

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount is the title given to Jesus' moral and ethical teachings in His discourse recorded in Chapters 5-7 in Matthew's gospel (CP Mt5:1-7:29). These are Christ's instructions to His followers on how to live Godly lives in this present world. They represent His expectations for every professing Christian and are conditions of entry into Heaven that He has laid down for all who would follow Him. Jesus commences His Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes – the declarations of blessedness He pronounces upon Christians (CP Mt 5:1-11). These are the Beatitudes. They define the characteristics of Christians as expressed by Jesus. When citing the Beatitudes Jesus was laying down the principles of the Kingdom of God. They are a code of ethics and a standard of conduct for all professing Christians. They contrast Kingdom values with worldly values, and superficial faith with the faith by which Christ expects Christians to walk.

The Beatitudes are not multiple choices. Christians cannot choose to regard some and disregard others – they must be conformed to as a whole for Christians to inherit the Kingdom of God. They set forth qualities and experiences that are combined in the ideal character of Christians. They show what Christians should be like as followers of Christ. Each Beatitude tells Christians how to be blessed, but here the word *blessed* means more than just being happy, its normal meaning. In the Beatitudes it implies the enviable state of those who have inherited God's Kingdom. "... *for great is your reward in Heaven*" (CP V 12). This of course only applies to those who conform to all the conditions of salvation laid down by Jesus (CP V 3 also Lu 6:20).

This is the first Beatitude and the first principle of the Kingdom of God laid down by Jesus. The *poor in spirit* are Christians who recognise their spiritual helplessness without Christ and God's saving grace (CP Psa 34:18; 51:16-17; Isa 57:15-16; 66:2). What pleases God more than any sacrifice is a penitent heart and a humble spirit that looks to Him for mercy when they sin. Christians in whom these principles manifest forego their own identities as individuals in order to possess the Kingdom. They see the Kingdom as the ultimate to be possessed (CP Mt 11:12). The *violent* here are those Christians who vigorously seek the Kingdom in all its power, no matter what it costs them. It is the responsibility of every professing Christian to seek unceasingly, in all its manifestations, the Kingdom of God (CP Mt 5:4).

This is not speaking of bereaving Christians, but of Christians who are grieved over their own weaknesses in relation to God's righteousness and Kingdom power (CP Lu 18:13-14), and are grieved in their spirit over the sin and immorality manifested in the world. They take upon themselves the burden for the souls of sinners and cry out to God for their salvation (CP Ro 9:1-3; 10:1-3; 2Cor 7:9-10; Ga 6:1-2; Jas 4:7-10; 2Pe 2:4-8). *They shall be comforted* means that they that mourn will be comforted by being saved – by inheriting the Kingdom of God and receiving from God righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (CP Isa 61:1-3; Ro 14:7).

(CP Mt 5:5). The *meek* here are Christians who find their refuge in God and commit their way entirely to

Him. They have a humble, mild, gentle, forbearing disposition. Meek is not weak, as many think, but controlled strength in gentleness and forbearance; restraint coupled with strength and courage. One can be meek but actively angry at evil (CP Mt 11:29; Ga 6:1; 2Ti 2:24-26 with Mt 21:12-13; 23:13-33; Mk 3:5; Ac 13:6-12; 1Cor 4:21). Paul's purpose in making Elymas blind in Ac 13:6-12 was to punish him for a time for resisting the gospel, and he had the backing of God in this (CP Mt 18:18; Jn 20:23). Jesus in Mt 21:12-13 and Paul in Ac 13:6-12 were both meek in their own cause, but actively angry in God's cause. In the second part of Mt 5:5 Jesus declared that the meek shall inherit the earth. They will literally inherit it when they rule and reign with Christ in Eternity (CP Mt 5:6 also Lu 6:21).

The spiritual condition of Christians right throughout their lives will depend on how much they hunger and thirst after righteousness. They must not allow that hunger and thirst to be destroyed by worldly anxiety and deceitfulness of riches (CP Mt 13:22), desire for things (CP Mk 4:19), worldly pleasures (CP Lu 8:14), and failure to abide in Christ (CP Jn 15:4). When the hunger for God and His righteousness are destroyed, those affected will forfeit their salvation, whereas those who continually hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. They will rule and reign with Christ throughout eternity (CP Isa 55:1-3; Jn 4:14; 6:27, 35). Mt 5:6 is one of the most important verses in scripture, for the foundational requirement for all Godly living is to hunger and thirst after righteousness. That is the only way one can be assured of being filled with the good things of God and inheriting His eternal Kingdom (CP Mt 5:7).

The *merciful* are Christians who are not simply possessed of pity, but are actively compassionate toward those who are suffering from sin or sorrow. They mercifully desire to make such suffering less by bringing those people to the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ (CP Mt 18:21-35; Lu 10:30-37; He 2:17; 1Pe 3:8-9). 1Pe 3:9 here teaches that Christians in whom active compassion is manifested ensure their place in God's eternal Kingdom. This is the blessing Peter said they are to inherit. They reflect the love of God for others, and their own love for God (CP Col 3:12-14; 1Jn 3:16-19).

