

# MATTHEW

## Chapter 5

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

### The Beatitudes

**<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup>“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. <sup>7</sup>“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. <sup>8</sup>“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. <sup>9</sup>“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called son of God. <sup>10</sup>“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

**5:1-12** Jesus introduces His Sermon on the Mount with nine beatitudes that detail the future blessedness of His disciples. These promised blessings are God’s gracious gifts to those who repent of their sins and trust Christ for righteousness. Only after Jesus has assured His disciples of God’s goodness to them does He call on them, in the rest of His sermon, to be good and do good. When we recognize our own spiritual poverty, when the Lord leads us to hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness, when He makes us pure in heart so that we seek to worship only the true God, then we are blessed, now and forever. (TLSB)

**5:3-11** Jesus began His sermon by nine times declaring His disciples blessed because of what God had in store for them. Jesus was not making ethical demands of His followers but was describing blessings they would fully enjoy in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1). The beatitudes are a common literary form found throughout Scripture (e.g., Ps. 1:1; Luke 11:28; Rev. 19:9) (TLSB)

**5:1** *crowds* – Ἰδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους—The adversative translation of δὲ as “but” is called for by the contrast between the massive crowds that followed Jesus (4:25) and his action of separating himself (though not completely; see 7:28) from them in order to teach more directly those who have begun to be “his disciples” (5:1). (CC)

His fame spread from north to south through the whole Holy Land, and even beyond its borders... His influence spread wider and wider; His holy teaching, His works of mercy, attracted crowds from every quarter. It seemed as if the whole world was going after Him, as if all Palestine would submit to His authority. It was not to be so, sunshine would give place to place to darkness, favor to persecution. (PC)

Jesus separated Himself from the “great crowds” (4:25), though some did hear His teaching (7:28). (TLSB)

As part of the introduction to the Sermon, Matthew mentions for the first time the figure of the “crowds” who followed Jesus (4:25). As is clear in these verses and throughout the Gospel, the “crowds” never attain to the status of those who believe in Jesus, even if imperfectly. Although 7:28–29 will declare that in some sense Jesus also teaches the Sermon to the crowds, the specific comment in 5:1–2 that “*his disciples* approached him, and he opened his mouth and began to teach *them* and say ...” distinguishes Jesus’ “disciples” from the “crowds.” These crowds hear Jesus’ words. Moreover, they understand his claim to authority and are astonished by it, though they do not show that they accept his claim (see the textual note on ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων in 7:29). However, through Jesus’ authoritative teaching, it is possible for individuals to emerge from the crowds and to *become* disciples. I shall argue that this is precisely what Matthew narrates in chapter 8. (CC)

As Dale Allison has noted in his remarkable and largely persuasive analysis of the Sermon’s overall structure, Matthew has artfully bracketed the Sermon with a narrative introduction and conclusion. Observe the careful correspondence of features: In 4:25, “Many crowds ... followed him” from around the entire region; in 8:1, “Many crowds followed him.” In 5:1, “When he had seen the crowds, he went up on the mountain”; in 8:1, Jesus “had come down from the mountain.” In 5:2, Jesus “opened his mouth and began to teach” his disciples; in 7:28–29, after Jesus “completed these words, the crowds were being astonished at his teaching.” The concept of “authority” is implicit in the formal reference that Jesus “sat down” and “opened his mouth” (5:1–2), and his “authority” is explicitly mentioned in 7:29. (CC)

These crowds followed Jesus about in many places, at times gathering by the thousands, so that Jesus often found little time to rest and privacy. Some of them may have been attracted by some of the things he did and may not really have been disciples.

*mountainside.* The exact location is uncertain. It may have been the gently sloping hillside at the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee, not far from Capernaum. The new law, like the old (Ex 19:3), was given from a mountain. (CSB)

Location unknown. Mountains were common sites for significant events (cf 17:1). Jesus’ teaching in chs 5–7 has long been known as the Sermon on the Mount. It is the first of five major sermons, or discourses, in Mt (cf ch 10; 13:1–52; ch 18; chs 24–25). Augustine: “The sermon before us is perfect in all the precepts by which the Christian life is moulded” (*NPNF* 1 6:3). (TLSB)

ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος—Although εἰς often means “into,” the context of “he went up” and “mountain” naturally adjusts the sense of the preposition to mean “to, on” (see BDAG, 1 α). This clause, “he went up on the mountain,” provides the most significant textual evidence for scholars who detect that Matthew wants his readers/hearers to view Jesus as a new or greater Moses. While there is nothing inherently objectionable about such a typology, its presence here is doubtful. Although the language does occur in the LXX ten times in reference to Moses ascending Mount Sinai, it is used in other contexts as well. Therefore, that clause alone cannot bear the weight of establishing a Moses typology in 5:1–2. It is important to observe that mountains in Matthew are not particularly connected with Moses; see especially the commentary on 17:1–8, where Matthew presents Jesus in terms of his deity, and on 28:16–20, where Jesus’ identity as Son of God is most prominent. Also, LXX Ps 23:3 (MT/ET 24:3) asks about the worshiper who “will go up on the mountain of the Lord” (ἀναβήσεται εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ κυρίου, LXX Ps 23:3, from a psalm that is the background for Mt 5:8), so when the disciples approach Jesus on the mountain in 5:1, this suggests that he is “the Lord.” (CC)

Does Matthew here portray Jesus, as he ascends a mountain, sits, opens his mouth, and begins to teach his disciples, as a new or greater Moses? Many authors have so concluded. Others are not convinced. Still others acknowledge that while Matthew may be describing Jesus so as to evoke the image of Moses, other Christological concerns are more important. David Garland's comments are especially helpful in this regard. He acknowledges (more fully than I am prepared to do) that Matthew's early chapters contain some parallels between Moses and Jesus. He then notes the major differences between Moses and Jesus in key Matthean texts. Garland concludes that, in general and specifically in 5:1–2, "while Matthew presents Jesus as Moses-like, he does not depict him as a new Moses but as the Lord, the son of God." (CC)

The very content of the Sermon also prevents too close an identification between Jesus and Moses. While one of the Sermon's major units (5:21–48) has to do with the proper interpretation of the Torah, Jesus speaks there six times with unfettered *divine* authority: "But *I* say to you ...". Moreover, most of the Sermon is not directly concerned with the Torah of Moses. In sum, while there is certainly a key continuity between God's teaching that came through Moses and the teaching that the Lord issues out of his own authority, Jesus does not ascend the mountain in order to speak like a greater Moses. If anything, it is the disciples who receive divine revelation on the mountain who "play the role of Moses," and Jesus speaks with the mouth of God himself. (CC)

Location unknown. Mountains were common sites for significant events (cf. 17:1). (TLSB)

*sat down*. It was the custom for Jewish rabbis to be seated while teaching (see Mk 4:1; 9:35; Lk 4:20; 5:3; Jn 8:2). (CSB)

Teachers at the time of Jesus sat in the midst of their pupils.

*disciples*. Lit. "learners." (CSB)

Gk *mathetes*; Learner, apprentice. Common in Gospels and Acts, but never used in Epistles. Often means the 12 called "apostles" (10:1-2), but can also mean a larger group of adherents. The feminine form appears once (see note, Acts 9:36). Here, the term includes the four fishermen (cf 4:18-22) plus others from the crowds who responded to Jesus' call to repent. (TLSB)

*mathatas* – It denotes the men who have attached themselves to Jesus as their Master. Unlike the people of Jesus' day, they did not choose him but he chose them (John 15:16). Disciple always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the disciple. The basic meaning of the English noun "disciple" and is "learner." Essentially a disciple is one who accepts, learns from, and follows a teacher and his instruction. These were the twelve and also others who believed.

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Acts 2:42 "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

**5:2** *taught them* – ἐδίδασκεν—The imperfect indicative readily conveys an inceptive force: Jesus "began to teach." See also the imperfect περιῆγεν in 4:23. Matthew's Gospel contains five major teaching discourses and several smaller ones; the Sermon on the Mount is the first. Here is where

Jesus truly does begin to teach his disciples, and his teaching is a major concern of the first Gospel. (CC)

To a large extent, the Sermon can be seen as Jesus' blessing of his disciples (5:3–12) followed by the enunciation of the calling (5:13–16) that he has given them to be salt and light. The implications of that calling are then fully spelled out in the main body of the Sermon. The order of these parts, however, is significant. Without the blessing of Jesus—without the strength and power and hope that the Beatitudes provide when they are rightly understood and believed—no one can receive and live in the calling that Jesus then gives. (CC)

The extent to which triads dominate the Sermon's organization can be easily shown. There are nine beatitudes (though the ninth is clearly different from the first eight): three times three (5:3–12). There are two sets of three issues with regard to which Jesus says, "But I say to you ..." (5:21–32; 5:33–48). The treatment of piety deals with three issues (giving of alms, prayer, and fasting) and is characterized by strongly parallel language triply repeated (6:1–18). The summary of the disciples' calling is marked by three invitations: "ask ... seek ... knock" (7:7–11). The conclusion of the Sermon contains three warnings: "Enter ..." (7:13–14), "Beware ..." (7:15–20), and "Not everyone ... will enter ..." (7:21–27). (CC)

Another intriguing rhetorical feature of the Sermon is of some importance for understanding how the Sermon will affect, or not affect, those who hear it. The Beatitudes, it will be argued below, are the introduction or the "doorway" into the Sermon. In order to understand the Sermon aright, one must appropriate the Beatitudes as the Gospel pronouncements that they are. After eight *third person* plural statements ("the poor in spirit ...," "the people who are mourning ...," etc., 5:3–10), Jesus changes and speaks one final, longer *second person* plural statement ("You are blessed ...," 5:11–12). In other words, as people enter the "doorway," Jesus speaks first to "them" (see also 5:2) and then to "you." After the Beatitudes, the Sermon's teaching continues the second person (mostly plural) address without interruption until the concluding "exit" and warning section (7:13–27). There the pattern is reversed: the exit unit begins with second person plural warnings (7:13–14 and 7:15–20) and then shifts to third person address in 7:21–27. Thus in the exit and warning section, Jesus speaks first to "you" and then to "them." (CC)

These changes in address seem to suggest the following. Unless the hearer/reader receives for himself the Lord's teaching *through* the blessings of 5:3–12, the rest of the Sermon's teaching will not be accessible. In other words, by faith the hearer can and does claim the Beatitudes' blessings, which Jesus first offers to "them," as offered for "you." All who receive those gifts are disciples. Receiving the gifts of the Beatitudes, then, disciples hear the calling of Jesus in the main body of the Sermon's teaching. Further, every disciple of Jesus lives his life cognizant of the sober warnings about life in this time, when the reign of God in Jesus has both come and has not yet fully come, and lives with an eye on the final goal (7:13–27). A person who does not receive Jesus' blessings and does not live with that perspective will not stand on the Last Day. The final warnings at the end of the Sermon change back to third person address, applying not only to the disciples, but to all people, and thus the hearer/reader "exits" the Sermon. To the majority of the crowds, then, the Sermon on the Mount is about "them," in third person, for they do not believe in Jesus' authority. For those to whom faith and understanding begin to be granted, however, the blessing and calling of Jesus become their own; Jesus speaks to "you." (CC)

One final matter is important before turning to the exegesis of the blessed doorway to the Sermon. That is the matter of how Matthew portrays the Jesus who is here speaking. Two textual features deserve emphasis. The first pertains to the authority with which Jesus speaks the Sermon

in its entirety. The crowds, who by and large remain “third person” observers of the Sermon and indeed of Jesus’ ministry as a whole, react when the Sermon is finished by marveling at Jesus’ claim to authority (7:28–29). None of their other religious teachers dared to speak divine blessing and calling simply out of their own authority the way Jesus has done. In fact, Jesus has claimed that his words are the unshakeable foundation on which a person may and *must* build his hope for eschatological salvation (7:24–27)! (CC)

The second textual feature is the way that Matthew portrays Jesus *using* such unparalleled authority. Both before the Sermon and after it, Jesus speaks and acts with authority. His authority, however, is of a particular kind. It is an authority for the needy, an authority that expresses itself in healings and exorcisms (4:23–24; 8:1–16; 8:28–34), in saving those in danger (8:23–27), and in forgiving sins (9:1–8). Even through the brief narrative leading up to the Sermon (4:18–5:2), Matthew portrays a gracious Jesus, reaching out to those in need and manifesting the gracious rule of God as he drives back the power of Satan and calls people to be his disciples. (CC)

This is the Jesus who opens his mouth and begins to speak to his disciples and to all who will have ears to hear. He has brought the reign of heaven into history. He now reveals both the blessings of that reign as well as the calling given to those who in faith receive those royal end-time deeds of salvation in him. (CC)

The tension between the “already now” and the “not yet” of the reign of God in Jesus is vital and central to the message of the Beatitudes. This “already/not yet” tension is reflected most obviously in the verbs in the  $\delta\tau\iota$  clauses, the tenses of which should be taken seriously. The  $\delta\tau\iota$  clause verb  $\epsilon\sigma\tau\iota\nu$  in Beatitudes 1 and 8 (“... *is* theirs,” 5:3b; 5:10b) is present indicative. The verbs in the  $\delta\tau\iota$  clauses in Beatitudes 2–7 (5:4–9) are future indicatives. The reign of heaven in Jesus *already now* belongs to the poor in spirit (5:3b), even to those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake (5:10b). Yet the promise of final comfort (5:4b), final inheritance (5:5b), final satiation with God’s saving righteousness (5:6b), final mercy (5:7b), the perfect vision of God (5:8b), and the blessed reception of full identity as the sons of God (5:9b) will come *only on the Last Day*. In the meantime, the disciples of Jesus must expect that their present existence, ever blessed because of Jesus’ presence with them (18:20; 28:20), will nonetheless be characterized by “mourning,” “hungering,” and “thirsting” (5:4a, 6a). The equivalent statement in St. Paul’s terms would be “We were saved in hope. ... But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait eagerly for it through endurance” (Rom 8:24–25). The tension between present blessing and joy on the one hand and present mourning until the final time of comfort on the other is central to life as Jesus’ disciples. So certain and strong, however, is the promised final comfort that it impinges on and alters the present flawed existence. Jesus’ disciples live now in light of what is to come. (CC)

To summarize this lengthy treatment of the Beatitudes, they do not make ethical demands, nor do they primarily exhort. They do not refer directly to Jesus himself. Rather, the subject of the main clause in every verse describes those whom Jesus has called to be his disciples. The first group of four blessings addresses Jesus’ disciples in terms of their own innate emptiness (5:3–6). Left to themselves, apart from Christ, disciples (and all people) are “poor in spirit” and “lowly,” given only to “mourning” and to “hungering.” If one were to ask, “Where is Jesus?” with regard to the first four blessings, the answer would be, “In the  $\delta\tau\iota$  (‘because ...’) clauses!” Those who have no resources to offer God are nevertheless eschatologically blessed, “*because*” Jesus has come to reign over such persons in grace and mercy, “*because*” the promised end-time blessings will come to those who have nothing besides God-given faith in Jesus. He is the Servant of Yahweh, proclaiming Good News to the poor! (CC)

The second group of Beatitudes (5:7–12) still describes the disciples of Jesus: the merciful, the pure in heart, and so forth. These blessings testify that Jesus' call to discipleship begins to transform those who are called (5:7–12). When Jesus joins men, women, and children to himself, that union begins to manifest the life of Christ himself in the lives of his disciples. That was true for Jesus' original disciples there on the mountain in Galilee. It is also true for the disciples of Jesus today, who are baptized into union with Christ and who comprise his church, which hears and receives the Beatitudes in faith. Indeed, the Beatitudes contain within themselves the kerygmatic power to *make* a hearer or reader into a disciple of Jesus and a member of his church. To hear and believe that one is poor in spirit, spiritually bankrupt, and then to hear Jesus pronounce blessing and the promise of the reign of heaven can make one into a believer in Jesus. Hearing and believing the Beatitudes can also sustain that faith. When life is hard and the power of evil is too great, Jesus' words comfort us: "The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is theirs!" (5:3). (CC)

Nouns and not verbs. Where there are verbs (reward part) they are done by God.

**5:3-11** Jesus began His sermon by nine times declaring His disciples blessed because of what God had in store for them. Jesus was not making ethical demands of His followers but was describing blessings they would fully enjoy in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1) (TLSB)

**5:3** *Blessed*. The word means more than "happy," because happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances. "Blessed" here refers to the ultimate well-being and distinctive spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. (CSB)

μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι—In each of the nine Beatitudes, the Greek puts the plural adjective μακάριοι, "blessed," in emphatic first position, and therefore I have italicized it in the translation. Wallace notes this common phenomenon of fronting for emphasis. In each Beatitude μακάριοι is predicate to the subject (here οἱ πτωχοί). The adjective μακάριος in Matthew has strong connotations of present (11:6; 13:16; 16:17) and future (24:46) *salvation*. It does not mean "happy," but something much stronger, tantamount to "saved." (CC)

makareeos – To be extend great fortune and be well off. It means to have a joy (deep/true happiness) that is with us even during difficult times. One way of looking at it is that "happiness" comes from the word "happenings." Not everything that happens to us makes us happy. Joy is a "J" word as is Jesus. In Jesus we can have joy even in the midst of tears of losing a loved one or other painful events. This involves the blessings of faith that come through the Word.

makarioi – Possessing great spiritual treasures, God's favor and His aid in all aspects of life. This goes well beyond happy because happiness is linked to happenings and some of the things that happen in our lives do not make up happy. Blessed could better be described as joy because that can be linked to Jesus. We can be crying and yet have the joy of Jesus comfort in our hearts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

The Beatitudes are markedly Christological, but not in an isolated sense. They are descriptions both of Jesus and of those who have been joined by Jesus' Father to his kingdom. For Matthew Christology and ecclesiology are interrelated. They are the Christological prism through which the followers of Jesus find their standing before God. (The Sermon on the Mount – David P. Scaer – CPH – pp. 79, 81)

The Beatitudes (5:3–12) are the first unit of the Sermon on the Mount and, as I have indicated in the commentary above on the Sermon’s structure, these blessings form a sort of “doorway” through which Matthew’s readers/hearers must pass if they are to grasp aright the Lord’s great teaching in the Sermon. The Beatitudes’ structure consists of two groups of four blessings in the third person plural (“the people/they,” 5:3–6 and 5:7–10) followed by a final, much longer blessing in the second person plural (“you,” 5:11–12). That final, ninth statement of blessing (5:11–12) acts both as the definite conclusion to the Beatitudes as well as a transition into the second person address that characterizes Jesus’ teaching in the body of the Sermon. There are obviously nine Beatitudes, each beginning with the plural adjective “blessed” (μακάριοι). Also obviously, however, the first eight Beatitudes comprise a unit that is bracketed by 5:3 and 5:10, the only sentences in which the verb in the ὅτι clause (“because . . .”) is not a future indicative, but a present indicative (“because the reign of heaven *is* theirs,” 5:3b, 10b). Indeed, the entire ὅτι clause in 5:3 and 5:10 is identical. This *inclusio* marks off 5:3–10. At the same time, the common “blessed” and shared subject matter between 5:10 and 5:11–12 insure that the last long statement of blessing is related to the first eight blessings. (CC)

In addition, the eight Beatitudes in 5:3–10 can be understood as consisting of four pairs in a patterned arrangement. I will show below that 5:3 names those who occupy a certain *status* which, when hearers acknowledge it as their own status, produces the *attitude* described in 5:4. That is to say, to be “poor in spirit” is an objective condition that characterizes all humans in and of themselves, whether they know it or not. When a person begins to acknowledge that he or she is “poor in spirit,” that acknowledgment produces the “mourning” of which 5:4 speaks. A similar relationship holds for the second pair of blessings. Mt 5:5 describes a status that then produces the attitude articulated in 5:6: those who begin to see that they are objectively “lowly” (5:5) are then moved to be “hungering and thirsting for righteousness” (5:6). Thus, the first two pairs of blessings each exhibit a relationship of “condition . . . result.” (CC)

The third (5:7–8) and fourth (5:9–10) pairs of Beatitudes exhibit something very close to the same paired relationships, but in reverse order. The reversed description “result . . . condition” works well, I would judge, with regard to “merciful” (5:7) and “pure in heart” (5:8), especially when the latter descriptive phrase is understood in light of LXXs 24:3–6). Those who in their lives show themselves to be “merciful” are able to do that because they are “pure in heart.” The fourth pair of blessings is also related, but here the connection is a little different. Those who have become “peacemakers” (5:9) can expect to find themselves among those who are “persecuted because of righteousness” (5:10). For the peace that Jesus’ disciples will offer to the world will sometimes be rejected, and that very offer of peace will cause them to be hated and persecuted by others. (CC)

Turning to the interpretation of 5:3–12, then, let me emphasize again one specific point. Jesus teaches the entire Sermon with authority (see 7:29). Most especially, then, these nine eschatological Gospel blessings proclaim with authority the saving and transforming truths that the reign of God in Jesus offers to all who are Jesus’ disciples. When a man or woman is given to grasp the meaning of Jesus’ gracious preaching in the Beatitudes, that person will be able to encounter the remaining teaching of the Sermon in a certain way. You enter by the doorway. (CC)

*poor in spirit.* In contrast to the spiritually proud and self-sufficient. (CSB)

The spiritually poor who acknowledge their moral bankruptcy. Cf Lk 4:18. (TLSB)

In 5:3, Jesus pronounces both a present blessing to “the poor in spirit” and a present grounding reason for that state of blessing. Since the emphatically positioned μακάριος, “blessed,” in Matthew’s Gospel is virtually the equivalent of “saved” or “redeemed,” it is of utmost importance to specify the meaning of “the poor in spirit.” What persons does Jesus pronounce to be blessed—saved because the reign of heaven, with its attendant gifts, already now belongs to them? (CC)

As indicated above in the textual note on 5:3, the crucial context for interpreting Jesus’ first Beatitude consists of 11:2–6 and Is 61:1. We will first consider three important connections between Mt 5:3 and 11:5. First, the only theological use of the term “poor” in Matthew occurs in 5:3 and 11:5. Second, the promise of eschatological blessing is central to each context. In chapter 11, Jesus responds to the Baptizer’s query whether Jesus is the One who is to come by summarizing the deeds of the Christ in phrases drawn from Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61, and concludes with the promise, “Blessed [μακάριος] is the one who is not caused to stumble because of me” (11:6). Third and finally, the activity described in 11:5, “And the poor are having Good News preached to them,” portrays “the poor” as the objects of proclamation; they are being addressed. This is precisely what is happening in 5:3, albeit in third person rather than second person address. It is hard to escape the conclusion—indeed, one should not try!—that “the poor in spirit” in 5:3 are the same as “the poor” in 11:5 to whom Good News is being proclaimed. Here in 5:3, then, Jesus is proclaiming Good News to “the poor in spirit.” (CC)

With an eye still fixed on 11:2–5, then, we may ask what it means to be “poor in spirit” (5:3). If the dative of respect is virtually the equivalent of an adverb, then the phrase means “spiritually poor.” This in itself, however, does not yet lend enough precision. I want to speak carefully and precisely here and to take my lead from the other phrases found in 11:2–5. Jesus’ reply to the Baptizer identifies various groups who have been receiving his ministry: blind people, lame people, lepers, deaf people, dead people, and “the poor.” Setting the last crucial phrase aside for the moment, every one of the other groups refers to people in an objective condition of need. There is nothing in the description about the *attitude* or *awareness* of these people. Jesus has not been ministering to people who are “sorrowing that they are blind” or “aware that they are lepers,” although doubtless such sorrow and awareness existed. Rather, his ministry has gone out to those in conditions of want, of lack, of inability, of objective need. (CC)

