

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Jack Sequeira



Chapter 1

Laying the Foundation

Matthew 5, 6, and 7

Now we begin a new series of studies on what is considered by many Bible students as the greatest sermon that was ever preached by Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount. We have 30 studies on this subject, which covers Matthew 5, 6, and 7. I am not going to rush through this. I want us to have a clear understanding of what Christ is saying here.

There are two books that I would like to recommend, if you can read them as we go along. The first one is *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* by Ellen G. White [available online]. If you don't have it, please get it. It is a book we should read concerning the Sermon on the Mount. The other one is by the Anglican scholar, John Stott, called *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*.

When I was in my last year at Newbold College — I was then engaged to Jean — I would sneak off almost every Sunday to visit her. When it came to six o'clock in the evening, she would have to go to the New Gallery Centre to begin the evangelistic effort they were having there. And so I would sneak off and go and listen to two of the greatest preachers Britain has ever produced, at least in this century. One was this man, John Stott. Excellent Biblical expositor.

The other one was Martin Lloyd Jones, a Congregational preacher. Jones was a more dynamic preacher. Stott was more scholarly. But, I'll tell you, both these men packed their churches every Sunday — especially Martin Lloyd Jones — and both of them have preached on this topic. Jones used to pray for at least 15 minutes and he never preached for less than 60 minutes. And I would say half his congregation were college students from the London University. He fed the flock and these two men inspired me on expository preaching.

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount is under the series of “The Bible Speaks Today.” It is a movement from many Britons trying to restore biblical preaching in the Christian church and they have a series of books by different speakers. Its purpose is to make the Bible alive to the Christian world today.

Stott is the one who spoke to the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in 1980 and he is the one that I took several of my pastors to listen to. At that time he gave a series on Thessalonians and he made a statement on the third or fourth day that really impressed me. He said, “We evangelicals know how to preach the good news but we have failed to preach the good life. And the reason why we have failed is because we have done away with the Law.” And he emphasized that the Law is still the standard of Christian living.

The two archbishops that were in front of us — one was an Anglican, the other one was a Presbyterian — said, “This man speaks like a

Seventh-day Adventist.” A very fine Christian. He is now retired and he is the Director for the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity but when I heard him he was the Pastor of the All Souls Church in London.

What I want to do now is to lay the foundation of this wonderful sermon that Christ gave on the mount. In 1975, my family and I had the privilege of standing on the mountain where He preached this sermon (at least, this is supposed by most archaeologists to be the place where He preached). It was by the Sea of Galilee, it was up on a mountain. I suppose in America we would call it a hill, it wasn't extremely high, but it had a beautiful setting where the people could sit down and listen to Him preach.

In this sermon, Christ outlined what is considered the true meaning of what it means to be a Christian. As you study this sermon, you will find that to be a Christian is absolutely radical to how the world looks at human lifestyle. In fact, I will give you a portion of John Stott's book, what

he considers is the heart of this message.

But the sermon begins with what is known as the eight Beatitudes, in which Christ describes the true and only source of real happiness. And, you know, the world today is looking for happiness. Our young people are looking for happiness and here in the Beatitudes, which we will cover in detail, we find this. The rest of the sermon is an exposition of these eight Beatitudes put into practice.

As I mentioned, in this first study, we will lay the foundation. It is a wise rule that, whenever you deal with any teaching of scripture, to look at the general message before you go into the details. Otherwise, you tend to look at the details out of context. So you want to get the context first. We will do that by taking a general view of the whole of this Sermon on the Mount.

I do not know how long it took Him to preach it, but I am assuming it was quite a long time and they were quite accustomed to that. Now the

questions we are going to ask today are:

1. What is the real purpose of the sermon?
2. For whom was it intended?
3. To whom does it apply?

Jesus preached the sermon primarily to the Jewish disciples, the believers who had accepted Him. But the purpose of this sermon was not only for the Jews but it was for the Christian church. It applies to all Christians, at all times of the world's history. As we study this message, we will see that, in a special way, it has a tremendous importance to us living today in the last days.

Turn to Matthew 5 and look at the first two verses. It gives us the background:

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying....

It was the common practice in the days of Christ for the preacher to sit down and for the

congregation to stand and listen to him. I think the congregation here on the mountain sat down, but normally they stood and listened.

...And he began to teach them saying....

And this is the Sermon on the Mount that He preached. What was the essence of this sermon? In a nutshell, this sermon was an exposition of what we call “The New Commandment” that He gave His disciples. And if you want to look at the new commandment, turn to John 13:34-35 — this is what He expands on:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

In other words, these two texts can sum up what Christ is preaching in the Sermon on the Mount. This new commandment was so radical, was so different from Judaism and from paganism, that when the sermon was over they were amazed

at the message He preached. They were amazed at the contents, at the substance, as well as the authority He had in preaching this sermon.

As I mentioned, this is the definition of what true Christianity is and I want to read from the back of this book how John Stott sums up the sermon — it is very excellent:

“The followers of Jesus are to be different. Different from both the nominal church and the secular world. Different from both the religious and the irreligious. The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counterculture.”

We have to be different, he says, from our environment and our culture around us.

Here is a Christian value system, ethical standard, religious devotion; an attitude toward money, ambition, lifestyle, and network of relationships, all of which are totally at variance with those in the non-Christian world. And this

Christian counterculture is the life of the Kingdom of God. A fully human life indeed, but lived out under the divine rule.

And, as he brings up in this book, which is very true, he says:

“This lifestyle cannot be produced by trying. It is to be experienced only by those who have experienced the new birth and who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.”

I want to give you a couple of texts which bring out in a nutshell what this is all about. Turn first of all to the Old Testament, Leviticus 18, because, you see, when God delivered the Jews from the bondage of Egypt, God wanted them to be different. Now the Jews failed, the Christian church has failed, and we dare not fail because the world is looking upon us. So I want to turn to Leviticus 18 and read the first four verses.

This is what God said to the Jews in the exodus. Verse 1 of Chapter 18 reads like this:

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God. You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live...’”

In other words, you must not copy the lifestyle of Egypt.

“‘...And you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices....’”

“You have to be different from the Egyptians where you came from and from the Canaanites where you are going to. You are to be a peculiar people, somebody different.”

“‘...You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God.’”

In other words, God raised the Jews to be the light of the world, to be the representatives of His kingdom. Now we must admit that they failed.

They failed miserably and the Christian church has failed miserably to be the light of the world and I believe that God has raised us up to do it, and, of course, unless we understand this Sermon on the Mount, we will fail, too.

The other text is from the New Testament. Turn to Titus — a little book just before Philemon, also just before Hebrews — Chapter 2 and I want to read verses 11 to 15. It starts by a gospel statement in verses 11 and 12:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us [this is what the gospel produces] to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age...

God’s salvation is for all people. In other words, verse 11 is the gospel; verse 12 is the fruits of the gospel — we must be clear on that. Verse 13:

...While we wait for the blessed hope — the

glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...

In other words, from the time we accept the gospel until the time of the second coming of Christ, how should we live? We should bear fruit.

Then, in verses 14 and 15, Paul tells us what the gospel is all about:

[Jesus Christ] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Now the Sermon on the Mount is dealing with this very thing. In Christ we have been delivered from the kingdom of this world, which is under Satan. We have been placed under a new kingdom, called the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of Christ, and, of course, the Lord of that Kingdom is Jesus Christ. And in

this sermon, Jesus is saying, “Please, don’t behave as if you still belong to the kingdom of this world. Please behave as children of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is how you are to behave.”

Now I am going to give you an outline of this study. And the first thing I would like to say, because some have gone wrong here, the first thing I would like to say here is that the Sermon on the Mount is a description of the character and the conduct of a Christian. It is not a sermon on rules and regulations, because that is what Christ is condemning the Pharisees of doing.

So please remember, the Sermon on the Mount is not a code, a set of rules; it is not do’s and don’t’s. It is the description of a Christian who is justified by faith and who is living under the direction of Jesus Christ as his Lord and Master and Savior.

In this Sermon of the Mount, Jesus begins with what I mentioned — the Beatitudes. The

Beatitudes can be divided into two parts. The first seven Beatitudes have to do with our character and conduct as Christians before God. The last one has to do with our attitude and our relationship to the world. Matthew 5:3-12 are the eight principles that represent the character and conduct of a Christian. The key word in the Beatitudes is the word “blessed” and I will explain to you in the next study what that word means in the Greek. It does not mean “holy”; it means something different.

Then, in verses 13 to 16 of Matthew 5, Jesus explains how the Christian’s character and conduct should be in terms of our influence to the world and he uses two metaphors: Christians are the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” We will deal with that also in detail.

In Chapter 5 verses 17 to 48, Jesus describes the relationship of the Christian to God’s Law. And He does it in contrast to the way the Jews handled the Law and this section is extremely important to Adventists because we have fallen too often into the same trap as the Jews. But basically,

we will discover that the Law and its demands must be looked at in the spirit more than the letter. The Jews emphasized the letter of the Law; Christ emphasized the Spirit of the Law and that is what we will spend some time with when we come to it.

In Chapter 6:1-18, Jesus Christ explains what should be the true devotional life of a Christian. Here again is a contrast with the devotional life of the Pharisees and scribes. What is the difference? Their devotional life was outward. Christ said, “No, it should be inward.” They prayed publicly so people could see them. They had a very holy appearance and that is the result of legalism. You know there are some people who come to church that look very holy but at home they are devils. That’s the fruits of legalism and here Christ will explain that the true devotional life is an inward experience.

The other difference is that the true devotional life is sincere; the pharisaical devotional life was mechanical. They had rules: fasting twice a week, praying three times a day, and all kinds of rules. It

was mechanical.

Chapter 6 can be divided into two units: the first unit is our devotional life, the second unit, verses 19 to 34, is a Christian's relationship to possessions, to money, to materialism, etc. This also is crucial for us who are living in a materialistic world. We will discover that a Christian lives under the subjection of God; he is totally God-dependent for all his needs.

Then we go to Chapter 7. Again there are two sections in Chapter 7. The first 20 verses are how Christians should relate to one another; so Chapter 7 is dealing with relationships in the first 20 verses.

Then, in verses 21 to 27, Jesus explains the Christian's commitment to Christ our Lord. And this is really His conclusion; this is an area where we need to be clear on. You see, Christ is not only our Savior but He is also our Lord and our Master. Christians are supposed to live under the total subjection of the rulership of Christ.

Paul will put it this way. 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

And Colossians 1:18:

And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

“The church is the body of Christ and the head is Christ.” When you take the human body as a metaphor for the Church, you will find an excellent illustration of what Christ is talking about here.

Everything my body does is under the leadership of the head. For example, if my stomach is hungry and I feel pangs of hunger, the

stomach depends on the body to be satisfied. So it sends a message to the head: “I am hungry.” The head sends a message to the legs, “Please take this stomach to the fridge.” This is not hard to do in America — you know everything is in the fridge. Now the legs don’t say to the head, “Look, I am not hungry; if the stomach is hungry, why doesn’t it go itself?” There is no such thing as living independent of the body. The legs immediately, without question, obey the head. Once the body has been taken to the fridge, then the head sends instruction to the hand, “Please open the door,” and so the hand obeys without questioning. This is how our body works.

Christ is saying that the only way a Christian can function and fulfill all those characteristics that He describes in His Sermon on the Mount is when we live under total subjection to God: “Not I, but Christ.” This is what we will deal with in detail.

I am going to spend one study for each Beatitude because that is laying the foundation. You see, Paul and Christ take the same format.

They do not begin with the standards of Christian living. They begin by what it means to be a Christian. And the other thing is, they approach it from different angles. Paul approaches it from turning to Christ as our personal Savior. Christ approaches it in the Sermon on the Mount by dealing with our attitudes.

To be a Christian you have to have the attitude of the Beatitudes, and I would like you, for the next study, to read what Ellen G. White says on the first Beatitude. Neither Ellen G. White nor John Stott spend too much time on the Beatitudes; he spends only one chapter and she spends just several paragraphs on each.

But I would like to go into more detail because, if you have understood the Beatitudes, you have laid the foundation for the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. And I would like you to read — if it would be possible for you to get the books — the books by White and Stott. Stott's costs almost \$10 but it's worth investing in; it's an expository approach; Ellen G. White uses more counseling

and spiritual application and the two together make an excellent study.

So please read the Sermon on the Mount part from The Mount of Blessing. Next study we will deal with verse 3:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is a complete contradiction to what the Pharisees taught. They said, “Blessed are they who are good; blessed are they who obey all the rules of Judaism, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

But Christ says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and that will be our next study.

I want to end by saying this much: when you read the whole sermon, the first thing you will say is, “Is this possible? Is it possible for us to live the life that Christ is outlining?” Well, the answer I want to give you is the answer Jesus gave Peter: “With man it is impossible” (Matthew 19:26). Let

me be very clear. What Christ is demanding from us is impossible.

For example, when we come to the section on our relationship with one another, He says, “You should love others just as God loves the human race — unconditionally.” We should pray for our enemies, love those who hurt us. Humanly speaking, this is impossible. But that is why we must remember that this sermon is not do’s and don’t’s. If you try to make this into rules, you will fail. This is possible — while you still have sinful flesh — this is possible only when we have Christ in us and when we allow Him to take over in our life.

In other words, the life that Christ is demanding from us in this Sermon on the Mount is the life that He Himself lived 2,000 years ago. And what He’s saying is, “I want to reproduce this in my body, the Church. But before I can reproduce it, you must have the mindset of the Beatitudes.” And I’ll tell you, the Beatitudes primarily deal with the first half of the formula: “Not I.” For you to say “Not

I,” you have to believe that you are poor in the spirit, that you are mourning about your sinful condition, that you admit that you are incapable of doing what God is demanding, that you are hungry and thirsty after the righteousness of God. These are the conditions.

It is my prayer that we will remember that this is the goal that God has — not for one or two Christians, but for every believer. This is His goal. In other words, the Sermon on the Mount is what God wants each one of us to aim at through the indwelling Spirit as we walk by faith alone. And when this Sermon on the Mount becomes a living reality in your life and my life, this earth will be lightened with His glory. So this is in harmony with Paul’s message of righteousness by faith. This is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

I hope that we will receive a blessing in these studies. We’ll go step-by-step.

Now there is another passage in Luke and some scholars say this is the same Sermon on the Mount;

I am not going to discuss it. We are going to study in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. The one in Luke is more condensed; the one in Matthew is in more detail and this, I believe, is the sermon we need to come to grips with. This is believed to be the greatest sermon that Christ ever preached. I hope, as we cover this sermon, that it will bring a change in your life, in my life, in the life of this church.

Because we have been studying the good news so far. We have looked at the foundation which is the fact that Christ is our righteousness. I want you to forget all about your worries about going to heaven. That has been solved. No longer should you be concerned whether you will make it to heaven or not. Christ saved you while you were a sinner, while you were helpless. What you want now is the world to see what it is to be a Christian.

I'll just give you the meaning of the word "blessed"; I'll explain it in more in detail when we come to it. The word "blessed" means "happy." That's what the Greek word means, "happy," and Christians who are not happy need to examine their

situation. Now, the word “happy” is used in complete contradiction to the human idea, because people who are poor in spirit are normally not happy. Am I correct? But Christ says, “If you are poor in spirit, you should be happy.” So He is completely contradicting psychology and all the teachings of the Church.

The world says, “If you are good and have plenty of money, and you have material things, you should be happy.” Christ says, “If you are poor in spirit, if you are mourning about your failures, you should be happy,” because the gospel is not for good people. Jesus did not come to save the righteous, but He came to save sinners.

So don't worry, “Will I make it to heaven or not?” That has been settled, 2,000 years ago. Your concern now is for the world to see Christ in you and Christ cannot live in you if you are still worried about your salvation. And I'll tell you why. At the very foundation of the Sermon on the Mount — Christian living — is that you live for Christ and not for self. And you can't do that if

you are still worried about your salvation.

Now we are going into an important series — “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The fact is this, that you in Christ is your anchor. Christ in you is your witness. With you in Christ, you have peace, you have hope. Now I want Christ to live in you.

I had a phone call from a couple who hadn't been to church for 15 years and they said the reason they left the Church was because the Church gives them nothing but guilt, guilt, and guilt. And the wife got a heart attack — she couldn't take it — and she called a Baptist minister and he gave her the peace. And she said, “Why is it I couldn't get peace in this Church?” And I said, “Sister, be patient, be patient. God is returning the gospel — you have been away from this Church too long. You need to know what is happening.” So I invited her back to our Church. I said, “Please come back” and I gave her a couple of sermons on Romans and I said, “I want you to listen. The gospel is good news, unconditional good news.” She said, “We have been in this Church for 40

years and I went from worse to worst condition because all I was told was do's and don't's and 'unless you will fulfill this, God will not take you to heaven.'" What a terrible condition to be in!

The gospel is that, in Christ, you have a new history, a new identity. No longer are you to be concerned. The first blessing God brought to you in the gospel is peace with God. But now He says, "This is how I want you to live."

The Jews failed to see the preamble of the Law and we have failed the same way. Please never read the Ten Commandments without first reading the preamble which says (Exodus 20:2):

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

He has delivered us from the slavery of sin, from the slavery of guilt, from the slavery of fear of death, from the slavery of condemnation. He has delivered us and now He says, "This is how I want you to live and I know you can do it. I want

you now to abide in Me and I will abide in you. Because without me you can do nothing. And as you link yourself with me, as the vine to the branches, you will bear much fruit and my Father will be pleased and the world will see God manifested in the flesh.” In our sinful flesh, God will be manifested.

So may God bless us as we begin this series of studies and let’s go systematically through the Sermon on the Mount.

We laid the foundation today. We will begin in-depth study next with the first Beatitude:

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

“Happy is the person who thinks he can’t save himself.” Here’s the good news. Happy is the person who realizes that, in himself, there is nothing good. That is good news.

Chapter 2

The First Beatitude Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The first thing we must keep in mind is that this was a sermon to his disciples. If you will notice verses 1-2 of Matthew 5:

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:

The second thing that we must keep in mind is that what Christ is requiring of His followers in the Sermon on the Mount is absolutely impossible for us to produce in our own strength. For example, look at verse 44 of Matthew 5:

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,....

Tell me, how many of you can do it in your natural strength? It is an impossibility of our nature, so we must keep in mind that Jesus is not simply saying, “These are the rules that I am giving you.”

In verse 43, He says,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you....”

He’s talking to people who have already accepted the gospel, those who have been born again.

The third thing I want to keep in mind is that we do not start with the people to whom He’s addressing. The people — the disciples who were listening to Him at the Sea of Galilee — were Jews.

There were two problems with them:

1. They were victims of Judaism; which is legalism. They were people who were heavy laden with burdens, with no hope and no peace. And the Pharisees and the Scribes had no time for them, especially the sinners and the publicans.

2. They were also in bondage politically. They were under Rome. They were poor politically and poor spiritually and they had no peace.

Christ begins with the Beatitudes and what He says is completely in contradiction to what they were taught. I want to begin by showing you a statement that is mentioned about Jesus. Keep your finger here and turn to Luke 4, because the Sermon on the Mount, at least the Beatitudes, is a fulfillment of this statement we read in Luke 4:18-19. This is Jesus talking and see what He says:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me [or ordained me] to preach good news

to [to who?] the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

It is in this context that we need to understand the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus came to preach the good news to the poor, to those who had no peace from the Pharisees and scribes. So, with this in mind, we are going to look at the first Beatitude today.

But let me give you, first of all, a general statement or two about the Beatitudes. You will notice that each one of these Beatitudes begins with the word "blessed." Now the Greek word means "happy," or it can mean "honored," or it can mean "highly favored." Remember the angel said to Mary, "Blessed art thou among women" [Luke 1:30, King James Version]. The New International Version reads:

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid,

Mary, you have found favor with God.”

You know how the Catholics interpret that? They say that it means that Mary was holier than the other women and then they went one step further. How was she holier than other women? She was born sinless; they called it the Doctrine of Immaculate Conception. But the word does not mean “holy.” It means “happy,” it means “honored,” it means “favored.” It can also mean one who is to be envied, it also means one who is blessed. It has quite a strong meaning and that is why most modern translations show it as an inner happiness that comes from God, not from man. It is a happiness that comes, not from our environment or performance, but from what God says to you.

In other words, the happiness that Christ is talking about here has to do with our vertical relationship — not with our relationship man to man, but our relationship with God.

The second thing I want to say about this

blessing is a question: Is this blessing to come upon present reality, or upon a future test? Now if you look at all the Beatitudes, verses 3 through 10, you will discover that two of them uses the present tense — the first and the last:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Look at verse 3:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, those who are poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is guaranteed to them. And verse 10 is also in the present tense:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

But the others are all future tense. Look at verses 4-9:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be

comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

So verses 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 — they are all in the future tense. So to answer the question, “Is this blessing present or future?” the answer is both. It is present in the sense that you have inner peace, you have a hope, you have a guarantee. It is future in the sense of actual reality. We are still living in a sinful world; we still have hardships, but we have

a future hope.

That is why we should never present the Second Coming as the gospel. The Second Coming is good news only to the believer. It is bad news to the unbelievers. So if you want the Second Coming to be good news to your neighbors, first give them the gospel. It is only to those who have accepted Christ as their Savior that the Second Coming is good news. To those that don't accept Him, it is the Day of Wrath. So please remember that the blessings of the future are for those who have this prerequisite. The first one, which is the key one, which is what really opens the door for all the others is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Luke 6:20 says, "Blessed are you who are poor" [only] and some people say "blessed are they who are physically poor, materially poor, then they will be blessed." So I need to explain this.

The Jews had twisted the Old Testament teachings. Therefore, they had interpreted material poverty to mean spiritual poverty. Let me put it

this way: The Jews were teaching (and sometimes we are guilty of this) that if you are good — if you are doing everything God wants you to do, and if you are paying tithe, and coming to church, and if you are circumcised, etc. — then God will open the windows of heaven and you will be filled with money. So to the Jew, a rich person, a person who is rich materially, is blessed. That is Judaism. And for those who are poor, it is because God is putting His curse upon them because they are not good.

I will give you an example of this. Keep your finger here and turn to Matthew 19. You can see what Jesus was saying was completely radical to what they were being taught. In Matthew 19 you have an illustration, a good example of this. We will not be able to read the whole thing. I will just give you an outline because I am sure you are familiar with it. In verse 16 a young man comes to Jesus:

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

In other words, “What must I do that I may have happiness, eternal life?”

Now please remember that this young man did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. He did not address Him as the Messiah. He addressed Him as good Master, or good Teacher. So he addressed Him as a human being, but one who had a reputation now of teaching some good things. And the first thing that Jesus tried to remind him was that there is nobody good but God. Now, Jesus was talking as the Son of Man, as a human being. And He says, “We human beings are not good.” Only Who is good? Verse 17:

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

Why did He say that? Because, you see, in order for you to do something good, you have to be good. And this man’s foundation was wrong. He was not poor in spirit. And so Jesus says, “Why do

you call me good?” Then He goes on to say, “If you think you can go to heaven by being good, here is what the law says. What does the law require? Keep the law.” Verses 18-19:

“Which ones?” the man inquired.

Jesus replied, “ ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

In other words, if you want to go to heaven by being good, keep the commandments. And, of course, the young man replied, “Which one?” “Which commandment are You talking about?” And Jesus gave the commandments which referred to our relationship with our fellow man: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, etc. And He ended up with this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Now have you ever analyzed that?

1. Number one, we love ourselves spontaneously. We never try to love ourselves; it is automatic. Love your neighbor automatically.

2. Number two, we love ourself irrespective of whether we are good or bad. That's why when we do something wrong, we say, "Please forgive me," because we want to escape punishment. Why do we want to escape punishment? Because we love ourselves. You must love your neighbor whether he is good to you or bad to you.

The young man did not realize the depth of this requirement, so he said to Jesus in verse 20:

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

"All these things have I kept from my youth. I have been good. What do I lack?" And you know what he was hoping for? A pat on the back.

So the young man wanted a pat on the back, but did Jesus give him a pat on the back? No. He said

if you want to be perfect in your goodness, here it is. If you love your neighbor as yourself, take all your wealth and give it to the poor, and follow Me and I will give you my wealth. Now, that was a tremendous bargain, if he only knew the wealth of Christ. Did the man do it? No. He went home sorrowfully. Verses 21-22:

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Now all of this is background. What I want you to see is what Jesus said to the disciples after he left, verse 23 onward. Jesus said it is very hard for a rich man to go to the kingdom of heaven. In fact, He says in verse 24, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, [which was very ridiculous, but that is how impossible it is for a rich man to go] than for a rich man to enter into the

kingdom of God.” Verses 23-24:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

I want you to notice how the disciples, who were all Jews, responded to this statement of Jesus Christ. Look in verse 25:

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Why were the disciples amazed? Because they were raised up with the idea that a rich man was a good man. And when Jesus said, “It is very hard for a rich man to go to heaven,” to them it meant that it is very hard for a good man. And if a good man can’t make it, what hope is there for a poor sinner?

And I want you to notice the answer Jesus gave. Look at the next statement, Matthew 19:26:

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

“You fellows still haven’t understood the gospel.” He looked at them in pity and said, “With men this is impossible; [you can never make your way to heaven] but with God all things are possible.”

Now going back to Matthew 5:3, Jesus said,

Blessed are the poor in spirit....

What is He saying? “Blessed are they who have no confidence in themselves.”

So the first and main prerequisite to being blessed by God is to recognize that you are spiritually, totally bankrupt. You may have a lot of money, you may have a lot of virtues and natural abilities, but you must recognize that when you

stand before God, you are a sinner.

You remember that when those two came to pray, one was a Pharisee and one was a publican, or tax collector. And what did the publican pray to God? He didn't even lift up his face; he was too ashamed of himself. "Please forgive me." He was poor in spirit and he went home justified. Luke 18:9-14:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Now, we have to learn this and this is hard. If you will notice what Jesus is saying here in verse 3 is that we have to be first emptied of self before we can be filled with God’s blessings. Which comes back to our fundamental formula of the gospel applied: “Not I, but Christ.” And the “Not I” is the hardest part.

Now, I want to bring to your attention two texts. One is Philippians 3:3-9, where Paul had to learn this very thing and he could say, after he learned it, “We are those who rejoice in Christ and have no confidence in self”:

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh — though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put

confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

But the other one I would like to read because it applies to us. Turn to Revelation 3, and remember what Jesus said to the last Church on this earth: the Laodicean Church. He said, “You have a problem, and the problem is that you have not understood the first Beatitude.” Look at verse 17. There are two people evaluating us — One is

Christ and one is ourself:

You say [Laodicea saying to herself], “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” [Doesn’t that sound like the Pharisee who prayed?] But [Christ, the True Witness is saying] you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

So the first prerequisite is that we understand that we are poor in spirit. We have to come to the position that Paul came to in Romans 7:24:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

To such people the Pharisees gave no hope, but to such people Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

In other words, the gospel of salvation contradicts the philosophy of the world. The philosophy of the world is you must have confidence in yourself. People who have

confidence in themselves will make it. Christ says, “You must empty yourself of self before I can give you happiness.”

In other words, the gospel principle is Jesus saying that, “You must die first before you can have life. You must be emptied first before I can fill you. You must pull down what is confident in yourself that I may lift you up.”

Now I want to remind you of what Simeon said. When Jesus was brought to the temple as a baby, Simeon took Him into his arms and he made a statement. Do you remember that statement? Turn to Luke 2 and listen to what this godly man said about Christ, verse 34:

Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against,....”

First comes the falling, and then the rising. And for those who refuse to fall on the Rock and

be broken, there would be no rising.

In other words, Christ did not come to pat the Pharisees on the back, He came to make them nothing that in Christ they might be everything. And that is why Sister Ellen G. White says that the work of justification by faith is to take the glory of man and put it in the dust. It is very painful. You have to recognize your poverty before God can lift you up.

I want to give you an Old Testament text. Turn to Isaiah 57, the gospel prophet of the Old Testament. Look at verse 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.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit. I will dwell in you and I will give you hope and I will give you peace.”

Are you discouraged? Have you lost confidence in yourself? Do you feel that you are hopeless when it comes to being good? Then there is hope for you. “Blessed, happy is the one who has no confidence in himself, I’ll give you the kingdom of God.”

Now in the Old Testament there were many great men of God who were like this. When God came to Gideon and said, “I am going to do something wonderful through you,” do you know what Gideon said? “I belong to the lowest tribe and my family belongs to the lowest of the lowest tribe. How can you use me?” And God said, “That’s the kind of people I can use.” And He used him mightily.

God came to Moses after he was humble; it took Him 40 years for God to destroy Moses’ self-confidence. Then, when he was totally poor in spirit, God came to Moses and said, “I am going to use you.” Do you know what Moses said? “I am only a child. How can you use me? I can hardly

“speak.” And God used him.

You look at David. Do you know what David said when God approached him? “Lord, who am I, that You should come to me?” We human beings in the world look at people who have natural ability and we say, “He will make a fine minister, he has a wonderful gift of speaking and he has tremendous charisma,” but, I’ll tell you, God doesn’t call such people.

He said to Samuel, “Man looks at the outside. I look at the confidence in yourself, if you feel that you are no good.” If you go to the psychologist, he will try to build up your self-confidence. But if you go to Christ, He will say, “Happy you are. That is the kind of people I can use and I will give you peace.”

Look at Peter. Peter was very confident in himself. He was always outspoken, and Jesus had to humble him. After Peter denied Him, He humbled him at the Sea of Galilee (in John 21). Three times Jesus asked, “Do you love me?” —

He used the word agape — and Peter said, “Yes, Lord, You know I phileo you — this love is all I have, this human affection that shamed you.” But Jesus was not disappointed. He said, “Feed my sheep.”

This is what Jesus meant at the Lord’s Supper when He said, “when you are converted,” He meant, “when you have lost all confidence in yourself, then I will use you to help the other believers.”

Our relationship to God must always be a relationship of humility. Now, I must warn you that there are some people who say, “I’m no good, I cannot do anything, therefore, I will sit down and do nothing.” That is not what Jesus meant. Jesus said, “I want you in your relationship with Me to have a humble spirit and I will bless you, I will fill you with My Spirit and I will use you mightily.”

Look at Gideon. Did he sit back and do nothing? No. Look at Moses, look at David — these are great men of God. But what was their

relationship, their attitude toward God? It was poor in spirit. But what was their outward performance? Mighty. And that is why Jesus said, “If you are poor in spirit, heaven is yours, but while you are waiting for that (that is why the next few verses are future) while you are mourning, I will comfort you in the future; while you are being persecuted, I will give you peace; but while you are doing that, I will use you mightily, while you are waiting.”

I want to close with the best example: Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ became a Man and was one with us, do you know what He said? John 5:19 and 30:

Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ...By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

John 6:57

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

If the Son of God — He who created this world — can say, “By myself I can do nothing” or “I live because of the Father,” then only can we realize how little we can do by ourselves. If the Son of God can say this of Himself!

Turn to Philippians 2, because it is dealing with this issue of “poor in spirit.” I want to start with verse 1 (through verse 4):

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should

look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

That is being poor in spirit. Then in verses 5-8:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

He's now using Christ as an example of what we should be as Christians. Then in verses 6 through 8 he says, "Look, this is the kind of mind Christ had. He was equal with God (verse 6) but He did not claim that equality but He emptied Himself. Now if the Son of God could humble Himself and make Himself 'poor in spirit' so should we."

But I want you to notice what God does to such

people. Verse 9:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name....

So Jesus says, “Blessed are they who are poor in spirit.” This is the kind of people who we will find in heaven. There will be no bragging in heaven. There will be no ‘glory for me’ in heaven. We will take our crowns and drop them at the feet of Jesus and we’ll give Him the glory. And I think that is hope for us. The kingdom of heaven is not for those who have high opinions of themselves.

I remember when I was in London at the New Gallery where Jean was working, a young man came and he wanted one of the workers to take him around and show him London. The workers were kind of busy and they said, “Can you wait?” And he said, “I want you to know [and he kind of put his thumbs in his jacket lapels] that I am from the G.C.” [the General Conference, the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church]. In other words, “I want preferential

treatment.” And one of the workers was bright enough to ask him, “What do you do at the G.C.?” He was a custodian. He was ashamed to tell us that and finally he used a very highly technical word, and the worker was very pushy and he asked, “What do you mean by this?” and he said, “I am in the custodial department.” But he did not want us to know that; he just wanted us to know that he was from the G.C.: “You’d better give me special treatment.”

Jesus said to the disciples, “In the kingdom of this world he that is high is the one to be served, his servants serve him and do all that, but in My kingdom, he that is the greatest serves. The Son of Man came not to be ministered to but to minister.”

Christ has set the example. God does not want you to have a high opinion of yourself. He wants you to realize that you are poor in spirit.

In concluding, let me put it this way. When Adam sinned, he did not die physically straight away, but he died spiritually, and you and I are

born spiritually bankrupt. Ephesians 2:1 and 3 says we are born spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1-3:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

But the flesh doesn't want to recognize that. The flesh thinks that it can do what God is asking it to do. So let us face the fact that we are spiritually bankrupt by birth. David says in Psalms 51:5:

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

But the flesh is proud and doesn't want to recognize it. But the moment you recognize that between you and God it is impossible for you to

meet His requirements, then you realize — if you are poor in spirit — He says you are happy that heaven is yours. That is the kind of people who will inherit the kingdom of God. And so that is the hope for us poor miserable sinners. I hope that you will feel like Gideon or Moses felt when God comes to you.

Never, ever let us pray, “God, I thank you that I am not like those Philistines who keep Sunday.” We are sinners saved by grace. And if you are poor in spirit, it is such people that God will dwell, in such hearts. He will walk in you, not only dwell in you. And all that Christ is requiring on the Sermon on the Mount He will fulfill in you. But first He says, “You must be poor in spirit, otherwise you are not part of My kingdom.”

That is the message of the first Beatitude. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Isn’t it wonderful to know that there is hope for us?

Is it clear? Are you seeing what it means to be a true Christian? Can you see Jesus giving comfort

to those who are heavy laden?

What about folks with low self-esteem? You see, on the one hand, I must say, “I am nothing.” On the other hand I must say, “I can do all things through Christ.” So if somebody comes to you with very poor self-confidence, he may be on the right road, but the thing is, you are not to help him by building up his self-confidence. You are to build his confidence in Christ. In myself I am nothing, in Christ I am everything. In myself I am a sinner, 100%. In Christ I am righteous. In myself I am nobody in this world, in Christ I am a child of God and of the Kingdom.

The gospel is a paradox. Our self-esteem must be based not on our performance, not on our inheritance, but on what we are in Christ. I am a child of God. So I must not have a low esteem of myself as a Christian in Christ. I am a child of God. John says it does not matter what you appear, but when He comes you will be like Him.

So we should be happy, we should be

confident, not in ourselves, but in Christ. This low self-esteem is a product of capitalism. In capitalism only those who are strong-willed, those who are powerful, make it to the top; the rest are failures. But in God's Kingdom everyone is a success, even though, in their own thinking, they don't come with confidence, they come poor in spirit.

That is the first Beatitude. Next study will be the second: "Blessed are they who mourn." And this is not talking about those who mourn when somebody is dead. It is talking about those who mourn because they have so much failure; they are groaning because they are not making it.

Chapter 3

The Second Beatitude Penitence

Matthew 5:4

We're in Matthew, Chapter 5. We began two studies ago this great sermon, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We did in the last study the first Beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," verse 3, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Today we will turn to the second beatitude. Verse 4:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Now you will notice, as we begin this series of studies, that the Sermon on the Mount begins with the negatives, which is really an opposite of what you would normally think of from the human

approach. I want to give you two reasons why Jesus begins with the negatives.

1. Christ came to this world to save the negatives — the sinners. Is that clear? Remember, He said [Matthew 11:28]:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

“I have good news for you; I want to give you rest.”

2. When we take the gospel and apply it to our lives, it begins with a negative — “Not I” — and only those who are poor in spirit can say, “Not I.”

So, please remember, Christ begins with the negatives because he came to save the sinners — those who are unworthy — and because the gospel, when applied to our lives, begins with “Not I.” In other words, only to those who recognize and realize their spiritual poverty can Christ say, “Happy are you.”

Now this sounds like a paradox, but the gospel is a paradox. God brings joy to those who are crying, not to those who are already happy.

I want you to look at the second Beatitude and see what it says:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Do you know what He is saying? “Blessed are they who are unhappy. Happy is the person who is unhappy.” That sounds like a paradox. But we will discover that this is what the gospel is all about. Because on the surface it seems that, “How can I be happy when I am unhappy?” Christ says, “Yes, through Me you can be happy.”

There are three categories that we can apply to verse 4. Spiritually we can divide Christians into three camps.

1. There are those who do not know or who

refuse to admit that they are poor in spirit.

For example, we have the message to the Laodicean Church. What does Christ, the True Witness say about them? They do not know that they are poor, miserable, wretched, and blind. These people, these Christians have no cause to mourn. Why should they mourn about their spiritual poverty? In Christ's day, the Pharisees were a good example and today most legalists fall into this camp.

Oh, yes, they may mourn about the condition of the Church, but they never include themselves with that condition. And that's the difference between true mourning and a legalist who mourns about the condition of the church. And this may be right, [mourning for the church] but they do not include themselves.

2. Those who realize that they are poor in spirit, but who are indifferent.

They recognize that they are spiritually poor,

but they do not mourn about it. They fulfill the condition of the first beatitude — they admit they are poor in spirit — but they do not mourn about it. So they do not fulfill the second condition and there are some, unfortunately, who are in this camp in the church.

There are several reasons for this:

a. It could be that because they have had so much failure in the past, that the result is that they say, 'What is the use? This is how I am; what's the use of mourning about it? This is what I am and this is what I will be.' And so they settle down to be poor in spirit but they don't mourn about it. And that is a dangerous condition.

b. They do not realize, or they do not have the knowledge or appreciation of, the power of the gospel. They say, "It is impossible for God to give me total victory, so why should I mourn?"

And so both of these are a problem. But I want to go to the third group because this is who Christ

is addressing.

3. There are those that realize that they are poor in spirit and they are mourning about it.

Now please remember, as I mentioned last study, that Jesus is not discussing here mourning in the sense that we mourn over a loved one who has died. He is talking here in spiritual terms. He is talking about people who are mourning about their condition because they want to see some change in their lives. I want to give you some examples. This mourning comes primarily, not because of a horizontal relationship, but because of a vertical relationship.

Do you remember what Ellen G. White says? “The closer we come to Christ, the more sinful we will feel.” (And the more you will mourn). But I want to give you some examples.

Turn in your Bible to Isaiah 6:1. Isaiah was one of the great prophets of the Old Testament and we are told in verse 1:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Here is Isaiah seeing God in a vision. Then he describes the bodies of the seraphims (they each have six wings and so on). Then, in verse 3, he describes how one cried to another and said,

And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

And then he describes how the posts of the door moved at the voice of Him Who cried and the house was filled with smoke. But now I want you to notice the reaction that this had on the prophet. Verse 5:

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! [Here he is mourning.] For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips,...”

Please notice that he doesn't say, "The church is terrible, but I'm okay." He says "I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips."

"...And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

When you see Christ in all His beauty, you will mourn "what a terrible person I am." But I want you to notice how God responded to his mourning. Do you remember, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Isaiah 6, verses 6-7:

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." [I have made you clean in my Son.]

Here is the gospel. It is only when you realize that in Christ you have been purged, then can you look at verse 8:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I [the prophet] said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Only those who appreciate the love of God and His salvation to sinners can be used of God. Those who are mourning will be comforted and will be used by God. So that is a good example.

Now turn to Luke 18. I want to give you a couple of examples from the New Testament. Here is an example of somebody who mourned. This is a parable, but I want you to get the full context. Luke 18:9:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ...

This belongs to Category 1 that I described to you. They had a high opinion of themselves, and they looked down upon those who were mourning. This is the parable. You all are familiar with it but

let's read it [verse 10]:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

Which of the two of these men was the one who trusted in himself and despised the other? Well, the Pharisee is the one who trusted himself and the tax collector is the one who was despised because the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself (it was the custom in those days to stand and pray) [verses 11-12]:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

Is he mourning? What is he doing? He says “Lord, look at me, look at me! I’m not like other men — I’m not an extortioner, I don’t exploit others, I’m not unjust, I’m not an adulterer, or even as this tax collector at the back there. I fast twice

in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”

And, in contrast, [verse 13]:

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast [which is a Jewish custom of mourning] and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Two different kinds of worshipers. They are both believers, but one is quite happy about his condition and one is mourning. One is Category 1 and one is Category 3.

Listen to how Jesus responds to this parable. Verse 14:

I tell you that this man [the tax collector], rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself [or is mourning] will be exalted.

Can you see the paradox? It is good news. I

want to give you one more example, and, of course, that is the great apostle Paul. You see, Paul was a Pharisee. There was a time when he was like this very Pharisee that Jesus talks about but, you know, God humbled him. Turn to Romans 7:18. Here is a man who realizes that he is poor in spirit.

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.

And so he ends up in verse 24:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

He is mourning! In Chapter 8:23, talking about the believers, he says:

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Notice where they are groaning — inwardly, within ourselves — not groaning to others.

You see, it is not enough to acknowledge that you are poor in spirit. You must also grieve and mourn about it. Not publicly, but inside yourself. So I want to put it in theological language: It is not enough to confess your sins before God; there must be contrition.

I want to give you the need for both by giving you two texts concerning a church that needed it desperately. Turn to 1 Corinthians 5. Here was a church that was not mourning, and what Christ is saying concerning the believer also applies to the body of Christ. Here was a church that was not mourning and Paul is rebuking it. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2:

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your

fellowship the man who did this?

That is what we call “cheap grace”: “God has saved us; it doesn’t matter what we do.” They were condoning sin. They were not mourning about the condition of their church. Please notice they were not mourning about their own condition and so Paul is rebuking them.

If you turn a few more pages to 2 Corinthians 12, you will find the same thing. This church, of course, was in the big city and was facing lots of problems, but verse 21:

I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

In other words, “There are some who have not listened to my first letter, who have not repented. And I am afraid to come and see this condition.” (It is true that many did repent; if you read the

whole of Second Corinthians you will see this.)

I want to come to an important question: Why should we mourn individually or as a body? Why should we have contrition over our failures and our mistakes? First of all, it is not because we will be punished. That would be a selfish motive to mourn. There are three reasons why we should mourn.

1. Every sin we have committed, no matter how small it is, was implicated on the cross of Christ. And if you really appreciate Christ, you will mourn for what that sin did to Him on that cross. Please remember, salvation is free, it is a gift, but it cost God the cross. And the cross was not simply the Roman crucifixion; it was God's abandonment. Jesus went through that! Therefore, we must never treat sin lightly. Even the smallest sin was implicated on the cross of Christ. We must hate sin for what it did to our Saviour.

2. Our failures brings disgrace to the church. Remember that the church is the body of Christ. It

is God's representative on earth. When Christ came, He came to represent His Father. Today, it is the church who is supposed to represent Christ. And when we fail, we are bringing disgrace to the body of Christ. This is one of the greatest reasons for the failure of evangelism. You can preach the truth, but if the church is not lifting up Christ by its lifestyle, if the church is disgracing Christ by its failures, then we need to mourn about it.

Let me give you an example. Turn to Daniel 9. I want you to notice there is a difference between the mourning of Daniel for his church and the mourning that you normally hear from a legalist. A legalist will mourn about the church but never about himself. But here is Daniel mourning about the church because, please remember that in the days of Daniel, the people, the nations fought against each other in the name of their god. We don't do that today. Today we fight in the name of America, the flag. In those days, they fought in the name of their god. And the stronger god would always win, so when a nation or a tribe won, it meant that their god was stronger than that of the

nation that was defeated.

Israel was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews were taken captive and their temple was destroyed. Here is the temple lying in ruins for all these years, and Daniel was told through Jeremiah, the prophet, that it would take 70 years that this temple would be desolate. And now, God comes to him and says “No, Daniel, I have another prophecy.” [It was not the same prophecy, but Daniel did not realize it at that time]. “It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings before the sanctuary will be restored” [or cleansed]. So Daniel is concerned about the name of God and see how he mourns in his prayer. Daniel 9:4-5:

I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws.”

Notice that he does not say, “the church has sinned,” but, in verse 5, “We have sinned.” He includes himself with that body. Did Daniel as an individual do these things? No. Did the church do it? Yes. He identified himself with the church. Look at verse 6:

We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

“None of us, brethren and myself included, have listened.” Look at verse 7:

Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame — the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

All through the prayer he uses the personal pronoun which identifies himself with others. Verse 8:

O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you.

He's mourning about the condition of the church, but please notice how he does it. Not with a self-righteous attitude. I remember when I first went to Ethiopia, we had a terrible faction. In the olden days (even now to some degree), we had two policy books in the mission field: Section One and Section Two. [One was for the nationals and one for the foreign missionaries.] And the nationals had got together and rebelled against the missionaries; so there was a big faction. These were not lay people — they were both workers — one was missionaries and one was nationals.

They asked me to try and solve the problem. I had just arrived and the [conference] president called me to his office and said, "Can you solve the problem? You have an advantage that the others don't have." I asked, "What advantage?" He said, "Two advantages: (1) you are new here [I had just

arrived]; (2) you were born in Africa so, by their standards, you are a national. But you are a missionary at the same time, so you belong to both camps. Maybe you can bring them together.”

He was a Swedish president and I said, “I’m afraid those two advantages won’t help. But I will try and bring them together by using the gospel.” So I brought in the leaders of both groups. What had happened was that the missionaries that had mistreated the nationals were the pioneers, when there were still the colonial days. But those pioneers did not come from America; they came from Europe. These first missionaries to eastern Africa were from Europe. But now, the present day missionaries (which was 30 years later) were from America. So the American missionaries were saying “Why should you accuse us for something that the Europeans did?” And so it went on.

I said, “In God’s church there is no such thing as American and European and nationals. We are one body.” So I turned to the Ethiopians first and I said, “When you steal in Ethiopia, with what part

of the body do you use to steal?” And they said, “Hands.” And I said, “What part of the body gets punished if you are caught?” And they said, “The sitting department.” In Ethiopia, they believe in the Bible method: They give you 40 strokes but one, by a horse whip. It is very painful. They are very Biblical in their punishment. I asked them, “Why should one part of body, that had nothing to do with the stealing, suffer for the mistake of the hands?” And they said, “Because it is one body. There is no difference.” I said, “Exactly, and the mistakes of the missionaries are also the mistakes of you nationals. And nationals, your mistakes are the mistakes of the missionaries. If we would admit that, there would be no pointing of fingers.”

When a church is divided and one group says, “They are the troublemakers....” Have you ever heard that? What is the problem? They have not understood the gospel. That is the real issue. Because there is no part of your body that is a troublemaker and the other part is innocent. The whole body is guilty and we need to come to grips with this. And this corporate oneness is what will

produce mourning in the right way. We need that desperately; otherwise, there is no healing.

There was no healing in Judaism because the Pharisees and the scribes refused to admit that they were sinners like the Gentiles or like the publicans. They refused. But when we understand the gospel we realize, like Daniel, why we should mourn.

I'm giving you the three reasons why we should mourn. Number one, we have sinned because sin was implicated on the cross. Number two, our failures have brought disgrace to the church which is the body of Christ. Don't look at the church as an organization; that is the human approach. To God, the church is not an organization, the church is His body. He loves it, even though it has failed Him many times. But there is a third reason.

3. When we fail and let down Christ, we also are a poor witness. You see, we are living in a scientific age and God comes to human beings at whatever level they are. In a scientific age, God

can convince the world that the gospel is the power of God only when the church witnesses that power and, when it fails, what does the world say? “We knew you are no better than us.”

I am going to repeat two quotations I have already given you many times. One is from Nietzsche, the great pagan philosopher, who said to the Christian church, “If you expect me to believe in your Redeemer, you will have to look a lot more redeemed.” And we need to mourn about it because the church today — I’m not talking about just our church — the Christian church has been a failure and has let Christ down, has been a poor witness.

The other statement is from my fellow countryman, Mahatma Gandhi, when he was fighting against apartheid as a lawyer in South Africa. He addressed this statement to the Dutch Reformed Church: “When you Christians live the life of your Master, all India will bow down to Christianity. Until then, please don’t bring the gospel to India. I’ve seen enough of it here” (with

apartheid). Because at that time the Reformed Church was condoning apartheid.

So we must mourn because of these three reasons. I would like to add now what I have already said. This mourning has to be inwardly; in the innermost part of our being, we should mourn. The Pharisees mourned, but they mourned outwardly to let everybody see how religious they were. They looked miserable sometimes. They put on sackcloth and ashes on their head to show the people how dedicated they were about their mourning. No, the mourning must be done inwardly, between you and God. A Christian who mourns inwardly is a person who in his innermost being says to God, "I have failed you. I have been a disgrace to you. I have hurt your body, the church, please, forgive me." And God has comfort for you.

I want you to look at the prophecies concerning Jesus Christ to those who mourn. Turn your Bible back to Isaiah. Isaiah is the famous gospel prophet. Isaiah 40:1-5:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

When Christ came to this world, the common people — not the Pharisees — were mourning. Their leaders were giving them no hope, no peace. "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'" Do you know who made that statement? John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Messiah.

Look at the symbols Isaiah uses. These are metaphors. There are two things: there are valleys and there are mountains. The valleys represent those who are mourning; the mountains represent those who are boasting. He is not talking here of literal valleys and mountains. He is talking of two groups of people within the camp of Israel.

That text is a prophecy about Christ. He came to comfort those who are mourning and to bring low those that are exalted in their own eyes. The other prophecy that I would like for you to look at is Chapter 61:1-3. This is a prophecy about Christ which He Himself quoted, as you all know:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me [or ordained me] to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 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.

This is the passage, you remember, that Jesus read when He was asked to read the scroll in the synagogue. Zion is the Christian church, the believers. Zion at that time meant Israel, and today we know that the true Israel is not the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The true Israel is those who have the spirit, the qualities of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Please notice, Christ our righteousness is our hope, our comfort, and our peace.

Simeon was one of the first persons to hold Jesus Christ in his hands, when He was born. Do you know what Simeon said in Luke 2:25 when he held this Child? And keep in mind the definition of Israel. Here is Simeon holding this little Boy.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.

In other words, the Holy Spirit said to Simeon, “This is your comfort.” He was waiting for that comfort and now it is here.

Now, in concluding, I want to go back to Matthew 5:4. We have so far dealt only with the first half of the beatitude. Now for the next few moments I want to look at the second half. It is important that you see the second half also, because we human beings are impatient.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Past, present, or future? Future. There is comforting now. There is peace, but the full comforting will not come until the future, when Christ comes. “They will be comforted.” Justification by faith gives you peace now, but it is

not until the coming of Christ that you will receive the total comfort. I want to give you some texts.

In Luke 6, we have a repetition of the beatitudes but there is a slight difference, a different slant that Luke brings regarding this, especially the second half. Luke 6:21:

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

“Happy are those who weep now [you are mourning now] for you will [in the future] laugh.”

Now you are mourning and your mourning will take place until your dying day; that is what Paul did. Paul said, “I groan waiting for the redemption of my body.” Romans 8:23:

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Turn to a second passage — 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. After they had read Paul's first epistles, some of them were mourning:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Paul is approaching this from a little different angle. We mourn because of our failures and our weaknesses, but there is also another mourning that takes place. It is not easy to be a Christian. People

will ridicule you, people will despise you, people will laugh at you, especially if you are among intellectuals. Because to believe in God is only for these “old fogies.” Modern intellectual man doesn’t need God.

When we were in Ethiopia under Marxism, it was very hard for our University kids because their fellow students mocked them and laughed at them and they were always mourning about this condition. But God says, “Don’t worry. You will have the last laugh, because one day you will realize that mourning will be turned into joy.” Always remember that Christ is our Example.

I want to give you two texts. First is Isaiah 53:3. What does that prophecy say about Christ?

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

So when people despise you, remember that

Christ went through it and that is what Paul is saying. The other text is Luke 19:41:

As he [Jesus] approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it....

Why did He weep? Because He had great concern. The word “mourn” in English means “crying,” etc., but in Greek the word “mourn” means to feel deep sorrow, to show great concern, or to deplore some existing wrong that you see. So when Christ saw the city, He mourned over it. Why? Because it had rejected Him. Not because He was hurt but because their rejection of Him meant that He could not save them. There is no forgiveness for unbelief.

We have covered the mourning. I want to conclude with Jeremiah 31:11-14, part of the new covenant promise, part of the promise of God. First of all, I want to remind you what verse 3 says:

The Lord appeared to us [Israel] in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love;

I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”

If you are going through mourning and suffering, God has not forsaken you. Now look at verses 11-14 of Jeremiah 31:

“For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they...”

Now, get the picture. The Lord hath redeemed Jacob and ransomed him “from the hand of those stronger than they.” There is you and there is Satan. Who is stronger, you or Satan? Satan. But Christ has redeemed you.

“For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord — the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into

gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the Lord.

Now, this is the promise he will give you at the second coming:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Are you mourning about your condition? I don't know about you, but I am mourning. But I know one thing: I have hope; I have peace; I have a Comforter. Jesus did not come to save good people. He came to save wretched, miserable sinners like me, and I thank God for that.

It is my prayer that we will mourn, because unless a church mourns over its failures, unless we mourn for what we have failed to do...!

My professor at Andrews made this statement. I was taking systematic theology under Elder

Heppenstall and he made this statement one day in class, which kind of shocked the students. He said, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is to blame for the last two world wars. Because if we had done our job, we would not have had them.”

We are to blame for the mess that the world is in today. We need to mourn about it. We are to mourn because the world has not been lightened with His glory. We are to mourn because our own people are groping in darkness.

Now I said that was the last statement. But I want to give you a last text, Joel 2:28:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

That is what God is waiting to do to His Church: pour out His Spirit on all people. But when will He do it? After what? Verse 17:

Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

That is exactly what is happening today. “Where is your God?” And what is God saying, “Please, ministers, mourn over the condition of your church.” Verse 18:

Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people.

Chapter 4

The Third Beatitude Meekness

Matthew 5:5

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

If you keep on looking at these beatitudes, the first thing you will notice is that these beatitudes follow a logical sequence. Christ began with, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and those who are poor in spirit will always be mourning about their condition, the condition of the world, and so on. Now He goes on to number three: “Blessed are the meek.” And the first question we must ask is, What does that word mean?

The Greek word can mean several things. It can mean gentle, it can mean humble, it can mean considerate, it can mean courteous. All these are

connotations of that one word. If you notice your New English Bible, it translates it, “Blessed are those of a gentle spirit.” And that is mainly the direction that Jesus had in mind.

Meekness denotes a humble, gentle attitude towards others. And this is determined by a true evaluation of yourself. You cannot be meek towards others if you are not “poor in spirit.” Meekness is the result, is a by-product, of being “poor in spirit.” Those who are “poor in spirit” will have a true view of oneself and this will be expressed in terms of our relationships.

Keep in mind to whom Christ is talking. He was talking to an audience who were all Jews, and they were all victims of Judaism. What Christ was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, you will discover, is in complete contradiction to what the scribes and Pharisees were teaching. They were not meek. They looked down upon those who were having a hard time — the sinners and publicans. Why? Because they had a high opinion of themselves. You remember the prayer: “I thank

God I am not like that publican, — I do this and that”? What Christ is saying here is in complete contradiction to what the Pharisees were teaching. We need to keep this in mind because we as a people have often had the problem of Judaism. Self-righteousness does not leave any room for consideration, or gentleness towards others. Especially because those who are self-righteous and have success are normally people with very strong wills. And they have no sympathy for those who have weak wills. But the gospel is not for the strong-willed or the weak-willed — it is for those who realize their true condition and are meek.

The next thing I want to show you is that meekness is an essential quality for true Christianity because that is what Christ is describing. Christ is describing true Christianity in contrast to Judaism which, of course, was a human kind of religion that was full of hypocrisy.

The first text I want to give you is from the Old Testament. Zephaniah is a little book in the minor prophets, after Habakkuk. Chapter 2:3 is a text that

in the Septuagint uses the same word for meekness that Christ used.

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.

The self-righteous don't seek the Lord for His righteousness. They seek Him to show how good they are.

A person who is meek realizes that he is poor in spirit and he is totally dependent upon God. And God will hide you in the day of trouble and that is good news.

Now we'll go to the New Testament and start with 2 Timothy. Second Timothy was one of the last letters that Paul ever wrote. Here is the great man of God in prison, ready for execution. He is ready to die, he has done his job, he has finished his course, and is writing to Timothy. There is no complaining about how he is suffering in that

dungeon. There was no angel food cake for him; that is what they give them in prison here. I know because I ate with the prisoners and that is what we had for dessert. It is bad being in prison in America! But Paul was in a stinking dungeon, full of fleas, no proper light, and he says to Timothy in Chapter 2:25 that meekness is a quality for the Christian to learn:

Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth....

When we teach people who don't agree with us, we must teach them in meekness. We must not look down upon them and say, "We have the truth — you don't. You are Philistines." You will not help them. In meekness, says Paul to Timothy, please teach, instruct, those who oppose the truth. We need to have meekness if we are to be teachable and to teach.

Turn over to James 1 and you will notice that meekness is one of the qualities for salvation. If

you don't have meekness you will not be willing to say, "Not I." And if you don't say "Not I," you won't say the other half: "but Christ." James 1:21:

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Let the word of God become part of you, but you can only do it by meekness.

Meekness is an essential requirement for Christ to be your righteousness. That is why it is one of the requirements of the Beatitudes. One more text from 1 Peter 3:4. Here you will notice that meekness is one of the characteristics of a Christian and this is the context that Christ is using. He says, "Here is the characteristic of a true Christian compared with the false religion of Judaism." A true Christian should be meek. "Blessed are the meek," He says.

Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which

is of great worth in God's sight.

I want you to get the context. I know it is addressed to women but it also applies to men. He is talking of two kinds of adornment. The outward adornment and the inward adornment. Please remember that whatever adornment you talk about, the purpose of adornment is to draw attention to to yourself. But there is a good way of drawing attention and there is a wrong way. And in verse 4 he is saying the right way.

People need to see in us the adornment, the beauty of Christ. So we need to be attractive, but we need to be attractive in a way that will turn the eyes of the people to Christ — the characteristics of Christ.

I want to go to some examples of some great men of the Bible. First of all I want to go to Abraham because he is the “father of the faithful.” Read Genesis 13:7-12. Notice how considerate Abraham was toward his nephew, Lot:

And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

They were returning from Egypt and God had blessed them with tremendous wealth. In those

days, wealth was based on the number of cattle you had.