(CP Mt 5:8). The *pure in heart* are Christians who, after having been cleansed from the pollution and the guilt of sin by the grace of God, now strive to please and glorify Him. They seek to have the same attitude of heart that God has – a love for righteousness and a hatred of evil (CP Psa 15:1-5; 24:3-5; Ro 6:17-22; He 12:14). In Ro 6:17-22 Paul is contrasting Christians' old relationship to sin and their new relationship to God. He exhorts them to continue yielding their bodily members to righteousness and holiness even as they previously yielded them to sin and unrighteousness. Christians must follow after holiness or forfeit their place in God's future external Kingdom (CP 2Cor 7:1; Col 3:1-7). If God's people were not capable of living pure, holy lives, neither God, Jesus, nor Paul would have commanded it (CP Lev 11:45; Mt 5:48; Eph 1:3-4). Only the pure in heart will see God. To see God means to be His child and to dwell in His presence, now and in eternity (CP 1Cor 13:12; Rev 21:7; 22:4).

(CP Mt 5:9). *Peacemakers* are Christians who strive by their witness and life to bring lost sinners to be reconciled to God. Peacemakers are not simply ones who make peace between two parties, who have peaceful dispositions, or who love peace. They spread the good news of the peace of God which they themselves have experienced in His salvation (CP Isa 52:7; Ac 10:36; Ro 5:1-2; 2Cor 5:17-20; Eph 2:13-16). The clear teaching in Mt 5:9 is that only Christians who share the gospel of peace with the lost are designated by Christ children of God. Sadly, many Christians in the professing church do not see that it is incumbent upon them personally to share the gospel with the lost and reconcile sinners to God. Yet Jesus has commanded it (CP Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Ac 1:6-8; 10:42-43; 1Cor 9:16-17). Clearly, the onus is on every Christian to share the gospel with the lost and reconcile as many as possible to God, and if we say we love Christ, then we will obey His commands and ensure our place in the future eternal Kingdom of God, as children of God (CP Mt 19:16-17; Jn 14:15, 21, 24; 15:10; 1Cor 7-19; 1Jn 2:3-5; 5:2-3; Rev 22:14).

(CP Mt 5:10-11, also Lu 6:22-23). Christians are appointed to suffer persecution in the world for both righteousness' and Christ's sake (CP Mk 10:29-30; 2Ti 3:12). Mt 5:11 is the ninth and last Beatitude and principle of the Kingdom of God laid down by Jesus. We will deal with both the eighth Beatitude in V 10, and ninth here because they teach essentially the same thing: Christians will suffer unpopularity, rejection and criticism in the world for their witness to Christ and the truth of God's word, but they are to rejoice when they do (CP Jas 1:2-4; 5:10-14; 1Pe 4:12-13). Christians must beware the temptation to compromise God's word in order to avoid these experiences, for the principles of God's Kingdom never change (CP Ac 4:13-20; 5:12-29, 40-42). All that live Godly in life will suffer, but only those who endure to the end will inherit the Kingdom of God (CP Mt 5:12; 10:22; 2Cor 1:5; 4:7-11; 2Ti 2:12).

After He spoke the Beatitudes and laid down the principles of the Kingdom, Jesus moves on to describe the function of Christians (CP Mt 5:13-16). This is a stern warning to Christians to not only be hearers of God's word, but doers also. In V 13 Jesus likens Christians to salt, which seasons and preserves. Christians are to be seasoning agents in society to counteract the corrupt world system. If they no longer contain the characteristics to withstand the corrupt world system, Christians are like salt that has lost its "saltiness" – they no longer fulfil God's purpose in the earth. Like salt that has lost its flavour no longer has any value, they too are no longer of any value (CP Mk 9:50; Lu 14:34-35). Jesus goes on in Mt 5:14 to declare that Christians are the light of the world and that, as a city built on top of a hill cannot be hid but its glory is reflected for all to see, so too God's glory is reflected for the world to see in the good works of Christians (CP Mt 5:15-16 with Jn 14:12-13; 15:7-8). The purpose of all good works is to glorify God (CP Mk 4:21-25). Jesus admonishes Christians here to put into practice what they hear. Knowing that the gospel saves is not something Christians are to keep to themselves – it has to be shared with the unsaved (CP Lu 8:16-17). Christians have not been given the light of Divine truth to hide it from others – it must be

shared with them. What Christians do with the truth they receive will determine whether or not they will receive more, or lose what they already have, and forfeit their salvation as well (CP Mt 25:29-30; Mk 4:24-25; Lu 8:18).

Next, Jesus speaks of the Old Covenant in relation to Himself; that He did not come to destroy, but to fulfil it, and that it would remain intact until it was fulfilled (CP Mt 5:17-18). This scripture is used by many in the church to prove that the Old Covenant has not been abolished, not realising that it was Christ himself who fulfilled it. In fulfilling it Christ made it obsolete as God had always intended, and which scriptures clearly teach. It should be noted too that Jesus did not say that the Old Covenant would *never* pass away, only that it would not pass away *until it was fulfilled* (CP Ro 3:20-22; 10:4; 2Cor 3:6-13; Ga 4:21-31; Eph 2:15-16; Col 2:13-17; He 7:12, 18-25; 8:6-13; 9:11-15; 10:1-10). These scriptures all teach of Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Covenant and its complete abolition. (For a detailed teaching on this subject see author's study, *The Old Covenant – Fulfilled in Christ and completely Abolished*, in his book **Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith (Volume 1)**).

