no element of asceticism in our lives, if we give free rein to the desires of the flesh (taking care of course to keep within the limits of what seems permissible to the world), we shall find it hard to train for the service of Christ. When the flesh is satisfied it is hard to pray with cheerfulness or to devote oneself to a life of service which calls for much self-renunciation.

How is it possible to live the life of faith when we grow weary of prayer, when we lose our taste for reading the Bible, and when sleep, food and sensuality deprive us of the joy of communion with God.

Asceticism means voluntary suffering: it is *passio activa* rather than *passiva*, and it is just there that the danger lies. There is always a danger that in our asceticism we shall be tempted to imitate the sufferings of Christ. This is a pious but godless ambition, for beneath it there always lurks the notion that it is possible for us to step into Christ's shoes and suffer as he did and kill the old Adam. We are then presuming to undertake that bitter work of eternal redemption which Christ himself wrought for us. The motive of asceticism was more limited—to equip us for better service and deeper humiliation.

Jesus, however, bids his disciples to persevere in the practices of humiliation, but not to force them on other people as a rule or regulation.

The Simplicity of the Carefree Life (Matthew 6:19-24). The life of discipleship can only be maintained so long as nothing is allowed to come between Christ and ourselves—neither the law, nor personal piety, nor even the world. The disciple always looks only to his master,

never to Christ and the law, Christ and religion, Christ and the world. He avoids all such notions like the plague.

Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. ... where our treasure is, there is our trust, our security, our consolation and our God. Hoarding is idolatry.

But where are we to draw the line between legitimate use and unlawful accumulation? Let us reverse the word of Jesus and our question is answered: "Where thy heart is, there shall thy treasure be also." Our treasure may of course be small and inconspicuous, but its size is immaterial; it all depends on the heart, on ourselves. And if we ask how we are to know where our hearts are, the answer is just as simple—everything which hinders us from loving God above all things and acts as a barrier between ourselves and our obedience to Jesus is our treasure, and the place where our heart is.

Be not anxious! Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the time they are the very source of all anxiety.

The way to misuse our possessions is to use them as an insurance against the morrow.

Anxiety is characteristic of the Gentiles, for they rely on their own strength and work instead of relying on God. They do not know that the Father knows that we have need of all these things, and so they try to do for themselves what they do not expect from God. But the disciples know that the rule is "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Before we start taking thought for our life, our food and clothing, our work and families, we must seek the righteousness of Christ.

Conclusion

To give, to pray, and to fast were the three pillars of Jewish religious observance. These disciplines were to be done in secret. Bonhoeffer took seriously the spiritual disciplines, especially the discipline of prayer. So should we! Jesus not only taught his disciples how to pray, but for what to pray. Praying in Christ's name means praying within God's will. Prayer is the central spiritual discipline for

all Christians. If we don't get this spiritual discipline right, we will slip into cheap grace.

John Wesley expanded the spiritual disciplines to six, which include: Public Worship, Bible Study, Secret Prayer, Holy Communion, Secret Giving, and Secret Fasting. Prayer still stands first and foremost at the center of the Christian life. It is the most important of the Spiritual Disciplines because it puts us in touch with God through Jesus, the Christ.

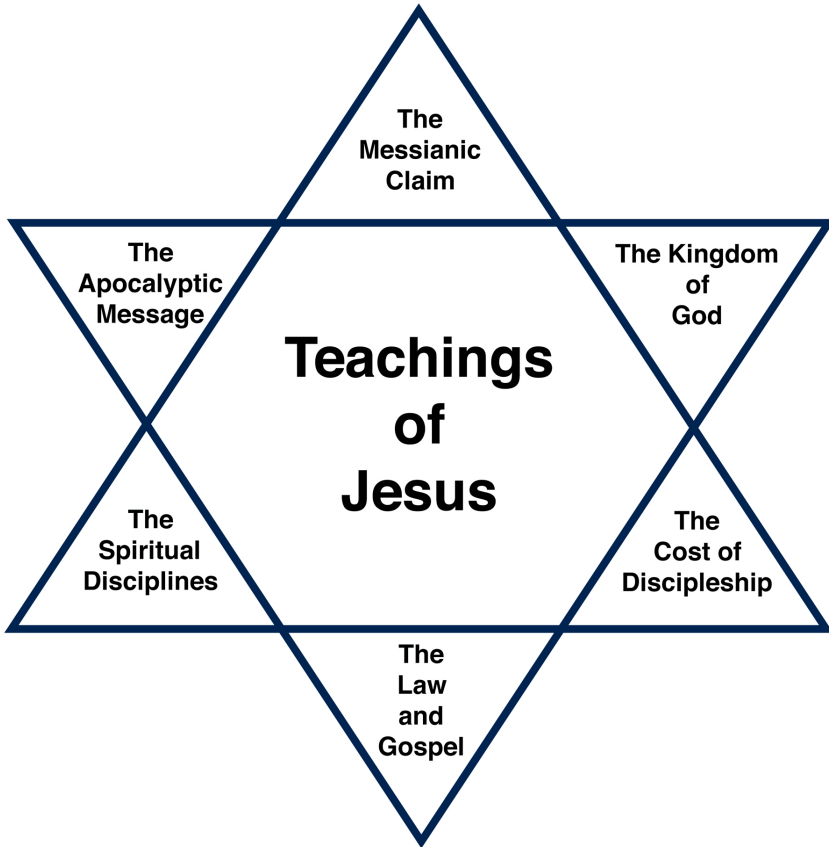
*Prayer puts us in touch with God
through Jesus Christ.*

“As for yourselves, beware;
for they will hand you over to councils;
and you will be beaten in synagogues;
and you will stand before governors and kings
because of me, as a testimony to them.
And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations.

Mark 13:9-10

6

THE APOCALYPTIC MESSAGE



THE APOCALYPTIC MESSAGE

*See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me,
to repay according to everyone's work.
I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*

Revelation 22:12-13 (NRSV)

1. The Little Apocalypse (Mark 13:1-37)

This chapter has parallels in Matthew 24-25, Luke 21, and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. It is similar in purpose to Daniel 7-12 and the Book of Revelation, and that is why it has been called *the Little Apocalypse*. Jesus seems to be talking only to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, although this is not the case in Matthew and Luke.

Apocalyptic literature has the characteristic of being written for times of persecution. Jesus prepares his disciples for just such a time by predicting the destruction of the Temple, including Jerusalem, the end of the age, and the beginning of the Kingdom of God. No one knows when all this will take place, but there will be certain signs. Those signs will be related to war and natural disaster. They will also take place in the time of the desolating sacrilege (13:14), which has to do with idolatry and the possible placing of an idol in the Temple itself. This would indeed be a desolating sacrilege. While the actual setting up of the desolating sacrilege took place under Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid King of Syria, precipitating the Maccabean Revolt of 165 B.C.E., the historical event referred to by Mark might be the attempt to do a similar thing by the corrupt Roman Emperor Caligula, who tried to set up his own image in the Temple in 41 C.E. All of this, according to Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11, will lead to three and one-half years of suffering. The time period should be understood in symbolic terms, but the suffering will be real.