This same objective character naturally applies to “the poor” who receive the Good News in 11:5 and to “the poor in spirit” here in 5:3. To be “poor in spirit,” in other words, refers to an objective status or condition. To be “spiritually poor,” then, is equivalent to being “spiritually destitute, without resource, without what one needs in the spiritual realm.” Those who are “poor in spirit” must have their spiritual needs provided by Another. They are, in a phrase, like sheep who are lost and distressed (9:36; 10:6) or like sinners who need to be called and forgiven (9:9–13). Thus Jesus’ opening blessing embraces all fallen human beings, for by nature all people are poor in spirit, and all need to hear Good News. (CC)

The phrase τῷ πνεύματι, “in spirit,” is a dative of respect, and virtually equivalent to an adverb: “spiritually poor.” The commentary will put forth the view that these are the same people as in 11:5: “And the poor [πτωχοί] are having Good News preached [to them].” This link between 5:3; 11:2–6; and Is 61:1 (to which Mt 11:5 refers) is the key that forestalls any interpretation that would make being “poor in spirit” either a virtue or an attitude of any kind whatsoever. It is a status, a condition. (CC)

The term “poor” as used by Matthew does not denote economic poverty, although both in Jesus’ day and in our own, the spiritually poor often are also economically poor. In a fallen world, wealth brings intrinsic spiritual danger (Mt 19:23–26; see also 1 Tim 6:9–10, 17–19), and the

powerful can readily oppress those who eschew violence and instead trust in God for their ultimate hope. In such a world the “poor in spirit” may very well be physically impoverished as well. Even as we reject the excesses of what is sometimes loosely described as “liberation theology,” we must beware the dangers of living in a wealthy, consumeristic, greedy society, such as North America in the twenty-first century. It is no blessing to be economically poor, and it is not automatically a bane to have an abundance of material things. However, God can use physical want to turn hearts to himself. Moreover, Jesus and his apostles speak sharply about the folly of those who glory in their wealth and whose hearts are cold toward their needy neighbors, especially fellow believers. (CC)

Franzmann says, “It is not saying too much if one describes the poor in spirit as the man who is acutely conscious of his own nothingness, of the poverty and lack of his self, of his need for another.” In his own mind and heart he is beggarly and quite humble (Is.66:2). An example would be the tax collector who “would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner.’” Yet he, Jesus says, went home justified (Lk 18:13-14). The poor are those who have repented and attached themselves to Jesus. Franzmann sees a connection between the poor in spirit and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, claiming that they are but two aspects of one basic attitude toward God, the Christian attitude. (cf. Ps. 25; 40:17; 69:32-33). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

It is stronger than poor, it is cringingly, beggarly poor... It is the attitude that grows out of the profound realization of utter helplessness and beggary as far as any ability or possession of self is concerned. These wretched beggars bring absolutely nothing to God but their complete emptiness and need and stoop in the dust for pure grace and mercy only. This is the condition and attitude of true repentance preached by the Baptist and by Jesus as basis for all who would come to God and to His kingdom. (Lenski)

Rock of Ages – LSB 761

As Christians we confess our total spiritual poverty and look to Jesus for rescue.

ptochoi – The corporate nature Jesus shares with his people also solves the problem as to how he could describe himself as “poor in spirit,” which we have defined as “those who stand before God as destitute beggars.” He is one with his people; he bears their sins (Matthew 8:17). Not only is he poor and has no possessions, but as slave he puts himself in debt to all men. (Scaer p. 81)

Isaiah 57:15 “For this is what the high and lofty One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* The kingdom is not something earned. It is more a gift than a recompense. (CSB)

A possession that disciples enjoy even now by faith. This blessing is repeated in v 10. Augustine: “The one reward, which is the kingdom of heaven, is variously named [in the Beatitudes]” (NPNF 1 6:7). (TLSB)

ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν—In the causal ὅτι clause, the genitive pronoun αὐτῶν is in emphatic first position, and so “theirs” is italicized in the translation. Here and in 5:10 the

genitive expresses possession. “The reign of heaven is theirs” is equivalent to saying, “The reign of heaven (and its attendant blessings) *belongs* to the poor in spirit.” (CC)

This is a future surety and a present reality through grace.

Jesus declares that such people are eschatologically blessed, already now. Why? Because the reign of heaven and the blessing that it is already bringing into history belong to people like that, to people who have no spiritual resources of their own: “The reign of heaven is *theirs*” (5:3). There is no reason to blur the distinctions between the tenses of the indicative mood verb in the ὅτι clause (“because ...”) of each Beatitude (see the second textual note on 5:3). The careful artistry and structure of 5:3–12 suggest that there is some precision to this teaching of Jesus. The promise of 5:3, then, is that already now the blessings of the reign of heaven in Jesus belong to those who, in themselves, do not have spiritual ability or strength. These blessings for the disciples during Jesus’ ministry include forgiveness (9:1–8), healing (e.g., 4:23–24; 8:13, 16; 15:28), and the divinely given knowledge of who Jesus is and what his reign is like (13:10–17). (CC)

We disciples of Jesus who live in the time after his resurrection and before his coming in glory possess the blessings of the reign of heaven as well: forgiveness, Baptism into Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit for faith and obedience, the nourishment of the Eucharist, the fellowship of the redeemed. All such present blessings of the reign of God in Jesus belong to those who have nothing in themselves. (CC)

This is nothing other than the Gospel of the reign of heaven (4:23), complete Good News, offered with no conditions, no specifications, no limitations. The Good News of this first Beatitude is completely consonant with the character of Jesus’ ministry of preaching and teaching and healing (4:23–24). Since his disciples are those who have already begun to be shaped by his message, “Repent! For the reign of heaven stands near!” (4:17; cf. 3:2), they will begin to grasp the Good News of 5:3. In their repentance, worked by Jesus’ preaching and teaching, they have begun to know that they are, in fact, “poor in spirit” (5:3). The first Beatitude from Jesus’ mouth, then, is a word of complete and utter promise and grace. The reign of heaven belongs to those who have no spiritual resources of their own, to the lost, to the sinners. Because of this, Jesus pronounces them “blessed”! (CC)

The reason why the poor in spirit are blessed is that they are now, in this life, members and subjects of God’s kingdom (Luke 6:20), ruled by His Spirit dwelling in their hearts. Their life will extend into heaven in God’s presence – His gift. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

For Matthew “the kingdom of the heavens” refers to the salvation which God is accomplishing in Jesus, that is, in his death for sinners and its proclamation. (Scaer p. 81)

Revelation 21:27 “Name in the Book”

**5:4** *those who mourn* – Over sin; similar to the spiritually poor. (TLSB)

οἱ πενθοῦντες—The present stem participle here (and in 5:6) is significant: “the people who *are* mourning ...” (CC)

he next declaration of blessing addresses those who have come to a certain awareness; they are “the people who are mourning” (5:4). The declaration of present blessing is the same as in 5:3a (“The ... *are* blessed”), but the reason for that blessing is now in the future tense: “They *will be* comforted.” There is an important interplay between the present stem participle οἱ πενθοῦντες, “the people who are mourning,” and the future tense “they *will be* comforted.” The mourning of which Jesus speaks is something that will continue to characterize the lives of his disciples, to a greater or lesser extent, until the day of final comfort dawns at the consummation of the age. There is a realism here, an acknowledgment that even though there is present blessing in the reign of God through Jesus, there is also sin and evil, which means the full comfort is “not yet.” This is, in fact, what causes the mourning: present sin and evil, both in the lives of the mourners themselves, who acknowledge that they are in themselves “poor in spirit” (5:3), and in the church and the world around them. (CC)

Mt 5:4 is not an exhortation to mourn, nor to mourn more fully, or anything like that. It would only become, in a perverse manner, a word of Law if anyone were foolish enough to think that he could be Jesus’ disciple and encounter no cause for mourning. The second Beatitude follows as a result from the first. All who recognize themselves to be poor in spirit and yet also blessed in Christ will find themselves mourning over evil and sin. So the function of 5:3 is repeated in 5:4. It is a Gospel word of promise and comfort. (CC)

The use of the present tense here (penhountes) denotes continuous grieving and lamentation over one’s repeated sinning. Our entire life must be continuous contrition and repentance, says Luther in the first of his 95 Theses. It is a constant cry of distress to God, which may well also include the cry caused by persecution from the enemies of Christ, mentioned in the eighth beatitude, and mourning over the damaging effects of sin, including illness and death. Already during Christ’s earthly ministry He comforted some mourners by restoring dead loved ones to life (Mt. 9:18-26; John 11). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Romans 7:15, 18-19, 24-25 <sup>15</sup>I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>18</sup>I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. <sup>24</sup>What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup>Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Our Lord’s primary thought must have been of mourning over not just one’s sins but over the realized poverty in spirit. (PC)

The sorrow for our sins in true contrition should not be excluded from this mourning... But, of course, we must include all other grief and sorrow due to the power of sin in the world as this inflicts blows, losses, and pain upon the godly. It includes every wrong done us, as well as every painful consequence of our won wrongdoing... Behind this sorrow of the godly lies the recognition of the merciless power of sin and our helplessness to ward it off and escape. Hence the mourning is a constant cry to God in their distress. (Lenski)

This is not walking around with a distorted face and accompanying behavior like the Pharisees sometimes did. John and Pharisees Mt 3:7-8.

Romans 5:1-5: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance,

character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: <sup>13</sup> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words.”

*Comforted* – The comfort the Messiah brings will be fully realized in heaven. (TLSB)

ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται—In Beatitudes 2–7 (Mt 5:4–9) the subject in each ὅτι clause is the unnecessary, and so therefore empathic, third person personal pronoun αὐτοί. “They themselves” would perhaps be a bit strong, and so in the translation I have italicized “they.” The pattern of emphasizing the human *recipients* of eschatological blessing is the chief reason why several of the verbs in the ὅτι clauses are in the passive voice. The agent of the passives—the one who will *bestow* the blessings—is, of course, God. Thus, for example, “*they* will be comforted” (5:4b) means “God will comfort *them*.” (CC)

This use of the passive voice when God is the implied agent of the action is called “the divine passive.” Wallace notes with common sense that Matthew and other NT writers do not shy away from using “God” as the subject of active voice verbs (e.g., 3:9; 6:30; 15:4; 19:6), and so he adroitly cautions against attributing this construction to a reluctance on the part of the author to use the divine name. (CC)

The future tense, used in the Second through the Seventh Beatitudes, points to an activity which God is about to do. The church’s affliction shall be replaced by ecstatic joy in the sense of Psalm 126 where those who weep “shall come home with shouts of joy” (Psalm 126:6). (Scaer p. 83)

Isaiah 61:2-3 “to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”

The future tense of “be comforted” is future to the mourning (Lenski). Divine comfort and consolation in the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ will follow on the heels of repentant mourning. And in heaven every tear shall be wiped away (Rev. 21:4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Matthew 11:28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Romans 5:3-5, <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Romans 8:37, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

**5:5 meek.** This beatitude is taken from Ps 37:11 and refers not so much to an attitude toward man as to a disposition before God, namely, humility. (CSB)

Lowly, humble. (TLSB)

μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς—I have translated the substantized adjective *πραεῖς* as “the lowly.” I intend by this a reference to a status or condition, as is the case with “poor” in 5:3, and not to an attitude or activity. The term *πραῦς* can bear the meaning of “gentle” or “humble” in a positive, voluntary, active sense, and this is the meaning when it is applied to Jesus in 11:29 and 21:5; see it also in 1 Pet 3:4, as well as LXX Num 12:3 (translating *רַבִּי*); Joel 4:11 (ET 3:11; MT 4:11); Zech 9:9 (translating *רַבִּי*); Dan 4:19 (MT 4:16; ET 4:19). Far more often in the LXX, however, the Greek term translates the Hebrew *רַבִּי* in the sense of “one who is objectively in need of deliverance.” That is the force of the term in LXX Ps 36:11 (MT/ET 37:11), which is an extremely close parallel to Jesus’ words here: οἱ δὲ πραεῖς κληρονομήσουσιν γῆν, “But the lowly will inherit the land.” See *πραῦς* also in LXX Pss 24:9 (MT/ET 25:9); 33:3 (MT 34:3; ET 34:2); 75:10 (MT 76:10; ET 76:9); Job 24:4 (cf. Job 36:15; Zeph 3:12; Sirach 10:14). At times, “the lowly” are contrasted with “the wicked” (LXX Pss 36:10–11 [MT/ET 37:10–11]; 146:6 [MT/ET 147:6]; cf. Is 26:5–6), and at least once, “the lowly” are equated with God’s people (LXX Ps 149:4). Thus, as many interpreters note, “the lowly” here in Mt 5:5 are essentially in the same needy condition as “the poor” (5:3), and the two expressions are closely parallel in meaning. (CC)

This is in a condition or status of not being able to help or save themselves. They may be oppressed by many different things or by many people. The oppressive power of Satan and their own sins are at the heart of their lowly status. (CC)

Here the Savior is referring to the kindly disposed – gentle, patient, and forgiving people which Arndt renders as the “kindhearted,” exemplified in the attitude of Jesus (1 Peter 2:23). Certainly they are not the gruff, the stern, the proud or violent – the grasping wicked ones (Psalm 37). Paradoxically, the latter are often the people who in this life enjoy greater prosperity (Mt. 6:25-34; Lk 18:29-30). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

These are those who trust in the Lord and wait patiently for him and place their hope in him. The meek are not loud and boisterous or insist on their rights but even abide mistreatment for the sake of Christ and his kingdom. Jesus demonstrated this by giving up his place in heaven, suffering and going to the cross for us.

Psalm 37:11 “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.”

*praeis* – This refers to internal condition of a person before God and known only to him. It manifests itself in behavior that could be described as “gentle, patient or kindhearted” exemplified in the attitude of Jesus.

1 Peter 2:23 “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

This beatitude comes from Psalm 37, especially verse 11. The meek are certainly not the gruff, the stern, the proud or violent – the grasping wicked ones described in this psalm. Interestingly the people who act like that are often people who in this life enjoy greater prosperity. (Mt. 6:25-34; Lk 18:29-30)

*Shall inherit the earth* – We will inherit the new heavens and new earth after our bodies are resurrected on the Last Day. (TLSB)

Jesus, the Son of God, promises to all such oppressed and spiritually powerless disciples the future eschatological inheritance of a new creation: “They will inherit the earth.” Please observe that the hope of those who are in need of deliverance is not some disembodied existence of the soul. The hope is both creational and eschatological. There will be a regeneration of all things (Mt 19:28) and a final Judgment Day (25:31–32). Those who have suffered oppression at the hands of wicked forces and wicked men will receive the blessings of God’s great reversal on that day. The light of that future horizon is already now beginning to shine; the reign of heaven stands near (4:17)! With that light on the horizon, the lowly are already saved, already blessed. (CC)

In the judgment scene the word “inherit” refers to what the Son of Man gives his followers on the Day of Judgment (25:34). Though Matthew does not use the word “grace,” he expresses the thought of unmerited and unearned reward with the word “inherit.” The followers of Jesus inherit a land which they did not earn. In the final judgment scene none makes a claim to reward for what they have done. (Scaer p. 85)

**5:6** *hunger and thirst for righteousness* – Fervent desire for God’s righteousness, or salvation (Is 51:5–8; cf 3:15). (TLSB)

μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην—The meaning of “righteousness” here is determined by the clause in which it occurs. Presumably, δικαιοσύνη refers to something that the named subjects desire but do not possess. They also cannot obtain it for themselves; otherwise, it is difficult to imagine why they would continue “hungering” and “thirsting” for it, as implied by the present tense participles πεινῶντες and διψῶντες. In view of the eschatological context, I take “righteousness” here in the same sense as in 3:15, namely, God’s saving end-time deeds. (CC)

This verse is the nucleus of this sermon study. The tense of two participles, peinentes and diphontes, denotes continued action of those who strongly desire and long to do God’s will far more completely than they have been doing. Even in the very act of doing God’s will, they know that they have not attained what they desire. Paul’s example of not having attained perfection, but straining toward and pressing on toward the goal, is apropos (Phil. 3:12-14). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Isaiah 55:1, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

Jeremiah 23:6 “In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”

Matthew 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Man who went to Buddhist monk for information but didn’t stop talking about how much he knew. Cup to overflowing – interview is over you are too full of yourself.

peinontez and dipsontez – Both are present tense participles that denote continued action. This refers not to a physical hungering, but to an internal longing of the soul in its relationship to God. The background is Israel’s sojourning in the wilderness where for both food and water they were completely dependent upon God. They long for something which only God can satisfy. (Scaer p. 85)

The craving for... Intense longing, such as can only be compared to that of a starving man for food. (PC)

Of the seven appearances of the word “righteousness” in the gospel, five are found in the Sermon. In none of these places can the meaning of righteousness be the fulfillment of God’s legal demands in the sense of the commandments. (Scaer p. 85)

Righteousness is to be understood in this context as referring to the sanctified life of right living according to God’s will, which results from justification by grace through faith in Christ. It must be better than the “righteousness” of the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 5:20), which was no righteousness in God’s sight and insufficient before Him (Arndt). No righteousness of our own, even it exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, will suffice for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Only the imputed righteousness of Christ through faith achieves that. In Christ we “become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

*Shall be satisfied* – This is done by the work of Christ.

ESV – satisfied – “We have the clear assurance that God does not cast aside sinners, that is, those who recognize their sin and desire to come to their senses, who thirst after righteousness.” (Luther) (TLSB)

The Greek passive voice points to satisfaction given us by someone else, which will be abundant satisfaction, as this strong verb connotes. In the miraculous feedings of the 5000 and 4000, this same verb is used (Mt. 14:20; 15:37), and it is significant that in both cases there were leftovers – more than the people could eat. God will satisfy the hunger and quench the thirst for righteousness, for God-pleasing living, and provide true happiness. But due to our present weakness a drop of bitterness will always remain in our cup on this earth. Only in the hereafter will we be perfectly satisfied and sanctified through the perfect, imputed righteousness of our Savior (Cf. Luke 6:25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Matthew 3:15 “Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.”

They will be satisfied or filled, points to something which God is going to accomplish eschatologically, though he has already begun to do it. (Scaer p. 85)

Isaiah 55:1 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

**5:7 the merciful** – A disciple who truly appreciates God’s blessings will be a merciful person and will receive mercy (cf 18:33). (TLSB)

There is a noticeable shift in the Beatitudes in 5:7. Jesus' words are still Good News. Jesus still pronounces present blessing. Moreover, the future eschatological gifts of God are still the reason for present blessedness, as affirmed explicitly in 5:10, where Jesus repeats the promise of 5:3, "because the reign of heaven *is* theirs," and also in 5:12, where Jesus promises, "Your reward is great in heaven." I argued above that in 5:3–6, the disciples of Jesus were described in terms of their inability, rather than their accomplishments, and clearly the last two Beatitudes (5:10–12) promise blessing for disciples who passively suffer. (CC)

In 5:7, however, Jesus says, "The merciful are blessed, because they will be shown mercy." Is this not in effect an exhortation: "Be merciful, so that you may be shown mercy"? I would argue that that is not the force of 5:7. Rather, the adjective "merciful" (as with the other adjectival subjects in the first four Beatitudes) *describes* Jesus' disciples—all of them. It bespeaks the transforming power of discipleship and of Jesus' call to faith. Jesus himself is mercy incarnate, perfect mercy. One simply cannot become his disciple without also beginning to exhibit mercy in a new way. (CC)

This is not merely true in a broad, scriptural or dogmatic way. Matthew itself displays the exegetical evidence to support this contention. It is true that the language of "mercy" is not prominent in Matthew's Gospel. The adjective ἐλεήμων, "merciful," actually occurs in the NT only in Mt 5:7 and Heb 2:17. The cognate noun "almsgiving" (ἐλεημοσύνη) occurs in Mt 6:2, 3, 4, where Jesus does assume that his disciples will show such mercy to those in need. Jesus himself responds to the plea of people for him to "show mercy" (ἐλέεω, 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30–31) by healing or exorcizing, but the disciples do not figure in those texts. To the contrary, the disciples are unable to exorcise the demoniac after Jesus' transfiguration (see the commentary on 17:14–21), and they ask Jesus to give the Canaanite woman what she wants so they can send her away (see 15:21–28). (CC)

The language of showing mercy does figure prominently in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant (18:23–35), and this parable's message provides the chief support for the view that "merciful" in 5:7 can describe disciples of Jesus *qua* disciples. In brief, the master in that parable shows mercy (18:33) to the servant who owed an astronomical debt. That act of mercy, specifically in the action of the master's forgiveness (18:27), has within itself the power to turn his servant into someone who also shows mercy and forgives the debt owed to him by a fellow servant. In the parable, however, the first servant refuses to show mercy. The result? He is no servant at all, but is condemned and cast into the parabolic equivalent of hell. (CC)

The order of events is all-important. First, the master shows mercy. If that mercy has its desired effect, it both forgives the debt and transforms the debtor. If the mercy does not have its desired effect, then the debtor is not transformed *and the debt remains*. The fifth Beatitude is to be heard in a similar way. First comes the proclamation of present and future blessing to those who have nothing but need, nothing but inability, nothing but hunger and thirst (5:3–6). Then comes the promise to those who are merciful (5:7). Jesus, who is perfect mercy, *empowers* his disciples, who are united to him, to be merciful. They are not perfectly merciful, of course; just read Matthew's narrative, read the NT, read church history, and observe the life of every believer! At the same time, however, mercy does emerge after mercy has entered in. Mt 5:7 describes all who are Jesus' disciples; it reminds them of their identity and promises final blessing and merciful forgiveness at the judgment. It is still a Gospel statement, not an exhortation or command. The force is this: "Those who are mine, and who therefore have begun to be merciful, are eschatologically blessed, for on the Last Day they will receive my mercy in all its fullness." (CC)

To a worldly-minded person, giving to the poor, visiting and comforting the sick, showing hospitality and aiding people in need and distress is merely a waste of time and money. But showing others the mercy we have experienced from God (Mt. 18:21-35), we will be treated with mercy in this life and in the life to come – not that it is the basis for obtaining life eternal, but because it presupposes justifying faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

eleamones – While in the OT mercy describes Israel’s God who, without limitation, forgives his erring people and always restores them to their former fortunes and status as his own people, in the NT mercy finds its purist expression in Jesus. Mercy describes the community of Jesus as a forgiving one. (Scaer p. 87)

**5:8 heart.** The center of one’s being, including mind, will and emotions. (CSB)

These are those who do not worship false gods. Augustine: “A pure heart... is a single heart; and just as this light cannot be seen, except with pure eyes; so neither is God seen, unless that is pure by which He can be seen” (NPNF1 6:5). (TLSB)

μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῆ καρδίᾳ—As with τῷ πνεύματι in 5:3, τῆ καρδίᾳ is a dative of respect. The precise phrase καθαρός τῆ καρδίᾳ, “pure in heart,” is found elsewhere in the Scriptures only in LXX Ps 23:4. See the commentary for the importance of attending to this psalm as the context for the meaning and exegesis of Mt 5:8. The adjectival phrase καθαρὰ καρδίᾳ, a “pure heart,” occurs in LXX Gen 20:5–6; Ps 50:12 (MT 51:12; ET 51:10); Job 11:13; 33:3; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22; and some manuscripts of 1 Pet 1:22. (CC)

Next comes “The pure in heart are blessed, because they will see God” (5:8). The chief task here is to determine what Jesus means by “the pure in heart” (οἱ καθαροὶ τῆ καρδίᾳ). The precise phrase occurs in the NT only here, and in the LXX it occurs only in Ps 23:4 (where it is singular, not plural; MT/ET 24:4), to which I will turn below. The Greek phrase καθαρὰ καρδίᾳ, “a pure heart,” occurs several times in Scripture and with a variety of meanings. In LXX Gen 20:5–6, the phrase applies to Abimelech, who took Sarah without knowing that she was Abraham’s wife, so there “with a pure heart” means “innocently, with no obvious evil intent.” In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul twice speaks of believers having a “pure heart,” which produces love for others (1 Tim 1:5) and a sincere dependence upon the true God (2 Tim 2:22). In Ps 51:12 (ET 51:10; LXX 50:12), David prays that God would create in him a “pure heart” after he has confessed his great sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah; here the phrase means “a heart that has been purified” by God’s forgiveness. The result of this gift from God will be the proclamation of God’s ways to transgressors and sinners (Ps 51:15 [ET 51:13; LXX 50:15]). In summary, the phrase “in/with a pure heart” can refer to an innocent motive (Gen 20:5–6), to one’s standing before God as forgiven sinner Ps 51:12 (ET 51:10; LXX 50:12), or more holistically to one who is in a right standing with God and therefore engaged in love for God and others (1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 2:22). (CC)

Commentators variously describe the force of “pure in heart” in the sixth Beatitude (Mt 5:8). Problematically, there seem to be few controls or guiding data that determine how the phrase is understood. What is perplexing, however, is the way that scholars routinely refer to LXX Ps 23:4 (MT/ET 24:4) as background without investigating the meaning of “pure in heart” in that psalm’s context. Since most seem to agree that LXX Psalm 23 is a helpful backdrop, it is reasonable to allow the meaning of “pure in heart” there to guide the way we understand Mt 5:8. (CC)

LXX Psalm 23 (MT/ET Psalm 24) exhibits a strong liturgical setting and tone. The third verse asks, “Who will go up to the Lord’s mountain, and who will stand in his holy place?” referring to

worship at the temple on Mount Zion. Verse 4 provides the answer to the question. LXX Ps 23:4 (MT/ET 24:4) literally reads:

The one innocent in hands and the one pure in heart [καθαρός τῆ καρδία],  
who did not take his soul to a vain thing  
and did not swear on a deceitful thing to his neighbor.