Jesus then went on to teach that the laws and commandments of the Kingdom He was ushering in were just as binding as the law of Moses was under the Old Covenant (CP Mt 5:19-20). Jesus is not referring to the Old Covenant commandments here as a great many Christians believe, but to the new commandments of the Kingdom He was ushering in, which transcend the commandments of the Old Covenant, as V 21-48 clearly teach: *on murder* (CP V 21-22). Here Jesus equates anger with murder – they both warrant the same judgement. *Raca* is a word of utmost contempt, while *fool* scorns the one addressed. Jesus does not mean that Christians cannot get angry, but their anger has to have a just and lawful cause, and even then it has to be kept under strict control (CP Eph 2:26). *On restitution* (CP Mt 5:23-24). Jesus is telling Christians here that before they can commit any sacrificial gift to God they must first make good anything outstanding against them by anyone else. This is God's law on restitution. God does not want Christians' gifts until they have resolved all matters outstanding against them (CP Mt 18:15-17, 21-35). *On civil suits* (CP Mt 5:25-26). Jesus is impressing upon Christians here the importance of making every effort to be reconciled with an opponent in a lawsuit without having to go before a judge because then the respondent would have to pay the utmost penalty (CP Lu 12:58-59 with Pr 25:8-9).

On adultery (CP Mt 5:27-30). Whereas the Old Covenant law forbade the act of adultery (CP Ex 20:14; De 5:18), the laws of the Kingdom Jesus was ushering in forbids the desire. Looking at a woman with continual longing with the mind is the same as committing the act itself – it will damn the soul to hell (CP Col 3:5; 1Pe 2:11). Opinions are divided among Christians as to whether Jesus is speaking literally or figuratively in Mt 5:29-30, but nothing is to be gained by changing the literal meaning. It would be more profitable to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand, if they were the cause of sin, and enter into eternal life, than to be cast down into hell with two eyes and two hands. And to further emphasise the seriousness of sin and

the terribleness of hell, in Mt 18 and Mk 9, Jesus included the foot (CP Mt 18:8-9; Mk 9:43-48). Jesus spoke like this to impress upon Christians the fact that sin is so serious, and hell so terrible, that sin must be dealt with in a radical way if need be, to save one's self from hell. Every influence of sin in a Christian's life must be opposed and rejected, whatever the cost (CP Psa 101:3; 119:101; Pr 4:27; Isa 33:14-16; Mt 6:22-23; Lu 11:34-36).

On divorce and remarriage (CP Mt 5:31-32). Here Jesus contrasts how divorce was permitted under the Old Covenant with the new laws of the Kingdom. Under the New Covenant Jesus permits divorce only for fornication. *Fornication* refers to any kind of sexual immorality, including adultery, incest, homosexuality, prostitution, etc (CP Mt 19:1-9; Mk 10:1-12; Lu 16:18; 1Cor 7:10-17). For a more detailed study on divorce and remarriage see author's comments on Mt 5:31-32 and 1Cor 7:14-16, in his book **A Question and Answer Study on the New Testament**. *On oaths* (CP Mt 5:33-37, also Jas 5:12 with Nu 30:2; Psa 76-11). What Jesus is teaching in Mt 5:33-37 is that Christians should not have to take an oath to attest to their truthfulness anywhere. The Christian demand is for absolute faithfulness and truthfulness in all speech, and Christians must never play word games, exaggerate, or speak anything other than the absolute truth at all times. For Christians not to observe this demand will bring God's condemnation upon them (CP Mt 12:36-37).

On retaliation (CP Mt 5:38-42 with Ex 21:23-25). In Mt 5:38-42 Jesus stipulates the code of conduct Christians must follow – in contrast to the law of the Old Covenant – when anyone infringes upon their personal rights (CP Lu 6:27-31). Christians are to surrender their personal rights and offer no retaliation to affronts against their dignity. Rather than retaliate Christians are to adopt God's approach and love even those who are their enemies (CP Ex 23:4-5; Pr 24:17-18; 25:21-22; Mt 5:44; Ro 12:17-21). "*For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on their head*" in Pr 25 and Ro 12, means that repaying injury with kindness will bring a burning sense of shame and guilt upon them. *On love of enemies* (CP Mt 5:43-47 with Lev 19:18). The words *and hate thine enemy* are not to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. This was a Pharisaic addition to the Old Covenant law. However, the Israelites were directed by God to have nothing whatever to do with their enemies (CP Ex 17:4-6; De 7:1-3; 23:3-6), and King David declared his hatred of them (CP Psa 139:19-22; 140:9-11). Nowhere though does God command hatred of one's enemies. In fact, the opposite is the case, as we have just seen in our previous study on retaliation (CP Pr 24:17-18; 25:21-22 with Mt 5:44-45 and Lu 6:32-36). Jesus then commands Christians to be perfect, even as God is perfect (CP Mt 5:48). *Perfect* here means complete, full, wanting in nothing; in complete conformity to God's law. It is used in Mt 5:48 and Lu 6:36 in a moral sense of persons, referring to God's expectation of Christians. It means completely blameless (CP also Mt 19:21; Ro 12:2; Col 1:28; 4:12; Jas 1:17; 3:2). Christians only have to do according to the laws of the Kingdom Jesus expressed in His Sermon on the Mount and they will be blameless before God.

Jesus commences the next portion of His Sermon on the Mount with a warning to Christians against performing acts of charity for the purpose of being seen by others (CP Mt 6:1-4). It is not the act of charity that Jesus condemns, but the motive. If the motive for doing it is to be seen by others, then that is the only reward that can be expected. When Christians do charitable acts it should be out of their love for God, not to gain notoriety for themselves (CP Mt 5:42; Lu 12:32-34). Jesus is not teaching here that gifts can never be seen by others; that they always have to be anonymous. Jesus simply condemns the blatant display of gift giving. Scriptures throughout teach that every good deed by Christians will be rewarded if done with the right motive (CP Mt 10:41-42; 16:27; Mk 9:41; Lu 6:35; 1Cor 3:8-15; 9:17-18; 2Cor 5:10; Col 3:23-24; He 10:35; Rev 11:18; 22:12).