Three terms that have become popular in Christian circles must be explained because they relate to the events described here in Mark 13. The first is the *Tribulation*, which can be defined as the suffering of the faithful. Christians were expected to live out their discipleship in an increasingly hostile environment. In addition to synagogue and political leaders opposing them, they would find divisions erupting in

their own families. Such was the cost of discipleship, and Christians should expect such hostility. The Tribulation should be viewed as an opportunity for witness, prompted by the Holy Spirit. The second term is the *Parousia*, which refers to the Second Coming of Christ, and was expected to take place following the Tribulation. No one but God knows when this will take place, but every Christian's task is to be ready for it whenever it happens. This does not mean that we are to do nothing while we wait. We are to be engaged in mission as we await the *Parousia*. These first two words are New Testament words and make up a valid part of Jesus' Apocalyptic message. The third word is not in the New Testament, but many Christians have used the word to explain what will happen in the *Parousia*. The term is the *Rapture*. The *Rapture* refers to God's sending out his angels to collect his own, sparing them from the *Tribulation*. The idea is that Christ will claim his own as he promises to do in Matthew 24:36-41 and Luke 17:30-36.

The most puzzling verse in the chapter is Mark 13:30, which indicates that all these things will happen prior to the end of the present generation. Jerusalem was indeed destroyed in 70 C.E., but the end of the age did not come, nor was the Kingdom of God completely established. What could Jesus have meant? One suggestion has been that the Jewish race will survive until the end of the age, but a better suggestion is that Jerusalem would come to an end within the lifetime of the present generation. The signs of the end have more to do with the birth pangs of the new age than its final establishment. This would mean that the Kingdom of God is still breaking in on us, and that we are still awaiting its final and complete establishment.

2. The Coming of the Kingdom (Luke 17:20-37)

The First Coming (Luke 17:20-21)

When Jesus says that the Kingdom will come without any dramatic signs, he is talking about his own inauguration of it. It has come in his ministry. There are signs of its coming, but these signs are not as dramatic as they will be in his second coming.

While there is a difference of opinion as to whether Jesus meant the "Kingdom of God is within you" or the "Kingdom of God is among you," it is clear that it has come in Jesus himself. It is only *within* those who allow Jesus to rule over them.

The Second Coming (Luke 17:22-37)

The second coming of the Kingdom, or its final establishment will be visible and dramatic; but first, certain things will have to happen, such as Jesus' own suffering and death, which he compares to Noah's time. When that time comes, which no one can predict, one should not look back (as did Lot's wife).

The final judgment will be clear to everyone, both those who benefit and those who do not. Even families will be split up when judgment is exercised. The disciples wonder where all this will take place. Jesus' answer is that the place will be as clear as the time. When a corpse lies in the desert, the place is obvious to the vultures. The final establishment of the Kingdom will be obvious to everyone.

3. The Last Days (Luke 21:5-38)

The End, according to Jesus, will come in two phases. In the first phase Jerusalem will fall and the temple be destroyed. In the second phase Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

The Fall of Jerusalem

Along with the Fall of Jerusalem will come the Destruction of the Temple. This may be what he was talking about in Luke 21:32 when he said that the present generation would not pass away before these things took place. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70 C.E. Roman armies encircled it, just as Jesus suggests here. Was Luke writing after the fact, or was he telling of Jesus' prediction?

The destruction of the Temple was even more inconceivable at this time than it had been in the time of Jeremiah. It was bigger, stronger, and more beautiful; and people were determined never to let it happen again. The mere suggestion that the Gentiles would destroy the Temple was considered blasphemous. It is one of the main reasons why Jesus was crucified.

4. Jesus' Lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37—24:2)

Jesus laments over the coming fate of Jerusalem, and compares his love for the city and its people to that of a hen for her chicks.

The Disciples of Jesus wonder about what he has just said, and so they ask him *when* all this will take place. Although he shares some signs with them, he never answers their question, primarily because he himself does not know. Only the Father knows.

The end of Jerusalem was close, for it would be destroyed in 70 C.E., but the end of the age would not come for some time, even though the signs were already present.

5. The End of History (Matthew 24:3-51)

The Birthpangs of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:4-14)

When a new Kingdom is born, there are always signs to be observed. Three of them are the emergence of (1) false messiahs [4:5], (2) war [24:6-7a], and (3) natural disaster [24:7b]. Before the old rule can pass away and the new rule be born, says Jesus in Matthew 24:14, the Gospel of the Kingdom must be proclaimed throughout the world.

The End of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-28)

The *desolating sacrilege* spoken of by Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11 was the erection of the pagan god Zeus in the Temple by the Syrian King Antiochus IV in 168 B.C.E. (1 Maccabees 1:54; 2 Maccabees 6:2). Jesus compares it to the upcoming desecration of the Temple by the Romans, who were about to lay siege to Jerusalem, the end of which would come in 70 C.E.

It is difficult to distinguish between when Jesus is talking about the end of Jerusalem and when he is talking about the end of the history. The image of the eagle refers to the Roman standards, which are about to swoop down on the rotting corpse of Judaism. Expecting that end, many Christians fled to Pella in 68 C.E. People should pray that this flight not be in winter, for the Jordan River would be at its highest level, and that would make flight very difficult.

The End of the History (Matthew 24:29-51)

It sounds like the end of the history will immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem, but no one will know when it will take place, not even Jesus. Only the Father knows. All that anyone can do is prepare for it.

Three examples of the need for readiness are given. They are (1) the story of Noah, (2) the householder about to be burglarized, and (3) the servant placed in charge of his master's possessions. Those who are ready will be received into the Kingdom, but those who are not will weep and gnash their teeth in hell.

Chapter 24 is apocalyptic, which means that its purpose is to disclose a hidden meaning of events taking place in the world. It gives comfort and direction to people who are living in chaotic times. Mark 13 and Luke 21 are equivalent apocalyptic chapters.

6. The Parables of Judgment (Matthew 25:1-46)

The Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-13)

This parable has to be understood in the light of the marriage custom of the bridegroom fetching the bride from her parent's home. What is somewhat confusing in the story is that no mention is made of the bride. The delay of the bridegroom was a compliment. He was spending a long time haggling with the bride's parents, and that was a sign that he considered her a valuable catch.

The bridegroom is the Messiah, Christ himself, who will arrive unexpectedly. The point of the story is that his followers will have to be ready, and that their readiness cannot be lent to someone who is not ready. The delay of Christ is a good sign, for it indicates the depth of God's love and how in his patience he waits for people to prepare for him.

The Talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

The term *talent* was originally used to describe a unit of weight of approximately 75 pounds; but by Jesus' time, it had become a unit of financial exchange, worth about fifteen years of wages for a common laborer. One talent was no small amount.

The whole idea of our *talents* comes from this parable in which the people of God are expected to invest the gifts God has given them. Not everyone's gifts are the same. Some have five talents, some two, and some only one; nevertheless, one is supposed to invest what has been given. The man with only one talent still had a remarkable gift. Our future depends upon how we use the precious gifts that God has given to us.