The psalm continues in verses 5–6, according to the LXX:

This one will receive blessing [εὐλογία] from the Lord  
and mercy [ἐλεημοσύνην] from God, his Savior;  
this is the generation of those who are seeking him,  
of those who are seeking the face of the God of Jacob. (CC)

Presumably—and this is the crucial exegetical move—the two relative clauses in LXX Ps 23:4 (MT/ET 24:4) that come after the psalmist has identified the qualified worshiper actually define what it means to be “innocent in hands” and (especially) “pure in heart.” That is to say, someone who is “pure in heart” is defined by the two relative clauses as someone “who did not take his soul to a vain thing and did not swear on a deceitful thing to his neighbor.” To what do those two relative clauses refer? We can examine their meanings first in the Hebrew of the MT, and then reflect on the Greek of the LXX. (CC)

For the first clause, the MT of Ps 24:4 reads, “who did not lift up his soul to vanity” (אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ לְבַטָּלָה). The phrase “to lift up the soul” can mean “to long for” something (Deut 24:15; Jer 22:27). In this context, however, and in light of parallels in Pss 25:1; 86:4; 143:8, it means “look trustingly to, worship.” The prepositional phrase “to vanity” (לְבַטָּלָה) can be adverbial, meaning “in vain” and is so used in the Second Commandment (Ex 20:7). אֲשֶׁר can also refer explicitly to an “idol” as a “vain thing” (Ps 31:6; Jonah 2:8). In the liturgical context of the psalm, this clause refers to someone who has not looked “to an idol” or to another god for help, but who desires to go up to Zion in order to worship the God of Israel, the only true God. (CC)

The second clause in MT Ps 24:4, “and (who) did not swear by deceit” (וְלֹא־נִשְׁבַּע לְמַרְמָה), also likely refers to worship. This verb “to swear” (Niphal of נִשְׁבַּע) and the noun “deceit” (מַרְמָה) do not occur together elsewhere in the Hebrew text of Scripture. The prepositional phrase “to/by deceit” (לְמַרְמָה) may be merely adverbial here: “(who) did not swear deceitfully.” However, לְמַרְמָה is parallel to לְבַטָּלָה, and לְבַטָּלָה, “to a vain thing,” likely means “to an idol.” Therefore, לְמַרְמָה, “by a deceitful thing,” may be a second reference to an idol. Thus “(who) did not swear by a deceitful thing” means “(who) did not swear by an idol.” On the basis of the MT, then, the worshiper who is able to ascend to worship at Zion is precisely he who has not worshiped another god nor has engaged in syncretistic practices. Rather, he only worships and acknowledges the God of Israel and seeks blessing and mercy from him alone. (CC)

We can now consider the Greek equivalent. LXX Ps 23:4 (MT/ET 24:4) preserves the message of the Hebrew original: the person who is “pure in heart” is one “who did not take his soul to a vain thing” (ὁς οὐκ ἔλαβεν ἐπὶ ματαιῶ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ). The normal Greek rendering for the liturgical idiom “to lift up the soul” employs αἶρω (LXX Pss 24:1; 85:4; 142:8 [MT/ET 25:1; 86:4; 143:8]), whereas LXX Ps 23:4 uses λαμβάνω. At other times, however, the LXX translates Hebrew שָׁמַר אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ with λαμβάνω ψυχή (2 Sam 14:14; Hos 4:8), so the choice of λαμβάνω does not materially affect the meaning of LXX Ps 23:4. The substantized adjective “a vain thing” (μάταιος) often has close connections to idolatry in the LXX<sup>a</sup> and probably refers to idolatry here in LXX Ps 23:4. The second clause in LXX Ps 23:4 about a person who is “pure in heart” is that

he is one “(who) did not swear by a deceitful thing to his neighbor” (οὐκ ὄμοσεν ἐπὶ δόλῳ τῷ πλησίον αὐτοῦ). The action of “swearing by a deceitful thing” also refers to worship offered to an idol; the same Greek idiom (with ἐν instead of ἐπὶ) pertains to idolatry in Wisdom 14:30, and similar idioms are used in LXX Jer 5:2; 7:9. (CC)

Both MT Ps 24:4 and LXX Ps 23:4, then, teach that the person who is innocent in hands and “pure in heart”—who is able to ascend Mount Zion and worship Yahweh there—is precisely the person who has been taught that there is only one God to worship and only one Lord by whom a person is to swear. People who approach with *this* purity of heart may go up to Zion and expect to receive blessing and mercy from the Lord. That is why, after all, people go up to Zion in the first place: they go up in need, confessing their sins and acknowledging that their help is in Yahweh, Israel’s God, and in him alone (see Psalms 121; 123; 130). (CC)

If this is the meaning of “pure in heart” in Psalm 24 (LXX Psalm 23), should it be used as guide for understanding Mt 5:8? There are four reasons, indeed, to let the teaching of Psalm 24 thus guide our understanding of Jesus’ words. First, the two texts share the phrase common to them alone, “pure in heart.” Second, they both involve contexts of people going up on mountains. Third, “mercy” is close at hand in the context of both—as a gift received in both LXX Ps 23:5 (MT/ET 24:5) and in Mt 5:7, the Beatitude that precedes Mt 5:8. Finally, both Ps 24:6 and Mt 5:8 evoke the promise of seeing God. The psalm envisions God’s presence in the Jerusalem temple, to which the worshiper ascends. The Beatitude envisions the final, full benefit of face-to-face communion with God in the glory of the age’s consummation in the new Jerusalem, where God’s servants “shall see his face” (Rev 22:4). (CC)

If this theology of the psalm is allowed to guide the interpretation of Mt 5:8, the following emerges: Jesus speaks Good News to those who know what it means to seek the true and living God, and to go up on his mountain to worship. He blesses, in the present time and for the Last Day, those to whom God has thus revealed himself. (CC)

Moreover, we can even be more precise in the context of this Gospel in general and of the Beatitudes in particular, where “the Lord” (3:3) is speaking authoritative blessing from his seat on the mountain (5:1). The “pure in heart” (5:8) are those who believe that the God of Israel can be found in this Jesus, who is “Immanuel,” “God is with us” (1:23). They are “pure in heart” because Jesus has called them (cf. 4:18–22), because the realities (and mysteries!) of the reign of heaven in Jesus are being revealed to them. They are not the pure in heart because they understand everything. Nevertheless, they have begun to repent and believe (4:17); they have been *given* pure hearts (Ps 51:12 [ET 51:10; LXX 50:12]). (CC)

Moreover, we may posit an important connection between the fifth (Mt 5:7) and sixth (Mt 5:8) Beatitudes. Those who have received mercy (LXX Ps 23:5 [MT/ET 24:5]) through Jesus and thus have become themselves “the merciful” (5:7) are such because they have been given pure hearts to know the face of the God of Israel in Jesus Christ. As disciples they have come to Jesus, “seeking the face of the God of Jacob” (LXX Ps 23:6 [MT/ET 24:6]). Jesus promises that on the Last Day, “they will see God” (Mt 5:8). (CC)

Those who do not worship false gods. “A pure heart ... is a single heart; and just as this light cannot be seen, except with pure eyes so neither is God seen unless that is pure by which He can be seen.” [Augsburg] (TLSB)

The “pure in heart” are those who strive for all that is true, honest, just, lovely, of good report, Christ-like (Phil. 4:8), and with singleness of purpose strive to resist and desist from the love of

money, love of the world, the lust of the flesh and eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16). They strive to keep their hearts pure, as God is pure (1 John 3:2-3), though out of their hearts proceeds by nature all manner of evil (Mt. 15:19; Prov 20:9). Again, all such efforts in this life will fall short of perfection, but the believer in Christ makes a beginning. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

The heart is the center of a person's being. They have learned a singleness of devotion from Jesus, especially as he was tempted in the desert and determined to live only by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The attention here is not on the outward behavior in the sense of the Pharisees who perform their righteousness before men, but on the inward condition, which is known only to God (6:1). What is impossible for man by himself (such as purity of heart) becomes possible for him as he is in Jesus. (Scaer pp. 87-88)

*Shall see God* – They rely on him and his work of salvation and will see him on the last day.

The worshiper in Ps. 24 who sought the face of God experienced the coming of the King of glory (vv. 7-10). Such disciples took forward to seeing God. (TLSB)

Seeing God is reserved as an eschatological reward for the faith that God has given them.

Luther holds that this seeing is understanding God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is obtained from the Scriptures. Arndt (like others) stresses the future tense of the verb and refers "seeing God" to "the blessed eternity the Christian enters at the time of his death and which finds its consummation in the everlasting kingdom that Christ established on the Day of Judgment. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

**5:9 the peacemakers** – Jesus would send out His disciples to bring peace to those who were worthy (10:13). (TLSB)

In the seventh blessing (5:9), Jesus continues to address those who are his disciples: "The peacemakers are blessed, because they will be called sons of God" (5:9). The exegetical task here resembles that in 5:7, namely, to work with the small number of exegetical connections that this passage has to its Matthean context. Just as the language of "mercy" (5:7) is rare in Matthew, so is the language of "peacemaking" or even simply of "peace." The adjective here (εἰρηνοποιός) occurs nowhere else in the entire Bible. Idioms for "make/establish peace" and the term "peace," as well as the general concept of peace, occur in Scripture often, and in a variety of contexts. Perhaps the closest verbal parallel to 5:9 is James 3:18: "And the fruit of righteousness is being sown in peace for those who make peace." The context in James indicates that "making peace" there is occurring intramurally, that is, within the Christian assembly. (CC)

The language of "peace" is not absent from the rest of Matthew's Gospel. It occurs again in chapter 10 in some striking ways that match up remarkably well with 5:9 if, as I have argued for the first six Beatitudes, Jesus' blessings come in pairs. To state things in another way, what will emerge if we suppose that "the peacemakers are blessed" (5:9) and "the ones who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed" (5:10) are in some sense paired together in meaning? Read together, 5:9–10 provides a remarkable parallel to the only other use of "peace" language in the First Gospel: the "peace" language in the Missionary Discourse of chapter 10. (CC)

As Jesus is sending out the twelve apostles to their narrowly defined ministry to the lost sheep, which are the house of Israel, he instructs them to “greet” (ἀσπάζομαι) whichever house will receive them (10:12). If that house proves to be worthy, that is, if its occupants accept the apostolic greeting, Jesus says, “Let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you” (10:13). Jesus has already given to the apostles the words that offer peace: “The reign of heaven stands near” (10:7). Those whom Jesus sends out are to bring peace to all who will receive it. This peace comes through the proclamation of the Good News of the reign of heaven in Jesus. (CC)

As the Missionary Discourse goes on to make abundantly clear, however, many will reject the message of peace and even persecute the messengers (see 10:14-18). Yet Jesus’ disciples should not be surprised, for he teaches them explicitly, “Do not think that I came so as to bring peace upon the earth. I did not come so as to bring peace, rather, a sword. For I came to divide a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother” (10:34–35a). The peacemakers will at times become those who are persecuted from city to city (10:23). (CC)

I would propose that in the first place, the phrase “the peacemakers” in 5:9 refers to Jesus’ disciples as they bring the message of the reign of heaven in Jesus into the world. Not all of them will bring the Gospel in the same ways, for twelve of his disciples will be chosen to be unique apostles (10:1–4), while others will be missionaries, evangelists, or pastors, and still others will be disciples of Jesus in their ordinary vocations in life. Christ’s church exhibits many different members with different callings and offices. All, however, in their own way have the same calling to be salt and light for the world (see the commentary below on 5:13-16). The peacemaking should not be seen as limited *only* to apostolic or pastoral activity. Jesus’ disciples will be active as peacemakers in any number of ways. As the parallel in James 3:18 shows, even after disciples are made, there is ample opportunity for peace to come *again* into their midst. Further, in their worldly and godly callings, Jesus’ disciples will have opportunity to work for the restoration of wholeness in many ways. (CC)

Firstly and primarily, however, blessed are the peacemakers whom God uses to bring the message of the reign of heaven, so that others may have the peace that Jesus brings. At the fulfillment of all things, Jesus’ peacemaking disciples will be called the “sons of God” (Mt 5:9). (CC)

The eiranopoiōi are those who make peace by communicating the message of reconciliation between God and man (2 Cor 5:18-21). As people who are at peace with God are filled with His peace which passes all understanding, they strive to thwart divisions, quarrels, and hatreds, and to work for God-fearing peace between Christians, neighbors, communities, and nations. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Isaiah 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

The title of peacemaker is clearly a redemptive term applicable to God’s Messiah as the Reconciler. It means that the followers of Jesus become in him God’s instrument of reconciliation with the world. (Scaer pp. 88-89)

*Shall be called sons of God* – The Son of God is named the Prince of Peace (Is 9:6). Those who trust in Him are blessed by being God’s sons and daughters (Gal 3:26–28). (TLSB)

Led by the Spirit of God they are sons of God (Rom 8:14), members of his family and kingdom. God not only designates them “sons,” but actually makes them so. The bearer of the name actually is what the name says about him. The passive be named thus approaches closely the mean to be. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

**5:10-12** Mt 5:9 and 5:10, the seventh and eighth Beatitudes, do go together, and the peace of the Good News in Jesus will not be welcome to many (again, see the rejection of the “peace” and the persecution in 10:12–18, 34–42). Therefore, Jesus begins the eighth Beatitude with these words: “The ones who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed” (5:10). “Righteousness” here in 5:10 could refer to the righteous behavior of those who follow Jesus in the way of discipleship. However, owing to the parallel between “because of righteousness” (ἐνεκεν δικαιοσύνης) in 5:10 and Jesus’ words in 5:11, “You are blessed whenever people insult you ... *because of me*” (ἐνεκεν ἐμοῦ), it is much more likely that “righteousness” in 5:10 has the same meaning as in 3:15 and 5:6, namely, God’s righteous saving deeds in Jesus. (CC)

In the eighth (5:10) and ninth (5:11–12) Beatitudes, then, Jesus completes his promise of blessing to his disciples. He describes them as those who are persecuted, insulted, the objects of slander. The dependent clause “whenever people insult you” in 5:11 makes it clear that, unlike the first seven Beatitudes (5:3–9), the final two Beatitudes (5:10–12) will not always apply to every disciple, nor will all experience such reproach in the same way. Jesus’ disciples are at all times, in themselves, “poor in spirit,” “mourning,” “lowly,” and “hungering” for God’s victory (5:3–6). By the power of their union with Jesus, his disciples have all begun to be “merciful,” “pure in heart,” and “peacemakers” (5:7–9). It will not always be the case that all of Jesus’ disciples are persecuted at all times. (CC)

When persecution for the sake of Jesus, who enacts God’s saving righteousness, does happen, Jesus promises his blessing. The reign of heaven and its blessings already belong to believers in such difficult times, just as those blessings belong to all who have nothing to offer to God, who are poor in spirit (5:3). Moreover, Jesus’ words in 5:11 invite a radical reinterpretation when his disciples are defamed and persecuted for his name’s sake. The final end-time reward that is stored up in heaven for such disciples is “great” indeed (5:12). They stand in line with God’s greatest servants of old, his “prophets” (5:12). They stand in line with Jesus, who came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (5:17; see also the second textual note on 1:22). (CC)

The final two Beatitudes prevent Jesus’ disciples, then and now, from adopting any triumphalistic ideas about the “advance of the reign of God.” The final day of victory does indeed belong to the Almighty and to his Christ. The present reign of God in Jesus, however, is a hidden reality that can only be known to those to whom it is revealed (11:25–27; 13:10–17; 16:17). Although power accompanies the ministry of Jesus and of the Twelve in Israel, the goal of Jesus’ ministry will not come with power in the way that the world thinks of such things. The forerunner of the Coming One has been arrested (4:12); he will die in the prison of the king (14:1–12). The disciples of the Coming One will at times be resisted and hated and persecuted. The Coming One himself will reign as King of the Jews and the Son of God. He will so reign, however, from a cross. Let the one who has ears hear! (CC)

**5:10** *those who are persecuted for righteousness sake* – Many times the suffering that we endure is something that our own actions have brought about. This suffering spoken of here is what we experience because we have for the sake of the Gospel. It is being insulted (v. 11) because we hold to the true faith.

Jesus later warned the disciples He sent out as peacemakers (v 9) that persecution would also be their lot (10:16–22). Augustine: “Where there is no sound faith, there can be no righteousness, for the just [righteous] man lives by faith” (NPNF 1 6:7). (TLSB)

οι δεδιωγμένοι—Some want to give the perfect passive participle its full force: “those who have been and now still are in a condition of having been persecuted.” However, it would be wrong to claim that the perfect stem participle requires that “persecution has occurred in the past and continues in the present.” The perfect does not indicate that the past *action* is continuing. Rather, it naturally emphasizes that the condition that results from the past action is a continuing *condition*. Rather than giving the participle its full force here, it is likely functioning more like a simple adjective, in light of the other adjectives in Mt 5:7, 8, 9. Therefore it is translated in the present tense: “the ones who *are* persecuted.” (CC)

Those who suffer ridicule, pain, refusal, punishment, loss of possessions or friends or family for doing what is right in God’s sight, as Jesus did, are (present tense) members of the kingdom of God now and forever. Membership is not gained by persecution, though persecution is the badge of Christ’s followers. The Spirit of glory and of God rests on them. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

1 Peter 4:14 “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

*For righteousness sake* – This easily applies to Jesus who in his persecution even to death reveals God’s salvific working among people. (Scaer p. 90)

**5:11** *blessed are you* – Jesus spoke the first eight beatitudes using the third person [they]. In this final beatitude, He addressed His disciples directly using the second person [you] for emphasis. He continued using “you” until 7:13. (TLSB)

*Pn my account* – The disciple of Jesus will be like him in being Satan’s target. The cause of the believer’s difficulty is Jesus, for whose sake they are persecuted. (Scaer p. 90)

*All kinds of evil against you falsely* – καὶ εἰπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθύμῳν [ψευδόμενοι]—The predicate position participle ψευδόμενοι may perhaps express means, telling how people will say every evil against the disciples: “by lying.” (CC)

“Troubles are not always punishments for certain past deeds, but they are God’s works, intended for our benefit, and that God’s power might be made more apparent in our weakness.” [Ap XIIB 63 – TLSB]

In the final analysis, this is the same as the phrase “because of righteousness” (V. 10), since the Christian does right for the sake of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:18-23; 3:16-17; 4:14-16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

**5:12** *rejoice and be glad* – This is the kind of reaction that is described in the definition of the word “Blessed.”

The source of joy for a disciple who suffers persecution is the promise of heaven. (TLSB)

*Reward is great* – Heaven is the ultimate reward. Knowing that we are going to heaven even gives a joy and peace here on earth.