We had a watchman at our college in Ethiopia and he was just retiring and we were having a farewell party and he was late because his wife was having another baby [even though he was about to retire]. And so one of the missionary ladies asked, “What number is this?” And he said “I don’t know.” He couldn’t remember. But he said, “If you ask me how many cows I have, I can tell you that.” Because in Africa wealth is the same thing; especially with certain tribes, cattle is the symbol of wealth. The Masai, the people who drink blood, believe that all the cattle in the world belong to them. If they were to come to America and steal your cattle, they are not stealing because they believe that it belongs to them. That is one of the problems we are facing there because they say, “No, we are not stealing; God has given them to the Masai people.”

Abraham and Lot were both very rich and there was not enough room for both groups of their cattle

to eat on the same land. There was fighting between the herdsmen. Remember, this is the land that God gave to Abraham. What did Abraham do? He said, “Look Lot, we should not fight because we are brethren. We are one in Christ, but I realize that the land we are dwelling in is not enough for both of us so why don’t we separate. I am going to give you the first choice.”

He could have said, “Look, this land was given to me — I’ll choose my part and you can have the rest.” But he did not do that. He was old and the land belonged to him, but he was meek. He considered Lot more than himself. Unfortunately, Lot did not do the same thing. He chose all the fertile land of the Jordan valley and gave Abraham the desert and mountains. (And there was no irrigation in those days). But Abraham did not complain — he dwelt there. And the wonderful thing is that God came to him after they had separated and said “Look north, south, east, and west [and he couldn’t do that without looking at Lot’s land] this land, all of it is for you.” “Blessed are the meek, they will inherit the earth.” God

said, “This is yours because you are meek.” So Abraham is a good example.

Then I want to turn to Moses and read how it took Moses 40 years to learn meekness. I hope it doesn’t take us that long. Notice what the Bible says about Moses after he was humbled by God. Numbers 12:3. Here is the greatest leader and see what the Bible says about him:

Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.

No wonder he was highly regarded by God — he was very meek.

Another example is David. In 2 Samuel 16:5-7, 9-11, you have the incident of one of Saul’s men coming and cursing David. He was cursing him, throwing stones at David, even though David was anointed by God to be the king. And David’s men said, “Look, shall we go and wipe that fellow out, let him realize who’s got the power?” And David said, “No, let him curse.” He would not take

revenge at that time.

As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!"

Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."

But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"

David then said to Abishai and all his officials, “My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to.”

Also Jonathan was meek — no jealousy of David. These are some examples. Jeremiah is also a good example. Jeremiah 26:12-14, you will see that Jeremiah was a very meek man. I sympathize with Jeremiah — he was the only prophet left in Israel.

Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: “The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.”

The rest — the cream of the crop — were all

taken to Babylon. And once he complained (to God), “You have given me to look after the sour grapes.” He had some hard messages to give and they were not appreciated. They mocked him, they ridiculed him, they rejected him, and yet he was faithful because he was meek.

Going to the New Testament we have some. Acts 7:60, remember, what Stephen said when they were stoning him:

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

That is the kind of spirit that these men had. Paul was the same. Look at 2 Timothy 4:16; you will notice that Paul says:

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.

“Now that I am taken prisoner, they have all

forsaken me, they have not stood by me. But, please, God I hope it doesn't affect their eternal destiny."

But the best example is Christ. If anyone deserves to say, "I am the sovereign God," it was Christ. But you know what the Bible says about Him. Turn to Isaiah 53:7. He was a man of sorrows. Can you imagine the temptation Christ had when He realized Who He was?

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

He did not fight for His rights. Now look at Matthew 11:28-30. Here is Christ; if there is anyone we need to follow as an example, it is Christ. But, please remember, we don't follow Him as our example to be saved. He is our Saviour, but He is also an example to those who believe.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me [He is using Himself as an example], for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

The meek person does not find rest in himself, he finds rest in God. Christ found rest in His Father. “I depend on my Father.” John 6:57:

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

“I live because of the Father.” Then He says,

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Why is “my yoke easy?” Because He does all the work. All he wants for us to do is abide in Him. And He does all the pulling. He says in John 15:4-5:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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.

“Without me, you can do nothing.” So Jesus said,

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

I want to say something about this word “meek.” It does not mean weakness, or to be timid. Let me give you an example. The martyrs were meek but they were not weak. They stood up to lions, everything. Remember that meekness is not weakness or timidity. It is a true evaluation of yourself. It is applying “poor in spirit” to ourselves. And, therefore, having consideration for others.

The time when we need to be meek is when we

have a discipline committee. We must not say that meekness and weakness are the same thing.

You must be clear that meekness is not a natural quality. It is not something you inherit. It is not a natural disposition of the human nature. Yes, timidity can be, and weakness can be, but not meekness. On the contrary. Our nature is self-centered, therefore it cannot be meek. So the question is, How do we obtain meekness? Do we pay money for it? How do we obtain it? There are two steps:

1. It involves denying self, recognizing that you are poor in spirit. That you cannot produce meekness by trying, because if you do, it is a false meekness. Jesus said in Luke 9:23:

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

“If any man follow me, let him deny himself,” and that means being poor in spirit — saying “Not

I, but Christ.”

2. When you put self aside, then you are opening for the Spirit to come into you and control you. And meekness is one of the fruits of the Spirit. Turn to Galatians 5:16. The first verse is counsel and the next one is the result of that counsel — when it is actually put into practice. You will notice when you read Paul’s writings, the first half of his writings is gospel, the second half of his writings is ethics. That is the pattern, and so is it with Christ.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

That is the counsel and then he explains: he divides what the flesh can do and what the Spirit does. And you will notice that the flesh cannot produce meekness. Now in verses 22-23, you only realize this when you walk in the Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In other words, the law is in harmony with this.

So, we have to lose all confidence in self and we have to allow the Holy Spirit to produce meekness. Paul says that if you walk in the Spirit, one of the fruits that you will produce is gentleness, consideration.

When Stephen said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them,” when they were stoning him to death — how could he do it? He knew that God could bring fire — but meekness of the Spirit controlled him. He was really showing the fruits of the Spirit. And Jesus said in John 15:4-8:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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. If anyone

does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

And one of those fruits is meekness.

I want to close with the second half of Matthew 5:5. We've been dealing with "Blessed are the meek." Please remember, the word "blessed" means happy, fortunate. What will happen to those that are meek? They "shall inherit the earth." Past, present, or future tense? Future. In the meantime, the meek may be trod under, may be mistreated, may be unappreciated (like Jeremiah), they may not be looked upon as great people in the world. Because the world has no room for meek people. So you may not be appreciated, you may be trampled, mocked, mistreated, but remember that you shall inherit the earth. The blessings for being meek is future. You inherit the earth made new.

The second thing that I want to bring out is that, in the New Earth, everybody will be meek. A meek person, remember, is one who has consideration for others. In this world, everyone is living for himself. In the New Earth, everybody — all of them — will be living for each other. That means all of them will be living for you. Which is better? You living for yourself or all of them living for you? So you can see the New Earth will be a happy place because everybody will be living for others. That is what Heaven will be like. There will be no jealousy, there will be no fighting, and there will be no promotional programs or visitations; we won't need that.

The Communist philosophy is trying to do this. The principle that Karl Marx came out with is “each according to his ability, each according to his need.” In simple English this means, those who have must live for others. Have they succeeded? No. In a sinful world, production comes through incentives — sometimes even in the church, unfortunately. But in God's Kingdom, production

comes because the love of God is in us, constrains us, and we have a drive that God puts in us to live for others. And so Paul says to the Philippians “for me to live is Christ.” He lived for others. The question doesn’t come, “Am I going to be paid overtime?” Once I had a call from the Theology Department — they wanted me to teach a class at the college and they gave me two choices. One was “The Sermon on the Mount.” They didn’t know I was using it at prayer meeting and so I said I would be happy to teach that. And they said, “We have something unfortunate to tell you — we can’t pay you any extra because the policy won’t allow it. But we can do something — we can pay the church.” I said, “Good, we need some money.” (So we will use it for a worthy cause.)

I could say, “If you don’t pay me I am not interested.” But to get the opportunity to preach the gospel to those kids is a privilege. The greatest joy, and I did not produce it in myself — it is God Who works and wills in me — all He is asking is for us to make ourselves available to Him. To be poor in spirit and to be used by God.

But just imagine what the New Earth and Heaven will be like. In Heaven we will have some problems. This may come as a shock to you but we will be judging those thousand years and we will be judging people who we love and who are not there. So there will be weeping, but in the New Earth He will wipe out all memory of sin, He'll wipe out all memory of the lost and all we will have is each other to live for. And everybody will live for each other. In the New Earth, there is no more crying, there is no more sorrow — each one will be living for others. That is what Heaven is like.

It is possible to have it in the church — its possible to have a taste of it. And it is my prayer that as we look at the Sermon on the Mount, we will reflect the true Christianity that the Sermon on the Mount is describing and not Judaism, which is hypocrisy and which is outward.

As we go through the Sermon on the Mount you will see the difference between Judaism and

true Christianity. Judaism is in the letter, Christianity is in the spirit. Do you know the difference? The letter means rules — do's and don'ts that we have follow. Have you seen the Review and Herald where there was a section of letters from missing members? Many of them left this church because they were tired of do's and don'ts. But the spirit means that we want to do it from the inside; there is a drive inside so we want to do this. We want to witness the gospel; we don't have to be pushed. We want to go Ingathering (the flesh may not); at least, we want to help others.

It is my prayer that this transformation will take place. Because when God has a people who are meek, Christianity becomes attractive. And that is what the world needs to see. At the moment, the world does not have a high opinion of the Christian church. Unfortunately, not only here but even in the Third World. The missionaries in the Third World were linked with the Colonialists; they were linked hand in hand. So a lot of African intellectuals will say to the missionaries, “When

your pioneers came here they gave us the Bible and took our land. Now we have taken our land back, you can have your Bible back.” Its a tragedy! Its unfortunate that we linked ourselves with politics. When I say “we,” I mean the Christian church. It has done damage. But I am praying that Christianity will become very attractive and our church will become very attractive so that sinners and publicans and all the rascals can come here and find acceptance.

I think of a young man who was my schoolmate at Newbold. His father was the President of the Norwegian Mission. He came to this country and was sick of do's and don'ts and so he went to Notre Dame University and got linked with hippies. They left their hair without washing it and combing and they liked to be objectionable to society. And he supposedly was taking drugs and things and then became very lonely. He found no peace and no hope. So he came to Andrews University one day to Church and sat at the back of the Pioneer Church. And a young couple from the seminary was sitting next to him and the lady

opened her bag and took out a comb and said, “Maybe you’d like to use this before you come in.” And he walked out and didn’t come back. He said, (later) “I was hungry for acceptance; I [already] knew the doctrine.”

And there was a song service that evening and (my wife and I were there on furlough) he went. And I said to Jean that he looked very familiar — like someone I knew at Newbold. She didn’t think it could be he. So I edged my way over and he was staring at me. I asked him if he was my classmate and he said, “Yes.” And I grabbed him and took him home for supper. He told me what happened that morning and I said, “I don’t care how filthy you look or how unkempt your hair is — I’m even jealous because you have a full head of hair! You are welcome to this home.” I spoke to one of the professors who took him under his wing there (at Andrews).

There are people who are coming (to our church) who want to be accepted. No matter what they look like, let’s accept them because they are

children of God. Christ died for them. And if God has accepted them in Christ, who are we to reject them? The change will come. But we need to be meek. True meekness will produce a loving church. You cannot produce a caring church by promotional programs. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It comes only to those who are poor in spirit, and who are mourning, and who are meek. May God bless us that we may reach this state.

Chapter 5

The Fourth Beatitude Hunger & Thirst

Matthew 5:6

So far, the last three beatitudes dealt with not only a progression but the Christian's attitude toward himself or herself. This next beatitude, in Matthew 5:6, is dealing with our relationship to God. Once we realize that we are spiritually bankrupt, and begin to mourn because of our sinfulness and our wretchedness, and in humility confess, "I can do nothing, for in me nothing good dwells," — then we turn to God, the source of righteousness and this is where we come to the next beatitude. Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The first thing I would like to do is to look at

the word “righteousness.” In the Bible it can involve four different meanings. We need to look at the four, first of all, and then ask ourselves, “Which context did Christ have in mind, primarily?”

1. The Bible speaks of righteousness in a legal sense.
2. The Bible speaks of righteousness in a moral sense.
3. The Bible speaks of righteousness in a social sense.
4. The Bible speaks of righteousness in a total sense.

Let me take each one of them. When the Bible speaks of righteousness in a legal sense, it has to do with our standing before God’s Law. This legal righteousness is described in the New Testament as justification. The word “justification” and the word “righteousness” come from the same root word. Justification has to do with our title to Heaven. We must have this clear. Some Christians think justification only means

forgiveness for past sins. The Bible doesn't teach that. It means three things:

1. It means that I am perfect in performance;
2. It means that I am perfect in justice; and
3. It means that I am perfect in nature.

And all of these three is ours only in Christ. When a person realizes his spiritual poverty and mourns and he comes to Christ, in Christ Who has already justified the whole world, this justification, which comes to us by faith, becomes effective. The moment that you believe, God looks at you as perfectly righteous in performance, and in justice, and in nature, because Christ redeemed us in all three aspects.

But the Bible also speaks of righteousness in a moral sense. And that has to do with character. It involves two things: motive and conduct. Both of these must be such as is pleasing to God. Moral righteousness is pleasing to God, not only in terms of conduct, but also motive. According to the context, this is the main thrust of verse 6. Christ

was speaking to believers, and believers are already righteous in terms of justification. If you haven't got that righteousness clear in your mind, you need to come to that before you look at the second.

Christ is talking to believers who already have been justified, but He is now concerned with them experiencing moral righteousness. I want to show you (we'll come to it in verse 20 later on) the distinction between the moral righteousness that is taught here by Christ and the moral righteousness that is taught by the Pharisees. You will notice there was a difference. The Pharisees were not concerned about motives. They were concerned about outward conformity (appearance). That is why in verse 20 of Matthew 5 Christ says,

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And He gave a couple of examples, and we'll

come to that. They were boasting, “I have not committed any murder.” What they meant is that they had not done the act. But Jesus said that, if you hate somebody without a cause, you have killed. So God looks at the heart.

The reason I am emphasizing this is because we human beings have a tendency to look at the outward act. I’ve told this experience before, but will tell you again. In England I was going home from a youth program (M.V.) on Friday night and a lady put her head out a high window and called “Excuse me, can you do me a favor?” She wanted me to switch her light on. I had visions that she was a cripple and couldn’t use her hands. When I got to the door, she opened it and she had the use of all her limbs. I was puzzled at the strange request. And she saw that in my face and said, “I know this is a strange request. But I am a Jew and it is sin for us to turn the light on, on Sabbath because it is kindling the fire” (which is technically correct). She wanted me to do it. She didn’t know who I was, and, being a rascal, I said to her, “But doesn’t the commandment say that even the

stranger in your gates should not work on the Sabbath?” And she was horrified that this Gentile knew the fourth commandment. She kind of blushed and she answered, “Yes, but you are a Gentile.” In other words, “You are lost in any case, so it doesn’t matter if you break the Sabbath.”

I turned her light on, but I asked if she had her Old Testament and had her turn to 1 Samuel 16:7 and she read it in the Hebrew text:

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Man looks at the outward act, but God looks at the heart. I said, “I was more than happy to turn the light on, but here is the problem. I am not doing my will, I am doing your will. So, as far as God is concerned, you have turned the light on. You are only using me as a tool. If that is sin to you, I am afraid you won’t make it to the

Kingdom.”

She looked at me in horror and told me I was making it very hard. But I took it one step further and told her it was impossible. When you realize that the Law demands perfect righteousness in motive, you can never do it because our nature is egocentric and everything we do is polluted with self apart from the grace of God. I gave her another text, Isaiah 64:6:

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

In this context, God told Israel that all their righteousness was like filthy rags — unclean. She looked in horror again, and I told her that I had good news for her. God gave “your people” the Messiah and, unfortunately, your nation rejected Him. But it is not too late. She said, “I was born a Jew, I will die one.” I told her she didn’t have to become a Gentile — Christ was a Jew, too. But

she would have to become a believing Jew.

What I am saying here (fourth beatitude) is that the Pharisees were looking at the outward act. We have a human tendency to judge people by outward acts. I have learned the hard way that you shouldn't do that. When we faced the crisis in Uganda and Ethiopia, I discovered that the people I thought would be the first to leave the church were the first to stand up for Christ. And the ones I thought would be number one to defend the church were the first to leave the church and be the enemies of the church. So I said that from now on I would not judge people by their outward appearance.

You have no idea how some of our members are struggling inwardly but outwardly they look like sinners. We must be clear that moral righteousness has to do with not only outward performance (conduct), but inward motives.

It is impossible for us to serve Christ — I repeat — it is impossible for us to serve Christ

from an unselfish motive if we are insecure of our salvation. If we do not understand justification, sanctification will only become outward conformity. There are two extremes which we must be warned against. Number one is external conformity, which is legalism. We must also condemn cheap grace which says, “I am already justified, it doesn’t matter how I live.” Christ is telling the believers that they must hunger and thirst after what kind of righteousness? He is primarily concerned about moral righteousness. If you go through the whole context in the sermon you will see that this is the clear emphasis of Christ.

There is an example of this in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. Turn to 1 Corinthians 6:9-13. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians was a letter of rebuke and this is what he says:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual

offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. “Everything is permissible for me” — but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me” — but I will not be mastered by anything. “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food” — but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

He gives a whole string of what he means by wicked, conduct that we are familiar with, which was their condition before their conversion, but, now that they are converted, in Christ they are already perfect in terms of justification, in terms of sanctification — in terms of performance. They are washed nature-wise. They are sanctified performance-wise and they are justified legally in Christ.

“Everything is permissible for me” — you are free — “but I will not be mastered by anything.” You have a new lifestyle since you have been justified. From now on, your hunger and thirsting is for moral righteousness — for revealing Christ. This is what Christ is talking about in Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The first thing I would like to mention about this moral righteousness is that you cannot produce it yourself. We are not justified by faith in Christ and sanctified by our own power. There is a cooperation involved, but remember what Jesus said in John 15:4-5:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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.

“Apart from me you can do nothing” Our part is to abide in Christ — His part is to produce the moral righteousness. I will say more about this shortly. But I want to go to Number 3.

We have looked at legal righteousness, which is justification. We have looked at moral righteousness, which is sanctification. And the Bible does talk of social righteousness. What does that mean? It has to do with the righteousness in our community, in our nation, in the world. We are living in a world that is full of unrighteousness. There is exploitation, there are injustices, and a Christian must be concerned about social righteousness in our society. We must not ignore the injustices that are taking place. You will notice the Bible does have a say about this. But we must do it in the right way because there is a teaching today, which is not so strong in America because we don't have the problems that we have in the Third World, but it is called liberation theology.

There is also a teaching in America called the social gospel. These are counterfeits of the truth.

Liberation theology says that we must give to the guerrillas so they can defeat the apartheid government in South Africa. We must liberate them politically. Remember that Christ did not try to bring any political liberation for the Jews. But He was concerned about the social needs of the people. He fed the poor, He healed the sick, and He cleansed the temple because there was exploitation there. He was concerned about social injustice and we should be concerned. We should be concerned about mercy, economic problems of the people around us, integrity in business, etc. Christ comes in the Sermon on the Mount to the taxing, etc.

Now I want to go to Number 4 — total righteousness. Sanctification is an ongoing process. You will discover that the words “hunger” and “thirst” are both in the present, continuous sense. It is not something where you hunger now and then stop being hungry. This is a continuous hungering and thirsting all through your Christian life. But you will never experience total righteousness until two events:

1. The second coming of Christ, where you will experience total righteousness in terms of your nature. 1 Corinthians 15:54:

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

This perishable body will become imperishable, and you will be liberated from all the internal problems that are pulling you toward sin.

2. A thousand years later, there will be a total righteousness in the sense that sin will be eradicated. There will be no more pain, no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more crying. Revelation 21:1-4:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of

heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Then we shall live in a universe that is totally righteous. Everything from the minutest atom to the greatest creature in all the universe will confess that God is love — God is agape. That is when we shall be totally filled. But the happiness is now. Happy is the person who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

This is in complete contradiction to the Pharisees. They were never hungering and thirsting because they already had it (righteousness) in their own eyes — outward conformity. But a true Christian doesn't say, “I am righteous. I have not sinned for the last two years.”

That is heresy. A Christian says, when they see somebody doing something terrible, “There goes I, but for the grace of God.” A Christian says, “God forgive me, a sinner.” But he doesn’t stop there. He doesn’t stop mourning and being meek; he hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

I’ve already mentioned that the hungering and thirsting is in the present, continuous tense. I want to give you an example of what that means. Christ is taking two things that human beings are very familiar with. The trouble is that in America we have so much. We really do not know what it means to hunger and thirst because we have a country that has a tremendous amount of food and we take water for granted. In Africa, water is one of the biggest headaches. The life there is a question of survival. The girls have to collect water; the boys look after sheep and cows. When the children get home from school, they can’t go and watch TV. The girls have to take their pots and walk two, three, four, five miles to bring water. The pots of the older girls can carry about four gallons of water.

Ladies, you try carrying those on your head — they sometimes even run. The water remains stationary. Normally, the water is from the river and since the rivers are at the bottom of the valleys they are carrying the water up. Besides water, they have to carry firewood. One day a few of us missionaries stopped a lady who was carrying firewood. Different tribes carry firewood differently. But this one tied the firewood with a leather strap made from cow hide and then a loop went over the head and the wood was carried on the back. If you remove the strap from the forehead there is a ridge sunk in from carrying it. We asked her if we could weigh the firewood and it weighed 60 pounds — carried by the head — and the lady must have been at least 45 or 50 years old.

I want to give you a text in Psalms. What does it mean to “pant” and to hunger and thirst? Listen to how David describes his experience. Psalms 42:1:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my

soul pants for you, O God.

When Jean's Mother came to visit us in Ethiopia, the cheapest flight we could get was into Kenya, because Kenya was a British Colony. It was a package deal and we had to go pick her up. It is about 3,000 miles from Kenya, Nairobi, to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We went and picked her up and were returning and in between the two countries is a lava desert — miles and miles of simply lava, no vegetation. There was a family of Masai people — nomadic people — a father with probably four or five kids. They hadn't had any water for three days. Their cows were dried and they waved us down and asked if we could give them a drop of water. The kids were dehydrated.

Unfortunately, we had already given most of our water to some other people and the only water we had was in the radiator and I think a little other, but we gave them all the water we had. But these people thirst and hunger. They go sometimes days without water. Terrible. The pot of water (carried up by the girls) is for a whole family for a whole

day. They told me, back in the 1950s, that the average American uses 22 gallons of water a day. I'm sure it has gone up. It's hard to believe — 22 gallons a day. The African would be horrified.

But here is what David says:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

David wanted to reflect God's love. His hope was only in God.

Jesus says, "Happy are they who pant, who hunger and thirst after righteousness." What does that mean?

1. You do not pant after righteousness if you already have it in experience. Have you ever offered food to someone who has just come from a banquet? He says, "Thank you, I am full, I don't need your food." The only ones who pant after righteousness are those who realize they are poor in spirit and they are bankrupt in terms of

righteousness. So a Christian is not satisfied merely being declared righteous. He wants more than that. He wants to reflect the righteousness of Christ.

2. It means we want liberation from sin. You cannot hunger after righteousness and not want freedom from sin. Why should I want liberation from sin? Not because I want assurance. I already have that in justification. I want freedom from sin for two reasons:

a. Every sin I have committed or will commit was implicated on the cross of Christ. It brought suffering to Him and, if I pant after God, I don't want Him to be part of that suffering He went through.

b. I want liberation from sin because I want to be a witness for Christ.

Look at Matthew 5:16. In verse 14, Jesus says to the believers that they are the light of the world. But verse 16:

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

Let your light so shine before people that they see your good works and glorify not you, not your denomination, but your Father in heaven. We are hungering and thirsting after righteousness because we want to witness Jesus Christ to this dark world.

Along with the above, we also want deliverance from this body of sin. A Christian who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness realizes that there is something that is a hindrance. We call that the sinful nature. Paul calls it the “law of sin in my members.” Paul will cry in Romans 7:24:

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

He means the body of sin. In Romans 8:23, he says that the believers, like nature, are groaning,

waiting for the redemption of the body:

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

So there is a hungering and thirsting after this kind of righteousness.

In this context, I want to look at all the statements that Paul makes concerning the Second Coming of Christ. If you were to ask the average Adventist, “What does the Second Coming of Christ mean to you?” They will say, “Golden streets, mansions.” My kids used to say, “Riding on a saber-toothed tiger.” Paul didn’t care about golden streets or mansions. To him the Second Coming meant liberation from this vile body. Why? Because he was hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I want to give you a text because I want to show you something else: Philippians 3:20-21. He’s looking forward to the second coming of Christ.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

He has not only justified you, He is not only sanctifying you today, but one day He is going to glorify you. He will put all enemies under the footstool. But that is the conclusion. Now look at verses 9-14. Paul makes the statement that he wants to be found where?

...And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or

have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

He is hungering and thirsting, not after his righteousness, but God's. "I have not reached that total righteousness. In Christ I am perfect, totally righteous, but in myself, I have not yet attained it. But I'm looking forward, I am aiming for that." Here is a person who is hungering and thirsting for that ultimate righteousness.

Ellen G. White puts it this way:

"Higher than the highest human thought is God's ideal for you."

Now verse 15:

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.

So here is Paul, the great apostle, hungering and thirsting after righteousness. May I make it clear that this righteousness that we hunger and thirst for, as I mentioned, is in the present, continuous tense. Sanctification is always an ongoing process. There will never come a time on this earth that we will say, “Now I have graduated.” Have you ever gone through an academy [high school] graduation? To them they have arrived. There is never a time when you can say, “I have arrived.”

It is in this context that Sister White says that we must never say, “I am saved.” In terms of moral perfection, there is always a battle to win. There will never come a time in this life, even after probation closes, when you will not have to wrestle such, until glorification. But there has to be progress, as you hunger and thirst. Let me remind you that this righteousness is not attained by

conformity to rules. How do we attain to this righteousness for which we are hungering and thirsting? Look at 2 Corinthians 3:17-18. First, verse 17:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

What does Paul mean? Freedom from what? Does he mean economic freedom, political freedom? No. I want to remind you of Romans 8. Inside of every human being there is a law of sin. The word law means a constant force. Christ, through His Spirit, gives you another force which Paul calls the “law of the Spirit.” Here in Corinthians, he calls it the law of the Spirit of freedom.

You have two constant forces (that is why it is called a law) in opposition to each other. Which of the two forces is greater? The law of sin or the law of the Spirit? The law of the Spirit. That is why it is called the Spirit of freedom or liberty. The only thing that can liberate you from the law of sin is the

law of the Spirit. You cannot liberate yourself by willpower. You may defy the law of sin by willpower, but you can never overcome it. Eventually, it will get you — when you are tired and when you are low. Now look at verse 18:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So when you see yourself in the mirror, you will see two things: you will see yourself as a sinner, but you must remind yourself that you are in Christ. And you must say to yourself, "I am a child of God. And as I look at Christ as my righteousness, I am changed." Please, you don't look at rules, you don't look at other people, you look at Christ and be "transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory [can you see the progress?], which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

I can give you many more texts, but here is

what the Bible clearly teaches us.

In concluding, I would like to say that there is a tendency, when you realize that this righteousness is only from God, for people to become passive, to sit down and say, “Well, let me wait for God to produce that righteousness” and that is not true. You cannot hunger and thirst and sit down and be passive. If you are sitting on your sofa and your stomach is rumbling and you are hungry (Now, if you have a good wife, you can say, “Please, bring me a peanut butter sandwich.”), but if there is no one else to do it, what do you do? You get up and make yourself one. In other words, there must be an evidence that you are hungering and thirsting. A person who is hungering and thirsting will not simply sit down and wait for it. He gives evidence. How?

1. He will attend places where that hunger can be satisfied. A good place is at prayer meeting. A lot of people come to church on Sabbath because they have been raised that that is one of the requirements. You have to keep the

Sabbath and one of the requirements is to go to church. In Africa, we called the Sabbath School and the Worship Service “Service One” and “Service Two.” And if you can do one of them, that is enough. Some will come to Sabbath School and go home because they “have done their duty” to God. And some will come to Second Service but not First Service, and you will notice that to some degree here, too. But a person who is hungering and thirsting will be there for Sabbath School, for Church, for Prayer Meeting — every opportunity that he has for feeding that hunger, he will go there. It is one of the evidences.

2. Another evidence is that he will spend time with Bible study. He will spend time with the Word of God because that is what will satisfy his hunger.

3. He will keep himself from the things that rob him of that hunger, that distract him. And there is a lot of distraction in this part of the world. We are living in a materialistic country where it is so easy to get distracted. They tell me that the

average American spends six hours a day watching television. And it is so easy to do because it is so convenient. You should see the TV in the third world. One channel, that's all. And 90% of the programming is propaganda — political propaganda about that country — something that you are tired of watching. But here there are all kinds of channels and you have Cable TV. But if a person is hungering and thirsting he will find more pleasure in doing things of God.

Remember, persons who are hungering and thirsting will not simply sit down. They will study their Bibles, they will spend time in prayer, and they will go to areas where they can satisfy that hunger. It is just like human hunger. If a person is thirsty, he will try anything to get a drink. The other day I came home and my dog was over-excited. I said, "What on earth is wrong with you?" When I opened the door, he ran straight into the bathroom and began drinking water from the toilet bowl and I knew immediately that he had no water — I had forgotten to put water out. I ran and got a bowl of water and he drank the whole thing.

He was thirsting for water. He had no peace. He couldn't speak but he was trying to tell me, "You forgot to put out water."

But God hasn't forgotten to feed you. He is ever ready to satisfy your hunger. And Jesus said, "If you eat me and if you drink me," that will produce springs of water and you will never thirst again. Only Christ satisfies. Our righteousness never satisfies us.

It is my prayer that we here will hunger and thirst after righteousness and the promise is, "We shall be filled." It is guaranteed. Christ said that if we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will your Father give the Holy Spirit to those who are hungering and thirsting after Him?

So that is our Fourth Beatitude. "Happy is the person who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness." He will not go home hungry. He will have righteousness first, he will be justified so he has peace with God. God will begin to work in

him to will and do His good pleasure, and God will put in you a tremendous burden for your society — your neighbors, community. And we will not need welfare, because the Christian church is supposed to do that.

Finally, we look forward to the Second Coming of Christ when we will experience perfect liberation and ultimate righteousness. Then we shall be totally filled and we shall live happily ever after.

A legalist is looking for happiness. A true Christian doesn't look for happiness. He's already got it. He may hunger for righteousness but, as for happiness, he's already got it, even though he is poor in spirit and he is mourning.

Chapter 6

The Fifth Beatitude Merciful

Matthew 5:7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Before we discuss what mercy is, let's discuss what mercy is not. Mercy does not mean he is an easy-going person who excuses everybody's sins. That is not mercy.

Mercy is not a natural attribute that Christ is talking about here. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit as a result of a person accepting the gospel.

Mercy in Greek means one who has compassion, has pity for those who need help, and puts this compassion into action. When we were in

Ethiopia, there were a young doctor and his wife who came as missionaries and she was, by nature, very compassionate. That is fine in America but is dangerous in the Third World. When people realize you are compassionate, they are merciless. They gather around your gate when you go to the market.

When you first get there, they put you to the test to see how merciful you are. She had no peace. She was very kind, very generous, very compassionate. As soon as the folks found out, they bugged her. She could not even leave her house. There were crowds around her gate. Within six months she was absolutely exhausted and ready for a nervous breakdown. In fact, we had to ship them back home. But before she left she called me up and said, “When we left America everybody thought what a wonderful missionary I would make. Now I am going six months later in disgrace.” I said, “Sister, I want to explain. You thought God sent you here to help the nationals but God sent you here to help you. He wanted to exhaust you so you would realize that it is ‘not I,

but Christ.’”

Only the grace of Christ is inexhaustible. Her natural compassion was exhausted. Sometimes it takes longer than six months. It took God 25 years to exhaust Abraham’s natural resources, and Sarah’s, before He gave him a child. Because He was trying to teach a lesson: this promised child is from above.

We must not look at this mercy as a natural attribute. Some people are born with natural compassion. Others are not. But Christ is talking to all the disciples.

Christ is not talking to people who are unconverted. At the very introduction He tells us that what He was teaching was to His disciples. See the second half of Matthew 5:1 to verse 2:

His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them....

We must take into consideration that He is

talking to people who had already accepted Him as the Messiah. I am emphasizing this because we will come to it in a moment. This beatitude has greatly been misunderstood, just like the Lord's Prayer. For it says,

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

In other words, if you want God to have mercy on you, you must first have mercy. That is what it sounds like, so we need to clarify that.

But what exactly does it mean? It means somebody who is compassionate, has pity for the needy, and, of course, who puts that into action. I will give you an example: the story of the good Samaritan. Here was this fellow that was beaten up by robbers. You will find it in Luke 10:30. There were two people who came by him. They may have had pity on him. They may have had compassion on him, but they did nothing about it. And that is not merciful.

It is more than a feeling, or a sense of compassion. It is putting it into practice. Turn to Luke 10. Who was the one injured — a Jew or a Samaritan? A Jew. Here is the good Samaritan who sees this enemy of his (Jews and Samaritans were at war) and see what he does.

First of all, I want you to get the context. Remember, Jesus is answering a question. The question was asked by an expert in the law. It actually begins with verse 25. He (the expert in the law) had not accepted Christ as the Messiah. He did not call Him Messiah, he called Him Master, which means “Teacher.” Luke 10:25:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Had he understood the gospel? No. So Jesus said, “What is written in the Law? If you want to be saved by doing something, then you have to obey the Law.” Verse 26:

“What is written in the Law?” he replied.
“How do you read it?”

And the lawyer answered in verse 27:

He answered: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

He had, at least, got the key text from the Book of Deuteronomy that the essence of the Law is love. And that is why Jesus said to him [verse 28]:

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied.
“Do this and you will live.”

But he was not sure of salvation still. Verse 29:

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

And then you have the parable Jesus told about the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:30-35:

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”

And when Jesus had finished, he asked a question in verse 36. Luke 10:36-37:

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of

robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

You need to keep in mind that this young man was raised up as a Jew, with a different idea completely. Turn back to Matthew 5:43:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”

This is how the Jews — the lawyers — interpreted the text that has just been quoted from Deuteronomy. You should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. To the Jew, a neighbor was only his fellow-friend and those who were good to him. But Jesus said [verses 44-45]:

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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.

So to Jesus, even your enemies are your neighbor. And He was saying the same thing to the lawyer, except through a parable. I suppose the lawyer thought He didn't know what He was talking about. "He is asking too much. How can I have mercy on everybody? I will never make it to heaven." Jesus was trying to show him that he could not make it by good works.

The good Samaritan was a person obviously touched by God. Did the Samaritan say, "I better help this fellow, otherwise I will not make it to heaven"? I don't think he even had a thought of that. His life was already changed by his relationship to God. He went out of his way to help this man and pay his bill at the inn, etc.

Mercy is having compassion and pity and putting it into practice. There is a difference in the Bible between mercy and grace. On the surface it may sound as if they are the same. How do they differ? Grace offers pardon and justification from sin, while mercy offers relief, healing, and help because of sin. There is a difference.

God has both: He saves us by His grace, which means He pardons us and justifies us. But He also has mercy — He comes to our aid, He offers us healing and help because of sin.

The first thing I want to show you now is that mercy is one of God's divine attributes. I want to give you several texts. We'll start with Psalms 108:4, this is David talking to God:

For great is your love [mercy], higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

So God's mercy is great. In fact, you and I wouldn't be here if it weren't for His mercy. Now turn a few pages to Lamentations. This is one of Jeremiah's crying books; he has some good things to say in this book. Lamentations 3:22:

Because of the Lord's great love [mercy] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

Hebrew poetry is different from English poetry.

They rhyme not words, but thoughts. Mercy and compassion have the same meaning; that is in Hebrew poetry. “It is because of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassion fails not.” This is the rhythm. Mercy and compassion are two of God’s attributes and they mean the same thing.

Turn to Joel 2:12-13:

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

“Gracious and merciful,” two different ideas connected by “and.” He will forgive your sins — that is “gracious” — and He will help you.

So we have a God Who is merciful. Let me

give you one more text. Micah 7:18:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

In the New Testament, the word “mercy” applied to God is linked to the gospel. I want to give you a couple of texts. Ephesians 2:4. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful,” He is saying, “Please behave like your Father in heaven.” He is talking to the disciples. In verses 1-3 He is talking about our sinful state. He ends verse 3 by saying that we are by nature the children of wrath. Ephesians 1-5:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its

desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

God is rich in mercy. It is one of His main attributes. One more text, Titus 3:4-5. In verses 1-3 Paul describes our condition as sinners:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Titus 3:4-5:

But when the kindness and love of God our

Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,....

We are not saved by works of righteousness which we have done. Not because we were showing mercy did He do this, but according to His mercy he saved us. It is only after He saves you that He says, “Now, go and be merciful.”

I want to take this same mercy and show you how. The same thing is what God wants His children to produce. He is telling us that we are under the umbrella of His mercy and He wants us to behave just like Him toward our fellow man.

Turn back to Micah 6:8. Talking to his people, he says,

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Please notice these are characteristics of the Sermon on the Mount, too: being meek, just, loving mercy. Christians should reflect the character of their God by being merciful. Now turn to the New Testament. Luke repeats the Sermon on the Mount except he did not go into such detail as Matthew did. This is a good text to show you the basis of being merciful. Luke 6:36:

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

In other words, God's mercy should be our goal. We should have mercy because He is merciful toward us. I will go into more detail on this, but first I want to give you one more text about Christians behaving mercifully. James 2:12. The reason I am using James is because, in Chapter 2, he is dealing with the relationship of faith and works. Are we saved by faith plus works? No. We are saved by faith that works. We must make a careful distinction. And this is what James is saying:

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom....

Have you ever asked yourself what James meant by “the law that gives freedom”(in some translations, “the law of liberty”)? Don’t stop at the word “law.” Turn to Galatians 5. The Galatians failed to understand this and they were trapped into legalism. Look at verse 1:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

What is the yoke of bondage in this context? The works of the law. The law as the means of salvation. If you just say “the law,” people will think that you are against the law — but works of the law. The gospel is not asking you to give up your freedom but it sets you free to do what? Look at verses 13 and 14:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful

nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Let me give you one more text. Turn back to 2 Corinthians 3:17:

Now the Lord is the Spirit [that is, when Christ went to heaven, He sent as His representative the Holy Spirit; that is why the Spirit is spelled with a capital "S"], and where the Spirit of the Lord is [the Spirit of the Lord is in you], there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory [which includes His mercy], are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Mercy is not something we can generate, it is the fruit of the gospel. Now back to James where we read only verse 12. Now Chapter 2:12-13:

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because

judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Paul says we shall be judged by the gospel and the gospel sets us free, not only free to go to heaven but free to live as God wants us to live. When you have heard the gospel and you throw it away, then you are throwing away God's mercy.

It says two things here. If a Christian does not show mercy it means that he has not appreciated God's mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment because, when you are merciful, you are living the Christian life — you are not worried about judgment because you stand justified in Christ.

Now verse 14:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

He is talking about two kinds of faith — false

(cheap) faith and genuine faith. Verses 15-17:

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James is not saying here that faith plus works saves us. What he is saying is that genuine faith always is accompanied with works. And then he gives an example of Abraham in verse 21 and notice how he applies the example in verse 22 [here are verses 18-22]:

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he

offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

His offering up Isaac proved that his faith was the genuine kind.

Now I want to go to the second half of the Beatitude. Turn back to Matthew 5:7. We have seen what mercy is not. We have seen what it is — we have defined it. Now I want to look at mercy as the fruits of the gospel. Because this is one of the statements of Jesus that is greatly misunderstood. If you look at the surface you see,

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

You have a similar problem in Matthew 6 — same Sermon on the Mount — regarding the Lord's Prayer in verse 12:

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

There are people who won't pray the Lord's Prayer because of this verse. Both of these statements give the impression that, if I am merciful, if I am forgiving, God, in turn, will have mercy and forgiveness. Many interpret these two verses in this way.

I will give you at least three reasons why this is the wrong interpretation.

1. If this is true, then Christ was teaching salvation by works. This is, having mercy and forgiving others has merit and this contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. And Scripture never contradicts itself.

2. When people have mercy and are forgiving because they want to be saved, they are motivated by egocentric concerns, which, in God's eyes, is sin. I want to give you a couple of statements that I carry with me: one from Steps to Christ and one from Patriarchs and Prophets [both by Ellen G. White].

“There are those who profess to serve God [they have mercy on people and they are forgiving] while they rely upon their own efforts to obey the law, to form a right character [which includes being merciful] and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. [That is how they interpret Matthew 5:7]. Such religion is worth nothing [it won't save you].” Steps to Christ, pages 44-45.

“Love to God is the very foundation of religion. To engage in His service merely from hope of reward or fear of punishment would avail nothing.” Patriarchs and Prophets, page 523.

So we must be clear on this. If we make being merciful and forgiving as a means of salvation, man will always do it out of an egocentric concern and that is sin in God's eyes. It is self-righteousness. It is the basis of paganism.

3. This is the wrong interpretation because it makes null and void all the texts in the New Testament about grace. If I am saved because I am merciful, then I am not saved by grace. Let me give you three texts. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Ephesians 2:8-9:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

[Verse 10 shows the fruit.]

Titus 3:5 (we have already read):

...He saved us, not because of righteous things

we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,....

If this is not the correct interpretation, what then is the correct interpretation of Matthew 5:7? We must be clear that God's mercy toward sinners makes us merciful. It is the evidence that we have been touched by the mercy of God. This can only happen when you realize that God is merciful to you, a sinner, and you cannot save yourself. If you have a high opinion of yourself, if you are not poor in spirit, then you will not appreciate mercy. Here are three examples: Stephen, Paul, and Christ. Turn to Acts 7:60. Here is Stephen being stoned for witnessing Jesus Christ. Paul was there (by the name of Saul).

Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Did he ask God to bring down fire upon them? No. And the last thing he said to God was not,

“Please take me to heaven.” He was sure of his salvation, but he said, “Please, these fellows have not understood the Good News; don’t bring this to their charge.” Was he merciful to his enemies? Yes. Could he do it naturally? No, it was the grace of God. He was acting like a child of God. Turn to 2 Timothy 4:16. Remember that Paul is in prison and this is one of the last letters he wrote.

At my first defense [when I was taken prisoner and stood before the judge], no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me [I was alone]. May it not be held against them.

That is mercy! “Please, Lord, forgive them.” Turn to the last one because that is the most important one — Christ. The only man who revealed God to the fullest was Jesus Christ. We are a poor witness many times, but Christ fully glorified the Name of God and revealed Him. Luke 23:33-34a:

When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals

— one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

I want to explain another point: mercy from God produces mercy in the believer. Lack of mercy shows two things: lack of appreciation for God’s mercy [it cost God His Son on the cross to have mercy on us] and when we realize how expensive it was, it changes us. God didn’t say, “Oh, I love these people, I will have mercy on them,” because He couldn’t have mercy and ignore His justice. The Bible is clear that mercy and justice “kissed each other” at the cross.

If we are showing evidence of being merciful, we are really saying that we are fit for heaven. Let me give you an example. 2 Timothy 1:16-18. I am not saying we are qualified, because we are qualified ones by Christ’s righteousness, but I am saying we are fit for heaven because the only kind of life we’ll live in heaven is a life of mercy. And if you don’t enjoy being merciful, heaven would be a hell for you. You can’t get revenge there in

heaven. It is in this sense that I mean we are fit for heaven:

May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day [day of judgment]! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

But I want to give you our best example. Turn to Matthew 18:21-35. What was the setting in which Jesus gave this parable? Peter had not yet fully understood the gospel — he was still a victim of Judaism.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” [That is what the Jews thought — you could forgive seven times and then take your revenge.]

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times [that is not My teaching; that is what you were taught], but seventy-seven times [indefinitely].

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king [this will be the characteristic of the people who belong to the kingdom of heaven] who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.”

And Jesus tells the parable. When the king began to take account he discovered that there was a man who owed him ten thousand talents. Have you ever looked up how much that is equivalent to? Approximately ten million dollars. And the man who owed couldn't pay.

“As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.”

It was the custom in those days to sell those people as slaves. And the poor man falls on his

knees and begs for mercy.

“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master [representing Jesus] took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”

Who suffered here? Did the king suffer by forgiving him of \$10,000,000?

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii [one dollar]. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.”

By the way, the word “me” [in “Pay back what you owe me!”] is not in the Greek. And his fellow servant did exactly what he had just done: he fell down on his knees and said exactly the same thing:

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

“But he refused [he had no mercy]. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’”

Who forgave first? The king. So also the gospel first has mercy on us. And we in turn will say, “God, thank you for your love and mercy towards us,” and we will say, “God, we want to be like you.” We will want to treat others the way God has treated us.

“‘Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until

he should pay back all he owed. [Here was salvation by faith without works, therefore, it was dead.]

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

In other words, the gospel is not cheap grace — its a conforming power. Do you know how God defined the gospel in Romans? Romans 1:16:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

1 Corinthians 1:18:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

In Corinthians he says, “I glory in the cross of

Christ because it is the power” not only to justify us but also to change us.

We will not be successful in everything in this world. We fall many times, but our goal in the heart is to be like Christ. Why? Because that is what we want to be like. That is how God created us. He set us free in the image of God. We were created in the image of God. We lost that image in the fall. The gospel doesn't only give us salvation, it does more than that. Romans 3:23:

...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....

Chapter 7

The Sixth Beatitude Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Before we look at this beatitude it would be most helpful if we remind ourselves of some things that we have covered so we'll know where we are coming from. I would like to point to four things:

1. To whom was the Sermon on the Mount addressed? Look at verses 1 and 2. It was addressed to His disciples:

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying....

2. We must make a distinction between a disciple and the ordinary public. A disciple is one who is already converted and is a follower of Christ. We need to keep this in mind; otherwise, we will misinterpret the Sermon on the Mount.

I want to show you something in regards to this. Turn to Matthew 28. Jesus had died, was buried, and resurrected, and He has gone to the Father, and now He comes back before He ascends for the last time. He comes and gives His disciples their commission. Look at verses 18-20a:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [By that He meant that now He had a legal right to take sinners to Heaven. He had authority, because He satisfied all that the Law required in terms of our salvation.] Therefore [because of this] go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you....”

“Go preach the gospel to those people and make them my disciples, baptize them.” The Sermon on the Mount is the key passage in the gospel of the teachings of Christ concerning how He wants His disciples to behave. He is not speaking of the gospel; He is speaking of the fruits of the gospel in the life of the believer.

3. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ is addressing His disciples and is teaching them what constitutes a true disciple. And He does it in contrast to Judaism. The people He was addressing were Jews. These Jews were raised up in the religion of Judaism, the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. And you will see as we go along the contrast.

4. The beatitudes follow a very definite sequence and we need to keep this sequence in mind. For example, the first three beatitudes describe the awareness, the consciousness of our needs. Matthew 5:3-5:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the

kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

A true disciple is one who realizes He is spiritually bankrupt, therefore, he is “poor in spirit.” Of course, because of that, he is also “mourning” because of his sinful state. And this awareness of his spiritual bankruptcy — his mourning — causes him to be “meek,” because he has a true understanding of himself. He is not proud. These three awarenesses leads the person to be “hungry and thirsty after the righteousness” that comes from God. Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

If you look at Matthew 6:33, you will notice that a disciple is one who “seeks first the kingdom

of God and His righteousness” and he recognizes that all the other things like food, clothing, shelter will be added “to you.”

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

The first three beatitudes are revealing our need; the fourth beatitude is satisfying that need:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

God will never answer that request in the negative. He always is generous with righteousness because that is what He came for.

Then, in the fifth, sixth, and seventh beatitudes, Jesus points to the result of that satisfaction. In other words, those who have been satisfied with the righteousness of God will reveal this in three ways: (a) they will be merciful; (b) they will be pure in heart; (c) they will be peacemakers. These are the

fruits. Matthew 5:7-9:

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

And then number eight directs us to the outcome of this. Matthew 5:10:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Do you know what the outcome is when you reflect Christ? Persecution. Let me give you a text: 2 Timothy 3:12. There is no “maybe” here; one of the outcomes of being merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker is persecution.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Please notice, back in Matthew 5:10, what are they persecuted for?

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Because of righteousness.” Verse 11:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

That is one of the “joys” of being a disciple, but it is only for a season. Matthew 5:12:

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Now, let’s go to our study, Matthew 5:8:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

First of all, what did Jesus mean by the word “heart”? He did not mean the heart that pumps our blood. (The Greek word for “heart” is “cardiac.”) It refers to that part of the human mind where are our desires, our motives are; that is what Jesus meant by the heart. In this beatitude, more than any other of the beatitudes, is the contrast between true disciples and Judaism (the victims of it).

Judaism was legalistic and the difference is this. The true Christian is looking for inner righteousness, the legalist (the Judaist) is looking for outward righteousness. Inner righteousness always produces outward righteousness, but the emphasis is different. God looks at heart righteousness, man wants rule righteousness, or outward righteousness.

I want to give you an example of the scribes and Pharisees. Let me read you a statement from

Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing by Ellen G. White (pg. 24):

“The Jews were so exacting in regard to ceremonial purity and their regulations were extremely burdensome. Their minds were occupied with rules [rules righteousness] and restrictions and the fear of outward defilement and they did not perceive the stain that selfishness and malice imparted to the soul.”

[Then, on page 25, she quoted, “Blessed are the pure in heart” and she wrote:]

“This beatitude has a deeper meaning. Not merely pure in the sense which the world understands purity [that is free from that which is sensual, pure from lust] but true in the hidden purpose and motives [that is the inward righteousness] of the soul. Free from pride and self-seeking, humble, unselfish, and child-like.”

Children are wonderful because we know what they are thinking. They express what they think.

It's only when they grow up that they learn to hide things. I remember when we first went to Ethiopia, we were invited to an Ethiopian home. We had never eaten Ethiopian food before in our lives and it was quite an experience. They make a pancake out of flour that I had never seen grow anywhere else in the world. It is called "teff." It is almost sand; it is a little grain. They make a paste and keep the paste setting for four or five days until it gets quite sour. And the pancake is about two feet in diameter. Because it is so big you don't flip it, so they cook it in the griddle and the top part is cooked by steam. And the way they steam it (I discovered later on) is they use a basket. And to make it air tight they smear it with cow's dung. But the bread is steamed and it is sour and then they cut it in strips and roll it up and it looks like bandages. And you break a piece and dip it in sauce and the sauce is awfully hot. And here we sat around this table and we took this stuff and my little girl at that time was three years old. And she put it in her mouth, and she felt exactly like all of us felt, but she was young, so she did not hide her feelings. She said, "Yuk, this stuff tastes terrible!"

Because, you see, she was not used to it. Of course, once you get used to it you get almost addicted to it; in fact, she would love it today if she visited there. After eating it for six years, you develop a taste for it. It's tasty once you get used to it.

The pure in heart do not say one thing and mean another. That is to be double-minded. Do you know what James says about a double-minded person? James 1:7-9:

That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Let me give you what Jesus says about the Pharisees. The Pharisees were double-minded. Their actions and their heart did not coincide. Please turn to Matthew 23; we won't read the whole chapter, but the whole chapter is dealing with this. We'll look at one or two verses. We'll start with verse 5. This is the righteousness that comes from the Pharisees. When we come to the

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will say that the righteousness of the disciples must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. In other words, it must be more than an outward conformity; it must be inside. But look at Matthew 23:5:

Everything they do [by the way, their works were good, but why did they do them?] is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long [They said, “We mustn’t show our knees because we want people to see how holy we are.”];....

Then go to verse 25-28, because I want you to notice there are words that Jesus uses many times. In this chapter there are two phrases that He will use: (a) you “blind guides” and (b) “hypocrites.” Matthew 5:25-26:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside

of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

So what Christ is saying here is that it is possible to clean the outward and not the inward. But He is saying that, if you clean the inward, the outward will also be clean. Legalism is concerned about outward performance; the gospel is concerned with the heart. The outward follows, but it may take time.

Look at verses 27 and 28:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

In other words their motives were not clean, their actions were. And we need to keep this in mind. The word "hypocrisy" came from play-

acting. In the olden days, they did not try to conform to their role in play-acting like the Hollywood actors do. Now Hollywood actors produce tears or smiles, but then they used to use masks for tears or smiles — play-acting — and from that came the word hypocrisy. And so Jesus is saying that a true disciple is clean inwardly.

Now here is the problem: we cannot judge the heart because we can't read it. Who does it? God does. Sometimes the heart is clean but the outward has not yet become clean, so when you sit in this church and you say, "look at the way she or he dresses," please remember that, inside, they may be cleaner than you. Once God cleans you inside, it begins to work outward. We need to know that because Christianity is not conformity to rules.

I want to give you an experience we had. One day a young girl — she was about 12 years old — came to our house. Here in America, young people go out on a newspaper route; in Africa, they go selling eggs, because it is hard to get eggs there, so they go to missionary homes selling eggs. This girl

was the daughter of the elder of the Church. Her father had told her never to come home until she had sold the eggs. She came to our college and she went from house to house and she did not sell a single egg. And our house was the very last. She came and knocked on the door and when Jean opened the door and asked what she could do for her, she asked, “Would you like to please buy these eggs?” Jean looked at them and they were huge; usually African chicken eggs are very small. They are smaller sometimes than the smallest eggs here. And Jean said, “I have never seen such big eggs. Are they chicken eggs?” and the girl said, “Yes.” And Jean told her that she must have special chickens to have such big eggs. And the girl said, “Yes.” But Jean called me because there was something strange about those eggs. I said, “These are not chicken eggs; they are duck eggs.”

So not to embarrass her in front of my wife, I spoke to her in her language. Jean did not know the language. I said to her in Swahili, “Why did you lie?” The moment I spoke in her language, she felt comfortable to talk to me. She told me that her

father had told her that she must not come home until she had sold the eggs and we were the last house. “My father is very strict and it means no supper for me and I am starving.” The Africans have only one main meal a day; they have porridge, which is made of corn flour with water without sugar and without salt and without milk.

One cup of that for breakfast and the next meal is at eight o'clock in the evening, no snacks in between. So she was starving and her father said she couldn't come home until she sold her eggs. So I said to Jean, “Why don't you buy them?” And she said, “What can I do with them? Duck eggs are unclean.” I said, “Are you sure?” So we decided to look. She looked in the Spirit of Prophecy [by Ellen G. White] and I looked in the Bible and we couldn't find it anywhere. And she said, “I'm sure they are unclean.” So, since she couldn't find it, she said, “When in doubt, abstain.”

I felt sorry for the girl so I said, “Why don't you go call your father and I'll explain to him the problem so he will not deprive you of your

supper.” And he came and he was furious; he was not in the mood to be told anything. He said, “I don’t know what is wrong with you new missionaries.” The old missionaries were from Europe; they ate anything. The new missionaries from America were very fussy. He said, “The old missionaries allowed us to do anything, so I prefer the Adventism of the old missionaries.” He was judging Adventism by outward conformity and he was saying, “I prefer that because it gives me more license than this.” And I had to sit down and say, “Look, brother, the issue is not the outward conformity. The issue is that we must be clean in the heart. If this egg is unclean, then these people are right because they want to be honest with God.” He wouldn’t listen, so I gave him a bit of money for the sake of the girl and said, “Look, will you please feed your daughter.”

But we are in danger of making outward righteousness the essence of Christianity and we must be clear that God is concerned about the heart. It is very easy for us to appear holy in front of the members. Now the question comes, “How

can we become pure in heart?” Let us not forget that the true disciple is “poor in spirit.” What does that mean? It means that he recognizes, he is aware that, in and of himself, he can do nothing. He cannot clean his own heart.

What is the heart naturally? Let’s look at what the Bible says about the natural heart. See what Jeremiah says about the natural heart. Jeremiah 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

In other words, it will deceive even you. Let’s turn now to Matthew 12:34-35. Jesus is talking to the Judaizers, the Jews who were so concerned about outward righteousness.

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored

up in him.

Remember that God is concerned about the source. Turn to Matthew 15:17-20. This is Jesus talking to the disciples, explaining an argument He had regarding the Pharisees. The Pharisees were accusing the disciples of eating without washing hands.

Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man "unclean." For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man "unclean"; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him "unclean."

Jesus is not talking about health here; He is talking about spiritual things. The Jews had taken even the health laws that God gave the Jews and they used them as a requirement of spirituality. It is possible for our hearts to be full of murderous

thoughts, and thoughts of fornication, and false witnesses, and blasphemies and yet our words may be good. That is hypocrisy. This is what Christ is saying about the natural heart. Can you clean your own heart? The greatest evidence I can give you is the experience of the Russian countries. The philosophy of Marxism is that you can clean the heart of man by changing his environment, by forcing him to share, by forcing him to be good. Well, Russia has been forcing its people for 70 years; East Germany has been forcing for a little less time than that. Have they produced a clean people? No. They have produced a people who want to run away and find freedom. So please remember, number one, you cannot purify your own heart. Then how do you do it? I want to give you Christ as an example because Christ took our humanity. How did His heart remain pure? Please turn to Matthew 11:28-30 and Christ Himself will tell us how His heart remained pure. He is talking to the same kind of people who were trying to purify themselves in order to go to heaven.

Come to me, all you who are weary and

burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

“Come to me all of you who are trying to purify your own heart.” Jesus recognized, “I can do nothing of myself” (He was talking as a man). Jesus was the best example of a true disciple: He was meek.

He is talking about His yoke, which is the new covenant, in contrast to the yoke of Judaism, which is the old covenant. What is the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant? In the old covenant, you are promising God to be good. You are the one who is trying to clean your heart. You are the one who is trying to produce righteousness and that is not only hard work, it is very discouraging work and it brings up a heavy-laden problem.

In the new covenant, it is God Who promises to clean your heart. It is God Who does it. Man’s

part is faith. In other words, the new covenant is God's promises made effective in our life through faith alone. And I want you to know that God clearly taught the Jews this in the Old Testament but they were not willing to accept it. I want to give you some passages. Turn to Ezekiel 11:19-20. This is a description of the new covenant.