Next, Jesus warns Christians against hypocrisy when they pray (CP Mt 6:5-8). Again, motive is the issue with Jesus. Christians should not purposely position themselves in public areas so that others will see them and be impressed by their piety. If their love of prominence is their only motive for praying, then that prominence will be their only reward. Then in V 6 Jesus teaches that the key to answered prayer for Christians is to pray in the privacy of their room with the door shut. He is not teaching however against corporate prayer, prayer meetings or collective prayer in public. The first century church did all these (CP Ac 2:42; 12:5, 12; 13:2-3; 14:23; 20:36). The issue with Jesus is not where one prays, but the reason – to be seen by people, or to be heard by God? Christians must forsake any display of religion that is done only for man's approval.

Prayer should not consist of *vain repetitions* – much talk without content, speaking the same thing over and over again, useless speaking without distinct expression of purpose as contrasted to succinct, knowledgeable speech. Jesus wants Christians' prayers to be sincere, from the heart, through which Christians develop an intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus went on to say that the Father knows their needs before Christians even ask Him. It is reasonable then to ask, why should Christians pray at all? The answer is that by praying Christians are acknowledging their dependence on God to provide their needs (CP Php 4:6-7 with Jas 4:2). Jas 4:2 teaches that God does things in answer to prayer that He would not have done otherwise. To ensure that Christians know how to pray properly Jesus then gave them a model prayer (CP Mt 6:9-13). This is commonly called "*The Lord's Prayer*".

In the Lord's Prayer Jesus directs Christians to pray to the Father – not to Himself, nor the Holy Spirit. Whatever Christians ask of the Father in Jesus' name, will be done (CP Jn 15:7-8, 16; 16:23; Php 4:6-7). Christians are to pray for the establishment of God's Kingdom in the earth, not only in the age to come, but in lives and situations now. Jesus defines this as God's will being done on earth as it is in Heaven. Christians are to express their desire to see God's will acknowledged throughout the world. The Lord's Prayer is also found in Luke's gospel. There, immediately after He taught the Lord's Prayer, Jesus told the parable of the friend at midnight to assure His

followers of the certainty of their prayers being answered (CP Lu 11:1-10). Although it was midnight the man in the parable got what he asked for because he boldly and unashamedly went to his friend, knocked on his door, and asked for it. There was never any doubt in his mind that he would get what he asked for. In V 9-10 Jesus assures Christians that they can do the same with God. All they have to do is expect God to respond as the householder in the parable responded. The word *importunity* in V 8 (KJV), means shamelessness, boldness, impudence, audacity. Jesus is teaching here that as the man who shamelessly dared to ask his friend at midnight to meet his needs, and got what he asked for, so too Christians who shamelessly through prayer ask, seek and knock, will also get what they ask for from God (CP Mt 7:7-11; 21:17-22; Mk 11:12-14, 20-24; 2Cor 1:19-20; Php 4:6-7; 1Jn 3:16-22; 5:14-15).

Jesus also told a parable in response to the Pharisees' demand to know when the Kingdom of God should come, to illustrate how Christians need to persevere in prayer for it (CP Lu 17:20 – 18:8). Lu 18:1-8 is called the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow. It is a call to Christians to persevere in prayer against the works of the devil until Christ comes again and sets up God's eternal Kingdom in the earth. The widow's adversary in the lawsuit in the parable is the equivalent of Christians' adversary the devil, in the earth. The parable teaches that Christians are not to be passive spectators but to persist in faith and persevere in prayer for God's will to be done on earth, in spite of continued opposition and rejection, which is what the unjust judge portrays in the parable. That is what Jesus means in Lu 18:1 when He says that men ought always to pray and not faint. He wants Christians to pray the Kingdom in and not give up, even though His second coming may not be immediate. That is why He questions whether the Christians then remaining when He does come back will still be faithfully pressing in for the things of the Kingdom and persevering in prayer, as portrayed by the widow in the parable, or will they have given up hope and lost their faith.

Jesus then contrasts the unwilling and uncaring judge's tardiness in vindicating the widow, to God's willingness and readiness to vindicate His children. When Christ comes back God will vindicate His righteous cause and therewith the cause of His children, but they must trust Him and not lose heart in the meantime. They must here and now continue faithfully in the work He has assigned to them. Now let us go back to the Lord's Prayer (CP Mt 6:11). This teaches Christians that they are to totally rely on God's providence each day for both their spiritual and physical sustenance. Jesus also teaches here that Christians' way of life has to be without the desire for more than that which will satisfy their everyday needs (CP He 13:5-6). Christians do not have to set aside reserves for their family's future needs as some teach. That is totally unscriptural, and in fact contradicts what Jesus and Paul both teach (CP Mt 6:19-21, 24-34; Lu 12:15-34; 1Ti 6:6-8). This is not teaching that Christians cannot own a family home and provide the necessities of life for their family (CP Pr 13:11; 21:20; Ecc 5:18-20; 1Ti 5:8). Christians are obliged to provide for their families, but they should only labour

to meet their everyday needs, not to accumulate wealth (CP Mt 6:12).