Though Jesus used this term when referring to heavenly blessings, He taught that the reward would be based on God's goodness, not the amount of work done (cf 20:1–15). Any reward our heavenly Father gives is an expression of His grace. "We confess that eternal life is a reward; it is something due because of the promise, not because of our merits" (Ap V 242). John Hus: "When [a disciple] has patiently continued to endure[,] it helps to purify him as tools [purify] iron, and fire gold, and it helps to increase his reward of beatitude" (*The Church*, p 270). (TLSB)

While this is clearly in the future, it is already a reality in the heavens (God's presence). (Scaer p. 91)

### **The Authority of the Beatitudes: The Gospel Doorway**

Let the one who has ears hear indeed (11:15; 13:9, 43)! As the commentary above on the structure of the Sermon suggested, the shift from third person address (5:3–10) to second person address (5:11–12) shows that the Gospel blessings of the Beatitudes are the "doorway" into the remainder of the Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5–7). The "they" of Beatitudes 1–8 (5:3–10) becomes the "you" of Beatitude 9 (5:11–12), which is continued in the "you" of the rest of the Sermon through 7:20, referring to those who believe in the promise of present and future blessing that Jesus here teaches with authority. (CC)

To summarize this lengthy treatment of the Beatitudes, they do not make ethical demands, nor do they primarily exhort. They do not refer directly to Jesus himself. Rather, the subject of the main clause in every verse describes those whom Jesus has called to be his disciples. The first group of four blessings addresses Jesus' disciples in terms of their own innate emptiness (5:3–6). Left to themselves, apart from Christ, disciples (and all people) are "poor in spirit" and "lowly," given only to "mourning" and to "hungering." If one were to ask, "Where is Jesus?" with regard to the first four blessings, the answer would be, "In the ὅτι ('because ...') clauses!" Those who have no resources to offer God are nevertheless eschatologically blessed, "*because*" Jesus has come to reign over such persons in grace and mercy, "*because*" the promised end-time blessings will come to those who have nothing besides God-given faith in Jesus. He is the Servant of Yahweh, proclaiming Good News to the poor! (CC)

The second group of Beatitudes (5:7–12) still describes the disciples of Jesus: the merciful, the pure in heart, and so forth. These blessings testify that Jesus' call to discipleship begins to transform those who are called (5:7–12). When Jesus joins men, women, and children to himself, that union begins to manifest the life of Christ himself in the lives of his disciples. That was true for Jesus' original disciples there on the mountain in Galilee. It is also true for the disciples of Jesus today, who are baptized into union with Christ and who comprise his church, which hears and receives the Beatitudes in faith. Indeed, the Beatitudes contain within themselves the kerygmatic power to *make* a hearer or reader into a disciple of Jesus and a member of his church. To hear and believe that one is poor in spirit, spiritually bankrupt, and then to hear Jesus pronounce blessing and the promise of the reign of heaven can make one into a believer in Jesus. Hearing and believing the Beatitudes can also sustain that faith. When life is hard and the power of evil is too great, Jesus' words comfort us: "The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is theirs!" (5:3). (CC)

At this point, and only at this point, a person is ready to hear the teaching of Jesus in the body proper of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' teaching will continue to have the character of *divine, authoritative revelation*. He reveals truth about the disciples' calling, about the true meaning of God's OT Torah, about life under the Father's care, and so on. Aspects of this truth concern God's will for man's obedience. The Sermon contains Law, the commandments of God as Jesus

declares them. Sooner or later, that Law, when taken seriously by men and women trying to obey it, will rise up to condemn Jesus' disciples as guilty, as sinful—as poor in spirit. At those times, Jesus' disciples are invited to remember that the Sermon has a doorway, a doorway that in the first place swings open on this hinge: “The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is theirs!” (5:3). In this way, perhaps many times in a single day, Jesus' disciples will receive and enter and accept his authoritative revelation. In the first place (literally!), however, his authoritative revelation is his word of promise, of present blessing and final salvation to all his disciples. (CC)

**5:1–12** Jesus introduces His Sermon on the Mount with nine beatitudes that detail the future blessedness of His disciples. These promised blessings are God's gracious gifts to those who repent of their sins and trust Christ for righteousness. Only after Jesus has assured His disciples of God's goodness to them does He call on them, in the rest of His sermon, to be good and do good. When we recognize our own spiritual poverty, when the Lord leads us to hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, when He makes us pure in heart so that we seek to worship only the true God, then we are blessed, now and forever. • Gracious Savior, keep my eyes ever focused on You and Your blessings, which are mine by grace alone. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Salt and Light*

**<sup>13</sup>“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. <sup>14</sup>“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that<sup>l</sup> they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

**5:13-16** Matthew's readers/hearers have come to 5:13–16 and the teaching that follows it by a particular route: the Beatitudes (5:3–12). Taught, blessed, and strengthened by Good News from the Son of God and Servant of the Lord, Jesus' disciples now receive their calling and identity as he continues to teach with authority (see 7:29). As was suggested in the discussion of the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, 5:13–16 serves as a general heading for the main body of the Sermon's teaching (5:17–7:12). This little paragraph consists of two metaphors: “You are that which salts the earth” and “You are that which gives light to the world.” Precisely because these verses serve as a *general* heading for more specific teaching to come, the metaphorical language should not be pressed so hard that the imagery begins to limp. (CC)

Jesus commands His disciples to be salt and light. In the rest of the sermon, He will spell out specific ways in which they fulfill this calling. (TLSB)

**5:13 you are** – The first thing to note about Jesus' words is that they begin in the indicative mood: “You are ...” Though exhortation will follow in 5:16, the connection between blessing (5:3–12) and calling (5:13–16) is absolutely unbreakable. It is a question of the disciples' identity. To be the disciples of Jesus and to receive his present and future blessing is at the same time to have become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This relates to that fact that it is *Jesus* who calls them with authority and it is *Jesus* who decides the nature and character of his calling to them. Jesus' disciples, then, are by definition the people who salt the earth and who light the world; no one else has this calling. This reality need not cause the disciples to fear, however. Their identity is not created or preserved by how well they acknowledge and live out their identity as salt and light. Their identity is created and preserved by the word of Jesus: “The poor

in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is theirs” (5:3, the first and programmatic Beatitude). (CC)

*salt.* Used for flavoring and preserving. (CSB)

By their way of life, Jesus’ disciples are to be as useful as salt is. (TLSB)

Salt was produced by drying seawater from mineral deposits near the Salt Sea preserves, so it reminded the Israelites that God would preserve His covenant with Abraham, including the messianic promise that through Abraham “all the families of the earth” would be blessed (Gn. 12:1-3). Ultimately, this was fulfilled in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

ὁμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς—The explicit pronoun ὁμεῖς lends a note of emphasis: “You, my disciples—and no others—are . . .” The same is true in 5:14. I take the genitive construction “salt of the earth” as objective (“that which salts the earth”) for two reasons: (1) the verb “to salt” (ἀλίζω) is close at hand (ἀλισθήσεται two clauses later), lending a verbal force to the noun “salt,” and (2) the parallel genitive construction in 5:14, “light of the world” also seems to be an objective genitive, “that which gives light to/enlightens the world.” (CC)

We should not try to narrow the meaning of “salt” too precisely. The image is parallel with “light,” and salt served many useful functions in the ancient world. What is clear is that the earth is evil, corrupt, deficient. The earth needs to be salted; people need to be called to “repent” and believe the Good News that in Jesus “the reign of heaven stands near” (4:17). Moreover, only Jesus himself, and then Jesus’ disciples by virtue of their relationship with him, can do for the world what it needs. If his disciples were to turn away from and reject his calling, they would “become tasteless” (5:13), and then no means would remain for the earth to receive the necessary blessing. (CC)

Jesus speaks to “his disciples” (5:1)—to Christians. There is no need, as Luther does, to limit the function of “salting” and “lighting” to teachers in the church. Each Christian will live out this calling according to his or her vocation. Jesus does not threaten his disciples with his words “It is still good for nothing except, after [it] has been thrown out, to be trampled underfoot by men.” He does teach them, however, that their calling is part and parcel of their life in him. A person who utterly refuses this calling is a person who has never entered through the doorway of the Beatitudes. A disciple who deserts the Lord who called him can no longer salt the earth and will be “thrown out” and “trampled” on the Last Day. (CC)

*Lost its taste* – Becoming useless. (TLSB)

ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῇ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται;—This second use of “salt” also has the definite article (τὸ ἅλας). The article is anaphoric, referring back to the first mention of the noun: “that salt already mentioned” in the first clause. The phrase ἐν τίνι illustrates that in the NT the preposition ἐν with the dative is patient of the whole range of translational options available to the simple dative case. Here it expresses means (“by what means will it be salted?”). (CC)

The impact of the salt and light metaphors has to do with the beneficial effect Jesus’ disciples have on the *world* in which they live as disciples. The real tragedy, then, should the salt become tasteless, is that the *earth* will not “be salted.” I have translated the future passive verb ἀλισθήσεται with true passive force (“will be salted”). The fully expressed equivalent here in 5:13 would be ἡ γῆ ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; “With what will the earth be salted?” The unexpressed subject (“it”) must be “the earth” and not “the salt.” The passive voice of ἀλίζω means “to be salted”

(LSJ B, I), not “to become salty.” BDAG lists the meaning “to be made salty” only for this verse, and one suspects that the traditional understanding of this clause (that “salt” is the subject and that the verb means “to become salty”) has become a somewhat circular proof for the existence of this derived meaning for the passive voice of the verb ἀλίζω. The only other NT use of the verb occurs in Mk 9:49 (also in the passive voice), where too it is modified by a dative of means and has a true passive force: “Everything will be salted with fire.” Lk 14:34 is a distinct (though clearly related) saying and cannot be used to “amend” the meaning of ἀλισθήσεται here from “be salted” to “become salty.” Lk 14:34–35 reads: “Therefore salt is good. But if even the salt has become tasteless, by what means will it [the salt] be seasoned [ἀρτυθήσεται]? It is fit for neither the ground [γῆ] nor the manure pile; they throw it out.” An important parallel in support of the translation “By what means will it [the earth] be salted?” occurs in LXX Lev 2:13. There one reads καὶ πᾶν δῶρον θυσίας ὑμῶν ἀλι ἀλισθήσεται, “And every gift of your sacrifice will be salted with salt,” that is, salt will be added to the sacrifice. (CC)

The verb *moraine* in the passive voice means “become tasteless or insipid.” Arndt observes that the salt used in Palestine can become tasteless when exposed to the weather for a long period of time. When that happens, there is no way to restore it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

*saltiness be restored?* Lit, “How shall it [humankind] be salted?” Humanity will not benefit if salt—or disciples—become useless. One might as well throw it out to be trampled underfoot. (TLSB)

*no longer good...thrown out* – εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων—The syntax in this construction is a little obscure. Greek’s love of economy and ellipsis is not naturally shared by English readers and speakers! The implied subject of ἰσχύει is the neuter singular nominative τὸ ἅλας (“the salt”) earlier in the verse, which is also the referent of the neuter singular nominative aorist passive participle βληθέν (from βάλλω). The verb ἰσχύει, “it is still good,” should be understood to be repeated after εἰ μὴ, “except,” and this implied verb then governs the infinitive καταπατεῖσθαι (the salt “is still good for nothing except [it is still good], after having been thrown out, to be trampled underfoot by men”). The predicate position participle βληθέν has a temporal force: “after having been thrown out.” (CC)

**5:14** *light of the world* – ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου—The genitive construction “light of the world” is objective: “that which gives light to the world.” See also the first textual note on 5:13 (“salt of the earth,” that is, “that which salts the earth”). (CC)

“That which gives light to the world” (5:14) is a similarly general image. Light casts out darkness. Darkness is associated with evil, with danger, with the condition of being lost and unable to find one’s way. Jesus’ disciples—because they have become his disciples—are the world’s light, for in Jesus, light has begun to shine in Galilee (4:16). Just as salt that loses its saltiness is an utter contradiction in terms, so is an “invisible” city set on a mountain or a “covered” lamp. Those images just do not make sense. A city that has been set on a mountain is meant to be seen by those pilgrims traveling to it. A lamp is lit in order to spread light to everyone who is in the house. Jesus’ argument is irrefutable; to contradict him is to descend into absurdity. To seek to escape this calling means rejecting Jesus himself. He teaches with authority, and all his disciples, both ancient and modern, believe that in him they *are* God’s means of blessing the world around them. The key, of course, is “in him.” (CC)

John 8:12, “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Ephesians 5:8, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

Light is a universal symbol for what is beneficial to people. Jesus, the light of the world, called His followers to fulfill that function for the world. Augustine: “By the world must be understood not the heavens and the earth, but rather the men who are in the world or love the world” (NPNF 1 6:9). (TLSB)

*City set on a hill...cannot be hidden* – Just as there is no hiding the light of a city on a hill, the light of a true disciple cannot be hidden. (TLSB)

οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη—Although the participle κειμένη could be taken as adverbial (“not able to be hidden *while it is set* on a mountain”), it is better to take it as an attributive position adjectival participle directly modifying πόλις: “A city *set* on a mountain is not able to be hidden.” (CC)

**5:15 lamp.** In Jesus’ day people used small clay lamps that burned olive oil drawn up by a wick – The ancient lamp was a small clay saucer with part of its rim pinched together to form a spout from which protruded the top of a wick fed by oil contained in the saucer.) (CSB)

The light of a lamp is meant to illuminate a dark house. (TLSB)

οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον—This is the indefinite use of a third personal plural verb (καίουσιν, “*they* light”), analogous to the English usage “I understand that *they* have discovered a cure for cancer.” (CC)

*bowl.* A peck-sized bowl that held ground meal or flour. (CSB)

τὸν μόδιον—According to BDAG, μόδιος refers to “a peck-measure” of about 8.75 liters. “Two-gallon basket” is about the right size, and because most modern American readers (myself included) have no real idea about the size of a bushel, I have chosen this dynamic equivalent translation for the noun. (CC)

It was a measure for grain, holding about 2 gallons. The idea of lighting a lamp, burning precious oil, only to cover it with a bowl that conceals its light, is patently absurd. So, says Jesus, is a Christian who conceals his or her faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

**5:16 let your light shine** – λαμπάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν—The familiar English translation “Let your light shine” might mask the presence of the third person *imperative* λαμπάτω, addressed to “your light” (τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν). It does not mean “allow” your light to shine. Jesus’ words actively exhort the disciples’ light to shine. The force of the imperative amounts to “I command that your light shine.” (CC)

*Good works...give glory to your Father* – The exhortation of 5:16 describes how that blessing will take place, namely, through the good works of Jesus’ disciples. These works are “your light,” which Jesus exhorts his disciples to shine in the presence of other people. Jesus will specify in the remainder of his teaching in the Sermon (5:17–7:12) what some of those important good works are. By nature those good works are public and visible and done with one purpose in mind: that others may glorify the disciples’ heavenly Father (5:16). In the first place, this must refer to the conversion of the world to faith and discipleship. In the second place, the purpose of

the disciples' good works is the edification of fellow believers. To glorify the heavenly Father, one must know him rightly. One can know that heavenly Father rightly only through the right knowledge of his Son (11:25–27). (CC)

The good works of Jesus' disciples will be carried out in their "ordinary" vocations. Those works and those lives, however, are to be *extraordinary*, as Jesus' later teaching makes clear (especially in 5:21–7:12). Jesus' disciples are called to lives of *remarkable* purity, faithfulness, piety, love, and generosity. (CC)

There is a particular trap waiting here, I believe, for modern Lutherans. The Reformation rightly rejected the notion that monastic vocations held any spiritual superiority to the "ordinary" callings of Christians. Luther's proverbial "servant girl" was just as pleasing to God in her calling as was any other Christian of any other station. In Luther's context and time, the crucial truth to establish was that "ordinary" callings were ordained by God and that Christians who lived in them were pleasing to God. (CC)

This does not mean, however, that Christians are to live in their vocations *in ordinary ways*, that is, in the same ways that non-Christians do. I suspect that the malaise of our day presents a different error that must be rejected. Jesus' disciples are called to be *extraordinary* husbands and wives, *remarkable* neighbors and employees, *powerful* friends and citizens. Their deeds and their words, in the power of faith and the Spirit, will be like salt, like light in the darkness. (CC)

Both words and deeds are necessary. Words without deeds will not be heard. Deeds without words will bring no one to praise the Father in heaven. Each believing man or woman, layperson or pastor, stands as a disciple because of Jesus' forgiveness and blessing, and receives Jesus' calling to be salt and light. In the brightness of *his* light, our light will shine for the blessing and salvation of the world. For he teaches as one who claims authority and not as the scribes of his day (7:29). (CC)

Jesus urged His disciples to good works for the people of this world to see. Luther: "What {Jesus} calls 'good works' here is the exercise, expression, and confession of the teaching about Christ and faith...Shining is the real job of believing or teaching, by which we also help others believe" (AE 21:65; see FC Ep IV 18). (TLSB)

*Father in heaven.* Matthew uses the term "Father in heaven" or "heavenly Father" 17 times, whereas Mark and Luke use the term only once each, and John does not use it at all. (CSB)

τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν—This is the first of sixteen references in the Sermon on the Mount to God as the "Father" of Jesus' disciples. It is as his disciples that they may call God "Father." The Sermon is not addressed to humanity at large, but only to those who have believed in Jesus as the manifestation of God's reign in history. (CC)

Good works are meant to lead others to glorify our heavenly Father, not to bring praise to the one who does them. Leading people to worship the true God is the whole purpose of doing good deeds. (TLSB)

**5:13–16** Words without deeds are like salt that has become useless or like a light put under a basket. The words we speak in praise of our heavenly Father need the support of our deeds. Jesus wants us to witness by both words and deeds, even as God bears witness that He is our Father when He calls us His children. • Lord Jesus, help me to be good salt and a shining light wherever I am. Amen. (TLSB)

## *The Fulfillment of the Law*

**<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**

**5:17** *the Law.* The first five books of the Jewish Scriptures (our OT). (CSB)

*the Prophets.* Not only the Latter Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which we call Major Prophets, and the 12 Minor Prophets (lumped together by the Jews as “the Book of the Twelve”)—but also the so-called Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). Taken together, “the Law” and “the Prophets” designated the entire OT, including the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible. See 13:35, where Matthew introduces a quotation from the Writings (Ps 78:2) with “what was spoken through the prophet.” *fulfill.* Jesus fulfilled the Law in the sense that he gave it its full meaning. He emphasized its deep, underlying principles and total commitment to it rather than mere external acknowledgment and obedience. (CSB)

**5:17** *do not think that I have come to abolish the law* – οὐκ ἤλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι— The translation of πληρῶσαι as “to fulfill” is of some importance. In Matthew’s Gospel, once the verb πληρῶ has the physical meaning “to fill up”: the passive in 13:48 refers to a net that is “filled” with fish. One time the metaphorical meaning “fill up” refers to the climactic unbelief of Jesus’ opponents (“fill up the measure of your fathers,” 23:32). Every other use of the verb in Matthew is linked to the OT Scriptures, which Jesus’ ministry fulfills, that is, his ministry enacts God’s scriptural plan to save. The aorist infinitive πληρῶσαι here thus expresses a strong continuity between Jesus’ purpose and the OT, as well as introducing a note of newness and completion and thus discontinuity. The sense of “fulfill” in 5:17 has occasioned an extensive discussion in the literature. Some seem to limit the meaning to Jesus’ teaching, almost as if Jesus had only said, “I have come to fulfill the Law” (and not “the Prophets”). But 5:17 is a programmatic statement about Jesus’ relationship to the entire OT, and “fulfill” in such a statement must have the sense “that he enacts or manifests God’s purposes” in a broad sense. (CC)

In this sentence, the meaning of καταλῦσαι is determined by its use as an antonym of the more contextually certain meaning of πληρῶσαι, “to fulfill.” If the forward-looking nature of the OT and Christ’s enactment of its promises are in view in the verb “fulfill,” then the antonym of such meaning would entail “ending, abolishing, doing away with.” (CC)

Jesus abrogated the OT civil and ceremonial laws, but not before He fulfilled them personally as our King (civil) and as our great high Priest (ceremonial). What remains binding for all time is the moral law, the unalterable will of God with regard to right and wrong (which, of course, Christ fulfilled perfectly too on our behalf. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Jesus came to fulfill God’s Law, but not all the human accretions added by the Jews – the so-called Oral Torah, which they claimed was passed down by word of mouth from Moses. This verse refers to both the active and the passive obedience of Jesus, which has satisfied completely all that God will in the Law and which provides the perfect righteousness needed for us to stand

before God. It is the basis upon which we are declared righteous through faith. Christ's fulfillment included all the prophecies of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. The entire vicarious atonement of Christ is included here. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Jesus' opening statement in 5:17 fronts for his disciples the important question mentioned above: What is Jesus' own relationship to God's prior revelation in the OT, the Law and the Prophets? Jesus teaches an important middle road between two extremes. He has not come to abolish, do away with, or negate the revelation found in the Law and the Prophets. Left unexpressed is the other extreme view: neither has Jesus come into the world merely to repeat or to underscore God's OT revelation. No, he has come "to *fulfill*" the OT Scriptures (5:17). As the evangelist has repeatedly narrated, the OT story of God's dealing with Israel and the world was incomplete, forward-looking, waiting for God's decisive in-breaking and rule. The deeds of Jesus' life, even from his earliest years, are that in-breaking, that fulfillment of the OT; he came so that "what was spoken" in the OT "might be fulfilled" (1:22–23; 2:14–15, 16–18, 23; 3:15; 4:12–16). Now Jesus announces the same thing directly. He comes in continuity with and as predicted by the Law and the Prophets; he comes "to fulfill" them (5:17). (CC)

This notion of fulfillment, however, also contains a nuance of discontinuity. For the one who fulfills what was promised inevitably brings a *new* situation into the world. He stands in line with the Law and the Prophets. Yet he also, once he has accomplished his work of fulfillment, alters the relationship that God's people will have with that OT revelation. (CC)

Jesus fulfilled all that was written of Him in the Law and the Prophets. Likewise, He kept the commands of the Law perfectly (cf Heb 4:15). (TLSB)

**5:18–20** Jesus is not speaking against observing all the requirements of the Law, but against hypocritical, Pharisaical legalism. Such legalism was not the keeping of all details of the Law but the hollow sham of keeping laws externally, to gain merit before God, while breaking them inwardly. It was following the letter of the Law while ignoring its spirit. Jesus repudiates the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law and their view of righteousness by works. He preaches a righteousness that comes only through faith in him and his work. In the verses that follow, he gives six examples of Pharisaical externalism.

**5:18** *truly I say to you* – ἀμὴν γάρ—This is the first of Jesus' thirty-one "amen" statements in Matthew's Gospel, each of which carries a certain solemnity and emphasis. (ἀμὴν is translated "truly" in the translation above.) These statements relate to the material that precedes them in a variety of ways. Here used with γάρ (as also in 10:23; 13:17; 17:20), Jesus' firm and sure "amen" explains *why* he did not come to abolish, but to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. The commentary will attempt to highlight how important it is to let the *logic* of Jesus' words in 5:17–20 lead the way in understanding his meaning. That *logic* is revealed, in significant measure, through the conjunctions that Matthew gives to us: "for" (γάρ, 5:18, 20) and "therefore" (οὖν, 5:19). (CC)

Greek *amen*; used 31 times by Jesus in Mt. (TLSB)

*pass away*. At the last judgment. (TLSB)

*smallest letter*. One word in Greek (*iota*), which we use when we say, "It doesn't make one iota of difference." It is the nearest Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *yodh*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (CSB)

*least stroke of a pen.* The Greek word for this phrase means “horn” and was used to designate the slight embellishment or extension of certain letters of the Hebrew alphabet (somewhat like the bottom of a “j”). (CSB)

Refers to the smallest Hbr letter (*yod*) and even smaller markings in the sacred text. (TLSB)

ἰῶτα ... κεραία—The ἰῶτα is the little Greek letter I (later written ι). This Greek letter could refer to ך, the smallest Hebrew letter (see LXX Ps 118:73 [MT/ET 119:73]). The κεραία, “horn, projection, hook,” seems to refer to a small part of a letter, such as the serif on Hebrew and Aramaic letters. Therefore, the sense of Jesus’ statement about it is “not even the smallest part of a letter.” (CC)

With the death and resurrection of the Lord, then, *all things have taken place, and the new heavens and new earth have begun to manifest themselves in Jesus.* And with the accomplishing of all things in Jesus’ ministry, which culminates in his death and resurrection, now the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled. The time when God’s Torah commandments had unchanging significance for Jesus’ disciples has passed. To be sure, even after Jesus’ resurrection there is *continuity* between Jesus’ teaching and calling to his disciples and God’s teaching and calling to his people Israel in the Torah. Jesus fulfilled the Law and Prophets; he did not abolish them. Nevertheless, a change has taken place. Now the disciple of Jesus must hold fast to what Jesus has revealed and commanded. (CC)

Why is it that Jesus has come not to abolish (5:17a–b), but to fulfill (5:17c) the OT? Mt 5:18 gives the answer and, in giving it, raises questions of interpretation. Let me suggest at the outset of the discussion of 5:18 that Jesus’ words in this verse correspond quite closely to the negative and positive declarations found in 5:17. In the first place, Jesus’ words in 5:17a–b find a correspondence in 5:18b–c. That is to say, Jesus has not come to abolish the OT (5:17a–b) precisely because of the firmness, the importance, the unchanging and unswerving nature of God’s commandments: until heaven and earth pass away, no detail will pass away from the Law (5:18b–c). God’s Torah revelation was not given merely in order that it might be abolished! In the second place, 5:17c is matched and explained by 5:18d. That is, because Jesus has come to fulfill the OT (5:17c), nothing will pass away from the commandments “until all things take place” (5:18d). (CC)

*accomplished.* The Messiah’s work, esp His death and resurrection. (TLSB)

**5:19** *relaxes.* By teaching that the commandments were no longer applicable in their fullness. This was the error of the scribes and Pharisees (vv 21–48). (TLSB)

*Least of these commandments* – ὅς ἐάν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων ...—In the NT ἐάν can stand in the place of ἄν, as it does here (BDF, § 107). Note that later in 5:19 the more typical construction ὅς δ᾿άν occurs. There is an important difference between “loosen” here (λύσῃ) and “do away with” (καταλῦσαι) in 5:17. Here Jesus is not talking about a person who seeks to abolish God’s commandments, but merely to lessen their force or downplay their importance. This is precisely the error of the scribes and Pharisees. See also the commentary on 5:21–48. (CC)