I will give them an undivided heart [no jealousy or fighting among them] and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone [hard] and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Please notice He is talking about a covenant that He is going to make with people who He has first saved. He is not doing this in order to save them; He is doing this after they have been redeemed and accepted their salvation. Turn in the same book to Chapter 36:26-28; He repeats it. Ezekiel 36:26-28:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you [new motives]; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees [He will be the One Who will cause us to follow] and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

He repeats this in Jeremiah, too, and, of course, the writer of Hebrews brings this out very clearly. Hebrews 8:10:

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

“I will write the love of God in your hearts.” That’s the new covenant! So, number one: we cannot clean our own hearts; number two: the only way that our hearts can be cleaned is the new covenant promises. But for that to happen, we

must be like Christ. “I can of myself do nothing.” In John 6:57, Jesus says, “As I live by the Father, I want you to live by Me.” So our only hope is the new covenant.

Now, let’s go back to the beatitudes. So far I have covered only the first half of the beatitude. Matthew 5:8:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Do you realize what a blessing that is? What did Jesus mean?

Turn to John 14. Do you remember the question Philip asked Jesus in verse 8?

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

What was he asking? Show us the outward appearance, the physical appearance of God. He was a victim of Judaism. Listen to the answer

Jesus gave. John 14:9a:

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father....”

So did the disciples see the Father? Yes, in Jesus Christ. Did they see Him in the physical sense or in character sense? Christ revealed God’s glory to them. He revealed the love that His Father had for them through His lifestyle. So we are able to see God now. And a true disciple has seen God. He is not afraid of God.

Let me ask you a question. If you have had a bad day, you got up late so you forgot to pray, and you lost your temper because the porridge your wife cooked was without salt, and then you got to work and then you were mad at people who were under you because you were mad at your boss but didn’t want to reveal that and you take it out on the others. Then you come home and you look back and you say, “I wonder if God will listen to me

today?” And you don’t pray because you are afraid He will not forgive your sins. Have you ever had this experience? You have not seen God completely. God is willing to forgive you, even though you have been a total failure. You may say to God, “I did not mean to be what I was today.” God will say, “As long as you do not depend on me, you will be just what you were today.” Don’t try and kid yourself. God is not taken by surprise.

So first thing, you need to see God now and only those who have seen God through the new covenant experience and know God have seen God because they know what He is like. When will we see Him fully as He is? Because even though we see Him in terms of love, we must admit that there are some areas that we are not quite clear about. And one of them is: Why is He allowing such terrible things to happen here when He could have stopped it? There are Christians who are asking, “God, why?” David says, “When I know of your righteous judgment, I will praise your name, I will see you completely.” Look at 1 John 3:2:

Dear friends, now [not in the future, but now, speaking to true believers] we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears [at the second coming], we shall be like him [for now we will be totally redeemed], for we shall see him as he is.

That, we can say, is the final atonement. Hearts that are pure may be one with Him, but our natures are not. In the Second Coming of Christ there will be nothing that separates us from God. We will be like Him. We will have the same kind of nature, the same attitude; you will be like Him.

In closing I want to read verse 3 [of 1 John 3]:

Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

In what sense? Look at verse 1 for the context:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world

does not know us is that it did not know him.

The world doesn't know God. They are afraid of God. They think He is a tyrant, but we know God because the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts." And everyone who has this hope, has one desire: to be like who? To be like God in character. Christ will expound on this when we come to the last part of Matthew 5.

Please remember, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Because God is pure in heart. His outward acts do not look to us pure sometimes because we don't understand Him, but remember that God does nothing that is hypocritical. Whatever God does comes from the heart and we need to understand that is how God wants us to be. He wants us to be honest in heart, humble in heart, clean in heart. He wants, in other words, for us to be single-minded. Your friends and your spouse cannot read your heart, but there is One Who can read your heart as an open book and don't ever try to hide your feelings and your motives from God. And when your natural heart

takes over and you have some terrible thoughts, don't be afraid to say, "God, that's me. Please take over." And He will do it because we know that our natural hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful. When you put your trust in Him, He will say, "I am the only One Who can take away your stony heart and give you a heart of flesh." When that happens, we will have a Church that will be very attractive; we won't have to promote a caring Church. May God bless us that we may reach this stage.

Remember, this is one of the fruits of the gospel. It is only those who have been satisfied with the righteousness of Christ who will be merciful and pure in heart.

Can you see that God's ideal for man is above human ideals? He doesn't want us to be just mediocre. He doesn't want just outward conformity. And ladies, if you read the texts that we normally use about jewelry, you will notice that it is in this context that both Paul and Peter say that the inward beauty is more important than the outward beauty. That is the emphasis. The priority

is inward beauty. That must be true of all of us — men and women. God is pleading that your goal be for inward purity. Don't worry about the outward; it will come.

I think of a young lady with whom we studied. When she first came, she had lots of jewelry and things and I gave her the gospel. And after she understood the gospel, I said, "Now I want to give you some of the doctrines." I knew I was coming to standards. And as we went along, I noticed she was changing and changing and when we came to jewelry, I said, "I don't even have to touch this." Because she had already conformed to the standard. She said, "It is no longer attractive to me." The gospel had done it. But if she had not seen God! If we do not fall in love with God, we are then concerned about outward conformity: what people will think about us and what they will say about us.

It is my prayer that we will aim for inward cleansing and the outward will take care of itself.

Chapter 8

The Seventh Beatitude Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9

Here Christ points out what is the main characteristic of a true disciple. The Christian, because he is controlled by the love of God, is a peacemaker. Look at Matthew 5:9:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

In England — I don't know whether you have it here — we have an expression. When we see kids behaving like one of their parents, we say, "They are a chip off the old block." And Christians should behave like God, because we are His children. We have become children through Christ.

It is in this area that God wants us, as His people, to shine. He wants us to be peacemakers and the reason for that is because God Himself is a God of love and a God of peace. So the first thing I want to do is to point you to some texts, and I am going to use the Bible quite a bit in this lesson so you better oil your fingers. I am going to show you several texts. First of all, I want to show you that God is a God of peace. That is one of the titles that Paul gives primary to God. Then I want to show you a group of texts that shows that Christ is God's means of our peace. And of course, we will then go to the application to our own lives.

Let's start with the God of peace. The reason I am doing this is because peacemaking is the evidence that agape is controlling you. In contrast, you have jealousy, strife, and envy. This is evidence that self is controlling you. Turn to Romans 15:33. You will notice that Paul quite often will end his epistles with a salutation and one of the statements he normally makes is about the God of peace.

The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Please notice Paul calls God “the God of peace.” Then, in Chapter 16:20:

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

“If you are having problems, don’t worry. The God of peace will curse or bruise the Serpent, Satan shortly.” Do you know that God is going to give us victory over Satan?

Turn now to 2 Corinthians 13:11. Notice how Paul puts it here:

Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

“Live in love and peace because the God of love and peace is our God.”

Now a few pages to Philippians 4:9. And this is a good text:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Isn't that a wonderful promise? "The God of peace will be with you."

In this world you will have strife, you will have problems. But the God of peace will be with you. I remember when we were being deported from Uganda. We were not allowed to take anything. We could not take our bank accounts (they were frozen), our property, our goods were not allowed to be taken. The plane was absolutely full. Every seat was taken and everyone of those people were deported; I was not the only one. Eighty thousand people were deported, so our plane was full. People were in tears because some of them had lost all of their life savings and they were going now as refugees. Some of them were quite wealthy but

now they were refugees. The lady who was sitting behind us turned to Jean and me and said, “How come you are not crying? Haven’t you lost anything?” And I said to her, “No, we haven’t lost anything.” “How come?” she asked. I said, “Because everthing we own is in the hands of God. We are in His control.” And she responded, “I wish I had your peace.” The peace of God was with us.

Look at 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Please notice what Paul is saying in this one:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please notice that the God of peace wants to bring peace in the church. Let me give you one more on this. Hebrews 13:20-21:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead

our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Please notice that Paul refers to God as the God of peace. The word “peace” or “peacemaker” means “one who makes reconciliation between two people or between two groups that are in opposition to each other.” And man in his fallen condition is in rebellion with God and he is at war with each other. We are living in a world that is torn by strife, with disagreements. Vertically and horizontally, we have no peace. This is one of the results of sin. Sin has not only deprived mankind of heaven, but it has robbed man of agape and peace. And it is the work of the gospel to restore that. Peace with God and peace with our fellowman is one of the fruits of the gospel.

Now I want to turn to Christ, Who is God’s means of bringing peace. Satan has given the world the impression that God is an angry Judge

and is waiting to punish you. God did not send Christ to condemn us but to restore peace between earth and also to restore peace between each other. I'll give you a couple of texts, first of all, from the Old Testament because they are important. In Isaiah, the gospel book of the Old Testament, we will look at two chapters. First, Isaiah 9:6. This is one of the titles that was to be given to the Messiah when He came. It's a very famous Christmas text.

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 [the creator of heaven and earth], Everlasting Father [He will never disown you], Prince of Peace [How did He bring this peace?].

Isaiah 53:5:

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

He restored our peace through His death on the cross, because, at the cross, we were reconciled. With this in mind, let us turn to the New Testament. First of all, I want to turn to the words of Jesus Christ Himself. John 14:27, a very familiar text:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Christians should have peace because Christ has left us with peace. Turn to Chapter 16:33. Jesus realizes that He has to go back to His Father; He realizes that His disciples will be discouraged; and so He says (John 16:33):

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Notice the In-Christ Motif: in Christ we have peace. We don't have peace in ourselves, but in

Christ. Romans 5:1:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

The world will mistreat you, the world may abuse you, the world may do many hard things to you, but, please remember, it is only temporary. You have peace and one day you will experience it.

Now turn to Acts 10:36. This is Peter's sermon to the Gentiles. He explains how the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, and then he says:

You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

He is extending the peace that Christ brought to the Jews to the gentiles — He is the Lord of all, the Jews and Gentiles — between mankind and God.

Turn to Ephesians 2:14 and Paul tells us of this

peace that Christ brought:

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace....

Between Jew and Gentile there should be no distinction anymore. He is our peace.

That is why, when we have divisions in the church, it is a contradiction of the gospel. There should be no divisions in the church. Turn now to Philippians 4:7. Notice how Paul puts it:

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The worldly people can't understand it. "Why do you have peace? You are having a hard time, you lost your job, and you are still having peace."

That is because we have understood the gospel. One more text: Colossians 1:19-20. I want you to know how much it cost God and Christ to give us that peace.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

It was through the cross of Christ that the barrier between a Holy God and sinful man was removed. So far, we have looked at God as a God of peace and Christ as a means of peace. But now, what the beatitude is saying, “Blessed are the peacemakers” — God wants us to be His ambassadors of peace. Christians are to be ambassadors of peace in two directions: vertically and horizontally. Vertically, because men who do not know the gospel need to be reconciled to God. Please notice what I said. On the cross, God reconciled Himself to who? To man. And, through faith, man is reconciled to God. It is a

two-way thing because it is a relationship.

First, I want to start with Luke 2:14. How do we Christians become ambassadors of peace vertically? Between man and God? We do it only through the gospel message. The first time Christ was born, please notice what the angels said. These are the angels that appeared to the shepherds and they bring them good news of great joy that will be for all the people (verse 10), but now look at verse 14. This is what the angels sang:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

Notice it is God's good will towards man.

God sent His son to bring us peace. When Adam sinned and God came to visit Adam and Eve, Adam and Eve thought that God was coming to punish them. But why did God come? To bring them peace, to bring them reconciliation. The gospel is a message of peace. Because of that, we Christians who have accepted and understood the

gospel are given the commission. And here it is in 2 Corinthians 5:18:

All this is from God [He is the source of everything], who reconciled [past tense] us to himself through Christ [God has already reconciled us to Himself through Christ] and gave us the ministry of reconciliation....

I have to repeat this story. I had a meeting at the college in Nairobi, where parking is a big headache. The rest of country has offices and no cars, but there, everybody had cars (lots of foreigners) and I couldn't find a parking place. I looked, and I looked, and I looked. Finally I found a place that said, "No Parking," but a car was parked there with a special number plate. Regular plates were black and white but this one was red and white; that meant it was an embassy car. And embassy people in the Third World have what we call diplomatic immunity. That means they can park in a "No Parking" place and the policeman cannot give them a ticket. So I said to myself, "I am an ambassador, too."

So I parked my car there and I went to my meeting and when I came back an hour later there was a policeman sitting on my hood waiting for me. It's quite a hassle in Africa, so I waited a bit hoping he would leave. But he wouldn't. He had all the time in the world; I didn't, so I thought I had better face the music. I came up to the car and when he saw me with the keys he said, "Is this your car?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "You have broken the law." I said, "So has this car," and I pointed to the embassy car. And he said, "No, this car has diplomatic immunity." I asked why and he said it was because it was an embassy car. And I said, "But I am an ambassador, too." He asked why I didn't have a different number plate, an embassy number plate. I said, "The problem is that my embassy is not of this world."

He saw the Bible in my hand and said, "I see you are a minister." Then he paused and said, "I am a Roman Catholic. I will make a deal with you. I have done something terrible and I am ashamed to go and tell my priest, but I need confession."

Otherwise I will not get to heaven. Since you are a minister, if you will ask God to forgive me, in exchange, I will forgive you.” I told him I was afraid that I didn’t have that prerogative. He asked how come the Catholic priest could do it and I told him that the priest didn’t have that prerogative either. But I told him that I would give him some good news. I sat down and I introduced him to the gospel. I gave him a Bible study; I spent about an hour with him.

Soon he began to smile and said, “You mean there is hope for me?” When I told him, “Yes!” He told me, “This is good news.” He said, “As long as I am in charge of this area, you can park your car here anytime.” I had give him the peace of God by preaching to him the gospel. Not by asking God to forgive him. I don’t have that prerogative. God has already forgiven the human race in Christ. I wanted him to understand that. So we are ambassadors. I gave him two texts: one was Romans 5:10:

For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were

reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

But I also gave him 2 Corinthians 5:20:

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Our job is to say, "Please, don't run away from God. He has already reconciled Himself to you through the death of His Son. Won't you please say, 'Thank you, God' and be reconciled to Him? He is waiting with open arms." The policeman was amazed that God was so wonderful.

But God doesn't want us only to be ambassadors of peace between man and God; He also wants us to be ambassadors between man and man. He wants us to be ambassadors both in the church and in the world. I want first to say something that is very important. You cannot be

an ambassador of peace by your human effort. Peacemaking is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The first text I want to give you is Galatians 5:22-23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Peace is one fruit of the Spirit. Another text that supports this is 1 Corinthians 14:33a. The Corinthian Church was divided into all kinds of factions. There was jealousy, there was strife; in Chapter 3, Paul mentions that. But in Chapter 14 I want to remind you that the context is spiritual gifts.

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

There must be no divisions in the church. If God is in control, there won't be. Because of this, Paul counsels the Christians that this peace is the greatest evidence that we are children of God, that

we are His disciples.

I want to give you several texts in regarding this admonition. 2 Corinthians 13:11. See the admonition Paul gives after declaring to them that one of the fruits of spiritual gifts is peace.

Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

And then in Ephesians 4:3-6:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [Then he explains why.] There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

In other words, there is only one God. He is controlling all of us and God is not divided, so we

should not be divided; we should have peace. Turn to 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. Here Paul is admonishing the Thessalonians the same thing.

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

In other words, behave like Christians; don't behave like worldly people. The same thing Paul said to the Corinthians in Chapter 3. One more text, this to young Timothy. 2 Timothy 2:22. Here is Paul giving this young man some advice:

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Now, I want to turn to a very important area, that is: the cost of being a peacemaker. It is not cheap; it is costly. I am afraid it is very costly to be a peacemaker. In other words, to be a

peacemaker involves the cross. In Luke 9:23, Jesus says,

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Now turn to 1 Peter 2:20-21. When you become a peacemaker, you will have to suffer. Your motives will be sometimes misunderstood or misjudged. Your acts will not be appreciated and you will feel like saying, “What’s the use?” Please remember when you read what Peter says about it. 1 Peter 2:20-21:

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

If you have done something wrong and you are punished for it, there is no glory in that; you deserve what you are getting. But if you are trying

to make peace and suffer for it, and take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

When you try to make peace, sometimes people will misunderstand you. They think that you are causing trouble and they will turn against you, but please remember, that is one reason it is so costly. What does it mean, what does it involve? I have already mentioned that it involves dying to self. To be a peacemaker also involves bridling your tongue and that is a hard thing, very painful. Turn to James 1:19:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,...

All of these three things require the grace of God. You cannot do it. And in verse 20:

...for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

In other words, man's anger is not revealing

God's righteousness. It is contradicting God's righteousness. Then turn to James 3:2:

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

May I make it clear that it takes the grace of God to do this. Without the grace of God, your mouth will open automatically, I can guarantee you that. And that is why it is only the fruit of the Spirit. One of the things the Spirit gives us is the ability to hold our tongues.

The next thing I want to say is that, to be a peacemaker, you must be able to swallow your pride; it is part of self-denial. I want to give you a couple of texts. Matthew 5:43-44 (we'll cover this in more detail). Verse 43 [the first sentence below] is what the Pharisees were teaching, which contradicts what Christ is teaching [the second sentence].

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your

neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [You don’t need to swallow your pride for that.] But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”

Now that is against our human grace. Here is someone who has mistreated you and no longer is talking to you and later that person loses his job and you hear that he is having a hard struggle to keep body and soul together and you go to the supermarket and buy him a whole box of food and you take it to that person. That is a peacemaker.

But I’ll tell you what will happen when you do that. Turn to Romans 12:18-20. What does it mean, what effect will that peacemaking have? You swallow your pride, you say, “He doesn’t deserve this; he deserves to starve to death” (that’s how you will feel). But the grace of God says, “No, he is a sinner like you and a victim of the devil” and “God loved me when I was a sinner, so I should love him.” What happens when you do that? Romans 12:18-20:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 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."

They will feel very dirty and ask why they mistreated that person. And it will bring peace back.

In concluding, I want to look at the second half of the beatitude in Matthew 5:9. The word "blessed" means "happy."

Happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Now, I used the expression "chip off the old block"; I would like to change that to "chip off the new block." That is what we should be. The word "called" in the Greek means "owned," to be owned

by somebody. Remember, we have been bought. We belong to who? Christ. And what Christ is saying here is that those who are peacemakers are revealing that they are God's property.

It is my prayer that we remind ourselves daily who we belong to. We have been bought with a price; we are not our own. Let us, therefore, glorify God in our words, in our actions, and in our behavior. We must be peacemakers. Jesus said in John 13:35:

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Please remember that peace is the outworking of love, when you have peace one with another. This is what God wants for us.

I was preaching at a campmeeting for the Pentecostal Church and it was quite an experience. This was over in Ethiopia. The young people had heard me and they put in my name to be a speaker at their campmeeting. The leaders of the Church

were horrified that the young people had asked a Seventh-day Adventist preacher to be their speaker at campmeeting (this was for the youth department).

There was a little bit of discussion and then the leaders said, “Why don’t we let God solve the outcome?” So they agreed to have three days of fasting and prayer. On the third day, while they were praying together, the leader (we would call them our Conference President) said, “The Lord has impressed me that the answer should be yes.” So they called me and I gave a series on the cross and then some of these young people, mainly university students, began coming to our Church. And some of the leaders began coming, and then the Pastor of Church where we had the campmeeting (with a membership of over 800) began coming. In fact, the whole church began keeping the Sabbath and called themselves “Seventh-day Pentecostals.”

The Sabbath School Secretary of the Union saw this Pastor coming out of the church and he said to

me, “Why don’t you try to bring these people into our church?” And I said, “Why don’t you ask him?” (He had already told me why they wouldn’t join our church.)

So the Pentecostal Pastor said to me, “Now you are putting me on the spot.” I said, “No, I want [the Adventist Pastor] to hear from your own lips why you are not joining our church.” He said, “When you Adventists learn to love each other, (like the Pentecostals love each other) we’ll join your church.” Those were his words.

You know our church was divided into factions — tribal and nationals. And he saw all that. That is why he said, “When you Adventists learn to love each other, we will join your church.” And poor Sabbath School Secretary had no answer to give him.

When the world sees that we have love for each other, then they will know we are His disciples. As long as I am pointing my finger at somebody else, I have not learned to deny self. The issue is not who

you are. The issue is that it takes two to cause trouble. And if one person is always loving, the other one will stop; he will be silenced. But even if he isn't, we must be willing to suffer like Christ suffered. He left us an example. That is what Peter says, that we must suffer as Christ suffered.

It is my prayer that we will truly behave like children of God. We will be peacemakers. It will be costly, as I mentioned, and we will deal with that in more detail. Next study we are going to deal with verses 10, 11, and 12 — three verses. The outcome of being a disciple of Christ is persecution and that is what we will cover next time. I will tell you it is worth it because we are representing Christ when we are willing to suffer for Christ's sake.

Did the disciples, before the cross, have peace with each other or were they fighting like cats and dogs? Why? Because they were trapped into Judaism which is legalistic. But after the cross, when self was crucified and the Holy Spirit was poured out — two months, that's all. At the Lord's

Supper, they were all fighting among themselves but two months later they were all of one heart, one mind, and they witnessed with power. Now, if God can do it in two months with the disciples, He can do it with us today.

From a human point of view, I know what you are saying to yourselves, “Impossible!” With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. It is the truth that will do it. Not promotional programs. It is not telling people, “Let us love each other.”

It is like telling the members, “Please, let us fly together to the moon.” To have peace with one another, the way God wants us to have peace, is the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot produce it by trying. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” Free to love each other, free to help each other, free to make peace, free from anxiety, free from everything. That is why my concern is to preach the gospel and leave the gospel to do its work.

God says in His Word, “My Word will not return unto me void.” It may take time for the seed to germinate and Jesus was with His disciples for three years. Were they any better at the end of three years? It didn’t look like it. Once He had to rebuke them. “Even you don’t understand what I am preaching.” We say that Jesus was the greatest speaker and He was, but it takes the Holy Spirit to illuminate what He teaches. And they didn’t understand Him.

But afterward, when they were broken down and their egocentric desires were crushed and they realized on the cross that it was not just someone dying a physical death. Because they were Jews they looked at the cross as the curse of God against sin. But now, they saw Him dying the second death for them. They were transformed and then the Holy Spirit was poured out on them and the Word was not void. They turned the world upside down with their message.

We have to do the same thing. It takes time sometimes because we are not able to bear all

things. Please remember that God is able to bring His Church into oneness. Our main work is to make ourselves available to Him. We must constantly say, “Not I, but Christ.” And then God will take over. This is what happened at Pentecost. The disciples no longer depended on themselves. They were of one heart, one mind. And if you read Acts 4:33 onwards, you will notice that all the multitude of believers were of one heart, one mind, they shared everything they had together. Those who were rich sold their land and possessions and they gave all to the church: not 10%, all of it. Acts 4:33-35:

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Chapter 9

The Eighth Beatitude Suffering for Christ

Matthew 5:10-12

We have come now to the last Beatitude. It is recognized by most commentaries that verse 10 is the Eighth Beatitude and then, in verses 11 and 12, Christ is expanding on that.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

This is a tough one isn't it? First of all, may I remind you that this Beatitude, like the rest of

them, begins with the word “blessed.” “Happy is the one who is persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” The best way I can describe this Beatitude is in the words of that great German martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He said, “This is the cost of discipleship.”

We must be absolutely clear that it is blessed, it is happy, it is wonderful, it is fortunate to be a disciple of Christ. But if you look at the Beatitudes, many of the blessings, in terms of reality, are in the future. Only number seven has to do with the present reality. Let’s look at them. The First Beatitude, Matthew 5:3:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

When will we really have the kingdom of heaven? When Christ comes. The Second Beatitude, Matthew 5:4:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Shall be or will be comforted — maybe not now, but in the future. The Third Beatitude, Matthew 5:5:

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

The earth made new, which is also future. And so down the line.

The only one in the present tense is the seventh Beatitude in verse 9:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

When do you and I become a child of God? Let me give you a couple of texts. Turn to John 1:12:

Yet to all who received him [and that is what a disciple has done], to those who believed in his name [the moment you received him], he gave the

right to become children of God—....

Then in 1 John 3:2. I like this one.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So in this eighth Beatitude, the blessing is in the future. The question that I want to ask is, “Why are Christians to be persecuted?” Notice the Beatitude:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It is one thing to be persecuted for doing

something wrong, but this has to do with righteousness. Why? Why should I be persecuted for doing something right?

I would like to give you some reasons. First of all, because the righteousness that we are doing is not the righteousness of man but the righteousness of God. You will notice He says, “because of me” (or “for my sake,” in some translations). It is the righteousness of Christ that is imparted that we are being persecuted for. Why? Because the moment you become a Christian and you begin to reflect the character of Christ, then you become actively involved in the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. You can be sure of that. Satan, who is the prince of this world, looks at you as a traitor. He looks at you as an enemy. And since the whole world is under him (1 John 5:19), he will use the world to persecute you. Not for being bad, but for being good.

I want to give you a passage where Christ brings this out. Turn to John 15:18-25. Here Jesus gives one of the reasons why you will be

persecuted:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

A Christian is an extension of Christ and if the world hated Christ, it will hate you. The world looks at you as a traitor; you used to belong to the world, but you have changed sides. You have taken the side of Christ, instead of the prince of this world, so the world will hate you. Continuing with verse 20:

Remember the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Christ is saying here, “Please don’t think I am asking you to suffer while I go scot free. If I, your master, was persecuted and had to go through difficulties, you can be sure that you will, too. I

have been through it.” Continuing with verses 20-21:

If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

The words “do not know” can be deliberate. The Jews knew the Messiah but they deliberately rejected him. So this is not out of ignorance they are persecuting, because they deliberately reject Christ, therefore, they abhor you. Verses 22-24:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

They hated Christ because the works which He

had done, no other man could do. If the world can imitate the Christian, no problem. But if you are doing something they cannot do, they will get angry. Verse 25:

But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: “They hated me without reason.”

And they will hate you without a cause. The moment you accept Christ, you have a wonderful hope for the future, but right now you have become involved in the Great Controversy. It is no longer simply an idea. You are implicated, you are involved, you are part of it now.

The second reason that Satan will persecute you is that he wants to get you back on his side. He has lost a citizen from his kingdom and he wants you back. The only way he can have you back is by destroying your hope and one way he will do it is by persecuting you. You will say, “Why should I suffer? Let me give this up and go back to the world.”

I was talking to a lady in Idaho when I was there and she had stopped coming to church. She said, “I was a faithful Christian for three years. I paid my tithe, and I did this and this, and things went from worse to worse. My bills increased, and I decided it isn’t worth it.” I said, “You mean heaven isn’t worth it?” And she said, “Heaven is o.k. but it isn’t worth it to be a Christian. When the time of trouble comes, I will accept Him again and I will come back to church.” I said, “If you can’t put up with these problems today, how do you expect to put up with the problems in the time of trouble? Don’t kid yourself.”

Jesus also brings this out in Matthew 10:16-22. This is because you are (to Satan) a traitor, because he is mad, because he wants you back:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to

them and to the Gentiles [i.e., unbelievers].

But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. [Isn't that a wonderful promise?]

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

This sounds impossible, but I saw it happen in Ethiopia. I saw parents report to the government their children who were not giving up Christ and vice versa. It was terrible. Please don't say that can never happen here. We are all sinful and, when the devil controls us, we will do things that are unbelievable. And you will be hated not because you are bad but because you are a Christian.

Satan is trying to destroy your faith but as you go through persecution, remember the words of Christ. The prophets suffered this, too.

There is also another reason why a Christian is persecuted and that is because God wants to refine you and prepare you for the time of trouble. A Christian who reflects Christ is looked upon as a traitor. He's also looked upon as a thorn in the flesh because the Christian reveals a life that the unbeliever cannot reproduce.

Let me give you another text. John 7:7. We read in Chapter 15 of John that the world hated Him (Jesus) because the works He did no other man can do. But now He says the same thing from a different angle. He's is talking to the Jews and unbelievers.

The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

When man compares his works with man, he is not so bad off. But when he compares his works

with God's, what do his works look like? Filthy rags. And that is very painful to the human ego and so he will persecute you for that sake. This text was applying to Christ.

I want to give you another text, 2 Timothy 3:12:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,....

Now, in what form is this persecution to come? Let's go back to the Beatitudes. In Matthew 5:11, when Christ expounds on this persecution, He tells us there are three ways that we will be persecuted:

Blessed are you when people [1] insult you, [2] persecute you and [3] falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Number one, Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people will mock you for being a Christian." (Reville, as some translations read, means mockery.)

When I was Chaplain at Nairobi University, a lot of our kids went through this. Some of the students would say to our young people, “You mean you still believe in God? That is old-fashioned! It is for our parents who have not been educated. We know better; there is no God.” They were victims of reading Marxist books. Karl Marx said, “God is an invention of man.”

It was a German scholar who was teaching the class at the University where Marx was a student who made this statement. He said, “We have been raised up to believe that man was created in the image of God but that is a lie. The fact is that God was created in the image of man. Because much of the world is living in poverty, man invented God and he invented heaven where he can retire after going through a hard life in this world. There is no God. There is no heaven. When you are dead that is the end of you.”

And many of the University students had fallen for this. And they were mocking our kids. You

can be mocked here (in America) in a so-called Christian country. One day my head deacon in the Nampa [Idaho] Church stopped coming to church. I asked him what happened. At work somebody gave him a little tract by Jimmy Swaggart about the Seventh-day Adventists and there he called us a cult. And the deacon said, “I don’t want to belong to a cult.” So he stopped coming to church. That was mocking because the word “cult” has a stigma. So he said, “I will not come to church.”

So, number one, Satan will make life hell for you by reviling you. It comes in different ways. When you go to the University and get a Ph.D. — especially in theology — it is very hard for you to stand with your peers and say, “I believe in Ellen G. White.” Because she had only three years of education. It’s hard for our students, so we need to pray for them. “You mean you believe in that person who had hallucinations, and had only three years of education? How can you believe that nonsense?” Persecution comes through mockery.

Number two, through persecution, the devil

will make life hell for you on this earth. He will make life difficult. It can be physically difficult, it can be socially difficult — you can be ostracized — or it can be economically difficult. You can lose your job for being a Christian or for Sabbath-keeping. But he will persecute you. He will make life difficult for you until you give up. But only those who endure to the end will be saved. So whenever you go through any of this persecution, please remember, “Blessed is the person who is persecuted.”

Why should he be blessed? Because the kingdom of heaven is his. I want to give you a text to keep in mind when they are persecuting you. I want to give you a picture of what will happen to those who persecute you, those who revile you, who mock you, when Christ comes and establishes His kingdom. In Revelation 6:14-16, you will notice what happens. Before that time, the believers, because they are persecuted, will be hiding in caves and rocks. They are human beings. They are scared like the disciples were in Jerusalem. And they are waiting. They are crying

in agony, “Lord, when will deliverance come?” There will be an earthquake and the heavens will open and we will see the Redeemer coming. And two things will happen at that time: Those who have been hiding in the caves will come out and say, “This is our God; this is the day we have been waiting for.” Those who have been hounding us and persecuting us and reviling us, they will take our place (in the caves) and they will cry to the rocks, “Please fall on us. It is better for the rocks to kill us than for us to face the Messiah with all our guilt.” So please remember when you are going through this, it is only for a season.

The third way the devil will accuse you — this is a hard one — is by false accusation. He will falsely accuse you and speak of you. It is hard when someone phones you and says, “The reason I don’t come to your church is because you are a heretic.” I have to say, “The judgment will reveal who is a heretic.” But I hear all the time, “Don’t listen to this fellow, don’t buy his books; he is a heretic.” The truth will triumph. They said the same thing about Christ and about Paul. We are in

good company. It is very hard for you to be falsely accused. But the devil wants to get you.

How should we Christians react to all this? Look at Matthew 5:12. Not only are we to take persecution sitting down — that would be hard enough — but:

Rejoice and be glad [that takes the grace of God], because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I want to give you an example of this; turn to Acts 5:28. The disciples, after they received the power of the Spirit, were able to do exactly this. They were having a hard time; they were taken captive by the councils, the Jewish brethren.

“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

But now turn to Acts 5:40-42. After Gamaliel spoke to them and said, “Look fellows, if this is of God, we can’t stop it, but if it is of man, it will come to an end.” Very good advice. And verse 40 begins:

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

It is hard enough to get people to witness for Jesus in good times, but these people were commanded not to speak, they were beaten. But they rejoiced for suffering for Christ and daily they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. I thank God for this. We are waiting for that power today. Remember, this only happened because they received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Before this, they were a bunch of cowards.

Now, let's notice three groups of texts why we should rejoice. Number one, because heaven is ours. Turn to Romans 8:17. To understand this, I must remind you of something. A Christian is a person who has identified himself or herself with Christ; therefore, Christ's cross is your cross. His suffering is your suffering. But, also, His resurrection is yours and His heaven is yours. You receive both the good and the bad that He went through. And this is what Paul is saying in verse 17. Look at verse 16 first:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

This is the only Beatitude we have in reality now: we are the children of God.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ [heirs in the future], if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

What came first in the history of Christ: the glorification or the suffering? The same thing will happen to us. Suffering first and then glorification. Not because God wants but because we are living in enemy territory.

Turn to another passage — especially written for Christians that had been persecuted — the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Hebrews 11:24-26. It's about Moses, one of the men of faith used in this chapter.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. [He was refusing to become one of the greatest leaders of the greatest nation of his time.] He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. [Do you think he was a fool? Where would he be today? In a museum. Where is he today? Is he alive? Very much so.] He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead

to his reward.

He was willing to suffer for the Messiah even though Christ had not yet come. He was willing to suffer what Christ would go through in exchange for the treasures of Egypt because he knew that the reward he was getting in Christ was much, much greater than the reward he would get from Egypt. The reason I chose this passage is because we are living in a country where materialism is one of the dangers. The devil will dangle trinkets and say, “If you follow me, if you give up the church, I will make you a great man.”

When I first went to our College in Ethiopia, like they have in some of our academies here, there were pictures of graduates of every year. And I looked at the first graduates. There were 12 of them and every one of them were graduates in theology. That was all the College taught in the beginning; it was not a Liberal Arts College at that time, it was just a seminary. I looked at the names and I asked how many of these men are still in the ministry. And out of the 12, only five. So I asked

the five, “Where are your buddies?” And I was quite surprised: one of them was the Finance Minister of Ethiopia, one was the Assistant to the Emperor; they all had very high positions. Then a year later, we had the Marxist revolution and these men’s lives were in danger. And they came back to the Church because now they had lost everything.

And I asked the Finance Minister, “Exactly what made you leave the ministry?” He told me a very interesting story: “I was coming home one day from visitation — I was doing things for our members — and one of my schoolmates from the academy stopped me.” He (the schoolmate) was a chauffeur-driven man now, Assistant to the Emperor, sitting in the back of the limousine and he stopped him. They hugged each other; they hadn’t met for years.

This politician said to the minister, “You are still an Adventist, I can see. You are working for the Church. Are they paying you well? Why are you walking? Don’t you have a car?” The pastor

said he couldn't afford one on his salary. "You are a fool. You were one of the top students in our class and here you are, walking like an uneducated man. Why don't you join the government? I have the second-highest position in this country. I can get you a nice job and you can help the Church with your money."

It was such a great temptation that he left the ministry, joined the government, and rose up to be the Finance Minister. He said, "I thank God for everything, even this revolution. If it hadn't come, I would have been lost forever. But now God brought me to my knees like he did for Nebuchadnezzar. I was fool to fall for it. Even though I became the Finance Minister for Ethiopia, I was not happy. I was always full of guilt wondering what my eternal destiny would be. I had no peace. I had money but no peace. The thing that bothered me the most was that there once was a Finance Minister who went to Jerusalem and was converted and here am I who was a minister for God and did the reverse." (It was a Finance Minister who the Apostle Philip converted, the

Ethiopian). So this pastor said he was glad to be back and was willing to lose everything for Christ. This was his testimony. But, unfortunately, not all of them do that. We must keep our minds on that City Whose Builder is God.

The second reason that God allows us to suffer is that we may be partakers of Christ's righteousness. Do you know that there can be no reflection of Christ without suffering in the flesh? There are many texts I can give you. Let's start with 1 Peter 4:1:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

But just let me give you 2 Corinthians 4:7-11. Please notice the statement in verse 7:

But we have this treasure [Christ] in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. [There you have "Not I, but Christ."] We are hard pressed on every side, but

not crushed [because we have a hope]; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned [never forget that you are not abandoned]; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

For Christ to live in you, you must be willing for your pride, for your glory, to be cast to the ground and that is suffering. When somebody mocks you, what is your first reaction? It is to fight back, especially if the person is weaker than you. But if you want Christ to be revealed in you, what do you do? Was Christ falsely accused in Pilate's court? He opened not His mouth, like a sheep going to the slaughter.

That is the cost of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew what he was saying. His colleagues, fellow professors here in this country, pleaded with him not to go back to Germany. He

was here in this country lecturing at Princeton and Harvard [Universities] and they pleaded, “Don’t go back to Germany.” And he said, “If I don’t go back, what will I preach? I have already died in Christ. What will I tell my people? You suffer there while I enjoy America?” So he went back, was imprisoned, and was martyred by Hitler, two months before the War ended, at the age of 39. Was he a fool? No. During his prison years, he wrote books and letters and today Bonhoffer is still speaking. He is dead but he is not dead.

There is a third reason that is connected with the second reason: to strengthen us for the future. God knows that the time of trouble is about to come upon us. God is holding the winds but He will not do it forever; He will have to let go. Do you know why He will let go? Because the world will make a decision and the decision is, “God, please stop bugging us; we don’t want you.” I read in Romans 1 that, because they don’t want to retain God in their memory, He will let go. When He lets go, all hell will be let loose and Satan will use the world, now controlled by him, to persecute the

Christians.

In closing, I want to give you two texts. First is James 5:10. Because we who are living in these last days must be prepared for it. Peter is repeating what we read in Hebrews earlier, but this is a good text.

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

We must use God's people in the past as an example. But the text that I want to close with is Revelation 7:1. Chapter 7 is answering a question found in verse 17 of Chapter 6, which has to do with the Second Coming of Christ and the events that precede it.

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?

God's wrath is "letting go." Romans makes it very clear that God's wrath is revealed from

heaven: He will let go. And who will be able to stand?

It is a question that was asked by Jesus himself in Luke 18:8b:

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

Who will be able to endure to the end, withstand the great tribulation? Most Christians today say we don't have to worry about it because Christians will be raptured before the great tribulation. They are in for a shock. That is a cop out. Can God produce a people whose faith is unshakable even though the heavens fall? Yes. So God says to the four angels in Revelation 7:1-3:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud

voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”

“Don’t let loose yet. Protect these people until they are sealed.” Until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads and then, when they are sealed, the four angels will let go. But now look at verse 14, which answered the question in verse 13. Who are these precious people?

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?”

I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

They were willing to die rather than to give up

their faith in Christ. These are the people that we can belong to. Verse 14 is dealing with the last generation of Christians. “Blessed are they who are persecuted, mistreated, reviled, and falsely accused for my name’s sake, for great is your reward.” When you come to the final trouble, I hope this will come to your memory and we will say, “I am not going to give up because I am going to put myself in the hands of Christ.”

Now remember, Christ will never let go of you, but you can say, “God, I don’t want you.” Christ suffered so you might be saved. The prophets suffered because they knew in Whom they believed and it is my prayer that all of us will be in that camp that belongs to verse 14 in Revelation 7. We have come out of great tribulation and made our robes white in the blood of the Lamb and we will receive the blessing in verse 15:

Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.”

Isn't that a wonderful hope? Blessed are they who suffer persecution.

Chapter 10

Salt of the Earth

Matthew 5:13

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

According to this passage, the influence of salt is two-fold. Number one, salt represents a silent and a negative influence. Number two is light, which represents a positive and open influence. We will concentrate in this study on verse 13. Let's read it first and then we will analyze it. Jesus talking to His disciples, after describing what that should be like, says:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

First of all, let us notice that we are to be the salt of the earth before we are the light. It is easy for us human beings to want to be in the limelight. But salt is a very silent, a very unnoticed influence. So Christ put being salt of first importance.

This essential commodity was used in two ways in the days of Christ. Today we normally use salt mainly for flavoring our food. But in the days of Christ, and especially to those he was speaking to — the disciples who were living by the Sea of Galilee, most of them were fisherman — to them, salt was primarily used as a preservative. They caught the fish and they had to transport it from the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem. That was the main market. It was a distance of about 60 miles. You try carrying fish on the back of a donkey for 60 miles, which took about two or three days. They had no ice or fast transportation, so they rubbed the fish with salt and it kept it from rotting so it arrived in a safe, saleable condition. Today we put the fish on ice.

It is in this context that Christ primarily meant “You are the salt of the earth.” Of course, He also meant that we Christians are to be a flavor in the world, but, primarily, He was using the word “salt” as a preservative or antiseptic. That was understood by the people He was talking to and who knew very well what he was referring to.

Incidentally, when the Communists took over in Ethiopia, everything was rationed. Gas was rationed, sugar was rationed, and we were allowed 10 gallons of gas a week. That was all and we had long distances to travel. I was driving from Addis Ababa to our college, which was about 150 miles, and two young men stopped me on the road. They had a pickup and I said to them, “What can I do?” I thought they were broken down. They had run out of gas two miles before and were walking toward Addis Ababa.

I said, “If I give you any of my gas, I will probably run out before I reach the college.” One of the young men said, “We are desperate, come and see.” So he took me to the pickup and it was

full of fish and they were transporting this fish from the lakes right up to the big hotel in Addis Ababa. I asked how long they had been waiting there and they said, “For two hours.” He told me that there was no ice on the fish and if they didn’t get them to the hotel in a short time they wouldn’t be worth anything. So I told them I would take the risk and supply them with one and one-half gallons, which was enough to take them into town. So I gave them the gas and one of the boys turned around and said to me, “This is true Marxism.” And I said, “I am sorry, I have to correct you. Those two hours that you were waiting was true Marxism; what you are seeing is true Christianity. Marxism only gets things done at the point of a gun. I’m giving out of concern for you. Please don’t give Karl Marx the credit.” He didn’t know what to say; he was embarrassed.

What did Christ mean when He said, “You are the salt of the earth?” There are very important implications. Number one, what do you use salt for? To preserve live fish or dead fish? Dead fish. Salt is needed only to preserve something that is

dead, something that will rot. And Jesus said to the Christian, “You [that is the human race] are the salt of the earth,” it implies that the world is rotting. It is dead and the Bible does teach that. First of all, let me take you to a statement Jesus made Himself: Matthew 8:20. Have you ever wrestled with this statement? Jesus was approached by certain people and they wanted to follow Him and asked where He was staying:

Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

He was saying, “If you want to follow me, please don’t expect material things.” Verses 21-22:

Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” [He was giving an excuse.] But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

What did Jesus mean by that? He meant that

the unconverted could take care of the unconverted. He was talking of people who were physically alive but spiritually dead. If you turn you to Ephesians 2:1, I will remind you of a passage that we looked at in the beginning. Paul says that we, by nature, are spiritually dead:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....

When Adam sinned, he did not die physically, he died spiritually. And the physical death began the process. Spiritually, the world is dead and it is rotten. This is the clear teaching of Scripture, which completely contradicts the theory of evolution. Because they say we are getting better and better.

Let me give you an example. Turn to Genesis. When did this rotting process begin? It began the moment Adam and Eve sinned. And by the time we come to Genesis 6, what does God say? Especially in verse 5 onwards. Genesis 6:5:

The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Not only was his actions evil, but his mind was perverted and was evil constantly, so that in verse 6:

The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

And so God destroyed the earth with a flood and give it a new chance. But the flood did not restore men's spirit and so the rotting process began again. And so you have Sodom and Gomorrah within a few years and God had to destroy them by fire as an example. And so all through the Bible you have it.

You look even at the Jews. God called the Jews out of Egypt, out of paganism. He restored His truth to them, but what happened? The rotting process began. Man without God. All of this is in harmony with Romans 1:18 onwards. Man,

because he is spiritually dead, is ungodly, says Paul in Romans 1:18. And even though he has the knowledge of God, he does not want to retain that knowledge. Seeking to be wise, he becomes a fool. And that is what happens: he gets worse and worse. Romans 1:18-23 (read the rest of the chapter on your own):

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

So number one, the Bible clearly teaches that the world is spiritually dead and, therefore, it is rotten spiritually. And we as Christians must act as a preservative. We retard the process by our influence. The implication, if we are the salt of the earth, is that the world is rotting.

Number two, how does salt preserve? It is only when it comes into intimate contact with the dead flesh. That, of course, brings a very important lesson to us. It implies that Christians cannot be salt by isolating themselves from the world. And we Adventists are guilty of that to a large degree.

We must be clear: the Bible teaches, on one hand, that we are not of the world. In other words, our thoughts, our deeds, our actions, our objectives, our mind-set — everything must not be in harmony with the world. But, on the other hand, we are not to be aloof. In the days of Christ, there were a group who cut themselves off from all society. They were called the Essenes and they locked themselves up in those caves near the Dead Sea.

Then, in the Dark Ages, you have the monastic system and all the time you have hermits keeping themselves from the world, but that is not what God intended. Let me give you the words of Jesus Christ. Turn to John 17:15-19. Jesus puts it very clearly there in His prayer to His Father. Listen to what He says to His Father:

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one....

So there is a danger. When you mix in the world and rub your shoulders with the world, there is the danger that, instead of influencing them, they influence you. Continuing, from verse 16:

...They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. [Then He offers this request of His Father.] Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. [That is why we need to spend time with the Word of God, otherwise we will lose our saltiness.] As you sent me into the world [“God so loved the

world that He gave His only Son....”], I have sent them into the world. [To be what? To be salt and light.] For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

In other words, we are not to be isolationists. There will come a time when probation will close and we will have to flee. But, until that time, we have a work to do. And the only way we can do it is by rubbing ourselves close to the world and let the rotting process be retarded. That is one function. The other function is to be light.

I want to give you one more text regarding this: 1 Peter 2:9. What does Peter say about the Christians?

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So we are not of the world, but set apart, to “declare the praises of God” to whom? The

worldly people. God wants us to show His praise to the world.

Number two, we can only be the salt of the earth as we rub ourselves against the world. We are not to keep ourselves isolated.

Number three, the proportion of salt. How much salt do you need to preserve? Which is more in quantity, the fish or the salt? The fish. It takes a little salt to preserve a lot of fish. Please remember that we may not be many in numbers. As we mingle with the world, as true Christians, we may be insignificant. You may ask the question as you read the Beatitudes, “How is somebody who is poor in spirit, mourning about our sinfulness, we are meek, how can we affect the world?” Jesus says, “It is not what you are that affects the world, but what is in you.” Christ in you is the power.

And He does not depend on quantity, He does not depend on budget, He depends on people who have a dynamic relationship with Him, who are walking in the Spirit. And even though we are

few, it can affect many.

I will give you my own experience. When I was in the academy (or high school, we call it secondary school in the British system), I wasn't a practicing Christian. I was a Roman Catholic, but I wasn't a practicing Christian. I used to play for my school. We called it football, but it was something different than we call football here in America; you'd call it soccer. At the end of the game, we would sit in our little pavilion and sometimes we would crack dirty jokes and things and use foul language. But there was one of students who was a very sincere Christian. The moment he walked in, there was silence. He didn't say a word; his very presence is all that it took and there was silence. The dirty jokes stopped, the foul language stopped, he was acting as salt, he was acting as a retardant.

Sometimes he would, of course, talk to us. But, at that time, we were too young to appreciate what he was saying; he was being a light. But sometimes he said nothing, he just stepped in and there was dead silence. Sometimes we would

make our own cigarettes and smoke them and the minute he walked in, the fires went out. He was acting as salt. As I look back, I realize that, even though he didn't say a word, he was influencing us.

But let's go to our text (in Matthew 5). Jesus says in verse 13:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

“You are the salt of the earth,” but (there is a “but” there) if you are no longer salty, you are of no value to God and you are of no value to man. All you are fit for is “to be thrown out and trampled on.”

If you were to go to that area where Christ spoke, it was quite common to see big lumps of saltless salt. The salt there was not the refined salt we have here and some of the salt had lost its ability, its saltiness, to preserve. So you would

have big mounds of this and people would walk all over it and trample it down. Jesus was saying, “If that is how you end, you are useless.”

In 1975 I was in Damascus, the place where Paul was converted. We were with an Arab, a Muslim. I felt sorry for them. They were having a hard life. They were homeless. They were in Israel for so long. That was home. I was with this Arab, he was a guide. We were talking and we were at the spot which is believed that Paul saw the vision. It is tradition; we don't know exactly where he was converted. There was a huge, beautiful archway and in beautiful, gold letters were these words: “There is only one God, Mohammed is His prophet.” Of course, it had the word “Allah” (for God).

He said to me, “I want you to look very carefully. You will discover something very important.” You could see that he was very sarcastic and I asked what was there. He said, “Look carefully.” And I looked, and lo and behold these words were inscribed on top of some other

words that were rubbed but not completely removed. And I could read in very faint letters, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” And then he told me the story.

He said, “This archway wasn’t built by the Muslims, it was built by the Christians. But we Muslims in the Seventh Century defeated the Christians in the Middle East. We have taken over. I said to myself, “Christianity in the Middle East has lost its saltiness.” It is fit for nothing. It was torn down in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries by the Islamic hosts.

This is the thing that happened in the Middle East. This is exactly what happened in the Eastern European bloc. Do you know all the Communist world was once Christian? Do you know that Russia was once a Christian country? Do you know that one of the best manuscripts of the Bible was in Russia? When they became Communists, they didn’t want it and they sold it to the British museum for 90,000 pounds.

We must be careful because this is beginning to happen in America. We are losing our saltiness and the result is that, when the church, when Christians lose their saltiness, they are useless. Useless to God and useless to man. That is why it is important that we take counsel in the words that Jesus spoke to the Laodicean Church (Revelation 3:15-21):

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens

the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

“I am knocking at the door. I want to come in. I want to change you so that I can transform you so you are really the salt of the earth.” If the few Christians who are in this country do not mix with the world and allow their saltiness to preserve this world, we are going to go further and further into the rotting process.

Ever since the 16th and 17th Centuries, especially since what we call the “Birth of the Scientific Age,” the Christians in Europe began to turn their backs to God. They said, “We don’t need God.” That is why the 18th Century was called the “Age of Enlightenment.” That is why in France they said they didn’t want the Bible. They had the mind; they had reason. Unfortunately, the Christian theologians began to take that route, too. We have liberal theology, we have modern

theology, we have theology that is leaning heavily on the human mind.

The mind can invent wonderful instruments. It can find its way to the moon and even send a satellite toward Venus, but, as far as morality is concerned, as far as spirituality is concerned, science cannot redeem us. In fact, science today has invented a monster that can wipe us out. The only thing that can preserve this world from rotting is Christians. Jesus says to you and me, “You are the salt of the earth.” If the salt loses its saltiness, it is fit for nothing.

It is my prayer that, even in this valley, we will be salt. We are not many, we are few, but if we have that living connection with the source of our salt, we will affect our community. It is my prayer that, whether you are at work or whether you are on the playground — it doesn’t matter — as you rub with the world, it is my prayer that you will have a tremendous influence upon those that you rub against. At work, at play, in the shops, in the mall, as you rub with people, it is my prayer that

somehow they will realize that there is something in this person that tells them that they need to change.

Once you have done that, then, of course, you can turn to verse 14 — which we will see in our next study — where Christ will say, “You are the light of the world.” We have a two-fold function. The salt is a negative function. It simply retards the rotting process. And, wherever there has been a reformation in the Christian church, there has been an effect on society. You read the history of world: when there was a reformation in Europe, there was a change in the culture, there was a change in society. When there was a revival in England in the 19th Century under John Wesley, it affected the prison, it affected the government, it affected everything. And when we have a revival in this country, it will change our senators, our society, it will change people for good.

But that in itself will not save them. We have to be also the light of the world. That will be our next study. I feel that we need to emphasize the

responsibility that we have in the world. We are not simply insignificant people. The world may think that we are just Christians. But, in God's eyes, we have an important responsibility.

It is my prayer that we rub with the world; they need salt. Everywhere we need to be salt. It is my hope that we will not be simply superficial Christians but that we will be the salt of the earth.

Chapter 11

Light of the World

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

We come now to the second domestic metaphor that Christ used to describe the Christian and his influence in the world. You remember the first effect that we saw is a negative one: “You are the salt of the earth,” implying that the world is spiritually dead, it is rotting, and it needs the Christian to retard the corruption process.

I will give you a text that I did not give you last time as a review of what we covered. Turn to

Isaiah 1:2-6. Isaiah is complaining about the way the Church (Israel) has conformed to the world. Instead of being “the salt of the earth,” it allowed the world to corrupt it. We read:

Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: “I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.” Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. [Then, in verse 6, this is the condition in the world, this is the condition Israel fell into:] From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness — only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil.

This is the condition of the world: it is rotting spiritually. Christ is saying that we are the salt of the earth.

But now I want to turn to Matthew 5:14-16. Because if all we do as Christians is to retard the corruption process, if that is all we do, we have failed miserably. Christ has also a positive obligation that we have to the world. It is found in these verses:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

This is a tremendous passage. What is Christ teaching here? Let's look at it step by step. Just as the word "salt" implies that the world is rotting, the word "light" implies that the world is groping in darkness. This has become more apparent in the

last 100 or so years because the world has made tremendous strides in science, in technology, in mechanical things, but, in spite of this, the world spiritually has not made one improvement. Look at the situation in the world. There is exploitation, there is greed, there is fighting, there is distrust. So we have not improved because all these inventions cannot solve our problem. There was a time that they thought that the more we educate the world the more we will solve our problems. And today we are trying to solve the moral problem in this country, the drug problem, through education. But, without Christ, we are groping in darkness.

Please turn to 2 Timothy 3:1-7. This is a clear picture of what the world is like today. This is something that Paul prophesies, but it is reality.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous,

rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

In this context, Christ is saying, “You Christians, you are the light of the world.” The only hope of the world arriving at truth is that you and you alone are to bring light to the world.

Now the question is, what did Jesus mean by “you are the light of the world”? How can we be a light to the world? Let’s go step by step. The first thing I want you to notice is the important fact of the grammar. Because the grammar in the English is not clear, we have, to some degree, missed the point. I want to show you something in verse 14 that you might not see too clearly in your English Bible.

The statement in verse 14 is “You are the light of the world.” The word “You” is in the plural form in the original. And the word “light” is in the singular. We are many, but we are one light. And this has implications in terms of our interpretation. This means that we are not many lights. We have a song that we teach our children called “This Little Light of Mine.” When you discover what that light is, it is not little and God doesn’t have many little lights. He has many Christians but one light. Who is that one light? It is Christ. The Christian himself is not the light. It is Christ in you that makes you the light to the world.

Turn to Isaiah 60:1-3, where we have the first mention of a prophetic text which talks about the coming of Christ as the light:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

This is a prophecy concerning the first coming of Christ. Do you know that not only was the Roman Empire groping in darkness but so was Israel. They had missed the point. And when Christ came He came to be the light of the world.

Now going to the New Testament, I want to give you several texts. We'll start with the Gospel of Luke. Luke 1:76-79. This is the angel appearing to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. And listen to what the angel says about the child that was to be born:

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

Christ came to bring peace to the world that is groping in darkness. This is referring to John the Baptist, who would point to Christ. Then turning to Chapter 2:25-32 of Luke:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents [Joseph and Mary] brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Jesus came to be the light of the world — of the Gentiles and of the Jews. But the best passages

that deal with this are in John. Go to the Gospel of John. John 1:4-12 brings out very clearly who that light is, speaking about Christ. But I want you to notice specifically what John is saying here because we need to know what aspect of Christ is the light:

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God....

Please notice that Jesus came to bring life to the

world because the life we have is condemned. It belongs to the grave. And that life, that eternal life that Jesus came to bring, is the light of men. Now one more text from John: Chapter 8:12. This is Jesus now speaking:

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.”

This is simply explaining what the light is. You are the light of the world but the question is, “How are we Christians to be the light of the world?” And I want to take this step by step.

First, for Christians to be the light of the world, Christ must dwell in us. How does He dwell in us? Do we have to pay money, do we have to go on a pilgrimage? I am trying to see if you remember what Paul taught us in Ephesians 3:17a:

...So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

How does Christ dwell in the believer? By faith. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” And when He dwells in us, we become the ones through whom Christ is transmitted to the world.

I want to give you two verses. One is Colossians 1:27, where he speaks of:

...Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And if you look at the context, what Paul is saying here is that we are the glory of God before the whole world — the Gentile world. Here’s the entire verse:

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The word “Gentile” has two meanings in the New Testament. It can mean the non-Jew or it can mean unbelievers. In this context, it is unbelievers.

The world needs to see Christ. How do they see Him? “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” You remember in Revelation 18, the fourth angel gives power to the church. Revelation 18:1:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

It will lighten the earth with the glory of God. That is our privilege. I want to give you one more text that gives this idea that you and I are only the candlestick; we are not the light. But when light is put into us, we become the light of the world. Turn to 2 Corinthians 4:5-6:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

That is our privilege. Our privilege is to

explain to the world the good news about Christ. Then in verse 7:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

God will give you opportunity to explain to the world about His Son, Jesus Christ. The world desperately needs to know that there is a Savior. I was trying to give this gospel to our kids at the college where I was teaching. And in one class, one of the students came up to me and said, “Why haven’t we heard this before? That Christ is our Savior?” Apparently they had not understood that Christ had totally redeemed them in His doing and dying. And I was glad to give that.

