

The Teaching on the Mountain (Mt 4.23–8.1)

The portion of Matthew that includes the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ runs from Mt 4.23 to 8.1. Because a ‘sermon’ is something that a ‘preacher’ gives in a church, and Jesus is not doing that, it seems better to call this unit what Matthew calls it— a ‘teaching’ (*didachē*, διδαχή; 5.2; 7.28-29). In this Teaching, Jesus is largely occupied with showing the real meaning of the Torah. ‘Teaching’— not ‘Law’— is the real meaning of the Hebrew word ‘*Torah*’ (from *yarah*, ‘teach’).

Since the gospel was written to be remembered, it’s not surprising that this Teaching has a careful, straightforward, and easily memorable structure. Once we see the structure, it will be easy to think about the Teaching as a whole and even to remember it in detail once we grasp the structure, because the structure itself help us to keep its content in mind. It also provides a perspective or context for each of its pieces, and shows us connections we might overlook, for instance when parts are meant to read in parallel— or *not*, as the case may be.

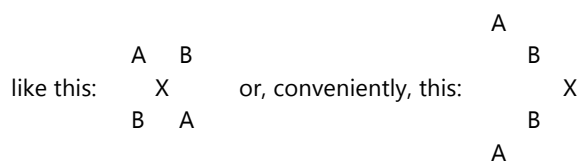
Recognizing the structure of the whole Teaching and of each of its segments will also help us to avoid some mistaken impressions that can lead to negative spiritual consequences (we’ll point out a few of these as we go).

A. Narrative Envelope 4.23–5.2/7.28–8.1

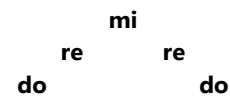
When two passages mirror each other on either side of a central text, they create an *envelope*. The mirroring elements could be anything— letters, syllables, words, sen-

tences, ideas— as long as they’re the same on both sides, they constitute an envelope.

Such an envelope marks off the material inside it as a distinct literary unit, which may have some structure of its own. When that structure is an envelope inside of an envelope inside of an envelope and so on down to a central (letter, syllable, word, verse, passage, or even book), we call the structure a *chiasm*. That’s because in its simplest form (A-B-X-B-A), it can be arranged like the Greek letter *Chi* (‘X’)—



or maybe best of all:



That last example suggests an interesting approach to the ‘step method’ of reading texts in church, doesn’t it? Anyway, some scholars find that whole books of the Bible (for instance the letters of John) are arranged *chiastically*.

So, for an example of how this works in practice, let’s look at the nice little chiasm in 4.23d-24:

4.23dα	and he was... <i>healing</i>
4.23dβ	<i>all disease and all sickness...</i>
4.24a	and his fame went out to all Syria...
4.24b	<i>all those... with diseases...</i>
4.24c	he <i>healed</i> them!

By reading the *structure*, we sense Matthew's excitement, and through him, the crowds'—

'he healed— all!— his fame!— all!— he *healed* them!'

We also see that the key point is located at the climax. Interestingly, at the same point in his story of Jesus, Mark also has a chiasm, though not the same one. Mark is interested in the *multitudes*, and focuses the picture inward, on Judea and Jerusalem (Mk 3.7-8):

a <u>great multitude</u>
from <u>the</u> Galilee was following him and
from <u>the</u> Judea and
from Jerusalem, and
from <u>the</u> Idumea, and across the Jordan,
and around Tyre and Sidon
a <u>multitude great</u>

Matthew, by contrast, describes Jesus' *healing activity* and focuses his picture *outward*, on Jesus' fame *even as far as Syria*.

Chiasms are very common in ancient literature. A chiasm is a natural and satisfying oral/aural way of arranging a story or speech. Skilled narrators could draw attention to it by the ways they emphasized or inflected their words, and audiences skilled at picking them out, delighted in doing so.

So the point of all this is that the Teaching on the Mountain (5.3–7.27) has an *envelope*, and the envelope is *chiastic*. Envelopes don't always have to be chiastic; they just have to mention the same keywords or ideas at the beginning and end. But the narrative surrounding the Teaching on the Mountain forms an envelope, and this particular envelope is chiastic.

The envelope is not part of the Teaching itself, but provides a narrative frame or setting for it, so we will call it the **Narrative Envelope**.

The Narrative Envelope of the Teaching on the Mountain

4.23-24	he healed all the sick
4.25	<i>many crowds followed him</i>
5.1	<i>he went up the mountain</i>
5.1b	and sitting down [position of <i>authority</i>]
5.2a	he <i>taught</i> them
5.2b	<i>saying</i> (<i>legōn, λέγων</i>)
TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN	
7.28a	<i>sayings</i> (<i>logous, λόγους</i>)
7.28b-29a	his <i>teaching... teaching</i> them
7.29b	as one having <i>authority</i>
8.1a	<i>coming down from the mountain</i>
8.1bc	<i>many crowds followed him</i>
8.2-17	three healings

In the opening of the Envelope (4.23–5.2) we find Jesus healing in Galilee; many crowds come, and he ascends the mountain to teach. In the closing of the Envelope (7.28–8.1ff), he will finish teaching, come down from the mountain, the crowds will follow, and he will continue his healing. Jesus goes up; Jesus goes down. As you can see, he takes the same (narrative) road both ways!

Healing Everybody: Widespread

Gossip and Many Crowds 4.23-25

23 And he was going about
in all of Galilee
teaching
in their synagogues
and proclaiming
the empire's good news
and healing
every disease
and every weakness
among the people.

23 Καὶ περιήγεν
 ἐν ὄλῃ τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ
 διδάσκων
 ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν
 καὶ κηρύσσων
 τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας
 καὶ θεραπεύων
 πᾶσαν νόσον
 καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν
 ἐν τῷ λαῷ.

'Jesus was going about in all of Galilee'. Remember that he had 'withdrawn' (*anechōrēsen*, ἀνεχώρησεν) to Galilee after John's arrest (4.12), presumably from the area along the Jordan where John had been working. In 'Galilee of the gentiles' (4.15), that is, in occupied territory, he gathered his first four disciples (4.17-22), and now in the same territory he launches his ministry (4.23). In fact we will learn that it was Galilee's ruler, Rome's client and puppet, Herod Antipas, who had arrested and would murder John.¹

The magi 'withdrew' from Herod on the sly (2.12-13). Joseph 'withdrew' to Egypt to avoid Herod (2.14), and upon returning to Israel, he 'withdrew' to Nazareth to avoid Archelaus (2.22). But when Jesus' 'withdrew' to Galilee (4.12), it was not for safety, and he is certainly not trying to remain hidden. He has chosen disciples— that is, established a faction— and now is going around spreading his message.

He does so by engaging in three activities— 'teaching... proclaiming... and healing'. The verse says *what* he was proclaiming ('the good news of the regime'), and *what* he was healing ('every disease and every weakness'— note the emphasis on 'every')— but Matthew says only *where* he was teaching ('in their synagogues'). That's because *what* he was teaching will be the *content* of the Envelope that we're opening.

Again remind yourself that Jesus was not 'preaching the gospel of the kingdom'. 'Preaching' is an activity that takes place in a church, and involves a 'sermon'. Also a 'gospel' is a book or a Christian religious message. Matthew is not telling us that Jesus is doing anything churchly, or even giving a 'religious message'. Jesus was 'proclaiming the empire's good news'. Matthew doesn't

say 'the good news of *heaven's* empire' at this point. *Basileia* (βασιλεία) means 'empire' in the sense of imperial power, or 'regime'. Jesus is making an official announcement on behalf of 'the empire'. But which?— Rome's? That's what we should think of when we hear of an 'empire'. But he's proclaiming by *healing every disease among the people!* Now, that's new! We don't know this yet, he *is* Israel's King and God, proclaiming that he is now taking power. He isn't proclaiming that there's a 'true King in heaven', far off in the sky where you can go after you die. He was *proclaiming, as Israel's King, that his regime— that is, his empire— has arrived 'on earth as in heaven'* (6.11).

Obviously, such a regime would be radically opposed to that of Caesar and his murderous puppets, the current band of satanic usurpers (cf 4.8-9) who were illegally occupying God's land and people Israel. Jesus is proclaiming— *Heaven's regime is here!* And that meant, *Rome's satanic regime is over!*²

So— what is 'heaven's regime', and how will it be different from Rome's? Isn't 'regime' or 'empire' (*basileia*, βασιλεία) already a very ominous term? What kind of 'regime' does Jesus have in mind? That's what Matthew's book is about.

Your bible probably says Jesus was proclaiming in 'their synagogues'. There's no evidence of any building called a 'synagogue' in first century Israel. A *synagogē* was simply a village assembly. Presumably the assembly might meet indoors in bad weather, if someone in the village had a house big enough to accommodate them. But otherwise, people would just meet in the trading center on the seventh day of each week, when no business was to be conducted.

So Jesus was going around proclaiming that *heaven's regime had arrived in the village assemblies and market-places of occupied Israel.*

And to prove it, he was *backing up* his announcement by healing *every* illness and *every* disease in God's people!

Jesus wasn't 'working miracles' in order to 'prove he was God'. The point of these 'works of power' was to show that heaven meant business. God's *regime* was now unfolding. He was *asserting* his reign over his *people* Israel— and that's why Matthew says Jesus was proclaiming, teaching, and healing 'among the people (*en tōi laōi*, ἐν τῷ λαῷ)'— not just among 'people' generally (compare

¹ Herod Antipas, the tetrarch, one of Herod the Great's sons, ruled Galilee and Peraea from 4 BC until he was deposed in 39 AD.

² As NT Wright points out, Jesus proclaimed heaven's regime instead of Rome's regime, and so, when the early church proclaimed 'Jesus as Lord', this meant 'Caesar is not'.

6.5; see Lk 2.14), or even among the 'crowds', but 'among *the people*'— *God's people*— that is, *Israel*.

And it was *electrifying*. Jesus' fame overflowed Galilee and spread even throughout Syria:

24 And his fame
went out
into all of Syria.

24 Καὶ ἀπήλθεν
ἡ ἀκοή αὐτοῦ
εἰς ὅλην τὴν Συρίαν·

Matthew stresses that they brought 'all' who were sick, tormented, demon-possessed, moon-struck (in the ancient world epilepsy was associated with the moon), and paralyzed— and he healed them.

and they brought to him all
who were sick with various diseases
and constrained by torments
and demonized
and moon-struck [ie, epileptic]
and paralytic
and he healed them

καὶ προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ πάντας τοὺς
κακῶς ἔχοντας ποικίλαις νόσοις
καὶ βασάνοις συνεχομένους
[καὶ] δαίμονιζομένους
καὶ σεληνιαζομένους
καὶ παραλυτικούς,
καὶ ἔθεράπευσεν αὐτούς.

The response to Jesus' Galilean tour was gossip (*akoē*, ἀκοή, literally, 'hearing'. Ears were buzzing in all of Roman Syria. This is the excitement described at the center of the first chiasm we looked at, above (4.23d-4.24)—

'he healed— all!— *his fame!*— all!— he *healed* them!'

Matthew underscores all this with a summary focusing on the geographic spread of Jesus' growing reputation (honor rating). The upshot of the gossip was crowds— '*many crowds*' (4.25).

25 And there followed him
many crowds

from Galilee
and the Ten Cities
and Jerusalem
and Judea
and beyond the Jordan.

25 καὶ ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ
ὄχλοι πολλοὶ

ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας
καὶ Δεκαπόλεως
καὶ Ἱεροσολύμων
καὶ Ἰουδαίας
καὶ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου.

Note that the list of places where the crowds came from more or less follows that of Mark 3.7-8 (above). It's not strictly chiasmic as in Mark, but Matthew follows Mark in naming Jerusalem centrally.

'Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan' had come out to John the Baptist (3.5), who was also 'proclaiming' the arrival of 'heaven's regime' (3.1) on the other side of the Jordan. John was big! But Jesus was *huge!* *Many* crowds came from the *whole* of Israel, and his fame extended even to *Syria!*

Keep in mind the word 'many', though. It will show up again at the end of the Teaching:

7.13 'Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are *many*.'

7.22 'On that day *many* will say to me, "Lord, Lord"' [and Jesus will reject them].

Many crowds are following Jesus, and they will continue to follow him throughout the story. But we don't know yet whether they will join his faction and 'enter'— that is, become part of 'heaven's regime', the new empire that Jesus is asserting, or not. At the end of the Teaching, Jesus will speak of *many* who prophesy, cast out demons, and work miracles in his name— and yet they will hear him say, 'Get away from me! I never knew you!' (7.22-23).

A. Seeing the Crowds, Jesus Goes Up the Mountain, Like a New Moses

5.1-2

5.1 But seeing the crowds,
he went up into the mountain,

5.1 Ἴδὼν δὲ τοὺς ὄχλους
ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος,

So, 'seeing the crowds, he went up into'— not 'a' mountain, but 'the mountain' (*to oros*, τὸ ὄρος). These words, 'he went up into the mountain', *exactly* quote the Septuagint (LXX) of Ex 19.3: 'Moses went up into the mountain of God...'.³ Interestingly, the Hebrew says only that 'Moses went up to God'. Matthew is either exploiting the Septuagint ('LXX') here, which would suggest that his audience is used to hearing the Scriptures in Greek, or that he's using a different Hebrew text than the Masoretic Text ('MT') in use today. Matthew doesn't always quote the LXX, but he does so when it suits his purpose.

At the other end of the Teaching (8.1), Matthew will say, 'coming down from the mountain', not quite exactly quoting but closely alluding to Ex 32.15: 'Moses... came down from the mountain'.

This is a way of showing that Jesus is Israel's new Moses. But there's a difference. Instead of *receiving* revelation on the mountain, Jesus *gives* revelation. (And if there's only One God who does that make Jesus?)

and once he'd sat down
his disciples
approached him:

καὶ καθίσαντος αὐτοῦ
προσῆλθαν αὐτῷ
οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ·

In the Sinai Narrative (Ex 19), the people are first commanded to go up the mountain with Moses to make a covenant with God. But they're afraid, and remain in the camp; after that, they are forbidden to go up and only Moses goes. Subsequent covenants are made *in view of* their failure.⁴ But it seems that this time, the disciples, if

not the crowds, are not afraid to ascend with Jesus. Will things go better this time?

Sitting was the normal posture of an authoritative teacher in the ancient world. (In fact bishops used to sit for their sermons, while the congregation stood.) That's why this line corresponds to the notice at the other end of the Teaching that 'he taught with *authority*' (7.29).

The *disciples* 'approached' (*proselthan*, προσῆλθαν) Jesus as you would 'approach' a man of authority. This is the first of 72 (!)⁵ uses of the word 'disciple' or its related verb (*mathētēs*, μαθητής; *manthanō*, μανθάνω, 'learn') in the gospel. It means a 'learner', an apprentice, and corresponds to the Hebrew *talmid*, one who is learning a rabbi's *talmud*, or 'teaching'.

2 and having opened his mouth
he taught them saying:

2 καὶ ἀνοίξας τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ
ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς λέγων·

The disciples approach; Jesus addresses the Teaching to *them*— *in the presence of* the crowds.

'Opening the mouth' is a biblical way of indicating that someone is about to speak. It connoted speech with power, or even prophecy, or at least in general, free and full expression.

³ 'Μωυσῆς ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τοῦ θεοῦ.'

⁴ On this topic, see John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Literature: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan,

1992) pp 51-57. Note that the translations do not always accurately reflect the text, for reasons that Sailhamer discusses.

⁵ Matthew, like all the writers of scripture, seems to use many significant words a significant number of times. I will always signal this by placing '(!)' after a number that I think is significant.

B. Discourse Envelope 5.3-16/7.13-27

Outer, narrative envelope	
<i>Up/mountain/crowds/teaching</i>	4.23–5.2
DISCOURSE ENVELOPE	
<i>Three Encouragements</i>	5.3-12
Main Teaching	5.13–7.12
<i>Three Warnings</i>	7.13-27
DISCOURSE ENVELOPE	
<i>Down/mountain/crowds/teaching</i>	7.28–8.1
Outer, narrative envelope	

The *contents* of the Narrative Envelope— the Teaching itself— open with Three Encouragements (5.3-16), and close with Three (3) Warnings (7.13-27). Thus the actual discourse— the Teaching itself— turns out to have its own envelope, a **Discourse Envelope**. This does not have a chiasmic structure, but is tied together by the keywords ‘heaven’s regime’ (5.3,10; 7.21), ‘foolish’ (5.13; 7.26), ‘cast out/into’ (5.13; 7.19), and ‘father in the skies’ (5.16; 7.21). Encouragement and warning often go together in the OT, for example in Dt 27–29. So here’s an outline of the Discourse Envelope:

The Discourse Envelope of the Teaching on the Mountain

5.3-16	Three Encouragements
5.3-12	Nine (3 x 3) Beatitudes
5.13-14	Salt of the earth
5.15-16	Light of the world / lamp in house
7.13-27	Three Warnings
7.13-14	Two gates and two roads
7.15-23	False prophets and two trees/fruits
7.24-27	Two houses and foundations

1. Three Encouragements 5.3-16/7.13-27

1. NINE (3 x 3) BEATITUDES 5.3-12

Sometimes you hear that there are eight Beatitudes. But it would be strange if the final saying on ‘persecution’ (5.11-12) introduced the subsequent ‘salt and light’ material (5.13-16) even if it addresses ‘you’ directly, like those verses do, whereas the other Beatitudes are in the third person. The ‘salt’ and ‘light’ sections say nothing of persecution, but persecution is the point of the eighth beatitude (5.3-12). So the eighth and the ninth seem to go together. And not only in the Bible, but in Jewish prayer texts and even English literature, the last member of a series is often different than others, and has some kind of twist, as from the third to the second person here.⁶ We will also see that this is a regular feature of Matthew’s way of doing lists or series. So— *nine* Beatitudes.

Nine, of course, is 3 x 3. Matthew has not organized the Beatitudes into groups of three, but once again, we find that Matthew likes the number three.

So Jesus begins his Teaching with a triple triad on who is ‘blessed’ (*makarios*, μακάριος)— i.e., ‘happy’— in heaven’s regime.

The Structure of the Beatitudes⁷

Matthew 5.3-12 consists of nine Beatitudes.⁸ The first eight are in third person,⁹ the ninth in second person.¹⁰ For a move from third person to second person in the same series, compare Si 47.12-22 and 48.1-11.

The first eight Beatitudes are held together by a variety of rhetorical devices:

- (1) ‘for theirs is the regime of the skies’ (5.3,10) is an envelope;

⁶ See Isa 63.10-14; Si 47.12-22; 48.1-11; Mt 1.2-16; 23.13-36; Lk 1.68-79; 6.37-38.

⁷ I am more or less plagiarizing CH Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, SC, 2004), pp 48-50 for this section.

⁸ For a series of Beatitudes, compare Si 25.7-10, Tob 13.14-16, 2En 41.2-42.14.

⁹ Cp Ps 1; 40.4; Pr 8.34; Si 14.1-2; Tob 14.14; 2Bar 10.6; 1En 99.10; 2En 42.7,11.

¹⁰ Cp 1En 58.2; Isa 33.20,29; Ps 127.2; As Mos 10.8.

(2) the subjects of the first four all begin with the letter/phoneme *p*:

- 5.3 *ptōchoi* ('poor')
- 5.4 *penthountes* ('mourning')
- 5.5 *praeis* ('meek', 'powerless')
- 5.6 *peinountes* ('hungering').