The presence of the inferential conjunction οὖν, “therefore,” shows the central importance of 5:19. The commentary will argue specifically that, in the logic of 5:17–20, the most prominent declaration in these verses is not 5:20, as is often asserted, but the conclusion found in 5:19. (CC)

It is grammatically possible for the near demonstrative pronoun “these” (τούτων) to be prospective, that is, to refer to some reality that is about to be mentioned (see Lk 18:11; 1 Cor 11:17). However, most often in the NT, and always in Matthew, it refers retrospectively to something that has already been mentioned. When this fact is matched with the logic, wherein the conclusion in 5:19 depends on the ground of what has just been said in 5:17–18, it is certain the “these commandments” that Jesus refers to in 5:19 are the commandments in the Law. This view is further supported by the content of 5:21–48, in which Jesus contrasts the scribal and Pharisaic interpretation of God’s Torah with the Torah’s true authoritative meaning, which Jesus himself proclaims. (CC)

James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

*Least in the kingdom* – Such a false teacher will not be excluded from God’s kingdom but will have a lesser status, something we will understand only in heaven. (TLSB)

ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν—There is a very strong parallel to this clause in 11:11, where the comparative form μικρότερος is functioning in the place of the true superlative form ἐλάχιστος here: “The one who is least in the reign of heaven is greater than he” (ὁ δὲ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν μείζων αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, 11:11). The parallel shows that here in 5:19, the person who is “called the least in the reign of heaven” does not refer to someone who, on the Last Day, is *excluded* from that reign, but rather to a person who is *included* under its blessing and activity. So, Jesus’ words here in 5:19 about those who will be called “least” and “great” in the reign of heaven in both instances refer to persons who will enter eschatological life at the consummation of the age. (CC)

Now, however, Jesus is sitting on the mountain and revealing to his disciples what it means for them to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13–16). What inference may be drawn for their calling from what he has just revealed about himself as fulfiller of the OT? I paraphrase Jesus’ answer (5:19):

*Therefore* [οὖν], do and teach the holy commandments of the Torah as God intended them to be kept! Everyone who so strives to live and to teach to other disciples will on the Last Day be called great among the company of the saved! But everyone who falters in his grasp of the importance of this holy obedience to the Torah’s intent will be called the least among the company of the saved. (CC)

Four aspects of 5:19 require comment. First, Jesus’ words “the least of *these commandments*” almost surely refer to God’s will as expressed in the Torah, the Law. The fact that 5:19 follows logically (οὖν, “therefore”) from 5:18 points in that direction. In addition, the demonstrative pronoun “these” is almost certainly retrospective (see the first textual note on 5:19). Moreover, Jesus is about to begin his explication of the true meaning of the Torah in 5:21–48. Jesus’ original disciples, during his earthly ministry, must regard God’s true intent in the Torah as God’s calling and claim upon their lives. Even we who are Jesus’ disciples on the other side of his death and resurrection will carefully and Christocentrically discover God’s ongoing will for our lives in the OT. Again, Jesus does not abolish the OT. He fulfills it (5:17). (CC)

Second, those who inquire about the relative importance of God’s different commands—seeking to know which commands they may safely ignore, since Jesus called them “the *least*” of the commandments—are barking up the wrong tree. The rhetorical force of the implied command “do not loose the *least*” is surely “hold fast to *all!*” (CC)

Third, it should be emphasized that here in 5:19, a person who “loosens” God’s commandments and teaches others to do the same, but who nevertheless still believes in Jesus, will be “called the least in the reign of heaven,” but will still receive eschatological salvation; he or she is still “in.” The parallel in 11:11 supports this (see the second textual note on 5:19). However, disregard for God’s Word can lead to a loss of faith in Christ, and so to a loss of salvation. Moreover, the person who “loosens” God’s commands (5:19) is in that way failing to be “salt” and “light” in the world, and thus is failing to bring others to “glorify” the “Father who is in heaven” (5:13–16). (CC)

Fourth, we must address those who will not be comfortable with talk of being “least” or “great” (5:19) in the eschatological consummation of all things. Jesus elsewhere is quite willing both to define spiritual greatness among the company of his disciples and to summon his followers to such greatness. The clearest example occurs in 20:20–28 in the incident that is sparked by the question of the sons of Zebedee, extended to Jesus through their mother. To speak briefly and to the point, all of the disciples present in chapter 20 seem to be operating with a particular definition of “greatness” or “prominence” in regard to the reign of heaven. Jesus does not dismiss the question out of hand; he *redefines the terms of the question*. Seats of exaltation are for those who drink of the same cup Jesus drinks and who are baptized with the same baptism he receives—entailing his passion (20:21–23). The status of being “great” (μέγας, 20:26, the same term used here in 5:19) is reflected in the role of servanthood, just as the place of “first” is equated with the status of being a slave to one’s fellows (20:26–27; see also 23:11). Jesus does not reject the notion of spiritual greatness. Rather, he redefines the “great” as those who serve. (CC)

Here in 5:19, then, Jesus also defines for his disciples a kind of spiritual greatness. In so doing, he orients his disciples’ priorities toward the holy will of God, which is expressed in his written Word. The extent to which any believer manifests those priorities does not determine his entrance into the reign of heaven, for on the Last Day both greatest and least are “in.” After all, Jesus’ disciples only arrive at this teaching by passing through the doorway: “The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is *theirs*” (5:3). Nevertheless, Jesus teaches with authority also here in 5:19. His disciples will receive this teaching. In faith, they will seek to conform to God’s will (as Jesus the Fulfiller will explicate that divine will) in their words and deeds, and they will teach others so to believe and live. (CC)

Mt 5:19, then, is the inference that follows from 5:17–18, and *it is the major proposition of 5:17–20*. Mt 5:19 is, properly speaking, the introduction to Jesus’ teaching in 5:21–48, wherein the Son of God offers with divine authority a sample of teaching that unfolds the true meaning of God’s Torah. Jesus offers his teaching in 5:21–48, then, to his disciples who trust in his Gospel blessing (5:3–12) and who desire to manifest their calling as salt and light (5:13–16) in accordance with God’s will. (CC)

**5:20** *for I tell you* – ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑμῖν—This sentence, like 5:18, begins with the postpositive γὰρ, a causal or explanatory “for, because.” Explicitly, then, 5:20 supports 5:19. That simple but important observation suggests that 5:20 should not be regarded as the theme or introduction to what follows in 5:21–48. Rather, 5:20 stands in closest relation to 5:19. Moreover, 5:19, in its character as the primary conclusion drawn from the complex of ideas in 5:17–18, is the real “punch” of 5:17–20 and the introduction to 5:21–48. The commentary will try to show more fully how 5:19 is the most important part of 5:17–20 and how this affects the way we should read 5:21–48. To anticipate that discussion, if 5:20 were the most significant introduction to 5:21–48, then Jesus’ commands in 5:21–48 would describe the greater righteousness that, according to the natural force of Jesus’ words, *would be necessary for a person to gain entrance* into the reign of

heaven on the Last Day. If, however, 5:19 (along with 5:17–18 and 5:20 as a supporting truth) is the most important “bridge” into 5:21–48, then Jesus’ words in the six “antitheses” in 5:21–48 describe the path to spiritual greatness *among those who will enter the reign of heaven* and who then may be called either “least” or “great.” (CC)

To repeat: the interpreter should *not* use 5:20 as a basis for concluding that 5:21–48 is a prescription for how a person may attain the righteousness that will allow him to gain entrance into the reign of heaven. Rather, the interpreter should use 5:19 as the basis for concluding that 5:21–48 displays standards of spiritual greatness for all those *who will, by grace*, enter the reign of heaven on the Last Day (when they may be called “least” or “great,” but in either case they will be “in the reign of heaven,” 5:19). (CC)

*Your righteousness* – The phrase “your righteousness” most likely refers to the disciples’ good deeds that flow from their relationship with Christ himself. Now, it is true that “righteousness” occurs in the near context (5:6, 10) with a meaning of “God’s saving action in Jesus.” It is also true that whatever good works disciples perform are preceded and enabled by the prior gracious blessing of Jesus (5:3–12). Nevertheless, three factors militate against “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) in 5:20 having the same “Gospel” meaning as it does in 5:6, 10. First, Jesus has been speaking about doing and teaching the commandments (5:19); this refers to the disciples’ obedience and “good works” (5:16). Second, Jesus does not speak of “God’s righteousness” or merely “righteousness,” but of “*your* righteousness.” Consequently, the “righteousness” here is an attribute or product of the disciples; it is good fruit from a good tree (7:17). Third, later in the Sermon (6:1), Jesus says, “Pay attention not to do your righteousness before men in order that you may be visible to them.” The phrase “your righteousness” there clearly refers to the good works of Jesus’ disciples. So here in 5:20, “your righteousness” also refers to the good works of Jesus’ disciples. (CC)

*Exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees* – ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἢ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων—This involves an ellipsis of a repetition of δικαιοσύνη, “Unless your righteousness abounds more greatly than [namely, τῆς δικαιοσύνης, ‘the righteousness’] of the scribes and Pharisees ...” The neuter singular adjective πλεῖον is the comparative of πολύς, “much, many.” The neuter singular form, as is typical also of other adjectives, functions as an adverb (see BDAG, s.v. πολύς, 2 b β). The adverbial phrase “more greatly than [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees” describes in what way or how the disciples’ righteousness must and will abound. It is, I will argue in the commentary, primarily a *qualitative* distinction, rather than a *quantitative* one. (CC)

True righteousness is the result of a right relationship with Jesus. Good works are a fruit of faith in Him (Eph. 2:8-10), something that most scribes and Pharisees did not possess. (TLSB)

The single article τῶν governing the two plural nouns, γραμματέων and Φαρισαίων, does not illustrate Granville Sharp’s Rule and does not indicate that “the scribes” and “the Pharisees” are identical groups. Wallace suggests that this is an example of the first group constituting a subset of the second group. The sense of the phrase would then be “the scribes and other Pharisees,” all the while acknowledging that other scribes (of various degrees of learning and influence) existed who were not Pharisees. (CC)

What can Jesus mean, however, when he seems to place a condition (“unless”) on eschatological salvation that involves the disciples’ good works abounding more greatly than those of the scribes and Pharisees? First things first. Unless one is willing to posit a stark contradiction in the teaching of Jesus in Matthew, we may dismiss any thought of good works as *causing* salvation in any way.

The Beatitudes have taught better than that, and other clear Gospel promises in Matthew (not to speak of the NT as a whole!) guard against such a *causative* reading of 5:20 (see, e.g., 19:23–26; 20:28; 26:28). (CC)

The key to understanding lies in the second important question regarding 5:20, namely, the force of the words “abounds more greatly than that of the scribes and Pharisees.” The most important thing to know about the scribes and Pharisees is simply this: they are not Jesus’ disciples. As the narrative progresses, they appear as Jesus’ opponents, who reject his claim that the reign of God is present in his ministry. The scribes and Pharisees do possess a certain kind of “righteousness,” and they manifest it in their behavior. It is, however, a “righteousness” that is entirely cut off from Jesus<sup>32</sup> and so is not “true” righteousness, not truly “good works” at all. (CC)

Jesus’ disciples, by contrast, receive a blessing (5:3–12) and a calling (5:13–16) from Jesus, who fills them with the “righteousness” for which they hunger (5:6). Out of that relationship of grace and present promise and future blessing, Jesus’ disciples do their righteousness, seeking to let their light shine (however imperfectly) in the presence of other people (5:16). Because their righteous good works flow out of their relationship with Jesus, the disciples’ righteousness abounds. The disciples’ righteousness is not something that can be determined or measured quantitatively, but *qualitatively and relationally*. For to a disciple, who already has something (righteousness), more will be given, and “*he will be caused to abound*” (περισσευθήσεται, 13:12; 25:29, a different form of the same verb used in 5:20, περισσεύση, “abounds”). Conversely, as for an unbeliever, “who has nothing” (no true righteousness), “even what he has will be taken away from him” (13:12; 25:29). Since unbelievers are “diseased” trees that can bear only “bad fruit,” their fruit/righteousness does not please God (7:17–19). (CC)

Such “righteousness” of a disciple of Jesus does not *cause* his entrance into the reign of heaven. Nor is it helpful to say that it is *necessary* for *entrance* into the reign of heaven, though it is proper to say that for the Christian, good works indeed are necessary, and they are done “out of the love of righteousness.” We might state it this way: this “righteousness” of good works is an inevitable fruit of one’s union with Jesus (see 7:16–20). All who enter into eternal life will be accompanied by such abounding righteousness. (CC)

The following summary can articulate the connection between 5:20 and 5:19 and express the logic and message of 5:17–20 as a whole. Good works are a part of every disciple’s existence, being caused by Jesus’ call to belonging, blessing, and discipleship. Because of this place that good works play in the life of *all* who are saved (5:20), it follows that doing and teaching even the least of God’s commandments are the priority and goal for all disciples (5:19). This view of God’s commandments in the Torah is grounded in the relationship of the Law and the Prophets to Jesus; he came into the world to fulfill the OT Scriptures (5:17–18), and he now calls his disciples to be salt and light for the world (5:13–16). (CC)

As indicated above, the climactic statement in 5:17–20 is 5:19. There Jesus sets the priorities for his disciples and calls them to such a life. In the teaching that follows in 5:21–48, then, Jesus focuses on some of God’s commandments in the Torah and declares their true meaning and intent, in contrast to the interpretations of those same commandments that his disciples had heard from other sources, such as the scribes and the Pharisees. (CC)

Jesus teaches with authority (7:29); his disciples acknowledge and trust his authority. As they heed his call to do and teach, at times Jesus’ disciples will succeed, by means of the power that he provides to them; the church lives out her life in the power of her baptismal union with Christ (cf. Rom 6:1–11). Often, however, Jesus’ disciples will fail. In that failure they will experience again

their poverty of spirit (5:3), and they will mourn (5:4). They will also hear and receive again the gracious promises of Jesus that the poor in spirit are blessed because the reign of heaven and its everlasting blessings already belong to them (5:3). (CC)

*Never enter the kingdom of heaven* – οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν—In Matthew the phrase “enter into the reign of heaven” seems always to refer specifically to the Last Day (7:21; 18:3; 19:23–24). The one possible exception is 23:13, but I shall argue in the textual notes there that 23:13 also refers to final salvation at the consummation of the age. Once again, the horizon for the disciples’ existence is eschatological, corporate, and creational. (CC)

**5:17–20** The scribes and Pharisees read and study the Law and the Prophets. They accept the fact that “Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn 10:35), but they do not believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures (cf Jn 5:39). They seek to achieve righteousness by keeping the Law, for which they have a high regard. But Jesus goes on to point out just how defective their righteousness really is (vv 21–48). “Christ takes the Law into His hands and explains it spiritually” (FC SD V 10). When judged by the true intent of God’s Law, our righteousness is likewise defective. Only in Christ do we have true righteousness. • Jesus, when I read and study the Scriptures, help me to see my sin and to see You, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Murder*

**<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults<sup>bl</sup> his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell<sup>el</sup> of fire. <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.**

**5:21–48** The commentary on 5:17–20 argued that 5:21–48 is *not* a prescription for how a person may attain the righteousness that will allow him to gain entrance into the reign of heaven. Rather, in 5:21–48 Jesus displays standards of spiritual greatness for disciples who already now receive the blessings of the reign of heaven through faith in him, and who will, by grace, fully enter the glories of that reign on the Last Day. Before briefly considering the theology and application of Jesus’ teaching on doing and teaching God’s Torah commandments (5:19) that is contained in 5:21–48, three hermeneutical issues should be addressed. (CC)

First, if Jesus’ sixfold saying “But I myself am saying to you” (5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) involves a contrast of some sort between his authoritative revelation and something else, with what is Jesus making the contrast? Is the contrast between the Law of Moses and Jesus’ own teaching? Or is the Christ pitting his own authoritative interpretation of the Torah against current scribal interpretations of the same? (CC)

Second, should Jesus’ teaching be read as if he were here giving a full exposition on any of the six topics? That has sometimes been the way Christians have approached Jesus’ teaching, especially with regard to the material on divorce and remarriage in 5:31–32. Or should Jesus’ teaching be read as “general truth,” sweeping revelation that comes from the very heart of God,

but does not give explicit answers to all of the specific questions that disciples (ancient or modern!) may have about the important matters that the Lord's words address? (CC)

Third, how can attention to the first-century context of Jesus' teaching help us to understand what he is intending to say and what he does not intend to say? A brief discussion of these three key issues now follows. (CC)

Regarding the contrast, some interpreters argue strongly that Jesus' teaching here is set as a contrast to the revelation that came through the Mosaic Law *per se*. However, at least three textual features lead us to a different conclusion: in 5:21–48, Jesus, the one who comes to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (5:17–18), is offering his disciples the true intention of the Law of Moses, in contrast to typical Jewish interpretations that Jesus' hearers will have encountered in the first century (CC).

First, when Jesus undeniably cites the OT Scriptures elsewhere in Matthew, he never says, "You heard that it was said" (which is the refrain in 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43; a shortened version of that refrain is in 5:31). The first textual note on 5:21 gives the pertinent data. Second, while I have argued above that 5:19 (and not 5:20) is, in the most important sense, the theme or heading or introduction for Jesus' teaching in 5:21–48, Jesus' reference in 5:20 to "the scribes and Pharisees" brings to the attention of readers/hearers typical ways that Jewish interpreters understood the Torah in Jesus' era. Furthermore, the crowds' reaction when the Sermon is complete does the same thing: "For he was teaching them with the conviction that he had authority, and not *as their scribes* [taught]" (7:29). While the evangelist's words in 7:29 contrast the *manner* of Jesus' teaching, rather than its specific *content*, other teachers in Judaism are explicitly in the foreground. Third, Jesus' identity as the One who fulfills the Law and the Prophets and the important continuity between Torah and his own teaching (implied strongly in 5:17–20 and discussed in the commentary on those verses) support the position here taken, to wit, that Jesus is expounding the true meaning of God's OT commandments. (CC)

To repeat, in answer to the first question, I conclude that in 5:21–48 what Jesus offers to his disciples as they seek to do and teach the commandments of God (5:19) is the proper, authoritative interpretation of the Torah. The Torah will remain unchanged until all things take place (5:18d)—and all things do take place in Jesus' death and resurrection. (CC)

The second introductory question is more important since a wrong answer to it can subject 5:21–48 to misunderstanding or even abuse. Jesus' teaching in 5:21–48 should be received as sweeping, general truth and revelation from God. It is not case law. It does not contain explicit applications covering all particular circumstances. In the case of every one of the six units found in 5:21–48, we must make "adjustments" of greater or lesser size to avoid taking Jesus' teaching to erroneous and (perhaps) ridiculous extremes that would contradict other Scripture passages. Jesus does not attempt or intend to supply his disciples with teaching that covers every possible scenario that fallen humanity's pathetic shortcomings and sins might create. Great wisdom and broad knowledge of all the Scriptures must be brought to bear when applying the truths of 5:21–48 to the lives of disciples as they carry out their calling to be the earth's salt and the world's light (5:13–16). I can illustrate a few of the ways in which it is clear that Jesus' teaching was not intended to be taken strictly and literalistically. (CC)

All interpreters would agree that some of Jesus' statements must be "qualified" based on what he himself says elsewhere and on what the inspired authors of Scripture record elsewhere. First, when Jesus forbids anger against "your brother" (5:21–26), he surely also means to prohibit anger against non-Christians, even though he does not explicitly state that. In addition, Jesus' own

speech indicates that he does not mean to forbid *every* use of “insulting terms” such as “fool.” Second, despite the surface teaching of 5:27–28, Jesus must not be forbidding a man to look upon a woman so as to desire her when that woman is his wife, although Jesus does not mention that exception. Moreover, few would conclude that the Son of God is advocating self-mutilation as an antidote for temptation (5:29–30). Third, few would consider Jesus’ words in 5:31–32 to prohibit the remarriage of an unlawfully divorced wife whose husband has since died. Yet Jesus’ words do not specifically offer that kind of qualification; it must be supplied from 1 Cor 7:39. Fourth, unless one is willing to say that later disciples, including Paul, sinfully violated Jesus’ teaching regarding oaths, then Jesus’ words in Mt 5:33–37 are not an absolute rejection of all oaths, although if read literalistically his words offer that kind of *absolute* prohibition. Fifth, Jesus’ admonition in 5:40, if followed to the letter, would result in naked disciples, and 5:39, strictly speaking, could be used as a rationale for retaliating if one were struck in the nose rather than on the cheek. Sixth and perhaps most obviously, it would be difficult to find anyone who seriously entertained the possibility that Jesus’ words in 5:43–48 meant that we are to love *only* our enemies and persecutors. Surely the force of his words must be expanded to mean, “Love everyone, *even* those who hate and persecute you.” (CC)

These examples are (perhaps!) easy and obvious. This should not mask the important hermeneutical insight, however, that Jesus’ teaching in 5:21–48 must be interpreted in harmony with other NT passages. The section cannot be read as literal and comprehensive. To repeat the point, Jesus’ teaching is not legal, case law material. This insight will be especially important when it comes to apprehending the force of Jesus’ teaching on divorce and remarriage in 5:31–32 (see the commentary on 5:31-32, and more extensively, on 19:3–12). (CC)

The third hermeneutical issue highlights the importance of the first century as the appropriate backdrop for understanding Jesus’ words in 5:21–48. The reference to “the altar” in the Jerusalem temple (5:23–24) is an obvious example of this. Jesus’ teaching assumes that the Jerusalem temple cultus was still operating and that his disciples would still be participating in that cultus, for “all things” had not yet occurred in his death and resurrection (see the commentary on 5:18). A less obvious example that will be developed below is that knowledge of first-century Judaism and its understandings of divorce and remarriage must inform the interpretation of Jesus’ *contrasting* teaching in 5:31–32. Jesus is teaching his first-century disciples to attend to his interpretation of God’s will, and not to the competing first-century interpretations they have heard. Jesus’ twenty-first-century disciples must reckon and wrestle with this important hermeneutical issue before applying his authoritative revelation on marriage, divorce, and remarriage to their own lives and situations. (CC)

Jesus’ disciples are to receive his teaching in 5:21–48 according to the spirit of his words and to interpret it according to the analogy of Scripture. I know full well how this leaves open the possibility of diluting the force of Jesus’ teaching to the point of ignoring it: “Well, Jesus can’t have meant for me to do something as unreasonable as *that!*” This hermeneutical danger simply must be acknowledged and avoided to the extent that we sinners can do so. At the same time, we cannot abuse Jesus’ teaching in 5:21–48 by taking it literalistically or legalistically, making it into something that our Lord never intended it to be, that is, casuistic legislation that offers comprehensive situational application for every possible scenario. (CC)

**5:21** *it was said*. The contrast that Jesus sets up (vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) is not between the OT and his teaching (he has just established the validity of the OT Law). Rather, it is between externalistic interpretation of the rabbinic tradition on the one hand, and Jesus’ correct interpretation of the Law on the other. (CSB)

This means what the disciples had heard from Jewish religious teachers such as the scribes and Pharisees. (TLSB)

ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις—The aorist indicative “you heard” could very well be translated as an English perfect, “You have heard” (so KJV, NASB, RSV, ESV, NIV). I have retained a somewhat more wooden past tense in order more clearly to show the contrast between what Jesus’ disciples *heard* and what Jesus by his own authority now *says* to them. One should not think that the invalid biblical interpretations or applications that Jesus rejects in 5:21–48 were universally held in all of Judaism. The belief that anger deserves punishment just as much as actual murder does was found elsewhere in early Judaism. (CC)