Now comes the big question, “How are we to shine?” We have Christ dwelling in us. He is inside. We are earthen vessels. How are we to shine? Let’s go back to Matthew 5 and see what Jesus says:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Having made the statement in verse 14, “You are the light of the world,” He then goes on to say, “A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” Why not? Because all the houses in that city have light. And, of course, everybody can see those lights from a distance. When you travel in a plane or car and you are going over the wilderness and suddenly in the distance you see a bunch of lights, you know there is a city there. This is not so apparent here, but in Africa, our mission station, thanks to the generosity of you Americans, most of our mission stations have power from 6:00 in the evening until 10:00 at night through a generator, a diesel engine. And the Africans have kerosene lanterns; you can’t see too far off. But when you are traveling and see on the hill — most of our missions stations are on a

hill — you see all those lights; then you know that this is an SDA campus. Turn to verse 15:

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

Jesus is saying that God hasn't given you Christ to dwell in you so that you may hide Him! He is taking this metaphor and He is saying that the whole world needs to know that you are a Christian. Whether at work or in school, there must be something about you that tells them you are different, that you are a Christian. Of all people, Christians must be the happiest people in the world. If you go about with a long face, they will not see the joy. The only way you can be happy is to know that Light is your life. He is the life of men and you have a hope. Now we must go to verse 16:

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

Christ doesn't want just to dwell in us. He wants more than just to dwell in us. Turn to 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 and let us look at the new covenant desire of God:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? [He is talking here of compromising.] What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

What does the word "temple" or "sanctuary" mean? We have bird sanctuaries, what does that mean? That is where they dwell. And God and Christ are dwelling in us.

God wants to walk in us so that the world can

see. Jesus said, “Let your Light shine.” How do we let Christ Who dwells inside of us shine? Remember, Christ is the Light of the world, so first we must look at Christ and see how He shone when He came to this world. And then we will know how He shines through us.

Look at John 14:8. One of the disciples comes to Jesus and says “show us the Father and we will be satisfied.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Philip said, “We want to see God.” Look at the reply that Jesus gave to him (verse 9):

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

In other words, he who has seen the Christian must also see Christ. Just like the one who saw

Christ, saw the Father. Why? Look at verse 10:

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

In Matthew 11:20, we are told that those works were mighty works, miracles, not ordinary works:

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

Now verse 11 of John 14:

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

Let me explain to you where the problem is. Humanly speaking, did Jesus look any different from the other Jews? Was He anything special outwardly? No. Was there a kind of halo around

Him? No.

In Wichita I stayed with a doctor and he asked me to go with him on his rounds. It was a very big hospital in Wichita, about twice the size of St. Mary's. And he was visiting only the accident patients. There were about 26 of them. Young kids mostly. He said 80 percent of these are alcohol-related accidents.

He told me that I was going to see a young boy that had a halo. And I didn't know what he meant. The boy did have a halo screwed right into his head. I felt sorry for him and I said to myself, "That's not the kind of halo I want." Did Christ have a halo around His head like some pictures or paintings of Him that we have? No. He looked outwardly like others but there was something about His works that were different.

Do you remember what happened in John 9 when Jesus made clay and healed the blind man? Do you remember what the argument was? Look at verse 16:

Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided.

Now going back to John 14:11 listen to what Jesus said:

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

In other words, there is something about my works that proves that I am not an ordinary man, that I have God dwelling in me. What were those works? Turn to John 15:24. What was so special about the works of Christ?

If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

What was the greatest evidence that Jesus gave that He was the Messiah? It was His works. His works were supernatural and He gave evidence that there was somebody supernatural living in Him. There was no excuse, He said. They have seen the works so they have no excuse. So also when the Apostles preached Christ. When you look at your New Testament you will discover that with great signs and wonders they preached Christ.

Likewise, in the last days, with great signs and wonders God is going to manifest Himself to us. So that even the scientists will have to admit that there is no explanation. It has to be supernatural. Having given evidence about Himself, listen to what Jesus said in John 14:12:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Why should we do greater works? Because God had only one body to live in Christ. But now,

God has many bodies to reveal Himself. That is why the “you” is plural. You are many, but you are one light. Let me put it another way. The first four books of the New Testament are called what? The gospels. What exactly are the gospels? The gospels are primarily a historical account of God being revealed in one man: God’s many facets in the flesh of one man.

The next book is the Book of Acts. It is also a historical account, but is the revelation of God not in one man, but in many men and women — the body of Christ. The trouble is that revelation was short-lived. There was a falling away that came and the Church no longer became the light of the world. It grew in numbers, yes, but it began to compromise with the world, paganism, etc.

Please notice in John 14:12 why we will do greater works:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the

Father.

“Because I go to my Father.” What does Christ going to the Father have to do with much works? Look at Chapter 16:7:

But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Christ, because He took humanity, cannot dwell in us literally. He dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. Please turn to Romans 8:9. I want you to notice something. Talking to the believers, Paul says [Romans 8:9-10]:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. [Notice it is called the Spirit of God.] And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ [So the Spirit of God is synonymous with the Spirit of Christ.], he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet

your spirit is alive [That life is the light of Christ Who is the light of the world.] because of righteousness.

Now turn to John 6, where I will show you something that points to Christ and to us, also. This chapter is dealing with Christ as the Bread of life. There were many metaphors used for Christ. He is the Light of the world, but He is also the Bread of life. It is talking here about the believers doing what with the bread? Eating it. It is in this context, for example, in verse 54:

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

If you have eternal life, then you are the light of the world because that Life was the light of men. Now look at verse 57:

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

In other words, a Christian must live by the formula of “Not I, but Christ.” Let me put it in the words of Paul. Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. [That is what it means to be the light of the world.] The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

There are two things here. Christ dwells in me by faith. He lives in me by faith. It is all by faith. John 15:4,5,8; you are familiar with these verses but this is what Jesus is wanting from us:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. [Just like Christ and the Father were abiding in each other, Christ is now telling the believers.] No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 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. ...This is

to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This is exactly what Christ said in Matthew 5:16:

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

What did Jesus mean by the good works? Doesn't the unbeliever also do good works? There are two differences in the good works that the Christian must do. How do I know that? Because whatever we do, the world must recognize that the source of the good works is not me, but the Father. Let them see your good works and glorify God. Do you remember what Nicodemus said to Jesus when he came to Him at night? Turn to John 3:1-2:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we

know you are a teacher who has come from God. [“You have convinced me that you are from God.” What convinced him?] For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

This is what the world can see. In other words, if the world sees you doing what they themselves are doing, they see no difference; they won't glorify God. Does the world see the poor? The United Nations are doing (for the poor) much more than we are doing. What does the United Nations depend on for feeding the poor? It depends on budgets; it needs money. Just like United States aid depends on money. If we (Adventists) are feeding the world only by budget, are we any different? When we feed the world the world with five loaves and two fishes then they will say, “How do you do it?”

There are two things that the world must see. Number one, when we talk of supernatural acts, we normally think in terms of “acts.” I would like to point out that, in the Bible, it is not only the act that

must be supernatural, but the motivation. Can God produce a people who are doing good acts out of agape love with no self in it? The world must see this. Turn to Acts 2:42-44:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

They lived in love and they performed miracles. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 15:18-19 about himself (Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles):

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done — by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

How did he preach? By signs and wonders. Let me put it this way, the signs and wonders are only outward evidence that a supernatural power is controlling you. But we must preach the gospel accompanied by this. At Pentecost all the apostles spoke in tongues. Not in gibberish but in the language of the people from the various areas. But what did the tongues do? It got the people's attention. They saw something that was a mystery they could not explain. Once they got together, Peter stood up and he gave them Christ, preached Christ. We don't need to depend on human resources. When this Church has received power, God will use us mightily to draw the people. But we must have a clear knowledge and preach Christ. Read the sermon that Peter preached. You will notice that he preached Christ our Righteousness.

How will this affect the world? Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." How will this affect, when Christ is revealed through the Church? In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:16, we get only half the picture. It is true that when the world

sees Christ in you and me, many will be drawn to Christ and thousands will be baptized. But the world will be divided. Will everyone accept Christ? No. There will be two groups in the world. One will say, “You have convinced us that you have the truth” and they will join the Church. But there will be another group. When Christ lives in you — when He does the works in you — He does something to the world. Go to John 7:7. When Christ lived in this world what did His works reveal?

The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil.

When you compare the works of Christ with the works of men, what do the works of men look like? At their very best, what do they look like? Filthy rags. And that is very painful to the world, so they turn against Christ. Turn to John 3:19-21:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does

evil hates the light [If you reveal Christ, there will be some who hate you.], and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

Jesus is saying here that people who do not want to give up sin do not like to live close to Christ. Why? Because Christ is the Light and when the Light comes there is nothing that is hidden. If our hearts have been cleansed and we come close to Christ, we are not afraid because we, in our hearts, want to be like Him.

Chapter 12

Christ Fulfills the Law

Matthew 5:17-19

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. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

I would like to begin by reminding you that we must never forget that the whole Sermon on the Mount is a unit. It is not random portions, so as we begin this new section, we want to remember that it is linked with what Christ has already taught. Let

me start by giving you a quick resume of what Christ is doing in the Sermon on the Mount.

Number one, we must keep in mind that Christ is addressing His disciples. He is not addressing people who have not accepted Him. He is addressing believers; therefore, the Sermon on the Mount is not evangelical in the sense that it is not trying to preach the gospel to convert people. But it is what we call deductive, or teaching. Christ is teaching His disciples how they should live.

Number two, Christ introduces the Sermon on the Mount by what we call the Eight Beatitudes. It is a description of what a true Christian should be. Then this is followed by how the true Christian must affect the world by his lifestyle — by his message. He affects the world in two ways: salt and light. Jesus used the word “salt” in the sense of preserving or retarding the rotting process in the fish that was transported to Jerusalem from the Sea of Galilee. Christ is saying by this symbol that the world is spiritually dead and that it is rotting, and Christians, as they mingle with the world, are to

retard the rotting process.

But we have to do more than that. We are also the light of the world. What the world desperately needs to see is Christ; He's the Light of the world. And the Light is equated with His Life. The Life that He gave to all men. Now in Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus lays the foundation, He speaks in general terms, as to how a Christian must live. In one word we can describe it: he must live righteously. The life of the true Christian is a life of righteousness.

We want to cover verses 17 to 19 in this study. (Verse 20 is a transitional text and goes with two sections.) What Christ is saying is two things in this section.

Verses 17-18:

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. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means

disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Verses 19-20:

Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Christ is telling us two things. We can divide this section into two parts: verses 17 and 18, and verses 19 and 20. And He is saying in the first part (vs. 17-18) that the teaching of Christ is in perfect harmony with the Old Testament teachings. The New Testament and Christ's teachings do not contradict the Old Testament teachings. Number two, He is saying that His teaching completely contradicts the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees.

With this in mind, let's look at it in detail. Look at verse 17 and the first question is, "What prompted Christ to say, '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'?" The scribes and Pharisees claimed to be the authority of the Bible. They claimed to be the authority on the teachings of the Old Testament. They claimed to be the authority in interpreting the Law and the Prophets. Christ's teaching disagreed with their teaching. Therefore, the Pharisees accused Christ of doing away with the Law and the teachings of the prophets. The question is, "Are they correct?" Is He there to destroy the teaching of the Old Testament? And the answer is, No. "Do not think," don't believe what those Pharisees are teaching you. "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"

There are some examples of this in John 9:16, when the Pharisees and scribes accuse Christ of breaking the Sabbath:

Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, “How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?” So they were divided.

This is not the only time. Let’s look at some other texts in Matthew itself. Turn to Matthew 11:19. The Old Testament taught temperance, but look at what Jesus said in verse 19:

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they [scribes and Pharisees] say, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners.’” But wisdom is proved right by her actions.

This is what the Pharisees and scribes accused Christ of. Then turn to Chapter 26 of Matthew and, in verse 65, when Christ was brought before the Sanhedrin, listen to what they say to Him. Jesus had just mentioned that they would see Him coming in the clouds of heaven with power. And

listen to what the high priest said:

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy.”

Christ was accused of terrible things. He was accused of breaking the law, accused of blasphemy, of being a drunkard, gluttonous. And so the Pharisees were giving an impression to the people that Christ was an imposter, that Christ was against the Law, against the Old Testament. By the way, Paul had the same problem. Turn to Acts 21:27-28. Remember when Paul was arrested by the Jews? Here is what they said about him. This is the Jews who grabbed him and accused him.

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place [the temple].

And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.”

Now are these accusations right? Was Christ a glutton and a drunkard? Was Christ a breaker of the law? That is what the Pharisees were teaching. And Christ said, “This is not true. Think not that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets.” Why were these accusations against Christ? Who was behind this? Satan. Satan does not like for the truth to be preached and we have the same problem today.

I learned many years ago that it is impossible to preach the gospel without coming under fire. Even in Walla Walla, Washington, you will come under fire. It is one of the costs. I was getting many phone calls, asking, “How many rooms are there in the heavenly sanctuary?” Apparently someone is telling folks that I am a heretic: “He doesn’t believe in two rooms.” I would advise you to read the book that has just come out, *The 27 Beliefs*.

We (the Adventist Church) came under fire

because we gave the impression that the Father and the Son were separated for 1,800 years. The Sanctuary was a model, a parable of the truth as it is in Christ. Yes, there is a Sanctuary in heaven. The New Testament is absolutely clear on that, but the moment you take the earthly and make the heavenly like it exactly in every respect you have problems. In the earthly, God and the priests were separated by a curtain except for once a year.

To counter the accusations, we have said God was also in the Holy Place, but, if that was true, it was no longer the Holy Place, it was the Most Holy. A place is never most holy, it is the presence of God that makes it Most Holy. We must not become paganists and make something holy out of things. It is God that is Most Holy. What the two rooms pointed to was two ministries. The daily ministry and the yearly ministry: the intercession and the judgment.

Christ faced it [misunderstanding], Paul faced it, anyone who preaches the gospel has to face it. Read the New Testament. The bread in the

sanctuary represented Christ. John 6:35:

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”

The light (candlesticks) in the Holy Place represented Christ. 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.”

The mercy seat is Christ. In Hebrews 10, He is the curtain, or veil, in some translations. Hebrews 10:19-20:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body....

You go right through the New Testament and

Christ is the reality [of the sanctuary]. But, above all, look at John 2:19-21:

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

The Jews replied, “It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

Jesus is the temple. (There is however, a heavenly sanctuary, Hebrews is clear.) But Christ must always be the reality of the type. Otherwise, we destroy the purpose. Who is the lamb? Christ. The spotless lamb represents His perfect obedience and the sacrifice of the lamb represents the justice of the law.

Christ said [in Matthew 5:17], “I have not come to destroy the Old Testament [the law and the prophets] but I have come to fulfill.” The Greek word for “fulfill” means “to fill it up, to make it a reality.” What is Christ saying? What part of the

Old Testament did He come to fulfill?

Turn to an important text to answer this question, Luke 24. You remember, after the resurrection, Jesus met with the two men on their way to Emmaus (a distance of approximately 7 miles). At what point [in the Old Testament] Christ began I do not know, but in verse 27, after a certain amount of dialogue, listen to what we read:

And beginning with Moses [the book of the law] and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Christ is the reality of the Old Testament: He came to fulfill. Did He come to fulfill only the ceremonial law or did He come to fulfill the moral law? If He fulfilled only the ceremonial law, He did not save us because in the Old Testament the ceremonial law points to Christ as the fulfillment of the moral law. The definition of righteousness is the moral law — clearly, nothing else. And Christ came to fulfill all righteousness. The

ceremonial law simply pointed to Christ as the fulfillment of the moral law to be our Savior.

Turn to John 19:28. This is what Christ meant when He said, “I came to fulfill, not do away with.” Here, in this verse, Christ is hanging on the cross:

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

What was Christ thinking about? He was thinking about Psalms 69:21, when He said they would give Him vinegar to ease His pain:

They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

See verses 29-30 in John 19:

A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he

had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Now going back to Matthew 5:18:

I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

The word “law” here means the Torah, the five books of Moses. Did Christ fulfill the whole of the Old Testament in His earthly ministry? The answer is, “No.” Because the Old Testament also points to the heavenly ministry of Christ, and, when that is finished, He will stand up and He will say, “It is finished.”

Christ came, primarily, to fulfill the promises. In other words, the Old Testament is promise. Christ, His earthly and His heavenly ministry, is fulfillment. We have to look at Christ as the reality of the fulfillment. Go to verse 19:

Anyone who breaks 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 practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

That text has been misunderstood. Jesus is not teaching that you have to keep the law in order to be saved. What He is saying is: “I am not come to do away with the law, but I am come to fulfill it and lift it up and present it to you as the right way of righteous living.” In other words, the law has two functions and we must keep this in mind. Number one, the law points us to and leads us to Christ. It is our schoolmaster, says Paul, to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. We must never use the law as the means of salvation. That is what the Pharisees were doing and that is what Christ is contradicting.

For an example, turn to Matthew 19:16. You are familiar with this, the young man comes to Jesus:

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

Where did he get this from? Who taught him that he had to do something good in order to get eternal life? The scribes and the Pharisees. [Please notice that the young man did not address Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God, but as a good teacher, Rabbi.] Jesus said to him (verse 17):

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

Christ implied that in order for him to do good, he must be good. In order to produce an apple, you must be an apple tree. In *Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White says that, in order for us to keep the Sabbath holy, we must first of all be holy. (I think it is page 40). How will we become holy? Not by trying, but by faith. But, Jesus says, if you want to enter into life — in other words, if you want to earn

eternal life, then the definition of righteousness is the law — keep the commandments. And the young man asked which one (verse 18):

“Which ones?” the man inquired.

And Jesus referred to the commandments that deal with our relationship and He ended up by saying, “Love your neighbor in the same way as you love yourself.” Verses 18b-19:

Jesus replied, “ ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

That means spontaneously, without trying, and whether you are good or bad. That is how you must love your neighbor.

And the young man replied in verse 20:

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

“All these things have I kept from my youth up. Since I was in Primary Sabbath School, I have been keeping the law.” No, what he was keeping were the rules and regulations the scribes and Pharisees were giving him. How do I know? Turn to Philippians 3:5-6 and you will discover what Paul says about himself as a Pharisee (Pharisees were experts on the law):

...Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

This young man, very sincerely says to Christ, “I have been keeping the commandments ever since I was a youth.” What did Jesus say? Did Jesus pat him on the back and say, “Keep up the good work”? No. Matthew 19:21:

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you

will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

“If you want to be perfect in regards to keeping the law, if you really love your neighbor as yourself, then you would take all your wealth and give it to the poor and you come and follow Me and I will give you My wealth.” How is that for a bargain? If he had accepted Christ as the Messiah, would he have jumped for it? Yes. Because the Messiah owned the universe. But look at verse 22:

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Did he, under this test, did he really love his neighbor as himself? No. Therefore, was he really keeping the commandments? No. As far the law was concerned, was he qualified for heaven? No. And so, when Jesus turned around to the disciples, notice what He said in the last part of verse 26 after he explained that this man had failed:

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this

is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Going back now to Matthew. Were the Pharisees really teaching the law correctly? No. Where were they wrong? Christ is going to spend much time in explaining where they were wrong in verses 21 onward and we will cover that.

But the one area in which they were wrong that I will touch now is that they were wrong in the fact that they were using the law as a method to go to heaven. They were wrong there. Did Christ use the law as a method to go to heaven? No. Did Christ use the law as a standard of Christian living? Yes. And that is what He is teaching here. He is saying that the law is not a method of salvation, but it is a standard of Christian living. “I came to fulfill the law, that you may go to heaven.” Christ is the righteousness of the law in terms of going to heaven. That is what He meant by “I have fulfilled the law.”

That is why (so that everything about Him in the Old Testament prophecies might be fulfilled) in

John He said, “I’m thirsty.” But, when it comes to Christian living, He uses the law as the standard of Christian living. So did Christ come to do away with the law? No. That is why we need to know clearly the relationship of law and grace. Are these two enemies? What is the relationship of grace and law? What does grace do?

Grace does two things. Number one, grace saves you. Is it clear that we are saved by grace alone? But there is something else that grace does. Grace also writes the law in our hearts and it gives us new incentives, new desires. What are they? My incentive is to live for Christ. And my desire is to live also for my fellow man. Christ is saying that, if you are truly a disciple, you will accept Him as your salvation (He fulfilled the law for your salvation) but you will also look at the law as the standard of Christian living.

I was at a World Council of Churches seminar for pastors in Nairobi, Kenya. There were 1,500 pastors from 83 denominations. Of course, we weren’t invited as a Church because we don’t

belong to the World Council of Churches, but the man in charge of the Theology Department was from Sweden and, since I sold books in Sweden and spoke the language, we became good friends and spent quite a lot of time discussing theology. He said to me, “We can invite you as a visitor, we have permission; we have visitors’ passes.” I told him it would depend on who was speaking; if it was a liberal theologian, I didn’t want to waste my time. He said, “No, we have the very best: John Stott.” I said, “Please give me all the passes you want.” I had heard Stott speak in England when I was studying at Newbold.

But this is what I want to tell you that he said:

“We evangelicals know how to preach the good news, but we have failed miserably to preach the good life. And that is because we have done away with the law. Grace never did away with the law. Grace presents the law as a standard of Christian living.”

And I used to alternate between hearing him, an

Anglican, and Martin Lloyd Jones. The best preacher that England has produced in the Twentieth Century was Martin Lloyd Jones. He was a medical doctor in the top line of doctors in Britain. He gave his practice up, a very lucrative profession. He gave it up to be a preacher and became the pastor of the Congregational Church in Westminster Chapel. And he said the same thing in different words. He said, “The law is always the standard of Christian living.”

And this is what Christ is saying here. And then He says in verse 20:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, “Not only am I presenting the Law as the standard of Christian living, but the righteousness that the Law demands as a standard must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.” Could you exceed their righteousness?

Weren't they very particular? What was Christ trying to say? In what sense should our righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees? How should it be in terms of performance? Because, when Jesus goes to verse 21 [next study], He is dealing with performance.

Number one, the moment you use the law as the method of salvation, your motivation for lawkeeping will be self. Remember the prayer of the Pharisee [in Luke 18:9-14]?

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

“God, thank you I am not a sinner like the tax collector. I deserve to go to heaven.” Any lawkeeping that is done, either out of fear of punishment or a desire to go to heaven, in God’s eyes is filthy rags.

How can human beings who are egocentric by nature serve a God out of unselfish love? How? Because Christ first of all gives you peace with Him. He satisfies the longing in every human soul for heaven. Every human soul is born with the fear of death. Jesus removes that fear through the gospel. He removes your anxieties. The first thing He gives you is peace with God. Then once He gives you peace, He says, “This is how I want you

to live.”

When I was at Newbold College (U.K.), there was a young man who was showering a girl with all kinds of presents: flowers and chocolates, every week he would buy something. And after doing that for two years, he asked the girl to marry him. And she came to me and said, “Can you give me some advice? I appreciate all the gifts he gave me, but I am not in love with him.” I said, “Well, say no to him.” “But how can I say no? He showered me with all these things.” I said, “Anyone who gives you gifts in order to get something back from you, that is bribery, that is not love. Just tell him that you appreciate all the gifts but you can’t say yes because you feel that deep down God has not put you together.” And so she did and he replied, “You ungrateful thing.” What was he telling her when he said that? “I was trying to buy your love.” I said to her, “Sister, if you had married him, he would have stopped giving you the gifts, because he would have got what he wanted.”

Why do you serve God? Is it because you want

something or is because you are so filled with appreciation for what Christ did that you want to serve Him out of love? We love Him because He first loved us. We don't love Him because we want a reciprocal love. We love Him because He first loved us and He redeemed us. God so loved the world while it was rebellious and He saved us. So Christ says, "If you really appreciate my sacrifice, if you really appreciate what I have done for you, you will keep my commandments." We don't love Him because we want something in return. We love Him because He has already redeemed us. When we can produce a people like this, then our righteousness will exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

And when we go to verse 21 onward, the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is simply expounding on this one statement, that Christians should not be Christians only in words, but their lifestyle must reflect that they are citizens of heaven. So please remember that the law is not a method of salvation, but it is a standard of Christian living. And what Christ wants from us is not keeping the law in the

letter but in the spirit. And this is what Paul teaches.

I want to conclude by turning to Romans 7:4,6. Paul tells us that He delivered us from under the law — not that we can now live as we like.

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. ...But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

No longer does the law say to the Christian, “You obey me; otherwise, you will be zapped.” The law can’t say that to the Christian because he is no longer under the law. He is liberated by the fulfillment of Christ. Now he is “released from the law,” not released (or “delivered,” in some translations) from keeping it but released from its demands in terms of salvation.

The Pharisees and scribes were serving the law “in the old way of the written code.” They were serving the law under the old covenant. What does the old covenant teach? “Obey me and you will live, but, if you disobey, you will die.” The new covenant doesn’t say that. The new covenant says, “I will write the law in the heart.” Do you know what that means? It means that our desire will be in harmony with the law. We will want to do these things from the inside. Not “we must do those things, otherwise we won’t make it.” We will serve in “the new way of the Spirit.”

And when that happens, the earth will be lightened with the glory of God. And the Church will become very attractive. The world will say, “If this is Christianity, this is what we want.” But right now they are not saying that. Why? Because — forget the world — our own young people say, “It is a misery to be a Seventh-day Adventist because it is full of dos and don’ts.” The same young people will go out of their way to do tremendous things for somebody they love, for

their girlfriends, or their team. We need to present to our young people the matchless charms of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then they will say, “I don’t want to do anything that will hurt my Savior. I don’t want to do anything that brought Him to the cross.” They will hate sin, not because they are going to be punished but because they love Jesus Christ.

In other words, God hates sin because He loves us. Because what does sin do to us? It kills. So God hates sin because He loves us. We should hate sin because of what it did (and does) to Christ. Under grace, it is grace that takes the punishment. And on the cross, Jesus suffered the most terrible death, the death that nobody has yet suffered. He suffered the death of God’s abandonment. And God did not spare His own Son because He loved the people of this world so much.

It is my prayer that we will hate sin because of our love for Jesus Christ. And that we will use the law, not as a hammer on our people, saying, “unless you do this, you won’t make it.” Jesus did

not teach that. He said, “I did not come to destroy the law. I came to fulfill it.” And He fulfilled the moral law primarily to save us. All other prophecies pointed to Christ as the fulfillment of the moral law to save us. He kept the law perfectly that He may be our righteousness. He died the wages of the moral law that He might be our righteousness.

The ceremonial law was simply pointing to Christ as the fulfillment of the moral law. So when I look at the ceremonial law and see the spotless lamb, it points to the perfect obedience of Christ to the moral law.

When I look at Christ crucified, the lamb slain, it points to Christ as the fulfillment of the justice of the moral law. It is the moral law that says, “The soul that sins must die.” And that is what Paul meant that Christ is the reality of the moral law.

But now I look at the law not as rules but as the righteousness of Christ, which I want now to reflect. The world needs to see Christ in me, “the

hope of glory.” And then we will not have all these people leaving our churches. They will realize that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

Chapter 13

Letter vs. Spirit

Matthew 5:20-28

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, “Raca,” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to

your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

We are dealing with some difficult areas. We need to wrestle with these areas. Last study we dealt with Matthew 5:17-19, where Jesus taught that He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets but to fulfill them. Please remember that the Pharisees and scribes were accusing Christ of doing away with the law, so He was correcting that false accusation. But now, in verses 20-28 — which is what we will cover in this study — Christ

goes on and explains that, besides fulfilling the law, He wants us to know how we should relate to the law and He is contrasting His interpretation of the law with that of the scribes and Pharisees. And He makes a statement that we may take for granted today, but which was, I am sure, shocking to His hearers. It is verse 20:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

That is a tough one. Especially to the people that heard it. This statement that Christ makes in verse 20 presented a two-fold problem. First of all, let me suggest the problem as it appeared to the hearers. Please remember that, to the Jews, the scribes and Pharisees were the epitome of what righteousness is.

Let me first of all describe the scribes. What was a scribe? He was a person who spent most of

his time scribing, teaching, expounding the law. He was an expert on the law, an authority on the law of God. He was the one who copied the manuscript and was very meticulous as he copied the book of the law. He was looked upon by the people as an expert, as an authority on the law.

What about the word “Pharisee”? A strict Pharisee was actually a separatist: one who came out of the world and was living only for God. If you want a good definition of a Pharisee, look at Paul before his conversion. Turn to Philippians 3:5. Look at what Paul is saying as he tells what he was like before his conversion. He makes several statements and one of them concerns his pre-converted condition in the second half of verse 5:

...Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ...

What did he mean by “in regard to the law, a Pharisee”? The Pharisees prided themselves as the first-class people in terms of keeping the law. I

suppose if they were living today in America, they would join the holiness club. The scribes were the experts in the law and the Pharisees were the experts in keeping it, in carrying out the law in their lives. They were the ones who rigidly obeyed all the rules and regulations of the Rabbis. They obeyed every detail that the book of the law said.

In view of this, how could Christ say to the disciples, “Your righteousness must exceed theirs”? Can you imagine how tough it was for the disciples when they heard that? They must have said, “What on earth are you talking about?”

The second problem with the text is that it sounds like, if you look at the second half of verse 20, that unless your righteousness is superior to the scribes and Pharisees then you cannot make it to heaven:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

It sounds like that Christ is teaching that the condition here to go to heaven is that your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. And that was tough for the hearers, too.

Is Christ here contradicting His own statement in the beatitudes when He said [Matthew 5:3]:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We need to wrestle with this, because verses 21-28 is simply expounding on this one verse.

What did Christ mean when He said, “Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees in order for you to qualify for heaven”? How would you describe the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? That is what we need to come to grips with. In a nutshell, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was the righteousness of a legalist. And what Christ is saying is that the

righteousness of a legalist cannot qualify you for heaven.

Why not? I will give you at least three or four reasons. Number one, the righteousness of a legalist is primarily a righteousness that is external, whereas the law demands an inward righteousness also. Let me give you a couple of examples. Turn to Luke 16:14:

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

Jesus was talking about the parable of the unjust steward and worldly dilemma, the stewardship of life, etc., and the Pharisees who heard him (who were covetous) heard all these things and they derided him. Look at verse 15. Christ is responding to the Pharisees:

He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”

Men can only judge by external righteousness because we cannot read the hearts. If you come and say that you have not sinned for the last two years, I will not be able to prove that you are wrong, but I will ask you if you can say that before God. So number one, the Jews, the Pharisees especially, were wrong in their righteousness, it was legalistic because legalistic righteousness is always concerned with the external. Whereas God looks at the heart. Let me give you another passage: Matthew 23:1-5, 27-28. God spends the whole chapter on this issue but we can't read all of it. Here's verses 1-5:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples [He is talking to a mixed group]: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. [He meant that these two groups of people claimed to be experts on the law.] So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. [Christ is not against the law.] But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach [your righteousness must exceed theirs]. They tie up

heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; [and so on]...

...

Then in verse 27 [Matthew 23:27]:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! [A hypocrite is one who outwardly appears righteous but whose heart is far from righteous.] You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.”

Today if Jesus was talking He would say you are like beautiful caskets (instead of whited sepulchers). In verse 28, He is applying the symbol to the reality:

“In the same way, on the outside you appear to

people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Christ is saying that outward righteousness cannot take you to heaven. Number two, the reason why a legalistic righteousness does not qualify you for heaven is because it is a righteousness that concerns only the letter of the law. And this of course is connected with number one (the letter and not the spirit). Look at Matthew 23:23:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter [God is not against outward righteousness], without neglecting the former.

They were concerned about outward conformity, the letter of the law, but lacking an inward obedience. Does the law also require inward obedience as well as outward conformity?

In a moment we will come to the issues: letter versus spirit.

Number three, legalistic righteousness is a righteousness of man. Not of God's righteousness but of man — self-righteousness. The scribes and Pharisees had substituted 248 man-made commandments for God's law. Plus they had 365 prohibitions. Do you know what Christ said about these rules and prohibitions? Turn to Matthew 15:1-9. Here it begins:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law [the same group we are discussing] came to Jesus from Jerusalem [headquarters] and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders [various rabbis]? They don't wash their hands before they eat!”

Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?”

These traditions were supposed to elaborate on

the book of Moses, but, in actual fact, they were going around the Ten Commandments, although on the surface they looked like they were obeying them. To continue:

“For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.”

They made loopholes. I was reading their commandments about the Sabbath and it was amazing how they found loopholes. For example, the Old Testament rules said, “You can’t carry a burden on Sabbath.” Now of course, the houses in the Middle East are flat roofed, they don’t get much rain there. They used this flat roof to sit in the evening and have their evening meals because it was cool when the sun went down. The problem was they had no staircase, they had a ladder which

they kept in the house. On the Sabbath, if they wanted to go up, if they carried the ladder it was work, but if one part of the ladder touched the ground, if they dragged the ladder, it was okay.

They could only walk about 1/2 mile on the Sabbath. But they said if you wanted to see a girlfriend two or three miles away and if you stopped every 1/2 mile and drank a sip of water you were qualified to go another half mile. So they would stop at the houses and ask if they could have a glass of water, and everybody knew. Then they would walk another 1/2 mile and stop again. If they couldn't find a place for a drink they would swallow their spit and that would be acceptable. They found loopholes. You remember the lady who asked me to switch her light on because it was Friday night and she was a Jew and switching the light on Sabbath was work. But if a Gentile did it, it didn't matter because he was lost in any case. That lady told me that the rich Jews had timers for their lights, TVs, etc. It was wrong to switch the TV on but if it went on automatically it was not a sin to watch it. (I wondered if this had been

introduced in my Church). Terrible. Let's go on to Chapter 15:7-9:

“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’”

We are laughing, but we have been guilty of this very thing. We have made rules and we think if we obey these rules we are doing God's will, but, please remember, God is looking at the heart. What is in our hearts that He wants to see? Let me give you one more thing about legalistic righteousness. Legalistic righteousness is motivated by what? Self. They want to let people see how good they are.

A man who told me at the Washington Campmeeting that he had not sinned for two years. I said to his wife, “Is this true? It must be wonderful to live with such a man.” And she just smiled. She was wise; she knew. You cannot bluff

your spouse, but, above all, you cannot bluff God, because He can read your thoughts; He knows what is in your heart. That is why we are told in the Bible not to judge.

I believe that we are going to be awfully surprised in heaven. We will see people who we have already condemned to hell and we will ask them, “What on earth are you doing here?” And they will point their finger to Jesus Christ and say, “Ask Him. I am saved by grace. If you want to give any credit, it is He who gets the credit.”

In contrast to all this legalistic righteousness, the true Christian is described by Christ in the beatitudes. That is how He begins. A true Christian is poor in spirit, he is meek, he is merciful. A legalistic, self-righteous Christian always looks down on people who are not making it like them. But a true Christian is one that ... let me give you an example. Turn to 1 Timothy 1:15. I think you will all agree with me that Paul was a true Christian. Let's look at his evaluation of himself. He is writing to Timothy and he says

(let's read verse 14 also):

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.

The “I am” is in the present, continuous sense. Can you imagine Paul, a Pharisee, saying this? He did not say this as a Pharisee. He spoke these words as a Christian.

Having explained what Matthew 5:20 is all about — a true Christian is concerned about pleasing God:

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And, in pleasing God, he may not look so holy

to his fellowman. He is concerned about his relationship with God and, because he has a relationship with God, he is concerned about his fellowman. He is willing to eat and drink with publicans and sinners. He is concerned about their eternal destiny. He is not concerned about what people think of him because he thinks of himself as “I am the chief of sinners.”

In verse 21 up to verse 28, He is contrasting the righteousness of the Pharisees and the righteousness of the true Christian in the context of the law. Please remember that Christ and the Pharisees disagreed. They looked at Him as a lawbreaker. I would like to say clearly that we must never set Christ in opposition to Moses. Christ did not do that. We must never set the Old Testament in opposition to the New Testament. We must never set the gospel in opposition to the law. Here in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says that the Old and New Testaments are in harmony. The gospel and the law are in harmony. And here He explains the relationship of law and gospel. And He contrasts this with the scribes and

Pharisees and their righteousness. Look at Matthew 5:21-22:

“You have heard [this is what you were taught by your religious leaders — the contrast is between Christ and the religious leaders of His day] that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ [Does the law say this? Yes, but listen to what Jesus says:] But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Then in verse 27 He says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Here you have the difference between the letter

of the law and the spirit. The Pharisee could stand up and say, “I have never killed anybody.” From the human point of view, was he right or was he wrong? Right. From the law’s point of view, was he right or was he wrong? Wrong. Because God looks at the heart and the law of God was given by Who? Therefore, the Law of God looks where? At the heart.

This brings us to a very important question. Everyone of us is tempted. Am I correct? The temptation may come from the devil. It may come from without; it may also come from within.

Is temptation sin? Remember that temptation is the desire, a longing desire that you want to experience. Is temptation sin? No. Otherwise you would have to make Christ a sinner because He was tempted like we are. The question is, “When does temptation become sin?” I will give you an illustration that I gave my kids (in the class at the college).

I am driving to an appointment in Seattle. And

I am driving on the freeway and my gas mileage is kind of low. It is a hot day in the summer and I am thirsty and I stop at a small town. There is a gas station there and I go to pay for my gas and I want a drink but the only drink is Coors Beer. And I say, “Don’t you have some soft drinks?” And the clerk says, “I am afraid we have run out, but we are expecting the truck in an hour or so if you can wait.” But I can’t wait and I think, “Well, nobody here knows me [and that is the temptation — nobody knows me], why don’t I just have a beer? After all, I have heard so much about Coors Beer. Everywhere it is advertised and I have never tasted it and this is a good opportunity.” I turn around to go to the fridge and, just as I turn, I see a car pull in to get some gas and there is a Church Elder and I think, “I am glad I caught myself in time.” And I say to the clerk that I think I will pass. Have I sinned? Yes. In my heart.

When does temptation become sin? I have two choices. One is when I commit the act. The other one is when my mind says “yes.” I haven’t really drunk it; I can never be accused of drinking beer.

But in God's eyes, have I sinned? Turn to James 1:14:

...But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

We have a nature that is in harmony with sin. Even if the devil was destroyed today, you still would be tempted. I don't need the devil anymore to tempt me because I have a nature that is in harmony with sin. That is why we have to be redeemed from this body of sin. Paul says, "I groan for the redemption of my body." Because we have a nature that is in harmony with sin.

Adam was not tempted by being "dragged away and enticed by his own evil desire." The devil had to put an idea into his head, but all of us have a sinful nature. When does this sinful nature become sin? Look at verse 15 [James 1:15]:

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

When does the temptation conceive? When the mind says yes. Sin is the fruit of conception. When does human life begin? When a baby is born or when it is conceived? According to the Bible, at conception. And that is when sin begins.

I may not perform the act, and the reason may be that the policeman is around the corner or somebody is watching me. I told the college kids this example: I was going to an exam. It was a difficult subject so I wrote all the formulas (don't you ever do it) on my fingers and nobody can see it. Here I am sitting for the exam and look at the question — and the answer is on my fingers. But the trouble is that the examiner is standing next to me and I say to myself that I wish he would move. But he doesn't move. And he stands there. And then the bell rings. Have I copied? No, he can never give me an F for copying because I haven't copied. But in God's eyes have I copied? In God's laws have I copied? Yes.

The Pharisees said that sin begins with an act;

Christ says, “No, if you hate somebody in your heart without a cause, you have already killed him.” When the Pharisees heard Christ say those words, did they hate somebody without a cause? Yes, they were even planning to get rid of Jesus. Did the scribes and Pharisees look at a woman and lust? Yes. So Christ is saying, “You are a bunch of sinners.”

You are going to say, “Who then can make it to heaven?” The Christian makes it to heaven by grace. But he has now a heart that wants to serve God. Righteousness in the Christian world does not begin with acts, it begins with the heart. So when you bring somebody to Christ and he looks all unkempt, is full of drugs and things, please, let God transform him. What he needs is a change of heart. And that is the gospel of Christ. That is the new covenant. God says, “I will take away that stony heart [legalism doesn’t do that] and I will give you a new heart.” And He gives you a heart that wants to do right.

I want to quote a theologian who puts it very

nicely. He says, “God gave the law to sinful human beings to drive us to Christ. And once we come to Christ and find peace and hope and assurance and justification, then Christ sends us back to the law and says, ‘This is how I want you to live.’” The law was never given as a method of salvation but the law is a standard for Christian living.

The law is not only outward righteousness — that is the letter — but it begins as an inward righteousness. And when the inward righteousness takes place, the outward gradually changes. And you will see a transformation outwardly. But many people who have inward righteousness are still struggling with bad habits.

I was giving a Bible study of Romans at a penitentiary. Now, these were hard, cold prisoners. And one Sabbath, one of those men, a murderer — he is in for life — came to me and handed me a paper. He said, “Pastor, you have no idea how excited you have made me through the study of Romans. I sat down the other day and I read

Romans 6.” (We had just covered Romans 6). And he said, “The ‘light’ came on and I was impressed to sit down and write.” He wrote about five pages; I wish I could read it all to you, but I want to read his prayer at the end of his statement. Please remember this is a hard-core criminal praying:

“Dear Father, help me to discern who I should accept as friends and who I should consider as acquaintance, and who I should avoid. Let my company be a blessing to others and lead me to all Your ways. Father, open my eyes to dangers and lead me in the way that I might combat them. I need to approach you with anticipation as I focus on you. Father, soften our hearts and the words of our mouth. Let me be a peacemaker. Let the words of my mouth spread comfort and calm and make my actions a testimony to your great love. Father, sometimes I feel I just can’t go on. Please fill me with the strength I need, both of body and of character. Don’t let me give up, but deliver me. Plead my cause, Lord, with those that strive with me. All day I need to seek after You and make

You my focus. Then the walk I walk, the talk I talk, and the life I live, and the prayers I pray as You would have me. Help me to understand how to care for people and Lord, teach me love. Thank you, Father, In Jesus name.”

Now, that is the prayer of a convict. He is understanding what Paul has already stated that through faith in Christ we stand acquitted. He’s no longer worried about going to heaven. He has assurance. “I am not guilty,” he says. “But,” he says, “having given me this hope, Paul emphasizes that we need no longer live under sin’s power.” And then he shows that the righteousness that comes from God begins within. He says, “I have struggled, I have struggled all my life with the sin problem. I have tried to overcome sin and all I have met with is failure. But I thank God that I have peace in my heart, and now I want Christ to live in me.”

When I read this, I said to him, “This is the power of the gospel. Don’t give me credit.” I am very tempted (I would have to get his permission)

to send this to the Review and have it published. He's understanding Romans 6:6-8:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Your old self-life has been nailed to the cross with Him. That part of you that loves to sin was crushed and fatally wounded so that our sin-loving body is no longer under the slavery of sin. For when you are dead to sin, you are now free from its allurements and its power over you. And since your old sin-loving nature died, in Christ, we know that you will share his new life. (This is how he paraphrases Romans 6:6-8.)

My dear people, the righteousness that God wants to see in us is an inward righteousness which shines outward. It is my prayer that God will liberate us from the righteousness of the Pharisees,

the outward performance. It doesn't matter what people will think or see, God is in your heart.

Chapter 14

Mortifying the Flesh

Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

This text has been taken literally by many Christians, especially in the early Christian church in the Third and Fourth Centuries. And even today, many sincere Christians take this somewhat literally. And it has caused a lot of suffering. We know in some Churches there were actually individuals who cut their hands off and plucked their eye hoping that this would save them.

When we were in Ethiopia, I discovered

something among the Coptic monks. The European Church was part of the Coptic Church of Egypt and a lot of the monks up in the monasteries were eunuchs. They had castrated themselves to try and liberate themselves from the problem of the sexual temptations that come. Do you think they were successful? (I will bring it up again.)

We need to look at this text and I would like once again to emphasize: never read a text out of context. We need to get the context first before we interpret a text; otherwise, we can do the same thing as the early Christians did.

Two facts were revealed as we studied verses 21-28. Christ was dealing with two areas in terms of how He understood the law and the prophets in contrast to how the scribes and Pharisees were teaching. In the first place, we look at sin. And we discover that, to the scribes and Pharisees, sin was an act. A temptation became sin when a person performed the act. To Christ, a temptation became sin when the idea was cherished in the heart or mind.

The second difference we saw was obedience. To Pharisees, obedience was external — do's and don'ts. We call it “the letter of the law.” To Christ, obedience was internal, when you obeyed from the heart. Now keep this in mind because this is the context. If we interpret verses 29-30 of Matthew 5 with the mentality of the scribes and Pharisees, then we will take Christ literally and we will have to say, “The only way for us to lead holy lives is to cut off our body parts.” Where are you going to begin?

Let's take this text seriously. To the Pharisees, the right side of the body was good and the left side was bad. By the way, this was true even in our country and in the western world for many years. I remember my brother and sister are both left-handed. My father forced them to go to the right hand because the left hand belonged to the devil. The Pharisees had the same idea. The right eye was good and the left eye was bad. But if the right eye offends, something is wrong, so you pluck it

out.

Let me ask you a question. If I remove the right eye, will I still see? Yes. And will the left eye lead you to temptation? Yes. So, if you use the right hand to steal (the scribes and Pharisees did not use the left hand, even if you were left-handed you were forced to use the right hand), if you cut off the right hand, would that stop you from stealing. No. Let's go beyond that.

If Christ did not mean that we should literally pluck our eye out and cut our hand off because it is an offending body part, what did he mean? First of all, let's keep in mind that the Bible does not teach that our human body, with all its parts, is in and of itself evil. That is a Greek concept, not a Biblical concept. The Greeks believed that matter was evil. The Bible says that we have a sinful nature because there is a force, a power dwelling in us called the law of sin.

If we are to deal with sin, you cannot solve the sin problem by cutting off your hand. Because to

God, sin is not an act. Sin is a desire that is cherished. Do you need your hands to be tempted to steal? No. Even if I cut off both my hands and I see something I want, I will still be tempted to steal. But because I cannot use my hands, I will find somebody else to help me. And I will say that “I didn’t do the stealing; he did it.” You are kidding yourself.

Paul tells us in Romans 7:23:

...But I see another law [another principle, another force] at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

There is a force that brings my mind into captivity and if my mind says, “yes,” I have sinned, even though I may not have performed the act. I discussed this issue especially with one of the Coptic monks in Ethiopia who became an Adventist and actually got married (as a Coptic he had to be good by practicing celibacy and he was a

eunuch). I asked him, “Don’t you ever have a temptation when you look at a woman to lust?” He said, “Yes, but I don’t commit the act.” “But you desire to commit the act?” “Yes.” So I told him that he had not solved the problem and he agreed. But he did not know it at that time and he was doing his best.

Please remember that sin begins in the heart. Let me give you an example. Matthew 15:1-2:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

What did Jesus say? Matthew 15:10-11:

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean,’ but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘unclean.’”

Jesus’ disciples asked him to explain the

parable. Matthew 15:17-20:

“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean.’”

“It is not what you eat that defiles you; from the heart comes all these terrible things.” Remember that Jesus is not telling you that literally you are to cut off your hand or pluck out your eye.

If the source of my sin is the law of sin, where exactly is it found? Where is that law of sin dwelling? It is part of the life you received from Adam. The life we received from Adam is a sinful life. Let me put it this way: God created Adam out of the dust of the earth. When God was creating him from dust, could Adam think at that time,

could he move? When did his thoughts come to him? When was it possible for him to live, to move. When he became a living soul, a living person. He could think, move, do things. That life that God gave him was a sinless life. It was a life in the image of God.

The moment he sinned that life became bent toward self. That is “the law of sin in my members.” If I cut off my hand, it is true the hand dies but do I die? No. Therefore, I have solved the problem of the hand but I have not solved my problem. What then is the solution? Only death will eradicate the problem. That is why I want to remind you of Romans 8:4. Christ condemned the law of sin in the flesh, the flesh that He assumed. We’ll start with verse 3:

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, [here’s verse 4] in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully

met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

The death of Christ struck at the very source of our sin problem. That is a Biblical truth. But that death was not a single death, it was a corporate death. How many died in that death? All. 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, “When one died all died”:

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

In baptism, what do we do? Baptism is a public confession that I have identified myself with Christ and Him crucified, which means that His death is my death.

It is in this context that Paul is discussing baptism in Romans 6. He says, “We have died with Christ, were buried with Him, and were raised with Him.” And then he explains in verse 10 that in that “He died, He died to sin”:

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Sin, singular, the power of sin came to an end in the death of Christ. In verse 11:

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

“Likewise, in the same way, because you were baptized into Christ, you must consider yourselves dead to sin.”

In fact, Romans 6:6-7 says that when this old life is dead, the human body is deprived of its power to sin:

For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

What has this to do with cutting off your hand?

Remember that Christ literally died to sin. The human life He assumed actually died on the cross; it was not make-believe. But I have died only by faith. What is faith? Turn to Hebrews 11:1. It is important that we understand a very important factor about faith:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Faith is a reality, but it is a reality in Christ that I have accepted; it is a hope that I have not yet experienced. When you are baptized in Christ, the old life does not literally die, it is still there. It is still in you. And it is this life that is a hindrance to each believer. Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:6, “That which is born of flesh is flesh”:

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

In other words, a man who is baptized into Christ does not have any change of nature. His nature remains sinful to his dying day. Do you

know that our nature remains sinful? So what Christ is saying in this statement in Matthew 5:29-30 is that inward obedience, when you obey God from the converted heart (that is where the change has taken place), it always involves suffering in the outward man because the two will not agree.

The best example I can give you is Christ Himself. Let's turn to Hebrews 2:10:

In bringing many sons to glory [us], it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author [or the source] of their salvation perfect through suffering.

And then in verse 18 it specifies a little more:

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Was Christ tempted? Yes. Like whom? Like us. Did He give in to temptation? No. Did He obey and did it cause Him suffering? Yes. One

more text in Hebrews 5:8-9:

Although he was a son [the Son of God], he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him....

Will Adam, and will we, in the New Earth suffer every time we obey God? No. Otherwise, heaven would be no heaven. Do we have to suffer here when we obey God? Yes. Why? Because there is something in you and me that is out of harmony with God. The Bible (King James Version) calls it “the flesh.” Romans 8:7 says that the mind controlled by the flesh is enmity with God, is not subject to the law of God, and can never be:

...The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.

In other words, we have a nature that cannot be transformed, that cannot be reformed. What is God’s solution to that nature? I will come to it in a

moment, but one more text about suffering: 1 Peter 4:1. You need to read the whole section but verse 1 gives us the basis for the rest of the passage:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

What Christ is telling us in Matthew 5 is that obedience that comes from the heart always involves suffering in the flesh and that suffering is as painful as if you have cut off your hand or plucked out your eye.

Let me read you something from Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing. Listen to how Sister [Ellen G.] White explains the same passage which we are studying. (Page 61):

“The soul, corrupted and deformed, is to be purified [transformed] that it may be clothed in the beauty of the Lord our God. In order for us to reach this high ideal, that which causes the soul to

stumble [Please remember that the words ‘soul’, ‘mind’, ‘heart’ are in the same area.] must be sacrificed. It is through the will that sin retains its hold upon us. The surrender of the will is represented as plucking out the eye or cutting off the hand. Often it seems to us, that the surrender of the will to God is to consent to go through life maimed or crippled. But it is better, says Christ, for self to be maimed, wounded, crippled, if thus you may enter into life. That which you look upon as disaster is the door to highest benefit.”

I am going to read something from a book by John Stott. This is the book we used with the Sermon on the Mount at the college. Listen to how this excellent scholar interprets this passage:

“The commandment to get rid of troublesome eyes, hands, and feet is an example of our Lord’s use of dramatic figures of speech. What he was advocating was not a literal, physical self-maiming, but a ruthless, moral self-denial. Not mutilation, but mortification is the part of holiness He taught. And mortification, or taking up the cross to follow

Christ means to reject sinful practices so resolutely that we die to them or put them to death.”

In other words, Christ is saying that if you want to experience the obedience of a true Christian, it will be painful. Keep in mind that Christ is not saying that you must have this obedience to go to heaven. But He does make a statement that sounds that way, so we need to look at it. The second half of both this study's verses say, “It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” It says it twice — Matthew 5:29-30:

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Now I would like to give you some other texts in the New Testament which conforms with what

we have just said. In Luke 9:23, Jesus said:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

“If any man follow me, let him deny himself daily.” Is it easy to deny yourself? No. Is it painful? Yes. Especially with inherited and cultivated habits. You ask people who are victims of smoking how painful it is to say “no” to that. It is a struggle, but please remember that is because our flesh is not converted and is unconvertible. It does not mean that you are unconverted. It is the devil telling you that. The Bible says that you will have to deny self daily. There is a text that will help us in Romans 8:13. This is very important. Self is part of me. It is the very essence of my being. It is impossible — I repeat it — impossible for self to deny self. That is why I am giving you this text. Let’s read verses 9-13 to get the whole sense of the passage. Verses 9-10:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in

you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. [This passage is dealing with believers.] But if Christ is in you, your body is dead [not literally, but because you have surrendered this body to the cross] because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Remember that the body is dead, not literally, but by faith. And if you want the best proof, pinch yourself; if you feel the pain, you are not literally dead. Verses 11-12:

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.

Now verse 13:

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die [this is saying the same thing that

Christ said about it being better to cut off a member than go to hell]; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live,....

You cannot mortify the deeds of the body yourself. Justification is by faith. Sanctification is also by faith. Our part from beginning to end — “the just shall live by faith.” The just will be saved by faith, will live by faith, and will be glorified by faith. It is the work of the Spirit. Now turn to Galatians 5:24-25 and I want to remind you of the context: the fruit of the Spirit. When the Spirit lives in you, He doesn’t only mortify the flesh but He produces fruit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, and faith. Can you imagine what our Church would be like with this fruit? Meekness, temperance — against such there is no law. Now we have the context, look at verse 24:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Turn back to 1 Corinthians 9:27 and listen to what Paul has to say about himself:

No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

One more text — Colossians 3:5:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Now let's look at the last part of Christ's statement: "It is better for my hand to be cut off than I should go to hell." Let me put it this way. Is the devil happy when you accept Christ? Why not? Two reasons: he has lost a subject of his kingdom and he wants company when he gets burnt up — misery loves company. And he is deprived of both of his desires when you accept Christ. Is it true that when you accept Christ it is impossible for you to be lost? That is a tough one. Let me put it

another way. If you accept Christ, is it impossible for you to leave Christ? No.

There are two extremes that we must avoid. It is very interesting that those who go to one extreme are condemning the other and vice versa. But both are wrong. One extreme teaches that every time you make a mistake you become unjustified, so that you go in and out of Christ. The other extreme is once saved, always saved. They are both wrong. Does a Christian, every time he falls, become unjustified? Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that. Does the Bible teach that once you accept Christ it is impossible for you to leave Him? No. How am I saved? By faith. As long as I believe in Christ, salvation is mine. But is it possible for me to say goodbye to my faith? Yes. That is what the devil wants.

One of the ways the devil has is to use your flesh to discourage you. He will get you to fall down until you say, "It's no use." And there are many Christians who have left the Church for this very reason. They were raised with the idea that

every time they fall they are lost. They are tired of going in and out of Christ and they have nothing but failure so they say, “I might as well go to the world.” The flesh is your greatest enemy in your Christian life. It is not your neighbors or the person in the church who doesn’t greet you, it is not the Pastor, not your brethren — it is the flesh that is your greatest hindrance in the Christian walk.

But it is more than a hindrance, it is a tool that Satan will use to get you out of Christ. And the moment you say, “It is no use. I might as well give up Christ,” then he has got you. Remember (I am paraphrasing from Steps to Christ) that we will have to come to the foot of the cross many times because of our shortcomings but we are never forsaken. But there is something in you that Satan is trying to use to pull you out and the Bible calls it the flesh. And that flesh belongs, as far as the Christian is concerned, on the cross of Christ. That is where it belongs. Daily you must remind the flesh, because it is still alive and wants to pop up its ugly head, you must remind it that it is

crucified.

Now I want to give you a text about those who will be alive at the second coming of Christ. Turn to Jude; I'll start with verse 21, but I want to give you verse 23. This is counsel to Christians who are justified in Christ.

Keep yourselves in God's love [His love is the basis of your salvation] as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. [The only person who needs mercy is sinners.] Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear — hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

In the last days even fashions will go. We won't worry about what we wear and what we eat. But now I want to give you verses 24-25 of Jude:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God

our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Remember that there is a battle that we are fighting. The battle is the flesh and when the Spirit says “no” to the flesh, it will be very painful. The devil got Eve into his camp and then he used Eve as an instrument to get Adam. Could God give Adam another wife? Yes. But was it painful for Adam to say goodbye to Eve? Very painful. It was so painful that he was willing to die for Eve. He should have been willing to die for Christ. He chose Eve. She could not save him.

You will have to die. Whether we like it or not we will all have to die. But those who are willing to die for Christ — no problem. He will raise you up. Choose you this day whom you will serve. But remember it is costly to live the Christian life. All your lives you will have to drag this flesh. I have some bad news to you who flee to the mountains. You may say goodbye to the evil cities and environment but you will not say goodbye to

the evil flesh; it will come with you. And the devil will use the flesh there in the mountains to destroy your faith. Only those whose faith is rooted and grounded in the love of God and His saving activity in Christ will be able to stand.

I hope that you will be willing to suffer with Christ for a season. Because that is what it will cost. And my prayer for you is that you will want to obey God and reveal God, not because you want to go to heaven, but because you want to reveal Christ.

It is my prayer that, just as Christ was willing to suffer, we will be willing. I will close with this text. He endured the shame and pain of the cross. Do you know why? The cross was the most shameful kind of death ever invented by man and was an extremely painful death. Hebrews 12:2:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author [source] and perfecter of our faith [our salvation], who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the

throne of God.

What was the joy? Three times the Son prayed, “Father, if possible, remove this cup” and three times the Father said, “No, I will not spare you the cup.” Why? Because the Father set before the Son the joy to see us in heaven, because He is the author and finisher of our faith.

My prayer is that for the joy that is set before us, the joy of glorifying Christ, let us be willing to endure the cross, self-denial. That the world may see Christ in us. It is my prayer that, as disciples of Christ, we will be willing to suffer for a season. I look at Paul, flogged how many times? Shipwrecked how many times? In prison, deprived of food, he held on. Because for Paul, he said, “For me to live is Christ and to die is profit.”

May God bless us. We have life because Jesus died. We who have received this life may be willing to die to self and live for Christ. We should say thank you to God that we are willing to suffer with Christ for a season. The disciples were, and

we must be willing for the joy that is set before us.

Can you see that Christ is not saying you must cut off your hand? That won't help you. Even if you cut off your ears, you will still be able to hear in your mind. Cutting off your body parts cannot put away the evil thoughts that come out; you will still remember what you heard ten years ago. You will still remember the things that you read, even if you pluck out your eyes. It doesn't help. The problem is much deeper than the members of our body. May God bless us.

Chapter 15

Christian Lifestyle

Matthew 5:31-42

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

“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.’ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

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

I would like to remind you that our study in the Sermon the Mount is what Jesus is telling His disciples. He is instructing them on how Christians should live on this earth while they are waiting for the coming of Christ.