(3) the first eight Beatitudes break into two sets of four each:

- 5.3-6 36 words, ending with 'righteousness'
- 5.7-10 36 words, ending with 'righteousness'

Note also the Ninth Beatitude:

- 5.11-12 35 words (or 34 = 17x2, without 'falsely', as in some mss.

(4) the verb forms used in the first eight Beatitudes follow a chiasmic pattern:

5.3	<i>act</i>	verb <i>to be</i>	
5.4	<i>pass</i>	(divine)	
5.5	<i>act</i>	future with object	
5.6	<i>pass</i>	(divine)	

5.7	<i>pass</i>	(divine)	
5.8	<i>act</i>	future with object	
5.9	<i>pass</i>	(divine)	
5.10	<i>act</i>	verb <i>to be</i>	

(5) The ninth Beatitude is linked to the eighth by the catchword 'persecute' (*diōkō*, διώκω). It functions in three ways:

- It signals the end of the series. A series with an extended last member is frequent in ancient literature, both Jewish and pagan.¹¹
- It functions as the climax of the series.
- The shift to the second person draws the disciples into the picture.
- The shift to the second person also leads in to 5.13-16, which is also in second person.

The first four Beatitudes deal with what the disciples can expect from God. The last five focus on horizontal relationships: three where disciples have the initiative, followed by two in which disciples are acted upon.

The Beatitudes give a portrait of, and promises to disciples in each of the following situations.

¹¹ Daube, *The New Testament*, 196-201; Blass, Debrunner, and Funk, *A Greek Grammar*, 260.

Portrait	Promises	Verb
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4 beatitudes on God toward you

poor in spirit	regime of the skies	be
mourn	comforted	passive
meek	inherit the earth	future
hungering and thirsting for justice	satisfied	passive

3 beatitudes on you toward others

merciful	receive mercy	passive
pure in heart	see god	future
peacemakers	called children of God	passive

2 beatitudes on others toward you

persecuted for the sake of justice	regime of the skies	be
you, when people revile, persecute, and defame you	great reward in the skies	be

Analysis of the Beatitudes

Makarios, 'blessed', means 'happy' in the sense of *well-to-do* or *rich*. It's usually translated 'blessed', but not in the sense of having been 'blessed' by someone (that would be *eulogēmenos*, εὐλογημένος). It translates the Hebrew word '*ashrei*', a plural noun¹² that conveys the idea of prosperity, based on a root that means 'go straight ahead, advance, be or make right or firm', etc.¹³ In its exact economic sense, it means, 'O the riches of [so-and-so]!'. In view of the honor-shame setting, a good translation would be 'How honorable...'

¹² A *noun*. So the Hebrew formula is actually, 'O the riches of so-and-so', not 'happy is so-and-so', as in Greek.

¹³ *Makarios* occurs 66 times in the Septuagint. It is always the head word of a 'beatitude' (or 'makarism'), and not, for example, a simple modifier like 'that blessed man'. See Gn 30.13; Dt 33.29; 1K 10.8; 2C 9.7; Tb 13.15-16; 4Mc 7.15, 22; 10.15; 17.18; 18.9; Ps 1.1; 2.12; 31.1-2; 32.12; 33.9; 39.5; 40.2; 64.5; 83.5-6, 13; 88.16; 93.12; 105.3; 111.1; 118.1-2; 126.5-127.2; 136.8-9; 143.15; 145.5; Pr 3.13; 8.34; 20.7; 28.14; Qo 10.17; Jb 5.17; Ws 3.13; Si 14.1-2, 20; 25.8-9; 26.1; 28.19; 31.8; 34.15; 48.11; 50.28; Sol 4.23; 5.16; 6.1; 10.1; 17.44; 18.6; Isa 30.18; 31.9; 32.20; 56.2; Bar 4.4; Dn 12.12.

In saying who is 'wealthy' and therefore 'honorable' in heaven's regime, Jesus is telling his audience *whose side God is on*. Such a pronouncement, if it had any authority (and there we see the importance of Jesus' sitting down to speak, and of the notices about his authority in 7.28-29) would be *good news* (5.23) for anyone it applied to. But shockingly, Jesus does not name any of the elite, whether of Rome or of Israel. That's a big surprise. He'll need some miracles to make this stick!

He's also redefining honor itself. Nine times he ascribes honor to those unable to defend their own position or who refuse to take advantage of or to trespass on the positions of others. Their honor will come from God, not from the usual social sources. This is quite contrary to the social values of the time, but honor from God can't be gainsaid or surpassed.

So Jesus opens his Teaching by declaring that God honors those whose present life is far from enviable (compare Si 14.1-2; Dn 12.12). They are honorable, they are wealthy, because heaven's empire belongs to them (5.3,10).

We should not lose sight of this astounding reversal. In a world where wealth is honor, Jesus is saying something like,

3 *How wealthy are the poor,*
for heaven's regime is theirs!

3 Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι,
ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

Isa 61.1-7

The Greek term for 'poor' is concrete, though not exclusively economic. 'Poor' people are those who can't maintain their inherited or acquired honor in society because of misfortune or injustice. More than just involuntarily poor materially, the Greek *ptōchoi* (πτωχοί) is related to the verb *piptō* (πίπτω), which means to fall down, or bow down timidly, to cringe or beseech like a beggar. They are socially, religiously, economically, politically, and domestically vulnerable. The maimed, lame, blind, and so forth are 'poor,' regardless of how much land they might own. Similarly, a widow with millions of denarii but no son is always a 'poor widow.' Social rather than economic misfortune makes a person poor. Even if one were economically poor, as the vast majority were, cultural attention was riveted on honor-rating rather than material wealth. Being poor is a *social* reality with *economic* overtones or consequences, although among the mate-

rially desitute, relative economic poverty hardly made any difference.

Essential to understanding poverty in the ancient world is the notion of 'limited good'. In modern economies, we assume that goods are in unlimited supply. If you get more, it doesn't automatically mean someone else gets less; it just means you wanted more than s/he did and maybe got a good deal at the store. But in ancient Palestine, all goods existed in finite, limited supply and were already distributed— not only land and material goods, but honor, friendship, love, power, security, and status— literally everything. Because the pie couldn't grow larger, if one person took a larger piece, someone else automatically got a smaller one.

Isa 5.8 Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, till there is no place, so that they dwell alone in the midst of the earth!

In our economic situation today, we're starting to realize that even we Americans live in a 'limited good' society; the '.01%' are getting phenomenally wealthy, while others are losing their homes. But we have to look at the big picture to see this. In the ancient world, though, where there never was a middle class, the limits were much more obvious, and an honorable man would therefore be interested only in what was rightfully his, and would have no desire for more and more. That would be taking what belonged to others. Acquisition was stealing; every rich person is either unjust or the heir of an unjust person.¹⁴ Profit making and the amassing of wealth were automatically assumed to be the result of extortion or fraud. An 'honest rich man' was a contradiction in terms.

4 *How wealthy are the grieving,*
for they shall be comforted!

4 μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

How wealthy are the homeless,
for they will inherit the world!

5 μακάριοι οἱ πρᾶεῖς,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν.

¹⁴ Jerome, *In Hieremiam* 2.5.2; CCSL LXXIV, 61

Poverty is constantly associated with powerlessness and oppression in both Testaments.¹⁵ In the first Beatitudes, the poor 'in spirit' are associated with 'those who mourn' or 'are grieving' or even 'are aggrieved', that is, those who suffer from and protest against social evil (e.g., 1Co 5.1-2), and with 'the meek,' people who have had their inherited lands stolen and protest the fact (see Ps 37).

Matthew 11.4-5 associates the 'poor' with the blind, the lame, lepers, the deaf, and the dead. Similarly, Lk 14.13,21 lists the 'poor' with the maimed, the lame, and the blind. Mk 12.42-43 tells of a 'poor' widow (a woman socially unconnected to a male was often a victim). In Lk 16.19-31 a rich man is contrasted with poor Lazarus, a beggar full of sores. Rv 3.17 describes the 'poor' as wretched, pitiable, blind, and naked.

In our society, wealth brings power, but when power brings wealth, those who don't have wealth consider it corruption. In the first-century, however, it was simply *assumed* that power brought wealth, and powerlessness meant no access to wealth. If you had a public position, you would certainly use it to aggrandize your wealth. Since the total social wealth was limited and not particularly prone to expansion, if one person took more of the pie, others got less.¹⁶ This inevitably meant that the greedy preyed on the weak. Thus the terms 'rich' and 'poor' might sometimes be better translated as 'greedy' and/or 'shamelessly strong', and 'weak' and/or 'socially unfortunate.' Fundamentally the words 'rich' and 'poor' describe social conditions relative to one's neighbors. Those persecuted undeservedly ('for righteousness' sake') and those 'reviled falsely, on my account' receive the same reward as the poor— 'heaven's regime' (5.3,10).

6 How wealthy,
those who hunger and thirst for justice,
for they will be satisfied!

6 μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες
τὴν δικαιοσύνην,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

The Beatitudes console those who have become poor, been robbed of their lands, have no food, have become the butt of persecution and public outrage because of the *greediness* of the wealthy and the *viciousness* of the powerful.

¹⁵ An excellent study of the OT vocabulary of oppression is Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Orbis: Maryknoll, NY, 1983).

¹⁶ This is what sociologists call a 'limited-good society'.

Many people wonder what 'poor *in spirit*' means. The 'poor in spirit' (see Isa 61.1) are those whose economic poverty makes them dependent solely on God (see Ps 12.5). This is defined by the parallel phrases in the other beatitudes: the blessed are not just those who 'hunger and thirst', or are 'persecuted', but those who hunger and thirst or are persecuted '*for the sake of justice (or righteousness)*'. Not just the ritually pure, but the pure *in heart*. Not just the abused or persecuted or slandered, but those who suffer 'for my sake'— these are 'well off indeed!'

But there is more: to be 'rich' meant having the power or capacity to take from someone weaker what was rightfully his. By the same token, being 'poor' meant you couldn't defend what was yours. It meant falling below the status at which you were born. You were defenseless, without recourse. You could not exploit others, but were vulnerable to exploitation. To be poor *in spirit*, then, meant not even to attempt to exploit others, even if you could.

The psalmist said that the 'meek' or 'humble' (*praeis*, πρᾶεῖς), not the strong, would inherit the land (Ps 37.11). Isaiah announces that Israel's *exiles*, long dispossessed of their land, will inherit it a second time (Isa 61.7). Jesus is announcing the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise.

Later, Jesus himself will be called 'meek/humble' (11.29; 21.6), like Moses (Nm 12.3).

In the same context in Isaiah that we just mentioned, those who *mourn* will be comforted. Their 'mourning' is not just over personal loss, but over Israel's fallen and oppressed state:

Isa 61.1-4,7-8 The spirit of the Lord Ὑἠωῆ is upon me, because Ὑἠωῆ has chosen me. He has commissioned me to encourage the *poor*, to help the brokenhearted, to decree the release of captives, and the freeing of prisoners,

2 to announce the year when the Ὑἠωῆ will show his favor, the day when our God will seek vengeance, to *comfort all who mourn*,

3 to strengthen *those who mourn* in Zion, by giving them a turban instead of ashes, oil of gladness instead of *mourning*, a garment of praise instead of discouragement. They will be called oaks of *righteousness*, trees planted by Ὑἠωῆ to reveal his splendor.

4 They will rebuild the perpetual ruins and restore the places that were deso-

late; they will reestablish the ruined cities, the places that have been desolate since ancient times. ...

7 Instead of shame, you will get a double portion; instead of humiliation, they will rejoice over the land they receive. Yes, they will possess a double portion in their land and experience lasting joy.

8 For I am the Lord, loving righteousness and hating the exploitations of injustice; I will pay them for their hard work righteously, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

7 *How wealthy are those faithful to the covenant,*
for they will find [God's] covenant faithfulness!

7 μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

'Mercy' is not the same as compassion, but implies the repayment of interpersonal debts, *rather than blowing them off because the person you owe is at a social disadvantage*. We consistently psychologize because we have no other context for thinking about these things beyond our own cultural tendency to read everything as about individuals and their feelings, but the underlying Hebrew words *hen* and *hesed* are *covenant* terms. The merciful are those who keep their covenants— business or otherwise— in the framework of God's covenant with Israel. They will receive the same treatment from God.

8 *How wealthy are the clean in heart,*
for they will see God!

8 μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.

'Cleanliness' or 'purity', whether of heart or anything else, has to do with socially shared systems of meaning that tell when some person, thing, or activity is out of place ('dirty' and/or 'deviant'). In Israel, this was established in the great purity codes of the Torah, which were primarily concerned with what was fit for Temple use or Temple participation.

The 'heart' is the human faculty of emotion-fused thinking, and is something close to our word 'conscience'.

To be 'clean of heart' is to have one's thinking and feeling attuned to God's point of view regarding people, things, and activities. Your 'heart' (not just your external behavior) is ready to enter the Temple, that is, God's dwelling place:

Ps 23.3-5 3 Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord? And who shall stand in his Holy Place?

4 He who is innocent in hands and *clean in heart*; who has not occupied his soul with empty things, and has not sworn deceitfully against his neighbor.

The reward Jesus promises to the pure of heart is that 'they shall see God'. 'Seeing God' generally refers to the goal of pilgrimage. All the joys and experiences bound up with pilgrimage to the Temple are available to one who is 'pure of heart.'

Ps 23.3-5 5 This one will receive blessing from the Lord and mercy from God his savior.

9 *How wealthy are the peacemakers,*
for they will be called God's sons!

9 μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί,
ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται.

'Peace' (Heb. *shalom*) refers to the presence of what is necessary for a meaningful human existence; 'peacemakers' are those who work toward this end. Their reward is to be called 'sons of God' by God himself (as the 'divine passive' indicates), that is, they will be honored by God as part of his 'family', with all the protection and assurance that such a powerful kinsman affords.

10 *How wealthy are those persecuted because of justice,*
for theirs is the empire of the skies!

10 μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι
ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης,
ὅτι αὐτῶν ἔστιν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

11 *How wealthy are you whenever they abuse you and persecute you, and say every wicked thing against you, [lying about it] because of me,*

11 μακάριοι ἔστε
 ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς
 καὶ διώξωσιν
 καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν
 [ψευδόμενοι] ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ.

All the foregoing statements were made in general terms, in the third person plural, but Jesus now addresses the audience directly by changing to the second person plural. He himself directly honors those who suffer reproach, persecution and reviling for his sake.

He also switches from persecution 'because of justice' (5.10) to persecution 'because of *me*', a striking statement that makes Jesus himself the point on which all the social injustices he has named revolve. In what sense can that possibly be true? (Matthew's whole task is to show us. By the end of the gospel, we'll see how well he's done.)

12 Rejoice and be happy,
 for your reward/wage
 is much in the skies:

12 χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε,
 ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν
 πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Except for 'rejoice and be glad' (5.12), there are no imperatives in the Nine Beatitudes at all. These Beatitudes are not *rules* or *requirements* for entering heaven's regime. You don't have to *do* anything except 'rejoice and be glad' if you find yourself in one of these categories (5.11-12). You certainly don't go out and *find* persecution and slander— but if it comes unjustly— God honors you with great reward!

You can rejoice and be glad now because great reward is stored up for you in heaven. This does not mean that you will have to wait to go to heaven to claim it. Heaven is the sphere of God's action and the 'direction' that his blessings come from. He will bestow them when and as heaven's regime is manifest on earth (6.10). (See also 19.29.)

for thus did they persecute
 the prophets
 that were before you.

οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν
 τοὺς προφῆτας
 τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.

The Gospel repeatedly mentions that the prophets of the past were persecuted (eg, 23.31-37) and that— like John and Jesus himself— Jesus' followers, who have the same prophetic calling, could expect the same fate. Not all the prophets mentioned in Scripture suffered persecution, but they frequently complained that Israel was ignoring their messages (eg, Jr 7.25; 26.5; Lm 2.20). Moreover, Scripture depicts some of the major prophets—Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah, with whom the Gospel closely associates John and Jesus (16.14; 17.3,12)—as suffering persecution, and mentions that prophets were mocked, abused and sometimes killed.¹⁷

The second half of each 'couplet' has to do with something *God* is going to bring about. Obviously the 'meek' are not in a position to claim their inheritance. But (it is promised) they 'will' do so. These are *eschatological* statements. This is significant. They are not 'wisdom', whose purpose is *moral exhortation*. The qualities upheld in them don't show up in lists of virtues (nor are poverty, hunger, or persecution virtues in any case)— but they do often appear in apocalyptic material. *Apocalyptic* aims at *consolation*

Jesus is addressing a suffering audience directly, giving hope, consolation, and promise. He is listing the rewards that those who follow him have now and can look forward to in the future. No *particular* change in behavior is envisioned at this point.

He is also declaring that the 'poor in spirit' and those who are 'persecuted for the sake of justice' *already* own heaven's regime— 'theirs is heaven's regime'— not '*will be*'. Jesus has been going around proclaiming the arrival of heaven's regime (4.17,23). These are the kinds of people, he announces, to whom it already belongs.

2. SALT OF THE EARTH 5.13

After declaring his disciples' power ('heaven's regime'), wealth ('the earth'), and honor ('called sons of God'), Jesus now announces their *vocation*, as a Second Encouragement: They are, and are to be, the 'salt of the earth' (5.13) and the 'light of the world' (5.14-16).

13 You are the salt of the earth:

¹⁷ See 1K 18.4,13; 1Ch 16.22; 2Ch 36.14-16; Ps 105.15; Jr 26.20-23.

13 Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἄλας τῆς γῆς·

Salt, in scripture, has a variety of meanings: of course it's a seasoning (Jb 6.6), one of 'the basic necessities of human life' (Si 39.26); Elisha uses salt to *purify* drinking water (2Kg 2.19-23); sharing salt suggests *loyalty* (Ezr 4.14), as does the expression 'salt of the *covenant*' (Lv 2.13; Nm 18.19)— and perhaps at least partly for that reason, every *sacrifice* must be salted (Lv 2.13; Ez 43.24). But throughout ancient culture, salt was also an image of *wisdom* (Mk 9.50b; Col 4.6), and that seems to be upmost on Jesus' mind here, as we'll see.

Yet the image is strange to us. What is 'salt of the earth'? Unaware of the social background of this saying, commentators tend to focus on the individual words 'salt', 'earth', and so forth, to explain it. Does Jesus mean 'salt from the ground'— and thus a decent, dependable, unpretentious, 'salty' person who has the kind of wisdom you get from a life of hard, honest labor? Perhaps.

But how can salt 'lose its saltiness'? Is this about the adulteration of salt with other materials— something like the corruption of the innocent hillbilly by the blandishments of city living?

Commentators point out that the 'earth' is mentioned six times in the Teaching (5.5,18,35; 6.10,19). It belongs to God (Ps 24.1; Lv 25.23), but its inhabitants don't do the divine will (6.10) since the devil has usurped authority and now owns 'all the regimes of the world' (4.8). The earth is where disciples live, who are poor in spirit, mourning, powerless, hungry and thirsty, dominated and exploited by the ruling elite (5.3-6). But heaven's regime has arrived (4.17), and they are summoned and invited to embody that regime in ways Jesus calls for.

These explanations, while not wrong, are somehow less than satisfying. They don't quite achieve as much as their authors hope.