Jesus is not merely quoting the OT. Rather, Jesus refers to various scribal interpretations of the Torah in order to offer by way of contrast his own authoritative interpretation. When Jesus directly quotes the OT, he never introduces the citation with ἐρρέθη, “It was said.” Instead, he uses expressions such as “It is written” (γέγραπται, 4:4, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:31); “What this is” (τί ἐστίν, 9:13; 12:7); “The prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled that says” (ἀναπληροῦται ... ἡ προφητεία Ἡσαΐου ἢ λέγουσα, 13:14); “Isaiah prophesied, saying” (ἐπροφήτευσεν ... Ἡσαΐας λέγων, 15:7); “God said” (ὁ ... θεὸς εἶπεν, 15:4); “David in the Spirit ... , saying” (Δαυὶδ ἐν πνεύματι ... λέγων, 22:43); and “Have not/never you read?” (οὐκ/οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε, 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31). (CC)

*Those of old* – τοῖς ἀρχαίοις—The dative noun cannot be translated as an agent, “by the ancients.” The dative case very rarely expresses personal agency, and then only normally with a perfect middle or passive verb form, whereas ἐρρέθη is aorist. (CC)

*murder*. Several Hebrew and Greek verbs mean “kill.” The ones used here and in Ex 20:13 specifically mean “murder.” (CSB)

οὐ φονεύσεις· ὃς δᾶν φονεύσῃ, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει—The negated second person future indicative φονεύσεις has the force of an imperative: “Do not murder.” οὐ φονεύσεις agrees verbatim with LXX Ex 20:15 (MT/ET 20:13) and LXX Deut 5:18 (MT/ET 5:17). This is the first reference in Mt 5:21–48 to what “was said.” It combines a direct quotation of Scripture—the Fifth Commandment—with a commentary upon it: “And whoever murders will be liable to the judgment.” This further shows that Jesus is contrasting his interpretation of the Torah with other views that were current in the first century, rather than just with the Torah itself. (CC)

*liable to judgment*. From a human court. (TLSB)

**5:22** *but I say* – ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν—The pronoun ἐγὼ is unnecessary (since the verb λέγω is first person), and therefore emphatic: “But I myself am saying to you ...” This adds to the contrast between what Jesus’ hearers have heard from others who interpreted the Torah and what Jesus himself now declares to them as the true meaning of God’s Word. (CC)

Jesus stated His own teaching with the voice of authority (cf. vv. 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 7:29). “Christ takes the Law into His hands and explains it spiritually” (FC SD V 10). (TLSB)

*Is angry* – Jesus takes aim at an understanding of the Fifth Commandment that his disciples had “heard” (5:21) from some Jewish teachers in their first-century context. Murder makes one liable to divine judgment. In itself, of course, this teaching is correct. But the Fifth Commandment entails more, and Jesus reveals the fullness of God’s intention in giving the commandment against unjustly taking the life of another. You can “murder” someone in your

heart or with your words. Bitter insults partake of the same poisonous root as murder itself, and there is no essential difference in the sight of God; murder, anger, and bitter insults all can lead down the road to eternal damnation. It is an especially grievous matter when a disciple treats a fellow Christian, a “brother” (5:22), in this way. (CC)

Murder and anger both alike incur God’s wrath. Yet this teaching does not mean that anger and insult are identical to murder *in every respect*—and this is a crucially important distinction. Murder and anger are most certainly *not* identical in terms of the damage they may do in the horizontal realm of human relationships, or even in terms of the damage they do to the spiritual life of the sinner. James the brother of the Lord makes this dramatically clear in his epistle: “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14–15 ESV) both theologically and practically, some sins are more “fully grown” than others and more clearly indicate a dire spiritual condition or wreak more dreadful spiritual consequences. A pastor or a fellow Christian would not deal with a person who committed the sin of anger in the same way as a person who committed the sin of murder! (CC)

Nevertheless, from the beginning, God’s intention in the Fifth Commandment was to prohibit not only the outward, fully grown sin of murder, but also malice in the heart against one’s fellows, and especially one’s fellow believers. To violate this will of God, revealed in the OT through Moses and now revealed anew and interpreted by the authority of Jesus, is sin indeed, and those who follow Jesus will repent and urgently turn away from it. Reconciliation is the sign that disciples belong to Jesus, and “the refusal to be reconciled is the sign that the person no longer belongs to Jesus.” (CC)

*With his brother* – τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ—This first use of “brother” to mean “fellow disciple” flows from the first mention of God as “your Father” (5:16; also 5:45, 48, and often in chapter 6), the Father of Jesus’ disciples. This is a point of great significance. The Sermon on the Mount is overheard by, and in some sense also directed at, the spiritually ambivalent crowds who can only marvel at Jesus’ claim to authority when he is finished (7:28–29). But the Sermon’s truth of blessing and calling will only take root in those who because they are or become Jesus’ disciples can call God “Father” and regard each fellow disciple as a “brother” (ἀδελφός, 5:22–24). (CC)

Fellow believer. (TLSB)

*Judgment* – God’s judgment. (TLSB)

*Raca*. May be related to the Aramaic word for “empty” and mean “Empty-head!” (CSB)

ῥακά—BDAG describes the debate over the precise force of this “term of abuse/put-down relating to lack of intelligence, *numskull*, *fool*.” That it is a negative term is certain from the context in which Jesus here uses it, standing as it does between “being angry” and “fool.” (CC)

*Sanhedrin*. Religious court. (TLSB)

*You fool* – Duzzle Tier – Fool is a word of contumely (Rudeness or contempt in behavior or speech; insolence. An insulting remark or act) which is more forceful than “raca”; for “raca” belongs in sphere of the intellect, while “fool” touches upon the ethical domain. (Ylvisaker)

μωρόε—Jesus’ prohibition against calling someone a “fool” must not be absolute, since in 23:17 Jesus himself calls the scribes and Pharisees “fools and blind men” (μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί). The book

of Proverbs contains many descriptions of the kind of person whom God considers a “fool,” and Pss 14:1 and 53:2 (53:1) declare, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” See also 1 Cor 15:36, where Paul calls a hypothetical questioner “Fool!” (ἄφρων). (CC)

Another term expressing anger and abuse. (TLSB)

*hell.* The Greek word is *ge(h)enna*, which derives its name from a deep ravine south of Jerusalem, the “Valley of (the Sons of) Hinnom” (Hebrew *ge’ hinnom*). During the reigns of the wicked Ahaz and Manasseh, human sacrifices to the Ammonite god Molech were offered there. Josiah desecrated the valley because of the pagan worship there (2Ki 23:10; see Jer 7:31–32; 19:6). It became a sort of perpetually burning city dump and later a figure for the place of final punishment. (CSB)

Lit, rubbish pit near Jerusalem, where fire always smoldered. Symbolic of eternal punishment. “He says that we must not kill, neither with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help, nor counsel” (LC I 182). (TLSB)

τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός—Literally, this is “the Gehenna of fire”; the genitive is descriptive in a Semitic way. The term γέεννα originally referred to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, a ravine on the south side of Jerusalem. The place was regarded as desecrated because of the human sacrifices to Molech that apostate Israelites offered there (2 Ki 23:10; 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31–32; 32:35). From the second century BC onward, the place was “equated with the hell of the last judgment.” (CC)

**5:23 offering** – ἐὰν οὖν προσφέρῃς—This use of οὖν is truly inferential. The exhortations of 5:23–24 follow logically and ineluctably from the seriousness of the sin of “murdering” your brother through anger or words (5:22). (CC)

*The altar* – τὸ θυσιαστήριον—This is presumably the huge altar that stood in front of the Herodian temple. Its dimensions were “fifteen cubits high, and with a breadth and length extending alike to fifty cubits, in shape a square with horn-like projections at the corners, and approached from the south by a gently sloping acclivity.” (CC)

Jesus’ statement about bringing an offering to the altar of the temple that was destroyed in AD 70 shows the extent to which his teaching is directed at first-century realities. Valid applications to modern situations have to take into account the differences between our historical context and that which Jesus presupposed. (CC)

This is an offering to be sacrificed on the temple altar. Augustine: ‘We may interpret the altar spiritually, as being faith itself in the inner temple of God, whether prophecy, or teaching, or prayer, or a psalm, or a hymn, and whatever other such like spiritual gift occurs to the mind, it cannot be acceptable to God unless it be sustained by sincerity of faith’ (NPNF1 6:12-13). (TLSB)

Although the “altar” of 5:23–24 is clearly not to be equated with altars in modern church buildings, there is a fortuitous theological connection by way of Paul’s teaching regarding the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. Believers must not approach the Eucharist when they are harboring division and especially bitterness and a competitive, comparing spirit over against their fellow communicants. To do so invites God’s judgment. The liturgical custom of the “passing of the peace” immediately before the eucharistic distribution is a meaningful opportunity

for all in the congregation to acknowledge that the reconciliation Christ Jesus has effected in his death and resurrection must remove bitter divisions between those who commune together. (CC)

*something against you.* A fellow believer has a grievance against the worshiper. (TLSB)

**5:24** *first be reconciled* – ὑπάγε πρώτον διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου—Robertson notes the classical idiom of linking ὑπάγε with another imperative, here διαλλάγηθι (“go ... be reconciled”). The forms of ὑπάγω used in the NT always employ the present stem, and many of the imperative forms of this verb in Matthew are linked to another imperative. (CC)

The first priority for a worshiper is to seek reconciliation with an offended believer. (TLSB)

He does not specify in 5:23–24 the type of sacrificial offering that one might be bringing to the altar. His point, however, is clear and taught throughout Scripture. The believer cannot pretend that the horizontal relationships that he carries on with his fellows are independent of his relationship with God. His vertical relationship with God must affect his horizontal relationships with his brothers. Unless a broken horizontal relationship is repaired and nourished, it can damage the vertical relationship. If you remember that you have sinned against your brother and he has something against you, you cannot go to church and act as if nothing needs to be done! (CC)

Matthew 15:18-19, <sup>18</sup> But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Luke 6:43-45, <sup>43</sup> “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>44</sup> Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. <sup>45</sup> The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

*Then come and offer your gift* – καὶ τότε ἐλθὼν πρόσφερε τὸ δῶρόν σου—The present tense of the imperative πρόσφερε does not, by itself, justify an ongoing translation, such as ours (“and then come and *resume offering* your gift”). But in 5:23 Jesus describes an act with a present subjunctive (ἐὰν οὖν προσφέρῃς, “if you are bringing”) that was interrupted. The context, then, justifies translating the present imperative πρόσφερε here in 5:24 as “resume offering.” (CC)

**5:25** *come to terms quickly* – ταχύ—As with πλεῖον (“greatly”) in 5:20, this neuter singular adjective functions as an adverb, “quickly.” (CC)

Jesus’ second illustration is a judicial one (5:25–26). He urges the same truth as in 5:21–24, underscored by an “amen” saying (“*Truly* I say to you,” 5:26). It is not necessary to treat this illustration like a parable or other form of allegory in which the “opponent,” “judge,” and the judge’s “servant” represent specific figures. Jesus’ point is clear enough. Do not neglect your relationships with fellow disciples. Be reconciled; give up your anger and seek forgiveness. Just as the sin of murder is damnable before God, so is the sin of anger and bitterness. Before him all sinners are alike in their need for mercy, which he provides in Jesus (5:7). (CC)

Jesus urged immediate action in resolving disputes. (TLSB)

Ephesians 4:26-27, <sup>26</sup>“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.”

*While you are going...to court* – μήποτε σε παραδῶ ὁ ἀντίδικος—The negated subjunctive verb παραδῶ forms a negative purpose clause: “lest, so that this does not happen,” that is, “lest that opponent hand you over.” The definite article in ὁ ἀντίδικος is anaphoric; “*the/that* opponent” refers back to τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου, “your opponent,” mentioned earlier in 5:25. (CC)

*Put you in prison* – καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν βληθήσῃ—After the subjunctive (παραδῶ) in the preceding negative purpose clause, the future indicative verb βληθήσῃ denotes a “further consequence” (BDF, § 369.3) to be avoided. Not only will you be handed over to the judge and then in turn to the attendant, but also “you will be thrown into prison.” (CC)

**5:26 penny.** The smallest Roman copper coin. (CSB)

The end for someone who is angry with a fellow believer (v 22) and does not seek reconciliation (vv 24–25) is imprisonment. (TLSB)

οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν, ἕως ἂν ἀποδῶς τὸν ἔσχατον κοδράντην—According to Blomberg, the κοδράντης is “the second smallest Roman coin in first-century currency.” As indicated in the textual note on 1:25, the precise semantics of “until” clauses in Matthew must be decided on the basis of context, and not on the basis of grammar alone. The sense of this verse, especially in light of the dangers of “fiery Gehenna” in 5:22, seems *not* to be, “After you have paid the last cent, *then you will get out* from there [from prison],” but rather, “You will not get out from there without paying the last cent, and in fact, *you will never get out.*” Instead of referring to a time of release, the clause refers to the severity of the exacting punishment. (CC)

**5:21–26** Jesus teaches that not only murder but also anger makes one liable to the hell of fire. He urges His disciples to energetically seek reconciliation with fellow believers who might be vexed with them. This stern preaching of the Law causes us to take stock of our own behavior and to confess that we often, through sinful anger, fall. Our only hope for salvation is to trust the reconciliation that Christ accomplished by His sacrificial death (cf 2Co 5:19). Having been reconciled to God, we may be reconciled with one another. • Mighty Judge, cover my outbursts of sinful anger with the embrace of Your reconciling peace. Amen. (TLSB)

### **Adultery**

**<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.**

**5:27-30** Jesus speaks now with authority about God’s original intention in the Sixth Commandment (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18). In Mt 5:27 he merely cites the commandment itself and does not explicitly mention or add any of the current understandings of this commandment among Jewish teachers of his day. The larger context, however, shows that Jesus will be contrasting inadequate interpretations of “You shall not commit adultery” with God’s true intention for sexual purity among his people, the disciples of Jesus. (CC)

God's will is that his people exhibit sexual purity in inner thought as well as outward deed. In the heart, a man or woman can fall into grievous sin, for out of the heart come the various sins that defile a person (15:18–20). Impure thoughts are a radical danger to the life of discipleship, both for OT Israel and for Jesus' disciples. (CC)

**5:27** *not commit adultery* – οὐ μοιχεύσεις—This negated second person future indicative has the force of an imperative. This Greek translation of the Sixth Commandment agrees verbatim with LXX Ex 20:13 (MT/ET 20:14) and LXX Deut 5:17 (MT/ET 5:18). See also the third textual note on 5:21, with οὐ φονεύσεις. (CC)

**5:28** *looks...with lustful intent* – πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτήν—Matthew uses πρὸς τό plus an infinitive to express purpose in 6:1; 13:30; 23:5. The same construction in 26:12 can hardly be purpose in the strict sense, as if the woman who anointed Jesus specifically intended to anoint him for burial; probably closer to the mark there is a sense of result. If one takes this construction here in 5:28 as strictly purpose, Jesus' meaning is severely narrowed: a man commits adultery only if he looks at a woman for the purpose—with the prior intent—of desiring her. However, Jesus' meaning seems broader than that,<sup>3</sup> so I have translated the construction as “so as to desire her” to allow not just for purpose, but also for result: with no prior intent to sin, a man may look upon a woman, but if he then desires her, he has already committed adultery. (CC)

The manuscript tradition shows a slight grammatical “discomfort” with the accusative αὐτήν, “her.” Some manuscripts read αὐτῆς, the genitive of the feminine personal pronoun, since the verb ἐπιθυμέω, “to desire,” often takes a genitive case object. Grammatically, then, the accusative pronoun could be the *subject* of the infinitive, resulting in this translation: “Every man who looks at a woman so that *she* desires ...” However, contextually that is highly unlikely, so I have taken the accusative pronoun as both the original reading and as the object of the infinitive. (CC)

Burning sexual desire (1Co 7:9). (TLSB)

*Already...adultery ...in his heart* – ἤδη ἐμοίχευσεν αὐτήν—The combination of the adverb ἤδη, “already,” and the aorist indicative ἐμοίχευσεν, “he committed adultery,” produces an English perfect: “he *has* already committed adultery.” The sin has already happened. (CC)

Sin is not merely outward action. Jesus identified the sinful heart as the source of all evil (15:19). Augustine: “There are three things which go to complete sin: the suggestion of, the taking pleasure in, and the consenting to” (NPNF 1 6:15. (Cf. Gn. 3:6; 1 John 2:16. (TLSB)

This brings to mind the three steps in Psalm 1:1. See notes below:

*walk in.* Order his life according to. (CSB)

Don't begin to accept their values. (PBC)

“go with the wicked in their planning” (Beck)

Not follow their advice, plans or pattern of life. (IB)

“who has not shaped his conduct after the principles (plans) of the ungodly.” (Leupold)

*Wicked* – Getting loose from God and falling into evil. (Leupold)

*counsel.* Deliberations and advice (see Pr 1:10–19).

*stand.* Station oneself.

Don't hang around with them. (PBC)

We do not slow down to “stand in the way of sinners,” listening to their supposed wisdom and joining them in their sinful actions. (LL)

*sinners.* See v. 5; those for whom evil is habitual, for whom wickedness is a way of life. (CSB)

Means their manner of living. When a man “takes his stand” in such a way he is committed to the nefarious (evil – infamous) way of life that marks all who are walking in it. (Leupold)

*sit.* Settle oneself. – Make yourself comfortable. (PBC)

“Nor taken seat in the assembly of scoffers.” Birds of a feather flock together. Mockery and ridicule of that which is holy have often drawn men together in this unholy cause. This last has plainly advanced farthest away from God. (Leupold)

Mention is made here of the “seat” of the scoffers. They come together for the purpose of holding unholy sessions, so that one may encourage the other in his enmity against God. They talk together with unrestraint, and so their exchange of ideas develops into a scoffing session, as one encourages the other by displaying a bold front in defiance of God's Word and will. The sin of scoffing, mocking, and indulging in profanities flourishes best in the company of like-minded people. Everyone who attends such a meeting is apt to be swept away to engage also in such wicked talk. (Stoeckhardt)

*Walk...stand...sit* – Luther and birds overhead but not nest in hair. – It does briefly indicate that, when a man once begins to live in the company of men who are separated from God, both will find themselves becoming involved ever more deeply. (Leupold)

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The English idiom “already has committed adultery *with her*” should not be misunderstood to imply that the woman must be guilty of complicity in the sin. Notice that in the Greek, the woman is the direct object of the verb: the man (literally) “already has adulterated her.” He has committed the sin. Notice too that the sin occurred “in *his* heart.” (CC)

As we noted about anger and murder, we note here too that lust is not the same as adultery *in every respect*. For one thing, whereas physical adultery involves the willing complicity of both parties in the sin, when the adultery is committed only in a man's or woman's lustful thinking, the other party is innocent of any wrongdoing. Jesus' wording in 5:28 places the blame squarely on the one who is looking with such evil intent. And to repeat the comment from the discussion above on 5:21-26, the spiritual condition of someone who commits physical adultery will not be identical to that of someone who looks lustfully but refrains from acting upon that desire. A person who commits physical adultery but then genuinely repents surely is forgiven completely in Christ (cf. Jn 8:11), as also is a person who commits adultery in the heart and then repents. However, as Jesus indicates in Mt 19:9, physical adultery may cause irreparable damage to a person's marriage (and perhaps other relationships), and broken marriages in turn negatively impact the church and society in many ways. To be sure, lustful thoughts damage marriage and other relationships, but those relationships may remain even though the one who commits

adultery in the heart struggles and repeatedly commits the inner sin, then repents. Finally, an obvious difference is that, unlike lust, physical adultery can result in the communication of venereal diseases and also in pregnancy, and children born into broken homes may suffer a lifetime of dysfunctional relationships. (CC)

**5:29–30** Jesus is not teaching self-mutilation, for even a blind man can lust. The point is that we should deal as drastically with sin as necessary. (CSB)

This is hyperbole, though such punishment was known (*Jos, Life, 169*). Jesus used strong and exaggerated language to emphasize the seriousness of sexual sins. Such sins (and other abuses) wreak havoc with personal relationships. If an eye or hand leads one to commit sin, it would be better to get rid of these body parts than go to hell (cf. 18:8-9). (TLSB)

**5:29** *causes you to sin* – σκανδαλίζει—Of the twenty-nine NT occurrences of the verb σκανδαλίζω, Matthew’s Gospel uses it fourteen times. Although context must indicate the severity of the stumbling, virtually every time in Matthew it involves the very real danger of apostasy and damnation. Since Jesus in 5:29 and 5:30 compares the alternatives of entering life with a body part missing versus the whole self being thrown into Gehenna, the verb in 5:29 and 5:30 has its strongest possible force: the person who stumbles is excluded from eternal life and instead is damned to Gehenna, hell. It also has that strongest meaning in 11:6; 13:21, 57; 18:6, 8, 9; 24:10; 26:31, 33. In 15:12, the verb may have the lesser force of “offend,” and it certainly conveys that lesser meaning in 17:27. (CC)

*Tear it out* – συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ...—This expression is repeated in both 5:29 and 5:30. The verb συμφέρει is impersonal: “It is better.” The subject of the verb (the “it”) is the entire clause headed by ἵνα, “that one of your members perish and your whole body not be thrown into Gehenna” (5:29), as reflected in the translation. The two subjunctive verbs (“perish” and “[not] be thrown”) are part of the same ἵνα clause.