The move from money to spiritual gifts is valid. Although Jesus uses a financial term, this is not all that he means by it. We need to be investing both our financial and spiritual gifts. To whom much is given, much will be expected.

The Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46)

At the end of history there will be a final judgment. Christ will come and judge all nations and individuals. All races and tribes will be present. Judgment will not be made simply by what one believes, but according to how that belief is expressed. This accounts for the presence of those who did not know of Christ. Some professing Christians will find their faith lacking, and some who never heard of Christ will find their faith accepted. Faith without works is dead. Faith that is alive always bears fruit.

These last three parables teach that God will pass judgment. At judgment time it will be too late for the five foolish bridesmaids, the man who refused to invest his one talent, and all those who failed to serve people with pressing human needs. The time for developing one's faith is *now*. Tomorrow may be too late. We should not be troubled by judgment, for it means reward as well as punishment. God knows how to divide those with faith from those without it, and his judgment will be just and fair. This passage affirms the reality of both heaven and hell. It also emphasizes the urgency of our task to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God and to invite people to make their responses to it now. Matthew 24 and 25 are both a warning and an invitation.

7. Jesus' Last Words on Earth (Acts 1:1-11)

The Promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:1-5)

John taught that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (See Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:33). In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus himself promised that his Spirit would be with his disciples forever. The Holy Spirit can be described as the Spirit of Jesus, which is alive in the world through his followers.

Before Jesus' disciples received the Holy Spirit they were called disciples, which means that they were still learners, or students of Jesus. After they received the Holy Spirit, they became Apostles, and

were given power to witness and teach. They became missionaries or ambassadors for Christ. Their authority and power came through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which means that they were filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

Jesus Ascends into Heaven (Acts 1:6-11)

Since Jesus' main message had been about the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15), his disciples asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) The disciples expected Jesus to establish his Kingdom and make Jerusalem the capital. They were hoping that the Jews would become the rulers, who would conquer the Romans. They did not yet understand Jesus' definition of the Kingdom. They thought he was going to rule on earth and did not realize that Jesus was establishing a spiritual Kingdom.

Instead of promising them political power, Jesus promised them spiritual power. He told them that they would become his witnesses. In the Greek language the word for *witness* is *Martyr* and it means "one who is willing to die for his faith." A Martyr is loyal up to the end, even if it means death. Jesus promised this kind of power to his disciples. It is not power over others, but power to witness to the Kingdom of God. This witness to the Kingdom of God, according to Acts 1:8, was supposed to begin in Jerusalem and then spread to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. The end of the earth meant the whole Roman Empire, but today we would interpret it to mean the whole wide world.

After Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit, he returned to his Father in heaven. This happened forty days after his resurrection (1:3) on the Mount of Olives, which is about one-half mile East of Jerusalem. What did his return to heaven mean? It meant that although Jesus' body would no longer be present on earth, that his Spirit would be present throughout the whole world. If he established a political Kingdom in Jerusalem, people would have to go to Jerusalem in order to see him; but if his Spirit were alive throughout the whole world, then everyone could have fellowship with him at the same time.

8. Questions about the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11)

Two questions about the second coming are raised. They are (1) What will happen to those who have already died? and, (2) When will the Lord come?

The first question is answered in 4:13-18 and the second in 5:1-11. Neither the question nor the answer deals with the non-Christian dead. Both deal with those who have died in Christ. The question does not ask about the sequence of the resurrected dead, but Paul's answer concludes that the dead in Christ will rise first. The word *rapture* comes from the Latin translation of the phrase, "will be caught up." It does not mean only a few will be caught up in the air. According to Paul, everyone will meet Christ in the air. Sleeping was a common metaphor for the dead (Matthew 9:24 and John 11:11), and one gets the idea that we all wait for the coming of the Lord, both the living and the dead.

There is no specific answer to the second question. No one knows when the Lord will come; therefore, everyone must be ready at all times. He will come suddenly and unexpectedly. This calls for constant readiness. We must put on our breastplate of faith and love and wear for our helmet the hope of salvation. A time like this calls for encouraging one another and building one another up. This is what the Thessalonians have been doing.

Amos was the first to use the phrase "the day of the Lord" (Amos 5:18). This phrase means the same thing as "the second coming." Although "the second coming" was not used in the New Testament, it was used in the early Church. Justin Martyr coined the phrase in the second century. Hebrews 9:28 comes very close to using the phrase, and so we must conclude that "the second coming" is indeed a biblical concept.

9. Jesus speaks to John (Revelation 1:8-20)

Jesus speaks to his Church through John, who writes Jesus' words in letters to seven churches. The word *seven* implies "wholeness and perfection." The letters are not written only to seven specific congregations, but to all Christians everywhere, especially those facing persecution and death. The message to them is that the Lord is coming

soon, and that everything will be made right. In the opening vision to John, Jesus claims to be the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the “beginning” and the “end;” the one who is, who was, and who is to come. This is an expansion of God’s name as it was given in Exodus 3:14. The One who is coming, has made us His Priests, and so we can anticipate His coming.

The Context (Revelation 1:9-11)

The vision took place on the Island of Patmos, a six by ten mile Rocky Island in the Aegean Sea off the coast of Western Turkey, to which John had been exiled. It was on the Lord’s Day (Sunday) while he was in the Spirit (worshiping) that he had a vision of Christ. This is the first time that “the Lord’s Day” is used in the New Testament, although “first day of the week” has been used. Jesus described worship to the Samaritan woman in terms of “in the Spirit.” (John 4:24) The context for this worship then seems to be on the Lord’s Day on the Island of Patmos. Was anyone else present? No one is mentioned.

The Vision (Revelation 1:12-20)

A great deal of imagery is used to describe this vision, but the essence of it is the presence of Christ in the midst of his Churches (Lampstands). Albrecht Durer has attempted to recreate this vision in one of his famous woodcuts, “St. John’s Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks.” Below is a list of some of the imagery to look for in the woodcut.

Seven Golden Lampstands

The Son of Man (Daniel 7:13 and Mark 2:10)

The Long Robe

A Golden Girdle around his breast

Head and hair white as wool and snow (Daniel 7:9)

Eyes like a flame of fire (Daniel 10:6)

Feet like burnished bronze (Daniel 10:6)

Voice like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 43:2)

Seven stars in his right hand

A two-edged sword in his mouth (Isaiah 49:2 and Hebrews 4:12)

His face like the sun shining in full strength (Daniel 10:6)



As John beheld this vision he fell prostrate, as dead, before Christ. This reminds us of how Isaiah felt when he saw a similar vision in Isaiah 6:5.

Two questions come to mind as we see Jesus standing in the midst of the seven Churches. First, these Churches are highly valued, for the lampstands, which symbolize them, are priceless as gold; and their function is to give off light (Matthew 5:14-16). Secondly, these Churches are connected not by Apostolic Succession or Government or Polity, but by the living presence of Christ in their midst. Christ is dressed as a King to remind John's readers of just who he is. He is the King of the coming Kingdom of God.

10. Jesus speaks to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1—3:22)

There is a similar structure in each of the seven letters to the seven churches, and I would like to highlight that fivefold structure. While there are elements missing in some letters, the structure is present in most of them.

1. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)

Danger: Losing Our First Love

Ephesus had a population of 250,000 people and was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. It was also the most important of the seven cities. Not only was it the capital city of Asia Minor, but the famous trade route from the Euphrates terminated there. It contained the Temple to Diana (or Artemis), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Temple contained one hundred columns, which were fifty-five feet high, and they stood on a platform which measured approximately one hundred thousand square feet. The Amphitheater seated 25,000 people. In addition to all this, the Church in Ephesus had the advantage of a rich tradition of Christian leadership, beginning with the Apostle Paul, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, and ending with the Apostle John himself.

The Descriptive Phrase

“...him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

The Commendation

The Church is commended for (1) sound teaching and (2) resistance to false teachers. The false teachers are identified as the *Nicolaitans*, who felt free to eat food offered to idols, but practiced immorality in the name of their religion. They are also mentioned in the Letter to Pergamum (2:15), where they are identified with idolaters who hold to the teachings of Balaam a sorcerer and opportunistic false prophet.

Irenaeus, one of the early Church fathers, said that the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the seven chosen by the Apostles in Acts 6:5. If he is correct, then Nicolaus fell from Grace and lost his Faith. Clement of Alexandria acknowledges the connection, but insists that Nicolaus himself remained faithful and that the Nicolaitans only claimed him as their teacher. Nothing can be known for certain except that the name *Nicolaitans* flourished as a designation for false teachers.

The Condemnation

In spite of the Church's doctrinal purity, it suffers from the absence of love. It has abandoned its first love, and this is a most serious charge, for without love, faith and even sacrifice amount to nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

The Exhortation

Repent or lose your lampstand (status as a Church). Recover the true center of your faith, or your faith is in vain. "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Jesus frequently used this sentence when he wanted to emphasize something. Although it is not used at the same place, it is included as an exhortation to every one of the seven congregations. Sometimes it calls people to repentance, and sometimes it reminds them of the promise God makes to them.

The Promise

Those who *conquer*, that is, recover what has been lost, will be given the right to eat from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God. Ephesian coins in this period contained carvings of a sacred tree used in nature worship. This promise assured Christians of a far deeper

source of life than that gained from the nature goddesses. The ban on the Tree of Life would be lifted (Genesis 2:9,17 and 3:22-24).

2. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)

Danger: Fear of Poverty and Suffering

Smyrna was a coastal city located some thirty-five miles north of Ephesus. It was known as a strong center for emperor worship. The Temple of Roma was built in 195 B.C.E. and the Temple of Tiberius in 23 (26) C.E., both of which were built on the acropolis in the midst of other Temples. All of this produced a dramatic visual effect, which became known as “the Crown of Smyrna.” Bishop Polycarp worked in this city, but was executed in Rome in February of 156 C.E. Smyrna still exists today, but its modern name is Izmir.

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life...”

The Commendation

The congregation, due to its faith, lives in poverty and will experience suffering; but the suffering will not last long. The threat does not come only from the Roman Empire, but also from misguided Jews. The Synagogue of Satan refers to the hostility of some Jews in Smyrna, and does not imply that Judaism itself is demonic. Ten days is not a lengthy period (Daniel 1:12), and so the suffering will not last long.

The Condemnation

Smyrna was one of two Churches not condemned for anything. The other one was Philadelphia.

The Exhortation

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” These are words of encouragement to remain faithful even as the suffering comes.

The Promise

Those who “conquer” will not be hurt by the “second death.” The phrase “second death” is not used elsewhere in the Bible, although it is alluded to in Matthew 10:28; but it does appear three more times in this Book (Revelation 20:6; 20:14; and 21:8). It means that the power of evil is not the final power. Human and cosmic evil cannot overcome the power of Almighty God. Those who trust in this God will be given a Crown of Life more glorious than the Crown of Smyrna (the Temples on the acropolis).

3. Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17)

Danger: Doctrinal and Moral Compromise

Fifty miles north of Smyrna was Pergamum, which had been the capital of the Roman Province of Asia (Asia Minor) since the second century before Christ. Although Augustus moved the capital to Ephesus, Pergamum remained a major center for emperor worship. There were shrines to Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and especially Asclepius, for which the city was famous. The serpent was Asclepius’ symbol, which is still represented in the caduceus, the insignia of medical associations. To John however this was a symbol of evil.

Temples were built to Roma and Augustus in 29 B.C.E. While some think of the pagan shrines as the “throne of Satan,” it is generally considered to be a reference only to those shrines demanding Emperor Worship.

The city also had a library housing more than 200,000 parchment rolls. Alexandria was so jealous of this library that Egypt refused to ship any more papyrus to Pergamum. As a result a new kind of writing material had to be developed, which was named “pergamenta charta,” which we simply call “parchment.”

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword...”

The Commendation

Since they held fast to the Lord’s “name” and their own “faith,” the members of this Church are commended. About *Antipas*, nothing is

known, except that he seems to have been a martyr who inspired the faithful. According to Tertullian, Antipas was slowly roasted to death in a bronze kettle (bull) during the reign of Domitian. They were trying to force him to profess Caesar as Lord, but like Polycarp, he had no reason or will to deny Christ.

The Condemnation

The condemnation is against those who hold to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. Balaam was a seer summoned by Balak, King of Moab, to curse Israel prior to its entrance into Canaan. Instead he pronounced a series of blessings, affirming the present and future pre-eminence of Israel (Numbers 22-24). With the exception of Micah 6:5, all other biblical references to Balaam are unfavorable. His journey to Moab is considered motivated by desire for gain and he is blamed for the defection of Israel to the Moabite Baal at Peor (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:16 and Revelation 2:14). The teaching of Balaam then has to do with “idolatry” and “immorality.” Since the Nicolaitans were accused of the same sins, they are tied in with the followers of Balaam, but they might have been two separate groups within the Church. Because of these two groups, there was great immorality in the Church. Only Corinth rivaled it in immorality.

The Exhortation

Repent or face the sharp two-edged sword in the Lord’s mouth. This sword represents “ultimate authority,” which is greater than that of the Emperor. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The Promise

To those who “conquer,” will be given “hidden manna” and a “white stone,” with a new name on it, which no one knows. The first image is a familiar Old Testament one, and the second a first-century Roman one. The “manna” might be identified with Jesus’ claim to be the “bread of life” (John 6:31-35). The “white stone” was a symbol in the Roman world used in legal trials, academic grading systems, and at athletic events. A Stone with the Roman letters SP imprinted on it was given as an award for valor. The Stone was also a symbol of identity. Patients recovering from a serious illness would take a new name to signify their complete recovery. Those who resist “idolatry” and

“immorality” will be sustained by “hidden manna” and given a new identity, symbolized by the “White Stone.”

4. Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29)

Danger: Moral Compromise and Tolerance

Forty-five miles inland from Pergamum, with no high-fortress land formations, was located the military outpost town of Thyatira. Not suitable as a major city, it existed to protect the road from Pergamum to Sardis. In the first century it was primarily a commercial center for weavers, leather-workers, potters, and bronze-workers. William Ramsey observes: “More trade guilds are known in Thyatira than in any other Asian city.” Along with their presence was also the pressure to worship the idols of the various city temples, the most popular of which was the one to Apollo. This was also Lydia’s home town (Acts 16:14).