Continuing in the Lord's Prayer here, Jesus teaches Christians to petition God to forgive them their trespasses as they forgive those who trespass against them. If Christians do not forgive those who trespass against them neither will God forgive them their trespasses. God's forgiveness of their trespasses is conditional upon their forgiveness of those who trespass against them (CP Mt 18:23-35). This is called the parable of the unmerciful servant. Jesus told it in response to Peter's question concerning forgiveness in V 21-22 (CP V 21-22). What Jesus is teaching here is that forgiveness has to be a constant attitude with Christians regardless of how many times they have been sinned against. As God has forgiven them they too must forgive others (CP Ps 103:10-12; Mt 6:14-15). Forgiving also means forgetting (CP He 8:12). Christians are to behave toward others as God behaves toward them. If they claim to be His, then they must have His disposition to forgive, even their enemies (CP Mt 5:7; Lu 6:35-36).

Forgiveness is a matter of life or death for Christians. If they do not forgive others, neither will God forgive them. The judgement the King pronounced on the unforgiving servant in the parable of the unmerciful servant is the equivalent of eternal damnation upon unforgiving Christians, because just as the servant could never repay his debt to the King, Christians can never repay their debt to God. They have had all their sins forgiven by God, so they must forgive others in return (CP Mk 11:24-26). Forgiveness is a condition of answered prayer (CP Mt 6:13). It seems incongruous that here Jesus instructs Christians to petition God not to lead them into temptation when elsewhere scriptures teach that God tempts no man (CP Jas 1:13). Opinions are divided among bible scholars as to what exactly Jesus means in Mt 6:13. One thing is certain: He does not mean that Christians are to ask God not to allow them to be tempted when again, elsewhere in scripture, Christians are told to count it all joy when they are tempted (CP Jas 1:2-4, 12; 1Pe 1:6-9). Jesus allowed Himself to be tempted (CP Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12-13). God promises that no Christian will ever be tempted above that which they can endure, but that with the temptation He will also make a way of escape (CP 1Cor 10:13). *Temptation* here means a state of trial in which God brings His children through adversity and affliction in order to encourage and prove their faith and confidence in Him (CP 2Pe 2:9). In light of this and the second part of the petition in Mt 6:13, "... *but deliver us from evil*", it seems more likely that Jesus means that Christians are to pray that they would not be led into such temptations as would destroy their faith, but for God to deliver them from such. In closing the Lord's Prayer Christians are to praise God for sharing His Kingdom, power and glory with them, "*for thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen*" (CP Lu 10:19; Jn 17:22; 2Ti 4:18).

Jesus then went on in His Sermon on the Mount to denounce the hypocritical form of fasting practiced by the Pharisees (CP Mt 6:16-18). To fast means to voluntarily abstain from eating food for a certain time. Fasting was an Old Testament practice, but Jesus did

not stress it for New Testament Christians although He sanctioned it here. But when John the Baptist's disciples questioned Him as to why Jesus' own disciples did not fast, Jesus included fasting as part of the Old Covenant Judaistic religious system that He had come to replace, which kept people under its law in bondage to sin (CP Mt 9:14-17). This is called the parable of old and new cloth and wineskins. Jesus is teaching here that His New Covenant of grace is not compatible with the teaching of the law under the Old Covenant (CP Also Lu 5:30-39). His reference to new cloth and new wine was a way of saying that He did not come as a reformer to patch up an old worn out religious system, but to replace it completely with a dynamic new teaching.

This is not teaching against fasting by New Testament Christians. Fasting was observed by the first century church (CP Ac 13:1-3; 14:21-23). But other than this there is nothing about fasting in the New Testament. The only other fastings recorded are what Paul described as part of his sufferings for Christ (CP 2Cor 6:5; 11:27). These fastings refer to lack of food, not voluntary abstinence from food. The object of fasting in the Old Testament was to humble the soul before God (CP Psa 35:13 with Dan 9:3-23; Joel 2:12-19); to crucify the appetite and deny it in order to enhance prayer and to receive from God (CP 2Sam 12:15-17; Ezra 8:21-23; Dan 1:8-16). Fasting by voluntary abstinence from food is not obligatory upon New Testament Christians. Jesus sanctions it in Mt 6:16-18, but does not command it. But there is a fast chosen by God though that is obligatory upon New Testament Christians, and they must always be ready to do it (CP Isa 58:6-8 with Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-18).

The next imperative for Christians in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is not to lay up treasures for themselves on earth (CP Mt 6:19-21). Jesus admonishes Christians here not to allow the acquisition of material possessions and wealth to become their life-goal, because it will eventually estrange them from God (CP V 22-24). It is through the eye that the body receives illumination and can see. The good eye belongs to those with a single-minded desire for God's interests, not their own. Their whole life is flooded with light. They forsake earthly riches and lay up treasure for themselves in Heaven, knowing that this is the only security they have. Jesus is teaching here against double-mindedness. No one can serve God and mammon. *Mammon* refers to earthly riches – material possessions and wealth. Christians must ever be alert to the danger of being seduced from their allegiance to God by the allurements of riches and material possessions. They must guard against any preoccupation at all with material things lest they become more important to them than the things of God (CP Mt 13:3-9, 18-23).

This is called the parable of the sower. It perfectly describes what the end is for Christians serving mammon – caught up in the pursuit of wealth. The teaching in the parable centres on the different soils, which represent those who receive the gospel, and how they respond to it. The term *deceitfulness of riches* in V 22 means that wealth gives a false impression – a false sense of security – whether by appearance, statement or influence. *Choke*, in the

same verse means figuratively to overpower. What Jesus is impressing upon Christians here is that the false sense of security emanating from material possessions and wealth overpowers the word of God in Christians and prevents them bearing fruit for the Kingdom. They have been seduced by their wealth from continuing in God's service. Paul also teaches this (CP 1Ti 6:9-10).