In this section we are going to cover today, Jesus is dealing with three of His six statements where He begins, “You have heard” [or “It has been said”] but “this is what I say.” What Jesus is doing is showing His people that the way they were raised up under Judaism was not the right way and He is trying to show them the correct interpretation of Moses in contrast to what they were taught.

We must keep in mind verse 20, which is the key passage to these six statements. Matthew 5:20:

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

When we dealt with verse 20, we saw that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was the righteousness of legalism, which was in outward conformity: it was in the letter. The righteousness that God wants us to reveal is the righteousness of the Spirit: the fruits of righteousness by faith.

As I mentioned, there are three areas which Christ is dealing with in this passage. One, the sanctity of marriage (verses 31-32). The second has to do with swearing, oaths, and profanity (verses 33-37). And the last, He enjoins non-resistance; in other words, He is dealing with abuses and mistreatments, etc. (verses 38-42).

Let's take them one by one. The first one is a very sensitive area in view of the condition of our world today. It is dealing with the issue of divorce. I realize it is sensitive and that people are hurting. But let us see what Jesus says — He is dealing with the ideal — with how God views marriage. Matthew 5:31-32:

“It has been said [this is what the Pharisees and scribes were teaching], ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

These two verses are a summary of what Jesus expounded on in Chapter 19. We need to get the full picture before we deal with the summary. Matthew 19:3-9 is the full picture: the full picture of what the Pharisees taught, why they taught it, and how Christ reacted to their teaching. Verse 3:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They

asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

Now I need to help you here. There were two famous Rabbis: they are Shamiah and Hilliel and they both gave opposite instructions to the verses that Moses gave about divorce and marriage. The Shamiah Rabbi was very strict; the Hilliel one was very liberal and the Pharisees tended to follow Hilliel. Hilliel said that if your wife displeases you in any area — for example, if she burnt your food — you could divorce her. Or if you found some other woman that pleased you more than your wife, you could divorce your wife. They wanted to find out which camp Christ belonged to. You have the same situation today: People will ask you questions to find out to which camp you belong. “Do you belong to Shamiah or do you belong to Hilliel?”

So the Pharisees presented the Hilliel view when they asked Jesus if it was right for a man to put away his wife for ever cause, for any small mistake she makes. Is it right? Verses 4-6:

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

Please notice that He did not go to Shamiah; He did not go to Hilliel. He went to the Scripture and to the original plan that God had for marriage: God “made them male and female” for a specific reason, which he then states.

They were not satisfied with His answer, so what did they say? Verse 7:

“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

Please notice that they interpret Moses as saying that “he commanded us” but, of course,

Moses was inspired. Verses 8-9:

Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Jesus doesn’t contradict Moses but says, “The reason why Moses allowed this was not because God wanted this but because of the hardness of your heart.”

If you look at this passage and then interpret Matthew 5, you will notice there are three major differences. Number one, the Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds of divorce. Jesus was teaching them about the institution of marriage, what God intends marriage to be. What God is saying in the verses we read is two things: (a) marriage is exclusive — it has to do with husband and wife — and (b) marriage is permanent: “Therefore what God has joined

together, let man not separate.”

Number two, the Pharisees called Moses’ provision for divorce a commandment. Do you know what a commandment means? It means that God said you must do this. Christ called it a concession because of the hardness of their hearts. When the Jews came out of Egypt (where they had been for over 400 years), they had been influenced by the Egyptian mentality. And the Egyptian mentality is that a woman has a very low place in society. The Jews were affected by this.

When you read the Bible, when they counted people, they counted only men. The result of this was that a woman had no rights and they were treating women like dirt — divorcing them and so on. (I will come back to our modern situation in a moment.) God had to gradually wean them out of this mentality and so He made certain concessions. For example, when they were coming to the promised land, but were still in the wilderness, they lusted for flesh. What did God do? Did He say, “No, this is not my idea?” He said, “I’ll give you

what you want.” God did make concessions and, when you read the Old Testament, you will discover that God made many concessions. For example, polygamy. Look at the great men of God. Jacob, the father of Israel, had twelve sons. How many wives did these sons come from? Look at Abraham and Hagar. Was that God’s plan? No. But He did make concessions because of the hardness of men’s hearts.

When a man sinned, he departed so far from God at times, that God could not bring him back to the right place immediately. You look at the reformation. Did God give Luther all the light? No, he could not handle it. He was coming out of darkness. The Dark Ages had turned the church so far away from the truth that God had to do it gradually. This was not a commandment that God gave to Moses. It was simply a concession because of the hardness of their hearts, because of what sin had produced in society. And you will find this all the time. We are living in the end of time and God’s ultimate purpose for His people must be revealed in the last days.

The third area where Christ differs from the Pharisees is where Pharisees treated divorce lightly. They would give a divorce writing for any small cause. What Moses said was that, “You can’t just simply drop your wife. You need at least to give her a written statement that you have divorced her.” We face the same problem today of treating divorce lightly.

But Jesus took divorce as a very serious issue. He said, “There is only one reason why God will condone divorce, and that is for unfaithfulness.” Some Bibles say, “fornication”; some Bibles say, “adultery.” But do you know the word that Christ used for the word in this passage? It is *pornia*, from which we get the word “pornography.” It is the word that was used for a prostitute. It is not dealing with somebody who suddenly makes a mistake. It is dealing with somebody who is unfaithful as a practice. Christ is saying that is the only exception that God makes for a divorcement.

Now, let’s take what we have discovered and

look at it in our modern situation. If you look at your Bible, you will find that God gives three basic instructions regarding marriage. His original plan, which Christ used, is in Genesis. Genesis 2:24:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

That was no problem to Adam and Eve because they had a nature that was controlled by agape and agape “seeketh not her own.” There was no self in either Adam or Eve and so for them to be one was no problem. Just like the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are in perfect harmony. Have you ever asked yourself how it is that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one? Look at the plan of redemption: each of these three persons in the Godhead have taken different positions:

1. The Father is the Chairman,

2. the Son has made Himself a Slave of the Father (Philippians 2:7:

...But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

3. and we read in John that the Holy Spirit has placed Himself under Christ.

Please remember, they are all equal. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are all equal. Why did the Son not say, “Look, why should I take second place?” and the Holy Spirit could say, “Why should I take third place?” Because they have no self in them. Their one desire is to save the human race and the Son is willing to come under the Father and say that the Father is greater than Himself.

In Adam’s and Eve’s case, there was no problem. The problem came when Adam and Eve sinned, because their natures became changed. They were both bent toward self. When you have two people who are controlled by self, it is impossible for them to be one. They can never agree on every point. And so God gave a new law,

which you will find in Genesis 3:16:

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

That statement was perverted by sinful man. God did not mean that the husband should dominate the wife, but this verse was misused right from the beginning and gradually the women were pushed down and down and down. And the result is that, since both men and women are dominated by self, the time came — and that is what has happened in this country — when the women are not willing to remain down. And so we have the movement called “Women’s Lib.”

How did the men react to that? When somebody is on top, is he willing to step down? No. And so what has happened in this country, as I see it, is that the men are not willing for the women to be equal. And the result is that, because they are stronger physically, you have an increase of wife

beating. Why? Because they are threatened, so they use force. The wife cannot use force so she uses the law. In this country, the law has reached the point that men and women are equal. So you have these problems all the time. The women will use the law to fight for their rights and the men will use physical strength, so we have a problem.

But there is instruction that God gives to the Christian church. The Christian has something that the unbeliever doesn't have and that is why Christian marriage can go back to the ideal. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....

How did Christ love the Church? With what kind of love? With the agape love, the love that "seeketh not her own." If we are to take the instructions of Christ, is it possible in a Christian home for husband and wife to be one like God's original plan? And the answer is, "Yes, it is possible." But please remember that we have

sinful natures and we still have to make decisions and, because of our condition, we will still have disagreements.

How do you deal with disagreements in a marriage? I can only give you some counsel here that I hope will help. When two people are married, you will discover that both have good points, areas where they are good. For example, the husband may be good at controlling the finances and the wife may not, or vice versa, it depends on the couple. I think they should come to an agreement. When it comes to money matters, the one who is cautious and prudent should be in charge. When it comes to education, maybe the wife is better. The husband and wife should come to an agreement on the various areas and then they should work as a team.

Then, also, you should decide on what areas you both are compatible. Very often the husband and wife are opposites. I am an introvert. My wife is an extrovert. She helps me. When there are socials, I don't want to go and she says, "No, you

must come.” I listen to her. I am happy by myself reading a book but she tells me I must go because I am the Pastor, so I go. Because we have a Christian marriage, I don’t say, “God said that I should rule over you.”

When it comes to money matters, I am more careful than she is, so she never buys anything big without consulting me. We sit down and we work it out. And that is how it should be. Christ is saying that God’s original plan for marriage hasn’t changed because of sin. The purpose of the gospel is to restore God’s original plan — whether it is marriage, in health and eating habits, or whatever, God’s original plan hasn’t changed. He allowed concessions because of our sinful state.

The Christian home should aim at the goal “the two shall be one.” When two married people follow the principals of the gospel and they are married for 30, 40, 50 years, they even begin to look alike and think alike. A husband can make a decision when his wife is not there because he knows exactly what she will say. They have lived

together so closely they can even read each other's thoughts. That is the goal we want to reach: to be one.

I realize that our culture is so far away from this today. I have heard three times, twice in Idaho and once here, that the average American couple can expect three partners in their lifetime. And now in many courts where people get married, they have changed the marriage vows from "until death do us part" to "as long as we love each other." If you love each other only with human love, which is changeable and unreliable, you can guarantee that this is going to add to the problem.

Now, let's go to number two, Matthew 5:33-37, which has to do with honesty in speech. Let's read the verses and then I will give you some background:

"Again, you have heard [same introduction] that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all:

either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

If you read this without looking at other passages, it will sound like a Christian should never take an oath. But we know from the Bible that God Himself swore. Look at Genesis 22:16-17. God swore to Abraham; He took an oath:

...And said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies....

If you look in the New Testament when Christ was before Caiphas, in Matthew 26, the priests and

people were accusing Him and He did not reply. But finally, in Matthew 26:63b, Caiphas said, “I adjure you,” which in Greek means, “I make an oath before God, are you the Christ?” Matthew 26:63-64a:

But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied....

And Jesus answered because Caiphas gave an oath. You will find that Abraham, when he sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, made the servant swear certain things. When Joseph was about to die, he made his brethren swear they would not leave his bones in Egypt. When Jonathan and David had an agreement, Jonathan made David swear. So we see that the Bible is not against oaths, correctly used. What Jesus is condemning here is taking the name of God in

vain. He is referring to the third commandment. Another text for this is Leviticus 19:12:

“Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.”

This is what Moses taught but the Pharisees had twisted that text. In fact, they were using Deuteronomy 6:13 to back up their position:

Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

If you go to the Middle East today, the same problem still exists. To convince you that they are telling the truth, even though they are lying, they will always use the name of God. If they are Muslims, they will say “Allah,” or, if they are Jews, they will use the name of “Jehovah” They will keep swearing all the time. If you listen to people who are not Christians, they will keep using the name of Jesus, as if it was nothing. What God was saying is that a Christian should be honest, therefore, he doesn’t need to swear. If you

say, “yes,” you must mean “yes.”

Now look again at this in terms of the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. A person who says “yes” with his mouth and “no” with his heart is only obeying the law outwardly and there is too much of this. You do not know where you stand when people say one thing with their mouth and in their heart they mean another thing. We do not know and we often ask the question, “Do you really mean that?” We should never have to ask that question of true Christians. We should always say what is in our hearts and, if what is in our hearts might not be the best thing to say, then we shouldn’t say it. Christ wants us to let our “yes” be “yes” from the inside and our “no” be “no” from the inside. Don’t say one thing and mean something else is what Jesus was saying.

Now let’s go to the third item and we’ll come to a conclusion. Number three is a difficult one. Matthew 5:38-42 deals with passive, non-retaliation:

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

First of all, let’s look at the statement, “You have been taught an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” Where is this found? It is found in more than one place. First of all it is found in Exodus 21:23-25:

But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

The next time it is found in Leviticus 24:19-20:

If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has

done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.

And the third time is in Deuteronomy 19:21:

Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Did Moses actually say these words? Yes. Is Christ contradicting Moses? No. What is the problem then? These statements were given by God, through Moses, as legal statements. These were instructions that God gave to the judges, to the law courts. They were never to be used personally. That is where the Pharisees went wrong. God said to the judges, “If somebody has stolen \$10,000, his punishment must be equivalent to that crime.” That is what God instructed the law to do. But God never intended for the Jews to take these and apply them personally and use it as an excuse to take revenge.

What Jesus is saying is, “You must leave the

method for justice in the hands of the law.” But you say, “the law is corrupt.” There is a statement that we have covered already in Romans 12:19. How do we deal with injustices? It doesn’t mean that we just sit back, but we do not take revenge if we are mistreated. Romans 12:19:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

The best example of this is Jesus Christ? Was He mistreated? Was He falsely accused? How did He respond? Let me start with Isaiah 50:6, a prophecy about Christ:

I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

Can you imagine what they were doing to Christ? They not only flogged him, they pulled his hair. Have you ever had your hair pulled? It is painful.

Turn to Mark, where we will read a couple of texts. Mark 14:65. How did Christ respond to His mistreatment?

Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

They normally struck a person on the back. It was an insult in the Middle East to slap the face; it is the same today. And then, in Mark 15:16-20, He got the same thing from the soldiers:

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the

purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Can you imagine Jesus, the Son of God, the Creator of this world being insulted. All He had to give was one look and they would have dropped dead. He had the power to do that. But He did not.

Jesus said, “If somebody forces you to walk with him one mile, you go two miles.” Please remember the context here. The Jews were under Roman bondage and the Roman law allowed a Roman soldier to give his baggage to a Jew to carry. The typical situation was this: a Roman soldier would force a Jew to carry his heavy baggage, but he was not allowed to make him carry it for more than one mile. And the typical picture is the Roman soldier walking in front with nothing in his hand and the Jew was behind with this heavy load and as he would walk he would mutter under his breath all kinds of curses against the Roman soldier, swearing at him and cursing him.

But Jesus said, “If somebody does that to you,

don't walk only one mile, don't curse him, but say to the soldier, 'How would you like for me to walk two miles?' ” (That was pouring coals on top of his head). “If he slaps you on the right cheek, you are to give him the other.”

Many years ago while I was in Africa, I was reading a story of a black American who was mistreated and he told his Pastor, who was an ex-boxer. And the Pastor went to the person who was mistreating his member and pleaded with him not to mistreat him and this fellow slapped him on the face. And the Pastor turned around and said, “Would you like to slap me on the other cheek?” And the man did so. And the Pastor said, “Now I have done my will to God, and so now I will do my will to my fellow man.” And he took this man and gave him a terrible hiding, broke his jaw. But God did not say that or mean that.

Now let's conclude. What is the situation? What is the problem here? What is the conclusion of the matter? Please remember that both the Pharisees and Jesus Christ, neither one, disagreed

with Moses. They both used Moses. The problem was not there. The problem was their interpretation of Moses. That is where they disagreed. The Pharisees and scribes claimed to be experts in the law. They claimed to be zealous for the law, but they were legalists. Legalists always find loopholes.

Let me give you my personal experience. When I first arrived in the United States in 1964, we were at the General Conference and were put up in Washington, D.C., by a very fine family. He was the Educational Secretary of the General Conference. The reason they put us up is because his son was my roommate at Newbold. They took us to the Takoma Park Church. It was about the time when the new officers were being introduced to the Church. And I heard some rumblings, some talk (we were up in the balcony). Apparently there was a controversy.

There were some ladies who were chosen by the Nominating Committee to be officers in the Sabbath School Department. Some of the

members opposed it because the ladies were wearing wedding rings.

It was in the days when that was a big issue. And the Church decided they could not hold office. And there was much disagreement. Some disagreed with that because the ladies were excellent Christians, and so on. When the ladies came on the platform, I noticed that many of them had huge, bright, flashy brooches. It wasn't to keep their blouse together, it was to the side. I said, "I can't understand this." And someone said, "That is the trouble, we are inconsistent."

But that is exactly how the Pharisees were. They were particular about certain things. But they had loopholes. They had rules and loopholes so they could enjoy the flesh and yet keep the Sabbath, etc. And Jesus was pointing at their hypocrisy. God said, "You must not swear," but they found loopholes. God said, "You should not divorce," but they found loopholes. They took texts from Moses and twisted it for their own desires. And that is typical of a legalist. They are

very particular about certain things and they will condemn you if you don't follow them. But if you look at their lives, they are completely inconsistent. One man said to me, "I have never, ever, even put a morsel of meat in my mouth," but you should have seen him eating ice cream! What he ate was doing him more harm than meat, the way he was eating it. But the Church never condemned eating ice cream so that was okay. In fact, his wife told me that if he ever went through the end of a meal without eating ice cream, he would always be grumpy.

What God is looking for is people whose hearts are right. And when the heart is right, you will not be condemning others. You will know that you yourself are 100% a sinner. And your heart wants to do exactly what God wants you to do. Christ was not against the law, even though the Pharisees accused Him of being. He was against hypocrisy. He was telling His disciples, "Please, your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees." They were keeping the law in the letter. Outwardly they looked beautiful.

But, if you read the whole Chapter of Matthew 23, you will discover what Christ had to say to these Pharisees who were zealous for the law.

I will read you only one of them: Matthew 23:26-28:

Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. [They were only concerned about outward conformity.]

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.

“In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Please remember that you cannot deceive our young people. Our young people are experts at

spotting a hypocrite and they have seen so much hypocrisy that they say, “If this is Christianity, we want nothing to do with it.”

It is my prayer that the righteousness that is produced in us will be an inward righteousness, a righteousness that is motivated by love. We will not say, “God has done away with the law.” God has not done away with the law, but He wants us to keep the law out of love. Love must be the fulfillment of the law. And this is what Christ is dealing with in these six sections.

There are six statements that Christ makes: “You have heard,” or “I have taught you.” The first one has to do with murder: Matthew 5:21-22:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger

of the fire of hell.”

Christ said, “If you hate somebody in your heart, you have killed him.” The second one was, “You have been taught thou shalt not commit adultery.” Matthew 5:27-28:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

What was adultery to the Pharisee? The outward act. Jesus said, “If you look at a woman and have desire for her in your heart you have committed adultery.”

The next three are the ones we covered today. The next study will be “You have heard you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” Is this what Moses taught? Jesus said, “I say unto you....” And that is what we will cover in our next study.

Chapter 16

Perfect Love

Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

We are dealing with the last section of Matthew 5 and also the last of the six illustrations that Christ used to explain the meaning of God’s Holy Law and also the meaning of what true righteousness is. Christ is giving these six illustrations in contrast to

the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees and that is why, in each illustration, He begins with the phrase, “You have heard.” That means, “This is what you have been taught.” As I mentioned, this sixth one is the most important of the illustrations because it is dealing with the issue of love. Love is the foundation of the Christian church; love is the foundation of God’s government. As you look at Matthew 22, you will see that Jesus says that love for God and love for our fellowmen address all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:36-40:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

So if we understand this, we have come to grips with the center of the Sermon on the Mount message.

In Matthew 5:43, Jesus is referring to what they had been taught and uses the typical introduction:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

The question arises immediately, “From where did the scribes and Pharisees quote this statement for their teachings?” All the other five are quotations from the Old Testament. Let’s quickly look at the other five and I will give you the text they are quoting from. Then when we come to verse 43 you will see that there is something different.

1. Verse 21: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’” This is a quotation from Exodus 20, the commandment.

2. Verse 27: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’” This also was taken from Exodus 20.

3. Verse 31: “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’” That is a quotation from Deuteronomy 24:1.

4. Verse 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.’” That is a quotation from Leviticus 19:12.

5. Verse 38: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’” This statement is quoted at least three times in the Old Testament so I’ll give you all three: Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deut. 19:21. These three texts say the same thing.

In each of these five cases, the scribes and Pharisees had perverted the meaning of these texts and Christ is correcting that. But when we come to verse 43, you will find no statement in the Scriptures which says, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” You won’t find it. Were the scribes and Pharisees making this up? No. They

took two passages, two texts, from the Old Testament and joined them together and came up with a teaching. I will give you the two texts. The first one is Leviticus 19:18:

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

The other quotation is taken from Deuteronomy 23:3-6. This passage almost contradicts Leviticus, so we have to look at it in detail:

No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.

The Rabbis, from whom the Pharisees got this teaching, took these two groups of texts and said, “When God said, ‘Love thy neighbor,’ He meant, ‘Love your fellow Jews.’” And they took the other text from Deuteronomy and said, “We must not love the Canaanites.” When they put these texts together they came up with the teaching, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.”

The first thing I would like to say about this is that here is an excellent example of the danger of using the proof-text method: taking two verses and putting them together out of context and giving them a doctrine that is not taught by Scripture. It is not wrong to use the proof-text method, but it is important that you look at the context of each verse you use. Otherwise, you can make the Bible say whatever you want.

How can we solve the problem? We need to solve this problem before we go to the teachings of Christ. There are similar texts in the Old Testament which have been used to give the

impression that the God of the Old Testament is a hard, harsh Judge ready to push you into the fire, but Jesus is love. I have even known of Adventists who think that Christ is by the side of the Father, pleading with the Father, “Please, don’t be so hard on these poor sinners.” We forget that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Tell me, Who sent Jesus here to save us? God. John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

In Romans 8:32, we read that God spared not His own Son:

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

If you carefully examine the Old Testament, you will discover that all of these texts, those against the Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites and

so on, are judicial judgments of God on these people, and not to be taken personally. Let me give you a passage that will explain what I mean. Turn to Numbers 14:18-23. This is a key text. This is God talking to Moses and this is what He says about Himself. Verses 18-19:

“The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

This is God talking to Moses. Moses had just been discussing the Israelites who were being rebellious, and Moses is asking God to pardon their iniquity. Here is Moses interceding. Verses 20-23:

The Lord replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth,

not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times — not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.”

What is the issue here? God is love but there is one sin God cannot forgive — the sin of unbelief. Hebrews tells us, speaking of the same people, that they did not enter in because of unbelief. I will give you some examples of unbelief so that you will realize when you read the Old Testament and all the atrocities that God commanded Israel to perform, please remember they were judicial actions.

First of all turn to Jude, verse 7. Here God tells why He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah:

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of

eternal fire.

To understand this verse, you need to go back to Genesis 18 and we will start with verse 20 onwards. This is the background: God came to Abraham and said, “I am going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.” Verses 20-21:

Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

Verses 23-24:

Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?”

“There are some believers there,” says

Abraham. “How can you destroy the two cities when there are righteous people there?”

Abraham is saying to God that he thinks there are at least 50 souls who have accepted Him and he asks if He is going to destroy the whole city. See how Abraham continues in verse 25:

Far be it from you to do such a thing — to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

”It is against your character, God; this is unlike You.” Verse 26:

The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Abraham knew Lot was there in Sodom, but he began to wonder if his count was accurate. This is the Middle East — they always bargain — so here Abraham begins to bargain with God. Verses 27-

28:

Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city because of five people?”

“Supposing my figures are a bit wrong, supposing it is 45 instead of 50, will you spare them?” And God again agrees.

So Abraham continues to bargain: how about forty, how about thirty, and God says Yes. I appreciate God; He enters into that bargaining. He takes people where they are. He becomes a Middle Easterner to the Middle Easterner, just like Paul says, “I am all things to all men.” Do you know how low Abraham dropped? Look at verse 32:

Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

There weren't even ten there, because the city was destroyed.

What is this passage telling us? Did the people of Sodom and Gomorrah receive the message of God? Yes. What did they do with it? They persistently rejected it, until they reached the point of no return. Then came the judicial decree. God is long-suffering. He is merciful. But please remember, He will not let the guilty go scot-free. You cannot spurn His Son and expect not to suffer the consequences.

Let me put it in another way. There are some now who are beginning to teach that God is love and that even the unbelievers will one day be saved. We call this Universalism. Yes, God is love, but He is also just and He cannot save anyone who deliberately, persistently, and ultimately says to Him, "I don't want Your gift of Jesus Christ." He cannot take them to heaven. Why? Because He created us with a free moral choice. He is giving us salvation as a gift and if we deliberately refuse it, He can do nothing.

Let me give you another example. Turn to 1 Peter 3:18-20. Here we have the example of the flood:

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom [the same Spirit] also he went and preached to the spirits [persons] in prison [prison of sin] who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,....

Notice the longsuffering of God. How long did it take Noah to build the ark? He wanted Noah to take all the time necessary to preach and give the people a second chance, a third chance, etc. At the end of those 120 years, how many souls believed God's word? Eight souls were saved.

Turn now to Genesis 15 and this will give you in a nutshell what I am saying. Start at verse 13.

God is speaking to Abram:

Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.”

God said to Abram that He had given him Canaan but for four hundred years the children were to be in Egypt. God wanted Abram to witness the true God to the Canaanites; He wanted Abram’s children to witness the true God to the Egyptians and give them a chance too. And God gave the Canaanites 400 years. I read in verse 16:

In the fourth generation [after 400 years] your descendants will come back here [your children will come back to Canaan], for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

The word “Amorites” is an ancient term for “Canaanites.” God is saying that He is going to give Canaan 400 years of probation time but, when that is finished, they will have to make an ultimate

choice. If they would accept and join Abram's children, that would be an outward sign that they had accepted God. But if they attacked, persecuted, and rejected them, then they would not be attacking and rejecting simply human beings, they would be persecuting the agents of God. They would be outwardly showing that they deliberately and willfully rejected the God of heaven. Probation is closed and they were wiped out. Why? Because if they had been allowed to live, they would have generated their rebellious attitude of unbelief and it would be passed on. That is a judicial act.

Jesus said the same things to the Jews. Remember when He came to the Mount of Olives and He looked over Jerusalem. What did He say? Matthew 23:37-38:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you

desolate.”

Turn to Romans 11. Here you will find the same thing as in Luke 21, where Christ said that Jerusalem would be trodden under foot. That was their punishment until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. The same phrase appears in Romans 11:25 [He is talking to Gentiles]:

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”

God has now given the Gentile world approximately 2,000 years to accept Jesus Christ. He gave the Jews 1,500 years. And before the end comes, He is going to give them a final chance. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to every nation, kindred, and tongue. But sometime, sometime we have to come to a point where we make a final decision. And I know what He will say then. He will say to the Gentile world the same

thing He said to the Jews: “How often I have offered you My Son, but you would not. I leave your house desolate.”

What the Jews did was to take those judicial statements and applied them to anybody who was not a Jew. So the Jews began looking at Gentiles as dogs, unclean human beings, unfit for heaven. This so permeated the minds of the Jews that even the disciples had to learn the hard way that the gospel was not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. Remember the unclean animals coming down in the sheet [Acts 10]? What was God trying to tell Peter? Acts 10:15:

The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

“What God has cleansed [the Gentiles] don’t call unclean.”

You would think that by now, in the Twentieth Century, that all this would be over. When I came here to this country for the first time in 1964 on the

Queen Mary, there were seven rabbis on board. I tried to talk to one of them on Friday; I had something in common with him because we both kept the Sabbath. I said, “Can you tell me what time the sun sets?” I just wanted to open up a conversation. He looked at me with no response, so I repeated my question and the second time I could see actual anger in his face. And he turned around and walked away. A sailor who was scrubbing the deck told me I had done a terrible thing. “Don’t you know that you are a Gentile and he is a Jew?” I asked if it was a sin to talk to a Jew and the sailor told me that, as far as the Jew was concerned, “Yes.” “He just had a bath to prepare for his Sabbath and now, by the fact that you talked to him, you defiled him and now he has to have another one.”

This is how the Jews had perverted the teachings of the Old Testament. Sometimes we do the same thing by looking down upon others. I don’t care whether you are Jew or Gentile, or what denomination you belong to, we are sinners saved by grace. If you are going to help others to

understand the gospel, you had better treat them as friends. Otherwise, they won't listen to you. We have a message, but if we have the attitude that the scribes and Pharisees had, we will never reach them.

With this in mind, let us now turn to Matthew 5 and see what Christ says. We have been dealing so far with what the Pharisees were teaching the Jews. I gave you all this background to show you that we don't dare repeat the same mistake. We don't dare take Bible texts out of context and make them say what God is not saying. We human beings are expert at that. What is Christ teaching? Matthew 5:44-48. I want to show you five points here.

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more

than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Behave like your Father: love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who use and persecute you.

Jesus is talking here of two opposite concepts of love. God’s love is unconditional (vs. 45). Human love is conditional, reciprocal: I love you if you love me. You don’t have to be a Christian to love your friends. The worst criminal loves his own friends and family.

Look at the context. In what sense are we to be perfect? In the sense of loving. Our love must be without discrimination, it must be unconditional, we must love as the Father loves.

1. Number one, what kind of love is Christ describing here? In the New Testament, this is called the agape love. Christ is describing agape in

action. Agape in action is a love that knows no discrimination.

2. Number two, this agape sinful man cannot generate. It is not something that I can produce. I am born with a selfish nature. Everything I do is polluted with self. We are told in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 13:5, what love is:

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

There is no self in agape.

3. Number three, this agape, which is God's love, and which you and I cannot generate, is the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers.

Turn to 1 Corinthians. Normally we read Chapter 13, but I would like to read the last verse of Chapter 12 because Paul had no divisions. What does the Commandment say? Exodus 20:17:

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

What does verse 31a say?

“But eagerly desire [“covet” in some translations]...”

Is Paul against the Law? If I took that statement by itself and out of context, I could make it say that.

“But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.”

He is showing us now the very best of the Holy Spirit's gifts which He wants to give to everybody. Then he describes in Chapter 13 the gift of agape. Look at verse 5, because it sums up the qualities of this love. Actually we'll read verses 4-8a. By the way, the word “love” (“charity,” in some translations) is not the word Paul used. He used the word agape.

Love [agape] is patient, love [agape] is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love [agape] does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love [agape] never fails.

Do you see that in verse 6?

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

If you have this kind of love, you will hate sin. You will rejoice in truth. You cannot produce hatred for sin by promotional programs because our nature loves sin. What we don't love is the punishment of sin. But this verse is not saying that we hate the punishment, but sin itself.

The next thing I want to say is very important. This gift is not given to us for salvation. God

doesn't give us the gift of agape and then say that by the gift He wants us to keep the Law (which is agape love) and, once we keep the Law, He will save us. He doesn't say that anywhere in Scripture. He does give the gift to those people who have already received the gift of salvation. How do I know? I read it in John 13:34-35. Jesus is talking to His disciples who had already accepted Him. And He is telling them something here:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

In contrast to this, turn back to John 5:42. Jesus' verdict against the scribes and Pharisees and Jews who have rejected Him.:

“...But I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.”

Were the Jews keeping the Law of God mechanically? Yes. Were they particular about

the details of the Law? Yes. Did they have love and mercy and kindness? No.

Let's go to one more text so that you are clear that I am not giving you cunningly devised fables. 1 John 4:7-8:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves [manifesting agape] has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

I spend time on these texts in the Old Testament because there are many who do not know that God is love. Oh yes, they know it mechanically. They have read the text in verse 8 and John 3:16, but, deep down, they are afraid of God. His love has not become part of them. Now look at verse 12. 1 John 4:12:

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Can you imagine a Church that is manifesting this? What is this all about? It is the fulfillment of the new covenant. And the new covenant is ..., well, let's let the Bible speak. Turn to 2 Corinthians. By the way, the "new covenant" and the "everlasting covenant" are the same thing. The "new" here in Greek is not something brand new, but something that was lost and restored. 2 Corinthians 6:16:

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

When God walks in you and God is love, what will be revealed in you? Love. Love for your enemies, those which spitefully use you, love for those who misuse you. It takes the grace of God. You can never do that by trying. You are wasting your time to try. It has to be spontaneous and it only happens when God dwells in you. Look at

Hebrews 8:10-13:

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. [I will put love in them.] I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

Can God produce such a people? Can God produce what Jesus is describing in Matthew 5:44-48? Is it simply some theoretical teaching which is so high above us that none of us can ever dream of reaching it. Can God produce such a people?

I want to give two texts. First, Exodus 32:31-

32. You will see that Moses revealed such a love.

Moses came down with the Ten Commandments and discovered that the people were worshiping an idol after promising God, “All that you say we will do,” which is the old covenant. God told Moses He would destroy them and make a great nation out of Moses. Moses said, “I love this people, don’t do it.” Have you ever read how these people treated Moses? It is amazing that he could ever go through all of that. Moses said, “God, if you can’t forgive them because their sin is so bad, then blot me out. Let me die the eternal death in their place that they may live.” Here was Moses revealing God’s character. Exodus 32:31-32:

So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

You have the same thing in Romans 9:1-3 in

the case of Paul:

I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit — I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,....

The Jews hated Paul. They were the ones really responsible for his execution. He loved them. He said, “I’m telling you the truth. You may not believe me. You may think that I’m against you, but God knows my conscience. I am willing to be accursed, lost forever, if it will save the Jews.” Can God produce a people, a church who are so filled with agape that there is no more fighting, no more accusations, and, even though there may be differences, they are one in Christ? If you read Acts 4:32-33, the great multitude at Pentecost were of one heart and one mind:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his

own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Will God repeat this history? Yes. Revelation 12:17:

Then the dragon [Satan] was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Why is Satan angry with the remnant? Because they have the testimony of Jesus Christ and they are keeping the commandments. Not mechanically, but they are keeping the spirit of the law. They are keeping the law as Jesus defined it, not as the Pharisees defined it. As long as we are like the Pharisees, as long as we are putting our emphasis on external obedience, we shall fail miserably. Only as we truly understand justification by faith, because the fruit of justification by faith is love. And love is the

fulfillment of the law. Only when we understand this can God produce a people who will reflect, through sanctification, the character of Jesus.

If I want to produce Red Delicious apples, where should I concentrate? On the apples or on the tree? If the tree is right, what happens to the fruit? The foundation of genuine Christian living is justification by faith. It is the foundation. Because you and I are born slaves to the fear of death; Hebrews 2:14-15:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

As long as that fear exists in you, it is impossible for you to serve God with a pure motive. That is why the first thing that must happen is for the love of God to cast away fear. The reason why the love of God will cast out fear is because “God so loved the world that He gave

His only Son.” In Christ we have nothing to fear because we have been redeemed, we’ve been reconciled, we’ve been justified in Christ. We have been accepted in Christ. Once I have that peace with God, I am able to face the ups and downs of life, I am able to face anything, and, above all, I am able to serve God without a selfish motive. When that happens the world will see what a wonderful church this is.

I will close with an experience we had in Ethiopia. I held a Week of Prayer at the Pentecostal Church. The young people wanted me to speak in their Church. They had prayer and fasting for three days and at the end of the third day the Lord impressed the Pastor to let me come. When I gave the Week of Prayer, they asked me to give a study on the Sabbath. I did it in the light of the gospel and the whole church — 800 members — began keeping the Sabbath. They call themselves “Seventh-day Pentecostals.”

One day their Pastor came to hear me in our Adventist Church in Addis Ababa. The Union

Sabbath School Superintendent of the Union had been rebuking me for a long time. He thought I had made a great mistake in leaving the people there instead of bringing them to our church. He reminded me that day when this Pastor was there. So I said to him that he should go ask the Pastor as to what reason he had why they had not joined our church.

At that time, we were fighting in our church between the nationals and the missionaries because there were two wage scales, two policy books, and so on. And this Pentecostal Pastor was very honest. He said, “When you Adventists learn to love each other, we will join you.” The day we learn to love each other in spite of our differences, we will fill this church three times. Love is attractive. But as long as we condemn each other and have a “better than you” attitude, we will never bring souls to this church the way God wants us to.

It is my prayer that you will realize that it is the love of God that transforms lives. It is the love of God that witnesses to the world that the gospel is

the power of God unto salvation.

Chapter 17

True Benevolence

Matthew 6:1-4

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

We turn now to Matthew 6. Since we are beginning a new chapter in the Sermon on the Mount (the Sermon on the Mount covers chapters 5, 6, and 7), it would be helpful if we begin with a quick review of what we have already covered. So

we know the logic of what Christ is teaching us.

First of all, Jesus began with Beatitudes which describe the essential elements that constitute true Christian character. Then He proceeds to show us how this Christian character should influence the world. He uses two metaphors: salt and light. One negative and the other is positive. Salt implies that the world is spiritually dead and is rotting and Christians are to retard that rotting process by mixing with the world. Light is to give them the knowledge of Jesus Christ; He is the Light of the world.

Then He describes Christian righteousness, which must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. He gives six illustrations where He demonstrates how Christian righteousness must penetrate beyond our actions, beyond our words, and must come from the heart and from the mind. In other words, God is concerned not only with good performance, but He is concerned that our motives are right.

I have a statement I would like to read from Steps to Christ [by Ellen G. White], pages 44 and 45:

“There are those who profess to serve God while they rely on their own efforts to obey the law and to form a right character and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. Such religion is worth nothing.”

This is primarily the thrust of what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 6. With this review let us turn to Matthew 6:1-4:

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their

reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

What Christ is doing in Chapter 6 is pointing out the life of a Christian in the world and that it has to be lived entirely dependent on God and under total submission to God. A Christian is one who depends entirely on God and is in total submission to God. Jesus said, “Without me you can do nothing.” If Christ is to do something in me, then I have to abide in Him.

The key verse of the whole of Chapter 6 is verse 1. Here He lays down the general principles that will govern the religious life of a Christian. It will cover all of Chapter 6 so that is why I want to spend a bit of time on verse 1.

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father

in heaven.”

The first thing I would like to mention is a manuscript problem. Those of you who have the King James Version will read “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men.” If you have a modern translation, you will notice that the word “alms” does not appear there. It is the word “piety” or “righteousness.” That is what it really should be, either “piety” or “righteousness.” He goes on in verses 2-18, giving three examples. What He is really saying here is, “Take heed that you do not show off your righteousness before men, in order to be seen by them.” Why don’t you have a reward? If you are doing it to be seen by men, then you already have a reward: they have seen it. Jesus is condemning the same thing as He did in Chapter 5. He is presenting true religion in contrast to the practices and teachings of the scribes and Pharisees.

With this in mind, and having had explained the verse in terms of the best manuscripts, let us look at another problem. Compare this verse with

Matthew 5:16. You will notice that on the surface they seem to contradict each other:

“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

In Matthew 6:1, He says, “Don’t let people see.” Is He contradicting Himself? No. God wants the world to see our good works, but He wants them to see through our good works to Christ Himself. I want to give you an example. Turn to John 14. You will discover if you read the gospels that the greatest evidence that Jesus gave that He was the Messiah was His works. Here is an example in John 14:8-11:

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

Since we are into this, let me give you another text. Turn to John 15:22-24:

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father."

In the book of Acts, you will notice that by "great signs and wonders" they witnessed Christ. So please remember that Jesus is not condemning works in Matthew 6:1. He is not contradicting

what He said in Matthew 5:16. What is He talking about? He is talking about works to bring attention to self.

I want to share with you a burden (there is nothing we here can do about it) but I want to share this to show you the point. When the missionaries first went to Africa, they looked upon the Africans as heathens, as pagans. They came with the gospel (I am talking about Christian missionaries of all denominations) and they said, “We have come to bring you light; you are living in darkness.” The Africans are very religious people. They were religious before the missionaries ever came there. It is true that they were worshiping the wrong god and they were doing good things for the wrong reasons (out of ignorance).

Unfortunately, the missionaries worked hand-in-hand with the Colonialists. When these African countries began to get independent, the educated ones began to say, “You came with your Bibles and gave us Christianity and you took our land. Now we want our land back and you take your

Bibles.” This created a problem. So some of the top African theologians said, “We need to do something about this, plus we need to explain to our people that Christianity is not a Western religion.”

So what did they do? I want to warn you. They took the morals of their pagan religion. You will notice that in any religion there are three basic lifestyles: almsgiving, praying, and fasting. You will find this in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, pagan religion, and that is why Christ is taking these three for examples. The African theologians took these three pagan practices and showed the people that this is also practiced in the Bible. Therefore, they said, Christianity came to Africa before the missionaries came and they call this the “Africanization of Christianity.”

Now, what is wrong with that? In all pagan religions you do these things (giving, praying, fasting) in order to gain heaven. That is the fundamental difference between Christian morality and pagan morality. A Christian does these things,

not to gain heaven, not to earn favor with God, but because he already has salvation. Out of joy and gratitude, he wants to do these things. It is not forced. That is why I read the statement from Steps to Christ that such religion is “worth nothing.” So we must keep this in mind because, when we read Matthew 6:1, there are two basic facts we must come to.

Number one, the ultimate choice is the choice of not pleasing self but pleasing God. “I want to do this because I love God and want to please Him, not because I want to earn His favor.” There are a lot of our people who have been doing things to earn favor from God. When they hear for the first time that salvation is a gift, what is their reaction? They will feel this way: “I was doing all those things for nothing?” What has happened is that those who were doing these and were very strict about them have gone from that extreme to “Now I don’t have to do anything.” Both extremes are wrong. Genuine Christianity always produces a person who wants to serve God. He wants to do anything for God because he sees that God has

been so good to him and he wants to live for Him.

The great champion of the gospel is Paul. Tell me, was Paul a lazy man? What does he say in 1 Corinthians 15:10?

No, I worked harder than all of them ...

But he corrected himself (same verse) and said,

...Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

1 Corinthians 10:31:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Number two is something a Christian has to cultivate. You may be familiar with this, but you need to cultivate it. We must do whatever we are doing as if God is present there, because He is there. The other day one of my members said to me, “I wish we would have more reverence in our

Church like the Catholics have.” If you go to a Catholic Church you will see they are very reverent there. I was raised a Catholic. When you go to a Catholic Church you will notice a little red light. It may be over the altar, or to one side, but there is a red light. That red light tells the Catholics that God is actually watching them. As a kid I was scared of God because He was watching me. I could do anything outside the Church but the moment I stepped in, God was watching me. I have bad news: God is watching you all the time, whether you are in the church or out of it. But He is not watching you in order to punish you but is watching you because He cares for you.

When Jesus went back to heaven He said, “I will send you another Comforter, the Holy Spirit” [which is a member of the Godhead]. The actual word is paracletos and that means “someone who is by your side to help you.” Not to push you into the fire but to help you. Every time you fall, He will help you up. We need to keep reminding ourselves that God’s presence is with us.

The best example is Christ. When He was here on this earth, He said, “I seek not my own way; I do all things to please My Father.” That is how we should live. That is what Christ is teaching in verse 1. That is the foundation He is laying. David said in Psalm 139:7-8:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I go to the moon or depths of the ocean, He is there. There is no way I can escape God.

The next thing we need to remember is that God doesn't only see your actions, He can actually read your thoughts. When you realize that He is there to help you, then you learn to talk to Him with your thoughts. When you are shopping and tempted to buy more than you should, then talk to Him: “Should I buy this?” He is our Friend and wants to listen to you.

With this foundation, let's look at verse one more closely. Christ is saying, "Beware, do not practice religion before men to be seen of them; otherwise you have no reward from your Father which is in heaven." Christ wants us to do right things for the right reasons, not because we want to be noticed. Most people who do good things to be noticed are terrible people in private. That is a typical legalist. They will do good things in front of everybody but at home you will discover that they can be pretty tough.

One of the crises we are facing in our Church is wife beating and child abuse. It is a big concern. Why is there so much of this? Could it be that legalism has produced it? Remember when the Pharisees brought Mary to Jesus and said, "We caught her in the act." Have you read in *Desire of Ages* [by Ellen G. White] how she got in that condition? Who led her? The same people who were accusing her.

Now let's look at verses 2, 3, and 4. Jesus has laid the foundation for Chapter 6 and now He says

(Matthew 6:2-4):

“So [here is an example] when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do [He is making a contrast] in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

If you are trying to show men how good you are and they praise you, then you have got your reward. What will God say in the judgment? Turn to Chapter 7. Matthew 7:22-23:

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name [proclaimed your name], and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

Is Christ against proclaiming His name? Is Christ against casting out devils? Is Christ against doing many wonderful works? No. That is not what He is saying. He is saying, “You did it not for My glory, it was not me working in you, you were doing it for your own personal glory and selfish needs.”

In contrast, turn to Matthew 25. This is the same Jesus talking. Listen to what He says to those on the right, the sheep. Matthew 25:34-40:

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord,

when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

The true Christians were doing many wonderful works but they were not doing them to be seen of men but were doing them because of their relationship with God. They were filled with gratitude: “For me to live is Christ.” Going back now to Matthew 6, Jesus is saying, “Don’t do this for people to see.”

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

There has been some question as to what this “openly” means. Most of the scholars take the position that He will give us joy. The reward may not be material blessings or praise before men but He gives you the satisfaction of seeing someone who is hurting relieved of that fact. True love wants to see others relieved of pain and suffering. This is what Christ is saying.

Christ is dealing with a very important issue: What is true religion? Is true religion doing nothing? Is true religion excluding yourself from the world? No. True Christianity is going about doing good. You will notice in this Chapter, in the three examples Christ gives, that He is expressing our duty in three areas: to God through our prayers, to others through our giving, and to ourselves through our fasting. (Fasting is primarily for the purpose of self-discipline.)

Christ is saying that He wants us to pray, and to give alms, and to fast, but not so we can get recognition from human beings or do get some merit from Him. But He wants us to do it because

the love of God constrains us. That is true Christianity. It is my prayer that we will be noted for that. We want people to see our good works, but not to glorify us but to glorify the Father in heaven. The world can only judge us by what we do. They will know us by our fruits.

I want to close by saying that the greatest test as to whether you are really serving God is when people do not appreciate what you are doing. That is a real test. We know that Jesus went about doing good. He healed the sick, fed the poor. Did the people really appreciate Him? At the end of His life, what did these people do? They crucified Him. Did Christ retaliate? Did He say, "After all I have done for them, this is the way they treat me." No. One of the greatest tests of Christianity is when you are unappreciated. Will you still work for Christ? That is a great test.

It was a test in the mission field. In the olden days, the pioneers faced physical hardships primarily. They lived in mud huts, etc. But the Africans in the early days really appreciated them;

they treated them like gods. They carried them on stretchers and almost bowed down to them. Not today. Today they will say, “Go home. We don’t need you.” That is hard to take. Very few of our missionaries now ever fulfill their full term. It is hard to handle. “They don’t need me. Why should I stay here?” The question is not whether they need you or not, but did God send you or not. Whether they appreciate you has nothing to do with it.

God sent Jesus to this world to do a job and at the end of His ministry He said, “Father I have finished the work that You have given Me to do.” God uses you, He sends you, and whether you are appreciated or not has nothing to do with it. “For me to live is Christ.” If Christ was not appreciated, why should I expect to be appreciated? I thank God for Paul’s example and for that of the disciples. The disciples were so filled with the love of God that almost everyone of them died as a martyr for Christ. They were willing to be used, to be spent, to be beaten, to be martyred; they couldn’t care less. They just went on working for

Christ.

I want to give you two examples as evidence that this can happen. The first one is Moses. You know what a hard time they gave Moses. They didn't appreciate him, they criticized him, and gave him a hard time. But he said, "God, please don't destroy them. I would rather you blot me out of the Book of Life that they may live." That attitude is the revelation of Christ in you.

Paul says, "I am willing to be cursed, to be lost forever if that will mean salvation for my people." You know how the Jews treated Paul as a traitor, they treated him worse than a criminal, and it was through them that he was taken to Rome and finally lost his life.

The world is watching us. When you do good works, sometimes they will test you. They will insult you for doing good. Christ is teaching that true Christianity is what He wants. I would like to give you just one text in closing: 1 Peter 2:20-21. Peter is giving counsel to the believers in this

chapter:

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

I pray that we will follow in His steps. God wants us to do good — to give alms, to pray, to fast, and do many good things — but we must do it in a way that the glory goes to God. He doesn't want us to sit down and do nothing. The Church is not an audience; it is the dynamic body of Christ and must reveal Him in all our works. It is important that we do our works for the right reason, otherwise the Sermon on the Mount will have no value for us.

Chapter 18

Concerning Prayer

Matthew 6:5-8

Chapter 6 of the Book of Matthew describes what true religion is in contrast to the practices of the pagans and also in contrast to the hypocrisy practiced by the scribes and Pharisees. Christ lays the foundation in Matthew 6:1 where he says that our righteousness, our piety, or religion must not be like those of the hypocrites or the pagans. Having laid this foundation, Christ uses three examples of religious practices that occur in some form in every religion: almsgiving, praying, and fasting. You will find these three in all religions in some form or other.

We dealt with almsgiving last week and in this study and the next I want to deal with prayer. We will deal with verses 5 through 8 where Christ addresses personal, or private, prayer. Next Wednesday we will deal with the Lord's Prayer,

which, of course, is the model that Christ used to instruct His disciples. Let's read verses 5 through 8 first and then we will look at them in detail. Matthew 6:5-8:

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

First of all, we better define the word “prayer.” What does that word mean to you? In all pagan religions, prayer was an essential part of their way to heaven. They were required to pray. For example, the Muslims are required to pray. And those of us who have lived in a Muslim country

have seen that, when it comes to prayer time, there is a man that stands up in that minaret and he shouts and the whole town can hear him. And if you are in a taxi driven by a Muslim, he will stop — everybody stops — and they bring a little mat out, they face towards Mecca, and they begin their prayer. Some of them three times and some of them five times a day.

The Catholics have rosaries. When you do something wrong and go to confession, then the priest may say, “For your penance, you must do three rosaries.” So you go back and you rattle away those three rosaries to do penance for your sins. An essential part of salvation! The Hindus have prayer wheels, flags, incense, and candles; every time the candle flickers it is a prayer. Every time the wheel turns, it is a prayer; it is an easy way of praying. Basically, to the pagan, prayer is an essential part, something that their god demands to appease his anger or in order for them to receive something that they want.

Christ said not to use vain repetitions the way

the pagans did. Now let's look at the Pharisees. They prayed (vs. 5) to be seen of men:

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

They wanted to give the impression that they were very religious, very righteous people. What was behind that? The Pharisees were the leaders of their religion and they wanted to give the impression that they were very holy, so they would pray publicly on the street corners. They could hardly wait to go to the temple; they would stop at the street corners and pray to display themselves. And Jesus said that they already had their reward. What did He mean by that? If you are praying to be seen by men and they see you, then you have got your reward.

In contrast to all this, we need to look at what true praying is. Jesus is not discussing praying in

general. He is not discussing public prayer here in these verses. He is discussing personal, private prayer. What is praying? Look at verse 6:

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

We must not take the words “go into your room and close the door” literally. [Some translations read “closet” instead of room.] What He is saying is that prayer is communion between the believer and God. It is a communion with God in a relationship of a child to a benevolent father.

To understand this, let’s go back to the original plan that God had. When God created Adam and Eve, He would come and visit them every evening. God created man to have fellowship with Him.

Then sin came in, and we read in Genesis 3:8-10 that, when Adam and Eve sinned and God came to visit them, they hid:

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

The first thing that sin did was it separated: it brought a barrier between a Holy God and sinful man. They tried to cover their shame by leaves and it failed. We read in Isaiah 59:2:

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Our sins produced a gap between earth and God. This is something that we need to keep in

mind because, in the light of the gospel, this has all changed.

The devil doesn't want you to know this. Very often a Christian who has had a bad day finds it very hard to pray. The devil says, "You've been no good today. You haven't said your prayers, you've lost your temper, etc." And you feel so guilty that you don't feel God can listen to you. That is why I want to give you a couple of statements. Turn to Galatians 4:4-6. I've already shown you before that when Christ died on the cross He reconciled the human race to God. But I want you to look at this text to see how that affects us in terms of prayer:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Why "under the law"? Because the race he

came to redeem was cursed under the law.

We can talk to God as our “Dear Father” thanks to the cross of Christ. Turn back to Romans 8:14. You have the same thing there:

...Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Who are those who are led by the Spirit? Those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour. The Holy Spirit convicts us of the gospel and we accept it. Now look at verse 15 onward:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

We do not come to God like the pagans in fear,

but like a child to a loving parent.

When I was first becoming an Adventist and I went and saw my Roman Catholic priest, he felt that I should not pray to Jesus but that I should pray to Mary. She was the one who could help me to solve this confusion that the Adventists were putting in my head, he said. He reminded me of what I was raised up with. This is the idea they have: God is a very severe judge and if you want something from God you cannot go directly to Him or through Jesus Christ. You need a mother. And this is the way they taught me: When you want something from your father, don't you go to your mother? (And very often this is true.) And they gave a wonderful example. They said, "Look at the first wedding feast that Jesus attended. The juice was gone and they were scared to go to Jesus, so they went to His mother." And the tragedy is that many Adventists look at God in the very same way, as somebody who is very reluctant to bless or listen, so we have to go through a mediator. The Bible tells me that we can call God "Dear Father."

Jesus said that praying is communicating with your heavenly Father just as a child does with a Father who is understanding and willing to help you out. There is a problem as we go back to Matthew 6 and that problem is that you cannot see God with your physical eyes. So Christ tells us that, when we go to God in secret (please remember we are dealing with private prayer), we don't have to even speak our communication. We can talk to God even by our thoughts. Christ meant that He sees us secretly. He can read your thoughts, He can read your motives, and you can be sure that you don't have to hide anything from God. In fact, if you try to hide something, you are bluffing yourself only.

When you fall down (spiritually), it doesn't take God by surprise; He already knew it. When you realize that God is on your side, He is out to help you, He gave us His Son so that we may be reconciled to Him, and when we know that He knows even our innermost thoughts, we need to practice (what a Roman Catholic called) "the presence of God." We need to sense His presence

and the reason for this is because there will come a time when there will be nobody to help you. There will come a time when we will have crises and there will be nobody: not the pastor, nor church members, nobody. We need now to learn to practice the presence of God. He is right there in you, listening to your thoughts, and He wants to talk to you! This is one of the things we need to learn.

Now I want to cover two things in regard to prayer. Why should Christians pray? Remember that praying is communicating with God as a child to the father. Children, before they grow too big, are very dependent on their parents. As an example: At the end of a worship service, when the children come out and I go to shake hands with the little ones, they run and grab their parents. They are saying, “Daddy, I am not sure if this fellow is for me or against me. Help!” The first thing we must remember is that, as children of God, we are totally God-dependent.

First, I will give you a text from the Old

Testament. One of the reasons we pray is because we need strength. We are living in a world that is too great for us. We are living in a world controlled by Satan and we cannot conquer it. Look at 1 Chronicles 16:11:

Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

We need to know that God is on our side. There are times when you will feel that He is not on your side, but don't depend on your feelings. We must base our relationship with God on truth, not on feelings. And whether you feel that God is listening to your prayers or not is immaterial. He will always listen to you. In other words, God doesn't listen to you only when you are good; He knows your struggles and the problems you are facing and you must seek His face continually.

There is a similar idea in Luke 18:1. This is Jesus talking:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show

them that they should always pray and not give up.

The parable He tells is the “Persistent Widow” (or, in some translations, the “Unjust Judge”). Luke 18:2-7:

He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’”

And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?”

And He says, “This widow did not give up.” It

isn't that God is reluctant to answer our prayers but, at the end of the parable, He makes a statement in connection with persevering. Look at verse 8:

“I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

So one way to keep your faith unshakable is to have a constant communion with God. And you can only have this when you have understood that, in Christ, you stand a child of God. May I repeat: God doesn't look at you as you look at yourself. God looks at each one of us as we are in His Son. I want to remind you that at least three times God said, “This is my Son in whom I am well pleased.” So don't let yourself believe the devil when he tells you that you aren't good enough to pray. You do not pray because you are good enough, you pray because you are a child of God.

Let me give you another text regarding why we should pray: Matthew 26:41. Remember that praying is not necessarily going on your knees.

Praying is keeping in contact with God. Keep this in mind as we read this verse:

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

What did Christ mean here? The context is Gethsemane. The disciples couldn't keep their eyes open. What He is saying here is that the flesh, the body, cannot conquer temptation. I want to pause a moment here and explain the situation. The mind of the believer is the battleground. Both the Holy Spirit and the devil wants to control your mind. And if your mind is preoccupied with talking with God, then the devil has a hard time getting a word in. But if your mind is idle, then it is much easier for the devil to get you. And he does it very slowly. He puts ideas into you. Little ideas that may not be too strong and then, gradually, he gets you. Remember that praying is one way to handle temptation. If your mind is controlled by the Holy Spirit and a temptation comes, the mind, because it is controlled by the

Holy Spirit, will respond instantly, No. But if your mind is idling, then you will begin to play with that idea: yes, no, yes, no. Finally you will say, Yes. Then you will go on your knees to God and say, “God, I did not mean what I did.” But the flesh meant all the time what it did. But you are not forsaken. You may have to come to the foot of the cross many times because of your shortcomings.

There is another reason why we should pray and that is in the context that the Church is the body of Christ. Ephesians 6:18. I would really like to put some emphasis here because the need is very great:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

We human beings have a tendency, when something goes wrong, to gossip about it. But Paul is saying that when you see a brother go wrong, you pray. Sometimes that is the only thing you can

do for them. Sometimes visitation does more harm than good. Sometimes they have built a barrier. But they need to be visited and they need to be prayed for. And if there ever was a time that we needed to pray for each other, it's now. Because the devil knows his time is short and he is coming strong on us. There are some believers who cannot handle the pressures and we need to support them and we need to pray. Remember our studies on Romans 14 and Romans 15? Those who are strong must help the weak and one of the ways is praying, sharing our burdens with God. We want to be part of the family of God, instead of condemning and gossiping about them.

The next thing I want to say is, in order for our prayers to be as Christ wanted in Matthew 6, there has to be a certain attitude of the mind. The attitude of self-righteousness is not the attitude of true praying. Remember the parable of the two men who went to pray [The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector]? Luke 18:9-14:

To some who were confident of their own

righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

What did the Pharisee say? “God, I thank you.” He was praying but he was praying with himself. Let’s now go back to Chronicles; that book has some very good advice regarding prayer. This time we’ll go to 2 Chronicles 7:14, and I want you to notice what we read here: Solomon’s

counsel to us. He was a man who had wisdom.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

The word “seek” in Hebrew also means “who will listen.” And what does God say? “Please don’t run away from me. I am not here to punish you; I am here to save you. Who will listen me, who will call me by my name — my God, my Saviour — and who will commune with me? I will be there to answer their prayers.” The thing that I want you to keep in mind is humility. We come to God not to tell Him how good we are. That’s the Pharisees. We come to God not because we have to fulfill certain obligations so that He might listen to us. We come to Him because He is our Father, our Friend, and One Who wants to help us. We come in humility.