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze...” This makes a vivid contrast to Apollo, the special deity of Thyatira. Apollo was the son of Zeus and twin brother of Diana (Artemis). He was the God of light and purity, and could reveal the future through his oracle at Delphi. Jesus is all of that and more.

The Commendation

A number of good things are mentioned, such as love, faith, service, and patient endurance; and the latter works of this congregation exceeded the former works. There existed an upward progress in spite of the presence of someone like Jezebel and her followers. The concern is that this one rotten apple might make the whole barrel rotten.

The Condemnation

The congregation is condemned for tolerating Jezebel, who like her namesake in the Old Testament, offered food to idols and involved herself and her followers in gross immorality. While the name is used symbolically, it may well refer to a real person and a specific situation in Thyatira. Since “idolatry” and “immorality” are mentioned as the

sins to be condemned, it has been suggested that the Nicolaitans are here too. Since the various temples in Thyatira were related to the trade guilds, we become aware of the fact that an economic price would have to be paid for faithfulness. The more subtle challenge to faith does not originate in public amphitheaters, but in the daily places where we earn the money we need to live.

The Exhortation

While the word “repent” is missing, there is a call to “hold fast” until the Lord comes. “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The Promise

To those who “conquer,” will be given the Lord’s “power” (a rod of iron) and “presence” (the morning star). “The morning star” is an Old Testament image of hope for the morning and the coming of the Messiah.

5. Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)

Danger: Spiritual Deadness

Sardis is thirty miles southeast of Thyatira. The city occupies a proud acropolis (1500 feet high), which commands the intersection of five highways. It was a city with a famous past, but a declining future. In the sixth century B.C.E., King Croesus reigned there with his treasures, but the glory of those days was long gone. Twice the city was totally surprised and humiliated militarily, first by Cyrus (Persians) in 549 B.C.E. and then by Antiochus (Greeks) in 214 B.C.E. Both times the city was taken by complete surprise in a night attack by soldiers, who scaled its steep and seemingly impregnable fortress walls. Finally the earthquake of 17 C.E. destroyed the city, but through the kindness of Tiberius Caesar, the city was rebuilt. It competed for the Temple of Tiberius in 23 (26) C.E., but lost out to Smyrna. In the latter half of the first century, Sardis experienced some prosperity with its dyeing and woolen industries.

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars...” These words symbolize Christ’s spiritual source of

power (seven spirits) and his sovereign control over all the churches (seven stars).

The Commendation

Nothing good is said about the congregation, except that there exists within this “dead” congregation a “faithful few.” There are a few who have not “soiled their garments.”

The Condemnation

While the Church has a reputation for being alive, it is now accused of being dead. Its main problems were apathy and indifference. It had fallen asleep.

The Exhortation

The congregation is told to repent while there is still time, for eventually, the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Since they will not know when, they better be ready at all times.

The Promise

Those who take heed and “conquer” will be “clothed in white garments.” The Lord will confess their names before the Father and his angels. White was the color for purity, but it was also the only color a slave could afford to wear. This promise made a sharp contrast in the minds of those who lived in Sardis, where the main vocation was that of making colorful and luxurious woolen goods.

6. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)

Danger: Failure to Keep Jesus' Word

Philadelphia, the smallest of the seven cities, was very young, having been founded in 150 B.C.E. by Attalus II Philadelphos, one of the kings of Pergamum, to spread Greek culture around. It was a border town, where the provinces of Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia met, and was located about thirty-five miles southeast of Sardis. Like Sardis, it had been destroyed by the Earthquake of 17 C.E.; and having received a generous donation, it was rebuilt, but not on as grand a scale as Sardis. At this time the name was changed in honor of Tiberius to Neocaesarea, but during the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.), the name was changed back to Philadelphia. Some think this is a good argument for

dating the Book of Revelation to the time of Nero, for the name was again changed during the reign of Vespasian (70-79 C.E.), only this time to Flavia. The land nearby was good for growing grapes, and so the area produced wine in abundance.

The Descriptive Phrase

“These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens....” The key of David symbolizes authority. A similar key was entrusted to Eliakim (Isaiah 22:20-22). The entrustment of the key is a Messianic reference, which ties the Messiah into the line of King David. The Messiah has authority to open or shut the door into the New Jerusalem.

The Commendation

The Christians in Philadelphia have “kept the word” and “not denied the Lord’s name.” They are true to the name of their city, which means “brotherly love.”

The Condemnation

Like the congregation in Smyrna, this congregation is not condemned. Everything is on the positive side.

The Exhortation

Their witness to the Jews will bear fruit, and they will come to them. The congregation will be spared much of the suffering that will overtake the whole world. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The Promise

Those who “conquer” will be made “pillars” of the Temple (in the New Jerusalem). The only difficulty with this image is that the New Jerusalem will not have a Temple (Revelation 21:22), but then we should not take any of this imagery too literally. The main point is that they will live out their lives in the presence of God who writes his name upon them. He is their God, and they are his children.

7. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

Danger: Lukewarmness

Laodicea had been founded as a major urban center around 250 B.C.E. by Antiochus II (Syria) and named after his wife “Laodice.” It was located forty miles southeast of Philadelphia, and one hundred miles east of Ephesus, on the south bank of the River Lycus. The city became known commercially for its black wool and carpets, banking, and its famous medical center, which had developed a well known eye salve called Phrygian ointment.

Although the city lacked an adequate water supply, a stone aqueduct was built to bring water from Hierapolis, some six miles away. Laodicea was the most affluent of the seven cities. Following the earthquake of 61 C.E., its citizens rejected help from Rome, and rebuilt the city using their own resources. The congregation was founded by Epaphras in Paul’s day (Colossians 2:1; 4:13-16), and was yoked in a special friendship to the congregations of Colossae and Hierapolis.

The Descriptive Phrase

“The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation...” “The Amen” is Jesus Christ himself, who is the Word of God, who was with God at creation (John 1:3 and Colossians 1:15 and 18).

The Commendation

Nothing good is said about the congregation, and yet there still exists hope for the faithful.

The Condemnation

This congregation receives the most serious condemnation of all. Like its water, after it has traveled the six miles from Hierapolis, it is good for nothing, but to be spit out. The congregation is neither hot nor cold; and although it lives in prosperity, it is really spiritually poor. The decline of this church may well be directly related to its affluence.

The Exhortation

Because God loves them, he calls them to repent. Repentance for them means receiving the salve that will enable them to see, and

opening the door, allowing Christ to come in. In spite of all their apathy, God still wants them to share in the Messianic Banquet of the coming Kingdom; but he will not force them. They must open the door from the inside of their hearts. When that is done, they will no longer be lukewarm. “Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

The Promise

The final promise to those who “conquer” is a place beside Jesus on his throne.

Conclusion

Bruce Metzger in his book, *Breaking the Code*, sums up the seven lessons to be learned from these seven churches.