Therefore, radical action must be taken over against lustful thoughts and desires, for in the sight of God such “inner adultery” is the same as the external action. To lose an eye or a hand is no small thing; neither will it be painless to turn aside from the temptations and habits of sinful lust. Left unchecked, such desires can lead to damnation. With a strong hyperbole the Lord lays out the options. Which is better for you? To be resurrected and then cast with your body intact into hell’s eternal torment, or the resurrection to eternal life without an eye or a hand? Be rid of such desires when they arise in your heart! (CC)

**5:27–30** The question asked in Pr 6:27 depicts the dangers that arise from lustful intentions: “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?” Christ wants us to exhibit sexual purity in our inner thoughts as well as our outward deeds. When we are guilty of sexual sins, Christ calls us to repentance and faith, to look to His cross for pardon and cleansing. • “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps 51:10). Amen. (TLSB)

### *Divorce*

**<sup>31</sup> “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**

**5:31** *give her a certificate of divorce* – δότω αὐτῇ ἀποστάσιον—We know, on the basis of both the Mishnah and a first-century-AD specimen recovered at Masada, the essential wording of a first-century writ of divorce. The writ in the Mishnah reads as follows:

The essential formula in the bill of divorce is, “Lo, thou art free to marry any man.” R. Judah says: “Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation, that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt.” The essential formula in a writ of emancipation is, “Lo, thou art a freedwoman: lo, thou belongest to thyself.” (CC)

The writ discovered at Masada, dated to AD 72, reads: “That you are free on your part to go and become the wife of any Jewish man that you wish. And this is to be for you from me a writ of divorce and a *get* [גט] of release.” Notice that the very wording of the writ assumes that the woman who has been divorced will remarry. (CC)

The essential wording of a divorce certificate was “Lo, you are free to marry any man.” Cf 19:3–9, where the Pharisees question Jesus about divorce. (TLSB)

**5:32** *except for marital unfaithfulness*. Neither Mk 10:11–12 nor Lk 16:18 mentions this exception. (CSB)

ESV has “sexual immorality.” The Greek word refers to adultery – sexual intercourse between a married man or woman and someone other than a spouse. Cf. Lev. 18 regarding other sexual sins. (TLSB)

παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας—The meaning of πορνεία here has been widely debated. Some attempt to limit its meaning to something like “incest” or “forbidden degrees of marriage,” with reference to Leviticus 18, which forbids marriages to close relatives. But the context here provides no clue for such a semantic narrowing. As the commentary will show, that limited meaning also neglects to take sufficiently into account the debates going on in Judaism between the schools of Hillel and Shammai in the first century AD. The term πορνεία here probably retains its common, broad meaning, “adultery,” that is, intercourse by a married man or married woman with someone other than his wife or her husband. Since in this context it pertains to married persons, it is better translated “adultery” than “fornication.” (“Fornication” can refer generally to intercourse between any people besides husband and wife, but it also can refer more specifically to intercourse between unmarried people.) (CC)

This phrase, “except for a matter of adultery,” pertains to both cases—both the man who divorces his wife (5:32a) and the man who marries a divorced woman (5:32b). (CC)

ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι—The Lord’s words here refer specifically to the sinfulness of the husband who wrongfully divorces his wife. The husband is the subject of ποιεῖ, which means “he makes” or “he causes” the sin. It is not immediately clear whether, or in what way, the wife is also guilty of sin, for “he *makes* her to have adultery committed [against her].” This use of the aorist passive infinitive μοιχευθῆναι in 5:32 is different, for instance, from the passive use of μοιχεύω in both Sirach 23:23 and Josephus, *Antiquities*, 7.131 (7.7.1), where the woman had adultery committed with her, and she is also guilty of sin. Here in Mt 5:32 the woman wrongfully divorced is *not* guilty of sin. When a man is the subject of the active voice of μοιχεύω and a woman is the object, the sense might be woodenly rendered as “he adulterated her” or more idiomatically as “he committed adultery with her” (cf. BDAG, s.v. μοιχεύω, b β). In the passages in Sirach and *Antiquities*, the sense of the passive voice of μοιχεύω with the woman as the subject of the verb is expressed woodenly as “she was adulterated,” and there is no doubt that the woman fully participated in the sexual sin. (CC)

Here in 5:32, the husband who divorces his wife except for a matter of *πορνεία* “makes her to be adulterated.” How precisely does wrongful divorce by the husband cause the *innocent* wife to have adultery committed against her? (Presumably, a wife who wrongfully divorces her husband likewise would cause adultery to be committed against him.) BDAG (s.v. *μοιχεύω*, β β) explains that a passive form of the verb with a woman as subject has an active meaning and says regarding 5:32 that by the wrongful divorce the husband “causes her [the wife] to commit adultery (if she contracts a subsequent marriage).” In light of contemporary practice of divorce in first-century Judaism, this is almost certainly correct; see the commentary on 5:31-32 and especially on 19:3–12. (CC)

NA<sup>27</sup> gives no variant readings at all for this clause. As a salutary reminder that the textual apparatus in NA<sup>27</sup> is a mere summary of the evidence, Swanson notes that most of the manuscripts used for his database read *μοιχᾶσθαι* (the present passive infinitive of *μοιχάω*) in place of *μοιχευθῆναι*. In either reading, the woman is still the subject of the infinitive. Since the passive voice of *μοιχάω* can mean “be caused to commit adultery” (BDAG, 1), the meaning is not changed by the variant. The variant *μοιχᾶσθαι* is probably caused by assimilation to the near context; the last clause in 5:32 has another form of *μοιχάω*. (CC)

The focus here is on the responsibility of the husband in matters of marriage and divorce. What have Jesus’ disciples heard from others? What “was said” (5:31) by teachers in Judaism regarding God’s will for husbands and the way they should deal with their wives? Jesus summarizes the teaching that stands in contrast to God’s intended truth; in effect, it is “If you are going to divorce your wife, you must give to her a certificate of divorce.” The main clause in 5:31 receives the main emphasis: “Let him give to her a certificate of divorce.” The question for some at least in Judaism was not whether or under what circumstances to divorce, but *how* to do so. What Jesus quotes in 5:31 is not a citation of the Torah’s teaching, for the Law nowhere contains this command. Rather, Deut 24:1–4 *presupposes* or *permits* the practice of divorce and mentions the giving of a certificate of divorce, but that is not the subject of the passage. (CC)

Deut 24:1–4 reads:

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if she does not find favor in his eyes because he has found in her some indecency [MT: עֲרֻתָּהּ רָבָה; LXX: ἄσχημον πρόγμια], and he writes for her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and belongs to another man, and the latter man hates her and writes for her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man who took her to be his wife dies, then the first man who sent her away may not remarry her by again taking her to be his wife, after she had been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not cause sin in the land that the LORD your God is giving to you as an inheritance. (CC)

The Hillel-Shammai debate centered around two issues. First was the meaning of the phrase rendered “some indecency.” The Hebrew construct phrase is literally “nakedness of a word/matter/thing,” meaning “indecency” or evidence of prior “improper behavior.” The LXX translates it as “shameful matter.” The school of Shammai took the phrase to mean “adultery,” which then was the only grounds for divorce allowed by that passage. But the followers of Hillel had a looser interpretation: (CC)

[They] concluded that the strangeness of the phrase suggested that there was an extra meaning hidden in it. ... They therefore concluded that the two words referred to two

different grounds for divorce—“indecency” and “a matter.” This meant that one could base a divorce on an act of “indecency” or on “a matter,” which meant “any matter.” (CC)

Thus the first-century debates between Pharisaic schools shifted the emphasis from that in the Scriptures to casuistic arguments and splitting of hairs. The dominant interpretation of Deut 24:1–4 and matters of divorce at the time of Jesus’ ministry was almost certainly the more lax view of the school of Hillel, which allowed a husband to divorce his wife for virtually any cause whatsoever. Divorce itself was assumed to be an available and acceptable option. The really important thing was to divorce in the right way. The lengthy and detailed discussion found in the Mishnah is eloquent testimony to the deeply flawed hermeneutic that guided at least some teachers in first-century Judaism. All this is probably what “was said” by some in Judaism about divorce (5:31). (CC)

Is God’s will for marriage merely that when a divorce is chosen, the divorce should take place according to some legal procedure that grants a measure of protection and future security to the wife who is being put away? With divine authority Jesus reveals the truth that marriage is much more than that! In a stunningly comprehensive revelation, he categorically denies the validity of divorce in general, though he acknowledges that where sexual unfaithfulness (*πορνεία*) has occurred, then divorce may be regarded as permitted. Divorce is *never* God’s will or intention. When a man divorces his wife, he separates what God has joined together (see 19:6), and it is the same as him committing adultery and forcing his injured or innocent wife into a remarriage that, likewise, is tantamount to an adulterous union *because it destroys the marriage union that God has created* (5:32a). Jesus’ words continue to address the same situation in 5:32b. Even a man who marries a woman who was wrongfully divorced—who was divorced for a reason other than sexual unfaithfulness—participates in the violation of the original marriage; he too commits adultery! (CC)

Divorce is the same as adultery, because both violate and destroy marriage. However, is divorce the same as adultery *in every respect*? As with the previous topics (anger versus murder in 5:21–26 and lust versus physical adultery in 5:27–30), so here too, even though the two sins may have different practical consequences, both are equally culpable and damnable in God’s sight. Nevertheless, divorce is not the same as adultery in every way. When two people are involved in literal adultery, both parties are equally guilty. But an unjust divorce, that is, one that occurs for a reason other than literal adultery, involves the wronged spouse in “adultery,” and yet she is not guilty. Practically speaking, divorce inflicts greater harm on children, relatives, and the fabric of society, whereas less harm is done by adultery if the spouses can reconcile and remain married. (CC)

Furthermore, should Jesus’ teaching in 5:31–32 be understood as a comprehensive declaration that covers every situation and that brooks no qualifications or exceptions? On the face of it, that seems inherently unlikely. We have already seen in the context immediately before this teaching that there are obvious ways that such qualifications for Jesus’ words are both natural and necessary (see the commentary on 5:21–26 and on 5:27–30). In each of the units of the following context (5:33–37; 5:38–42; and 5:43–48), a similar hermeneutic prevails. Perhaps it might be helpful to offer just one example of how it seems unjust to take Jesus’ teaching literalistically. Jesus declares that if a wife is wrongfully divorced by her husband, then he makes her participate in adultery. Yet she is the innocent party! What is she to do if her sinning husband then remarries, precluding the chance that she could reconcile with him (cf. 1 Cor 7:11)? The Lord’s words “everyone who divorces his wife . . . makes her to have adultery committed [against her]” (Mt 5:32) can hardly be understood as saying that the *innocent party* in a cruel divorce must not

remarry, lest she be guilty of permanent adultery with her second husband. Moreover, if a man is permitted to divorce a wife who was *guilty* of adultery, would that guilty party then be free to remarry? That is what a literalistic reading could conclude, for Jesus' words, strictly speaking, only forbid unjust divorce and remarriage after an unjust divorce. To the other extreme, a strict, literalistic reading of Jesus' words might dictate that even an innocent spouse who is wrongly divorced could never remarry. But the Lutheran tradition, at least, has not been willing to read Jesus' words in that way. The Lutheran Confessions label as unjust "the tradition that prohibits remarriage of an innocent party after divorce." (CC)

I am acutely aware of writing these words in the early twenty-first century in the context of the morally relativistic climate in North America. Divorce is rampant in society at large, and the situation is only somewhat better among the ranks of those who hold membership in a Christian church. I am also acutely aware of the extent to which sinful human beings will abuse the teaching of Jesus in 5:31–32 once they are told that Jesus doesn't cover every possible situation here. That problem of abuse, however, cannot be solved by pretending that 5:31–32 is something that it is not. There are ways in which divorce or remarriage are *not* the same as adultery. Jesus' teaching here does not specifically address every conceivable situation that would allow divorce. Neither does he include circumstances that would allow a divorced spouse to remarry another. If one were to presume that he did, then the inevitable conclusion would be that the apostle Paul contradicts the teaching of his own Lord and Master, since Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 has a more extensive discussion that includes such allowances. (CC)

Nevertheless, what Jesus *does* teach is just what he says. In his day, as in ours, the common presumption in society was that divorce was not that big of a deal, and the important matter was just to carry out the divorce in the right way. Against this, the Lord's voice of authority thunders! Divorce is sin! Divorcing your spouse is like forcing her or him into an adulterous union! Divorce, like adultery, shatters a sacred union that God intends to be permanent. Even in the case of a spouse's sexual unfaithfulness, Jesus allows, but does not command divorce. Those who think that the goal is how to divorce and then "still be friends" or have an "amicable divorce" or "realize that neither one of us really was to blame" have strayed far from God's will in the Torah, which Jesus clarifies and amplifies in his teaching for his disciples. In this brief teaching, Jesus simply says, "Do not divorce." To do so is, in the sight of God, as terrible a sin as adultery itself. Instead, let your light shine in the presence of other people; be faithful to your marriage vows, and so bring honor to your Father in heaven (5:16). (CC)

*anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery* – ὅς ἐάν ἀπολελυμένην γαμήσῃ, μοιχᾶται—The last verb is from μοιχάω, which is used only in the passive voice in the LXX and the NT. BDAG, 1, offers the meaning "be caused to commit adultery, be an adulterer/adulteress, commit adultery." The parallel in Lk 16:18 has μοιχεύει. This supports understanding the passive voice as having an active meaning also here: the man who "marries a divorced woman *commits adultery*." (CC)

Because marriage was often arranged for economic purposes, frequent divorces forced women into adulterous remarriages. (TLSB)

A man who married a divorced woman was guilty of adultery. However, Scripture acknowledges that in some cases a believer may not be at fault in a divorce (1 Cor. 7:15). In such circumstances, forbidding the believer to remarry could double his sorrow. (TLSB)

Once again, the Lord's teaching is in some ways difficult to understand precisely. Presumably, the woman he marries was divorced wrongfully; she is a woman who was divorced for some

reason other than adultery (πορνεία, 5:32a). Does the man who marries such a woman commit adultery because his marriage to her is not recognized by God? Or does the man who marries a wrongfully divorced woman somehow participate in that prior wrong by marrying the divorced woman? (CC)

Reading the sign of the cross in marriage means growing together in the Word, praying with and for each other, and encouraging and supporting one another with the Word of God. A recent study in a secular university found that of the 1287 couples who daily prayer and studied God's Word together, only one marriage ended in divorce. (.3 %) The national average for divorce now hovers near 50%. (Tom E. Eggold – 8/15/ 2010)

**5:31–32** Jesus condemns the easy divorce practices of His day that resulted in adulterous relationships. He teaches that the sacred union of marriage is lifelong. Jesus' authoritative teaching concerning divorce has often been violated, as have His teachings about other sins (cf vv 21–42). As God's children, we all need Jesus' teaching and encouragement to let our lights shine as we faithfully fulfill our marriage vows and honor the vows of others. The child of God who is guilty of a sinful divorce has the assurance that Jesus bore this sin also. • Lord Jesus, take away our sin. Be the cord that binds together Christian wives and husbands. Amen. (TLSB)

### ***Oaths***

**33** “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ **34** But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; **35** or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. **36** And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. **37** Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

**5:33** *again you have heard* – πάλιν ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις—This beginning marks 5:33–48 as the second triad of teachings in Jesus' authoritative interpretation of the Torah. (The first triad was 5:21–32.) The marker is a structural one; there is no evident reason why these two sets of three topics each are grouped as they are. Three features indicate the beginning of this second triad. First, Jesus uses the full introductory formula, “You heard that it was said to the ancients,” which had not occurred since Jesus used it to begin the first triad (5:21). Second, Jesus adds the adverb πάλιν, “again,” before the full formula. Third, each unit of Jesus' teaching in the first triad began with the generalizing participle “everyone who ...” (πᾶς ὁ plus a participle in 5:22, 28, 32), but that stylistic feature is absent from the three units that now follow in 5:33–48, indicating that they are a new set of units. (CC)

*you shall not swear falsely* – οὐκ ἐπιορκήσεις—The negated second person future indicative has the force of an imperative. The verb ἐπιορκέω occurs only here in the NT, and in the LXX only in 1 Esdras 1:46 and Wisdom 14:28. Some argue that it means “swear falsely, perjure oneself” (BDAG, 1), but perjury is obviously sinful, and there would be no need for Jesus to denounce it. Most likely it means “break one's oath” (BDAG, 2). Jesus is not citing the OT here. The Second Commandment uses a different idiom that literally renders the Hebrew: οὐ λήμψη τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου ἐπὶ ματαίῳ (LXX Ex 20:7; Deut 5:11). (CC)

Jesus' authoritative interpretation of Torah continues in a second triad of subjects. Especially for modern Western readers, the topic to which Jesus' teaching now turns firmly locates Jesus' ministry and Matthew's Gospel in a first-century Jewish context. An elaborate system of ranking oaths as to their validity and binding force existed among at least some teachers in Palestinian

Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Jesus broaches the subject not with a citation from the OT, but with a reference to that hierarchy of oath-taking. In light of Jesus' criticisms in 5:34–36, his reference in 5:33 to what his disciples were hearing from some teaching authorities could be paraphrased as follows: “Do not break oaths. Rather, be sure to honor the oaths that are sworn directly to the Lord, for these have a more binding force than oaths that are sworn by something else.” (CC)

Just as OT Law permitted divorce, so also the swearing of oaths was allowed. Jesus condemned swearing falsely and breaking an oath. (TLSB)

**5:34-36** *by heaven...earth...Jerusalem...head* – θρόνος ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ—The subject, unexpressed here, is “heaven” in the preceding phrase, and this phrase is the predicate. “Throne” is the predicate nominative, and the clause is a good example of Colwell’s Rule. For other reasons, it is clear that “heaven” is not just “a throne of God” but “the throne of God”; in other words, the context makes it clear that the noun “heaven” is definite rather than indefinite. When such a definite noun precedes the linking verb in its own clause, as here, it typically lacks the article. The identical construction occurs twice in 5:35. (CC)

μήτε εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα—This use of εἰς is unusual, especially since ἐν has already been used twice (5:34b, 35a) to express that “by” which an oath is not to be sworn. The change of preposition likely signals the end of the three-item sequence (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ... ἐν τῇ γῆ ... εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα) and identifies the next clause (5:36) as a new sentence with its own main verb: μήτε ... ὁμόση. (CC)

πόλις ἐστὶν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως—Since the first two items (“heaven” and “earth”) by which men are not to swear belong to God, it is likely that the third one, Jerusalem, is here viewed as God’s city and the “great King” is God himself. (CC)

Jesus criticizes that hierarchy of oaths on two grounds. First, the Son of God condemns the entire mindset that assigns varying degrees of importance or binding force to a solemn promise depending on the particular formula or wording of the promise. To swear by heaven or earth or Jerusalem is all the same as invoking the name of God himself. All things in creation belong to God and are related to him. Oaths and promises that invoke as binding authorities such things that are related to God cannot be ranked or quantified. Words are more important than that. Any oath is a promise to God. It is better not to swear at all (5:34–35)! (CC)

Second, Jesus rejects the distinctions that had become important in first-century Judaism because, while causing words themselves to be devalued, such casuistry also causes people to have an inflated view of their own importance and significance. To swear by one’s own head implies that one can actually effect a change of some significance. Jesus pointedly underscores how self-deceptive that is. No man can even change the color of a single hair on his own head. Why, then, swear by means of it? Let spoken words have their proper significance, and let the people who speak them remember their own frame, that they are but dust (Ps 103:14) and that nothing will prosper and no vow will be kept unless God enables it to happen (James 4:13–17). The tendency to use words carelessly, to break promises, and to exalt oneself by means of one’s words come from one certain source: “the evil one” (5:37), Satan himself, the father of broken and misleading and empty promises. (CC)

Modern applications are close at hand. In our legal system, how often is the promise to “tell the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but the truth” nothing but a sham and a mockery? Even words that are not framed as a formal oath have power, and we are responsible for what we say and how we say it. How many attempts to repair damaged relationships are stalled when one person hides

behind the form of his words with the excuse “Well, all I said was ...”? This metaphor still has power, and all the more for its rarity: “His word is his bond.” The disciples of Jesus can be such men and women, and in saying what they mean and only what they mean, they will salt the earth (5:13). (CC)

As already noted, Jesus’ words here cannot be taken as a comprehensive prohibition against all oaths at all times. The same Lord who spoke of dragging a camel through the eye of a needle (19:24) and of chopping off body parts to avoid temptation (5:29–30) knows full well the power of hyperbole, of sweeping truth broadly stated. This same Lord, when placed under oath by the high priest, gave sufficient answer to set in motion his death and resurrection (26:63–64). (CC)

When taking an oath, many Jews refrained from using God’s name but substituted some other significant term. Jesus pointed out that other terms closely related to God (e.g., “His throne, footstool, city.” Some people believed that swearing by an object other than God lessened their responsibility for keeping the oath or vow (cf. 23:16-22). (TLSB)

**5:34** *do not take an oath*—ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ὀμόσαι—After the verb of saying (λέγω) the infinitive ὀμόσαι expresses indirect discourse. To express the same thing, instead of the infinitive, Matthew could have used a clause headed by ὅτι followed by ὀμόσης, an aorist subjunctive (which is in 5:36): “But I say to you *that* you should not swear.” (CC)

Jesus instructed His disciples to refrain from taking any oaths. “We are not to swear in support of evil, that is, to support falsehood, or to swear when there is no need or use. But we should swear for the support of good and the advantage of our neighbor” (LC 1 66). (TLSB)

**5:36** *your head* – This is another example of substituting a lesser object for God. But even the hairs on one’s head are under God’s governance. (TLSB)

**5:37** *yes...no* – Nevertheless, the disciples of Jesus are not to use words lightly or take oaths as if such swearing may or may not possess binding force. To make a promise in the presence of God or of human authorities that God has established is no trifling matter. Nor are Jesus’ disciples to have an inflated view of their own importance. Speech matters. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. It is the devil himself who wants you to think differently about your words. (CC)

The truthfulness of a believer’s yes or no cannot be enhanced by swearing an oath, as Peter found out (26:72-74). (TLSB)

*from evil* – ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ—I have translated “from the evil one,” that is, from Satan. In Matthew πονηρός occurs in simple adjectival use fifteen times, and eleven times it functions as a noun. In its nominal uses, it is neuter (“evil thing[s]”) in 5:11; 9:4; and 12:35 (third use). As a masculine form, it refers to evil human beings in 5:39, 45; 13:49; 22:10 and explicitly to Satan in 13:19, 38. In this verse and in the Lord’s Prayer (6:13), the genitive singular form (τοῦ πονηροῦ) can be either masculine or neuter. If it is the latter, it would signify the abstraction “evil.” But in light of 13:19, 38 and the other uses of the substantized adjective, both here and in 6:13 Jesus almost certainly refers directly to Satan as “the evil one.” (CC)

**5:33–37** Jesus tells His disciples not to take an oath at all, expressing a general rule of conduct for them. The bottom line for Jesus is truthfulness. When believers lie or exaggerate commitment, they are not letting their light shine. This rule applies especially when believers converse with fellow Christians. However, there may be times when Christians will be asked to take an oath in their earthly affairs or contacts with governing authorities. Out of loving consideration for this

request, Christians may comply. Thanks be to God that He vowed to save us (cf Ti 1:2) and fulfilled that vow by His Son's life, death, and resurrection for our salvation. • Lord Jesus, help me speak the truth in all my conversations and testimony. Amen. (TLSB)

### *An Eye for an Eye*

**<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.**

**5:21-48** The commentary on 5:17-20 argued that 5:21–48 is *not* a prescription for how a person may attain the righteousness that will allow him to gain entrance into the reign of heaven. Rather, in 5:21–48 Jesus displays standards of spiritual greatness for disciples who already now receive the blessings of the reign of heaven through faith in him, and who will, by grace, fully enter the glories of that reign on the Last Day. Before briefly considering the theology and application of Jesus' teaching on doing and teaching God's Torah commandments (5:19) that is contained in 5:21–48, three hermeneutical issues should be addressed. (CC)

First, if Jesus' sixfold saying “But I myself am saying to you” (5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) involves a contrast of some sort between his authoritative revelation and something else, with what is Jesus making the contrast? Is the contrast between the Law of Moses and Jesus' own teaching? Or is the Christ pitting his own authoritative interpretation of the Torah against current scribal interpretations of the same? (CC)

Second, should Jesus' teaching be read as if he were here giving a full exposition on any of the six topics? That has sometimes been the way Christians have approached Jesus' teaching, especially with regard to the material on divorce and remarriage in 5:31–32. Or should Jesus' teaching be read as “general truth,” sweeping revelation that comes from the very heart of God, but does not give explicit answers to all of the specific questions that disciples (ancient or modern!) may have about the important matters that the Lord's words address? (CC)

Third, how can attention to the first-century context of Jesus' teaching help us to understand what he is intending to say and what he does not intend to say? A brief discussion of these three key issues now follows. (CC)

Regarding the contrast, some interpreters argue strongly that Jesus' teaching here is set as a contrast to the revelation that came through the Mosaic Law *per se*. However, at least three textual features lead us to a different conclusion: in 5:21–48, Jesus, the one who comes to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (5:17–18), is offering his disciples the true intention of the Law of Moses, in contrast to typical Jewish interpretations that Jesus' hearers will have encountered in the first century (CC).