But a little sociology can help. Apparently, 'earth' was (and still is, in Palestinian peasant culture) a name for an outdoor, earthen oven (cf Jb 28.5; Ps 12.6). Because wood was scarce, people used chicken dung as fuel. The dung heap was *salted*, and salt plates were used as a catalyst to make the dung burn. Salt 'loses its saltiness' when the exhausted plates no longer facilitate burning. So *Luke* specifies that salt that has lost its saltiness is 'fit neither for the soil *nor for the dung heap*; they throw it away' (Lk 14.34-35). Or as *Matthew* says, it's just 'thrown on the ground and trampled on' (5.13).

So the 'salt of the earth' is a *catalyst*. The disciples are to live a flavoring, purifying, sacrificial, covenantal, and

catalytic life loyal to God's purposes. Their presence *makes things happen that wouldn't otherwise happen*.

Jesus tells his *disciples*, not the ruling elite or the synagogue, that *they* are the 'salt of the earth'. The word 'you' is emphatic— '*You* are the salt of the earth... *you* are the light of the world'. This is polemical. Neither Torah nor Temple, neither Israel nor Jerusalem, nor some group within Israel such as the Essenes or the Pharisees, but *you*, the Messiah's disciples— *you* are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

but if salt should ever become foolish,

by what is it salted?

it's good for nothing

except, after being thrown out,

to be trampled on by people.

ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἄλας μωρανθῆ,

ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται;

εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι

εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω

καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Mark's version of this saying reads, 'If salt becomes unsalty' (*halas... analon*, ἄλας... ἀναλον, Mk 9.50). As we just discussed, salt becomes unsalty when it gets 'burned out'.

But *Matthew* says, 'if salt becomes *foolish* (*mōranthēi*, μωρανθῆ). This shows us that *Matthew's* Jesus is using salt as a metaphor for *wisdom*. If the disciples, who are the 'salt of the earth[oven]' become 'foolish, how can [they] be salted?' Salt can't be salted, and what would be the point of trying?

In the OT, a 'fool' is one who acts contrary to God's will.¹⁸ In *Matthew*, a 'fool' is one who acts contrary to Jesus' teaching (7.24-27). If the community loses its connection with Jesus' teaching, it becomes foolish and 'is no longer good for anything'. It loses its effect, and thus its purpose. 'Thrown out, it's trampled underfoot by people'.

Salt that has become *foolish* is 'to be cast out' and 'trampled on' (5.13). The pearls cast before swine at the end of the Teaching will also be *trampled on* (7.6-7). At the end of the Teaching, in the closing of the Discourse Envelope, Jesus will say, 'Every tree that doesn't bring forth good

¹⁸ Cf Isa 32.5-6; 44.24-25, esp. 25; Jer 5.21; 11-16, esp. 14; Ps 14.1, 53.1; Si 16.23; 22.12.

fruit is hewn down, and *cast* into the fire' (7.19, same verb). He will also say that 'everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them, will be like a *fool*, who built his house on sand' (7.26).

God called Israel to be the salt of wisdom in the oven of the imperial situation. As such, the disciples are to listen to Jesus' words and do them (7.24), lest their 'salt' become foolish. If they don't, the world they are to catalyze and transform will only trample on them.

3. LIGHT OF THE WORLD / LAMP IN THE HOUSE 5.14-16

Jesus continues in the emphatic second person plural: 'You are the light of the world' (5.14a).

14 You are the light of the world.

14 Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου.

Matthew described Jesus' arrival in 'Galilee of the gentiles' as 'light'—

4.15-16 15 "Land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles— 16 the people who sat in darkness have seen a great *light*, and for those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, on them *light* has dawned."

As the result of Jesus' call, a community of disciples now exists to give light to the world, so that all may glorify 'your Father in the skies' (5.16). Interestingly, in Matthew's story, there are at this point only four disciples, whom he has just barely chosen in 4.18-22. So far, there are no other disciples. This is a pretty wild thing to say to four peasant fishermen on a mountain in occupied Galilee.

It'd be impossible to list all the OT references to God himself as the 'light of the world', but in 2Sm 21.17; 23.4 the image is applied to the king, and in Isaiah there are a number of passages where Israel, and particularly, Servant-Israel, is named as 'light'. Note the close connection of 'light' with 'righteousness':

Isa 42.6 I, YHWH, have called you in *righteousness*, and will hold your hand, and keep you, and give you as a covenant of the people, a *light of the nations*. (cf also Isa 49.6)

Note also the parallel— that is, the equivalence— of 'light' and 'covenant'.

In Isa 49.6, God says that Servant-Jacob is not only to restore Israel and to be '*a light to the nations*'— they/he are even to be '*my salvation* unto the end of the earth'.

In Isa 58, God says that even though the people fast and pray as if they had always been loyal, the facts of their 'loyalty' are otherwise. They complain that he doesn't answer them. He makes it clear that if they would practice justice / righteousness / covenant loyalty—

Isa 58.8-10 Then your *light* shall break forth early in the morning, and your healings shall rise quickly, and your *righteousness* shall go before you, and the glory of God shall cover you.... If you... give bread from your soul to one who is *hungry*..., then your *light* shall rise in the darkness, and your darkness shall be like noonday.

So in view of the crowds behind them, Jesus is calling his newly chosen 'Gang of Four' to undertake *Israel's* vocation. This is the purpose to which he has called them (4.18-22), the content of his teaching (4.23a), and the aim of his healing (4.23b-24).

The disciples are to manifest God's regime and saving presence. They do not exist for themselves. They continue the task given to Israel, or more specifically, to Servant-Israel, who gives his life to the task.

set on top of a mountain,
a city can't be hidden:

οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι
ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη·

The image of a 'city on a mountain' seems to intrude, since Jesus explains both 'salt of the earth' (5.13) and 'light of the world' (5.14), but says nothing further about a 'city on a mountain'. But it actually fits, if you remember that the 'city on a mountain' is Jerusalem (cf Ps 47) and/or the Temple—

Ps 43.3 O send out your *light* and your truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto your holy *mountain*, and to your tents.

(cf also Ws 9.8; Isa 2.2; Jl 4.17; Zc 8.3; Dn 9.16).

The disciples are then to fulfill what Israel is, and to be what Jerusalem is, and even what the Temple is, for the sake of the world.

As usual, this is against a background of Rome's ideas about itself. 'Light' was a common image for the emperor and his regime. Cicero described Rome as a 'light to the whole world' (*In Cat* 4.11); The imperial poet Statius

praised Domitian, 'that present deity' (*Silv* 5.2.170), by noting his 'immortal brightness' (1.1.77), which shone even when he tried to dim it (4.2.41-44). He outshines constellations and the sun. People reflect his light (4.1.3-4, 23-27). Domitian comes to Rome as light to the darkness (Martial, *Epig* 8.21).

Rome has usurped but does not fulfill Israel's task. 'You' are the light of God's world (Gn 2.1), Jesus says, even though the world has fallen under the devil's control (cf 4.8; 13.38). 'You' are to *be Israel*.

but they don't light a lamp
and set it under the basket
but on the lampstand
and it shines for all those in the house.

15 οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον
καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον
ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν,
καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ.

The image of the lamp on a lampstand envisions a one-room house, since 'all in the house' can see it. The normal way to put out an oil lamp (which might have several wicks) was to put it under a basket so as not to fill the house with smoke. So the image means: 'You don't light a lamp just to put it out; you put it on a lampstand so it can shine on everybody in the house'.

16 thus
let your light shine
before men
so that they may see your good works
and glorify your father
who is in the skies

16 οὕτως
λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν
ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων,
ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα
καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν
τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Now using the logical connector 'thus' (*houtōs*, οὕτως), Jesus drives the point home: 'Let *your* light shine before people *thus*, so *that*'— and this is the ultimate point—

'they might see your good works and glorify your father in the skies'. Fulfilling Israel's vocation, the disciples are to be the agents of heaven's inbreaking regime. That is why they are not to be hidden; they work for their father's glory.

Isa 60.3 And the nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

The gospel presents a vision for a new community, not a sect separate from the world, but light for the world. The 'people' (*anthrōpōn*, ἀνθρώπων, 5.13) before whom they shine are the world, the focus of the community's mission (4.19; 28.19). Light shines when disciples live in the way outlined in the Teaching, and 'people see' God's regime manifested in their actions.

To 'see' doesn't mean just to look on, but to discern (2.2; 4.16; 13.10-17; 28.1) and to encounter (5.8) God's saving presence.

They will 'give glory to your Father in heaven'— that is, respond with true worship (contrast the devil's plea for worship in 4.9-10). The center of 'giving glory' to God in Israel is the *Temple*, but the rulers and those with them have made it a 'terrorists' cave' (*spēlaion lēistōn*, σπήλαιον ληστῶν, 21.13).

But glorifying God is not just a question of offering sacrifices and incense, or even of getting people to come and burn incense with *us* in *our* Temple. 'YHWH of hosts shall be exalted in *judgment*, and God who is holy shall be sanctified in *righteousness* (or: in *justice*)' (Isa 5.16). Jesus' Teaching (5.17-7.12) is about the *justice/righteousness* envisioned in the Torah (5.17-20).

Jesus refers to God, whose regime he manifests (4.17), as 'your Father in the skies' (5.16). This is the first of 14 (!) occurrences of this very important image for God in the Teaching on the Mountain.¹⁹ Jewish tradition associated God as '*Father*' with the formation and obedience of his people (Dt 32.6, Isa 63.16, Jr 3.19,22, Mal 1.6).

Many people think that the OT is 'about God the Father' and the NT is 'about God the Son', but the image of God as father is actually very rare in the OT— the verses just listed are just about the only places where it's found. Calling God 'father' had apparently become somewhat more common by Jesus' time, but Jesus' reference to God as '*your father*' is striking, especially because he's addressing a very non-elite faction on a hillside in Galilee, not the priests or leaders in Jerusalem.

¹⁹ See 5.45, 48; 6.1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7.11, 21; 23.9.

So we don't encounter God as father so much in the OT (although we do, there), as in the NT. It is Jesus who shows us the fatherhood of God.

'Father', of course, had another 'divine' context in Jesus' and Matthew's world. Conjoining imperial and patriarchal power, 'Father' was a title of Jupiter/Jupiter— and a title of the emperor. 'Fatherhood' naturally denotes origin, kinship, loyalty, and protection— but like 'regime' or 'empire' (*basileia*), 'father' might not seem a positive image for God in the context of first-century society. If the patriarchal and authoritarian father of the political realm and of the androcentric household is in view, Jesus' announcement that God is 'your Father in the skies' *could* be bad news.

But Matthew presents the image only *now*, after four chapters showing God as one who resists oppressive power structures (and as the one whom *they* resist), and as manifesting healing (4.17ff), mercy, and life (cf 7.13-14). For Matthew, the image of God as 'father' is defined by this and later contexts, not by Roman imperial, religious, or androcentric perspectives (cf 5.45-48) or even by common (first-century Mediterranean or other) human experience. God's 'paternal', 'patriarchal' nature is revealed and (re)defined precisely through Jesus, not by the empire, the papacy, or family psychology. Ultimately, Jesus' disciples will learn what God's 'fatherhood' means from Jesus' own relationship to the One who is uniquely *Jesus' own* Father (7.21).²⁰

These summons to fulfill Israel's vocation to be 'salt', 'light', and 'city' are quite general. Jesus does not yet say how to be or become 'salt', 'light', or 'city'; he's just asserting the fact that his disciples bear Israel's vocation, and calling them to fulfill it ('so let your light shine', 5.16). How are they to do so? That will be the subject of the central section of the Teaching (5.17–7.12).

The Teaching on the Mountain is not just moral teaching for the pious individual. In the presence of the crowds, Jesus is explaining to his four new disciples not only what it means to be *God's Israel*— that is, *who* and, in a moment, *how* they are actually to participate the project of being '*my salvation unto the end of the earth*' (Isa 49.6).

C. Inner Envelope:

Torah and Prophets 5.17-20/7.12

We've noted that the opening of the Discourse Envelope didn't actually say *how* the disciples were to *be* Israel. That will be the subject of the main part of the Teaching, its 'practice' section (5.17–7.12), which we're now about to discuss. Here Jesus will teach his audience not only how to be 'salt' and 'light', but also what it means to 'repent', in view of the fact that 'heaven's regime has arrived' (4.17).

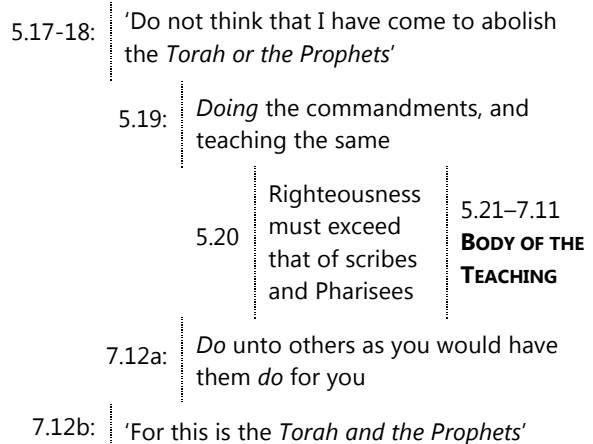
But it turns out that this 'practice' section has its own chiastic envelope. This '**Inner Envelope**' opens with a statements about the *Torah and the Prophets* (5.17-18) and about *doing* and teaching them (5.19). At the other end, the envelope will close with the Golden Rule: *doing* unto others as you'd have them *do* for you; 'this is the *Torah and the Prophets*' (7.12).

The center of the chiastic envelope is, 'Unless your righteousness (*dikaïosynē*, δικαιοσύνη) exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter heaven's regime' (5.20).

This verse is linked to 5.19 by the word 'for' or 'because' (*gar*, γὰρ). But as the center of the chiasm, it also introduces the main body of the Teaching (5.21–7.11).

So here's the setup of the Inner Envelope and its contents:

The Inner Envelope of the Teaching on the Mountain



²⁰ This is where a lot of 'feminist' theology goes off the rails. See also 6.9, 11.25-27, 12.50, 16.17, 18.19-20, 26.29,39-42; cf also Mk 14.36; Rm 8.15; Ga 4.6.

Tradition: Torah and Prophets 5.17-18

17 Don't think
that I've come to destroy
the Torah or the Prophets:
I haven't come to destroy,
but to fulfill'

17 Μὴ νομίσητε
ὅτι ἦλθον καταλύσαι
τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας·
οὐκ ἦλθον καταλύσαι
ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι.

—This chiasm is unique to Matthew. Jesus is explaining his relationship to the Scriptures, which his audience regards as authoritative. He has 'come' as 'light' to 'those who dwell in the region and shadow of death' (4.16). He attests to the continuing importance of Torah and Prophets (5.17-19), but he will demand a 'righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees' (5.20) who claim to interpret them.

The formulation of 5.17 ('Do not think...') implies that somebody *does* 'think'. At various points in the gospel, Jesus gets into altercations with the Pharisees and others over his apparent unconcern for the Torah (cf 12.2,10; 19.3; 21.17). Matthew is responding in just about all of these passages and here in 5.20 to the Pharisees, who were emerging as Israel's post-Temple leadership at the time he was writing. This section reassures both the disciples and the 'crowds' behind them (5.1) that Jesus has not come to 'destroy' the Scriptures (and hence the covenant, and hence *Israel*), but to show *definitively* what they mean. The Scriptures envision life in heaven's regime, but only as *Jesus* understands and teaches them.

Katalysai (καταλύσαι) means 'destroy'. Elsewhere, Matthew uses this verb only to refer to the destruction of the Temple (24.2; 26.61; 27.40). It appears in 2 Maccabees in reference to annulling, invalidating, or refusing to recognize the Torah's binding authority (2Mc 2.22; 4.11), and it was a key term in Greek political discussions of a state's laws: in general the founder's constitution can't just be abolished, even if modifications are in order. By Matthew's time, the Temple has been destroyed, but Israel survives. To destroy the Scriptures, though, would be even worse than destroying the Temple, for it would completely destroy Israel. So if someone thinks a man of

Jesus' fame wishes to destroy the Torah or the Prophets, he would think him a very dangerous man indeed!

Jesus repeats his denial for emphasis ('I have not come to destroy') and affirms instead, 'but to *fulfill*'. The verb 'fulfill' (*plēroō*, πληροῶ) means more than just to 'obey' the Scriptures. For 'obeying', Matthew prefers verbs like 'do' (ποιέω, *poiēō*— see the next verse) and 'keep' (τηρέω, *tēreō*, 19.17).

You might think that Jesus 'fulfills' the Torah and Prophets in teaching and doing 'love'. After all, doesn't St Paul claim that 'love fulfills the whole of the Torah'? (Rm 13.8-10; Ga 5.14). Jesus does call love the 'greatest of the commandments' (22.34-40), but he says nothing in Matthew about love as fulfilling the whole of the Torah and Prophets. So if we want to understand 'fulfilling' the Torah or Prophets *in Matthew*, we'll have to dig a little deeper.

Matthew uses the verb 'fulfill' sixteen times. In twelve of them, he introduces a specific scriptural citation.²¹ But here Jesus himself (not Matthew's narrator) says he's come 'to fulfill the Torah or the Prophets' *as a whole*. What does he mean?

'Torah and Prophets', first of all, refers to the totality of Israel's Scriptures— ie, the 'Old Testament'.²² Actually the usual full expression is 'Torah, Prophets, and Writings' (the three traditional parts of the OT) but this is often abbreviated to 'Torah and Prophets'. So Jesus is saying he has 'not come to destroy.... but to fulfill' the entire Old Testament.

In 11.13, he says 'all the Prophets and the Torah prophesied until John the Baptist'. Here we see that even the Torah 'prophesied'. Since the Torah is about the past and not about the future, we have to stop thinking of 'prophecy' as *prediction*. The word really means to 'tell forth' or to 'tell for' (God), rather than 'foretell'. The Torah is *the story of God's dealings with Israel— as told by God*. The Scriptures are *God's story of Israel*, and Jesus has come to *fulfill the purposes God has intended for Israel*.

So when Matthew points to a certain passage— say, 'a virgin is with child' (Isa 7.14) in connection with Jesus' birth, or 'out of Egypt I brought my son' (Ho 11.1) in connection with the flight to Egypt— he's not ransacking the Scriptures for contextless 'predictions' that Jesus might have mechanically 'fulfilled'. Many people went to

²¹ 1.22; 2.15,17,23; 3.15; 4.14; 5.17; 8.17; 12.17; 13.35, 48; 21.4; 23.32; 26.54, 56; 27.9.

²² See Sirach, prologue [three times]; 2Mc 15.9; 4Mc 18.10; Rm 3.21; Lk 16.16; Mt 7.12; 11.13; 22.40).

Egypt and came back; did they therefore 'fulfill' the Torah and the Prophets?

Matthew understood well enough what the prophets were saying to their own times and circumstances. Isa 7–9, for instance, which includes the prophecy about the virgin with child, is about the Syro-Ephraimite coalition that threatened Jerusalem during the time of Isaiah and Ahaz. Similarly, just before the destruction of Israel in 722 BC, Ho 11 is pronouncing doom *and restoration* for faithless Israel in view of his endless apostasies starting right after he was brought out of Egypt.

God made his ultimate purposes dependent on a *faithful* Israel. Therefore, although he carried out his promises at the time (eg, Jerusalem did not succumb to the Syro-Ephraimite coalition), his *ultimate* purposes remained unfulfilled. In fact the Prophets' books are largely about how God's purposes had *not yet* been fulfilled because Israel and her kings would not trust him.