The mindset we must have is that we must

come in faith. Turn to Mark 11:24. I want you to notice that this is Christ speaking:

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Believe that God wants to hear and answer your prayer!

He did not say “feel” that God will answer; He said “believe” that God will answer. If you read this text by itself, you will come to me and say, “I have prayed many times and He hasn’t answered me.”

Let me give you another text, in 1 John. And that is the third requirement — humility, faith, and submission. 1 John 5:14. There are times that you will say to your children “no” because you know that what they have asked for is not good for them. They may not appreciate it at that time, but, when they grow up, they will. But often God answers our prayers with “no.” 1 John 5:14:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

The confidence is this, that God will give us only that which is good for us. Good in what sense? Number one, good in the spiritual sense. For example, if wealth will deprive you of spirituality, He will deprive you of wealth for your own sake. He will say, “Can you wait and be poor for awhile because I know wealth is not the best thing for you.” Remember what Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:10:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil....

He did not say money was the root but the love of money was the root of evil. Here’s the rest of that verse:

...Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves

with many griefs.

You must remember that, when you ask God for something, you do it believing that His answer is what will be best for you. God has an advantage. He knows the beginning from the end. He may allow something that may be terrible to you. You may have a five-year old child suffering from a terminal disease and you plead with God and He says, “No, my answer is that child must go to sleep.” It may be your only child and you may be devastated, but please remember that I would rather see my child go at the age of five and be given back to me in the resurrection than for my child to grow up and be lost. Remember that God knows what is best. That is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12:

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Our prayer relationship is based on certain facts:

1. God loves us.
2. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law.
3. He wants fellowship with us.

In heaven we will see Him face to face but now we have to practice His presence. It is my prayer that we will become a praying people.

I would like for you take the Index to the writings of Ellen G. White and just look under the heading “Prayer” and you will notice what she says about private prayer. The Bible is clear that God wants us to pray but He does not want us to pray like the heathen, simply repeating the same thing over and over again. He wants us to pray so that we are communing with Him from the heart. It is a heart issue. It is not an outward display. We may bluff our fellow members that we are holy people by outward display but we cannot deceive God. God wants your heart. “Give me your heart,” He says.

It is my prayer that we will spend much time learning how to pray while we are driving the car and doing our work, especially when the work has become automatic. We must learn to pray. When I work on my car and I am trying to undo a nut that is refusing to budge, I say, “God, what is wrong with this nut?” I talk to Him. Learn to talk to Him because He is interested in every detail of your life. Then, in the time of trouble, the habit will be very useful. We must learn to practice and God will answer our prayers according to His will and He will give us what is the very best for us.

But that communication will build up your faith and you will become strong believers. Praying involves two things: (1) listening to God and (2) what Christ is dealing with in Matthew 6: our talking to Him. We don’t always have to talk to Him in terms of our needs. He knows our needs. He wants us talk to Him just as a child would share with a Father the things that are close to him. God wants us to have a prayer life. He is talking to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount and He says, “I want fellowship with you but please don’t pray

like the heathen or the hypocrites. Let's have a one-to-one relationship." You will find that your faith will increase and you will become stronger and stronger in Christ.

That is what Christ had to say about prayer. In our next study, we will go on and look at the Lord's Prayer, which is described in the New Testament as the model prayer. I want to read the Lord's Prayer and analyze it. I want you to notice what Christ is trying to say in the Lord's Prayer. He is not giving us a form, He is giving us a model.

The best way to teach a child to pray correctly is to reveal to them a God that is like a loving Father. Many children are given the idea that God is someone who is "up there" and you are down here and that is too far away. They need to have the idea that God is near to help them. Unfortunately, children have a tendency to project their human fathers on to God. That is a problem when a father is very abusive they have the same concept about God. You need to reveal God to them through Jesus Christ.

Very often, children will talk to God about their little concerns more than older folks do. In some churches, children are taught prayers. I was taught the rosary; that was our family worship and it became a form. As I was saying the rosary, my mind was wandering. When the child learns that God is there to help their every need, they will develop a conversational method. They must be able to talk to God with common language and yet have reverence. Some children are raised that they must say “Thou” and “Thee.” The word “Abba” in Hebrew is the common word for “Dear Father.” This was in contrast to the Jews. They were so scared of God that, even when they wrote God’s name, they would use a special pen. When they were copying a Bible passage and God’s name appeared, they would use a special pen because they were afraid if they used a common pen God would strike them dead.

We must teach our children that God loves them. Their prayer life will be in direct proportion to the image of God that they have. We must

present a correct image of God and the rest will take care of itself. We need to represent to our children a God who understands their weakness, their needs, and that they can turn to Him at any time without Him saying, “I’m too busy; I can’t listen to you.” God is able to hear all of us at the same time. We can pray without ceasing. There is much instruction in the Bible on praying without ceasing. In other words, keep communing with God and teaching our children to talk to God as our Friend and loving Father.

Chapter 19

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

[Note: Some texts read, “...but deliver us from the evil one” and omit “for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”]

Matthew is speaking in the Sermon on the

Mount in the context of what true Christianity, true piety is all about. There are three areas that Christ is dealing with: almsgiving, praying, and fasting. We have already dealt with almsgiving in Matthew 6:2-4 and the verses 5-15 are dealing with prayer. We covered the first half of it (verses 5-8) last week and we discovered that true Christian prayer is to be sincere. It involves the heart or the mind as opposed to the hypocritical praying of the Pharisees and the mechanical praying of the heathen.

Now I would like for us to turn to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15. I believe there are some very important lessons that Christ is trying to get across. And as we look for what true Christianity is, may we receive a blessing.

The first thing I would like to ask is, "Did Jesus give the Lord's Prayer as a model, as a pattern, or did He give it as a form?" When we read Matthew 6:9 we see it is presented as a model:

"This, then, is how you should pray...."

But if you turn to Luke 11:2, there it is presented as a form:

He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.’ ”

So you have both a form and a model presented in the New Testament. Which means that we cannot be dogmatic. It doesn’t matter whether it is a form or a model as long as we don’t make it vain repetition like the heathens.

What we need to look at is: what was unique, what was special, what was Christ trying to get across when He taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer? The first thing that is unique about the Lord’s Prayer is the way we address God, the kind of God to whom we pray. No heathen, no Pharisee, ever prayed “Our Father.” But Jesus told His disciples that, when they prayed, they were to call God their Father, which means that He presented to the disciples a personal God. Also he presented a God Who is like a loving father who

cares about his children.

But Christ did more than that. He actually gave us the right to call God our Father. I want to spend a few moments to discover this wonderful truth. Turn to 1 John 3:1. I want you to see that God is not just like a loving Father but that He is actually our Father in a unique sense.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

How did this unique experience come about? Please turn to Galatians 4:4-6:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father” [Dear Father].

Now I want to spend a few moments further on this truth. It is important that we know that God is our Father in a unique way. When God created Adam and Eve, they were the son and daughter of God by creation. There are two genealogies of Christ, one in Matthew and one Luke. The one in Luke takes us to Adam, who is the son of God. But when Adam sinned, he sold himself and his posterity (us) to Satan, so he came under the evil one. When Christ came to this world, He came to buy us back and to adopt us in a unique way to be God's children. The life we inherited from Adam has to die and, on the cross, that life actually died. In exchange, God gave us the life of His Son. So just like the human race is the multiplication of Adam's life, the Church is really the multiplication of the life of His Son.

Turn to John 20 and I want to show you something that took place at the resurrection. Notice what Jesus said to Mary. After the resurrection, one of the first to persons to see Jesus was Mary. Jesus said to her in verse 13, "Why are you weeping?":

They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

Of course, she was weeping because she thought somebody had taken away the body of Christ. Verses 16-17:

Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. [Apparently she said more than “Master”; maybe she grabbed Him in her excitement.] Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ ”

Jesus, in the resurrection, totally became one with us in the sense that we share the same life. The gift of God is the life of His Son. 1 John 5:11:

And this is the testimony: God has given us

eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Since Christ is God's Beloved Son, then we become God's beloved sons and daughters. So we can call God "Dear Father." Before the cross, Jesus is always called "the Only Begotten." The word 'begotten' in English implies someone who is produced. That is not the meaning of the Greek word. There are two words in the Greek: monogamy and monogamytos. This last means "to produce." But monogamy means somebody very special. So God says, "This is my beloved Son, my very special Son, in Whom I am well pleased." That is before the cross. But after the cross, Jesus is never called "the Only Begotten"; He is called the "first begotten." Before the cross, God had only one special Son but, because Jesus shared His life with the human race, now God has many special sons and daughters, of whom Jesus was first. And that is why John says, "Beloved, what manner of love God has bestowed upon us that we miserable human beings should be called the children of God." 1 John 3:1a:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

So Jesus, trying to get this idea across in the introduction to the Lord's Prayer says, "Our Father." He says, "When you pray, you have the privilege of calling God your Father." Now go back to verse 9 of Matthew 6 and notice the next statement, because there is a little bit of correction here. "Our Father which art in heaven" is a misinterpretation because, as you read it in English, it gives the impression that He is saying, "Our Father Who is dwelling in heaven." But this is not what Christ said. What Christ said was:

Our Father in the heavens....

That phrase "in the heavens" means that He is the One that rules heaven. So not only do we have a loving Father to whom we can pray, but we have a Father Who is the Ruler of the universe. Can you imagine having a loving Father Who is the Ruler of the universe? That is what it means "in the

heavens.” So “Our Father, Who is the Ruler of heaven” is what Jesus meant.

...Hallowed be your name....

“Hallowed” is an old English word meaning “holy.” This is important for us because the word “Abba” means “Dear,” as in “Dear Father.” But there are some who (I have heard it before) prefer to call God “Dear Daddy.” I want to explain something that you may not be familiar with. In the western culture, the relationship between child and Daddy is not the same as in the Middle East. In America a child can say, “Hi, Daddy.” You dare not do that in the Middle East. You can say “hi” to your friend but, when you refer to Daddy, you use a different term. In fact, even in Africa the word “hi” is “njambo,” so when I met my friends, I said ‘hi,’ but if I meet somebody who is older than me or if I meet my Daddy, I dare not say “njambo” -- that is an insult.

Even though God is our Father, we must have reverence. We must remember that, even though

God is our Father and the ruler of the universe, He is also a HOLY GOD. Jesus said,

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,...”

And then comes verse 10:

...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What did Jesus mean, “Your kingdom come?” If you read in the New Testament, you will notice that when Jesus came to this world and began His ministry, one of the phrases that used to introduce Himself was, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” If you read your New Testament, you will discover that God divides this human race into two kingdoms: the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of this world is under Satan and when Christ came here, He introduced the kingdom of God on earth. A new kingdom with a new foundation, with a new philosophy; everything new. Turn to John 15:16-

19 and you will see what Jesus is saying to His disciples about His kingdom:

You did not choose me [Jesus says to His disciples], but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

This is one of the principles of God's kingdom: those who belong to God's kingdom should love one another.

There you see that when Christ came, He came to establish a new kingdom. And His call is to the people of the world: "Come out of her my people and join my kingdom." The prayer is "Your kingdom come."

Let me give you another text: 1 John 5:18-19. This is a text that has brought some confusion, especially verse 18:

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Do you commit sin? A lot of Adventists have fallen into that trap, so, first of all, I would like to remind you of the context. The context begins with verses 13 through 17, especially the last two:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him. [And here is verse 16:] If anyone sees his brother [his fellow Christian] commit a sin that does not lead to death,

he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

Here John is introducing us to two kinds of sin; one is a sin that does not lead to death and one is a sin that leads to death. All unrighteousness is sin but there is a sin that does not lead to death. Can you tell me what the sin is that is not unto death? Remember, the sin that does not lead to death is the sin that God can forgive. What is the sin that leads to death? It is a sin that God cannot forgive. Is there any sin that God cannot forgive? Unbelief. That is called the sin against the Holy Spirit. A Christian cannot commit that sin. Why? Because He is a believer. 1 John 5:18-19

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. [The wicked one cannot deprive you of heaven.] We know that we are children of God, and that the

whole world is under the control of the evil one.

In other words, there is forgiveness for sin, but there is a sin that God cannot forgive and that is the sin of unbelief. In other words, the day you say “good-bye” to Christ, the day you say “I don’t want your gift in Jesus Christ,” then you are doing two things: You are crucifying Christ afresh and you are saying “good-bye” to the only Savior Who can save you. But, thank God, whoever is born of God does not sin because he cannot commit the sin of unbelief as long as he is a believer. You can’t be born again if you don’t believe and the new birth is a by-product of faith. Verse 19 again:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Now notice what it said in verse 19 that the “whole world is under the control of the evil one.” But we Christians aren’t under the control of the evil one. We are under God, so Christians belong to the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom has been

established by Jesus Christ.

What did Jesus mean when He said, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”? Let’s go back to Matthew 6. First of all, “Your kingdom come” definitely refers to the Second Coming of Christ. That is when the kingdom of men will become the kingdom of God. Remember in Daniel 2 when the stone comes and destroys all the kingdoms that are under Satan and God establishes His own kingdom? But there is another definition of “Your kingdom come” that we must keep in mind. How many people does God want to join His kingdom? All. And that is the prayer. What was God’s will in heaven? He sent His Son to save the whole world. I read in John 3:17:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

And in Jesus’ prayer to God in John 17:4, He says,

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

Christ is saying, “When you pray, ask God that His will on earth be done as it is in heaven.” What is His will on earth? That every human being accept the gift of salvation. You cannot pray that prayer and then simply sit down because most people will not come into the church unless you are witnessing to them.

Turn to Matthew 28. Jesus had fulfilled His mission, He had gone to heaven, He had received the green light from His Father, He comes back to His disciples before His ascension and listen to what He says in Matthew 28:18:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

What did Jesus mean by all “authority” being given to Him? When Christ went back to the

Father, after He left Mary, the Father gave Him the legal authority to take us sinners to heaven. The Father said, “Son, your sacrifice, your life has been perfect. I give you full authority to bring these people to heaven.” And Jesus tells the disciples that He has that authority but He wants them to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. Look at verses 19 and 20 of Matthew 28:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

“I want you to tell the world the good news.”

Christ is with us today. Don't be afraid to witness. But please don't pray “Your kingdom come” if you are not prepared to witness. Then you are praying like a hypocrite. Do you really want His kingdom to come on this earth?

Now let's go back to Matthew 6 and look at something that you may not have noticed. You will see that the Lord's Prayer is divided into two parts. The first part — verses 8, 9, and 10 — have to do with our relationship to God. Part two has to do with our relationships between ourselves. You will notice that it is the same with the Ten Commandments. The first four are about our relationship to God and the last six are about our relationships to our neighbors. Remember in Luke 2:14 where the angels sang at the first coming of Christ? They sang

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

In Matthew 6:9 and 10, the personal pronoun for God is “Your” — Your name be hallowed, Your kingdom come, Your will be done. The Lord's Prayer says that you begin with God. Why? Because a Christian is totally dependent on God, but Christ now turns to our own needs. In verses 11, 12, and 13 you will notice that the pronoun is “us.”

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Please notice that God is not only interested in our worshiping Him but He is concerned about us and our every need. The phrase “Give us today our daily bread” was very hard for the early Church fathers to accept. They couldn’t see how God could be interested in their eating bread and so they allegorized it. But I think Jesus is concerned about our eating bread.

Bread is the staple food of the Middle East. In fact, today in the Middle East the government actually subsidizes the bread; it only costs two cents. What Jesus is saying is that God is concerned about our material needs, our bodily needs.

But, then, He is also concerned about our spiritual needs:

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

If you take this phrase at its face value, you have a problem. It sounds as if God's forgiveness is conditional: "If you forgive somebody else first, then I'll forgive you." It is not quite like that. You will notice in the New Testament that it teaches that our forgiving others is a genuine evidence that we appreciate God's forgiveness.

Do you remember the parable of the man that was forgiven of a large debt? He went out and found someone who owed him a small amount and he would not forgive him. I want to give you two texts. Turn to Ephesians 4:32. Paul puts it very clearly:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Notice that we forgive others because we have

appreciated God's forgiveness to us. One more text in Colossians 3:13. Here is the same idea; it is found over and over in the New Testament:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Why should this be so? Go back to Matthew 6 and look at verses 14 and 15:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

What is Jesus saying here? Jesus is saying that if you really appreciate God's forgiveness, then you will forgive others. We must make a distinction between forgiving and excusing. Human beings very often excuse when they forgive. When a policeman catches me speeding and forgives me, how much did it cost him to forgive me? Nothing. He really hasn't forgiven

me, because he is doing something which is contrary to the law of this country. There is no provision in the law for the policeman to forgive. The law demands payment. Now if he paid my ticket and said, "I am paying your ticket, therefore I have a right to forgive you." Every time I would see that cop I would slow down.

Did it cost God anything to forgive us? Hebrews 9:22 tells me that without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness:

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

And when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He raised the cup and said, "This is my blood shed for the remission of sin." Matthew 26:28:

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

If you really appreciate God's forgiveness

(remember, He forgives you unconditionally), then the true appreciation for this will be that you will forgive others. I'll tell you why. Has God forgiven you? Yes. Has God forgiven your enemies? Yes. If God has forgiven your enemy, then you have to forgive him, too. Otherwise you are disagreeing with God.

How do I know that God has forgiven my enemies? I will give you a text: 2 Corinthians 5. God has forgiven not only the Christians, but on the cross he forgave all men. I read in verse 19:

...That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God did not condemn them; He condemned His Son for us. And He is telling us to please go tell the world that they have been reconciled to Christ. That is our mission. But if God has forgiven them, then we should also forgive them.

Is it easy to forgive? It may be costly, but whatever it costs you to forgive your enemies, it is nothing compared to what it cost Christ to forgive you. And that is what Jesus was trying to get across in the parable. The king forgave the man who owed a large amount of money. It cost the king. He wasn't accusing the man who owed him the money; he was suffering because he was deprived of the money which was his. Remember that Jesus suffered. And we need to forgive others because we have been touched by the forgiveness of God.

Let's go on to verse 13 of Matthew 6:

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

It does sound here that God leads us into temptation and we are begging, "Please, God, don't lead us into temptation." That is not what Jesus was saying. James 1:13 tells me that God never tempts anyone to do evil:

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;....

What then is Christ implying? A person who prays like this is admitting one thing. He is admitting that Satan is more powerful than you; your flesh is more powerful than you. James 1:14 tells us that every man is tempted when he is drawn after his own flesh. Can your willpower conquer the flesh? No. Why not? Paul tells us in Romans 7 that the flesh is a law; that in the flesh is the law of sin. Romans 7:20-23:

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

“So then, I, myself, in my mind, am a slave to God’s law, but, in the sinful nature, a slave to the law of sin.” The word “law” means “constant” and “unending.” Whereas the willpower is not a law, it is a force. The willpower is strong sometimes and it is weak sometimes. It is possible for the will to defy the flesh but never to conquer it.

But there is One Who has conquered the flesh completely. There is One Who is greater than the flesh and that is the Spirit of life: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And that Spirit is available to you. And what this prayer is saying is, “God, I recognize that I am no match for Satan. Please deliver me from his hand. Not that I may be saved, but that I can glorify you.”

I want to give you a text — 1 John 4:4 — and I hope you will never forget this text as you face Satan:

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them [i.e., the world; John has already said that “the world” refers to the lust of the flesh,

the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

Then go to 1 John 5:4 and listen to what John says here:

...For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Not our willpower, our faith.

Christ is saying, “Let us pray and ask God to manifest His power to deliver us from evil.”

...For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

The kingdom that we belong to is an everlasting kingdom. That is what Nebuchadnezzar was shown. That Stone which will crush all the other kingdoms will become an everlasting kingdom. And the power and the glory

will be given to the saints.

These three petitions that we have just looked at meet all human needs: our material needs (our daily bread); our spiritual needs (forgive us our debts); and our moral needs (deliver us from all evil). God is concerned with all three areas.

You will see that, when you say this prayer, you will notice that it is a complete prayer. But we must pray with meaning. Don't simply utter the Lord's Prayer. Whenever you pray this is a model. You can use it as a form. But, please remember, it is the words that matter.

Isn't it wonderful that we can call the Ruler of the universe Our Father! When you just think on that, it is mind-boggling. It is a privilege. And we can never be the same.

Chapter 20

True Fasting

Matthew 6:16-18

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

I want to remind you that, in Chapter 6, Christ moves from the general aspects of Christianity to specific items on Christian piety. And the three areas which we are covering in Chapter 6 is almsgiving, which has to do with our relationship to one another; praying, which has to do with our relationship to God; and now He is dealing in verses 16-18 with fasting.

If you read the whole passage, you will notice that Christ is contrasting these three areas with the practices and teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. For example in verse 1, Christ says:

“Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them.”

That is how the Pharisees were doing it. Then He gives His counsel on praying. Verse 5:

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”

Then, in verse 16, He goes to fasting:

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

I want you to notice that Jesus is in harmony with all three of these areas concerning piety. But He is dealing with an area that has to be done correctly. Our almsgiving, our praying, and our fasting must be done in a true Christian way. And so I would like, first of all, to look at the text itself. We'll go on with verses 17 and 18:

“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

First of all, what does the word “fast” mean? The Greek, as used here, actually means “abstinence from food.” That, basically, is what the word means. According to Luke 18:12, we know that the Pharisees fasted twice a week [Mondays and Thursdays]:

“I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

It became a tradition. But when we look at scripture, we discover that they went far beyond God's requirement.

When Moses gave them the Law, God required (through Moses) that the Jews fast only once a year and that was on the Day of Atonement. Then, after the Babylonian captivity, one or two more fast days were added. But then tradition began to add and add and add until twice a week they were fasting. Christ is not dealing here with the number of times. He is dealing with two things. He is dealing with the method of fasting and the reason for fasting.

I would like to show you the wrong reason and the wrong method for fasting and the right reason and the right method. First, let me say something about fasting. While most Christians lay stress on almsgiving and on praying, there has been a kind of departure from the emphasis on fasting. This was partly because of the way the Catholic Church handled fasting. Fasting became a requirement to attain salvation. Fridays you could not eat any meat. The Orthodox churches followed the same

route and the result of this was that many felt that fasting was eliminated in the New Testament.

But if you read your New Testament, you will discover that Jesus did not do away with fasting; the Christian church did not do away with fasting. Let me give you a couple of examples. Right here in the passage that we just read, Jesus said, “When you fast.” He didn’t say, “don’t fast.” He said, “don’t fast like the hypocrites.” Also, we know that Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days before He entered the second phase of His ministry which was pointing Him toward the cross.

As another example, the Church at Antioch, when they were about to send Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, spent a period of time in prayer and fasting. So fasting is clearly taught in the New Testament.

Let’s look now at the wrong reasons. Number one, we must never fast for an ulterior motive. In other words, we must not fast hoping that God will give us some extra blessing. We must not use

fasting as a means of twisting God's arm ("See, I am fasting.") That is not taught in the New Testament. We do not fast because we want a favor of God. God has already blessed us with all the gifts.

By the way, the same can be said about tithe paying. We don't pay tithe because we want our bank account to increase. God has not promised that. He has promised to make our bread and water sure. We must not fast for any self-interest. Fasting must be based on a spiritual relationship with God.

Let's look at the wrong method now. Number one, we must not fast mechanically. This is what the Catholic and Orthodox churches did. They set aside certain days for fasting. We have Lent (40 days before the cross); we have weekly fasts. In the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, the Orthodox churches, they fast mechanically; it is one of their requirements. It is part of their religious formula. We shouldn't just go through the motions of fasting, for that is of no real benefit.

Number two, we must never fast for outward show. This is what Christ is condemning here. When the Pharisees fasted, they disfigured their faces, they put ashes on their bodies, and they looked as if they were half dead to show people that they were fasting. And Christ is saying that if they fast so that people may see them, they have their reward: they have been seen.

Let's go now to the right reason. What is the reason for fasting? It must be a spiritual reason. For example, the Day of Atonement was a very solemn day for the Jews. It was a day of judgment. That is why the Lord admonished the Jews to fast on that day. When Christ was about to enter the second phase of His ministry, which pointed Him to the cross, He realized that this involved God-abandonment and He wanted to spend much time in fasting because He wanted to dedicate Himself to this cause.

If you look at all of the fasting in the New Testament, you will notice that all of it involves, to

some degree, self-denial. Let me tell you why. When you become a Christian, no change takes place in your nature. Your nature remains sinful. Because this body of sin (Romans 6), the body of this death (Romans 7), this body of ours is controlled by the law of sin. Paul says, “sin that dwelt in my members.” Romans 7:23:

...But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

In Christian living, that body controlled by the law of sin is a great stumbling block to our Christianity. It is a hindrance to spiritual growth. Christ is saying that fasting is often an expression that we are taking up our cross and following Jesus Christ. There are two basic drives that are found in our bodies through the law of sin. Number one is our appetite and Number two is greed. Both of these need to be kept under subjection and fasting is simply turning to God and saying, “God, I want to humble myself before you; I want You to take

over; I want to put myself completely in your hands.” And fasting is one form of self-discipline. Not to earn heaven, not to gain merit, but to remind yourself, to impose upon yourself that our bodies must not control us. It is our converted mind that must control the body.

Real fasting must do something to us. If you will turn to Isaiah 58, you will notice what God said through His prophet concerning fasting. If fasting makes you self-righteous and proud then you are not fasting in the correct way. True fasting should make you humble and concerned about others. Let’s read Isaiah 58:1-8. Verses 1-2:

Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

Verses 3-4:

“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?” Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Please notice that they were fasting for the wrong reason. We are not fasting to change God’s mind. Verses 5-8; this is God replying:

Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the

poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

You can see how God right there in Isaiah 58 was correcting the Jews but, at the time of Christ, they had not changed. They were the same. They were fasting to brag before the people and to brag before God. You remember the Pharisee who prayed, “Dear God, I thank You that I am not like the publican. I fast twice a week” [far more than you have requested God; aren’t I good]. Luke 18:11-12:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”

And Jesus is condemning that kind of fasting.

Fasting must come as a deep, heartfelt relationship with God and a desire to live according to the will of God. Do you remember what Paul said? “I keep my body under subjection.” As long as we are living in this sinful world, we have to discipline this body. When God says, “I want to give you victory and blessings of the Christian life,” it will always involve the cross. There has to be self-denial and fasting is one way that we express our self-denial.

What is the right method of fasting? Go back to Matthew 6 and Jesus makes it very clear how should we appear before others when we fast. And Jesus says, “Please appear normally. Let nobody know that you are fasting. It is between you and God.” In the history of the early church you will discover that whenever they had something very earnest to pray about, whether as a church collectively, or as individuals, they would spend their time in fasting and prayer. And when we have certain concerns we need also to spend time

in fasting and prayer.

I received a letter one day that requested the churches in the valley where I preached to spend a coming Sabbath in fasting and prayer because on Sunday they are going to choose who will be the president of the college there. That is a deep concern because that is the future of our young people.

We are living in the Day of Atonement. We are living in a time in this world when things are rapidly coming to an end. We are living in very serious times and we need to spend time in fasting and prayer but we must do it in a way that nobody knows. Because if you are fasting that people may see you, then where is the cross? There is no cross in that kind of fasting. Let me read to you what Christ said. Matthew 6:17-18a:

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting....

The thing is this, that the Jews, when they fasted, would not comb their hair and this was an outward sign that they were fasting. Sometimes they would rub ashes on their face and beard. They looked dismal and disfigured. Jesus is saying, “Please be normal. Behave normally.” Fasting is between you and God. Fasting is a vertical relationship. You are not denying yourself that you may appear better to God. You are denying yourself so you may walk in the steps of Christ. Christ lived a life of self-denial.

And when you humble yourself, when you deny yourself, it has to affect your relationship to others. That is why, in Isaiah 58, God says that what true fasting must produce is a relationship with others. You can sympathize with people who go hungry. You don’t have to starve, but you know there are people who don’t have food and you can sympathize with them and help them out. Today, 40% of the population will go to bed with an empty stomach. They have no choice. They are not fasting because they want to but because they are in a position where they don’t have food.

When we hear and read about them, then we can sympathize with them because we know what it feels like to go hungry. Not because we were in their circumstances but because we have fasted and know what it is. That is why Isaiah says that, when you fast, it has to create in you a concern for others in every area. Fasting is one way of carrying the cross and getting closer to Christ.

What Jesus is doing in Matthew 6 is not dealing with all that I mentioned today on fasting. I went into other areas. But the reason I have done this is because we, as a people, need to stress fasting a little more than we do. I think, as we see the end approaching, as we see crises coming upon us, we will have to spend more time in fasting. I want to make it clear that fasting is still part of the New Testament teaching and that is why I gave you some examples.

At the moment we are living in a wonderful country with lots of blessings. You remember, when Jesus was here on this earth, one of the accusations that was made was, “Why is it that the

disciples of the Pharisees are fasting and the disciples of John the Baptist are fasting but your disciples are not fasting?” Mark 2:18:

Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, “How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?”

And some have taken that statement and said that Jesus did away with fasting. But you need to listen to Jesus’ reply. Mark 2:19-20:

Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.”

We are having a great time here; things are going well, but soon this country also is going to face a crisis. Fasting will cause us to realize that we need to be on our knees and we need to fast in order to draw closer to God because of our own

problems. You will also remember that, when Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, there were some disciples who were trying to cast out the devil and they failed. Mark 9:28-29 [NKJV]:

And when He [Jesus] had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”

So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”

Fasting and prayer does not change God’s mind; it does affect us. The purpose is not to change God. God is always loving; God always wants to bless us. He doesn’t fluctuate; His love is everlasting. He changes not. But we need to change. And fasting and prayer is one way that we can make ourselves more readily available to God. God wants to come and dwell in us and He wants to walk in us. But God is not a dictator. He doesn’t say, “Move aside, I will take over.” He wants us to put self aside by surrendering ourself to

the cross of Christ. He wants us to deny self and make room for the Holy Spirit to take over. That is why fasting is one way of disciplining ourselves in a way that we are making ourselves available to God.

When God takes over, then we, too, will perform miracles like the disciples did after Pentecost. We, too, will be able to do great exploits for God because we have made ourselves totally available to God.

It is my prayer that we will keep in mind that there is in the New Testament, teaching that includes fasting. Not only almsgiving, not only praying, we should also be a fasting people. I know it is hard to fast when there is such plenty. But when the crisis comes, when you are facing individual problems, remember that fasting is one way of drawing us closer to God. Not because God won't come close to us but because we are making ourselves more available to Him.

Chapter 21

Investing in Heaven

Matthew 6:19-24

Turn to Matthew 6. We are coming to a new section in the Sermon on the Mount in verses 19 to 24. This is a very important section, one that we need to wrestle with. It is laying the foundation for a problem that is prevalent in this part of the world.

In this passage, Christ is still dealing with what constitutes true religion. But now He turns from Christian piety, which we have covered (almsgiving, praying, and fasting) to how Christians should relate themselves to this world. Let's read the passage first. Matthew 6:19-24:

Matthew 6:19-24:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for

yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Let me remind you that Jesus is talking to disciples, to people who have already accepted Him as their Saviour. When we accept Christ as our Savior, a radical change takes place in our spiritual status. Before, we were in the world, of the world, under Satan. After you accept Christ, you are still in the world, but no longer of the world.

Turn to John 15:19. This is what Jesus said to His disciples and it is true of us today:

“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

And if you look at 1 John 5:19, Paul divides the human race into only two camps:

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

Talking to Christians, he says, “We belong to God, but the rest of the world is under the evil one.” Keep this in mind because, in this world, we are constantly pulled by the two forces. The world is pulling us and the Holy Spirit is pulling us. There is this constant pulling and you will see this dichotomy all through. Jesus gives us the heart with the mind and the will. He says our hearts

should be in heaven and that is where our treasures should be. Our minds must be on God's truth because the word "eye" that we just read is used as a symbol, especially in the Old Testament to refer to our mind. And then our will: we cannot serve two masters, we must choose one and then we must serve him.

With this in mind, let's go step-by-step. First of all, let me explain what I mean by the word "world." When the New Testament uses the word "world" in its spiritual sense, it is not referring to the physical world; it is not referring to the people who are living in the world. It is referring to an attitude, a mentality that belongs to the world. I will give you several texts on that. Turn to James 1:27 and here James is discussing the same thing:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Here James is describing it the same as Christ

in the Sermon on the Mount.

Turn to James 4:1-4 where he puts it in a stronger way:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? [The devil is pulling us.] You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people [you who are having an unlawful relationship with the world], don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

You cannot have allegiance to both camps. This is the battle that Christians have all the time. The more wealthy the nation, the more materialism in the country, then the struggle gets worse. So

Jesus says in Matthew 6:19:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy....”

Now what did He mean by that? First let's see what He did not mean. He did not say that it is wrong to have possessions. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever condemn private ownership. In fact, in Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira sold part of their land and gave only part of the money and they lied; do you remember what Peter said? Acts 5:3-4:

Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.”

He said, “When this land was yours, nobody

forced you to sell it and, when you sold it, nobody forced you to give it to the church. Why did you lie?” The church has always recognized private ownership.

Jesus did not mean that we are not to save for a rainy day. In fact, if you go to Proverbs 6:6-11, it tells certain things about the ant and one of the things is that, during the harvest, he collects grain for the winter:

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest — and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

You have the same idea in Timothy, which we'll see in a minute. Christ did not condemn saving for a rainy day.

Also Christ is not condemning here the enjoyment of the things that He has created if we do it in the right way. What do you think then on “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”? The key word is “yourselves.” “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” He is condemning here the hoarding of treasure. Like the man who built extra barns in the parable. He said to him, “You fool, tonight you will die.” Luke 12:13-21:

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”

Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”

Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He

thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

“Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’”

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth” means “don’t put your emphasis on worldly possessions.” The word “treasure” can mean more than money. It can mean material things, or anything that you cling to on which you are depending for security and which you are putting your trust in. Don’t do that.

I will give you a couple of examples. When we went to the mission field (I think the GC has different policies for different countries) but when you go to Africa, the GC cuts your salary by 50% because they say you don't need that much in Africa. Which is true; we can survive with less there. But they realize that, when you come back, you will face a crisis. So they have what they call a differential. They do not send the money to you there but they keep some money here and they ask you where you bank, etc. When we went to Africa the GC did that and, when we came back on our first furlough, one of the brethren told us that we had done the wrong thing. That we shouldn't put our money in the banks because the banks are going to collapse; this was back in 1967-68. So I asked what they wanted us to do. They said you need to invest some money with the church.

Andrews University was trying to buy all the land around its campus so that all the people living around the University would be Adventists (they were having some problems). There was a man

who was dealing with this; he was the head of the Business Department, but he was also the head of a private firm that was doing this, purchasing the land. They told me that I should invest there because that is “guaranteed.” We listened and said o.k. We were in the mission field for 18 years and the year before we arrived that firm went bankrupt. Eighteen years of savings went down the drain. And what was worse, when they went bankrupt, the county sent notices to all the landowners (they sent a notice to me by overseas mail; it took a long time) and when mine arrived the deadline had passed. We learned the lesson that you cannot put your trust in treasures on earth.

When we were deported from Uganda, we had to say good-bye to everything. The only thing that Iddi Amin allowed us to carry out of that country was \$150 for the whole family and a small suitcase each with your personal belongings. Everything else had to be left behind for the country. They froze the bank accounts. We learned from those experiences that it is impossible to put your trust in your earthly possessions. Enjoy it and be content

with it but don't put your trust in it.

Turn to 1 Timothy 6. There is some excellent advice concerning this that Paul gives Timothy. Jesus says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth." I am going to read several verses; we'll look at verses 6-12 first and then verses 17-18. 1 Timothy 6:6:

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Learn to be satisfied with what you have. Christ is condemning materialism. By the way, "materialism" does not mean possessing material things. It means never being satisfied with what you have; you want the latest thing and are never satisfied. Verses 7-8:

For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. [Remember the fool who built extra barns.] But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

As long as we have the daily necessities, let's

be content. Verses 9-10:

People who want to get rich [they who want to live for themselves] fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Not money, which is the ingredient by which we live in this world, but the love of money. Verses 11-12:

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

These are the treasures of heaven. He didn't mean for us to lay up money in heaven but to put emphasis on those things which have eternal value.

Then, in verses 17-18, he gives Timothy advice for his church members:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Our focus should not be on earthly treasures but upon heavenly. Let me give you just one text regarding heavenly treasures. Turn to 1 Peter 1:3-5. This will give you a glimpse of the treasures of heaven:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, who through faith are

shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jesus, Paul, and Peter are all saying the same thing: do not store up treasures for yourself on earth. Let's turn back to Jesus' famous statement in Matthew 6:21:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What does Jesus mean by that? Your great concern will be where you put your emphasis. If your hope is not in this world, if it is in the next world, then that is where your heart is. And, as I said, it is much harder to do that in a materialistic world.

Our young people in Africa are on fire for Christ, but they have an advantage. Politically, economically, those countries have no future. They go to the university, but they are not guaranteed a job. They have nothing to look

forward to when they come out of college. But they have one hope and that is the coming of Christ. They want to hasten that coming, so they are active for Christ because that is their hope. But here we have so many blessings and that becomes a hindrance. Please remember the emphasis of Christ. He says that earthly treasures are corruptible; they do not last.

Go now to verses 22-23 of Matthew 6:

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

What does Jesus mean, “the light of the body is the eye”? He is saying that the eye, which is only a small organ, sees for the whole body. Whatever you use your hands for (driving a car, for instance), can you imagine what would happen without eyes? The eye is what makes the whole body work in a coordinated way so we can see what we are doing.

If your eye is focused on one item, then your whole body will concentrate on that one item. But if you are blind, then your whole body is having a hard time. Blind people learn to adapt themselves to a tremendous degree, but they are living in constant darkness.

My wife and I were giving a series of Bible studies to a group of blind kids. Ethiopia has a lot of blind people; I think it is some sort of disease. Once we were rather late and my wife said, “We better go home, it is dark outside.” And one of the blind boys said, “Sister, it is dark all the time for us.” Jesus is using the eye as a metaphor meaning the mind. In the Bible, the eye was often used to denote the mind. Psalm 119:18:

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

What David meant was, “Let my mind be focused on your commandments.”

I will give you a text that brings this out very

beautifully: Philippians 4:8-9. What Paul is saying here is, “Don’t let your mind be preoccupied with the things of this world. Let your mind dwell on the things of God and your whole body will be enlightened because where your mind is the body goes; that is the controlling factor of the human body.” This is the counsel that Paul is giving in one of the last letters that he ever wrote. Philippians 4:8-9:

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. [What you think, so you are.] Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Christ not only said, “Don’t lay up treasure for yourself on earth but in heaven,” but, secondly, “Let your mind be preoccupied with the things of God.” And as we approach the end, this attitude must be increased.

Then we come to the third item, in Matthew 6:24:

“No one can serve two masters.”

Some have had problems with this, because some people work for two employers. But Jesus did not use the word “employer.” He used a very specific word and that is the word that is used for “slave master.” Remember, this was during the slave society. Forty to sixty percent of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. It is possible for you to work for two employers. But, in the days of Christ, it was impossible for you to be owned by two slave masters. He is using the word “master” here in the same sense as “slave master.” Here’s the entire verse of Matthew 6:24:

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

You cannot be owned by two people. The question is, “Who owns you?” He closes by saying, “You cannot serve both God and Money.” The King James Version says “mammon”; the NIV will say “money.” But the word “mammon” was an Aramaic word that was transliterated into the word “mammon.” But the Aramaic word simply means “wealth” or “possessions” or “self.” Let me put it this way: Who controls you? Is it your possessions or is it Jesus Christ? Who owns you?

When God created man, He created him to be in control of his nature and his desires. When Adam sinned, those desires became lust and the lust began to control the man. And so we have endless problems today. There are people who want to give up smoking but they cannot because smoking is their master. This struggle keeps on going all through our lives. Our nature wants to control us; our desires, which have become lusts, want to become the master. And Jesus tells us that we cannot serve two.

I would like to give you a couple of texts. First

I want you to know that, as Christians, we are no longer owned by the world or by Satan or by our nature. We are owned by Jesus Christ; He has bought us. 1 Peter 1:18:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed [bought back] from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers....

Judaism had gone wrong. Remember how they had turned the temple of God into a money-making racket? He says, "Please, Christians, do not treat your salvation like that." Verses 18 and 19:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Please let us remember that we belong to Christ. The other passage is Romans 6:16 and is dealing with this same issue from a different angle:

Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

There are two slave masters — sin and righteousness — and to whoever you have yielded yourself you must obey. Look at verse 17:

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.

When a slave couple has a baby, is the baby free or is the baby a slave? It is a slave. We were born slaves, slaves of sin. Can a slave free himself? No. What was the doctrine Paul was talking about that was obeyed from the heart? It was the gospel. The gospel of freedom. See verse 18:

You have been set free from sin and have

become slaves to righteousness.

You became slaves of righteousness; you have chosen your master. Now, please, always serve him. You cannot serve two masters. What is Jesus saying in this concluding verse of Matthew 6:24? “We are living in the world but we belong to God.” Both systems — the worldly system and God — requires total allegiance. You can’t have one leg in the world and one leg in the church. The two are going to polarize and it is now happening. You can’t be a half-hearted Christians because, one of these days, you will have to make a final decision: Am I all for Christ or am I all for the world?

Remember the young man who came to Jesus and asked what was the greatest commandment. What did Jesus say? Matthew 22:36-38:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.”

The devil requires the same allegiance. He wants total obedience from you and so this struggle for allegiance is constantly our battle and Jesus is saying, “You have to decide who is your master.”

The devil wants you to serve him. Do you know why? Because he wants company in the lake of fire. Unfortunately, there will be some because Jesus will say, in Matthew 25:41:

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

But the devil has deceived you, he has bluffed you, he has got you, and then he will say, “Join me in the fire.” God never intended that any man should be in that fire.

Jesus wants you to serve Him, not because He wants to use you as a slave. He wants to bless you.

He wants to give you His kingdom. He wants to share His throne with you. Can you imagine it? Jesus has shared with us His life and His throne. That is why Jesus is no longer called, after the resurrection, the “only Son” of the Father (as in John 3:16), He is called the “firstborn.” Colossians 1:18:

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Paul says in Romans 8 that we are “joint heirs with Christ.” Romans 8:16-17:

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

In Hebrews 2:11, we are told that He Who sanctifies us and we who are sanctified are all of

one and that He is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters:

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

The only problem is that, when the devil offers us trinkets, He offers them now and we are a now people. When Christ offers His treasure, He asks us to be patient. He says that we may have to suffer in this world, but one day we will have what He offers and we will realize that it was worth it.

In closing, I want to give you an admonition that the writer of Hebrews gave the Jews. They were always in this danger. In Hebrews 10:35-39, there is some admonition to those of us who have chosen heaven. The devil wants to get you out of the kingdom of God. Here are the verses:

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will

receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Don’t give up your treasure in heaven. The devil will try to change your mind. The closer we come to the end, the greater need of patience. My prayer is verse 39: “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.”

Our treasure is not here; our treasure is in heaven. Our hearts should be up there. The closer we come to the end, the more we must concentrate on the things up above. It is my prayer that you will put your heart there and, if your heart is there, you will be living only for Christ and one day you will not regret it.

Chapter 22

Cure for Anxiety

Matthew 6:25-34

In this last section, Christ deals with a subject that immediately concerns each one of us. I don't think there is any person here who does not have anxiety over something. For various reasons, we are guilty of worrying — over certain material things, about jobs, etc., and we yield to anxiety about our future security. This is increasing as we see the end approaching.

The first thing I would like to do is to read the passage that we are going to study. Then we will look at it in its context and we will see what Christ is trying to get across. Matthew 6:25-34:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Quite a passage, isn't it? Please remember how

it begins: “therefore.” In other words, to understand this passage, we need to understand what Christ has said before. There are three things here that have been said before. In verses 19-21, He has told us that we are not to store up for ourselves treasure on this earth. That is the first thing He tells us. The second thing is in verses 22-23: “Walk in the light and not in darkness.” Notice the contrast. The third thing He says is in verse 24: “You cannot serve two opposite masters. You cannot serve God and self (which is what money represents here) at the same time.”

Please notice the contrast in these three things. It is the contrast between a believer and an unbeliever. An unbeliever gets his material security in his bank account, in what he stores up on this earth. A Christian’s security is not in the bank account but in heaven. Number two, a Christian walks in the light as Christ is in the light. An unbeliever walks in darkness. Number three, a Christian has God as his Lord and Master, whereas the unbeliever depends on self.

What Christ is saying is, if you apply these principles, then you will not worry. The King James Version says, “take no thought.”. That is not the best translation because Christ is not saying that you should not think about these things. What He is saying is that you should not worry about these things. Is worrying a sin? Yes. In fact, Sister [Ellen G.] White identifies it as sin because worrying is a denial of faith. But Jesus doesn’t call it a denial of faith; He says, “O you of little faith.”

With this in mind, let’s go and look at two things that this text is not saying. I’ve already mentioned one: Christ is not saying, not forbidding that we should think about these things. In verse 26, He says:

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns....”

They are concerned about eating, but they do not worry.

The second thing we must be clear on is that

Christ is not here denying forethought. We read in other passages of the Bible where He says (Proverbs 6:6-8):

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

What does the ant do? It stores up food for the winter. Remember that God is not saying that we should not think about these things or plan for the future. He is saying that we should not worry, that is the issue here. With this in mind, let us go to the passage itself and see what it says.

Number one, when you become a Christian, you turn from self-dependence to God-dependence. How much is God concerned about you? Is He only concerned about spiritual things or is He concerned about what we eat, drink, and what you wear? He is concerned about everything. Because of this, we should not worry about what we eat or drink — even if we are without a job we need to

remember that God sometimes allows this, that our faith may be developed.

Notice that the problem that He expresses is found in verse 30:

“O you of little faith.”

In other words, what Christ is saying in this passage is, “Please, I want your faith to become strong through these trials and difficulties that you will face regarding material things, regarding a home, regarding clothing, regarding food.”

Three problems are created by this passage that we must be aware of. Number one, faith in God is what Christ is requiring from the believer. That does not mean that we should not earn our own livelihood. It does not mean that we should sit down and God will open the windows of heaven and pour down food and clothing. I want to give you a passage where the New Testament is clear. The birds, for example, do they sit down and wait for the grain to be poured into their mouth? No.

They have to scratch for it, look for it. Turn to 2 Thessalonians 3 and I want to show you where certain Christians had misused this kind of thinking and were doing nothing but waiting for God or others to supply their needs. We will begin with verse 6, through verse 10:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

So please remember (and this is a command coming from Jesus) that Jesus did not mean that

faith simply sits down. You have to work; faith is not saying that you do not work. Faith is saying, “Do not worry.” Do not confuse working with worrying.

The number two problem is that faith in God does not mean that we have no responsibility to our brother. What do I mean by that? If you see somebody having a hard time financially, materially, you must not say, “Well, God will take care of him,” because God takes care of him through you. Let me give you a text — James 1:27. In fact, you need to read the whole of James. Chapter 2 brings this out in a very interesting way. James talks about a person in need and you say to that person, “I will pray for you” and you do nothing about it, your prayers are meaningless. Now James 1:27:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Please notice “to look after orphans and widows.” What James is saying is that faith does not mean that, when we see others in trouble, that we say, “God will take care of them.” Remember that God helps others through us. We are the instruments of God. So we must not use this passage in the Sermon on the Mount and say God says He will take care of His people like He takes care of the birds.

Number three, faith in God does not mean exemption from trouble. A Christian will face material problems. A Christian will face all kinds of problems — financial, physical, social. Look at Paul. Was he in prison? Yes. Was he shipwrecked? Yes. Did he have physical problems to face? Yes. But he put his faith in God. Why does God allow these things to happen? How can your faith increase unless it is tried? The same James said, “The trying of your faith develops endurance.” James 1:2-4:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know

that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Please remember that, when you are going through hardships and God doesn't seem to answer your prayers, there are two things you will feel like doing. You will feel like saying, "God doesn't love me. God is not taking care of me. I had better turn from God dependence to myself." That is the last thing you should do. Why? Because God's love for you is everlasting. He will never let you down.

The second thing that can happen is that no matter what happens I will hold on. I know that God will never let me down. The best example I can give you is Jesus Christ. Did Jesus feel forsaken of God on the cross? Yes. But by faith He was victorious. When you face hardships, remember it is not because God doesn't see and provide for your needs; it is because He wants your faith to develop. You are going to face a crisis one of these days, when God will hand over His people

to Satan. He will remove all the protection and He has to produce a people whose faith is unshakeable.

In this context, I would like now to turn to Matthew 10:29-31. This is Jesus talking:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

This may not mean anything to you, but in the Middle East they use sparrows sometimes for eating. They make soup out of them or they may use them for sacrifice. A farthing was the price tag in those days. Continuing with verse 30:

And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

So please remember that your faith must not dwindle. That is why Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good":

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.

God allows everything to happen to you not because He wants to see you suffer but He wants to develop faith in a people who will one day reach the goal.

With this in mind, go back to Matthew 6:31-32. Now he gives the application. First He gives the counsel not to worry about what we eat, drink, and wear (verse 31), then He gives examples. The first example is the “birds of the air.” I would like to give you an illustration that I gave to a Coptic priest in Ethiopia. We were facing a famine. You are familiar with the famine in Ethiopia not too long ago. And the people were starving.

One day I was discussing the gospel with a Coptic priest and I said to him, “Why is it that people are starving in Ethiopia? Doesn’t God take care of them?” He said to me, “I have often wondered why God is allowing our people to

starve.” And I replied, “Look at the birds (there were some sparrows and pigeons feeding on the ground and they were looking fat and healthy); how come they are not starving?” He said, “Because God takes care of them.” “And He is not taking care of you?” I asked. He said, “That is bugging me.” Then I took him to this passage and I took him to Matthew 10 and I said to him: “Could it be two things? One is lack of faith on our part and two, could it be that God is trying to develop a people?”

Birds are not like us. God takes care of them because they do not have the power of either faith or unbelief. But us? God wants our response to Him to be from the will. He doesn't want us to become automatic robots. He created human beings with the power of choice. I want to take you to a very important incident to help you realize what the application is all about. Christ said in Matthew 6:31:

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we

wear?’’

Please turn to Genesis. I want to show you where this all began. God created man, Adam and Eve, and God did something for man in Genesis 2:8. What did God do for our first parents?

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

Who planted the garden? God. For whom? Adam and Eve. God said to Adam and Eve, “I will take care of you. I will supply your needs.” Between that text and the next text, which is Genesis 3:19, something happened. We call it “the fall.” In verse 19, the same God says to Adam and Eve:

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

What happened? What is sin really? Sin is turning your back to God. Sin is becoming self-dependent. Before Adam sinned, he was God-dependent. God supplied all his needs. When he sinned, he became self-dependent. That is why every human ideology is based on self. Whether it is Marxism, which has failed miserably, whether it is humanism, that is sweeping this country, it is all based on self. A Christian has turned from self-dependence to God-dependence. In other words, it is no longer your headache; you have to work, but it is not our problem to worry. The man who is self-dependent has to worry.

Let me put it another way. The fundamental issue all through the history of the Bible is over this issue of self-dependence versus God-dependence. Bring it down on the spiritual level and it is salvation by works versus salvation by faith. These two have been in conflict all through the ages. The first evidence of the conflict was between Cain and Abel. Both of them offered sacrifice. Cain was depending on his sacrifice for salvation and Abel offered a sacrifice of faith. He

offered a lamb, depending on Christ. What did Cain do to Abel? Killed him. And it seems that all through history that salvation by works (or legalism) has won the battle.

Why did the Jews crucify Christ? Because His works were better than theirs. He was telling them that they could not save themselves. He told Nicodemus, “You have to be born again.” So they crucified Him. This conflict reveals itself in many ways. I believe that, in the last days, the showdown will take place. The conflict over self-dependence and God-dependence will take place over the issue of Sunday and the Sabbath. We must not make the issue over days. We must make the issue over what the days represent.

Sunday will symbolize self-dependence. And if you will look at the philosophy of these two days — the principles — you will notice they are opposite. Man first works and then he rests. And he rests, not because his work is finished, not because his work is perfect, but because he wants a break. His work is never perfect and it is never

finished. Sunday will symbolize salvation by self-dependence. In the Sabbath issue, Adam did not begin by working. The first day in Adam's life was God's Sabbath. Adam began by resting. As long as Adam rested in God, God supplied all his needs. And this will be the fundamental issue in the last days.

The issue is not between Sunday-keeping Christians and Sabbath-keeping Christians; that is not the issue. In the end of time, the issue will be clearly settled that the Sabbath will represent all of those who are resting in God by faith. And Sunday will symbolize all those who are resting in their own dependence — or salvation by works. That is why it is important that we understand what Christ is saying here. “Therefore” meaning “if you are depending upon God.” Now verse 31 (of Matthew 6):

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’”

Verse 32:

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Remember that the word “pagans” (“Gentiles” in some translations) has two meanings in the New Testament. The word “pagans” can mean a non-Jew — that is one definition. The second definition of the word is “an unbeliever,” those who do not believe in Christ. It is in this context that He is using the word “pagans.” In other words, the unbeliever worries about what he shall wear, what he shall eat, what will happen for tomorrow. Why does he worry? Because he is depending on himself and he cannot provide. He is not sure of his future, he is not sure the banks will take care.

I learned this the hard way. We were on furlough in 1975 and a dear brother (he must have been listening to Charles Wheeling) came up to me (he was a GC leader) and he said, “You know, Jack, by the time you come back on the next

furlough the banks in America will have collapsed. The evidence is very clear. And my advice for you is not to leave any of your money in the bank — it will be of no value. Invest your money in some land.” At that time, Andrews University was trying to get Adventists to buy land around it.

So we took his advice and we bought a piece of land and we put all of our life savings in that land. The General Conference [World SDA HQ] allows you to keep a certain amount of money for when you come back from overseas. And one year before we were coming back, the firm that was buying the land went bankrupt. The County sent a notice to all landowners that you have to claim your land within three months — they gave a deadline. They sent my notice by sea mail; it took four months. The deadline was over when I got the letter. I learned the hard way that I was depending on the wisdom I was given and I lost everything. The man who went bankrupt felt very guilty and he said he was trying his very best to get it back for me. He is still working on it.

I have learned a lesson: I must not worry. You may make wrong decisions, you may make right decisions; God is not saying here that you must not invest or try the best thing. I did what I thought was the right thing, but I learned that it is very hard not to worry. It is human to do that and my faith was tested. I took counsel from a sincere person and he meant well. Sometimes it seems that you can't help but worry but we must not allow that worry to overrule and destroy our faith. Therefore Christ is saying in verse 32, "It is the unbelievers' privilege to worry about these things, but your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things."

What then should we seek? The pagan seeks his security, his personal security. What should the believer seek? Here in verse 33 is the contrast:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

And when I take that I have to take all the

counsel that He gave in the previous verses. To seek the kingdom of God means to put your treasure in heaven and not on earth. To seek the kingdom of God means walking in the Light. To seek the kingdom of God is to serve God and not self — to be God-dependent. We must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. What does it mean to seek God's righteousness? It is righteousness by faith. What is man's righteousness? Let me give you a text that will show this. Turn to Romans 9:30-31, where Paul talks about two righteousnesses:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.

“Gentiles” here means non-Jew, but they are believers.

Now what is the law of righteousness? How does one attain to the law of righteousness? What does the law say to you? Those who do it shall

live. Look at Romans 10:5, where Paul explains the two righteousnesses:

Moses [he represents the Law] describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.”

How many of you here have kept the Law perfectly? (No one is implied.) Then you have failed. Now Paul is not talking here about the Law as a standard of Christian living. We must never confuse the two. He is talking of attaining to righteousness by your works. Now look back up at verse 4 because it tells of righteousness by faith:

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

In Christ we have the righteousness of God. Let me give you another example. Turn to Philippians 3:9 and Paul describes the same kind of thing:

...And be found in him, not having a

righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Paul is teaching the same thing that Christ is teaching in Matthew: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” How do we seek the righteousness of God? By faith. “And all these things will be given to you as well.” Righteousness by faith does not simply mean spiritual things. It means that we no longer worry about material things. We no longer worry about the future because righteousness by faith puts our lives in the hands of God. This is what Christ said in the beginning: “Is not your life more important than these things?” Your life is now in the hands of God and if He says, “I want you to be hungry,” accept it. If God says, “I want you to die as a martyr,” accept it, because you have put yourself in His hands. Now to verse 34:

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

We don't have to worry about the future. God is not saying that we shouldn't plan for the future, but don't worry about the future. I get mail every day from some company that is promising me that, if I invest in their program, they will take care of my future. Even if you invest your money in gold, it will be valueless in the time of trouble. Christ wants the believers [remember, the Sermon on the Mount is for believers] to be totally dependent upon God — through hard times or easy times. Our faith must be resting in God not only for righteousness in terms of our vertical relationship but in terms of our horizontal needs.

It is my prayer that the cure for anxiety is righteousness by faith. Righteousness by faith gives me peace with God and it gives me peace in terms of my future and in terms of material needs and that is the joy of the gospel. That is the kind of people that God wants. I want to conclude by our experience in Uganda.

I was deported from Uganda in 1972 by Iddi

Amin. He closed our bank account. He closed all bank accounts; you could not touch your own account. You could not go to the bank and draw out money from your own account because it was illegal now according to his law. You could not take your property out of the country. We had to leave everything behind. We were missionaries and we didn't have too much to lose. But there were 80,000 people who were also deported. Some of them were millionaires. One of the men who sat next to me on the plane lost 25 million English pounds. All you were allowed take was your bed clothing and the women were allowed to wear one pair of earrings and three bracelets.

The man in front of me had two daughters and he made huge, heavy gold earrings for his daughters. It was very painful for them. So the little girl, she must have been 7 or 8, took off the earring after she was in the plane and was holding it. It was a little smaller than a golf ball and it was heavy. It was hurting her and she took it off and was holding it in her hand and one of them dropped and rolled. She got down to find it and someone

picked it up and she got frantic because her father got mad at her. He went on his knees actually pleading, “Will you please give me back my livelihood?” And nobody looked at him; they ignored him.

The thing that impressed me was the lady sitting behind me. Jean and I were talking; we were enjoying the flight. “Excuse me,” this lady said, “why are you smiling? Haven’t you lost anything?” I said, “A Christian loses nothing.”