First, when Jesus undeniably cites the OT Scriptures elsewhere in Matthew, he never says, “You heard that it was said” (which is the refrain in 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43; a shortened version of that refrain is in 5:31). The first textual note on 5:21 gives the pertinent data. Second, while I have argued above that 5:19 (and not 5:20) is, in the most important sense, the theme or heading or introduction for Jesus' teaching in 5:21–48, Jesus' reference in 5:20 to “the scribes and Pharisees” brings to the attention of readers/hearers typical ways that Jewish interpreters understood the Torah in Jesus' era. Furthermore, the crowds' reaction when the Sermon is

complete does the same thing: “For he was teaching them with the conviction that he had authority, and not *as their scribes* [taught]” (7:29). While the evangelist’s words in 7:29 contrast the *manner* of Jesus’ teaching, rather than its specific *content*, other teachers in Judaism are explicitly in the foreground. Third, Jesus’ identity as the One who fulfills the Law and the Prophets and the important continuity between Torah and his own teaching (implied strongly in 5:17–20 and discussed in the commentary on those verses) support the position here taken, to wit, that Jesus is expounding the true meaning of God’s OT commandments. (CC)

To repeat, in answer to the first question, I conclude that in 5:21–48 what Jesus offers to his disciples as they seek to do and teach the commandments of God (5:19) is the proper, authoritative interpretation of the Torah. The Torah will remain unchanged until all things take place (5:18d)—and all things do take place in Jesus’ death and resurrection. (CC)

The second introductory question is more important since a wrong answer to it can subject 5:21–48 to misunderstanding or even abuse. Jesus’ teaching in 5:21–48 should be received as sweeping, general truth and revelation from God. It is not case law. It does not contain explicit applications covering all particular circumstances. In the case of every one of the six units found in 5:21–48, we must make “adjustments” of greater or lesser size to avoid taking Jesus’ teaching to erroneous and (perhaps) ridiculous extremes that would contradict other Scripture passages. Jesus does not attempt or intend to supply his disciples with teaching that covers every possible scenario that fallen humanity’s pathetic shortcomings and sins might create. Great wisdom and broad knowledge of all the Scriptures must be brought to bear when applying the truths of 5:21–48 to the lives of disciples as they carry out their calling to be the earth’s salt and the world’s light (5:13–16). I can illustrate a few of the ways in which it is clear that Jesus’ teaching was not intended to be taken strictly and literalistically. (CC)

All interpreters would agree that some of Jesus’ statements must be “qualified” based on what he himself says elsewhere and on what the inspired authors of Scripture record elsewhere. First, when Jesus forbids anger against “your brother” (5:21–26), he surely also means to prohibit anger against non-Christians, even though he does not explicitly state that. In addition, Jesus’ own speech indicates that he does not mean to forbid *every* use of “insulting terms” such as “fool.” Second, despite the surface teaching of 5:27–28, Jesus must not be forbidding a man to look upon a woman so as to desire her when that woman is his wife, although Jesus does not mention that exception. Moreover, few would conclude that the Son of God is advocating self-mutilation as an antidote for temptation (5:29–30). Third, few would consider Jesus’ words in 5:31–32 to prohibit the remarriage of an unlawfully divorced wife whose husband has since died. Yet Jesus’ words do not specifically offer that kind of qualification; it must be supplied from 1 Cor 7:39. Fourth, unless one is willing to say that later disciples, including Paul, sinfully violated Jesus’ teaching regarding oaths, then Jesus’ words in Mt 5:33–37 are not an absolute rejection of all oaths, although if read literalistically his words offer that kind of *absolute* prohibition. Fifth, Jesus’ admonition in 5:40, if followed to the letter, would result in naked disciples, and 5:39, strictly speaking, could be used as a rationale for retaliating if one were struck in the nose rather than on the cheek. Sixth and perhaps most obviously, it would be difficult to find anyone who seriously entertained the possibility that Jesus’ words in 5:43–48 meant that we are to love *only* our enemies and persecutors. Surely the force of his words must be expanded to mean, “Love everyone, *even* those who hate and persecute you.” (CC)

These examples are (perhaps!) easy and obvious. This should not mask the important hermeneutical insight, however, that Jesus’ teaching in 5:21–48 must be interpreted in harmony with other NT passages. The section cannot be read as literal and comprehensive. To repeat the point, Jesus’ teaching is not legal, case law material. This insight will be especially important

when it comes to apprehending the force of Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage in 5:31–32 (see the commentary on 5:31–32, and more extensively, on 19:3–12). (CC)

The third hermeneutical issue highlights the importance of the first century as the appropriate backdrop for understanding Jesus' words in 5:21–48. The reference to “the altar” in the Jerusalem temple (5:23–24) is an obvious example of this. Jesus' teaching assumes that the Jerusalem temple cultus was still operating and that his disciples would still be participating in that cultus, for “all things” had not yet occurred in his death and resurrection (see the commentary on 5:18). A less obvious example that will be developed below is that knowledge of first-century Judaism and its understandings of divorce and remarriage must inform the interpretation of Jesus' *contrasting* teaching in 5:31–32. Jesus is teaching his first-century disciples to attend to his interpretation of God's will, and not to the competing first-century interpretations they have heard. Jesus' twenty-first-century disciples must reckon and wrestle with this important hermeneutical issue before applying his authoritative revelation on marriage, divorce, and remarriage to their own lives and situations. (CC)

Jesus' disciples are to receive his teaching in 5:21–48 according to the spirit of his words and to interpret it according to the analogy of Scripture. I know full well how this leaves open the possibility of diluting the force of Jesus' teaching to the point of ignoring it: “Well, Jesus can't have meant for me to do something as unreasonable as *that!*” This hermeneutical danger simply must be acknowledged and avoided to the extent that we sinners can do so. At the same time, we cannot abuse Jesus' teaching in 5:21–48 by taking it literalistically or legalistically, making it into something that our Lord never intended it to be, that is, casuistic legislation that offers comprehensive situational application for every possible scenario. (CC)

**5:38** *eye...tooth* – ὀφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος—This OT citation agrees precisely with the same phrases in LXX Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21 except that Matthew adds καί. The Greek of the *lex talionis* affords a clear illustration of the normally substitutionary meaning of the preposition ἀντί plus the genitive; it signifies “instead of, in place of.” In Matthew the preposition ἀντί occurs in 2:22; here in 5:38; 17:27; and 20:28, every time with the same basic meaning. The most theologically significant passage is 20:28. (CC)

Jesus continues his authoritative exposition of the true divine intent of the Torah. There is a grudging sort of spirit that afflicts mankind by nature—at least, fallen mankind. Keep score; tit for tat; even-steven, that's the thing. “Do unto others before they do it to you,” said with a sneer. Given this universal human condition, it was inevitable that some teachers in first-century Judaism would have taken the biblical admonitions regarding just penalties and recompense (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21) and married to them this perspective of “do what you have to, and be sure to get even.” (CC)

This is as far away from the Torah's intention as the east is from the west. Kleinig summarizes how the Law's statements about retribution were intended to function, even on the level of legal interactions in non-Israelite societies: (CC)

The *lex talionis* [“law of retribution”] was already elaborated quite explicitly in Mesopotamia long before it was mentioned in the OT. It performed two very important functions there and in ancient Israel. First, it limited the scope for revenge, which always tended to escalate indiscriminately and endlessly in any tribal society. By it, the principle of equivalence was enshrined in the administration of justice. Second, it treated the life and the body of every person as equal in value regardless of social, racial, and economic status. (CC)

In place of a spirit of grudging recompense and quick revenge, Jesus calls his disciples to lives of reckless generosity and naiveté. His teaching is hyperbolic—but that does not mean that he is not serious. His words are to reform our instincts, our quick reactions, our unwillingness to sacrifice. St. Paul hits very close to this same target with his admonition to not repay evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:18–21). (CC)

If Jesus disciples will err, let it be on the side of not retaliating, of yielding, of giving, or of being taken advantage of. A backhanded slap on the face is not assault; it is insult. Jews in the first century could readily be forced by occupying Roman soldiers to relinquish possessions or even for a time their freedom. The One who teaches these things himself embodied such willing nonresistance and self-sacrifice and quiet submission to evil men when he gave his back to blows and his cheeks to striking. In the strength of his eschatological blessing (5:3–12), Jesus’ disciples can learn to exhibit this strong softness, gaining more by giving up what might be theirs by reasonable expectation and by right. (CC)

“By right!” Can there be any words more sacred to twenty-first-century North Americans, who instinctively worship at the altar of self? Those who fervently grasp their rights and live their lives in defense of the same are the walking dead. To be generous and willing to be taken advantage of is to invite abuse. So be it! To be grudging, ungenerous, and unwilling even to go the first mile, you see, is to flirt with damnation. (CC)

Law of equal retaliation (Lat *lex talionis*) is based in Scripture and is an attitude deeply rooted in the human heart. (TLSB)

**5:39** *do not resist* – Jesus prescribed a totally different attitude for His disciples, one He preached. He illustrated this nonresistance with four examples. He is not teaching pacifism or that governing authorities cannot exert force, but is describing the response of someone facing persecution. (TLSB)

μη ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ—The infinitive here, as in 5:34, expresses indirect discourse. Stassen has added his voice to others in arguing that the dative τῷ πονηρῷ should be translated as a dative of means, “[not to] resist by evil means,” rather than as the dative object of the verb, “not to resist the evil person.” However, grammatically that is very unlikely. By my count of LXX and NT uses of ἀντίστημι plus the dative, forty-seven times (including all NT instances) the dative noun is the object of the verb, and only once (4 Macc 6:30) does the dative element express means. (CC)

STRIKES YOU – More of an insult than an attempt to do physical harm. (TLSB)

other also – στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην—This use of ἄλλος, referring to the “other” of two cheeks, shows that the distinction between it as usually meaning “another of a different kind” and ἕτερος as meaning “another of two” is not always preserved in the NT and cannot be assumed. Both words can express both meanings, though they can, when deliberately contrasted, have more specified meanings as well. (CC)

**5:40** *tunic ... cloak*. The first was an undergarment, the second a loose outer one. (CSB)

Outer garment, which was more essential. “If ever you take your neighbor’s cloak in a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down.” (ESV)

Shows the high value of garments, due to the labor and material required to make them by hand. Each evening, out of compassion for the borrower (who needed it to keep warm at night), the lender should return the cloak used as collateral. This large, square outer garment was wrapped around the body or draped over the shoulder, similar to a Roman toga, and reached down to the knees. (TLSB)

**5:41** *forces*. The Greek verb comes from a Persian word meaning “press into service” and is used in 27:32, where the Roman soldiers pressed Simon into service to carry Jesus’ cross. (CSB)

καὶ ὅστις σε ἀγγαρεύσει μίλιον ἕν—The phrase μίλιον ἕν is an adverbial accusative of extent of distance, answering the question “*How far* would the person conscript you to go?” So too is δύο in the next clause. (CC)

ὑπάγε μετὰ τοῦ δύο—There is no significance to the imperative ὑπάγε being in the present stem. The verb ὑπάγω strongly favors the present stem. (CC)

Roman military forced some civilians to carry baggage. Jesus told His disciples to go the extra mile in serving these foreign soldiers. (TLSB)

**5:42** GIVE – Jesus’ final example of not resisting evil requires reckless generosity. His words are meant to instill a deeper insight into how He intends His disciples to act. Jesus wants us to be willing to make sacrifices, to think twice before we refuse a request for help. Tertullian says, “Who fears not to lose, finds it not irksome to give.” Luther states, “Christ is not telling to give what I have to any scoundrel that comes along and to deprive my family of it or others who may need it and whom I am obliged to help.” (TLSB)

**5:38–42** Jesus instructs His disciples not to resist evil people, a teaching that has provoked much debate over the centuries. As with some other statements Jesus made in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, there is a degree of exaggeration in what He says. We need to grasp His essential point. Jesus provokes self-examination in every Christian’s heart: have I always been generous in sharing with the needy, whether they are good or evil? Jesus was totally generous in giving His life for us. In Him, we receive forgiveness and renewal. • Show me Your face, dear Jesus, in the hurting eyes of the needy, that I may help them as You helped me. Amen. (TLSB)

### *Love for Enemies*

**43** “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**5:43** *love your neighbor...hates your enemy* – μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου—The second person future indicative functions as an imperative: “you shall hate your enemy.” There is no OT passage with this command. The only passage in the LXX with this verb form (μισήσεις) is the command *not* to “hate” your brother (Lev 19:17). Therefore this clause is the clearest proof that in 5:21–48 Jesus is not contrasting his teaching with the OT Torah; instead, he is contrasting his true exposition of the Torah’s intent with other Torah interpretations found among Israel’s religious teachers. See “The Son of God Reveals God’s Original Intention in the Torah: Introduction to

Matthew 5:21–48” and also the textual note on ἐπρέθη in 5:21. The source for “you shall hate your enemy,” then, is not to be sought in the OT, but rather in first-century Judaism. (CC)

Jesus’ authoritative explication of the Torah’s true meaning now addresses love for one’s neighbor. The desire to limit one’s loving deeds to a particular group manifests itself wherever sinners are found; in that sense Jesus’ words in 5:43–48 reject a universal tendency just as they did in 5:38–42. We cannot be certain whether Jesus aims his words about what his disciples have heard (“you shall hate your enemy”) at a particular group among the diversity of groups in first-century Palestinian Judaism (see the textual note on 5:43). No OT passage exhorts hatred for one’s enemies, though some command hatred toward evil (e.g., Amos 5:15). The Psalms often speak of the wicked hating God and hating the righteous. In some passages, the psalmist expresses hatred toward evildoers (e.g., Pss 26:5; 31:7), and David asks, “Those who hate you, O LORD, do I not hate? ... With complete hatred I hate them; they have become enemies for me” (Ps 139:21–22). Hence the error that the disciples have heard in their Jewish context could readily have grown its twisted fruit out of a misuse of canonical soil. (CC)

Cf Lv 19:18, where the “neighbor” was a fellow Israelite, which prompted a lawyer to ask Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” (Lk 10:29). (TLSB)

*hate your enemy.* Those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls commanded hatred for the outsider (see 1QS 1.4). (TLSB)

**5:44** *love enemies* – ἀγαπᾶτε ... προσεύχεσθε—The emphatic translation with “indeed” (“Love ... indeed and pray indeed”) is occasioned by the present stem imperatives. Jesus speaks eleven “ordinary” aorist stem imperatives or negated aorist subjunctives in this section (two in 5:24, 29, 30, 42 and one in 5:36, 39, 40). The present stem imperatives in 5:21–48 are a function of the specific meaning of the verb (ὀπάγω prefers the present stem in general [5:24, 41], and εἰμί [5:25, 37] has no aorist stem) or are necessitated by some other contextual factors (προσφέρω, 5:24; see the textual note there). (CC)

Now, it is also true that in the NT both ἀγαπάω (“to love”) and προσεύχομαι (“to pray”) occur more frequently in present stem imperative forms than in aorist imperatives (ἀγαπάω eight times present, once aorist; προσεύχομαι fifteen times present, twice aorist). But Matthew uses the present imperative of ἀγαπάω only here in his Gospel, and the four present imperatives of προσεύχομαι in Matthew all occur in contexts in which one could argue that they have an emphatic force (5:44; 6:9; 24:20; 26:41). In this climactic statement of the final antithesis (5:43–48), Jesus stresses the importance of love and prayer for those who by nature least evoke such actions by his disciples. The two greatest commandments are love for God and love for neighbor (22:36–39). For Jesus’ disciples, even the enemy is to be treated like a neighbor indeed. (CC)

Jesus *urgently* commands (present stem imperatives!) his disciples to “love” without reference to the worthiness of the person being loved and to “pray” for others in the same way; even the enemy and the persecutor must receive the loving deeds and prayers of Jesus’ disciples. His disciples’ purpose in loving and praying in this way is to give the evidence that they are, in fact, the sons of the heavenly Father, *who is known only in Jesus* (Mt 11:27). (CC)

Jesus was commanding not so much an emotion as loving actions. (TLSB)

Romans 12:20, “On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

*pray ... persecute.* Christ on the cross and the martyr Stephen did this. Hus: “When he himself was stripped, beaten and blasphemed by the soldiers, scribes, Pharisees, officers, and priests, not even then did he pronounce any malediction, but he prayed, saying: ‘Father forgive them’ ” (*The Church*, p 285). (TLSB)

**5:45** *so that you may be* – ὅπως γένησθε—The disciples of Jesus are already the sons of the Father in heaven (5:16, 48; 6:1–9); they do not become such only after they love their enemies. Though it would be unusual, γίνομαι here must mean something like “live as, act like, show yourselves to be.” The purpose construction is important. Jesus’ disciples have as their purpose, when loving their enemies, to demonstrate the reality of their relationship with the heavenly Father. (CC)

*be sons of your Father.* Sons of God will be like their Father, whose nature it is to love the world (Jn 3:16; cf 1Jn 4:16). Jesus died for God’s enemies (Rm 5:10). To love one’s enemies is to share in God’s peacemaking (v 9). (TLSB)

*sun ... rain.* Examples from nature demonstrate that God has mercy on all. (TLSB)

*on just and unjust* – Why will love even for the enemy reveal that Jesus’ disciples are the Father’s adopted sons? Because the Father is good to both evil and good, to just and unjust. This is so in the realm of creation, where God does not withhold his good gifts from those who have set themselves against him in unbelief and rebellion. It is preeminently so in Jesus himself, who will give his life as the ransom payment not in the place of the few, but of the many (20:28). (CC)

**5:46** *what reward* – τίνα μισθὸν ἔχετε;—Matthew’s Gospel uses the term “reward” ten times versus once in Mark (9:41), thrice in Luke (6:23, 35; 10:7), and once in John (4:36). The term seems to clash with the concept of grace until one reads the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1–16). There it becomes clear that the “reward” or “wage” that each worker receives (20:8) has no relationship with the amount of work that the worker has performed! In most instances one could almost paraphrase the noun “reward” with “blessing,” given by God solely out of his grace in Jesus, and received through faith (see 5:3-12). (CC)

Mt 5:46 begins with an explanatory “for” (γάρ), and at first glance, the logic doesn’t seem to follow smoothly. But 5:44–45 is one long sentence, the main verbs of which are “love” and “pray” in 5:44. In this light, 5:46 follows naturally: “Love your enemies. ... For if you love the people who love you ...” Jesus’ words have hit home and stung throughout the centuries, and they would have been strikingly powerful in the first-century context of patronage, where relationships of status over against other members of the community were of paramount importance. The Lord’s teaching also has special force in a society that is concerned with possessions and busy-ness, and in which families are falling apart at an alarming rate under the pressures of poverty and divorce. In our day, it seems almost newsworthy if someone succeeds even in the most basic task of loving those who love him or her. But in response to that kind of benefaction, Jesus asks rhetorically, “What reward do you have?” (5:46). The tax gatherers, among the most despised members of society, often succeed in doing such things. The impact of 5:47 is similar: even outsiders, non-believers, “Gentiles” succeed in greeting their fellows. (CC)

Rhetorical question; the answer is none. (TLSB)

*tax collectors.* Traditionally known as “publicans,” these were local men employed by Roman tax contractors to collect taxes for them. Because they worked for Rome and often

demanded unreasonable payments, the tax collectors gained a bad reputation and were generally hated and considered traitors. (CSB)

Romans (and local rulers such as Herod Antipas) awarded the right to collect taxes to the highest bidder, allowing local tax gatherers to levy a surcharge on the taxes they collected. Tax collectors typically abused the practice and were generally considered dishonest, traitorous, and “sinners.” Yet, even they returned love for love. (TLSB)

οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ τελῶναι τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν;—Greek (like English) can ask a rhetorical question in a way that expects either a positive or a negative answer. To anticipate a positive answer, the question begins with οὐ or the strengthened form οὐχί (see BDAG, s.v. οὐχί, 3). A question beginning with μή or μήτι expects a negative answer. Matthew *always* observes this distinction, and so should English translations. Questions expecting a positive answer occur in 5:46, 47; 6:25, 26, 30; 7:22; 10:29; 12:5, 11; 13:27, 55, 56; 15:17; 18:12, 33; 20:13, 15; 24:2; 26:40; 27:13. Questions expecting a negative answer occur in 7:9, 10, 16; 9:15; 11:23; 12:23; 26:22, 25. (CC)

**5:47** *what more are you doing.* Jesus asked this series of questions to show the difference between common human behavior and His teachings. Luther: “Do you see now how pious you are if you are friendly and kind only to your friends? You are just about as pious as the thieves and the scoundrels, as the whores and the criminals, or as the devil himself” (AE 21:127). (TLSB)

**5:48** *Be perfect.* Christ sets up the high ideal of perfect love (see vv. 43–47)—not that we can fully attain it in this life. That, however, is God’s high standard for us. (CSB)

Jesus, who previously cited the Father’s example (v 45), concluded His teaching on love of enemies by commanding His disciples to imitate the Father’s perfection (cf Eph 5:1–2). (TLSB)

ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι—As with other second person future indicatives in chapter 5 (see the textual note on 5:43), the sense of ἔσεσθε here is imperatival: “*Be perfect, mature.*” Every disciple surely knows that he or she falls short of this calling and needs Christ’s forgiveness. The Good News is that Jesus’ call for his disciples to be τέλειος should not be understood only as a demand of the Law. The disciples already are sons of the “perfect” Father (τέλειος, 5:48), who gives without regard to worthiness and who in Jesus Christ—indeed!—loves his own enemies (Rom 5:10). In light of this gracious Father’s love, Jesus’ disciples are free to seek the maturity of complete love to which Jesus here calls them (see τέλειος also in Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 4:12; James 1:4). (CC)

Scaer, *Sermon on the Mount*, 137–38, writes pointedly:

The commands to love the enemy and pray for the persecutors are given with the express intent that they must and can be fulfilled in the community of Jesus (5:11). These are not optional. If these commands are not carried out, this community is no longer recognized as belonging to Jesus. (CC)

The concluding comment in 5:48 is just that. Its exhortation *follows* from Jesus’ earlier commands to love the enemy, since the Father willingly does good to all. It is possible that 5:48 serves as a summary for the entire section, 5:21–48. The call to maturity, to completeness, to perfection that reflects the Father’s perfection is a fitting ending to Jesus’ authoritative teaching regarding the original intent of the Torah. (CC)

Mt 5:48 is often used as a proof text to bring to bear upon a sinner the full force of the Law in its second use, that is, to reveal human sinfulness. Undeniably, a man who tries seriously to obey the will of God that Jesus reveals in 5:21–48 will learn about his own sinfulness! (CC)

In this literary and canonical context, however, Jesus' primary aim is not to condemn his disciples as the sinners that they surely are but rather to reveal to his disciples the will of God for their calling as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (5:13–16). Their relationship with Jesus and with his (and their) Father is created by repentance (4:17) and faith in the promised blessings that Jesus pronounces in the Beatitudes (5:3–12). In that relationship and strengthened by that blessing, Jesus' disciples will, both individually and corporately, begin to manifest the will of God for their lives. They know all the while that their quest for perfection has nothing to do with causing or maintaining their standing in the presence of God. Jesus the Lord is the one who manifests absolute perfection on behalf of his disciples, and his completed and mature work for them is at all times the certain hope and confidence of his disciples. In him, Jesus' disciples also press on toward the completeness that he has revealed as the will of God among those who will, *because they trust in this Christ*, enter the reign of heaven on the Last Day (5:19). (CC)

**5:43–48** When we contemplate the six authoritative teachings of Jesus in vv 21–48, we must agree with Luther's verdict: "At this point you will discover how hard it is to do the good works God commands.... You will find out that you will be occupied with the practice of this work for the rest of your life" (AE 44:109). Some people, when confronted with the strict demands of the Law, will whittle off a point here, another there. They suggest that we do the best we can, and God will be satisfied. But God demands perfection, which sinners cannot achieve (cf Rm 7:21–25; 1Tm 1:15). Our perfection is in Christ alone. As God's redeemed people, Jesus declares that we are salt of the earth and light of the world. • Heavenly Father, though I often fall short of Your perfection, forgive my sins for Jesus' sake, and strengthen me for greater service. Amen. (TLSB)