But since God always does what he says he's going to do, the prophecies spoken to the ancients about *their* concerns and even fulfilled to some extent in their day point beyond their *immediate* fulfillment to God's *future* saving action. A virgin or young maid did give birth as a sign to Ahaz. But Ahaz's faithlessness prevented a realization of God's full deliverance. Therefore something was left undone— but God had announced the pattern, and told of the faithfulness he was looking for. So Mary gives birth in *fulfillment* of the sign to Ahaz, for Jesus comes to *fulfill the Torah and the Prophets*.

Thus in saying that he had come to 'fulfill' *all* the Scriptures, Jesus is saying that he had come to accomplish all that Israel has left undone, so that God could accomplish all the faithfulness *he* had left undone— precisely because he was waiting for a faithful Israel. That's what Jesus means when he says he came 'to fulfill' the Torah and the Prophets. He would be that faithful Israel in whom God would accomplish his final purposes.

Inside the envelope (5.21–7.11), Jesus will cite Israel's tradition fourteen (!) times and show that its *fulfillment* requires some positive action greater than the mere observation of prohibitions. Jesus has come into 'Galilee of the gentiles'— ie, Galilee *occupied by* the gentiles— as 'light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death' (4.15-16). He summons his disciples to join him and to be, themselves, the light of the world (5.14-16).

18 For amen I'm telling you,
until sky and earth
pass away
not even one jot or one tittle
shall pass away
from the Torah,
until all of it comes about.

18 ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν·
ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ
ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ,
ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία
οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ
ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου,
ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται.

The idea that Jesus has come to 'abolish the Torah and Prophets' is just wrong (5.17). And now with the word 'for' or 'because' (*gar*, γὰρ), Jesus introduces the *reason* why it's wrong. Jesus introduces this reason with a 'legitimation formula' that we will see fourteen (!) times in the Teaching— 'amen I'm telling you'²³— which vehemently asserts that what's about to follow is a definitive pronouncement.

Why is the idea that he has come to abolish the Torah wrong? Because 'until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the Torah, until it all comes about' (5.18).

Note that Jesus is speaking of the *written Torah*, not just a general idea of 'law'. He values even its smallest letters and careful marks, for nothing of the pattern revealed in the Scriptures will remain unfulfilled.

As for 'jot' and 'tittle', here are some Hebrew letters:

י כב ת ה ח

The letter on the left is a 'jot', in Hebrew, *yodh*, or as Matthew calls it in Greek, an *iōta*. It's the smallest letter of the alphabet— and still is, in English: the letter 'i'. A 'tittle' or 'horn' (*keriaia*, κεραία) is the stroke that differentiates one letter from another. The three examples in the middle are 'h', 'h', and 't'; and on the right, 'b' and

²³ The phrase occurs 58 times in Matthew. The simplest form is, 'I'm telling you', but the emphatic pronoun 'I' and/or the word 'amen' (or even 'amen amen') can be added for emphasis.

'k'— and you can see the only difference between them are their 'horns'. Effectively, Jesus is saying, 'Neither the dot of an i or the cross of a t will pass away from the Torah until it's all fulfilled'.

But Jesus qualifies his pronouncement on the Scripture's lasting authority with two temporal clauses. The first evokes the end of the age: 'until sky and earth pass away'. It may seem that this is a synonym for 'never'—

Ps 148.6 He established them forever
and forever and ever;
an ordinance he issued,
and it will not pass away.

But that is not actually true:

Isa 51.6 Lift up your eyes to the *skies*,
and look at the *earth* beneath;
for the skies vanish like smoke,
the earth wears out like a garment,
and those who dwell in it die like gnats,

but my salvation will be forever,
and my righteousness
will never be dismayed.

Isa 65.17 For behold, I am creating
new skies and a *new earth*,
and the former things
shall not be remembered
or come into mind.

The Torah belongs to the present order, which is 'vanishing like smoke', for it is dominated by evil, and God is already 'creating new skies and a new earth'.²⁴ But Jesus' own words 'will never pass away' (24.35). So there's a time limit for the Torah and Prophets— 'until it all comes about', or in other words, until it's 'fulfilled' (5.18)— and Jesus has come to fulfill it. But Jesus' own words belong to the coming Age— to God's empire which will last forever. Nevertheless, Jesus 'fulfills'; he does not 'destroy'.

Note, though, that by introducing the Torah's lasting validity with a legitimation formula ('amen I'm telling you'), Jesus effectively puts the Torah under his own authority: As the one who has come to fulfill it, '*I'm* telling you, the Torah will not pass away.' The Torah and Prophets are authoritative *as he interprets them!*

They are authoritative 'until all comes to pass' or 'comes about' (*genētai*, γένηται), see 1.22; 21.4; 26.54,56— not just because the things 'prophesied' or 'predicted' in Scripture are a kind of Fate, but because the whole of the Torah and the Prophets is 'coming about' in the mission of Jesus. The revealed pattern is finally being imple-

mented, the prophesied regime is at last breaking in— *through him*.

Diagnosis:

Loosing, Not Doing

5.19

19 Whoever therefore might loose
one of the least of these commandments
and teach people to do the same,
shall be called least
in the empire of the skies.

19 ὃς ἐὰν οὖν λύσῃ
μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων
καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους,
ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται
ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

'Therefore' (*oun*, οὖν) signals an implication, a consequence of the fact that the Torah and Prophets are in effect and binding until 'all comes to pass'. The Torah and Prophets disclose the basic 'grid' of heaven's regime in this age.

Jesus did not come to 'destroy' (*katalysai*, καταλύσαι) the Torah and Prophets, but there are some who would 'loosen' (*lysēi*, λύσει) them and teach people 'thus'.

If they do that, 'they will be called least in the regime of the skies'. As usual, a passive verb ('will be called') indicates *God's* action— to 'be called' in this case means to encounter God's judgment (see 4.21; 5.9).

To 'be called least' is to suffer shame, a very undesirable condition. Yet the expression doesn't seem to suggest total exclusion, for which the gospel has graphic and unambiguous language (13.41-42,49-50; 25.31-46), but as in any regime, there are degrees of reward (5.12; 10.41-42) and rank (cf 20.23). Perhaps, though, ashamed, one will even depart from Jesus' presence, as Peter did (26.75).

but whoever should do and teach [them],
this one will be called great
in the empire of the skies.

²⁴ Cf also 2P 3.10-12; Rv 20.11; 21.1; 1En 45.4-5

ὅς δ' ἂν ποιῆσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ,
οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται
ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

On the other hand, doing and teaching the Torah and Prophets, which belong to this age, will have a consequence of honor *in heaven's regime*: 'being called great' (by God!). One will not be called the 'greatest', because the 'greatest' in heaven's regime is God himself. One may be the 'least'— that is, the farthest removed from God in terms of honor, but God will honor those who teach his ways.

Key / Introductory Verse:

Greater Righteousness 5.20

The central verse of the chiastic Inner Envelope— again introduced with the legitimation formula— says

20 'for I'm telling you that
unless your righteousness exceeds
that of the scribes and Pharisees,
you shall by no means enter
into the empire of the skies'.
20 Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι
ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη
πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων,
οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε
εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

As the center, this verse is the point of the whole chiastic Inner Envelope. It also introduces the main body of the Teaching (5.21–7.11), which immediately follows it.

As the Inner Envelope opened (5.17-19), Jesus spoke of the *Torah and the Prophets*, and of *doing* the commandments. As it closes (7.12), he will speak of *doing* for others what you'd like them to do for you, saying that 'this is the *Torah and the Prophets*'. Here in the middle (5.20), he tells the disciples that their 'righteousness' (*dikaioσynē*, δικαιοσύνη)— that is, their *covenant faithfulness*— must 'exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees'.

So let's put it this way: the Inner Envelope indicates that the subject of its contents (the main body of the Teaching) is about the Torah and the Prophets. The center of the chiasm is about the practice of *covenant faithfulness*, or 'righteousness'. This tells us that the Teaching on the

Mountain is about *covenant faithfulness* ('righteousness'). What kind of *covenant faithfulness* do you need, if you wish to enter heaven's regime? Something greater than what the scribes and Pharisees show and teach.

Jesus introduces 5.20 with a logical connector, the third in four verses, with two more to follow— chiastically— when the envelope closes in 7.12:

- I have not come to destroy but to fulfill the Torah and Prophets (5.17), *because* (*gar*, γὰρ), amen I'm telling you, until heaven and earth pass away, neither jot nor tittle will pass from the Torah until all comes to pass (5.18);
 - *therefore* (*oun*, οὖν) the one who does/teaches the commandments will be called great, and the one who loosens/teaches them will be called least (5.19);
 - *because* (*gar*, γὰρ) (amen I'm telling you!) *unless* your covenant faithfulness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter heaven's regime (5.20);
 - *therefore* (*oun*, οὖν) do for others all that you want from them (7.12a),
- *because* (*gar*, γὰρ) this is the Torah and the Prophets.

So here's how the Inner Envelope works: Jesus has come to fulfill the Torah and Prophets. Why? *Because* the Torah is valid 'until all of it comes to pass', ie, 'until heaven and earth pass away'. *Therefore*— as a result of the Torah's enduring value— those who loose or do its commandments will respectively be shamed or honored *in heaven's regime*— which is now getting underway. Jesus has come to fulfill the Torah and Prophets *because unless* his disciples' righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, *they will not enter heaven's regime*. *Therefore*— if they wish to practice that 'greater righteousness' and thus to enter heaven's regime, they must do for others all that they want others to do for them, *because* this is the Torah and the Prophets.

This is quite deep. Jesus is saying that he has come to fulfill the Scriptures because his *disciples*' need a greater covenant faithfulness than Israel's teachers are offering. The way this is phrased suggests that the disciples have work to do, but the context indicates that Jesus has come to *show them how to do it*.

The goal of the Torah is 'righteousness', *dikaioσynē* (δικαιοσύνη), sometimes translated 'justice', but perhaps even better as 'covenant faithfulness' or 'covenant justice'. Israel did not have the abstract notion of justice

that we have today, after the Enlightenment, which supposedly based Law on Reason. In Israel, *righteousness* and *justice* meant, exactly, to act in a way that was *faithful to the covenant*.

The noun *dikaïosynē* occurs seven (!) times in Matthew's Gospel, more than in any other writing of the New Testament, except for Romans and 2 Corinthians.²⁵ It occurs only in sayings by Jesus. These sayings are found only in Matthew (3.15; 5.10,20, 6.1; 21.32) but not in the other gospels; or else, when Luke (Q), reports the saying, the word δικαιοσύνη appears only in Matthew's version of it (Mt 5.6; 6.33). Of the seven times it appears, five are in the Teaching on the Mountain.

Matthew's Jesus wants 'covenant faithfulness' to distinguish his community in contrast to outsider groups. *Dikaïosynē*, 'covenant faithfulness', 'covenant justice', or 'righteousness' refers to how *Israel* is to act, but Matthew's community is different from the usual teachers of the Torah insofar as their 'righteousness' is to 'exceed' theirs.

Matthew uses *dikaïosynē* to refer to Jesus, John the Baptist, and the disciples. John had to baptise Jesus, for it was proper for them both to fulfil all 'covenant faithfulness' (3.15). Those who hunger and thirst for 'covenant justice' are blessed (5.6). Those who are persecuted because of 'covenant faithfulness' are blessed (5.10). Unless the disciples' 'covenant faithfulness' surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Torah, they will not enter into the regime of the skies (5.20). The disciples should not do deeds of 'righteousness' (ie, display their covenant faithfulness) in front of men to be seen by them (6.1). The disciples have to seek God's regime and his 'covenant faithfulness' first of all (6.33). John came in the way of 'covenant faithfulness' (21.32).

Covenant faithfulness is more than Torah observance. Parts of Torah observance such as sabbath, kosher, and circumcision did have the purpose of separating Israel from the nations, but separation was not God's *ultimate* purpose in giving the Torah. God desires that *all* humans should come into his regime. He gave the Torah to Israel not only to separate her from the nations, but also that she might learn to be his 'salvation unto the end of the earth' (Isa 49.6).

The scribes and Pharisees were concerned above all with keeping Israel 'pure', that is, separate from the nations. That's why they enjoin punctilious observance of every

jot and tittle— tithing even mint and dill and cumin— but it's also why they fail to reach God's purpose. The scribes and Pharisees weren't just nit-picking, but they had missed the *point* of God's instruction. They keep separate well enough, but they don't enter heaven's regime (compare Lk 11.52) because their covenant faithfulness is stunted. Disciples' covenant righteousness must exceed theirs, if they want to 'enter'. It's not just about being 'separate', 'holy' and 'pure'. It's about letting 'your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in the skies' (5.16).

As always, this has practical and even political implications for Jesus' audience and for Matthew's, and hence for us. In Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees, whose covenant faithfulness was inadequate, were members of the societal elite, the governing group allied with Rome. They had a vested interest in maintaining, not reforming the structures of society, despite grave injustices (see 2.4; 3.7; 5.3-12; 7.28-29). They did and taught the commandments very zealously. As teachers, they 'sit in the chair of Moses' (23.2), and as doers of the commandments, they even tithe the spices they gather for their food— but they 'omit the weightier matters of the law— judgment, mercy, and faith— and these, Jesus says, 'you ought to have done, and not left the others undone' (23.23).

Careful and punctilious Torah observance is not wrong— you should 'not leave the others'— the tithing etc— 'undone'— but the problem is, by limiting covenant faithfulness to tithing, (23.23), not working on the Sabbath (12.1-14), washing hands (15.1-20), etc, the scribes and Pharisees *fail to see that their status quo or even their separatist aims are not God's purpose for Israel or for the world*.

Jesus *upholds* the written text— 'not one jot nor one tittle will pass away' (5.18)— but commands a 'greater righteousness' (5.20). He wants 'judgment and mercy and faithfulness' (23.23). Rather than ever-stricter prohibitions, these are *positive practices* that aim to implement *God's ultimate purposes*, not just to keep Israel 'pure'.

This would already suggest that when we make it into a demand for an *even greater moral purity than Moses taught, our usual reading of much of the Teaching is off-base*, as we'll see in some detail below.

When Matthew closes the Internal Envelope of the Teaching, he will sum up the required positive practices as 'whatever you want people to do for you, do also for them' (7.12). Note that his emphasis is not on 'thoughts' but on positive *acts*. Such will be the *summary* of the

²⁵ See CH Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament, (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2010) p 777 for the distribution of the word in the New Testament.

main body of the Teaching (5.21–7.11) as well as the closing verse of the Inner Envelope. The present verse (5.20) is both the central/key verse of the Inner Envelope, and the *introduction* to the main Teaching contained within it.

This is very important. The Inner Envelope has shown us that the main point of the Teaching is a 'greater covenant faithfulness'. Is Jesus now going to announce that the *negative prohibitions* of the Torah must be kept even more strictly than ever? That is exactly what the Pharisees thought. Is that the *greater covenant faithfulness* he desires of his own disciples?

For instance, three times the Torah says, 'Thou shalt not boil a kid in its mother's milk' (Ex 23.19; 34.26; Dt 14.21). Since by the time of Jesus no one knew what this was about, the Talmud forbids having *any* milk at a table with meat. It's fairly obvious that building an even higher 'fence around the Torah', as the rabbis put it, isn't what Jesus meant by 'greater covenant faithfulness'— but will he really 'spiritualize' the 'outward Law', for instance 'identifying [even] anger with *murder*', and thus *expanding* the commandment against murder so that 'murder now *includes* anger'? Will he announce, as a 'new commandment', that 'calling someone a fool, and failure to be reconciled with a friend or adversary' now makes you a *murderer*?²⁶

Is Jesus' idea of 'greater righteousness' or 'covenant faithfulness' that of the *Orthodox Study Bible*, which tells us at this point,

Righteousness is more than proper behavior, such as the scribes and Pharisees were advocating, and holy thoughts. It centers upon our relationship with God?²⁷

For to be fair, the scribes and Pharisees were definitely advocating more than 'proper behavior'. They were concerned with building up a 'pure' *Israel*. They certainly fasted and prayed and practiced in view of what they considered a 'right relationship with God'.

Jesus' idea of 'greater covenant faithfulness'— *his* idea of *righteousness*— is not a more exacting observance than a saint could ever even imagine. Israel should be the *light of the world* (5.14), just as he himself came as light to 'those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death'

in occupied Galilee. As a community— precisely as *Israel*— his disciples should be what Jerusalem, that *city on a hill* (5.14), was intended to be. Jesus' vision is not just private-spiritual, but covenant-social. The scribes and Pharisees are on the same page, but just as we tend to reduce Jesus' teachings to private spirituality, they reduced it to a question of national purity, and they miss what it's supposed to be about.

All along, Jesus has been speaking in the second person plural. He has not been addressing individuals so much as the minuscule community of four disciples that he's called so far. If the disciples 'loosen' the Torah and Prophets, they will lose sight of *God's purposes for Israel*. But if their righteousness does not 'exceed' that of the scribes and Pharisees, they 'will never enter the empire of the skies' (5.20). They will never participate in the completion of God's purposes, already manifest in Jesus' proclamation, teaching, and healing (4.17-25). And they must get it right, for 'many crowds' are in the background, watching and listening.

In speaking of 'the empire of the skies', Jesus is not talking about going to heaven when you die, or being saved from eternal hell when he comes again in glory. In the Teaching on the Mountain, he will call his disciples to begin shaping their *present situation* by God's own justice. As they learn to do that, they will become and be the catalytic 'salt of the earth', 'light of the world', and 'city on a mountain' (5.13-14). 'Entering heaven's regime' is something to do here and now, in a practical, active manner.

We've now opened all three of the Envelopes that contain the main part of the Teaching on the Mountain. So before we move on to their contents, it's useful to show the structure of all three envelopes together:

²⁶ *Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1993), at Mt 5.22 and also p 13.

²⁷ After this note, OSB points to further notes at Rm 1.17 and 3.26. The theory of 'righteousness' propounded here and elsewhere in the OSB is sheer Calvinism and its place in Orthodox teaching is doubtful at best. In general the editors seem not to have left their former evangelical training far behind. An 'Orthodox Study Bible' is a nice idea, but we don't have one yet!

A Triad of Envelopes

<i>Narrative Envelope</i>	
Crowds / Up Mountain)	4.23–5.2
<i>Discourse Envelope</i>	
Three Encouragements	5.3-16
<i>Inner Envelope</i>	
Torah and Prophets	5.17-18
Doing and Teaching	5.19
Greater Righteousness	5.20
14 TRIADS OF TEACHINGS	5.21–7.11
Doing unto Others	7.12a
Torah and Prophets	7.12b
<i>Inner Envelope</i>	
Three Warnings	7.13-27
<i>Discourse Envelope</i>	
Crowds / Down Mountain	7.28–8.1
<i>Narrative Envelope</i>	

D. THE FOURTEEN TRIADS OF THE TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN²⁸ 5.21–7.11

We've opened the innermost of the three envelopes, and come to the heart of the Teaching on the Mountain. Since we imagine that we're already familiar with it, let's start by looking at it in some of the ways we usually do. Not to put too fine a point on it, this will turn out to be a dead end— but we'll appreciate the road a lot better, once we've found it.

How We Usually Read the Teaching on the Mountain

The *contents* of the Inner Envelope— that is, the core of the Teaching on the Mountain— run from 5.21 to 7.11. Its first section, 'On Murder and Anger' (5.21-26) is usually taken to have the outline below. Please look at Mt 5.21-26 in your bible and go over this carefully. Pay special attention to the **headings** in this outline— 'Antithesis', 'New Commandment', 'Illustrations', etc— and try to get a sense of how the passage **flows**. If you don't agree with this analysis, or have questions about it, you might keep track of your thoughts in the margin.