Erred here also means seduced. Those who coveted after wealth erred from the faith. They were seduced by their wealth away from God. Paul's perspective on wealth is the same as Jesus'. The pursuit of wealth debases the mind, destroys Godly traits and makes Christians selfish, proud and avaricious, which all lead to destruction and perdition. *Perdition* refers to the state after death wherein exclusion from salvation is a realised fact, wherein man, instead of becoming what he might have been in God, is lost and ruined forever. *Perdition* here is the final destiny of Christians who determine to be rich. This is a grim warning to Christians against focusing upon earthly riches and serving mammon in this life, as opposed to serving God and storing up treasure for themselves in Heaven that will guarantee their eternal security (CP Lu 12:13-15). The word *abundance* here means more than is needed, surplus to needs. Accumulating more than is needed is the sin of covetousness. Covetousness is idolatry, and no idolater will inherit the eternal Kingdom (CP Lu 12:16-21; Eph 5:5; Col 3:1-6).

Jesus next admonishes Christians in His Sermon on the Mount not to centre their lives around what to eat and drink, and with what clothes they will clothe themselves (CP Mt 6:25-34). In V 26 Jesus illustrates for Christians how much more important they are to God than the birds of the air who neither sow nor reap, yet God feeds them. If He does that for birds how much more will He do for Christians? This is not teaching that Christians do not have to work for God to meet their needs – if Christians do not work they are not entitled to eat (CP 2Th 3:10). Working is an integral part of Christians' needs being met. To quote another author: "*the argument is that if God sustains, without their conscious participation, creatures of a lower order, He will all the more sustain, with their active participation, those for whom creation took place*". The conclusion of Jesus' teaching here is that if Christians will put God's interests first in their lives then God will ensure that they will never lack for anything (CP Mt 6:33-34 with Psa 34:10; 84:11; 91:1-16; 103:1-4; Pr 4:20-22).

Jesus continues His Sermon on the Mount with an admonition for Christians not to judge others lest they be judged themselves (CP Mt 7:1-5). A great many Christians interpret this scripture to mean that Christians are not to make any sort of judgement at all. But that is not correct. Jesus is admonishing Christians here not to judge others self-righteously or hypocritically. Christians are not to find faults in others while blinded to their own (CP Lu 6:37; Jn 8:1-11; Ro 2:1-3). Both Jesus and Paul here teach that being blinded to one's own faults results in an attitude of superiority and causes hardness to the faults of others. In Jn 8:1-11 Jesus exposes the evil hearts of the Pharisees who were quite prepared to put to death one found sinning publicly, yet they themselves were all sinning privately. In Ro 2:1-3 Paul declares that

there is a Pharisee in the heart of every Christian who esteems their own morality above others (CP Ga 6:1-3). When Christians judge, they must judge only as fellow-sinners. To think that they are anything other than that, or that they are exempt from the faults which they see in others, is to judge self-righteously and hypocritically, which is forbidden (CP 1Cor 4:3-7; Jas 4:11-12).

Paul and James both teach in these passages of scripture that Christians are not to criticise or condemn each other. No Christian is above criticism and it is God who will judge them all. This is also a rebuke to self-appointed judges in the church. They must not judge another's holiness by their own personal convictions (CP Ro 14:1-13, 22). Paul admonishes Christians here, both strong and weak in the faith not to judge each other. Every Christian is God's servant and is personally responsible to God for what they do aside from what is specifically forbidden. No one will fall who conscientiously follows God in the light of the knowledge they have received. Christians can fellowship with each other in spite of differences of opinion if they do not despise or criticise each other because of their differences. The strong are to bear with the weak and be tolerant of their doubtful practices. They must live in unity with one another (CP Ro 15:1-7 with 1Cor 13:1-7; Ga 5:22-23).

Jesus is the only one who is capable of judging Christians because He is the only one who paid the supreme sacrifice for their salvation, so no Christian should presume to criticise or condemn another for whom Christ also died (CP Ro 14:10-12). *Setting at naught* other Christians means despising them, holding them in contempt. That does not mean that Christians have to agree with what other Christians believe or teach, or that they must like what they do, but they are not to criticise or despise them because of it. Christians had better be looking at their own works rather than judge another's, because every single one of them will one day have to stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give an account of their own faithfulness (CP 1Cor 4:2-5; 2Cor 5:10 with 1Cor 3:11-15). None of this is teaching that Christians cannot exercise discernment regarding spiritual things (CP 1Cor 14:29). Christians can also examine, convince and reprove those in the world of their evil ways (CP 1Cor 2:15). This in no way is judging sinners, but simply witnessing to them the gospel of light.

Jesus is also not saying that Christians cannot judge false teaching, and who false teachers are in the church. It is obligatory upon Christians to do this (CP Mt 7:15-20; 1Th 5:21; 1Jn 4:1; Rev 2:1-2). Nor does Jesus mean that Christians cannot make value judgements with respect to sin in other Christians (CP 1Cor 5:1-5, 9-13). The fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers (foul-tongued abusers), drunkards and extortioners here are professing Christians, and Paul warns other Christians not to fellowship with them. They are to be put out of the church – excommunicated – so that God can deal with them outside the church. Christian judgements are limited to those inside the church – God judges those outside. Christians must always remember that the same measure of judgement with which they judge others will be measured back to them – doubled (CP Lu

6:36-38). The word *again* in V 38 means *repetitive* – it is repeated, so Christians get double judgement, just as they get doubly blessed in return for their giving.