The seven churches provide examples of the kinds of things that can go wrong in any church. These are the danger of losing the love that one had at first (Ephesus), fear of suffering (Smyrna), doctrinal compromise (Pergamum), moral compromise (Thyatira), spiritual deadness (Sardis), failure to hold fast (Philadephia), and lukewarmness (Laodicea).¹

Jesus’ Final Words (Revelation 22:7, 12-16, 20)

Jesus has warned us three times that he will come soon (22:7, 12, and 20). Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* offers some good advice: “We live each day as if it were our last, and each day as if there were to be a great future.” With this kind of an attitude, we are ready to offer our final prayer. The final prayer of the Bible contains three words: “Come, Lord Jesus!” This prayer is also found in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and in the Didache (10:16):

May grace come and may this world pass away.
Hosanna to the God of David.
If any man is holy, let him come;
If any man is not, let him repent;
Maranatha. Amen.

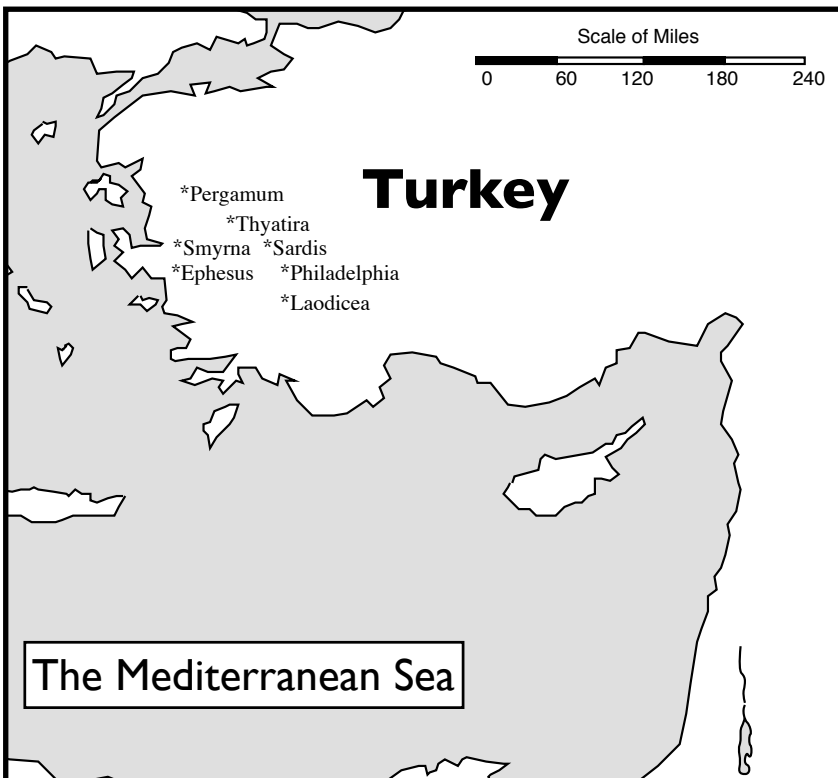
¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 46.

The Greek word *Maranatha* simply means “Our Lord has come,” or “Our Lord, come!” It can be either a statement or a prayer. It is a prayer, which indicates that we are ready for his coming.

Conclusion

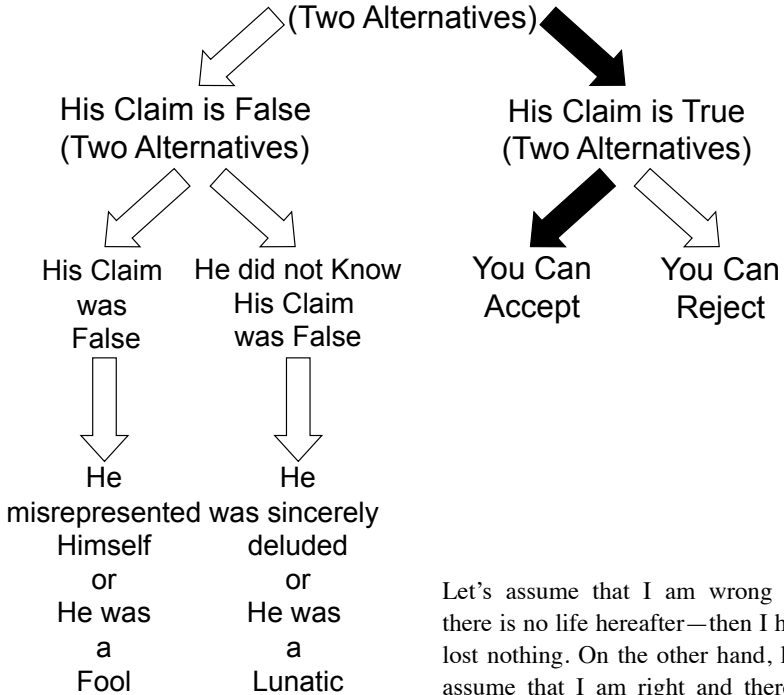
In describing the Christian’s relationship to Scripture, Karl Barth concludes with John’s final benediction: “Christians are the people under the Gospel. We are biblical Christians. Finally, ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.’” This final reference to the grace of God and his unearned love, makes a fitting conclusion to the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. In making his message Apocalyptic, Jesus is saying to us:

*The Kingdom of God will come like a thief in the night;
therefore be always ready.*



APPENDICES

JESUS CLAIMS TO BE GOD



A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd be either a lunatic on a level with a man who says he's a poached egg or else he'd be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.

C.S. Lewis

Let's assume that I am wrong and there is no life hereafter—then I have lost nothing. On the other hand, let's assume that I am right and there is life hereafter, then I have gained everything.

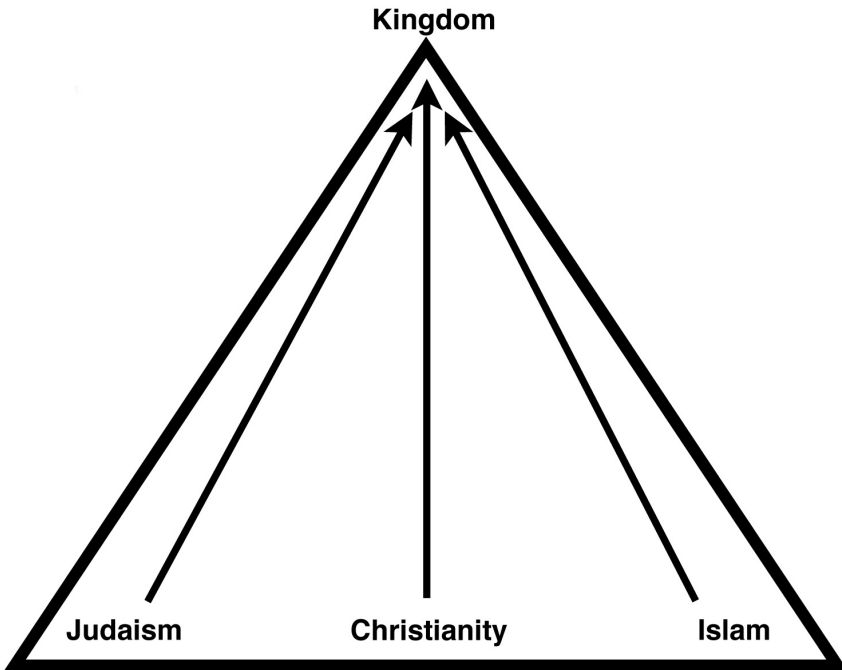
Blaise Pascal

There are only three kinds of persons; those who serve God having found Him; others who are occupied in seeking Him, not having found Him; while the remainder live without seeking Him and without having found Him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy, those between are unhappy and reasonable.