MATTHEW 5.21-26

A TEACHING ON MURDER AND ANGER

A. 5.21-22: *Antithesis*

1. 5.21: *Traditional commandment:*
 - a. You have heard...
'Thou shalt not murder'...
 - b. whoever murders, will be liable to judgment.
2. 5.22: *New commandment:*
'But *I'm* telling you'...
 - a. Everyone who gets angry ('without cause', some mss.) will be liable for judgment;
 - b. Whoever says *hraká* ('idiot!') to a brother, will be liable to the sanhedrin/Sanhedrin;
 - c. Whoever says 'fool', will be liable to 'hell fire' (KJV translation).

B. 5.23-26: *Applications/Illustrations*

1. 5.23-24: *First application*
 - a. Situation:
'If you're offering your gift and remember that your brother has something against you...'
 - b. Command:
Leave the gift, go, be reconciled, and then offer the gift.

²⁸ For this section I am heavily indebted to Glen H. Stassen, 'The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5.21–7.12)', *JBL* 122/2 (2003) 267-308; W. Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: a Sociopolitical and Religious reading* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 2000); Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1992); Hans-Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, edited by Adela Y. Collins (Hermeneia Commentaries) (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 1995); and others.

2. 5.25-25: *Second application*
 - a. Command:

‘Come to an agreement with your enemy quickly...’
 - b. Situation:

On your way to court.

C. 5.26: *Conclusion*

Otherwise your enemy will have you thrown in jail... and ‘you won’t get out till you pay the last penny’.

Now, how orderly is that! So let’s see what we learn from this structure:

Jesus definitely cites an OT commandment in (A.1), no doubt about it— see Ex 20,13, Dt 5.17, Ex 21.12, Lv 24.17.

But—

1. The Old Testament commandment (A.1) is about *murder*. Why does Jesus cite it, only to say *nothing more* about murder?
2. Is (A.2) really a ‘new *commandment*’? Jesus doesn’t actually *command* anything here. The verbs are either descriptive (indicative) or subjunctive (expressing a possibility).
3. Jesus speaks in (A.2.c) of the ‘*gehenna* of fire’ (*geenna tou pyros*, γέεννα τοῦ πυρός— translated as ‘hell fire’ in the KJV and many other bibles), so we read the whole unit as a statement about how to avoid ‘hell fire’. Which sounds great— until we realize that, if that’s the case, then what he seems to be saying is something like, ‘Moses said, Don’t murder, But I’m telling you, if you ever so much as call someone an idiot, you’re going to *burn in hell forever!*’ Sure... impatience is *bad*, but— ??!
4. After issuing his ‘antithesis’ to Moses’ law— or rather, a *mortal threat* that makes an infraction into a cause of *eternal damnation*— Jesus provides two ‘applications’ (B.1 and B.2) that presumably ‘illustrate’ his point... sort of. Neither of them talks about *murder*, which was his first topic; nor do they talk about *being angry*, which was the topic of his ‘new commandment’. Both do talk about what to do when someone *else* has something against *you*. Is all this supposed to fit together??
5. In the next section of the Teaching (5.27-30), quite similar to this one, Jesus will say that ‘anyone who looks at a woman to covet her has already committed adultery in his heart’ (5.28). Later on in the book he will say, ‘Out of the heart proceed murders’ etc (15.19). So is he saying here that getting mad at someone is ‘already committing murder in your heart’? He doesn’t actually *say* that, but are we to draw the conclusion that ‘murder now includes anger’, as the OSB put it?
6. Getting angry and hurling insults *might* eventually lead to murder, but they are *not* murder, nor do you necessarily have any intention to murder someone (say, your child) if you get mad at them. Calling someone an idiot (5.21-22) is *not* actually *murdering* them! And if Jesus or anybody else says it *is*, then they’re exaggerating. Jesus *would* be the expert on heaven and hell of course, so we can’t argue with that. Yet why would just calling someone an ‘idiot’ or a ‘fool’ land you in ‘*hell fire*’? Is that an exaggeration too? And if it’s an exaggeration, then just how serious is Jesus... ever?
7. Why are ‘idiot’ and ‘fool’ (which may be impolite, but actually seem pretty mild, as insults go)— so particularly bad? Is that supposed to be a kind of limit, so that anything worse than that will *certainly* land you in hell fire forever? What’s the principle by which we could tell, then?
8. Will you actually end up *burning in hell forever* if you get mad at a driver who cuts you off, and you mutter under your breath, ‘Idiot!’? KJV and others show discomfort with this idea by translating *enochos* (ἐνοχος) as ‘in danger of’, implying that you might *not*, after all, suffer ‘hell fire’ if you do that— but *enochos* really does mean ‘guilty and liable’. In 26.66, the Sanhedrin says, ‘He is guilty (*enochos*) of death’— and they meant it. Can a translator change what Jesus said just because it’s *uncomfortable*? If the gap between crime and punishment seems so savage and unreasonable, are we sure we understand what Jesus is saying?
9. What court or courts is Jesus talking about? Anger might set you up for negative divine judgment (5.22b), and ‘hell fire’ (5.22d) also suggests the Last Judgment— but what has the *Sanhedrin*, i.e., the Jewish high council (or even a local, village *sanhedrin*) (5.22c) got to do with the *Last Judgment*? Why on earth would Jesus refer to the Last Judgment as a ‘*sanhedrin*’, a ‘Jewish judicial council’, at all? Such a metaphor occurs nowhere else in Scripture, and the Sanhedrin appears elsewhere in Matthew *only* as the evil governing body that *murdered Jesus himself*. Is the *Son of Man* who will judge the living and the dead (25.31ff) a *sanhedrin*, or does he share his throne with another?

10. If Jesus is *not* talking about the Last Judgment, it's easy enough to see how getting angry and insulting people might (after some escalation, surely!) land you in court or before a sanhedrin. But then why bring up 'hell fire'? Could a *human* court condemn you to *hell fire*, especially just for muttering something under your breath? Only *God* sees the heart.²⁹
11. If getting angry makes you liable to hell fire, what about Jesus himself, who got 'angry' (Mk 10.14)?
12. Regarding the structure of the passage itself, Jesus cites the commandment, 'Thou shalt not murder' (A.1), and then says, 'But *I'm* telling you...' (A.2). So we think of (A.2) as 'Jesus' teaching', indeed as a 'new commandment', putting emphasis there. But aren't the so-called 'illustrations' in (B.1) and (B.2) also 'Jesus' teaching'? Why are his 'illustrations' so much longer than his main points? And why doesn't he actually illustrate his main teaching, which is about getting angry and/or murder?
13. Doesn't the strong 'therefore' (*oun*, οὖν) that introduces the first 'illustration' in (B), suggest that instead of an 'illustration', he's about to state a *conclusion*, that is, his actual *point*? Is (B) really even an 'illustration', then?
14. Given that Jesus has put *all* of his *imperatives* in (B.1) and (B.2), and *no* imperatives in (A.2), shouldn't we locate his 'new commandment' where his *commandments* actually are?
15. Why do the 'examples' talk about what to do when somebody *else* is mad at *you*, when in (A.2) he was talking about when *you* get mad?
16. And finally, what is the 'Conclusion' (C) about? If this is *God's* judgment, then the 'enemy' with whom you must be reconciled must be the devil. How do you 'come to an agreement' with the devil? (In Greek, it's even worse: 'be well-disposed' (*eunoōn*, εὐνοῶν) toward him!) Does the devil hand you over to God to be judged? And who is the 'guard'? And— well, 'prison' might be an apt image for hell, but what is the 'last penny' whose payment will get you released from it— and how do you pay it?

I'm afraid the *Orthodox Study Bible's* footnotes— as well as those of just about any other study bible— are pretty useless with regard to any of these questions.

²⁹ Cf 1Sm 16.7; 1K 8.39; 1Ch 28.9; Ps 7.9; Jr 17.10; 20.12; Ac 1.24.

But the problem doesn't originate with modern study bibles. Already just 50 to 75 years after Matthew wrote his book, in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, St Justin Martyr (Justin the Philosopher), an important Christian apologist, has Trypho say, 'Your precepts in the so-called Gospel are so wonderful and so great, that I suspect no one can keep them' (*Dial* 10.2). Justin doesn't respond to that, but passes on to why Christians don't need to keep the Jewish law... perhaps leaving the faint impression that he agrees about the impracticality of Jesus' Teaching.

St Justin's near-contemporary, the heretic Marcion of Sinope, taught that the Old Testament was given by a lesser, evil god, and that Jesus came to reveal the true and good God. He apparently pointed to the Teaching on the Mountain as a good example of how Jesus replaced the Torah with a higher teaching: 'You've heard, Don't commit adultery; but I say, Don't even lust' (5.27-28).

But of course, Jesus wouldn't *revoke* a commandment like, 'Thou shalt not murder' or 'commit adultery' (5.21,27), so the Church ultimately disagreed with Marcion about the value of the Old Testament, and we've learned to say, more carefully than Marcion, that Jesus *adds to or intensifies* the commandment.

Thus St Gregory of Nyssa says,

One can divide wickedness under two headings, one concerned with works, the other with thoughts.

God has punished the former, the iniquity which shows itself in works, through the Old Law.

Now, however, he has given the Law regarding the other forms of sin, which doesn't punish the evil deed itself, so much as it guards against even the beginning of it. (*Homily 6 on the Beatitudes*)

So, while St Gregory recognizes the value of the 'Old Law', he suggests that it's concerned with external 'works' (something we should not accept without discussion), and sees Jesus as 'heightening' it, taking it to a more spiritual and interior level.

That's the kind of treatment most commenators have given these verses, from earliest times, and it's no surprise that, in this venerable vein, and based not least on standard Evangelical Protestant ideas as well, the *Orthodox Study Bible* offers,

as the Son of God whose authority is greater than Moses', Christ proclaims the new law, the righteousness *leading toward perfection*, to which the Mosaic Law and the Prophets pointed. Jesus reveals the *deeper meaning* of several Old Testament laws, *broadening their implications*.... "You shall not murder" is *expanded*

beyond the command against physically killing another.... *Murder now includes anger*, calling someone a fool, and failure to be reconciled with a friend or adversary....³⁰

Well, that sounds good, but we should hit the pause button for a moment because that last point really was remarkable. Did the OSB just say that *murder* now 'includes *failure to be reconciled with an enemy*? Remember, 5.23-24 was about someone who had something against *you*, not the other way around. So—

'Wait!— you say— 'Ever since the boss gave me that job that Amy wanted, she's been backstabbing me every chance she gets! I've tried my hardest to reconcile with her, but she won't have it. *Have I then murdered her?*'

Well, uh.... maybe OSB could work on that commentary some more.

And anyway, did Jesus really come just to make Moses' Law more strict than Moses ever dreamed?

'Christ proclaims the new law, the righteousness *leading toward perfection*', says OSB, citing 5.48, 'Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect'. Nice that Jesus is proclaiming 'perfection'. But doesn't the 'Old Law' already say the same thing?—

Dt 18.13 Thou shalt be perfect with YHWH your God.

Lev 19.2 Ye shall be holy: for I, YHWH your God, am holy.

If the goal is 'perfection', who can be 'perfect'? If (as is often said), the Law of Moses was too burdensome to keep, how can we ever avoid despair *now*, knowing that 'murder now includes anger', that lustful thoughts are *already adultery*, and *just calling somebody a fool will land you in 'hell fire' forever?*

We pay lip service to Jesus' lofty ideals, and go about our lives in the 'real world' feeling guilty for kind of ignoring him. But what does it mean to say we believe in Jesus, if we freely acknowledge that we can't follow him? What exactly do we mean by *'faith'*?

We've heard these interpretations all our lives, so we don't really even recognize the questions we feel when we hear Jesus' strange words; maybe we don't even dare say what we feel. And when OSB and others arrange the units in 5.21–7.11 as 'traditional sayings', 'authoritative counterpoints', and 'applications'— all of it 'leading toward perfection'— nobody quite notices that they've set us on a path to scrupulosity, moral burnout, and spiritual

destruction. I don't know about you, but to me, this just isn't satisfactory, and it's not the Jesus I know.

So let's have to look at the *gospel*, not the *commentary*, and see if we can figure out what *Matthew's* Jesus is talking about.

A Way Out of the Trouble

One simple rule will pretty much settle all our questions:

PAY ATTENTION TO THE VERBS!

In Greek of course. And that's a problem, because most people don't read ancient Greek and none of our translations are very accurate, especially when it comes to the biblical writers' *style*. For some reason, style isn't something most translators try to translate. Instead, they always put their authors' prose into 'good English style', and in doing so, lose whatever it is that the author communicates through his own style. How much of a problem this is! But since the translations don't help us, I have to plead for your patience as we work through some Greek. It won't be too painful, I promise. Just work at it a little at a time— it will be very rewarding.

If we pay attention to the **verbs** in the main body of the Teaching on the Mountain (5.21–7.11)— the contents of the Inner Envelope— along with other obvious markers like, 'you have heard', 'but I say', 'therefore', and 'but'— you'll find that it breaks down quite neatly into *fourteen units*. Each of these has the following structure:

- **Tradition**— Jesus cites a commandment, practice, or proverb. Verbs here are determined by the material cited. What's important is to recognize that in this part, Jesus is only *citing* something from somewhere else; this is not his commandment, but something he wants to comment on. That's obvious when he says, 'You have heard...' (5.21,27,31,33,38,43), and quotes a familiar commandment. It's also clear when he names obvious traditional practices at 6.2,5,7,16. However, when he just says, 'Do not lay up for yourselves', 'No one can', 'Do not judge', and 'Do not give the holy place to dogs' (7.6), we don't recognize the source. *We have to rely on the structure* (which, to be sure, we've seen ten times by that point) *to tell us that he's citing a proverb or popular saying in order to comment on it.*
- **Diagnosis**— After citing a Tradition, Jesus then exposes and diagnoses problematic attitudes and actions that are related to it in one way or another, and he often uses the legitimation formula, 'amen I'm telling you' either to introduce this section or to

³⁰ *Orthodox Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1993) p 32. I've added the italics to highlight the commentary's approach.

emphasize its key point. Verbs here are almost *always* in the *subjunctive or indicative*, almost *never* in the imperative. In other words, at this point in the structure, Jesus is only diagnosing— that is, *describing*— attitudes and actions, not issuing *negative commands*. That’s significant, because this part of each unit is usually taken to be an ‘antithesis’ or a ‘new commandment’, which it’s not. ‘Everyone who gets mad at his brother all the time will be liable to judgment’ is an *assertion* or a *description* that points to an *attitude problem*, not a ‘commandment’ never to get angry.

- **Prescription**— Jesus then summons his audience to behaviors that deliver from the undesirable actions or attitude problems he’s just diagnosed. The key verbs here are *always positive imperatives*, never prohibitions. In many cases, this section tends to be longer than the other two, and thus contains the main teaching in each of the fourteen units. *Through the recommended practices, a disciple actively enters into and become part of heaven’s regime.*

A subordinate clause of **Explanation** concludes the section.

Thus the main body (5.21–7.11) of the Teaching on the Mountain is thus not a series of *expanded prohibitions* plus examples, but *fourteen positive teachings* on the ‘greater righteousness’ to which Jesus has just called his disciples (5.20).

Expanded prohibitions –vs– Positive teachings

— that’s a *huge* difference! For instance, in the first unit (5.21-26), he is not saying, ‘Don’t ever get angry or you’ll burn in hell forever’, but ‘Here’s what to do if anger arises’.

As I said, there are fourteen (!) of these three-part sections. Because they all have the same three-part structure, we’ll call them ‘Triads’. So we can speak of the **FOURTEEN TRIADS OF THE TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN**’.

Now isn’t this clever— just as Matthew put a Triad of Fourteen *generations* at the beginning of his gospel, he now puts Fourteen Triads of *teachings* at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

It turns out that Matthew *likes* triads. Scholars count more than 70 of them in the whole book. So it doesn’t cause total surprise that these Fourteen Triads themselves fall into a triad of sets. As we mentioned in discussing the Genealogies, fourteen is the gematric (numeric) value of the name David (d-v-d = 4+6+4). The Triads here break down into sets of 6+4+4. It’s not clear at this point whether that arrangement means anything

in particular (v-d-d would not be a word in either Hebrew or Greek).

Each set of Triads is distinguished by a common opening phrase (‘You have heard’, ‘Whenever you’, ‘Don’t’), a common *type* of material (Torah commandment, traditional practice, popular proverb), and other stylistic and structural features. Here’s the overview:

Six Triads on the Torah

- Each of the first six Triads starts, ‘you have heard that it was said’ (other words may be added, but this is the basic form).
- Each then cites a commandment from the Torah or Torah-related material.
- This section of Six Triads on Torah is subdivided (why is this not a surprise?) into two sets of three:

Three Triads—

5.21-26 murder / reconciliation

5.27-30 adultery / honor

5.31-32 divorce / adultery

‘Again’ (5.33a),

Three Triads—

5.33-37 oaths / truth-telling

5.38-42 eye for eye / nonviolent resistance

5.43-48 hatred / blessing.

Four Triads on Deeds of Righteousness

- A warning not to practice [deeds of] *righteousness* like the ‘hypocrites’ introduces the next four Triads (6.1).
- All but the third, which continues the second, begins with, ‘whenever you’.
- Each cites one of the activities that Jews traditionally refer to as *ṣedakáh* or ‘[deeds of] righteousness’— almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

6.2-4 Almsgiving

6.5-6 Prayer

6.7-13 Prayer

6.14-18 Fasting

Four Triads on Traditional Sayings

- Four final Triads comment on what appear to be traditional sayings or perhaps proverbs, though we can’t point to any particular source for them:

6.19-23 Where your treasure is

6.24-34 Material anxieties

7.1-5 Judging others

7.6-11 Patronage system (getting ahead)

We can now take the Fourteen Triads each in turn.

Six (3+3) Triads on the Torah 5.21-48

TRIAD 1— CONCERN FOR THOSE WITH WHOM YOU'RE AT ODDS 5.21-26

The first Triad is the teaching on 'murder and anger' that we looked at above. Let's look at it again, paying attention this time to the verbs, so we can see its triadic structure. We will also need to consider some significant translation issues. And finally we will see that it's not about murder and anger at all, but about concern for those with whom you're at odds.

(1) Tradition 5.21

21 You have heard that
it was said to the ancients,
'Thou shalt not murder',
21 Ἡκούσατε ὅτι
ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις·
οὐ φονεύσεις·

Right off the bat, three things are obvious:

- An **introductory formula**, 'you have heard that it was said to the ancients'.
- A **citation** of the Torah (Ex 20,13, Dt 5.17) follows the introductory formula.
- The **verb** in the citation is a future indicative with imperative force, in classic OT style, eg, 'Thou shalt not murder'.

When we meet these again, we'll recognize the pattern. This is how each of the Six Triads on Torah start out.

A second citation follows, also taken (this time a bit more loosely) from the Torah:

and, whoever might murder
will be liable to the judgment.

ὅς δ' ἂν φονεύσῃ,
ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει.

(see Ex 21.12, Lv 24.17). Actually the word 'and' found in some translations here is *de* (δέ), which has a mild *dis-junctive* force. It's often translated 'but'. It indicates a change of topic, or at least of direction. This will come up again in a moment.

We can refer to this as a **Tradition**. In the first six Triads, the Tradition will always consist of more or less the same introductory formula and a quotation from the Torah, sometimes exact and sometimes combining more than one verse. After the Six Triads, Jesus won't use the 'you have heard' formula again, because he will be citing a traditional religious *practice* (with its own introductory word) or a popular *proverb* rather than quoting the Torah. But whatever it is, each Triad starts with a Tradition.