To show that He was not forbidding every kind of judgement, Jesus then went on to warn Christians against giving holy things to dogs or casting pearls before swine (CP Mt 7:6). In the general sense this means that objects of value or sacred things should not be offered to those incapable of appreciating them. However, in this context it centres on Christians judging others by their own standards. The point Jesus makes here is that as dogs are incapable of recognising something sacred, and pigs have no regard for pearls, so Christians cannot impose God's standard of morality on those who are morally corrupt (CP Pr 1:22; 9:7-8; 15:12). Christians cannot expect those who have no relationship with God to adopt His standards of morality. Rather, the morally corrupt are more likely to turn on Christians trying to impose their morality upon them, and attack them. It should be noted here however, that contrary to what many Christians believe, there is no suggestion whatever in Jesus' teaching that Christians are not to share the gospel with unrepentant sinners in case they reject it and attack them, because everywhere else in scripture Jesus teaches that Christians must be prepared to die for the gospel's sake, if need be (CP Mt 10:38-39; Mk 8:34-37; Lu 9:23-25; Jn 12:24-26).

What Jesus teaches next in His Sermon on the Mount is the certainty of answered prayer (CP Mt 7:7-11, also Lu 11:9-13). Right throughout scripture God promises to answer the prayers of His children and fulfil His promises in their lives (CP Nu 23:19; Psa 34:15-17; 89:34; 145:18-19; Pr 15:8, 29; Isa 46:9-11; 55:10-11; Mt 18:19; 21:22; Mk 11:22-24; Jn 14:12-14; 15:7; 16:23-24; Eph 3:20; Jas 1:5-8, 17; 1Pe 3:12; 1Jn 3:21-22; 5:14-15). *According to the power that worketh in us* in Eph 3:20 means by, or as a consequence of God's power at work within us. Christians need to be in total agreement with what these scriptures teach, otherwise they will have little chance of ever having any of their prayers answered. The clear teaching throughout is that there are no limitations whatever on what Christians may ask of God in prayer, in line with His will – His word, the bible. What Christians know of God's word is what they know of His will, and what they know of His will determines the success of their prayer life. It is imperative that Christians are thoroughly acquainted with God's word and do it, for their prayers to be answered (CP Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-3). This is the guaranteed secret of success in the Christian walk: being thoroughly grounded in God's word. The closer Christians are to Christ through His word abiding in them as Jn 15:7 teaches, the more effective their prayers will be.

Christ's word abides in Christians in the measure it governs their lives, and in the measure they act upon it. That is what John meant in 1Jn 3:21-22: "*beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God and whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are right in His sight*". Also in 1Jn 5:14-15, "*and this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hears us,*

whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him". Christians walking in fellowship with the word will never ask for anything outside of God's will, and this ensures that the answer to their prayers will always be yes (CP 2Cor 1:19-20). There is not one promise of God that is no to a believer in Christ in line with His word. God is glorified in His promises being fulfilled in their lives, which is what V 20 teaches (CP also Jn 15:8). There are absolutely no limits to what Christians may ask for in prayer in line with God's word. Salvation for their family and friends (CP 1Ti 2:1-4; 2Pe 3:9), their own good health and wellbeing (CP Isa 53:4-5 with 1Pe 2:24), their finances (CP Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-3; 3Jn 2) etc. Christians can ask what they will in line with God's word and it will be done for them. If their prayers are not being answered they need to examine themselves closely and remedy the fault immediately (CP 1Cor 11:31-32; 2Cor 13:5). The fault lies with Christians, not God. He does not capriciously stop answering prayer – Christians themselves are the problem (CP Ro 3:4). If prayers are not being answered it is because Christians are not complying with the conditions God has laid down for them.

God watches over His word to perform it (CP Jer 1:12). He has given Christians the right to bring Him to remembrance of His word (CP Isa 43:26; 45:11). But as with all His promises, it is only to the extent that God's word lives in Christians, that they are able to bring Him to remembrance of His word, and have Him perform it in their lives. That is why it is so important to encourage new Christians and those weak in the faith to thoroughly immerse themselves in the word. As we learned earlier in 1Jn 5:14-15, it is only prayer based on His word that will prevail with God. Prayer avails only as sin has been confessed and renounced by the one praying (CP Psa 32:1-7; 66:18; Pr 28:9; Isa 59:1-2; 1Jn 1:5-10). Prayer avails only as it comes from a forgiving heart (CP Mt 6:12-15; 18:21-35; Mk 11:25-26). Prayer avails only as it is made in a context of harmonious human relationships (CP Mt 5:23-24; Eph 4:31-32; He 12:14-15; 1Pe 3:1-12). Prayer avails only as it is made in faith (CP Mt 17:20; Mk 11:22-24; He 11:6; Jas 1:5-7; 5:14-15).

Next, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stresses the imperative that Christians live by the "golden rule" (CP Mt 7:12, also Lu 6:31). Jesus teaches here that Christianity is not simply a matter of abstinence from sin, but also active benevolence toward others. "For this is the law and the prophets", summarises the moral teachings of the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets of Israel in the Old Testament. The righteousness demanded by the Old Testament is fulfilled in New Testament Christians who walk according to the Spirit (CP Ro 8:4). The spiritual law at the heart of the golden rule is the law of love (CP Lev 19:18; Mt 22:36-40; Ro 13:7-10; Ga 5:14; 1Ti 1:5). The golden rule is the Kingdom foundation for all social relationships. It is the kind of love God shows Christians every day. Jesus goes on from here to warn Christians that the only way to enter into eternal life is through the narrow confines of a Christian walk totally consecrated to the service of God, and completely surrendered to the authority of Jesus (CP Mt 7:13-14, also Lu 13:23-27). The word *strive* in Lu 13:24 means to labour fervently; to wrestle as in an award contest, straining every nerve to

the uttermost toward the goal (CP 1Cor 9:24-27; Php 2:12; 3:8-14; He 4:1).