Here is what I did when I left Uganda. I told the missionary who was not deported to please give our goods, our clothing, furniture, and utensils to the poor. If you are going to lose everything, you might as well give it to the believers who need it. When we left, we never expected to get anything back. But he did not have the heart to give our property away. So he put it in a huge crate — 10 feet high, 12 feet long, and 8 feet wide. Our furniture, utensils, my wife’s shell collection, my books, everything. And then he went to the government. They were all Muslim officers

because Iddi Amin was of the Islamic belief. He told them he would like to send the crate to Ethiopia (that is where I was sent) and the man said, “Whose are these?” And the missionary said, “These are the personal effects of our pastor who left for Ethiopia.” He asked one question, “Was he deported?” And the missionary said, “Yes.” “Do you know that it is illegal for him to take anything out of the country?” asked the officer. And the missionary responded, “Yes, I know.”

The officer said, “You have put me into a problem. If I say no, and he is a pastor of God, God may put His curse on me.” (Muslims are very strong on retribution from God.) So he stamped the papers. We had no communication because there was none between Uganda and Ethiopia. But one day I received a call from the railway station, “Please come and collect your box.” “What box?” I asked. “I don’t know,” he said, “there is a box here for you.” I wondered to Jean what box that could be. I expected a little box. But the man took me to the shed and showed me this huge crate and I asked if he was sure it was mine. I had to bring my

passport and he looked and said it was the same name as on the passport.

I had to hire a truck to get it. We opened it and we had got everything back; we lost nothing. And later, when I was at Andrews, the man who we lost everything to, said, “I have good news for you; you are getting your land back!” We put our faith in Who? God. Yes, there was times we worried, but I kept reminding myself, “We need not worry; God is in control.” Now He may not give you everything back, but I’ll tell you that I have learned that the best thing that a Christian can do is to put his trust in God. Do not worry.

It is my prayer that we will be like the disciples Christ wanted us to be. May God bless us that we will not have any worries. When that lady (on the plane) saw that we were not anxious about what we lost, she said, “I wish I had faith like you.” She was a Hindu. I pray that we by our lives and deportment will reveal that we are true Christians. When a Christian reveals that he is worrying, he is being a poor witness. And Christ will say to you,

“O you of little faith.”

I was speaking to somebody after I moved to Washington State and they said, “You were a fool to come to Walla Walla.” I asked why. “Haven’t you heard the news? Hanford [a nuclear plant] is going to explode.” I said, “Brother, I am already dead! My life is hid in Christ.” If a nuclear plant explodes and kills us; don’t worry, folks. Heaven is ours in Christ. Where shall we run to? There is no place that is secure in this world. No place except in Christ.

The Bible is saying God will take care of you. How He takes care of you is His business. He may not take care of you the way you want. The key to this is that God is preparing a people who will have to face a time of trouble that has never been experienced. He knows you can’t handle that straight away, so He has to develop that in you. There are times that He will let you wait to the very end, almost to salvation. That is why all through the New Testament one of the characteristics of a mature Christian is they have endurance —

endurance in terms of faith. Their faith endures to the end.

Let's look at the example of the disciples. They were cast in prison. They were flogged. They went through so many crises that it could seem to them that God was not taking care of them. And yet they believed that God was in control. It is easy to believe in God when everything goes well. Can you still believe in God when things are terrible? When there is no food in your pantry, and there is no money to pay your rent, do you still believe that God is in control and that He is taking care of you? That is the condition we have to reach and that is why God is preparing a people.

It is easy for us to lose faith in a country where materialism is so rampant. At a General Conference Session in Indianapolis, there were two ministers who thought they lost their suitcases. Their plane was from Uganda through Europe to New York. Then they had to take a local flight from New York to Indianapolis. They did not have the correct ticket. They knew nothing, did not even

know how to read the tickets. They arrived in New York and there was no flight for them. But their luggage was booked right up to Indianapolis. Others traveling had booked their luggage to New York; they pitched their luggage onto the bus and drove to Indianapolis. But these two thought they would never see their luggage again.

When they arrived they were smiling and I said, “Why aren’t you worried?” One was the headmaster of our college in Uganda. He said this was not the first time, that he had lost things before. Some of the other men had helped these two out with some clothes.

“I have learned to do without things,” he said. I told him that I didn’t think he had lost the luggage. I looked at his ticket and said, “You booked your luggage right up to here in Indianapolis. All you have to do is call the airline.” And he did and the last day of the General Conference he finally got his suitcase. But he wasn’t worried, because he had learned to put his confidence in God.

This is the kind of condition we have to reach here. Even in this materialistic world, we have to reach that condition. God doesn't say, "I will give you all the luxuries of life." What He says is, "But seek first My kingdom and My righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." What does He mean by "all these things"? Look at verse 25: what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear. Three things that will be given to you. The issue is, do you believe God's Word?

Chapter 23

The Speck of Sawdust and the Plank

Matthew 7:1-6

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7. We are coming to the last section in our study on the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7 consists of a number of apparently independent paragraphs and, because of this, there are some commentators who think that Matthew 7 does not belong to the Sermon on the Mount. But when you look at it closely, especially at the conclusion, it seems to be clear that Matthew 7 is part of the Sermon on the Mount. On the surface it may seem that these paragraphs are not connected. But, if you look deeper, you will notice that there is a connecting link all through the paragraphs in Matthew 7. I would like to define that link by one word — “relationships.”

For example, let me give you a brief summary of Chapter 7. The first five verses of Matthew 7 are dealing with how we should relate to our fellow believer who we think is going in the wrong way. There is plenty of that problem in the Christian church. That is a very long paragraph. The next one, verse 6, is very short. Here Christ is dealing

with our relationship with people who despise the gospel: How should we relate to people who treat the gospel as if it is dirt? Then, verses 7-11 describe our relationship to our Father in heaven: What should be our relationship to Him?

Verse 12 is a one-verse paragraph which deals with our relationship to everybody in general. Here is where Christ gives the golden rule. Verses 13 and 14 are dealing with our relationship to our fellow-believers who are, with us, struggling to walk that narrow road to heaven. In verses 15 to 20, Christ tells us what our relationship should be to false prophets: How should we treat false prophets? The paragraph in verses 21-27 is dealing with our relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. This, in a nutshell, is Chapter 7.

What we will do is take one or two relationships in each study and go through this Chapter. In this study we will deal with the first two, Matthew 7:1-6. First, let's read verses 1-5 and see what our relationship should be to our brothers who we think are not living as they

should:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

This is the first paragraph. What is Christ saying here? The first thing He says is, “Do not judge.” If you take only these first three words, “Do not judge,” you can go the wrong way. Did Christ mean that Christians should not judge at all? Does He say that judging is excluded completely in every phase of our Christian life? In a sense, the answer is “no.” For example, in verse 6, He says, “Do not give dogs what is sacred.” He, of course, is not talking about literal dogs; He is talking about

people who are behaving like dogs. How can you put that into practice unless you judge them?

Or look at verses 15 and 16 of Matthew 7:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”

“Watch out for false prophets” and “By their fruit you will recognize them.” How can we know that unless we physically examine their teaching? So Jesus is not saying that we cannot judge in any sphere of the Christian life. What does He mean then by “do not judge”? We have no right to judge the eternal destiny of our fellow believers. That is what He is saying. That is a prerogative that belongs to God Himself.

I will give you several texts to show that this is a clear teaching. The New Testament does not allow the believer to say to his brother, “You are

not going to heaven because you are not doing this and this.” We’ll start with Romans 2:1-3. It is very interesting that Paul is addressing the Jews here; in Matthew 7, Christ is speaking with the Pharisees primarily in mind. Romans 2:1-3:

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment?”

Turn now to Romans 14:4. Paul says the same things in this verse:

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

Remember, we are all servants of God. We

have no right to judge another man's servant. We let God judge His own servants. Now look down to verse 10 [of Romans 14]:

“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.”

We have no right to judge our brothers, no right to tell them that they will not make it to heaven because of certain things. That is the work of God.

Let's turn to another text that is very familiar to us as Adventists, Colossians 2:16-17. This text has sometimes caused us problems:

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”

Paul is not talking about our not doing these things; that is not the issue. The issue is that no

man should judge in respect to meat or drink, etc. Remember, one of the problems that they faced in the time of Paul was food offered to idols. Is it right or is it wrong? And they were judging each other. Some were saying, “If you eat food offered to idols, you will not make it to heaven.” And they were fighting and so Paul says, “Please, you have no right to judge.”

Why are we not to judge? I want to first give you another text to show you how the Pharisees and the Judaizers were judging. If you turn back to Acts 15, you will find there recorded the first big controversy that took place in the Christian church. Read verse 1:

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”

All through there was always this kind of problem — “Unless you keep the true Sabbath you cannot be saved”; “Unless this...,” “Unless that....”

Look at verse 2:

This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

The Judaizers were telling the Gentiles that they could not make it to heaven unless they were circumcised. We are going to read two more texts, the first of which is James 2:4-5. James has quite a bit to say about this, but I'll only give you this one text. Let me give you the context before we read. The context is that, if a rich man comes with fine clothes, you give him the front seat, but if a beggar comes in rags, you tell him to sit at the back. In other words, if you discriminate (this has nothing to do with social distinctions), there was in those days a significant difference between the rich and the poor and the relationship to God (as far as the Jews were concerned). According to the Jews, if you were rich, you were good. Why? Because they believed God only blesses good people. And,

if you are bad, you are poor. So when the Christian church was telling the rich, “You are good, so you can sit in the front, but you are poor, so you must sit in the back,” listen now to how James responds. James 2:4-5:

“...Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”

In other words, “You must not despise the poor because we are not saved by whether we are rich or poor. You have no right to judge and say this person is good and this person is not because of his outward appearance.” One more text and then we will go back to Matthew — 1 Corinthians 4:4-5. You will notice that all of these texts are dealing with judging in terms of eternal destiny.

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Here Paul gives us a very important clue. Why is it that we should not judge in terms of eternal destiny? One reason is because, in the judgment, God will not only judge us by our performance but also by our motives. Every thought, everything that you have planned that may not have been outwardly seen, will be brought before the judgment bar of God. Can we read motives? No. It is very hard to judge people in terms of their relationship to God by their outward appearance.

When we came under fire under Idi Amin in Uganda and when we faced the Marxist revolution in Ethiopia, it opened our eyes. The people that we expected to be the first to give up Christ were the ones that remained firm. I remember that there was a girl in our class and she was an expert at getting addresses of American people from the

Review and places and writing to them saying, “Please send me a pair of stockings” and so she was the only student who wore stockings and she looked very worldly; she had these trinkets from dear souls from this country, which are a luxury in Africa, and everybody envied her. She knew how to manipulate and most of the faculty felt that, when she would leave the school, she would go right out (of the church). Five years later, when we were in Nairobi, the ones who had been the class monitors, etc., in the school were out and she was still coming to church faithfully. So we cannot judge and Jesus tells us we are not to judge.

Now we are going to look at the reasons why He doesn’t want us to judge. Look at Matthew 7:2:

“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Let us get this very clear. Are we saved by works or are we saved by faith? Yes, we are saved by faith. If you judge people’s eternal destiny by

their works, then God will judge you also by your works. And the Bible is clear: “By observing the law no one will be justified.” Are works important? Yes. I am not undermining works, so don’t get me wrong. But we have no right to judge the eternal destiny of people by their works. We cannot tell a Sunday-keeping Christian that they are lost because they are keeping the wrong day. We have no right to do that because it is God only Who can read their hearts.

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet, according to Christ. And he was the one who God chose to prepare the way for Christ. Was his theology about the Messiah perfect? No. Or was he a victim of his culture? Did he think, like the Jews, that the Messiah was coming to overcome the Romans and establish a literal kingdom? Yes. Ellen G. White makes that clear. She says that he taught that Jesus was going to establish a kingdom on earth and when he was in prison and Christ was not doing this, he began to doubt if Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus never rebuked him for that. Jesus helped him. We have no right to judge each other

by performance. In this light, turn to Galatians 2:16:

“...Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

Who spoke those words? Paul. To whom was he speaking? To Peter. Why? Look at the context, beginning with verse 11:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth

of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

James was the first “President of the General Conference”; he was the leader. In the Jewish culture, when you ate with somebody, you were saying that you were brothers, that you accepted each other. He was fearing the Jewish leaders, “those who belonged to the circumcision group.” He was not acting “in line with the truth of the gospel.” What truth? — In Christ, there is no Jew and no Gentile; all are sinners saved by grace.

He is saying, “Why are willing to mix with the Gentiles and accept them as they are without being circumcised and all that, then now you withdraw

and say, No, until they are circumcised they are still unclean?” Now verse 15:

“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ [remember that Jews look at Gentiles as sinners] know that a man is not justified by observing the law [i.e., whether he is circumcised or not], but by faith in Jesus Christ.”

So Jesus is saying, “If you judge people by their outward behavior, you will be judged by your outward behavior and you will never make it. Because the law demands perfect obedience from beginning to end and none of us have done it. Do you want to be judged by faith? Then, please, judge your brother by faith.”

The question is not whether you are good or bad, it is whether you are a believer. In other words, if you insist that people who don’t conform exactly as you see things should be condemned, then you will be judged on the same grounds. I want to be judged by faith in Christ, because there I have hope.

Back to Matthew 7:3. You will notice all this time that Christ has in mind those Pharisees and chief priests who have been opposing Him and who have been teaching the wrong way:

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”

Is Jesus saying here that we should not correct each other? No, He is not saying that. But how should we correct our brother? Should we correct them like those who are bad people while we are good? Or should we say, “Brother, I am a sinner like you, but I can see that the way you are going is the wrong way.” Do we treat those who are going the wrong way who are sinners like us who need to be helped in love, or do we look down upon them and say, “You will never make it?” Notice that Jesus is saying:

“How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there

is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

It is in the context of judging. That word "hypocrite" is a key word here. What is a hypocrite? One who gives the appearance of being good but inside he is pretending. Jesus uses that word quite often in connection with the Pharisees. I would like to repeat that Jesus is not against helping each other and correcting each other. But what He is saying in verse 5 is, "Before you correct someone else, please realize that you are a sinner saved by grace."

I want to give you another statement regarding correcting because there is a very good text, which tells us how we should correct our brother or sister. James 5:19-20:

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the

error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

There is a place for helping those who are going astray. But Jesus said, “Please don’t correct in self-righteousness. Correct them in humility and in love.”

That concludes the first five verses. Now I want to go to verse 6 of Matthew 7:

“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”

What did Jesus mean by dogs and pigs? First of all, he is not talking literally about dogs and pigs. He is using these two words as metaphors. What did Christ mean by dogs? We must not give the word “dogs” the same meaning that the Jews did. Who did the Jews call dogs? The Gentiles. So Jesus is not saying that we shouldn’t give the gospel to the Gentiles. We know that is not true;

that would be contradicting the New Testament. In fact, when Jesus gave the Commission, He said go and preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and in the uttermost parts of the world. And the New Testament is full of statements that make it clear that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles. When Jesus said He had other sheep “not of this fold” He meant the Gentiles.

I want to give you a clue as to who these dogs are. You will discover that it is used in the New Testament as a term of reproach. If you want to insult someone in the Middle East — both among Jews and among Muslims — you call him a dog. In fact, if you take your dog for a walk and an Arab is coming and he sees you, he will cross the road. To them, even if a dog sniffs you, it is an insult. They are horrified at westerners who have dogs as pets. I want to give you a text that I think will help; turn to Revelation 22:15. I think this is what Jesus meant. Jesus is describing, through John, those who will not be in the kingdom:

“Outside [outside the New Jerusalem] are the

dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

Who is he referring to as dogs? What did Jesus say in Matthew? “Do not take something holy and give it to dogs.” The word “dogs” and the word “pigs” here refer to people who despise, who look down upon the gospel, who treat the gospel as dirt. What do you do with people who come to you and say, “I don’t need your gospel, I am just as good as you are?”

Jesus is saying that we should not give something holy to people who do not appreciate it. This is a hard saying. But let me give you another text that will help you to understand what these dogs and pigs are. Pigs wallow in mud and, if you give them pearls, they will trample on them. They don’t see the value of pearls. And Jesus identified pearls as the gospel. Remember the Pearl of Great Price. In Hebrews 10:29 I read these words:

How much more severely do you think a man

deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot [the way the pigs were trampling under foot], who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

What do you do with people that look at the gospel as nonsense? Or as something that is totally incompatible with modern scientific knowledge? The other day my wife was pointing out to me that she watched a program where the young people of this country are turning their backs to God. It was terrible, the things some of those young people were saying about God. What do we do with people who do not appreciate the gospel? Give it to them at least the first time. But they may say they don't want it. Jesus may have had in mind the scribes and Pharisees. Remember Jesus said, "How many times I would have gathered you to bring you under my wings and you would not. Therefore I leave your house desolate." Luke 13:34-35:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the

prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

There comes a point where you cannot keep pleading and pleading with people who despise the gospel and keep treating it as dirt. When people reach the point of no return, Jesus says to us not to keep on, there are other people that need the gospel.

Jesus instructed the disciples that when they went into a village that rejected the gospel and mistreated them, they were to shake the dust off their feet and go to others who were waiting to hear the gospel. Don’t waste your time on people who despise the gospel.

In closing, I want you to look at Matthew 15:21-28. It is one of the wonderful passages of

the New Testament. I won't go into a lot of detail now, but it is a passage that we need to spend some time with. Quickly, let me give you the background. Jesus was ministering, teaching, and healing by the Sea of Galilee. Then He tell His disciples that they should go elsewhere. They go to Tyre and Sidon, which was about 60 miles. It must have taken them several days of walking. And the only thing Jesus did there was heal one woman and then walk all the way back. What a waste of time from a human viewpoint! Why did He go all the way to Tyre and Sidon?

There was a woman who was not a Jew; she was a Canaanite. How did the Jews look at the Canaanites? As dogs. It may sound like Jesus was very hard on her, but remember that He was testing her faith. He wanted to demonstrate to His disciples what great faith is. He could not find it in Israel. He had to go out of the church to the Canaanites to find it. You will notice that, if you take all the great faith texts in the New Testament, most of them in Matthew, you will find that the majority are non-Jews (the centurion, the Syro-

Pheonician woman, etc.). Matthew 15:21-28:

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.” Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

You will see in verse 22 that this Canaanite woman looked at Jesus as the Messiah even though she was a Canaanite. And Christ apparently ignores her. In verse 23, He answered her not a

word. How would you feel if you went to your pastor for help and he ignored you? Then she does something that is typical in the Middle East even to this day. If you want to get something from somebody, you go to him through his friends. So she turns to the disciples; they wanted Jesus to send her away because she was a nuisance. Then it appears in verse 24 that Jesus is telling her that He came only for the Jews (because that is what they were teaching). In other words, “I am sorry, you don’t belong to our church so I can’t help you.” Christ has a good reason for sounding hard here. Verse 25:

The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

Now listen to what Jesus said (verse 26):

He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

Did she say, “You have insulted me, I will take you to court”? No. Listen (verse 27):

“Yes, Lord,” [You are right, I am a dog] she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Now the test was over.

Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

And Jesus departed back to Galilee. There are two kinds of dogs — those who despise the gospel, those who treat the gospel as an unholy thing. But there are those who look at Christians as dogs, as unfit. But it is my prayer that our relationship with God will be unshakable. We may be insulted, we may be ignored, but don’t ever give up. You may be called all kinds of things for being a Christian and the more agitated you are, the harder it becomes, because today educated people think that it is incompatible for you to believe in a God “up there.”

We know we have a God and without Him we cannot be saved. It is my prayer that our relationship with God will be correct so that our relationship with each other will be correct. We will look at each other, not as inferior people. We are all one-hundred percent sinners saved by grace. When we see our brother erring, we will correct him, not in self-righteousness, but, as we ourselves are sinners, who realize that our hope is only in God.

If the message we teach is despised and treated like dirt, go to somebody else. There are people everywhere who are hungry for the gospel. We must take it to everybody. Jesus is saying, "Please, I want you to have a right relationship with your brother." Don't judge them. That is not our job; that is the work of God. Our job is to walk together, helping each other, correcting each other, and together growing in grace. That is the first major paragraph of Matthew 7.

Can you see that, if we have a right understanding of ourselves, if we recognize that we

are sinners saved by grace, we will not look down on others. “There I go but for the grace of God.” We need to have love and understanding. We may not see eye to eye on everything. We may not agree. But let us try and help each other, not by condemning, but by walking in the light. We may not see eye to eye theologically, but I cannot correct by condemning. We need to sit down together and compare notes and see why we disagree. We need to press together. The enemy is Satan and Jesus said (Mark 3:25):

“If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”

Ask God to please guide us into all truth. We cannot produce unity by fighting, by condemning, and judging, and telling each other that, “You cannot go to heaven because you are teaching error.”

Chapter 24

Our Benevolent God

Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

Today we will turn to Matthew 7:7-11, and here Christ turns to our relationship with the Father in heaven. I find these verses very comforting because, as I read them, I discover that Christ presents God as a benevolent Father. The God we worship is the God Who cares about us. I want to give you a couple of statements regarding this.

One is an example, the other is a Biblical statement. Turn to 1 Peter 5:6-7. Most of the New Testament writers give you counsel on Christian living at the end of their epistle. First they give you the gospel — they explain the truth.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

The other example is concerning Christ Himself. Notice how Christ related to His Father when He was living on this earth as a man. In John 16:32, Jesus is making this statement to His disciples. He knows what is ahead of Him but He makes this statement:

“But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home [all of you will run away to preserve his own life]. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.”

It was this knowledge (that the Father was with Him) that made it possible for Christ to endure the cross. Even though He felt forsaken on the cross, by faith He knew that God had not forsaken Him, that God would keep His promise. And in verse 33 He says:

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

With this in mind, let's turn to Matthew 7:7-11 and read the passage first and then we will look at it in more detail:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,

how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

What is Christ saying here? Look at verse 7 and you will see three verbs there: ask, seek, and knock. All of these three verbs are in what we call the “present imperative.” It is almost like a command. In verse 7, Christ is taking examples from the Jewish culture and He is using these three imperatives, which were normal between a child and his father, and He is applying them to our relationship to God.

What Christ is saying is that, if you ask God, if you seek Him, if you knock at His door, He will not ignore you, He will respond. Verse 8 brings out that He will respond: “For everyone who asks receives,” etc. Remember that Christ had already spoken two times about praying in the Sermon on the Mount. Once when He gave us the Lord’s Prayer, but here He presents a God who is caring.

You must keep in mind that the Jews had a very different concept of God. They looked upon

God as a severe, stern Judge who would punish them for every mistake. One of the reasons that Christ came to this world was to reveal to us what kind of God we are worshiping. In His prayer in John 17 He said, “Father, I have glorified You — I have revealed to the world what you are like — a God of love.” John 17:4,6a,26:

“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ...I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. ...I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

But now I would like to look at verse 7 again because something more needs to be said about it. We must not take those three imperatives — “ask, seek, and knock” — we must not take them out of context. There are Christians who have asked God for something and when He has not responded, they say, “Look, God has not kept His word.” It is important that we take these three imperatives in

context.

Christ is not saying here that everything we ask will be given irrespective of whether it is good or bad for us. What He is saying is that He will give us (verse 11) only that which is good for us. He will not refuse that which is for our benefit. Remember what He said previously. In Matthew 6:33, He told His disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

He is talking now in Chapter 7 to disciples whom He hopes have put this into practice — the seeking first of the kingdom of God. Then “all these things will be given.”

Christ has already talked about praying to the Father. He has touched on “give us this day our daily bread,” etc. Matthew 6:11:

Give us today our daily bread.

His concern here is that, when we pray to our Father, there are three things that we must keep in mind, three presuppositions in order for us to understand verse 7. What are they?

First of all, when you pray a prayer of request, that presupposes that we have knowledge of God's will for us. I want to give you some examples of that knowledge that we should have. God will not give us anything which He knows will lead us the wrong way. There are times that I have asked God for certain things that I thought I needed. But now, as I look back, I am glad that He did not give it to me. I will give you an example.

When we were at Andrews University, most students who are at the seminary are sponsored, but those who come from overseas don't have that privilege. There were three of us who were not sponsored. So my poor wife worked 55 hours a week and I worked 20 hours a week besides carrying a full load in my Master's program. There

used to be a service station at Andrews and, since I know about cars, I worked there in the afternoon and at night I cleaned the toilets, which is a very difficult thing for my culture. That is reserved for a certain caste and I belonged to the very high class in the Indian culture and if my father ever knew that I cleaned toilets, he would be horrified. I never told him. The Brahman caste never, ever touches toilets. Of course, toilets in America are clean compared to the third world, so it wasn't too bad.

But just as I was taking my final exams I got two calls. One was to go as a missionary to Uganda without allowance — as a national returning. Which means no privileges except that they would pay my fare there. The other one was from the Pennsylvania Conference and it was a very tempting thing. They said they would pay all that I spent for my Master's program, all I would have to do is to work two years for them. That was a temptation and I went to the Lord to ask that I could take the Pennsylvania Conference. But He didn't answer that way. He made it clear to both

my wife and to me: “You go to Uganda.”

When we went, we never dreamed we would see the United States again. We were going there permanently. But God works in mysterious ways and here I am, enjoying the luxuries of the United States. But I am glad that I went because Africa opened my eyes to the gospel. You may call it the Dark Continent, but that is where my eyes were opened.

Turn to James 4:3. When we pray, we must have the knowledge that God knows what is best for us. He can see the beginning from the end. We may think that something is good for us, but we must put that in God’s hands.

When you ask, you do not receive [Is James contradicting Jesus? No, and see why:], because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

So if you ask, “Please, God, I am poor and I want to be rich,” and He knows that wealth will

lead you away from Him and eternal salvation, He won't give it to you. He says, "Yes, I will give you wealth if you will wait until you get to heaven where you are safe." Remember that, when we ask God, we must ask knowing that He will give us our request only if it is for our good. I will give you an example in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. This request was good, it was genuine, it was asked in sincerity and for the glory of God. Paul tells us that:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Paul thought that this was a hindrance to his work so what did he do? Verse 8:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

Did God answer Paul's prayer? Yes. But the answer was "No." Verse 9:

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

“Don’t depend on your ability or your resources. The weaker you are, Paul, the more My strength will be revealed.” Paul’s response revealed that He knew God.

So, number one, when you ask, please ask knowing that God will say “yes” only if it is good for you. Number two, prayer presupposes faith. It is one thing to know God’s will, it is another thing to believe it. In Mark 9:17-28, you have this father who comes and asks Christ for a favor. Notice how Jesus responded in verse 23 (you can read the whole story for yourself) and the man’s response in verse 24:

“ ‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do

believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

So when we come to God, we must come with faith knowing that He will answer. The answer may be “no,” but He will answer our prayers. In this context, I want to give you one more verse, Hebrews 11:6. Please notice how Jesus, through the writer of Hebrews, puts this across. Hebrews 11 is a chapter on faith and faith is a very important ingredient in the Christian life.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

You must believe in God and you must believe that He will not ignore you. Seek and you will find, but God may answer your prayer in a way that is surprising.

Now, number three: Prayer also presupposes a desire. When I say “desire,” I don’t mean a desire for the things of this world, but I mean a desire for

the things of God. We should, in our hearts, once we have understood the gospel, have a desire: “What is it, God, that You want me to do? I want to do Your will.” That should be our uppermost desire. Do you remember how Paul put it? “For me to live is Christ.” That was his desire. I want to remind you of the opening of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Remember, there has to be this hunger and this thirst.

Now I want to show you that verses 9-11 in Matthew 7 confirms these three prerequisites that I have just given you. Look now at the very short parable in verses 9-11:

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?”

In the Middle East they had lots of pebbles and

big boulders that looked like typical middle-eastern bread. Would a father give his hungry son a piece of stone? The answer is “no.” Please remember that Christ was talking by the Sea of Galilee where the staple diet was fish and bread. Verse 10:

“Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?”

The word “serpent” [in some translations] means a poisonous snake, a snake that will do you harm. Both the snake and the stone will do you harm. (The stone will break your tooth). Notice now verse 11:

“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”

What did he mean that “we are evil”? He is telling us that we not only have a bent toward evil, but we poor, sinful human beings are evil, unable to do something good. Paul also uses the words

“much more” to show a contrast with our Father, Who is good.

In other words, Why are you doubting your heavenly Father? Doesn't it make sense to you that if sinful human beings know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will our Father which is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him.

I made a statement earlier that we must not take verse 7 out of context. The same passage is repeated in Luke, except Luke uses another word where Matthew uses “good things” or “good gifts” in verse 11. Go to Luke 11:9-13 and you tell me what words Luke used instead of “good gifts.” You will notice that the passage is almost identical to that in Matthew:

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who

knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

You see here that the “Holy Spirit” is the “good gift.” Why? Because the title that Christ gave to the Holy Spirit is *paracletos*, which is a very important word. It means someone who is by your side to help you, to comfort you, to take you through trials, to be there for you. Please remember that the Holy Spirit is a divine person. He is the One Who gave Christ victory. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christ was able to conquer sin, the devil, and the world. That same Spirit is by our side to help us, to strengthen us, to comfort us when we are discouraged. That is why we now have to learn to depend on that Holy Spirit, the “good thing” that God gives us.

It is nice to be able to help each other, but there

is coming a time when we will be scattered just like the disciples were. Jesus in Gethsemane said to the three disciples, “Please wait and pray for me. I need your comfort, I need your encouragement.” Three times He came and what did He find them doing? Sleeping. And then, when He really needed them and He was taken captive, what did they do? They fled. But Jesus knew One Person Who would not forsake Him and that is God. God has sent you His Holy Spirit — a Gift above all good gifts. He is there by your side and you can talk to Him. Unfortunately, you cannot see Him, because the Spirit is like the air; you can’t see the air, but you can feel it. Do you believe that He is by your side? He is there to comfort you, to strengthen you, to meet your needs. When you tell God that you are discouraged, He will reply, “My Spirit is by your side.”

It is my prayer that we will learn in this time of ease to practice the presence of the Holy Spirit. We human beings need to see something, especially in this television world. We need to practice and to believe that He is there to help us

through trials, to answer our needs. That is the kind of God that we worship. A God Who loves us, cares for us, and will never forsake us. Jesus doesn't want us to think of our heavenly Father as a stern judge.

I want to conclude by giving you an example from the Sermon on the Mount which Jesus has given us. He said, "When you pray, how do you address God?" "Abba, Father." "Abba" was the common term which the Jews used when they were addressing their earthly father. Just like in Europe fathers are called "papa" and here we say "daddy." Abba was the common term for the earthly father, but no Jew would dare address God "Abba." When Jesus told the disciples to call their Father in heaven "Abba," that was radical. I can imagine some saying, "This is blasphemy," because, when the scribes wrote the name of God, they would use a special pen, they would never use the common pen which they used to write the scripture. They were so scared to use the name of God that they even lost the word that was originally used. They were scared of God.

Florence Litthauer is a famous speaker who has spoken to many Adventist audiences around the United States. She gave a series to a women's group in South Carolina. This is the statement that I want to give you. One of our ladies asked her to describe her impressions of Seventh-day Adventists after speaking to many similar Adventist gatherings. It is good to hear from outsiders as to what they think of us. Here is her impression:

“Adventists seem to be very aware of their distinctive doctrines but appear to have a low level of confidence in their relationship to God. Adventists spend time in Bible Study each day, at least some of them, but very few spend a significant amount of time talking to God in prayer. Adventists mistakenly attempt to substitute an intellectual grasp of their distinctive truths for the assurance of salvation which every believer can enjoy in Christ. This substitution naturally results in spiritual insecurity and the dominance of guilt.”

What a correct observation! I hope that we will eradicate from our own people this insecurity. We need to have the assurance that, “I can come to my Father, not because I am good but because He has redeemed me in His Son and He has adopted me while I was still a sinner.” When the time of crisis comes (and you will all face it — maybe personal crisis — but ultimately we will all face crisis) I want you to know that God will never forsake you. Your church might forsake you, your pastor might forsake you. When I took the Week of Prayer at the Middle East College in 1981, they had only one Lebanese pastor left in the whole of Lebanon. The rest came to this country. That one could not come because he could not speak English. You had to speak English to get a Visa. And many of the flocks were left without a shepherd and we had to import shepherds from Egypt and from Jordan and from Syria. Your pastors may forsake you, or your members may forsake you, or your conference may forsake you, but I tell you that our Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly Father, and His Holy Spirit will never forsake you; they are here by your side.

This is why we need to understand what Christ is saying in terms of our relationship with the Father. It must be the relationship of a child to a benevolent father. He has only one concern and that is for your good. He will never refuse you anything that is for your good.

That is our study this time. Next study, I am going to take only one verse from Matthew 7 because it is a verse that has been greatly misunderstood and that is the Golden Rule — verse 12. What did Jesus mean?

Chapter 25

The Golden Rule

Matthew 7:12

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

I want to deal with only one verse today. Matthew 7:12 is called the Golden Rule text. But first let me give you a little illustration. My first time to be in the United States was in 1964. I was at Andrews University and, in one of my first classes, we were required to visit a funeral home. A funeral home in America is something to behold. There is nothing like it anywhere in the world.

I was amazed at the caskets. I've never seen anything like them. In Africa, they wrap you up in a cloth; in Europe, it is just a plain wooden box. I saw this beautiful casket with nice silk lining and I said, "The dead know how to sleep here." There

was one casket that caught my eye. It was a very simple one with cloth covering over wood; it was better than anything I had seen in the Third World, though. It had a big placard which said, “The Golden Rule Casket.” I didn’t know what that meant, so I asked the funeral director what this casket symbolized. He said it was for those who couldn’t afford to buy a better one. I asked if he meant that this one cost nothing. (The cheapest one was about \$400 and the most expensive around \$3,000). I asked if the funeral home paid for the person who was too poor to buy the casket and he told me they would.

I asked him how often he had done it and he said, “in the last 20 years, only three times.” So I remarked that there must not be very many poor people there. He said, “That is not quite true. People are ashamed to take something free. Because when people come to the funeral, the friends would know this was a Golden Rule Casket and the family would rather borrow money.” Then he whispered to me, “This helps my business, gives the impression to the people that I am willing to

sacrifice for them.” Psychologically, he knew that this gesture would not cost him money. Is this what Jesus was talking about in verse 12? That casket was not the Golden Rule; it was the Monkey Rule: “I scratch your back so you will scratch my back.” That is based on human love: “I do you a favor so you will do me a favor.” But that is not what Christ is talking about. By the way, this appears in the New Testament several times. This is not the only place, but, basically, they all say the same thing. Matthew 7:12:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

First of all let us be clear on what this text is not saying. Christ is not saying that we should do something good for our neighbor so that they, in turn, will do something good for us. There are two statements in this text that help us — give us a clue — what Christ is saying. The first word, ‘so’ (‘therefore,’ in some translations) implies that this verse 12 is not a detached statement. It is linked

with what He has said previously. It implies that it is based on what He has said already in verses 1-6 regarding judging others and verses 7-11 dealing with God's goodness toward us. The word "so" tells us that this is what He meant: Treat others just as you would treat yourself. Look at verse 2; this is the context:

For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

In other words, put yourself in other people's shoes and treat them as you would treat yourself. Then the last part of verse 12 also gives us a clue:

...for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

When you read that, it immediately reminds us of an incident that took place in the life of Jesus. Turn to Matthew 22:36. It will help us to understand what Christ meant when He said "the Law and the Prophets." What He means is that this is the teaching of the Old Testament, the teaching

of Scripture. In this verse 36, a young lawyer comes up to Jesus and asks which is the great commandment in the Law. By the way, this word “master” means that this person did not believe that Christ was the Messiah. If he believed in him as the Messiah, he would have called him “Lord.” The word “master” means “teacher” or “rabbi.” So, obviously this man did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, verse 35 says he was tempting Jesus. Matthew 22:34-36:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

By “law” he meant the Book of Moses. The Book of Moses is full of laws and the young man was asking, “Which is number one?” Jesus said to him, in verses 37-40:

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest

commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

He is quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

Therefore, when Jesus said in Matthew 7:12, “for this sums up the Law and the Prophets,” He was simply saying that you should treat your neighbor as you treat yourself. Love your neighbor in the same way as you love yourself. And, if you look at verse 11 of Matthew 7, you will notice that Christ is also saying that we should treat others as God treats us:

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

In other words, God’s concern for us is always goodness. He wants to give everything to us that is good for us. He is saying here that the golden rule

is not some rule that you and I have made but is simply that you must love your neighbor as yourself; this is the Golden Rule. Loving your neighbor as yourself is identified as the Golden Rule by Christ: doing to others what we would want them do to us.

When we realize this, we face a problem. Is it possible in our natural strength for us to love our neighbor in the same way that we love ourself? No. Let me give you an illustration of this. Turn to Matthew 19:16. A young man comes to Jesus, also an unbeliever because he calls Him “Teacher” or “Good Master”:

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

You see that he is addressing Jesus as a human teacher and not as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. The first things Jesus says is (verse 17):

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good....”

Remember that the Old Testament is teaching this and Christ is simply quoting from the Old Testament. And, by the way, Paul quotes this also in Romans 3 that there is none good, none righteous, only God. Continuing verse 17:

“...If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

When the young man asked which commandment, then Jesus quoted the ones that deal with our relationships to each other (verses 18 and 19a):

“Which ones?” the man inquired.

Jesus replied, ““Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ ...”

Notice how Jesus ends in verse 19:

“...and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Verse 20 is the man’s reply:

“All these I have kept,” the young man said.
“What do I still lack?”

He told Jesus that since he was a child he was loving his neighbor as himself. But Jesus said, “Can I put you to the test?” Verse 21:

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect [if you really love as much as you claim to], go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven [I will give you My treasure in heaven]. Then come, follow me.”

Did the man do it? Look at verse 22:

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

What did this test reveal? This revealed that

the natural man cannot do it. Jesus did not say “try” and love your neighbor as yourself. When you analyze self-love, you will discover several things about it. Number one, it is spontaneous. Have you ever tried to love yourself? If you ever have, you need to see a doctor. It is spontaneous. Number two, it is always constant. Even those who commit suicide do so because they love themselves and they can’t handle a problem and so they find that way of escape. Self-love, according to the Bible is inborn in every human being. All seek their own, says Paul in Philippians 2:21, not the things of Christ:

For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

That is why when God comes to you — the man in the world — with the gospel, He doesn’t say that you must become good and love your neighbor as yourself and then He will save you. He comes to man and says, “I come to where you are. I am offering you heaven in exchange for debt.”

Every one of the disciples, without exception, accepted Christ for a selfish reason. That is why they were always fighting about who would be the greatest. When one of the mother's came and asked Jesus if her sons could sit on either side of Him when He established His kingdom, then the other ten disciples got very angry about it. Remember that man is born with a natural love for self. Is it possible for Christians to love their neighbors as themselves? Yes. The New Testament teaches that is the fruit of salvation, is the evidence of justification by faith.

Let me give you two examples. Turn to Romans 13 where Paul is giving the Christian ethics. He is describing the fruits of salvation. Look at verse 8 and 9 because this is how Christians who have been born of the Holy Spirit should live:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love [the word Paul uses is agape, it comes from God] one another, for he who

loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. [What is the law? Love your neighbor as yourself.] The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” [the same commandments Christ gave the young man] and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Here is Paul admonishing Christians to fulfill this. Why? Because Christians have something that the unbeliever does not have which makes it possible. We’ll come to that in a moment.

The other text I want to give you that says the same thing is Galatians 5:13-14, because this brings out clearly that this love is the fruit of the gospel:

You, my brothers, were called to be free.

By the way, if you read verse 1, you will notice that the liberty comes through the gospel of Christ:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

He has delivered us from the yoke of bondage which is legalism. So He is saying in verse 13, “Now you are free, my brothers.” Continuing with verse 13:

But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;...

Don't use salvation by grace as a license to sin. That is not what the work of grace is. It sets you free from condemnation, free from anxiety, from guilt, from insecurity, but it doesn't set you free to enjoy sin. Instead, what do you do? End of verse 13 and verse 14:

...rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

So we have seen that what Jesus is saying in

Matthew 7:12 is the great commandment, which belongs to the last six of the Ten Commandments, which is “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Can we keep the commandments in and of ourselves? The answer is “no” and Romans 7 brings this out. The law is holy and spiritual but I am carnal, a slave to sin.

But please remember that Matthew 7 is part of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Mount is addressed not to unbelievers but to believers. So Christ is also making this statement in the context of the fruits of salvation.

The next thing we saw is that Christians can love their neighbor as themselves. It is possible. The natural man cannot, but the Christian can. Why? Turn to 1 Corinthians 12:31. Do you know that it is not sin to covet some things? Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 1 Corinthians are dealing with spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 12:31:

But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way [gift].

And what is that gift? Love. How does he describe that love in Chapter 13:4-7? By the way, the word “charity,” used in some translations, is not the right word. Paul did not use the word “charity”; he used the word agape. The word “charity” comes from the Latin word caritas, which was coined by Augustine and it is a mixture of human love and God’s love. And it is caritas that created in the Christian Church that we are saved partly by our works and partly by grace: I plus Christ. Paul used the word agape which is God’s self-emptying love. When we receive this love, what will it do? 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a:

Love [agape] is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

When God comes and dwells in you He takes

that love that you have for yourself and He transfers it to your neighbor. That is the power of the Spirit in you.

Can you imagine a church that is controlled by agape? Let me, in a nutshell, remind you how this takes place. You will notice that when Christ spoke to the young man about the law being fulfilled that no mention is made of the first four commandments. Because, as we saw in Matthew 22, in order for you to keep all the commandments you have to have an ingredient called agape. Love for God and love for man are the two commandments on which the whole law and the prophets rest. We do not have that love by nature because we lost it at the Fall.

When Adam sinned, love disappeared and selfishness took its place. That is a layman's way of putting this truth. What technically took place is that agape, which was always outward, took a u-turn and bent toward self. The Hebrew word for that u-turn bend is "iniquity." In Hebrew, "iniquity" means "bent." And when Adam sinned,

that love which was toward God and toward Eve now bent toward self. So when God came and saw him, Adam did not say that he ate the fruit because he wanted to die with Eve, he blamed both God and Eve. “This woman that you gave.... This is not my fault.” Genesis 3:12:

The man said, “The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

And ever since then, we have been trying to find scapegoats out of self-love.

If I do not have agape then I cannot love God or my fellowman by myself. Here is the problem: we saw in 1 Corinthians 13 that “agape is not self-seeking.” If God gives me agape as a gift so that I may return this agape back to Him, then we have a problem because God Himself is no longer is agape. We make God selfish if we say He gave us the gift so we may return it back to Him. Look at 1 John 3:23, because the first four commandments are kept only in the context of faith:

And this is his command [notice there are two of them here]: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

That is the first commandment: belief in Jesus Christ. Faith is keeping the first four commandments and, if you look at them, you know you can only keep them by faith. Exodus 20:3-8:

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord

your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.”

If you believe in God, you will have no other gods. If you believe in God, you will rest on His day and not on yours. Please remember that faith fulfills the first four commandments. That is why, when we preach the Sabbath, we must preach it in the context of faith. Why am I keeping the Sabbath? Because I am resting in Christ. If you are asked for a text, give Hebrews 4. We who believe the gospel have entered into Christ’s rest.

So we keep the first four commandments by faith. What does God do in return? The moment we believe, the moment we turn to God as our only hope, as our only Lord, the moment we rest in Christ as our only Savior, He sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and the Holy Spirit brings with Him the gifts of agape. And this gift is given to us so it may go in the horizontal direction towards our

neighbors. And that is the second commandment of 1 John 3:23; the first one is that we believe on the name of Christ and the second one is:

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us [the other six commandments].

So this is how it works in practical terms. God comes to me with the gospel and says, “You can’t save yourself. There is only One who can save you: the One who created you is the One who will redeem you.” By the way, this is in the context of the Three Angels’ Message: “Give glory to God.” The first angel comes with the everlasting gospel and says, “Please give glory to God who created the heavens, the earth, and seas.” Revelation 14:7:

He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Another example is Paul and Barnabas in Lystra. Do you remember the people thought they were gods. And they worshipped him and Paul was horrified. He said, “Stop. We are men like you. There is only One God and it is Him that we worship: the God who created the heaven, earth, and sea.” Acts 14:8-15:

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: “Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.”

When you come to God in faith, He says to you, “I took you and I put you in my Son and I redeemed you. I gave you a new history, a new identity, and there you stand perfect. I have adopted you, I have forgiven you, I have reconciled you to myself.” You then say, “Thank you God, I believe You.” Then He sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in you and He says, “Now I want you to love your neighbor as yourself. I want you to forgive them as you were forgiven by me.”

Christian living is the fruits of the agape that is given you. And Jesus said in John 13:35:

“By this [this agape] all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

The greatest desire that God has for this Church and for every believer is to lighten the earth with His glory. He did lighten the earth once with His glory when Christ came to this earth. The Word was made flesh and we beheld His glory. Now Christ is in heaven and God wants to reveal this glory once again through His body which is the Church. In other words, the first four books of the New Testament, called the Gospel, is a historical account of God manifested through one Man, Jesus Christ. The next book, the book of Acts, is the revelation of God being manifested in the body of Christ, the Church.

The problem is that revelation was very short-lived. Why? Because there was a falling away from the gospel. There was a perversion; human ideologies came in. Paganism was creeping in. Now, God says, “Before the end comes, I will restore the gospel and I will demonstrate the power of the gospel through my people. I will lighten the

earth with the glory of God.” So God wants to produce His love through His Church and this is the Golden Rule that He gives us.

But, please, don’t ever take the Golden Rule and say, “From now on, I promise to keep it.” You cannot. Our prayer is, “Live out Thy life within me.” What the world needs to see is Christ. They need to see God manifest in the flesh, our flesh. Then they will have no excuse because they will now have seen the gospel in action. That is what Jesus meant when He said (Matthew 24:14):

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Testimony is a legal term. What the witnesses testify to in a courtroom is taken into account for judgment. The world will witness the gospel when they see Christ manifested in the body.

Don’t hang up the Golden Rule and say, “I am going to follow it.” The Golden Rule is only for

born-again Christians who allow the Holy Spirit to control them; they walk in the Spirit. That is why I wanted to spend a whole study on this verse. God's greatest desire is that we manifest this love. Then God will say to the world, "Here are my people who are keeping the commandments." We must never get the idea that keeping the commandments of God is something mechanical. The Jews were experts at keeping the law mechanically. That is why Jesus explained to this young man that the greatest law toward God and toward man was love. On this basis the whole commandment is kept.

It is my prayer that this love will transform us. That we will realize that the Golden Rule is something that must be lived out in and through us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our part is a total surrender to God: "Not I, but Christ."

Chapter 26

Two Ways

Matthew 7:13-14

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

We are going to look at Matthew 7:13-14. But, first of all, let me give you an overview of the whole Sermon on the Mount. Because we are coming now to a special section of the sermon. Most sermons, and this is typical, are divided into three parts: there is an introduction, a development or body, and there is the conclusion, which is the application.

The introduction to this Sermon on the Mount is the beatitudes, where Jesus describes to the disciples the characteristics of a true Christian.

Then comes the body, which begins in Chapter 5 after the beatitudes and runs right up to verse 12 of Chapter 7. In the body, Christ expounds to the disciples what Christian living is all about. And now, beginning with verse 13 up to the end of Chapter 7, is the application, the conclusion. This is what we will cover from now until we finish [through Part 30].

If you look at the conclusion which begins in Matthew 7:13, you will discover that what Christ is doing in His application and appeal is that every individual who hears the gospel must make a choice. He is showing the contrast between the two choices. Ultimately this world will be divided in only two camps: believers and unbelievers (or, as some translations put it, the goats and the sheep). He divides these two camps into four different groups. In this study, we will deal with the two ways — the broad or wide way and the narrow way. Next time we will deal with two teachers — the false teacher and the true teacher. Later, we will deal with words versus deeds. (The true Christian not only believes the truth but he

does it.) Finally, the two foundations — the house built on sand and the house built on rock. But let us now read Matthew 7:13-14:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

The first thing that I would like to emphasize here is that Jesus is not talking about salvation itself. Because, if you look at these two verses in the context of salvation itself, it sounds as if it is easy to be lost and hard to be saved. What Christ is dealing with here is the Christian life, which is the Sermon on the Mount.

Salvation is a gift. Is that clear? But let us also be very clear: Christian living is hard. Why? Because the moment you accept the gift, you are changing your citizenship from the world to the kingdom of God. But you will not experience the fullness of the kingdom of God until Christ comes.

Until then, we are citizens of heaven living in enemy territory, in Satan's world. And I can guarantee you that Satan will make life hell for you. And that is exactly what Christ is dealing with in this application. Someone may ask, "Then why should I become a Christian if the life is hard?" I'll tell you why: because of the destiny. The destiny of the easy life is destruction but the destiny of the Christian life is life eternal.

The first thing that strikes us as we read these two verses is that there is a tremendous contrast between these two camps. There is nothing in common; there can be no middle ground. There are many who would like to sit on the fence and ask, "Which way shall I go?" But when Jesus says in Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations...

then every human being has to take a position either for Christ or against Christ. This is the first

thing that this verses shows: there are only two ways, not three. There is no middle ground in this message.

Let's look at this passage in detail. We can divide verses 13 and 14 — the contrast of the two ways — into four main parts. First of all is the two gates. When you enter, you have to go through a gate, so we will look at them. The second thing is the two ways. The third thing we'll look at is the two destinations. And the fourth thing is the two crowds — large or small crowds.

We'll start with the two gates. What does Christ say about these? Look at verse 13 where He begins the application:

Enter through the narrow gate....

Some translations use the word “strait” instead of “gate.” Notice how the word is spelled. It is an old English word meaning “narrow.” It does not mean “straight line.” There were gates in the villages that were very narrow. I suppose if Christ

were living today He would say “enter in through the turnstile” because only one person can go at a time. That narrow gate was so narrow that you could not take any baggage with you. It is so narrow that you must leave everything behind. You can’t take your possessions and treasures with you.

Once I attended a Walla Walla Ministerial Fellowship at Park Plaza [a retirement center]. They had a new administrator and he was giving us a little description of the Park Plaza and he said that one of the problems that people face when they move from their homes to this retirement center is that they want to bring 30 or 40 years of things they have collected. But at the Park Plaza there is no garage where you can dump your stuff and so they had great difficulty in giving up their years of treasures. (I tell my wife that I call it junk, but she doesn’t believe that.) When we were deported from Uganda, we could not take anything with us and it taught us a lesson. It gave us an idea that when we enter the narrow gate, we cannot take our possessions.

Christ was not referring to physical possessions here. He was referring to our self-righteousness, our pride. Do you remember what we have studied so often? The way of Christianity is “Not I, but Christ.” Salvation is a gift; you cannot take your righteousness with you to heaven. You have to give it up. You cannot take the worldly life. I have to accept the life of Christ, the righteousness of Christ for my life. Now, please don’t call that a sacrifice. Tell me, if you give up \$10 in exchange for \$100 would that be a sacrifice? You are gaining \$90! So when we accept the life of Christ in exchange for our life, it is not a sacrifice. When we exchange our righteousness for the righteousness of Christ, it is not a sacrifice because our righteousness will appear naked in the judgment. The man without the wedding garment was a fool for not accepting the offered wedding garment in exchange for his “beautiful suit.” That is why we must remember that when you enter the narrow the gate — when you enter into Christ’s kingdom — it is all of Him and none of works. That covers the narrow gate.

The other gate is wide. You can bring everything you have with you. There is no limit on your luggage. There is no self-denial. You can take your pride, you can take your self-righteousness, you can take your sins — there are no restrictions. But Jesus said that, when you enter the narrow gate — let me give you a verse. Turn to Matthew 10:38:

...And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

There are passages that you will read on this in Matthew, in Luke, in John, and in Mark. One is in Matthew 19:27. What do we have to give up when we enter the narrow gate?

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

And Jesus gave them a wonderful promise in verse 29:

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”

So there is a narrow gate and we do have to take up our cross and follow Him. Now let's go to point number two — the two ways. There are some people who think that when you become a Christian you enter a broad way and it gets narrower and narrower. But from beginning to end it is narrow. The gate is narrow and the road is narrow. Not only is the gate narrow, but the way is narrow. Now I am assuming that Jesus had in mind Psalm 1. Notice the very opening statement of the book of Psalms (verses 1 and 2):

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

In other words, blessed is the man who doesn't

take the wide road, in spite of peer pressure. Blessed is the person who chooses God's way instead of man's way. And, of course, the road is wide in man's way but God's way is narrow. Now I gave you Matthew 10:8 regarding the cross, but if you look at Luke 9:23, not only do you have to pick up the cross when you enter the narrow gate but you must deny yourself and take up the cross daily — all of the journey:

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Not only must you enter the turnstile (in the libraries here you enter through the turnstile and then come into a big room) but, in the Christian way, you enter the narrow gate and then the way is narrow, too.

I would like to give you some texts which bring out that, while salvation is a gift (clearly), the Christian life is not an easy life. Anyone who has told you that when you become a Christian

everything will go well, you know better. Turn to 1 Corinthians 15. I want to give you the context. There were some Christians in Corinth (I wonder if we should call them Christians because they missed one of the major points of the New Testament teaching) and they were teaching that there was no resurrection for the Christian. You will find this in verse 12:

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

No resurrection of the dead means no hope at the end of the road. Now look at verse 19:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

The hope of the Christian is not in this life. It is in our destiny. We would be the most miserable people if our only hope was in this life because the Christian life is not always easy. Of course, Paul was living in a time when persecution was very

strong. In 1 John 2:15-16, we have admonition from John where he tells us:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.

The wide gate allows you to carry with you all of these things, but the Christian must not love the things of the world. Galatians 5:24 says that the one who accepts Christ and follows Him has crucified the flesh with all its desires:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

You have entered the narrow way. Now one more text — 2 Timothy 3:12. This is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer would call “the cost of discipleship.” When you follow the way of Christ, when you

follow the Sermon on the Mount, this is what will happen:

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,....

Will be persecuted, not may be persecuted.

Let me go now to the third position — the destinies. What are the two destinies? Those who have entered the wide gate and are walking the wide road end up in destruction. Proverbs 14:12:

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

I go back now to Psalm 1. I believe Jesus had this in mind because the disciples were familiar with the Old Testament. What is the end of those who go the way of the ungodly, the way of the sinner? Verses 5 and 6:

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the

righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The destiny of the wide road is destruction. Another good passage is Deuteronomy 30 because, when Moses came to the end of his ministry, he did the same thing that Christ is doing in the Sermon on the Mount. Christ says, “Enter the narrow gate.” Listen to what Moses told the Jews. Moses had given them a tremendous sermon and is completing it. We’ll read first Deuteronomy 30:15:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

Now go to verse 19, where he makes his appeal:

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live....

This is one of the texts that tells me that it is the choice of the parents that decides the destiny of their baby until he or she reaches the age of accountability. Paul said the same to the jailer when he said that if he accepted Christ that he and his household (and the word household means those who are still under you or haven't reached the age of accountability) would be saved. But that is a controversial subject that I will not discuss now.

What I want to point out to you is that, just like Christ says "Enter the narrow way," Moses said in the exodus: "Choose life that you may live." Now verse 20:

...And that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In other words, if you enter through the narrow

gate, life may be difficult now but, remember, the end result is eternal life. If you take the broad way, you may eat, drink, and be merry — that may be true — but, in the end, you shall die. Please don't say, "I will walk the wide way now and when I come to the end of my life I will change into the narrow way." Don't be deceived; now is the time in which we must choose.

Now I come to the final point: the two crowds. Going back to Matthew, what did Jesus say about the two crowds? Matthew 7:14:

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

In contrast, we see in verse 13 that many go in at the wide gate. Now please don't get the idea from these two verses that there will be only a few in heaven. Jesus is not discussing numbers, He is discussing proportions. In Revelation 7 and in other passages, we are told that the number of people in heaven is so large they are like the sand of the sea and that is the promise also that God

gave to Abraham: “like the stars of the heavens.” What Christ is pointing out here is that it is easy to walk the non-Christian life. There are no restrictions, you can do what you please, you are your own boss; basically, you can do what you like. The Christian way may seem hard to the flesh — not to the converted mind — but, to the flesh, it is a life of discipline and it involves suffering.

Jesus is the best example. He had no home to live in, He was a vagabond, He was rejected, was mistreated, and, finally, crucified. Why did He go through all of that? He already had eternal life, so why did Christ go through it? Please turn to Hebrews 12 and you will see that He went through all that for a reason. Hebrews 12:2, and notice that it is in the context of suffering. The writer of Hebrews says:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith [our salvation], who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What was the joy that was set before Him? Was it eternal life? No, He already had that as the Son of God. In fact, He said, “In Me is life.” What caused Jesus to endure the cross? Our salvation — that was the joy. He was willing to suffer for us. When Jesus says, “Walk in the narrow way,” He is saying, “for your own benefit because the end is eternal life.” He knows He is talking to human beings who are born selfish. Ellen G. White says in the book *Evangelism* that, when we preach, we are to tell the people there is a heaven to gain and a hell to lose. Christ comes down to where we are and tells us to enter the narrow gate. Life may be hell for a season but, at the end, is everlasting life. But here is the problem: we want to enjoy everything now. That is the reason why people take the wide gate, because they can’t wait for the end, it is too long. One of the qualities that a Christian has to develop because of suffering is patience. In Revelation 14:12, we see “here is the patience of the saints”:

This calls for patient endurance on the part of

the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

In James 1, "count it all joy when you face trials because it develops patience." James 1:2-3:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

All through the Bible, the advice to the believers is to develop patience because God knows that we do not have patience naturally. We want everything now. The greatest evidence of this is in this own country. This is the only country where you can have things now and pay later, which is a terrible system because of human nature. I get all these ads in my mail to enjoy things now and pay later. If you have a good credit rating, they say to enjoy a good vacation now: "Don't worry!" They don't tell you that they charge interest until later on.