(2) Diagnosis 5.22

22 But I'm saying to you that

22 ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι

Immediately after the traditional teaching comes a 'formula of authority'. The simplest form of this phrase would best be translated, 'I tellya' (*legō hymin*, λέγω ὑμῖν),³¹ but here Jesus adds the word 'but' (*de*, δέ), and the emphatic pronoun 'I' (*egō*, ἐγώ), so he's saying it a little more strongly— 'But *I'm* tellin ya'. He's not just stressing what he's about to say (ie, 'But I tellya')— he's stressing the fact that *he's* about to say it, *authoritatively*.

This formula, with its contrastive 'but' and emphatic pronoun, is the reason why people take his statement as an 'antithesis' to the Law stated in the previous verse.

So why would this not be a 'new commandment'?

Well, we *can* read the contrastive word 'but' (*de*, δέ) as if Jesus is about to contradict the Tradition he's just cited. But would Jesus *contradict* the commandment against *murder*? So it's not an 'antithetic' teaching, at least.

What's more, in Greek (as in English), 'but' doesn't always have a strong antithetic force. It can mean, 'on the other hand' or 'this too'; in fact KJV translated it as '*and*' in the

³¹ The simplest form is used at 3.9, 6.25, 11.9,22,24, 12.31, 19.24, 21.43, and 26.64; with 'amen' (ἀμήν) at 5.18; 6.2,5,16; 8.10; 10.15,23, 42; 11.11; 13.17; 16.28; 17.20; 18.3,13,18-19; 19.23,28; 21.21,31; 23.36; 24.2,34,47; 25.12,40,45; 26.13,21. In Matthew, Jesus uses this 'formula of authority' no fewer than 45 times!

previous verse (5.21b)— ‘and whoever murders...’. Mostly it just marks a shift of gears or change of direction.

So Jesus isn’t really putting his word and his authority above Moses when he says, ‘But *I’m* telling you’. OSB sonorously pronounces, ‘As the Son of God whose authority is greater than Moses’, Christ proclaims the new law...’, but this is problematic. *Is* there anything about claiming ‘greater authority’ than Moses’ here? If anything, he’s claiming Moses as an authority, and then saying something on his own authority.

But he has also shifted gears as he begins to *comment* on the traditional teaching he’s just cited.

He is not ‘expanding’ Moses’ commandment so that ‘murder now includes anger’ (as OSB puts it) for at least two reasons:

- If he were ‘expanding’ the commandment, we’d expect him to say something like, ‘Moses said, Thou shalt not; but *I’m* saying, Don’t even...’. Yet there are no imperatives or ‘Neither shalt thou’ statements here, at all.
- *What he picks up on now* is not ‘murder’, but the phrase ‘will be liable to judgment’ (*enochos estai tēi krisei*, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει) in the second part of the Tradition. He’s going to talk about *liability to judgment*, not about murder.

To be sure, murder— or rather, attitudes and actions that can lead to murder— are in the background— rather than, say, theft or adultery or Sabbath-breaking. But as it turns out, this Triad is not directly going to be about murder at all, or even violence.

He does talk about things that make you *liable to judgment*, but that’s not the same as setting a new commandment alongside or in place of an old one.

everyone who goes around getting angry at his brother
will be liable to judgment;
and whoever might say to his brother, *Hraká!*,
will be liable to the sanhedrin;
and whoever might say, Fool!,
will be liable to the gehenna of fire.

πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ
ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει·
ὃς δ’ ἂν εἴπη τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ· ῥακά,
ἔνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ·
ὃς δ’ ἂν εἴπη· μωρέ,
ἔνοχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.

He says first that ‘every *orgizómenos* (ὀργιζόμενος)... will be liable to judgment’.

Orgizómenos is a present participle of the verb ‘get angry’ or ‘blow up’. The participle and the fact that it’s an ‘ize’ verb suggest continuous- or repetitive-action. In any case, it refers to an activity, not a person as such; with no particular qualifiers, it means someone who ‘goes around getting mad all the time’. We could say, ‘everyone who keeps on blowing up all the time’ or ‘who keeps on going ballistic’. The point is that it’s habitual. That’s why KJV (and OSB’s) ‘whosoever is angry’ or ‘anyone who is angry’ is misleading. The point is not just anger itself; the point is, someone *keeps on* going ballistic. Such a person has an ‘attitude problem’. In effect, Jesus is saying,

The Torah says, ‘Thou shalt not murder’, and ‘whoever does murder will end up in court’. But *I’m* telling you, *everyone who keeps on going ballistic* all the time against a brother is going to end up in court’.

Many people read this as meaning ‘don’t ever get mad!’ Yet he hasn’t said, ‘don’t ever get mad!’ He has said, ‘whoever keeps on going ballistic’. That’s a *description*, and ‘is going to be liable’ is a *future*. In the NT, futures *never command* something, except in quotations from the Hebrew (‘Thou shalt not’, etc). So *this is not a prohibition!* Jesus is not saying, ‘Thou shalt not ever even get angry’. We’ve been taught all our lives to think Jesus ‘really’ means it as a prohibition, but if we just pay attention to the Text— especially the **verbs**— we see that *he’s actually just making an observation*: ‘Whoever keeps on going ballistic is going to end up liable in court.’

Now of course if you *want* to end up liable in court, you can keep going ballistic all the time. Otherwise, you can avoid it if you do as he’s about to say.

It’s an interesting point that Jesus uses the legitimation formula, ‘but *I’m* saying to you’, *fourteen (!) times* in the Teaching on the Mountain, and what he says after it is *never* an imperative but *always* an observation in the indicative and subjunctive moods.

The word he has brought forward from the Tradition is not 'murder' but 'liable' (*énochos*, ἔνοχος). He repeats this three times, each time the key word of the phrase.

We should take Matthew seriously. Our translations are often not accurate, because translators tend to translate what they *assume* Jesus is saying. But Matthew is quite precise. By the time he wrote his gospel, he and the church had been repeating and thinking about this material for 50 years already. He's quite aware of every nuance. Jesus does issue commands in the Teaching on the Mountain, but he *never* does so in the Diagnosis section. That's just a fact. And if commentators haven't always seen it, that doesn't change what Matthew wrote. He *always* puts the commandments in the *third* section of each Triad, which is why we will call it the Prescription (instead of the 'example' or 'illustration'). But in the Diagnosis section, never.

KJV adds some extra words in 5.22: 'whosoever is angry *without a cause*'. This is really only one word in Greek (*eikē*, εἰκή)— and it's not found in the best manuscripts. But it *is* found in the 'Byzantine' manuscript tradition and hence it made it into the printed Greek texts available in the late 1500s, and thus into the 1611 KJV, the NKJV, and (what is the same), the OSB and, I suspect, into many of our Orthodox altar gospels. So Orthodox Christians need to be aware that, among manuscripts, 'Byzantine' means a manuscript tradition that developed and was used *extensively* for some centuries in the Eastern Church because the emperor paid for copies to be made, but— it was by no means *exclusive*, nor was it especially *canonical* in any formal sense, nor was anyone particularly aware of any differences. On top of that, more than anything else, the printing press established the earliest text of our modern bibles, at a time when few manuscripts were available, their differences not well understood, and nobody took those differences very seriously anyway.

But it's obvious why someone added this word *eikē*, 'without a cause'. If you think (as people have often thought) that Jesus is 'expanding' the commandment against murder to 'include anger', then *without* some such qualifier, he's being more than a little unrealistic. First of all, can you really *never* get angry? So his message is that we're all going to burn in hell then!

But can this even be right? Have I really *murdered* you, if I get mad at you? Do I even *want* to murder you— or do I just want you to *stop doing that*? And finally, doesn't Jesus break his own commandment pretty seriously at Mk 3.5, where he is 'moved with anger (*orgē*, ὀργή)', when he angrily calls his opponents 'fools' at 23.17, and, most famously, when he takes a whip to the vendors and lenders in the Temple? So if we're going to take 5.22 as a

commandment, then Jesus is going to burn in hell forever. Unless, of course, he repents— and uh, well... so he must mean, 'angry *without a cause*', right? The problem is, that leaves us asking what kind of 'cause' would be justified, since people never get angry without *some* cause!

But the Scriptures don't actually know an injunction against all anger, nor do they ever talk about what kinds of anger are 'righteous'. What they're concerned about is anger nursed and brooded on. So for instance, in Ep 4.26 St Paul says, "'Be angry, and don't sin'", quoting Ps 4.5, and adds, 'don't let the sun go down on your anger'. In other words, Get mad, but let it go. Anger happens. Paul doesn't 'identify it with murder', but tells us not to get stuck there. Jesus shows what to do when it happens. And he does so in some interesting ways.

OSB's note that 'Jesus forbids sinful anger... identifying such anger with murder' —is just not helpful, either as spiritual teaching or as Bible interpretation. In fact it's based on a faulty manuscript tradition. It might be interesting to know what they mean by 'righteous indignation, that is not sinful', but there's no need to worry about it. Seriously, if the words 'without a cause' are in your bible, you can cross them out. They don't belong there and, as you'll see, we don't 'need' them to make sense of Jesus' teaching.³²

So then— citing the commandment not to *murder*, Jesus has raised the issue of *liability to judgment*. This has provided him with an occasion to teach about *attitudes and actions* that will land you in court. 'Will be liable to judgment' (5.22b) isn't a reference to the Last Judgment; it's a practical, this-worldly point: Keep on going ballistic all the time with a brother and you're going to find yourself in court. (We'll talk about liability to 'hell fire' (5.22d) in a moment.)

The second of three parallel scenarios that can end in legal liability is 'saying *Hraká!* to a brother' (5.22c). The untranslated word '*hraká*' means something like 'Idiot!'. The fact that it's untranslated suggests that Matthew's audience included a substantial number of Aramaic speakers. A person who goes around calling the 'brethren' 'idiots' 'is going to be liable before the sanhedrin', that is, the community council.

Calling a brother an 'idiot' might seem fairly innocuous to us, but Matthew seems to be suggesting that within his social horizon, it was as bad as calling someone a

³² For some interesting patristic commentary on the extra words, Manlio Simonetti and Thomas C. Oden, eds, *Matthew 1–13*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT vol 1a (Intervarsity: 2000).

'nigger' today. Go around doing that, Jesus says, and 'you're going to end up in front of the sanhedrin'.³³

We can get an idea of what makes this insult so bad from Ps 14.1: 'The fool says in his heart, There is no God'— and from the fact that later, Jesus will denounce the Jewish leaders in the harshest terms as *murderers* (remember, that's the commandment he has cited here), hypocrites, blind guides and, indeed, as *fools* who are inwardly corrupt and lawless.³⁴

In a highly charged religious society, calling someone, especially a leader, a 'fool' or an 'idiot' *in this sense* would be very serious— and probably dangerous— indeed. When it needed to be said, and nothing else could be said, Jesus didn't hesitate to say it— and to say it quite angrily— but it certainly landed him in front of the Sanhedrin and got him killed.

Twice Jesus has mentioned a 'brother'— 'everyone who keeps going ballistic on a *brother*' (5.22b) and 'whoever says *hraká* to a *brother*' (5.22c).

A 'brother' can be a family member, a fellow Israelite, or of course any human being. Matthew refers to 'brothers' 33 times, and in 22 of these, he just means natural brothers (eg, 'Andrew his brother', 4.18). But the remaining 11 times always refer to a fellow *community* member, and in 9 of those,³⁵ the context is about *correction*. So Matthew's Jesus seems to be especially concerned throughout Matthew with preserving peace among the brethren of the community whenever there's need for correction.

Of course, at this point *in the story*, everything is very concentrated— there are only four disciples, and they are two sets of blood brothers— since after all, Jesus chose them only a chapter ago (4.18-22). But by Matthew's time, there are thousands of 'brethren'. Jesus wants each of them to avoid ending up in front of the 'sanhedrin', the community's judicial council, so that's why this whole Triad is in the second person singular.

In the last parallel scenario, he says, 'If you keep saying, Fool! you will be liable to [the punishment of] the gehenna of fire' (5.22d). In this case, Jesus does not say the insult is directed to 'a brother', and the insult itself is expressed in Greek. This makes us think the scope now includes outsiders, even though 'fool' and *hraká* ('idiot') basically mean the same thing.

Note the 1 + 2 pattern in the list of offensive actions—

angry at a brother,
saying to a brother,
saying to anyone.

—and the 2 + 1 pattern of persons insulted, and consequences—

brother liable to the court,
brother liable to the sanhedrin,
anyone liable to *gehenna*.

So 5.22 doesn't lay out three different punishments for three different crimes, but interlocking and escalating images meant to emphasize the seriousness of 'going around getting angry' and abusing people.

In the last of the three scenarios, Jesus says, 'Whoever keeps saying, Fool! is going to be liable to....'— and here the KJV, OSB, and others have 'hell fire'.

Well, again. Not really. The expression is actually 'the *gehenna* of fire' (*geenna tou pyros*, γέεννα τοῦ πυρός).³⁶ By saying 'liable to hell fire', KJV (etc) make *fire* the point and *hell* the description. So this would be 'really, really bad and everlasting fire!'— whereas Jesus is actually emphasizing the *place*, 'gehenna', of which 'fire' is only a description.

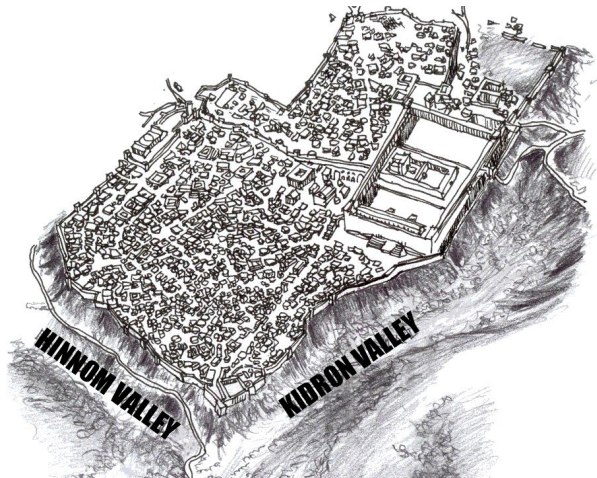
'Gehenna' has become an English word more or less equivalent to 'hell', because for us, it has lost its OT context. So we need to remind ourselves that *gehenna* was *Jerusalem's garbage dump*— an area originally known as the 'Valley of the Son of Hinnom'— in Hebrew, *ge ben-hinnom*, or *ge-hinnom* for short; *gehenna* is the Aramaic equivalent.

³³ Jesus encourages his followers to avoid the civil courts in 5.25,26,40. The poor would certainly view them as a threat, especially in a society where 'money talks'. So, 'sanhedrin' here in 5.22c, along with 18.15-18, may refer to a judicial body and legal process with the community. Depending on how much Matthew's community has separated from the larger Jewish community, this judicial council would be either the local Jewish one (for every community had its 'sanhedrin'); or a 'sanhedrin' within Matthew's largely Jewish Christian community. If the latter, then Matthew presupposes something like a sectarian or 'revolutionary' community that has its own procedures and structures to replace those of the corrupt civil realm. Compare also 1Co 6.1ff.

³⁴ Murderers, 23.29-39; hypocrites, 23.13,14,15,23,25,27,29; blind guides and fools, 23.16,17,19; inwardly corrupt and lawless, 23.28.

³⁵ See 5.22,23,24,47; 7.3,4,5; 18.15,21. Mark and Luke use "brother" in a literal sense, except at Mk 3.34 and Lk 6.42; 8.21.

³⁶ The word appears in 5.22,29-30; 10.28; 18.9; 23.15,33 (seven times); Mk 9.43,45,47; Lk 12.5; and Jm 3.6.



Commentators have probably gone too far in painting a picture of the valley as a constantly burning 'landfill', but it was certainly a place of fire and refuse. Archaeologists have discovered a layer of debris from 6-10 meters thick in the area where the Kidron and the Hinnom come together.³⁷

But Jesus' image is actually a lot richer than just a 'garbage dump', even one that's on fire. For the Hinnom Valley wasn't just any old garbage dump. It had direct role in Israel's *destruction* and *exile*. First of all, it was a place where Israel practiced human sacrifice, which was abhorrent to God:

Jr 7.31-32 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the *valley of the son of Hinnom*, to *burn their sons and their daughters in the fire* [as an offering to Molech the god of death; cf Lv 20.2-5]; which I did not command them, nor did it come into my heart.

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says Yhwh, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor Hinnomson Valley, but the Valley of Slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there is no place left. (Cf also Jr 19.6, 32.35).

2Chr 28.3 tells us that even King Ahaz— the king to whom Isaiah delivered the prophecy of Immanuel (cf 1.23, Is 7.14 LXX; Is 8.8,10)— *and who did not trust him*— 'made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and *burned his sons as an offering* [to the god of death]'. So did that most evil king, Manasseh (2Chr 33.6).

The righteous King Josiah 'defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn

his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech' there, ever again (2K 23.10).

Isaiah doesn't name this valley as such, but he clearly has it in mind in his vision of Jerusalem restored. At that time, the nations will come and offer true worship, and then—

Isa 66.24 they shall go forth [from the city], and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me: for their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be an abhorrence to all flesh.

In other words, all that doesn't belong in Jerusalem Restored will be thrown out into the garbage dump and burned. *This* is the 'gehenna of fire' that Jesus has in mind— Jerusalem's garbage as a metaphor for the place of fiery punishment where wicked 'fools' of the sort Jesus excoriates in ch 23— who have finally and totally been excluded from the Restored Jerusalem— will end up.³⁸

We really need to talk at length about 'hell', 'hades', 'hell fire', and so forth, because our popular ideas aren't very much in line with what Jesus teaches *at all*, nor really with what the church fathers teach. But there's no time for that at the moment. When Matthew's Jesus uses the word *gehenna*, though, he's thinking in biblical and first-century terms, and we should learn to think with him. What he's saying is, 'If you're going to go around going ballistic all the time and reviling and abusing people, *you won't be participating in Jerusalem's renewal*— you'll be thrown out to burn with the rest of the trash that doesn't belong inside the renewed Jerusalem!'

Jesus began by talking of human courts ('judgment', 'sanhedrin'), and now he's taken the series to an eschatological ending ('gehenna of fire'). He was not threatening his disciples with 'hell fire' if they ever so much as called a rude oxcart driver an 'idiot'. He has not 'identified anger with murder'. He has not said, 'murder now includes anger'. He has been talking about going around all the time engaging in angry, abusive, and insulting speech, especially with 'brothers', but really, with anyone. And he has said, if you do that, there will be negative consequences both in this age and in the age of fulfillment.

Remember: 'unless your covenant faithfulness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will in no way enter heaven's regime' (5.20). Heaven's regime *will* be realized in a Restored Jerusalem, the 'city on a hill' (5.14). But you're going to end up in the trash if you act like that!

Jesus' words are actually kind of funny. The accuser who goes around getting angry and calling people atheist

³⁷ R Reich and E Shukron, 'The Jerusalem City-Dump in the Late Second Temple Period' *ZDPV* 119 (2003) 12-18.

³⁸ See *1En* 27.1-2; 54.1-6; 90.26; *2Bar* 85.13; *4Ezra* 7.26-36.

fools all the time— is going to end up in the very gehenna where he expects the ‘fools’ to end up!