In 1 Cor 9, Paul reminds Christians that while there are many runners in a race, not all receive the prize. The Christian walk is like a race. It requires self-discipline. It calls for strenuous effort. It demands a definiteness of purpose. Paul is not suggesting however, that in the Christian walk only one can win the prize. What he is teaching, is that Christians must be as earnest to make Heaven their goal as runners are to win their race (CP 1Cor 9:24; Php 3:14; He 12:1-3). Paul then changes the figure from runners to wrestlers, and how they must exercise self-control in all things. They do it for a corruptible crown – one that perishes, whereas Christians do it for an incorruptible crown that will never perish (CP 1Cor 9:25; 2Pe 1:4-11). In view of the incorruptible crown to be won, Christians, like Paul, most run not uncertainly, nor fight as one that beats the air, but with singleness of purpose make every action in their Christian walk count (CP 1Cor 9:26; 1Ti 6:12). Also, like Paul, Christians must discipline their body and bring it into subjection in order that they too should not be a castaway after having preached to others (P 1Cor 9:27; Ro 6:14-23; 8:12-13; 12:1-2; 1Cor 3:16-17). *Castaway* in 1Cor 9:27 means disapproved, rejected, cast away (CP 2Cor 13:5-7; He 6:8).

Next, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns Christians against false prophets and deceptions in the church (CP Mt 7:15-20). The term *false prophets* includes in its meaning teachers of false doctrines in the name of God (CP Isa 8:20; Jer 23:16; Eph 5:6; Col 2:8; 2Pe 2:1-3; 1Jn 4:1). Outwardly the false prophets look like true men of God, but inwardly they are *ravening wolves*. They cannot deceive Christians who are thoroughly grounded in God's word (CP 1Jn 4:2-6), but they prey on the immature, the unstable, and the gullible (CP Ac 20:29-30; Ro 16:17-18; Eph 4:14; 2Ti 4:3-4; 2Pe 2:1-3). Their destiny is swift destruction as Peter declares here, but this is also a dire warning to all Christians of the need to be thoroughly grounded in God's word in order to quickly and accurately discern false teachers in the church (CP Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-4 with 1Cor 14:29-32; 1Th 5:21; 2Jn 7-11). Christians must test the spirit of every teaching in the light of scripture. Any teaching that does not conform to scripture must be rejected out of hand. False teachers may not always be immediately recognisable, but their doctrine will betray them to Christians who test their teachings against the pure word of God.

In 2Jn 7-11, John is warning Christians against knowingly fellowshiping with anyone, and praying God's blessings over them, who teaches against the Person of Christ as scriptures present Him. V 9 teaches that no one can be saved who teaches against the Deity of Jesus (CP V 9 with 1Jn 2:22-26). Anyone who denies Christ calls God a liar because God Himself bears witness to Jesus (CP 1Jn 5:9-13 with Mt 3:13-17; Lu 9:28-36 (also Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:1-8); Ac 13:33).

Now, in bringing His Sermon on the Mount to a close, Jesus warns Christians against mere profession of salvation (CP Mt 7:21-27). Jesus is passing sentence here upon all those who do not bear fruit for God's

eternal Kingdom. The clear teaching is that no one merely professing to be a Christian will be saved – only those who hear God’s word and do it will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (CP Psa 119:9; Pr 4:4; Lu 11:27-28; Ro 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; Rev 1:3). These scriptures all teach the same thing: the only way to Heaven is by doing the work of God’s word. As Jas 1:24 teaches, those who merely hear God’s word quickly forget it. They are like a man who looks at himself in a mirror and then walks away and immediately forgets what he saw. So too, the man who merely hears the word quickly forgets it. He cannot enter into eternal life with Jesus. Only those who hear the word and do it, will be blessed of God (CP Jas 2:14-26). We learn from this that no one can be saved by merely believing in Jesus. Demons also believe, but they are not going to Heaven. Both Jas 1:22-25 and 2:14-26 are directed to those in the church who profess faith in Christ and His blood atonement, believing that is all that is necessary for salvation. But those who believe that are deceiving themselves. Merely hearing God’s word will not get anyone to Heaven – it must be acted upon (CP Mt 12:30).

Jesus makes it very clear here that there is no neutrality in Christianity. If Christians are not actively involved in doing the work of the word for Christ,

then they are actively involved in doing the work of the devil against Him. Many Christians do not properly understand that what Jesus teaches here applies to Christians who are not doing the work of God’s word. They profess to love Christ, but do not obey His commandments, and thus will forfeit their salvation. We cannot downplay this meaning, for as well as the preceding scriptures, that is what is taught throughout the New Testament (CP also Mt 19:17; Jn 14:15, 21; 15:5-10; Ro 2:7-11; 1Cor 7:19; Ga 6:7-8; 1Jn 2:3-5; 3:22-24; 2Jn 6; Rev 22:14).

This study is now complete. It has been said of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount that “it would be a great point gained if people would only consider it was a *Sermon*, which was preached, not an *act*, that was passed”. Many in the professing church believe that it is not meant to be taken literally. But that is not correct as this study clearly shows. When the other scriptures pertaining to Christ’s expectations of Christians are considered with His Sermon on the Mount, it is plainly evident that in His Sermon on the Mount Christ was laying down both the principles of God’s Kingdom, and conditions of entry into Heaven. And only those conforming to them both will be able to enter in.