Anonymous

ENTERING THE KINGDOM

The teachings of Jesus are very clear on this subject. Not everyone will enter the Kingdom of God. Matthew 25, a chapter used by conservatives and liberals alike, clearly indicates that some people will not enter. While most of us can understand why evil people, such as Hitler, might be rejected, we have difficulty accepting the fact that good people might be denied entrance as well. We have this difficulty in spite of Ephesians 2:8-9, which teaches that Salvation comes by Grace through Faith. It cannot be earned by our good works.



The image of entering the Kingdom of God frequently accepted by many well-meaning people is one of a huge mountain. On top of the mountain stands the Kingdom of God, and many roads, beginning at the bottom, lead up to the Kingdom. Each road represents one of the

I would like to suggest a Biblical image for understanding entrance into the Kingdom of God. The image consists of two concentric circles and an ellipse. The larger circle represents the world in which we live. The smaller circle, about one-third the size of the first circle, represents the institutional church. About one-third of the world's population has been baptized. The ellipse is the smallest. I have represented it as elliptical because its boundaries are indeterminable, and the Bible teaches us that certain invisible boundaries do exist. This is why I have drawn this image with a dotted line.

To carry my image further I have placed crosses (+) and small zeroes (0) within the circles. The crosses symbolize baptized Christians, and the zeroes symbolize nonChristians. Since all baptized Christians are considered members of some congregation, all the crosses are contained within the circle of the Church. Some zeroes are also contained within this circle. I have discovered a number of unbaptized persons participating in the Church, who have not officially joined up. The crosses and zeroes within the circle of the world and Church are easily identified. Baptism makes the distinction.

The ellipse, representing the Kingdom of God, contains both crosses and zeroes. This is because God's Kingdom does not follow the lines of the institutional Church. Baptism does not insure entrance into the Kingdom of God. Some baptized Christians will travel through the narrow gate, but not all. Some nonChristians may also pass through this gate, even without knowing that they have entered the Kingdom. Certainly the patriarchs and prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures entered in; therefore, it is possible that nonChristians could do the same today, even if they do it accidentally. This is certainly the message of Matthew 25:33-40. What is important to bear in mind is that Jesus is the way into the Kingdom and not the institutional Church bearing his name.

One thing I have noticed in the New Testament. Confessing the name of Jesus does not insure Salvation. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do what my Father in Heaven wants them to do.” On the other hand, failing to confess him Lord, and yet living out the implications of his Lordship do not prevent people from entering the Kingdom. I appeal again to Matthew 25:33-40, where persons, not confessing Jesus as Lord, served him nonetheless. They are the “other sheep” of John 10:16, which Jesus would like to see in one flock and guided by one Shepherd. The flock however is not the institutional Church, nor is any bishop or pastor the Shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and his Kingdom is the flock. All my crosses and zeroes represent the sheep. Some sheep are safe within the fold, but many more sheep are climbing on the rocks, perilously close to the cliffs. They need to be led into the Kingdom, and that is our motivation for missions.

THE PARABLES

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

| | MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|--|
| PARABLES IN ONE GOSPEL | | | | |
| 1. The Tares (Weeds) | 13:24-30 | | | Good and evil in life and judgment |
| 2. The Treasure in the Field | 13:44 | | | Choose what is most valuable for eternity |
| 3. The Pearl of Great Price | 13:45-46 | | | Choose what is most valuable for eternity |
| 4. The Net | 13:47-50 | | | Good and evil will be separated |
| 5. The Unmerciful Servant | 18:23-35 | | | Forgive because God forgives |
| 6. The Laborers in the Vineyard | 20:1-16 | | | Grace is not earned. It can only be a gift |
| 7. The Two Sons | 21:28-32 | | | Insincerity and repentance compared |
| 8. The Wedding Feast | 22:2-14 | | | The necessity of the robe of righteousness |
| 9. The Ten Virgins | 25:1-13 | | | We must be ready at all times |
| 10. The Talents | 25:14-30 | | | We must use our abilities or lose them |
| 11. The seed Growing Secretly | | 4:26-29 | | The law of growth in religion |
| 12. The Absent Householder | | 13:33-37 | | Watchfulness |
| 13. The Two Debtors | | | 7:41-43 | Gratitude for pardon |
| 14. The Good Samaritan | | | 10:30-37 | Do good to all in need |
| 15. The Impertunate Friend | | | 11:5-13 | Perseverance in prayer |
| 16. The Rich Fool | | | 12:16-21 | Worldliness and death |
| 17. Servants Watching | | | 12:35-40 | Watchfulness and expectancy of Christ's return |
| 18. The Faithful Steward | | | 12:42-48 | Consistentness in trust |
| 19. The Barren Fig Tree | | | 13:6-9 | Unprofitableness under grace |
| 20. The Great Feast | | | 14:16-24 | Universality of God's invitation to salvation |
| 21. Building a Tower and a King Going to War | | | 14:25-32 | Counting the cost of discipleship |
| 22. The Lost Coin | | | 15:8-10 | Joy over the salvation of one lost soul |
| 23. The Prodigal Son | | | 15:11-32 | Everyone should welcome the repentant sinner |
| 24. The Dishonest Steward | | | 16:1-13 | Use one's resources for good and the future |
| 25. The Rich Man and Lazarus | | | 16:19-31 | The hopeless future of the unfaithful |
| 26. Unprofitable Servants | | | 17:7-10 | Serve God out of gratitude |
| 27. The Unrighteous Judge | | | 18:1-8 | Persistence in prayer |
| 28. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector | | | 18:9-14 | Arrogance and humility |
| 29. The Pounds | | | 19:11-27 | Diligence rewarded, sloth punished |
| PARABLES IN TWO GOSPELS | | | | |
| 30. The Two Builders | 7:24-27 | | | Wisdom and foolishness in building a life |
| 31. The Leaven | 13:33 | | 6:47-49 | Transforming power of faith in the Kingdom |
| 32. The Lost Sheep | 18:12-14 | | 13:20-21 | Joy over the salvation of one lost soul |
| 33. The Lamp Under a Bushel | 5:14-16 | 4:21-22 | 8:16-17 | Witnessing by radiant living |
| 34. New Cloth on an Old Garment | 9:16 | 2:21 | 11:33-36 | The new message does not fit old traditions |
| 35. New Wine in Old Wineskins | 9:17 | 2:22 | 5:37-38 | The new message does not fit old traditions |
| 36. The Sower | 13:3-23 | 4:2-20 | 8:4-15 | There are a variety of listeners to God's Word |
| 37. The Mustard Seed | 13:31-32 | 4:30-32 | 13:18-19 | The growth of the Kingdom of God |
| 38. The Wicked Tenants | 21:33-45 | 12:1-12 | 20:9-19 | Rejection of Christ by his own people |
| 39. The Fig Tree | 24:32-44 | 13:28-32 | 21:29-33 | Signs of our Lord's return |

THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN



**Orthodoxy
(Right Beliefs)**

John 3:16

Field Preaching
Society Meetings
Class Meetings



1. Do no harm.
2. Do good.
3. Attend all the Ordinances of God
 - Public Worship
 - Ministry of the Word
 - The Lord's Supper
 - Family and Private Prayer
 - Search the Scriptures
 - Fasting or Abstinence

Luke 24:32

Matthew 7:21

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.
Isaiah 42:6

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
Matthew 5:16

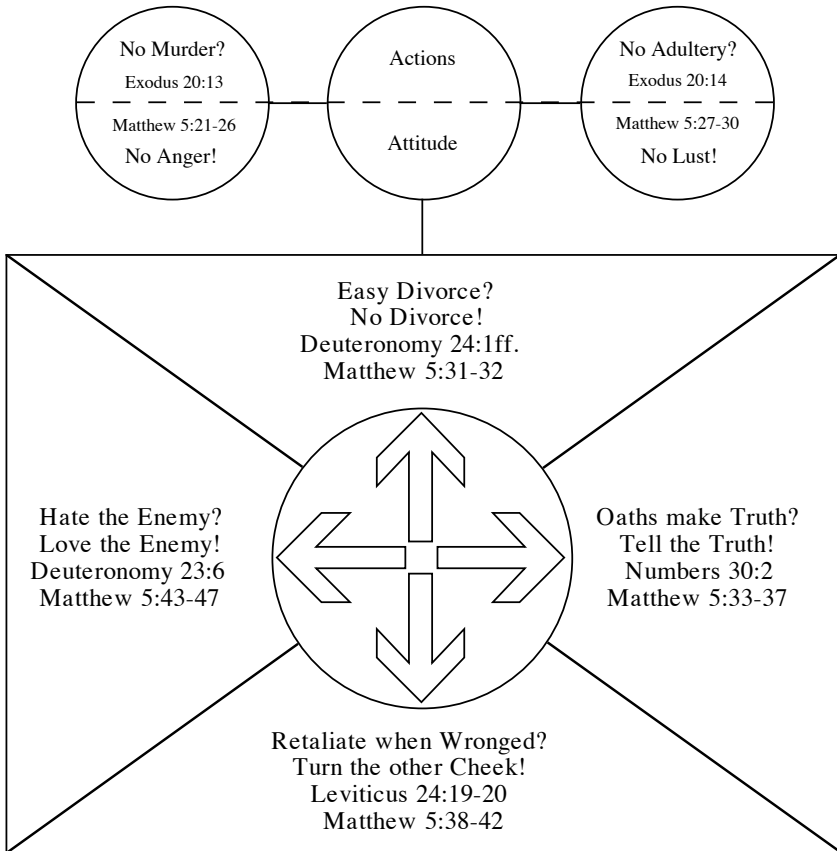


**Orthopathy
(Right Feelings)**



**Orthopraxy
(Right Practices)**

OBEYING GOD'S LAWS



The Goal



*"Be perfect, therefore,
as your heavenly Father is perfect."
Matthew 5:48*

OBEYING GOD'S LAW

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS CONTRASTED

| Revelation through Moses | | Revelation through Jesus | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, | One God (Exodus 20:2-3) | but I say unto you. | God is Father (Matthew 6:9) |
| | No Images (Exodus 20:4-6) | | God is Spirit and Truth (John 4:23-24) |
| | No Blasphemy (Exodus 20:7) | | Hallow God's Name (Matthew 6:9) |
| | Man for the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8) | | The Sabbath for Man (Mark 2:27-28) |
| | Honor your Parents (Exodus 20:12) | | Honor your Family (Mark 3:32-35) |
| | No Murder (Exodus 20:13) | | No Anger (Matthew 5:21) |
| | No Adultery (Exodus 20:14) | | No Lust (Matthew 5:27) |
| | No Stealing (Exodus 20:15) | | Give Freely (Matthew 5:42) |
| | No False Witnessing (Exodus 20:16) | | Tell the Truth (Matthew 5:33-37) |
| | No Coveting (Exodus 20:17) | | Covet Righteousness (Matthew 5:6) |

SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST ALONE?

Here is another thing that used to puzzle me. Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him. But in the meantime, if you are worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself. Christians are Christ's body, the organism through which He works. Every addition to that body enables Him to do more, if you want to help those outside you must add your own little cell to the body of Christ who alone can help them. Cutting off a man's fingers would be an odd way of getting him to do more work.⁵

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.(New York: Touchstone Edition, 1996), p. 65.

ON THE END OF THE WORLD

What We Cannot Know

They reckon as the first that made by Nero, the second by Domitian, the third by Trajan, the fourth by Antoninus, the fifth by Severus, the sixth by Maximin, the seventh by Decius, the eighth by Valerian, the ninth Aurelian, the tenth by Diocletian and Maximian. For as there were ten plagues in Egypt before the people of God could begin to go out, they think this to be referred to as showing that the last persecution by Antichrist must be like the eleventh plague in which the Egyptians, while following the Hebrews with hostility, perish in the Red Sea when the people of God passed through on dry land. Yet I do not think persecutions were prophetically signified by what was done in Egypt, however nicely and ingeniously those who think so may seem to have compared the two in detail, not by prophetic Spirit, but by conjecture of the human mind which sometimes hits the truth, and sometimes is deceived.⁶

In vain, then, do we attempt to compute definitely the years that may remain to this world, when we may hear from the mouth of the Truth that it is not for us to know this. Yet some have said that four hundred, some five hundred, others a thousand years, may be completed from the ascension of the lord up to His final coming.⁷

What We Can Know

Now Christ died when the Gemini were consuls, on the eighth day, before the kalends of April. He rose the third day, as the apostles have proved by the evidence of their own senses. Then forty days after, He ascended into Heaven. Ten days after, that is on the fiftieth after his Resurrection, He sent the Holy Spirit; then three thousand men believed when the apostles preached Him.⁸

⁶ Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), p. 663.

⁷ Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), p. 665.

⁸ Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), p. 667.

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

- 1. The Bible as Sacred History:**
Survey of the Bible
 - 2. The Struggle with God:**
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Major and Minor Prophets
 - 6. Between the Testaments:**
Books of the Apocrypha
 - 7. The Messengers:**
The Four Gospels
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Acts and Revelation
 - 9. The First E-Letters:**
All of the Letters
 - 10. The Second Creation:**
Revelation (Formatted: 6x9)
 - 11. A Vision of Hope:**
Revelation: (Formatted 8.5x11)
 - 12. New Testament Photos 1**
 - 13. New Testament Photos 2**
- 3. Our Spiritual Senses:**
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14 Common Experiences
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A Call to Missions
- 2. Reformulating the Mission of the Church:**
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