As a ‘new commandment’, this teaching sounds very spiritual, but it’s quite unrealistic. Who doesn’t get mad sometimes? It’s also *hugely* guilt-inducing, and in fact just not true. Just because you really *annoyed* me yesterday and I let you know it *does not* mean I’ve *murdered* you, or that I had *any* intention of doing so. Jesus isn’t even talking about the occasional flare-up. He has described and diagnosed an *attitude problem*, a *habitual* tendency to go ballistic. And when you have an attitude problem, especially if it’s brought on by harsh economic and social conditions, some genuine therapy would be *good news*.

(3) Transforming Initiative 5.23-25a

Jesus has cited a *Tradition* and *Diagnosed* actions related to it. In this case, the attitude is anger, and the actions are insults.

He has spoken of insulting community members (brothers) and of insulting (anybody). Now he has *positive advice* in two parts, one focused within the community (5.23-24), and the other focused on anybody, although again gentiles seem to be in mind (5.25-26).

The Prescription section (5.23-26) of the First Triad is five verses (83 words) long, whereas the Tradition and Diagnosis sections consisted of one verse each (15 words and 39 words respectively). These facts alone suggest that the Prescription section is where Jesus has put his emphasis.

23 if ever
therefore

23 ἐὰν
οὖν

5.23 begins with ‘if ever therefore’ (*eàn oun, ἐὰν οὖν*). These words signal something important— ‘here’s my point, *in view of* what I’ve just been talking about’. The conclusion consists of two little stories. The first is this:

you might be offering your gift
at the altar
and there remember
that your brother
has something against you,

24 leave your gift there
before the altar
and go,
first be reconciled with your brother,
and then, coming back,
offer your gift.

προσφέρης τὸ δῶρόν σου
ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον
κάκει μνησθῆς
ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου
ἔχει τι κατὰ σοῦ,

24 ἄφες ἐκεῖ τὸ δῶρόν σου
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου
καὶ ὕπαγε
πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου,
καὶ τότε ἐλθὼν
πρόσφερε τὸ δῶρόν σου.

You’re at the altar, and you remember that a *brother* has something *against you*. In this case, Jesus commands, ‘leave your gift at the altar and go, be reconciled with your brother; then coming back, offer your gift’.

We haven’t seen a single imperative up to this point, so it’s striking that Jesus has just issued *four* imperatives— ‘leave’, ‘go’, ‘be reconciled’, ‘offer’ here in 5.24— and there will be a *fifth* in the next scenario: ‘be of good will’ (5.25).

These imperatives are *not negative*. They do not, for instance ‘prohibit anger’. Rather, they aim at *transforming* a situation in which anger has arisen— and doing so *urgently*. When ‘all flesh’ comes to worship before the Lord (Isa 66.23), their offerings must be pure offerings. Those who are ‘liable to judgment’ will be thrown out with the eschatological trash. And pure offerings require— not long fasts and multiple washings, but— reconciliation. *Even when* you’re *not the person who has a beef!*

In other words, this first Triad is not strengthening the prohibition on murder, nor particularly showing how to avoid ‘hell fire’. It’s about *how you can actually enter heaven’s regime and participate in the life of Jerusalem Renewed*.

Interrupting a sacrifice in Jerusalem to go back to Galilee (where Jesus is speaking) to reconcile with someone (whom you've suddenly remembered is mad at you) is an exaggeration of course, but not one that makes you wonder whether Jesus is even serious. Rather, the image captures your imagination and drives home the seriousness of the situation. As soon as you realize that someone is mad at you, you need to deal with it, Jesus says. Even worship itself is impossible without reconciliation (6.12,14-16).

The interesting thing is that whereas Jesus has been talking about people who go around getting mad all the time and abusing others, here he's talking about what to do when you realize that someone else has gotten mad at you. *You must be concerned about your brother's liability*, he says. This is more important than offering your own sacrifice.

The sacrifice here seems to be one of thanksgiving, since sin-offerings made, for example, after defrauding someone (unintentionally), required restitution before the sacrifice could even be brought (Ex 21.33-36; 22.1,5-15). But even offering *thanks* to God is inappropriate if you realize that someone has something against you and you haven't tried to reconcile. That's the way a disciple lives.

If you want to enter heaven's regime, *you* have to humble yourself. There's certainly no room here for a wounded ego. This isn't always easy, but it's doable. And to learn that *this* is what God wants is a lot better news than 'Don't ever get angry or you'll burn in hell forever'.

To an audience steeped in Jewish tradition, the mention of murder in conjunction with a 'brother' especially in the context of making an 'offering' would have recalled the story of *Cain and Abel*, the first social crime in the Bible. And that would be why Jesus introduced this Triad with the Torah's commandment against *murder*. In fact the tradition often used Cain and Abel to illustrate how anger can lead to murder. Gn 4 tells us that Cain hated Abel because God rejected his gift and accepted Abel's. Ws 10:3 says, 'When an unrighteous man departed from [Wisdom] in anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother.' Murder doesn't 'include anger', but there is a kind of anger that includes murder. Cain 'was from the evil one and murdered his brother', and anyone 'who hates his brother is a murderer' (1 Jn 3.15). But that is not Jesus' point here. Surprisingly, he is admonishing *Abel* to stop worship, go to *Cain*, make peace, and then come back and bring his offering.

We can connect with the great fathers of the church at this point: We tend to read the Triad as *threatening punishment* for the evil thought of anger. But Jesus is not threatening punishment; he's diagnosed a problem, and

he's emphasizing what to do if it breaks out *especially in the community* (among 'brothers'). For Gregory, then, what's important is to guard against the outbreak of anger *in yourself* in the first place. Gregory's teaching about *thoughts in yourself* takes its starting point from Jesus' teaching about *public actions* meant to defuse dangerous situations *in the community*.

Because Christians no longer make sacrifices in a temple, the instructions in 5.23-24 ('when you are offering your gift at the altar...') have often been applied to prayer (eg, Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 4.13) and of course to eucharistic participation. St Cyprian of Carthage wrote,

One who comes to the [eucharistic] Sacrifice with a quarrel, [Jesus] calls back from the altar and commands him first to be reconciled with his brother and then, when he is at peace, to return and offer his gift to God. For God did not respect Cain's offering either, since he could not have God at peace with him, who through envy and discord was not at peace with his brother... (*Unity of the Church* 13).

This assumes that the person making the offering actually is quarreling. As we've seen, that's not actually the point in Matthew, although it's an important one.

Jesus' second therapeutic scenario (5.25-26) addresses situations that arise (both inside and) outside the community, just as the insult, 'Fool!', expressed in Greek (5.22d), was not necessarily addressed to a 'brother', whereas '*Hraká!*' was.

25 Take an attitude of good will
toward your legal adversary— quickly!—
right up to the point when
you're with him on the road,

25 ἴσθι εὐνοῶν
τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου ταχύ,
ἕως ὅτου εἶ μετ' αὐτοῦ
ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ,

Someone— an *antidikos* (ἀντίδικος) or 'legal opponent'— outside (or possibly inside) the community has initiated proceedings against 'you' (singular). We need to keep in mind several things as we look at this:

- In view of the consequences described in the second half of the verse— 'lest your adversary hand you over to the judge... prison... not get out until

you have paid...’— the ‘adversary’ (*antidikōi*, ἀντιδικῶ) is someone who has brought ‘you’ to court.

- Because ‘you’ must ‘pay the last penny’, this is a *debtor’s court*.³⁹
- Under Roman law, a creditor could either force a debtor to work until his debt was paid off, or have him thrown into prison. In that case, his relatives would have to sell his land to pay the debt, or pay it themselves— and since people were very poor, it could take a long, long time. Imprisonment was therefore not a punishment but a means of enforcing payment— and, in fact, of stealing land from the weak and the poor. That’s what ‘not get out till you’ve paid the last penny’ means (5.26).
- Debt was, in fact, causing serious loss of land and deepening impoverishment among the peasantry of first-century Israel. Not surprisingly, one of the first things the Zealots did when they gained control of Jerusalem in the First Jewish Revolt (66 AD) was to burn the debt records in the treasury (Josephus, *War*, 2.426-27).

In the previous scenario, ‘you remember that your brother has something against you’. There, you realized that a *brother* was thinking you’d done him an injustice. You were to take concern for your brother’s dangerous attitude and go and smooth things out with him. Perhaps you were quarreling; perhaps not. In either case you’re your brother is mad at you, you have to go and settle the matter first, and then make your offering.

By contrast, the present situation seems to envision an injustice being done to *you*. Jesus doesn’t mention a *brother* here. Think bank foreclosures in America since 2008 and you’ll get the picture— except that even in a large city like Antioch or Jerusalem— let alone a small village in Galilee— the legal system was hardly like America’s vast and impersonal urban civil court system, nor were debtors gigantic institutions like BofA. You were likely to have a fairly immediate relationship with your creditor, and the case would be tried by a magistrate you might well know by name.

Jesus is not *commanding* debtors to ‘reconcile on the way to court’— that might be a desirable eleventh-hour solution, but since it depends on the creditor’s assent, it’s not something that can be commanded, even by Jesus.

Still less is he saying that ‘murder now includes... failure to be reconciled’ with a creditor on the way to court

³⁹ See also (18.23-34, the parable of the unmerciful servant who would not forgive a small debt even though he’d been forgiven millions.

(OSB’s absurd comment)— for he certainly doesn’t mean, if you fail to get your creditor to write off your debt, you’ve *murdered* him and you’re going to burn in hell forever! So what is he saying, then?

This needs a careful look at the Greek, so bear with me.

Jesus uses the imperative ‘be’ (ἴσθι) plus a present participle. The verb ‘to be’ together with a participle emphasizes the *descriptive* aspect of the verb rather than the *action* that the verb would express by itself. With verbs of interior states, feelings, etc, as here, the construction describes an *attitude*.⁴⁰

So what attitude is Jesus talking about? Well, the participle *eunoōn* (εὐνοῶν) etymologically means to ‘have a favorable mind’ (*eu* + *nous*) toward someone. It’s usually translated in classical texts as ‘have good will’ or ‘be well-disposed’. But for some reason, translators of Matthew always assume that it has to do with coming to an agreement. Here are some common translations:

‘agree’	(KJV, NKJV, OSB),
‘settle matters quickly’	(NIV)
‘come to terms’	(ESV)
‘make friends’	(RSV, NASB).

Well, not really any of these. RSV and NASB come closest when they say ‘make friends’— but that’s shooting too far.⁴¹

It turns out that *eunoia* (the attitude indicated by Jesus’ verb *eunoōn*) enjoys some lengthy discussion among Greek philosophers. Aristotle points out that *eunoia*— *wanting the other to benefit*— is an important *part* of friendship, but it isn’t yet ‘making friends’, as RSV and NASB would have it, for ‘only when it’s *mutual*, is such good will (*eunoia*) termed friendship’ (*Nic Eth* 1156a). Still, ‘someone who wishes another good for his own sake... is said to be good-willed (*eunous*) toward him’ (*Nic Eth* 1155b).

Now, to be good-willed toward someone doesn’t just mean to be sure to send them flowers on their birthday and a card at Christmas. Demosthenes, a prominent Athenian orator and statesman who lived 384–322 BC, shows us the context when he says,

when a league is knit together by *eunoia*, when all the allied states *have the same interests*, then the individu-

⁴⁰ Compare ἦν διδάσκων, ‘he was [customarily] teaching’ (Mk 1.22); also ἴσθι ἐξουσίαν ἔχων ‘be having authority’ (Lk 19.17), and ἴσθι εὐδαιμονῶν, ‘be feeling happy’ (Lucian, *Tim.* 35) (BDAG s.v. εἶμι §11e,f).

⁴¹ In fact the ‘big’ Liddell-Scott-Jones Lexicon says right at the top, ‘distinct from φιλία [‘friendship’]’, citing Aristotle *Nic Eth* 1155b33, 1166b30. You really have to wonder, sometimes, how deeply the translators study their words.

al members are willing to remain steadfast, sharing the toil and enduring the hardships... (*Olynthiac* B.9).

Eunoia here is about *mutual self interest*. Elsewhere Demosthenes writes,

whereas the Athenian People in former times have been constant allies (*eunoēōn*, εὐνοέων) with the Byzantines and... came to our aid with a hundred and twenty ships...' (*On the Crown* 18.90).

Again, he's not talking about warm and fuzzy sentiments. He's talking about the converging self-interests needed if city-states are to go to war for each other.

A hundred years earlier, Antiphon the Sophist wrote of a legal scenario in almost the same terms that Jesus uses:

we legal opponents (*antidikoi*) view the case according to our interests (*kat' eunoian*), each naturally thinking that his own version of it is fair. (*Second Tetralogy* 4.1).

Again, Antiphon is using *eunoia* to speak of *self-interest*.

Matthew's contemporary, Josephus, mentions that Alexander 'had also with him that part of the Jews which favored him (*eunooun*, εὐνοοῦν)'— that is, the ones who had his interests at heart (*War* 1.93), no doubt because they saw it as advantageous to themselves.

And in Xenophon, we find a little dialogue on the training of a steward that's very instructive. Socrates asks,

5 'Then isn't *eunoia* ('loyalty') to you and your interests the first thing he should have...? For if a steward is without *eunoia*, what good is any knowledge he may possess?'

'None, of course,' said Ischomachus, 'but I may tell you, to be loyal (*eunoiein*) to me and to my interests is the first lesson I try to teach.'

6 'And how, in heaven's name do you teach your man to have *eunoia* to you and your interests?'

'By rewarding him, of course, whenever the gods bestow some good thing on us in abundance.'

7 'You mean, then, that those who enjoy a share of your good things are loyal (*eunoī*) to you and want you to prosper?'

'Yes, Socrates, I find that is the best instrument for producing *eunoia*.' (Xenophon, *Econ* 12.5-7).

A steward *might* be a friend, but the one thing he's got to have is *eunoia*, *loyalty*, looking out for his master's interests. He's got to think that *his own interests converge with his master's*.

Diodorus Siculus puts in diplomatic terms pretty much what Ischomachus says about *how* you train a steward:

If suffering ill treatment has the effect of creating bad faith, receiving kind treatment will surely cause our cities to be well disposed (*eunoousas*, εὐνοούσας) toward the Persians (*Library* 10.25).

Again, he's not saying that 'treating them nice will make them like us'. He's saying, 'we need to get them to see that *their own interests are best served when they serve the Persians' interests*.'

So the dictionary defines *eunoia* or the verb *eunoēō* as '(having) a positive attitude' or 'willingness'. It even notes that *eunoia* is a 'common term in diplomatic documents'. But what's missing from our *translations* is just this sense of having someone's *interests* at heart because you see them as *your interests*.⁴²

Jesus is not recommending that you 'agree' or 'be reconciled' or 'make friends' with your creditor. He's saying, 'keep your creditor's interests in mind'.

St Paul says something similar when he urges slaves to serve their masters 'from the soul with *eunoia*' (*ek psychēs met' eunoias*, ἐκ ψυχῆς μετ' εὐνοίας)— ie, with their masters' interests well and truly at heart as their own (Ep 6.6-7).

Now, if your legal oppoent is a creditor, he's wealthy. And, as we pointed out before, in a limited-good society, great wealth

was, by its very nature, understood as stealing. The ancient Mediterranean attitude was that every rich person is either unjust or the heir of an unjust person.... Profit-making and the acquisition of wealth were automatically assumed to be the result of extortion or

⁴² See also 2Mc 9.26; 11.18; Herodotus, *Hist*, 3.36; 7.237, 239; 9.79; Sophocles, *Ajax* 689; Lysias, *Agoratus*, 13; *Philon* 22; Aristotle, *Eunomia Ethics* 1241a11; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1166b.30; Plato, *Phaedrus* 241c; *Gorgias* 485a, 486a; *Republic* 470a; Demosthenes, *On the Crown* 54; 276 (= 'patriotic'); *Olynthiac* B.1; Aeschylus, *Seven* 450, 1012; *Suppliant Women* 940; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 4.7.20; Antiphon, *Herodes* 76; Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 1.22.3; 2.8.4; 2.11.2; 2.40.4; Herodotus, *Histories* 6.108.3. The following are the results of a search for εὐνοέω in Perseus: Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 1399; Aristotle, *Eud Eth* 1237b; *Nic Eth* 1156a; Demosthenes, *Crown* 18.90; *Arist* 23.181; Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 10.25; Herodotus, *Hist* 6.105; Josephus, *Ant* 1.277; *War* 1.93; *Ap* 1.309; Lysias, *Polystratus* 20.16; Plato, *Ep* 7; Sophocles, *Ajax* 646; Xenophon, *Cyrop* 8.2; Xenophon, *Econ* 12; Demosthenes, *Letters* 1; Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.4; Polybius, *Hist* 1.78; Plutarch, *Eumenes* 12; *Sulla* 10; Lucian, *De Syria dea* 26; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 1.66; 18.33; Dio Chrysostom, *Or* 1.31; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Dinarcho* 11; Cassius Dio, *Hist* 46.9; Marcus Aurelius, *Ad Se Ipsum* 9.27.

Interestingly, in Demosthenes, *False Embassy* 282, an *eunoia* means a gift given or required in order to secure a good political relationship; in his *On the Chersonese* 25, he says, 'They say that they are granting "benevolences (*eunoias*)."' That is the name for these exactions.'

fraud. The notion of an honest rich man was a first-century oxymoron.⁴³

So Jesus is not talking about 'coming to an agreement'— that might not be possible. Nor about being 'friends'— for it takes two to tango. Nor even about 'reconciling' with someone who is stealing your land— what would that even mean? He is saying, 'take interest in your opponent's interests'. Look for a way that this can work for both of you— right up to the point you're with him on the road.

Being 'well disposed' or 'loyal' in this sense would require you to set aside anger and to act toward the one who's suing you— most likely to take your land and your livelihood— by assuming, and concerning yourself with his interests. But is this about being a *doormat*? No, in each of the cases cited above, *eunoia* was the point at which your own interests converged with the other's.

And at the very least, in a highly personal, shame-based society, it would cause loss of face for the creditor to wrong a righteous and cooperative man. That is surely part of what Jesus means.

So find that point, Jesus says, and find it it 'quickly' (*tachý*, ταχύ), that is, 'without delay'. Something has just happened and you have to respond with the recommended attitude *immediately*. 'Quickly' here corresponds to the immediate action required when you're at the altar and you remember that your 'brother' has something against you. In the context of debt collection, 'what just happened' would likely have been notice of foreclosure.

And you must adopt this attitude 'until' (*heōs otou*, ἕως ὄτου), that is, 'right up to the point when'— 'you're with your opponent on the road'.

It's usually assumed this means 'on the road' to court, but Jesus doesn't actually specify. If we ask how likely it would be for the debtor to be on the way to court along with the creditor, it doesn't seem unlikely in the first century, though, that a creditor might have come with a couple of burly fellows to seize 'you' and literally haul you into court. So— when you get the eviction notice, then 'quickly, right up to the moment when you're on the way with him, adopt an attitude of looking out for mutual interests', to see if you can defuse the situation. Once he takes you away, it's going to be too late to do much of anything.

⁴³ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social*, p 48, citing Jerome, *In Hieremiam* 2.5.2; Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, LXXIV, 61.

Explanation

5.25b-26

As part of the section on Transformative Practice, Jesus adds a rationale or *Explanation* of why it's important to do as he's recommended. This Explanation usually has the form of a *subordinate clause*, so it is not a new point but only continues the point to which it's subordinate. That's why we're still dealing with Triads, not tetrads.

lest
your adversary hand you over
to the judge and
the judge to the guard
and you be thrown into the prison.