We need to keep before us the destiny. Jesus

knew that it is very difficult. So what did He do before He left this earth? He instituted the Lord's Supper. As often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you show the Lord's death until He comes. Keep that hope ahead of you. Unfortunately, many cannot endure it. But Jesus said in Matthew 10:22 that he who endures to the end would be saved:

All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

It is my prayer that, when you enter that narrow gate and the narrow way and life seems difficult and everything seems against you, remember the destiny. Don't look at the crowd, because you may only see a few compared to the others. But you are with the wiser ones because the end result is what counts. Jesus said [Mark 8:36]:

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

“What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul, his eternal life?” So are

you willing with Christ, with Paul, and with other Christians to suffer awhile, for “a season”? Paul tells us that, when we reach our destiny, we’ll look back and say that this suffering was nothing compared to the eternal glory that we have received. But now it seems hard. But hold on until that day. Jesus is not asking you to go through anything that He Himself did not go through for our salvation. If He was willing to endure the cross for our salvation, I think we must be willing to even suffer for His sake, besides the destiny. May God bless us that when we apply the Sermon on the Mount to our lives that we will be willing to suffer with Christ for a season.

Chapter 27

The Fruit Test

Matthew 7:15-20

In our last study, we began the closing remarks of Jesus — what we call the conclusion or application — to the Sermon on the Mount. We studied verses 13 and 14, which dealt with “The Two Ways.” Now we are going to deal with verses 15 to 20, which deal with the two kinds of prophets or teachers. I would like for us to read this section. It very important, especially as we approach the end, to understand the warning that Jesus is giving us here. Matthew 7:15-20:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot

bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

First of all, let's look at the word "prophets," because there are some people who think that prophets are only those who foretell the future. That is only one of the functions. A prophet is a person who claims to proclaim a message from God; not everyone who claims to be a prophet is a prophet. A prophet is one who proclaims a message from God. We had a sister in Ethiopia who claimed to have had visions. I hear it is popular in some parts of this country, too. The question is, "How do we know?" That is why this subject is important.

In the entire history of God's people, they have always been plagued by false prophets. In the Old Testament times they had them, and in New Testament times, and in our day, they have them. Let me give you some examples. Turn to Jeremiah 23:16. Jeremiah was a true prophet and gives the same kind of warning that Jesus gives:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.”

There were false prophets way back there. Now turn to the New Testament and I will give you a couple of examples. A false prophet and a false teacher are in the same category. A false prophet is one who teaches false messages.

Turn to Galatians 1:6-9. Galatia was an area that Paul had evangelized. After he left Galatia, some false teachers, called judaizers, came along and convinced them of a gospel that was different from the one they received from Paul. Paul heard about it and wrote this letter, one of the strongest letters that he ever wrote. There is very little commendation; it is a letter of rebuke:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of

Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ [false teachers]. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Paul gives this warning, then he repeats the same thing for emphasis.

Right in the beginning of the Christian Church, false prophets came. I will give you another passage. Turn to 2 Corinthians 11:3-4. Here is a pastoral concern of this great preacher. Let's look at verse 2 first, which gives us that concern:

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. [This jealousy for God's people is acceptable.] I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I

might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we [the apostles] preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

In other words, it is so easy for you to be sidetracked. Why? Because the Corinthians were so busy fighting among themselves that they had no time to study the Word of God and be established. I could give you other examples, but I would like to give you one more text that in a sense deals with our day. Matthew 24:11 deals with the great signs of the Second Coming and Jesus warns:

...And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Not a few false prophets, but many.

Now let's go back to our study in Chapter 7. How does Jesus describe these false prophets? By the way, the fact there are false prophets implies that there are true prophets. If there were to be no prophets at all, Christ would have said, "The moment John the Apostle dies, no more prophets." But he did not say that. There are many Christians that feel that the gift of prophecy ended with John the Apostle. But here is Christ pointing to the last days and saying, "Beware of false prophets," implying that there are true prophets.

Let's look at how Christ describes these false prophets in verse 15:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Please remember that, in the days of Christ, in first century Palestine, the natural enemy of the sheep were wolves. And one of the duties of the shepherd was to protect the sheep from the wolves. But these wolves looked like sheep. Normally, if

the wolf comes for the sheep, the sheep know because wolves and sheep look differently. But can you imagine a wolf putting on the skin of the sheep. The shepherd would not even recognize him. Here is the problem. Christ is saying that these false prophets had two things that we need to watch. One is they are dangerous and they are deceptive because they don't look like wolves. This is a problem that we need to be aware of because we cannot judge these false prophets by outward appearance. They look like sheep. The problem is inside of them. The trouble with human beings is we do not know how to see inside. That is why Christ says, "I'll give you a text." And He gives another metaphor.

But before we look at that, I would like for you to turn to another passage which talks about the same thing. Turn to Acts 20. Paul is returning from one of his missionary journeys and he stopped at Ephesus, where he had spent about three years previously as a pastor there. What does he do when he arrives at Ephesus? He doesn't have time to visit the churches; in those days, they didn't

have one church building, but they had house churches. He didn't have time because he was just passing by. So what did he do? When he arrived in Ephesus he called the elders or officers of the church (v. 17) and tells them many things. Now let's read Acts 20:28-32:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The end was coming and he was telling his elders to be careful that they not allow false teachings to come into the church. I'll tell you that

these days are not any better. All kinds of teachings come and a lot of people are trapped by it. Now let's go back to Matthew 7 and see how we can know who is the false prophet and who is not.

Now the first thing is this: you cannot know them by outward appearance. They appear like sheep, like innocent sheep. So what does Jesus say? He turns to another metaphor about trees and fruit. Matthew 7:16-20:

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

“You will know them by their fruits.” Then He lays down a fact that we are all familiar with. A good tree will produce good fruit, and a bad tree

will produce bad fruit. The only problem is that it sometimes takes a long time for the fruit to mature. When I first went to Idaho one of my members came up to me and had a very big concern for a family — a fine, brilliant family. Both parents were graduates of Harvard University — one in science and one in English — and they had very, very bright kids. I was absolutely amazed at the kids. They had 10 kids but they were brilliant. Their IQ was so high that they would put people to shame.

When I first visited them, the 11 year-old boy was quite an expert in calculus. The parents refused to send them to public school; they studied at home. One day the education officers of the government came up to them and told them it was illegal and that the boy had to go to some school. And the father said, “Okay, you give them some tests and, if they fail, I will put them in your school but, if they pass, leave them alone.” The two men brought them a test and these kids finished in one-third the normal time, then they bombarded these two education men, who both had degrees, with

questions they could not answer.

Then one day, J.R. Simplot, the potato king who makes the french fries for McDonald's and was a millionaire many times over, got a brilliant idea. The skins of the potatoes were being thrown away, so he decided to open another industry. He went into the fish trade. He built huge tanks and filled them with fish and tried to find out how the potato peelings could be converted into food. So he advertised for scientists who would experiment with bacteria to produce food from these peelings. Two of the boys, the 14 year-old and the 11 year-old, put in a request. So they were invited. The others who came were all Ph.D.s. Simplot said jokingly to his technician, "Give them a room, also; let them try." Well, guess what? They came out on top and were given the job.

They were sincere people, were very educated. But one day a man from Australia called Fred Wright came and had campmeeting and swept this whole family away. I went and visited them because they were no longer coming to Church.

They were holding their own meetings. I said, “Please, you have a measuring stick [the Bible]. I don’t care how sincere and earnest he was, you have a measuring stick.” But they would not listen. Five years later, they came to our Church and I asked what made them come back. The father said that they discovered that Wright was embezzling the tithe money they were sending him and living with another woman. It took five years before the fruit came out.

What are the tests? There is the immediate test and the ultimate test. What is the immediate test? Isaiah 8:20:

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

If they do not teach according to this, they are wrong. But you say, “These people quote scripture.” Well, I’ll tell you, one day I passed through a church foyer and I saw a pile, seven or eight bundles of papers. And I wondered where

they came from and I took one. I was horrified at what it was teaching. It looked good. It said, “Puzzled? Why Not Talk To God About the Sabbath?” It was six pages long but contained not one statement about how the Sabbath is linked to the gospel. But what bothered me was that a lot of the statements, which were very legalistic, were using Bible texts but they are out of context.

I am going to read two of them. It uses the question/answer method. Question #1 (as if asking a question of the Lord): Does my salvation depend upon my obedience to Your commandments? What would you say? Answer (a quotation from Hebrews 5:9):

...And, once made perfect, he [Christ] became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him....

If you look at the context of that text, it is the gospel. Now remember that faith is obedience. It is surrendering yourself to the truth as it is in Christ.

Question #2: Is it absolutely necessary to keep the commandments to receive eternal life? Answer (from Christ Himself, in Matthew 19:17b):

If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.

Have you read this in the context? The young man asks what good thing he must do to have eternal life. Jesus said there is nobody good but God. But, if you want to go to heaven by being good, then you must keep the commandments. But if you go on you will notice that the young man replied that he had kept the commandments and Jesus never promised him heaven. Instead He tested the young man. Did he pass the test? No. Jesus turns to the disciples and tells them that, with man, it is impossible. But here is a statement read by itself that, if you want to go to heaven, it is by keeping the commandments. No mention here of the Sabbath being kept as the fruit of salvation or as the evidence of salvation. Here the Law is used as a means of salvation.

Remember that, when you hear somebody who is ever so sincere, please remember that the Scripture is your measuring stick of truth. Turn to Matthew 12:33-37. When Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount and talked about the false prophets, He had in mind particularly the scribes and Pharisees. The same idea is here; if you want good fruit the tree has to be good. In *Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White says, “In order to keep the Sabbath holy, man must first be holy.” How are we to be holy? Always in Christ. In Christ, we are holy and blameless and then we can keep the Sabbath holy. We must never put the cart before the horse. Jesus is saying the same thing in verse 33:

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.

“First the tree must be made good and then fruit will be good.” Now Matthew 12:34-37:

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil

say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Here Jesus is saying that one of the tests has to do with the teachings. Turn a few pages to Matthew 16:6-12:

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not

understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

It is not the bread but the teachings of the Pharisees. Why? Because it permeates the whole church, the way yeast does bread. This paper was like yeast.

I want to read you some quotations. In 1970, I was researching the 1888 Message at Andrews University and I came across this wonderful manuscript: Manuscript 36, dated 1890. It was a sermon that Ellen G. White preached to the pastors in Battle Creek [Michigan] two years after 1888. I got excited because it really opened my eyes, so I went to Mrs. Jemison who was in charge and said,

“Can I have a copy?” and she said, “No.” “Why?” I asked. “Because it has not been released,” she said. So I told her I would be patient and to please try and release it. Five years later I returned on furlough and she saw me at Pioneer Memorial Church and she came running to me and said, “I have good news. I can give you a copy of that manuscript now. It has been released.” I asked who released it and she said Mervyn Maxwell. Thank God for some of our professors.

I want to read you a couple of quotations from this manuscript, because this has to do with false teachings that are creeping into our Church.

“The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining as a people false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The Law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the Law as was the offering of Cain.”

When we preach the Sabbath let us preach it in the context of Christ our righteousness.

“I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation. The ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly [Can you see the emphasis there?] in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”

This is now in the book Faith and Works, pages 18-20. Read the whole book; it is a very balanced presentation. I would prefer that they titled it “Faith That Works.” Genuine justification by faith always produces good works; the works are in harmony with the Law but they do not carry any merit. They are the fruits.

“Let the subject be made distinct and plain that

it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. [And how many have fallen for that.] If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages, and partly by grace. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all of this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”

This (salvation by works) is what the Pharisees were teaching. This is what the judaizers came and taught the Galatians, which they fell for; this is the false teaching we are facing today. So one of the

tests for truth is, “Does it agree with scripture?” If you hear a quote from either the Scriptures or The Spirit of Prophecy, please look at those quotations in their context. You can make statements from the Bible that sound right but perverts the truth. Sister White makes the statement that because the members will not study their Bibles, God will allow damnable heresies to creep into the Church that will force our members to go to Scripture.

I would like to remind you that, in 1980, when we reviewed our fundamental beliefs (in the Church Manual), we came up with some very clear statements. I want to read the introduction:

“Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of Holy Scripture. These beliefs as set forth here constitute the Church’s understanding and expression of teaching of Scripture.

The first one is the Holy Scriptures. After making a statement that we believe the Bible is

inspired it says:

“The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrine, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”

Then, when they go to Spiritual Gifts, which is one of our beliefs, they make the statement:

“One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy.”

This gift was, of course, part of the many-faceted ministry of Ellen G. White. And they conclude with this statement. After saying that her writings are for instruction, guidance, and correction, they say:

“They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.”

We must become Bible students. I am so glad when we study books instead of topics. Because when you study a book, the danger of side-tracking is less than if you simply take a text here and there.

The other fruit of a true prophet is their character, their lifestyle, their influence. If anyone who brings division in the church, be cautious about them. Anyone who appears holy at church but at home are like devils, then you can beware. But sometimes the influence or the character can take a long time to be revealed. They can be wolves inside. Those who split the Church and say, “They are wrong, you need to come and join my camp” — I am cautious about that because, no matter how wrong the Church is, we must lead people to Jesus Christ.

I will tell you my own experience in closing. Why it took me so long to become an Adventist — four years from the time I first heard the message until I became one. One of the main reasons was my loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. I have learned one thing: our loyalty must be to Jesus

Christ. Every other loyalty will fall. We must never be loyal to an individual, or to a movement, or a following. We must be loyal to Christ and His Word. Then we will be on our guard.

When someone tells me new light, then I want him to give me a Bible study that is in harmony with the Word of God following the rules of Bible interpretation. That is why, in this day, we must beware of false prophets. I believe that, as we approach the end, false prophets will increase in number. They will also increase in deception. It is worse here than in some other countries. When I first came here, I was shocked. There was one group studying about the end of the world and how we must be careful about the banks. Some of the brethren said to us that we must not leave our money in the banks because they were going to close. This was in 1975. They said to take our money and invest in land. So we did. The land we invested in went bankrupt and we lost all the money. The banks did not close; we should have left it there.

Be careful. Jesus says, “Be careful.” Paul says, “Be careful.” The devil wants to destroy this Church and its mission. So I warn you to please remember that one of the things that the devil wants to do is to side-track you from the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. It is important that we are established in Christ and then we are able to evaluate whether it is true or false. Any teaching that does not lead you to Christ as your Savior, as your righteousness, as your hope, as your security, as your sanctification — be careful. The true Christian is one who has no confidence in the flesh and is rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

Do not believe any man, including me; go to Scripture.

Chapter 28

False Peace

Matthew 7:21-23

We are coming now to one of the most serious statements found in this Sermon on the Mount, and probably in the whole of the Bible: Matthew 7:21-23. Let's read these verses first and you will realize why this is a very serious statement. Jesus is coming to a conclusion to His Sermon on the Mount. He makes two statements that are parallel. The first one is in verses 21-23; the second statement is verses 24-27, which we will study next. Matthew 7:21-23:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from

me, you evildoers!”

Isn't that a tough statement? Christ is not talking about the infidel, He is not talking about unbelievers, but here He is talking about sincere Christians who believe the right thing, who say the right thing and who do the right thing. But they will find themselves out of the Kingdom, lost. Can this be possible? Christ says “yes,” it can be. So we better listen to Him.

Let's look at these verses and see what He meant. First of all, He begins in verse 21 by saying “not everyone,” so He is qualifying here. Should Christians call Christ “Lord, Lord”? Yes. We know that those who refuse to call Him Lord will be lost. There is no doubt. But the fact that you call Him Lord is not a guarantee that you are saved. When He says “not everyone,” He doesn't mean an odd person here and an odd person there because, in verse 22, He identifies “not everyone” by using “many.” So that is a tough one. I suppose we can say like the disciples did when Jesus said to them, “One of you will forsake me”; each one asked, “Is

it I?” We need to wrestle with this passage.

When Christ said “not everyone” He meant “many.” We need to look at that seriously. What Christ is saying here is that many will be deceived and we need to analyze in what areas. In the judgment of the unbelievers, which will take place at the end of the millennium, there will be two groups among the lost. There will be the unbelievers, which will be a large number of people, but among them will be those who claim to be believers but who find themselves outside the gates of the New Jerusalem.

I would divide the human race into three groups: first of all, we have the believers who will be saved. They may suffer for awhile in the world, but they will enjoy eternity with Christ. They are the best of the three groups. Then we have the unbelievers who may have enjoyed, to some degree, this world. But, in the judgment, they will be found wanting and will be lost. But the third group has to be the worst of the lot. They are believers and have given up the world to some

degree, but they will not even enjoy heaven. They will not enjoy eternal life, but neither will they enjoy the pleasures of this world. These to me are the worst off. And, unfortunately, Jesus says, “Many will say to me...” and that is the tragedy.

The words “Lord, Lord” is a term that the early New Testament Christians used. To them it was synonymous with the Old Testament word for “Jehovah.” So these people recognize Jesus not simply as a great teacher, but they recognize Jesus as the Savior, Master, God, and Lord. These are not unbelievers; they are believers in Christ. What does Jesus say about them? He says that, “Many will say” that they all believed, they all called Him “Lord, Lord,” but they are not entering the Kingdom of heaven because they were not doing the will of the Father. What did Jesus mean by “the will of the Father”?

In verse 22, these people were saying, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Is this not the will of the Father? What

did Jesus mean by “the will of the Father”?

I want to turn to several texts. Turn to Matthew 12:49-50. This is the incident where Jesus was ministering among the people and His mother and brothers and sisters came to visit Him and the people said to Him while He was talking (verse 47):

Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

Listen to what Jesus said in verse 49:

Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Here we have one clue as to what is the will of God. The will of God is to be a disciple of Christ. What is a disciple of Christ? One who forsakes all and follows Christ. Matthew 10:37-38:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

“If any man follow me he is not worthy to be my disciple unless he takes up the cross and denies himself.” I want to give you another text which I hope will help further. 1 John 3:23. Here we get another glimpse of what God’s will is:

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

So the will of God is that we should believe in Jesus Christ and love one another. I’ll give you one more text and that is in the gospel of John, Chapter 15. We are familiar with the verse of John 15:5 where Jesus says:

“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.”

But let’s go on and look at some other verses beyond that. Look at verse 8 (of John 15), where He is talking to those who are abiding in Christ and who are bearing fruit:

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

So, please remember that a disciple is not only a follower of Christ but one who bears fruit. Let’s see how He explains the fruit (verses 9-12):

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Please remember that the will of the Father is two-fold: to believe in Jesus Christ and to reflect the love of God. Remember that God's love is unconditional. You don't love only those that are good. The nonbelievers can do that. The love of God is unconditional love that we must have for each other. It is easy to love those who are good to us. It is hard to love those who hate us, who speak against us. But that is what God's will is.

In other words, a true Christian is one who has lost all confidence in himself and who is depending totally on Jesus Christ not only for his salvation but also for His life — Christ lives in me. Let's go back to Matthew 7:22:

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’”

These people here claim to be Christians: they claim to believe in Christ, they are members of the Church, they may even have high positions in the

Church. What are the three things they say? Number one, they say, “Did we not prophesy in your name?” The word ‘prophesied’ means to proclaim God’s message. A prophet is one who proclaims God’s message. And prophecy as used in its broader sense — I am not talking now of just the gift of prophecy, but of prophecy in the broader sense, as Paul explains it in 1 Corinthians 14 — it is to proclaim in the name of Jesus Christ.

Here are people who are speaking in the name of Jesus Christ. They are witnessing, they are preaching, talking, giving a testimony, etc. Is this wrong or right? It is right. No problem there.

Number two, “in your name drive out demons.” We have a lot of this going on these days. There is a ministry going on called “Deliverance Ministries” and some people are spending all their time with it. Is this evidence that these are true Christians? Remember that Jesus is saying that they are claiming to prophesy in His name and are casting out devils.

And number three, “in your name ... perform many miracles.”

The question is, “How can such people — who prophesy in the name of Christ, who cast out devils in the name of Christ, and who do many miracles in the name of Christ — how can they be deceived and lost? How?

For example, turn to 1 Corinthians 12:3. When you look at this statement in Matthew, you feel you are on dangerous ground even if you are a Christian. Let’s see what Paul says here:

Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

So these folks have recognized, through the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is the Savior, He is the Lord, the Messiah, the Jehovah. How then can they be lost? Christ makes it clear that it is possible for them to be lost. 1 Corinthians 13 says that it is

possible for us to speak in the language of angels and not have love. Remember, if we love God, we will reflect the love of God. Paul says, “Even if I am the best orator and can convince people, but have not agape [love], I am become a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal.” 1 Corinthians 13:1:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

Let's read verse 2:

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love [agape], I am nothing.

So it is possible to do these things. For an example, turn to Matthew 24. Remember this chapter is dealing with the signs of the last days. Matthew 24:24 — speaking of our time, the last days:

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible.

When you see these false christs and false prophets doing great signs and wonders, please remember that miracles, signs, wonders, are not the final evidence. But the question is, “How can I be sure that I am not among these ‘many’?” It is an important and valid question. I don’t want to be among those deceived ones. Christ gives us a clue in Matthew 7:23. Why does Jesus reject these people? Two reasons:

“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

These were Christians but their foundation was not Jesus Christ. They taught in His name, they cast out devils in His name, but they were not established on the foundation of “Not I, but Christ.” In 1 Corinthians 3:11, Paul says:

For no one can lay any foundation other than

the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

And it is upon this Foundation that we build up our Christianity. Their faith (the people described in Matthew 7) was in their performance.

Please notice the reason they give as to why they want to enter in. They are pointing to their works. “Lord, we have done these things in Your name. Don’t you think we have a right to heaven?” And Jesus says, “I never knew you.” Please notice all these three facts that they claim to have accomplished are based on the word “we”: “We have prophesied in your name, we have cast out devils, we have performed miracles; therefore, don’t we qualify for heaven?”

I want to give you another passage that deals with a similar issue. Turn to Luke 13:23-30 and you will find a similar word in a different context but it is the same idea. It will help us to understand what Jesus is saying here because He is dealing with the same area, the same concerns:

Someone asked him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?”

He said to them, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door [the narrow door where you can take nothing that belongs to you], because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’

“Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you [we had the Lord’s supper with you], and you taught in our streets.’

“But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you

yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.”

This group will be the worst of all: they have not enjoyed either the world or eternal life. (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent three elements that must be in every believer — faith, new birth, endurance.)

Who are the first and who are the last? When Jesus asked the disciples to preach the gospel, He told them to go first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Why did the Jews not get in? In Romans 9, it says they had zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Paul explains why the Jews failed to enter in and why the Gentiles succeeded in Romans 9:30-33:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who

pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

The Gentiles succeeded because they accepted Christ’s righteousness by faith. The Jews failed because they were depending on their works. But now let’s turn to Romans 10:2-3:

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

That’s what the problem is. Let’s go back to Matthew 7. I said that there are two answers that Christ gives. One is, “I never knew you.” There was not the dynamic relationship of the believer

remaining in Christ and Christ remaining in the believer [John 15:5]. That was lacking. Only when we remain in Christ can we bear much fruit and the Father will be pleased. Now look at the second half of verse 23:

“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

I want to give you two statements from the Bible. Turn to Isaiah 64:6 for a very excellent definition of sin:

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

All our “righteous acts” — prophesying in Christ’s name, doing good works, casting out devils — if motivated by self-interest, are like “filthy rags.” Self-righteousness is sinful, not because of the acts but because of the motives.

The other passage is Zachariah 3. Remember that the section we are studying in Matthew 7 is in a judgment setting. “Many will say to me in that day” is referring to the judgment and Zachariah 3 is dealing with judgment. And what does it say about the judgment? Zachariah 3:1-4:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem [a symbol of the church], rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.”

Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you [the righteousness of Christ, which qualifies us for heaven].”

The question I want to ask you, the test is: “Where is your confidence? Who are you depending on for your security? Is it in your performance like the Jews? Or are you depending upon Christ?” Number two, remember that God does want righteousness. He wants a people who are keeping the commandments. Did the Jews keep the commandments? Yes. Mechanically — in the letter. Should Christians keep the commandments? More than in the letter — in the spirit. What is the real test? Remember that this is Christ’s conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. How can I know, how can I prevent belonging to that group that will be lost? How can I know that I do not belong to that group? What test must I apply?

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount the answer is very simple. That is the beatitudes. Jesus said (Matthew 5:3):

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,” people who have no confidence in their performance and what they do.

This is the attitude we must constantly have. We may not know for sure whether what we are doing is from God or from us because the flesh is always poking its ugly head up to get some credit. But we must have the attitude “in me there is nothing good.” We must say with Paul, “Not I, but the grace of God which was in me.”

If anyone does a Christian duty in order to escape punishment or to get a reward, such religion is worth nothing. The problem with the people that Jesus is describing in Matthew 7 is that they were depending, to some degree, on their performance to qualify for heaven. Yes, God wants a people who are reflecting His character, who are doing mighty works, but we must never look at those works for our ticket to heaven. When we come to God, we must come in the righteousness of Christ. That is why, having said this in verse 23 of Matthew 7,

Jesus goes on to say in verse 24:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Is the rock Peter or is it Christ? If it is Peter, you will discover when you study Galatians that Peter fell. He stumbled and Paul had to openly rebuke him. Galatians 2:11-16:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles

to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

“Peter, you know that we are not saved by keeping the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ. Why then did you separate yourself from the Gentiles and go to the Jews? You were denying the gospel.” The Rock is Jesus Christ! That is the place that I want to build my house because I believe the storm is coming; it is almost at our doorstep.

I believe that when it comes it will come suddenly. It came suddenly to Ethiopia and it came suddenly to Uganda. When Iddi Amin took over, the very first statement he made (which I heard with my own ears) was, “I have delivered you from him [past leader] because he was leading our country to ruin. I am not a politician, I am a

military man. I want you, after I have got rid of our enemies, to choose your own leader. I will give you this privilege in one year.” (He was there for eight years). When he made that statement everybody said, “At last, God has given us the right man to rule.” They had to eat their own words.

Put your confidence in no man but in Jesus Christ. Build your house on the Rock Jesus Christ. When you come to judgment, you can bring all the good reports of what you did that you want and God will say, “I do not know you.” Never use your performance for your qualification for heaven. There is only one thing that qualifies you and me for heaven and that is the righteousness of Christ. As we stand and build on this Rock, we will bear fruit. Anyone who remains in Christ will bear much fruit and the world will see. Jesus said (Matthew 5:16):

“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

The world must recognize that the works are not coming from you; they are coming from God.

These are very strong words. I am concerned about the word “many”; it could include us here. Read the beatitudes again; do you qualify? Are you poor in spirit? Are you hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of Christ? Go down the line and apply them to yourself. This is Christ’s conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. He wants us to build on the Rock.

A true Christian will do many wonderful works but a true Christian will not depend on them for his or her standing before God. Let me give you an example. Supposing you have had a very successful day — you have been kind, helpful, a good witness, you will find it very easy to pray at the end of that day. Another day everything has gone wrong — you got up late, forgot to say your prayers, lost your temper; and you come to the end of the day and the devil says, “God will not listen to you” and you feel that you don’t have the right to pray. That is the human element in us. We are

by nature legalists. Human beings tend to depend on their feelings and success or failure. That is why I believe the Celebration Churches have such a big following: because they lean heavily on feelings. It appeals to human nature. That is why the charismatic movement is so successful because they have an “electric shock” that they think is the experience that gives them salvation and they are on dangerous ground.

But please don't go out and say I don't have to study my Bible. If you really are resting in Christ you will study. John 6:54-57 says:

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.”

What is “his flesh”? The Word of God. We will read the Bible, however, for a different reason:

because we want to grow spiritually. A true Christian will always be hungry for the Word of God, just like physically when you are hungry you want to eat. The battle that you and I have to fight is the battle with self. The most difficult form of self to fight, the most disguised form of self, is when it raises its ugly head in the context of religion. The worst form of self is self-righteousness. Faith is always a battle. It is like swimming upstream; you cannot relax. Faith is “Not I, but Christ.”

Chapter 29

Rock or Sand

Matthew 7:24-27

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

In this study I am dealing with the last two verses of the Sermon on the Mount. Our next study will deal with verses 28 and 29, which concludes this chapter. Every sermon has an application and the application and conclusion of The Sermon on the Mount actually begins in verse 13 of Matthew

7. I would like to briefly summarize what He has said before so that when we come to the concluding verses (24-27), we will see how it fits in. What Christ does in His application is paint word pictures of the contrast between the true Christian, who not only hears Him but obeys Him, and the pseudo or false christian.

The first picture is found in verses 13 and 14:

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

The true Christian enters the narrow gate. The false christian enters the wide gate, which is popular – many go therein.

The second picture that He paints is in verses 15 to 20, where He describes the fact that the true Christian is not deceived by false prophets or teachers:

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

They recognize that there are wolves in sheep’s skins. They seem to have your concern in mind but really they are wolves. The pseudo-christian is swept by every wind of doctrine. One reason is because he is not studying; he doesn’t spend time studying the Word of God.

The third picture that Christ paints is of the true Christian who rejoices in Christ alone and puts no confidence in the flesh. You will find that in verses 21 to 23:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

There Christ is warning His disciples against legalism, against the teachings of the Pharisees. He goes on to say that, “Not everyone who says, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Do you know what the will of God is? Turn to John 6. There are several statements in the New Testament, especially in the gospels as to what is the will of God. In verses 28 and 29 we read:

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to

believe in the one he has sent.”

The Pharisees were doing lots of things but they had not believed in Christ. The Christian legalist is a pseudo-christian. He claims to be a believer but he doesn't know Christ. That is why Christ says, “I never knew you.”

Now we come to the fourth and final illustration which begins in verse 24:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

First of all, remember that this was spoken in

the Middle East. The Middle East has two rainy seasons – the main one is in winter. During the dry season the river beds are dry and sandy and very often, when the rains come, they have huge floods. We had a similar problem in Africa and we lost some very dear missionaries. They were traveling and stopped at the bottom of a river bed and they heard a tremendous thunder and it was a huge wall of water because it had rained in the mountains. It swept away the car and this dear brother and African pastor with him were swept away and we never found their bodies.

Jesus says there are two men and they both build houses, but the difference is one builds on the sand and the other on the rock. Notice the introduction (verse 24):

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice....

That is the wise man. Look at verse 26 and you will notice that the foolish man has something in common with the wise man:

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man....

They both hear the Word of God. One is a superficial believer: he hears the Word of God but doesn't do what the word says.

In this study, we will look at the similarities of the two men and the differences and we will do the same thing with the houses and then we will see how the application applies to us. Obviously, both these men were believers because they both heard the message. They both had the same desires: they wanted to build a house. They desired the same thing, they heard the same thing, they planned the same thing — there were no differences in that. That is where the similarity is. The difference is where they built. They are building not very far apart. Turn to Luke 6:47 where you have the same parable but it goes into a little more detail (Luke 6:47-49):

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice [he is a believer]. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

The surface soil for both houses may be sandy but the wise man did not build on the sand because he knew it could not stand the storm so he “dug down deep.” The foolish man said “Nobody can see the foundation! Why are you wasting your time?”

The foolish man was different in that he was only concerned about the outward appearance. He conformed outwardly — he looked outwardly like

a Christian — he came to church and did all the things that outwardly we do, but his heart was not in it. He did not dig deep. You will discover that, in the whole Sermon on the Mount, Christ is constantly contrasting between the true Christian and the pseudo-christian.

When we come to the application who is the rock? Go to 1 Corinthians 3:11. We all know that Christ is the Rock. That is not the problem. Even the superficial person believes that Christ is the Rock. There is something else we need to know. This text is dealing with the foundation:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

So the Rock is not only Jesus Christ, it is the historical Jesus Christ — what He has already accomplished 2,000 years ago. He goes on in verses 12-13:

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his

work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

The only difference here and in what Christ said is the test. Christ told of a flood and here Paul uses fire. It doesn't matter how we describe the test. But, when you look at the two houses, they were very similar in appearance. The problem was not the appearance; the problem was the foundation. And the foundation is revealed only when it is tested. Here are two men who looked alike, both were Christians outwardly, but one built on the Rock and one built superficially.

Do you remember when Jesus asked the people, "Who do you say that I am?" Matthew 16:13-18:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Who is this Rock that Jesus told Peter about? Christ. The word “Rock” that Jesus uses (upon which the Church is to be built) is feminine and it can’t be Peter because he is masculine. Some say it can’t be Christ then, because Christ is masculine, too. In reality, it is the confession of Peter, “You are the Christ,” that is the Rock. That is what we build our Christianity on. My faith is built on

nothing less than Jesus Christ's righteousness. That is the Rock — the confession of Peter is what the Church is built on and no storm can destroy that Church. No storm can destroy the individual whose house is built on the Rock Jesus Christ.

Let's go to one more text. This text reveals a very important truth. Let's read 1 Samuel 16:7:

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

You can deceive your fellow man but not God!

The foundation of our Christian experience must be Jesus Christ in the heart. There is another text that says the same thing: Proverbs 16:2:

All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

This is the difference between these two men that Christ is talking about. Both of them are believers, both attend Church, both hear the message, their names are on the books, but the difference is that one has built his Christianity on the Rock Jesus Christ and the other one on himself. If you look at Matthew 7:22 you will see the foolish man described:

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’”

The foolish man says, “Lord, Lord, haven’t I cast out devils in your name, haven’t I prophesied in your name, haven’t I done many wonderful works in your name?” And what will Christ say in verse 23? “I never knew you. Your Christian experience was not based upon the Rock.” Was Christ against the works of this man? No. Were this man’s works the problem? No. The problem was he was depending on those works for his security. That is why Christ said, “I don’t even

know you.”

If you look at the message of the Sermon on the Mount, you will notice that Christ is not making a set of rules — of do’s and don’ts — but a set of values and ideals which are entirely distinct from the ways of the world. The Christian thinks, acts, and behaves differently from the world. I will give you some examples. Repeatedly in this Sermon on the Mount you will see that Christ is calling for His disciples to be unlike the Pharisees, unlike the people of the world. We have to be different. The difference has to be in our mind. Turn to Romans 8:5. Here Paul describes two kinds of mentality:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Here is one major distinction between the true and the false believer. The true believer’s heart is on the things of God. Then Paul goes on in verse 6:

The mind of sinful man is death [when the storm comes you will not be able to stand], but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;....

That is why Paul, in his counsel in Chapter 12 of Romans, says in verse 2:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The perfect will of God is that you obey him from the heart, not just superficially.

Go now to 1 John 1:6-7, which brings this same idea out very clearly. Here John is also talking of believers but he is talking of pseudo-christians — outward, insincere christians:

If we claim to have fellowship with him [we say we are Christians] yet walk in the darkness, we

lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

The context of this passage is basically what Jesus was saying. He was contrasting. The true believer who walks in the light says, “I am a sinner but it is not I, but Christ.” But look at verse 8 for the other man:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

A true Christian is one, to use the words of Paul in Philippians 3:3, who is rejoicing in Christ Jesus and has no confidence in himself:

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh....

When we go back to the pictures that Christ is painting ... let's go back to Matthew 7 and we will

see in the previous picture in verses 21-23 that Christ is describing the legalist, the one who is doing many good things but for the wrong reason. He is doing them that he may go to heaven:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

We call it antinomianism. They believe in the things of Christ, they accept the things of Christ, but it does not transform them; it doesn't touch their lives. They are no different from the unbeliever in practice. Their lives are not conformed to the light, but they are living like worldly people. This is one of the biggest problems we face here (in the United States). When an African becomes a Christian, he knows that he is coming out of paganism. So when he is

baptized, he will change his name, which sometimes is a problem, because his friends know him by his old name.

We had a pastor who had three sons and they were having a fourth one so he came to my wife and asked if she would choose a nice name for their new child. She told him that she had a book that had all kinds of names in it with their meaning. She loaned it to him. The first thing they did with the book was look up the meanings of the names of their previous sons – one was about 12 and one about 9. They had given them names of well-respected people that they had known. One name was “Cleveland,” because a man with that name had held evangelistic efforts in Africa. The other one was born about the time that John Kennedy was assassinated and so they called him “Kennedy.” They couldn’t find those two names in the book and they got worried; they came to my wife and told her that they couldn’t find their sons names in the book.

In America, the last name is the “surname” and

then you have the “first name.” But in England, the last name is called the “surname” and the first name is called the “Christian name.” The last name is the family name and they don’t use the word “first” but “Christian” name. So Jean said to them, “Cleveland and Kennedy are not Christian names” meaning “not first names.” “You took the last name of a man and used it for a first name.” Do you know what they did? They went back home horrified and they changed the names of those two sons.

The problem we have here (in America) is we believe consciously or subconsciously that we are living in a Christian country. Therefore, we don’t have to change our name; this is a Christian country. The result is that the culture moves in one direction and just a few years later the Church moves in the same direction. So sometimes there is very little difference between the culture pattern and the church’s lifestyle. But we need to realize that there is no such country as a “Christian country.” There are Christians in a country. It is true that some of the lifestyles that were first

instituted in this country were from men who were Christians. But humanism has come into this country and we are moving in a very humanistic way: we are allowing our feelings, our desires to control us. We must recognize that because, when the storm comes, the world will be swept away and, if you belong to it, you will be swept away, too.

With that in mind, I want you to look at a couple of texts. Christ is ending with the application: Please do not be a superficial Christian. He is warning his hearers that they must not be simply hearers but doers of the Word. A doer of the Word is a person who allows Christ to change his life, to transform him through the Holy Spirit. The first text is 1 John 2:15-17 and here you have the contrast – the same counsel given by the Apostle John:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the

boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

What is the will of God? As we have seen, one “will of God” is believing in Him. But please remember that believing the Word is more than a mental assent to truth. Turn now to Galatians 5:24 and we will see what it means to believe the Word. And the context, of course, is the fruit of the Spirit. This text is Paul’s conclusion to the fruits of the Spirit:

Those who belong to Christ Jesus [who believe in Christ] have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

That is the mentality of a Christian who does the will of God. He has said, “Not I, but Christ.” The “Not I” means no more should we yield or respond to the flesh and be friends with it. Look at a text in Jude: verses 21-24, talking about the last generation of Christians. Maybe we should start

with verse 20, because it has to do with building. This is the counsel:

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear — hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy....

In verses 22 and 23, he is contrasting the two groups, just like the Sermon on the Mount. There are some who will have to learn to say goodbye to the flesh in the time of trouble. Ellen G. White says that what we fail to do in this time of ease we will have to learn to do in the time of trouble.

There is another text in James 1:27. Notice how the Apostle James describes a true Christian:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Take care of those who have needs. Christ went about doing good and true Christians have a great desire to help others.

You have the same idea in James 4:4; this is in the context of “come out of her, my people”:

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

We need to realize that this is Christ’s burden as He closes this sermon. A Christian who walks in the light is a Christian who has identified

himself with Christ. Not only with the good things but also with His suffering. When we by faith link ourselves with Christ, His thoughts will become our thoughts, His desires our desires, His goals in life our goals, His ideals will be our ideals. What Christ is considering in this sermon is this: “Please don’t give me lip service. I want a heart appreciation and a heart response.”

Here is the problem: When you look at a building, can you see the foundation? No. Why? It is below the surface. It is impossible for us to judge who is a true Christian in the Church and who is not. So Christ already said that judging is not our job, but He now is saying, “Do not be a superficial Christian.” He is warning His hearers that it is not enough to hear the word of God, it is important that we also respond from the heart and say, “God, what do You want me to do?”

It is my prayer that we will not give Christ lip service but that our service for Christ will come from the heart. That our hope, our righteousness, our security will not be based on us but on Jesus

Christ. When the storm comes it will be pretty bad. You know what happened in Ethiopia when they put those young people in the camps? Only one, that I know of, among approximately 8,000 were able to stand the pressure. It is not our willpower, it is not our performance; it is our faith in the Rock Jesus Christ. Faith in the historical Christ that will take us through. Even though Christ will give you total victory over sin, you will not know it. Your nature, which is always sinful up until the Second Coming of Christ, will always tell you that you are a sinner. The closer you come to Christ, the more sinful you will feel. Therefore, the Rock that will secure you is, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and His righteousness.”

While we are building the house on the rock let that house be built on the Rock Christ. Our performance, our desires, our activities, everything must be based on Jesus Christ. We begin with the historical Christ and we end with “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” When our house is built on that Rock, our performance will simply reflect what is

already ours in Christ.

Please remember that sanctification is not adding to justification; sanctification is simply manifesting justification. Justification by faith is the Rock [faith in Christ]; sanctification is the house. When the storm comes, the house cannot stand without the foundation. The foundation is what will take you through. May God bless us as we come to the end of this Sermon on the Mount.

Our next study is not so much what Christ says as how the people respond. I want you to keep this in mind. There is a problem today that existed in the days of Christ. That is this: Jesus had no formal training; He did not have a Ph.D. He had no theological background from the human point of view. Yet the people responded and said that He spoke with authority. What made the difference? Where did He get His authority? From God.

It will not be the scholars who finish the work in this Church. It will be lay people who receive their authority from God. Never get the idea that

you don't have the training. Jesus spoke with authority because He was totally God-dependent. And you will be able to do the same thing if you are totally Christ-dependant. He will lead you to truth through the Holy Spirit and He will give you power. Jesus said to His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." Why? Because all authority has been give to Christ and He passes it on to you if you build your house upon the Rock.

Chapter 30

Voice of Authority

Matthew 7:28-29

This is our last study on the Sermon on the Mount. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7:28-29. Those of you who have the red letter edition will discover that the Sermon on the Mount finished at verse 27. What we are dealing with now in these last two verses is telling us how this famous sermon affected the listeners when Christ preached it. The reason we should spend time studying this is because it gives us opportunity to consider what affect it should have on us. Matthew 7:28-29:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Number one, they were “amazed at his teaching.” The teaching of Christ was in complete

contrast to what the people had been hearing from the scribes and Pharisees. In what sense was Christ's teaching radical so that they were astonished? You will notice in the whole Sermon on the Mount that Christ did not come to teach another law like the Pharisees; they were always adding rules. Every new rabbi would add rules. Christ, who was recognized as a teacher, did not come to add some new law. In fact, He came to condemn any method of salvation that comes from human effort. In other words, He came to give hope to the people.

He condemned all trust in human endeavors. He said that all human efforts come short of the glory of God. That's why He said (Matthew 5:20):

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

“Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.” What Christ was

saying was what He had already said in the Old Testament in Isaiah 64:6:

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

He was teaching that the righteousness of man is filthy rags. There is no way that they could get peace, there is no way they could get assurance the way the Pharisees had taught them.

The Pharisees looked at salvation by way of outward performance. Christ said, “No, your Christian living must come from the heart.” And that comes only after you have received the new life, the new covenant where the law is written in your heart. The qualifications for that new life is the beatitudes. Christ said (Matthew 5:3):

Blessed are the poor in spirit....

The Pharisees said, “Blessed are they who are

righteous in their own eyes.” So they were astonished at His teaching.

But the main emphasis that is brought out in these two verses of Matthew 7 is in verse 29:

...because he taught as one who had authority...

The authority of Christ was questioned many times. Remember when He cleansed the temple? (See Matthew 21.) They said, “Who gave you this authority?” Matthew 21:23:

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

The greatest effect, then, that this sermon had on His listeners was not so much what He said but that He spoke with authority. Now remember that this means that He drew the attention of the people not only to His message but to Himself.

The scribes and Pharisees spoke with human wisdom. They quoted — “Rabbi so and so said this,” “Rabbi so and so said this,” etc. But Christ drew attention to Himself. “You have been taught this but I say --.” The essential, vital point of all of His teaching was to draw attention to Himself. Why? Because He claimed to be the Messiah. He said (John 10:10):

“...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

You must remember that Christ came to draw people to Himself. He said in John 12:32:

“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

We must come to grips with this because the purpose of preaching is to lead people to Christ. Turn to Matthew 28 and look there at the end of His ministry. A very interesting thing happens in Chapter 28. If you look at the second half of this

Chapter, begin with verse 11:

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened.

In other words, these people who watched over the grave of Jesus explained to the chief priests that Christ had risen from the dead. “This man whom you crucified rose from the dead.” What He had predicted had come true. Now look at verses 12-15:

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers [who were watching the tomb] a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor [Pilate], we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

The chief priests rejected the authority of Christ. Look at verse 16. Now we turn from the Jews to the disciples [Matthew 28:16-18]:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

This is the authority that hearers of the Sermon on the Mount meant when they said, “He is preaching with authority.” Now He plainly says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Jesus then continues (verse 19):

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....”

This is the authority that we must never deprive Christ of. 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 23-24:

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

...But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power [authority] of God and the wisdom of God.

When Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount, He drew attention to Himself as the only source of salvation. The Pharisees drew attention to the law and the wisdom of the rabbis but Christ drew attention to Himself.

The reason I am telling you this is because we today are facing a real problem. I need to expose you to this because it has not fully come out in the open. I will put it in a nutshell, but first turn to Luke 24. I want to show you the difference here

between what the Pharisees taught and what Christ taught and why the hearers were so astonished. In Luke 24, Jesus has just risen from the dead and He meets the two men [disciples] walking to Emmaus and He walks with them. They tell Him how disappointed they were that they thought Jesus was the Messiah and now He is dead (it had happened four days before). And after they had explained their deep sorrow, listen to how Jesus responded in verses 25-27:

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

He took the same Bible that they had been taught from for years about Christ by the Pharisees and He gave it a new interpretation and He showed them that all the Scriptures point to Himself. Verses 28-30 simply go on to explain the event:

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.

Then to verse 31:

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

Suddenly they discovered that the One who was giving them the Bible Study was none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Then in verse 32:

They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Did they not know the Scriptures before? Yes.

But they had not seen Christ in the Scriptures. Why? Because the scribes and Pharisees had not presented the Word of God as it was intended.

Now we go to the New Testament. All of the Old Testament points to Christ who was to come. All of the New Testament points to Christ who has already come. With this in mind, turn to John 1. I am trying to lay the foundation to face the problem that we are facing. We as members have to face it. Chapter 1 of John, verse 1, tells us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Who is this Word? How do you know? Because verse 14a says so:

The Word became flesh....

Now look at verses 12 and 13:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become

children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Bible points to Christ. So the Bible is simply the authority of Christ in written form. Here is where the crisis is coming. Today the authority of Scripture has been questioned. I want to give you the background. The moment we question the authority of the Word of God, we question the authority of Christ. You cannot separate the Word of God from Christ.

Let me explain the problem step by step. When the Christian Church was established, the disciples and their followers preached the Bible as it is: the Word of God. This lasted for 300 years. During that time, the Christian Church's primary concern was to survive the persecution and preach the Word. That is all they did. When the persecution was over in the Fourth Century and the Church became popular, the Christian Church divided into five camps; not five denominations but into five headquarters — let us say five divisions:

Byzantine — which was in Turkey — that became Constantinople; Antioch, another headquarters; Alexandria in North Africa; Jerusalem; and Rome. These five were headquarters.

Now that peace came in, the controversies came in. There were all kinds of controversies. There was the Agape controversy, the Easter controversy, the Christological controversy, and they argued. In this argument, one of the big questions was the issue of authority. By the Seventh Century, the Christian Church in the Middle East, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria — these headquarters were swept (in the 7th and 8th centuries especially) by Islam and they lost their power. And the Church that began to become dominant was the Church at Rome. (Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., so its power was lost.)

What happened at that time is that the Church of Rome took the authority from Scripture. The authority was moved from the Bible to the Church and what the Church said you had to believe whether you liked it or not. The authority came

into the hands of the Church. For example, the Church said the earth is flat. You had to believe it, you had no choice there because the Church said so. All through the Dark Ages the Church said that the blood in your body was pumped by God Himself. You had to believe it. Then came the Reformation. The Reformation destroyed that authority. It moved the authority from the Church to Scripture. So you have the famous statement “sola scriptura” [“scripture alone”].

Well, that did not last long. By the 17th Century, we entered what is known as the scientific age. The issue of authority began once again and the authority was between the Bible [revelation] and reason. The scientific method uses reason to arrive at truth. So there was the French Revolution where reason was elevated above the Word of God. One of the problems that came up during that time was how to reconcile the Word of God and reason and the scientific discoveries.

So, to keep up with the scientific age, many of the Bible scholars moved into a new approach to

Bible study. The technical name by which we call this today is the “historical, critical method.” Adventists as a Church, ever since its beginning, have believed in the authority of the Word of God. Our Church was founded on the authority of the Word of God. What the Word said we agreed with, regardless of the scientific method. One of the key areas, of course, was creation. We believe that the world was created in six days. We can’t prove it scientifically. Hebrews 11 makes it clear that it is by faith that we believe that God created this world without depending on pre-existing matter. Hebrews 11:3:

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

By faith we believe God’s Word.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, we began sending our scholars to universities to get their Ph.D.s and they came back with the historical, critical method. And it has been building up and it

has been producing controversy until the year 1986 (or 1987 — I can't remember the year) but it was at the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro that the Church took an action and, in that action, it said: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not accept the historical, critical method as a valid approach to interpreting Scripture." (I am paraphrasing, but that is the action they took.)

Let me explain the difference. You have two things: you have revelation [what the Bible says] and you have reason. Which decides what is truth? We have taken the position that the Bible, revelation, decides what is truth. The historical, critical method says, "No, reason must decide what is truth." And that argument has been going on.

Well, I am afraid the action of that Annual Council did not solve the problem. It got worse and worse and today a majority of our scholars are leaning toward the historical, critical method. In 1989, very concerned about it, a group of scholars who are conservative got together and founded a new society. You may have heard of it. It is called

“The Adventist Theological Society.” I (jokingly) accuse them of being a secret society. It is not really a secret society but they are very careful who joins it.

In the Spring of 1990, they put out their first magazine. It is called The Journal of the Adventist Theological Society and its real concern is to try and bring the Church back to the Word of God. I will give you an example. At the General Conference at that time, they had an Adventist Forum at the Hyatt Hotel. All attendees were Adventist scholars and they said they no longer believe that the earth is 6,000 years old. They said that it is at least 150,000 years old.

I would like to just expose you to this as I am sure most of you have not seen this yet. But I will give you the first three articles in this Journal, all dealing with the issue of authority. The first article is by Francis Wernick and his article is “The Power of the Word.” The second article is by Hagele, “The Crisis of the Authority of the Bible as the Word of God.” (He is meaning in Adventism.)

And the third article is by Davidson, a professor at Andrews, “The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage.” The latter is an excellent article because he belonged to the historical, critical method and discovered that it was bankrupt and has moved now to the authority of the Word of God.

Let me read you a few statements from the first and the last articles:

“Any uncertainty about our basic beliefs and mission would soon halt our growth and result in the loss of power. This is why pluralism of beliefs upon substantial issues [on fundamental beliefs] would soon rob us of our purpose for existing and weaken the will of our people as it has in other churches.”

I agree with this. Then he quotes from Ellen G. White and listen to what he quotes from: Signs of the Times, June 25, 1902:

“The life of Christ that gives light to the world

is His Word'. [This is his response] To neglect the study of the Bible is to neglect the only source of power that can change our lives for the better. Could this be the cause of lifelessness among so many Christians? How the Bible is studied is also important. It should not be approached as we study a secular book but as the Word of God. Even though it was written by human beings it must be studied with an implicit faith that it comes from God and is the Word of Life. It should be approached with awe and reverence. Of course, we need to bring to bear all the discipline and skills of scholarship as we seek to understand its language, its background, and its writers, but we must do so always keeping in mind that it is the Word of Life given to us by God."

Listen to this one:

"The supreme authority has been reserved for the Scriptures as the Word of God. They are the test of every other authority [and I would say including my reasoning]. Even the authority of the Spirit of Prophecy, which we fully believe and

accept as given to the Church through Ellen G. White, rests upon the Holy Scriptures. We test the validity of Ellen G. White's writing by the Bible."

Then he gives a whole pile of quotations from Ellen G. White herself defending this. And now the last one is from Ellen G. White:

"Before accepting any doctrine or precept [that is, teaching] we should demand a plain 'thus saith the Lord' in its support." Great Controversy, p. 595.

Now let me turn to the last writer. Davidson gives his background. What he saying here is, unfortunately, the experience of many young men and women:

"I have not always held the Scripture authority that I now maintain. I am now convinced that the issue of the authority of Scripture is basic to all other issues in the Church. The destiny of our Church depends on how its members regard the authority of the Bible."

Then he gives his history:

“Please let me share my experience with you. I was born in a conservative Adventist home and given a solid grounding in historic Adventism’s teachings and practices under godly parents and academy Bible teachers. But in college I found myself confronted with a crisis over the authority of Scripture. In a class entitled “Old Testament Prophets,” the professor, who is no longer teaching Bible in our school, [but the damage was done] systematically went through the traditional messianic passages of the prophets and explained how they really did not foretell the coming of the Messiah.”

Compare this to what we read in Luke. Jesus took the prophets and showed the disciples how they pointed to Him. Here is now a professor who says that the prophetic messages from the Old Testament did not point to the Messiah.

“He then went through the passages Adventists

have regarded as referring to the end of time [apocalyptic prophecies] arguing that they really applied only to local situations in the time of the prophets. Then he took the passages in the prophets that are quoted in the New Testament and insisted that the New Testament writers misinterpreted and twisted them.”

How do you expect our young people to deal with that? This is a young man who had been training for the ministry. He continues:

“By the end of this course, my faith in the authority of Scripture was greatly shaken.”

Then he goes into his experience. After he finished college, he went to the seminary.

“My seminary experience in the late 1960s served to confirm the conclusion of my college Bible teacher. In an Old Testament course, I was given an assignment that amounted to half of my grade. This assignment consisted of reading a scholarly debate over the proper method of

approaching the Bible and writing a critique that had to reveal my decision as to which side in the debate was right. This assignment was a watershed in my hermeneutical pilgrimage. I agonized over the two opposing views for weeks. I was not told in class which way to cast my vote but the general tenor of the lectures, I now see, was designed to lead me in the direction of the historical, critical method.”

And, of course, this article (that Davidson was agonizing over) was by a Harvard University graduate and he (Davidson) said to himself, “How can such a man be wrong?”

“For years, while I served as a Pastor [the college sent him out as a pastor], I was an avid proponent of the historical, critical method. It was a heady experience for me. I felt good wielding the critical tools and making decisions on my own as to what I would accept as authority in Scripture and what was culturally conditional and could be overlooked. I rejoiced in my mind being the authority now.”

Then, he says, he came to the Bible Conference of 1974. And it was this that shook his position and brought about a change. And he compares his experience with that of Eve. He said:

“Like Eve, I had felt the heady ecstasy of setting myself up as the final norm, as the one who would judge the divine Word by my rational criteria. Instead of the Word judging me, I judged the Word.”

I want to add this: it has crept in among even our lay people in a very subtle way. I will give you two statements that I hear quite often. When you hear something being taught from the Bible and you say, “It makes sense to me,” that is a wrong statement. The issue is not whether or not it makes sense to you. The issue is, “Is this what the Word is saying?” You cannot make your rationale the judging. Another statement is, “It sounds reasonable.” Please notice, you must ask yourself, “What does the Bible say?” Because there are some things that do not make sense to me but I

accept it because the Bible says so. Now he concludes:

“In Adventism at the present moment I believe I can say safely, though very regretfully, these two approaches...”

[The historical, critical method and the historical method which we call the historical, grammatical method, which is accepting the Word of God as final authority — these two approaches: reason versus revelation.]

“...these two approaches to Scripture are locked in a life-and-death struggle [in our Church]. I do not want to be an alarmist and it is not my mission to seek to stir up controversy, but I cannot pretend that the problem does not exist. There are many who feel that maybe it is only semantics but my own experience based on my own hermeneutical pilgrimage has convinced me otherwise. I believe there is a true division on the issue even within Adventism and that the ultimate authority of Scripture is at stake.”

Now let's go back to the Sermon on the Mount. The people heard this on the Mount and they were astonished because He spoke with authority. That had to cause a decision among them: Shall we accept Him as the authority or shall we accept what the Pharisees are teaching? And so, when you read your Bibles, you have to ask yourself, "Do I accept the Word of God or do I accept the words of scientific men or philosophers?" Paul said [1 Corinthians 1:17]:

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

When we read the Bible, we are not simply reading words; we are reading a Book that is revealing the Words of God pointing to Christ as the only hope for man. The moment you begin to undermine the Word of God in any area and allow reason to dominate you, you will end up eventually by giving up Christ as the authority for your

salvation.

There were some who heard the Sermon on the Mount who rejected that authority. Some of the Pharisees rejected that authority. What does Christ say to them? Matthew 23:38:

Look, your house is left to you desolate.

But to those who believed in Christ — let me go back to John and remind you what happens when you accept Christ as your authority, irrespective of what people say, irrespective of what happens. Listen to John 1:12:

Yet to all who received him [the authority], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God....

It is my prayer that you will never allow your education, your brilliant mind, to say, “I know better than the Word of God.” This Book is not human words. Yes, men wrote it. In one of these articles they give an excellent example: Christ was

both God and Man; He was divinity that was revealed in humanity. The Bible is men's words; men wrote it. But they were revealing their ideas, they were not "victims to their culture" or to the mentality of their age. They were writing God's thoughts. So when I read the Bible, even though it was written by a man, I am not reading men's thoughts. I am reading God's Word. It is my prayer that we will accept Christ — not only be astonished at His authority but accept Him as our authority. And that we will make the Word of God the only measuring stick of truth.

The Bible is "thought-inspired." The words are men's. I'll tell you the difference. Here is an experiment. Go to the four gospels and read every one of them regarding what was inscribed on that little card that was nailed on the cross. Every one of them is different in words. But how many inscriptions were there? Were there four inscriptions there or only one? Which one of them was correct? They all agree in thought even if they don't agree in words. They were quoting the inscription. The words are not inspired; the

thought was inspired. If they were “word-inspired,” all of the four gospel writers would write the same words. Do you see the difference between word inspiration and thought inspiration?

There are different meanings to “word inspiration,” but basically the meaning is that the words are dictated, like a boss dictates to a secretary — word for word. God inspired ideas: He gave them to the writers and they put God’s ideas in their own words. All the Bible is united. The Bible never contradicts itself. If I find two texts that I think contradict, I have to ask, “Which of them need I study carefully so that it agrees with the teaching of Scripture?” Otherwise, I make reason the authority.

What I am saying here is that the struggle between revelation and reason is not a struggle of the scholars, it is a struggle of every believer, because we are living in a scientific age and science is telling us many things that contradict the Word of God. One thing that you must be clear on

is that science rejects any supernatural acts. So the liberal theologians today no longer believe in the miracles of Christ. Did Christ actually change the water into wine or did He hypnotize the people? One is the Bible and one is human reason. Did Christ actually rise from the dead or did the disciples deceive the people into believing that? This is the issue and that is why, when I come to the Word of God, I must accept what God says to me. When He says that I am a sinner, I accept it. Sometimes I don't feel it, but when He says I am a 100% sinner, I must say "yes." When He says I am saved by grace, I say, "Thank God."