26 amen I'm telling you,
you will by no means get out from there
until you pay back the last quarter.

μήποτε
σε παραδῶ
ὁ ἀντίδικος τῷ κριτῇ καὶ
ὁ κριτῆς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ
καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν βληθήσῃ.

26 ἀμὴν λέγω σοι,
οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν,
ἕως ἂν ἀποδῶς τὸν ἔσχατον κοδράντην.

This Explanation is subordinated to the command to 'be keeping your creditor's interests in mind' by the word 'lest' (*mēpote*, μήποτε). In negative terms, this is why you want to do as he says.

In explaining his instruction in terms of a court scene, Jesus comes full circle and reconnects with the theme of 'liability to judgment' that was the first focus of his commentary (5.21,22). He describes what will happen in court if you fail to take the recommended action. Once you get to court, matters will not go so well.

If you live consumed by anger, hurling insults, ignoring those who have something against you, and bitter about unjust foreclosure, you'll end up in court and eventually even in prison until they've sold your land and you've paid in full— if you even have land to sell. And how will you manage then? Take a different attitude toward your creditor and those who trouble you.

The Prescription section of this Triad has presented not 'examples' of how Jesus' 'antithetical' teaching now extends the punishment for *murder* even to a simple *insult*, but *positive, therapeutic advice* for transforming situations (such as unjust debt foreclosure) that otherwise elicit deep rage and insult. How can we move from attitudes and actions that would land us in court, gain us no advantage, destroy our community, and eventually even get us cast us into *gehenna* outside the restored Jerusalem? Jesus has issued *four positive imperatives*— leave, go, make peace, return, offer— and a *fifth*: get yourself on the side of the other person, look for converging interests. And do this quickly and right up to the last possible moment.

Your creditor may well *be* unjust, and you may indeed end up in prison, losing your land anyway. In that case, honored are you, for yours is heaven's regime, and you will inherit the earth. But the 'greater covenant faithfulness' to which you're called is wiser than the angry peasant revolutionaries who sought freedom by murder and ended up with the Romans destroying Jerusalem and its Temple.

Jesus has issued direct, positive commands, not ideals, virtues, prohibitions or 'hard sayings': they are all quite normal and doable, if not always easy. We regularly talk things over with others to smooth out our relations and to make peace. Diplomats do it, parents do it, co-workers do it, and Jesus' disciples are to do it.

Trypho was wrong when he said that the Teaching presented such a high ideal that no one could follow it (Justin, *Dial* 10.2). Indeed, Jesus has taught us what to do!

Long ago, God proscribed murder, and the wise have never indulged in anger. Jesus is not just tightening the screws— as if nobody had ever thought that anger was something to avoid before he came along. He's not seeking to you feel guilty for getting mad. He's not stating a negative, idealistic, and unattainable 'ideal'. The Torah's traditional teaching on murder *and liability* points not only to a limit that must not be crossed but *already* to the consequences of attitudes and actions. In the restored Jerusalem, only pure sacrifices will be accepted.

Jesus is addressing this not just to 'people'— he's talking to his *disciples*, the *brothers*, the new community he has called into existence and charged with the vocation of being *Israel*— even within a situation of dire oppression and degradation. He also addresses each member of the community directly, in the singular.

We may live in Caesar's regime or in that of the corrupt Temple— but the point is not to avoid 'hell fire' and to go to heaven. The point is to participate in God's regime

here and now. It is to find a path different than the one that led to the total destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and to make heaven's regime manifest *on earth*.

The fathers tended to spiritualize Jesus' words, or at least to extract implications for spirituality. For example, St. Isaiah the Solitary equates 'your accuser' with your conscience (*Philokalia*, St. Isaiah the Solitary 3). This has great spiritual value, but neither Matthew, nor the Jesus who speaks in his pages, was actually talking about the *conscience* in the context of Matthew's story. However, St. Isaiah does recognize that the accuser has something against *you*, not the other way around, as many other interpreters seem to understand it. Matthew's actual *story* has to remain the basis for any *interpretation* or reflection we derive from it.⁴⁴

In this First Triad, Jesus has not pronounced a burdensome and unrealistic judgment on feelings of anger. Rather, he has shown angry and oppressed people how to enter into God's regime.

The emphasis in this and in all the Triads lies in the Prescription section. The prophetic *future* of God's regime projects into the *present*— we *enter* it by *participating* in it.

So the 'greater righteousness' that Jesus teaches is not that 'murder now includes anger'— still less the absurdity that failing to get your legal opponent to reconcile with you is the same as *murdering* them. The 'greater righteousness' that Jesus calls for is to find the point at which your opponent's interests converge with yours, and to work from there (5.9).

That's the payload. That is the attitude where heaven's regime breaks in, where we can participate in it.

This transforms our reading of the Teaching on the Mountain. Jesus is not an unrealistic idealist or a guilt-tripper. He offers the grace of heaven's regime in terms of a practice we can actively develop.

⁴⁴ The fathers comment on the gospels, but the gospels should not be turned into commentary on the fathers!

For further discussion of some patristic treatments, see D Allison, *The Teaching on the Mountain: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (Herder & Herder, 1999) pp 61-71, and M Simonetti and TC Oden, eds, *Matthew 1-13*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT vol Ia (InterVarsity: 2000).

TRIAD 2— COVETING

SOMEONE'S WIFE

5.27-30

(1) Tradition

5.27

27 You have heard that it was said,
Thou shalt not commit adultery.

27 Ἦκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη·
οὐ μοιχεύσεις.

The second Triad again begins with 'you have heard that it was said', not mentioning 'the ancients' this time, except in KJV, on the basis of printed editions, themselves based on manuscripts available at the time. But this is a good opportunity to compare the introductory phrases of the first six Triads:

Triad	Introductory Phrase
1	a You have heard that it was said to the ancients
2	b You have heard that it was said
3	c And it was said
	'Again'
4	a You have heard that it was said to the ancients
5	b You have heard that it was said
6	b <u>You have heard that it was said</u>

The pattern among introductory phrases is *a-b-c*, and 'again' *a-b-b*. The deviation of the Sixth from the expected 'And it was said' signals the end of the series of Six Triads on Torah. Deviation of the final member of a series is a regular stylistic device in Matthew, for instance with the Ninth Beatitude (5.12). Apart from the manuscript evidence, the pattern shows us that the words 'to the men of old time' do not belong in 5.27, so you can cross them out if they're in your bible.

After the introductory formula, a second traditional teaching follows: "'Thou shalt not commit adultery'", the Seventh Commandment (Ex 20.14; Dt 5.18). There isn't a secondary or parallel citation this time, as there was in the First Triad.

(2) Diagnosis

5.28

28 And I'm saying to you that
every male who keeps on staring at a woman
to covet her
has already committed adultery on her
in his heart.

28 ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι
πᾶς ὁ βλέπων γυναῖκα
πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτήν⁴⁵
ἤδη ἐμοίχευσεν αὐτήν
ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ.

Jesus again introduces his commentary with an emphatic legitimation formula. Translating the word *de* (δέ) as 'and' rather than 'but'— as we saw in 5.21 and again in 5.22 (four times)— is probably better than 'but', because Jesus is not contradicting the commandment not to commit adultery. 'And *I'm* telling you' draws attention both to his authority and to the further point that he wishes to make about the topic of the Commandment.

As in the previous Triad, he starts starts with a generalization: 'everyone who' (*pas ho*, πᾶς ὁ, 5.28, cf 5.21)— plus a participle implying continuous or repeated action— not just, 'everyone who looks at a woman', but 'everyone who keeps looking at a woman'. This 'looking' has a purpose— literally, 'towards coveting her'.

'Covet' is the proper translation of *epithymēsai* (ἐπιθυμῆσαι), not just 'desire'. True, the word is often if not usually translated 'desire', but Jesus is referring to the Tenth Commandment (Ex. 20.17), which has the same wording, so we have to translate it as 'covet' here, if we want to capture his meaning. Please change it in your bible.

It's good to review what the Tenth Commandment says:

Ex 20.17 ...You shall not covet (*epithymēseis*, ἐπιθυμήσεις) your neighbor's *woman*⁴⁶ ... or anything that is your neighbor's.

So it turns out that there actually is a secondary or parallel citation, as in the First Triad!

⁴⁵ This could be translated either 'in order to desire her' or 'in order that she desires/becomes lustful.' But the context is generally androcentric.

⁴⁶ Most languages, including Hebrew and Greek, don't make a distinction between 'woman' and 'wife'. 'Wife' is meant whenever 'belonging to' is indicated— eg, 'the woman of your neighbor'.

This connection with the Tenth Commandment is completely ignored— never even mentioned— in any commentary I've read, including OSB. Most commentaries discuss how adultery now 'includes' desire and then, having thus condemned 'the God-given mutual attraction of men and women', they have to squirm out of it. But the fact that Jesus is talking about the *Tenth* Commandment as well as the Seventh simplifies everything.

There's so much to unpack here, because the cultural context is very foreign to ours. First of all, the word 'everyone': in Greek, you use a masculine singular, especially with a general word like *pas* (πᾶς), 'every(one)' or 'all', to refer to an unspecified person who could be of either sex. Therefore we can read Jesus' word as referring to 'everyone', whether male or female. If you're a heterosexual woman, you make allowances for the sexist language of Jesus' day and just switch it around: 'every woman who looks at a male', etc. But Jesus is actually being more specific. In fact he's saying, 'every *male* who keeps looking at a [*married*] woman, to covet her'. We know she's a *married* woman, because that is the point of the Tenth Commandment, which he's directly alluding to.

Secondly, the word translated 'who looks' (*blepōn*, βλέπων): Like the word for 'going around getting angry all the time' in the previous Triad, this is a present participle, suggesting continuous or repeated action. So here's a guy who 'keeps staring at' another man's woman. Not just somebody who 'looks with desire' at a pretty girl (or boy). As before, Jesus is diagnosing an attitude problem.

In Jesus' honor-shame context, people had little concern for psychological things like 'desire'. What counted was what you did, and what others thought about what you did. Community approval or disapproval functioned as your 'external conscience'. To a great degree, thoughts were simply offstage, and words referring to internal states generally connoted an external expression as well. So again, here's a guy who isn't just having 'lustful thoughts', but 'staring' (a repeated activity) because he actually 'covets' another man's wife. 'Coveting' didn't just signify wanting, but *even trying to take something*. For that reason, the word is often best translated 'to steal', with the nuance perhaps that you haven't *quite* managed to do so yet. So Jesus is saying, 'Any guy who keeps staring at someone's wife in order to take her.'

Such a man, Jesus observes, 'has already committed adultery in his heart'.

Actually that's pretty much a no-brainer; what's supposed to be so revolutionary about it? But again, we need to understand the word translated as, 'commit adultery' (*moicheuō*, μοιχεύω).

We think of 'adultery' as 'having sex with a person who is not your spouse'. Or, more technically, 'who is somebody else's spouse'. 'Adultery', for us, means the ultimate romantic betrayal, the perennial subject of pulp fiction and country-western songs. 'Fornication' occurs when both persons are unmarried. We assume this Triad addresses both fornication and adultery, but it does not, as we'll see.

In English, both men and women can 'commit adultery', not because the English word 'adultery' has to do with 'adults', but because it comes from the Latin *ad-alterare*, 'to change or alter', and hence 'to corrupt'. Anybody can 'adulterate' something, including a marriage if you have one. But the Greek word that Jesus is using, *moicheuō* (μοιχεύω) contemplates a different idea. It is derived from the vulgar word *omeichō* (ὀμείχω), 'piss'.⁴⁷

This is very significant. In the patriarchal society of the ancient Middle East, a man who seduces a woman was contemptuously said to 'piss' on her, and she was said to be 'pissed on'. That's why the verb is always active for the man (*moicheuein*), as here, and passive for the woman (*moicheuthēnai*), as we'll actually see five verses hence, at 5.32. The man 'pisses on'; the woman is 'pissed on'. Just as with the word 'marry' (*gamēō*, γαμέω)— a man 'marries', while a woman is always 'married off'.

So Jesus is not saying that this guy who keeps staring at another man's wife, 'has already committed adultery with her', as if she were, or might be, a collaborator (though she may be, or he may want her to be). The man who keeps staring at her in order to take her has 'already pissed on her in his heart'.

We're talking about sex, but we should be thinking of how animals mark out territory by leaving their 'smell' on it— that is what the man is already doing in his heart. He wants to 'mark' her— her husband's most personal property— as his own. This is the exact *sense and nature* of the *dishonor* that adultery was felt to be. It's a violation of the most intimate family boundaries.⁴⁸

So here's a man 'who keeps staring at a woman in order to take her', and in doing so, is dishonoring, insulting, her husband. Such an insult is going to lead to serious reprisal, counter-reprisal, feuding, and so forth.

Jesus is not saying that every human being who looks at someone of the opposite sex with desire is 'already committing adultery'. He's being quite specific. Every

⁴⁷ Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grec* (Klincksieck: Paris, 1999), s.v.; my translation.

⁴⁸ I seem to recall reading from somewhere that adulterers were sometimes contemptuously referred to as 'dogs', but I can't find the reference.

male who keeps staring at a *married* woman in order to covet/take her 'has already *pissed on her— and hence on her husband—* in his heart'.

'Pissing on' another man's wife did not dishonor the woman so much as her husband. In Jesus' society, a woman tended to embody 'shame' more than 'honor'—shame as passivity and concern for the honor of others. Moreover,

Since it is males who embody gender honor, and since only male equals can challenge for honor, a female cannot and does not dishonor a wife by having sexual relations with her husband, nor can a married man dishonor his [own] wife by having sexual relations with some other female. A husband's relations with a prostitute do not dishonor the honorable wife.⁴⁹

Honor is primarily a male concern; that which aggressively defends honor and seeks greater honor.⁵⁰ And when someone dishonored you, that required satisfaction. To dishonor a man by taking his wife would even require bloodshed. And that is really the danger here.

So in this Triad, 'adultery' means *to dishonor another male by having sexual relations with his wife*. That definition is very specific, and it determines the overall meaning of this Triad.

Jesus is not just addressing 'the passion of lust' here. He's talking about someone who keeps staring at a married woman to take her. This is not about the ultimate romantic betrayal; this is about **honor**, and it's about **property**:

Ex 20.17 Thou shalt not covet/desire thy neighbour's house... thy neighbor's **woman**,... *nor anything that belongs to thy neighbor*.

To prevent feuding and endless bloodshed, Dt 22.22 required both the adulterer and the married woman he seduced to be killed.

However, if the woman was unmarried, the dishonor was not so great; a man who slept with her either had to marry her or, if her father absolutely refused to give her to him, he had to pay her father the bride-price he would have had to pay to marry her anyway (Ex 22.16-17). Or, he had to marry her, and could never divorce her (Dt 22.29).

In an honor-based society, Jesus is pointing to the social danger of *coveting (taking) a man's wife*. Leaving your dog-mark on another man's household would not just

indicate that you lacked respect and good sense or couldn't control your desires or were a slave to passion or any of the stories we always tell to make sense of this verse. By 'coveting' a man's wife even in your heart, you already dishonor *that man*, and if you even try to consummate your desire, you will provoke *violence*.

Jesus is not promulgating a new, 'interior' law as opposed to the old, 'fleshly' Torah. He is not 'expanding' the commandment against adultery so that it now 'includes' desires or 'thoughts'. The Tenth Commandment already said, 'You will not *covet* your... your neighbor's wife...' (Ex 20.17), and coveting (literally, 'desiring') is a *thought* as well as an act. Jesus is not really even speaking of 'thoughts' here at all. He's talking about 'looking' and 'taking', and he will speak in the next verses of 'eyes' and 'hands'. His interest, as usual, is in social behaviors and social situations, not in 'spirituality'. The issue of 'thoughts' is present, but secondary.

(3) Transforming Initiative

5.29-30a

29 But if your right eye traps you,

pluck it out and throw it away from you;

29 εἰ δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ὁ δεξιὸς

σκανδαλίζει σε,

ἔξελε αὐτὸν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ·

In the section on murder and anger (5.21-26), Jesus began his therapeutic Prescription with the words, 'if *therefore*' (5.23). Here, after describing a situation where a male finds himself trapped by his 'right eye' into dishonoring someone, Jesus prescribes, '*but if*' (*ei de, ei de*). That is the expression he will use to introduce the Prescription section in most of the remaining Triads.

We can translate *de* (*δε*) as 'but' in this case. As I mentioned above, it's a word that signals a turning point in the rhetoric, a shift of topic, a disjunction, but not always a strong one; sometimes weak enough to mean simply 'and also', as we saw at 5.21 and .22.

But we have to be careful! At this point, KJV reads, '[he] hath committed adultery with her already in his heart: *and* if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out'. This turns the present verse (5.29) into a separate, stand-alone commandment— '*and* if your right eye traps you, pluck it out'. But this '*and*' *coordinates* the present commandment with the foregoing *observation* ('everyone who

⁴⁹ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the New Testament* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1992), p 122.

⁵⁰ Bruce Malina, *New Testament World*, 49.

looks in order to covet', 5.28), and turns it into an *implied imperative* also.

That's how we arrive at the idea that Jesus is forbidding you to ever think a lustful thought. And since lustful thoughts arise fairly often in human beings, we turn Jesus into a guilt-tripper who mostly threatens people with 'eternal Hell Fire' for the least little *thought*. And then, to avoid that, we have to go to all kinds of lengths to explain just *how much* is a 'God-given natural desire' and therefore ok, or not (OSB).

More modern translations, including the NKJV (ie, the OSB), simply drop the word *de* ('but') altogether. This severs all link with the foregoing material, but it has the same effect of turning the passage into two parallel statements:

- 'Whoever looks... has already committed adultery';
- 'If your right eye causes you to sin... pluck it out'.

Again, the *observation* in 5.28 turns into an implied *imperative*.

But Jesus isn't saying that. He's saying, 'pluck out and throw away' your right eye *if* it entraps you. Into doing what? Into 'staring at a married woman with intent to take her'— *because* you're already dishonoring her husband in your heart, and 'sure as shootin' (literally), there are going to be consequences.

Jesus says, 'if your right eye *traps* you (*skandalizei, σκανδαλίζει*) you'. Here, the KJV has 'if your right eye *offends* you'. NKJV, OSB and others have, 'if your right eye *causes you to sin*'. NASB, NIV and others bibles have 'if your right eye *makes you stumble*'. The problem is, not one of these says what Jesus actually said!

A *skandalon* (σκάνδαλον) is not an 'offense' or a 'stumbling-block'. Where do such ideas even come from?? It is, quite simply, a 'trap' or an 'enticement'. Jesus is saying, 'if your right eye *traps* you'— and you find yourself already dishonoring someone in your heart— then you have to *do* something drastic about it (5.29-30). He prescribes four actions: 'take it out', 'throw it away'; 'cut it off', 'throw it away'.

Jesus said, 'You have heard, Thou shalt not leave thy mark on another man's wife. And *I'm* telling you that if you keep staring at a woman to take her, you've already made your mark on her in your heart. *But if* your right eye traps you like that, gouge it out and toss it away'. The connection that the translations keep omitting, is actually the *point* Jesus is making, '*But if* you do find yourself in this situation, do this...'

Jesus is *not* saying, 'Moses said, No adultery, but I'm saying, Thou shalt not ever even have a lustful thought'.

He is giving a *positive imperatives* to *do* something if you find yourself repeatedly staring at another man's wife— that is, if you find yourself already in the trap. As in the previous Triad, the burden is on 'you'— in this case, the male whose eye has 'trapped' him— to *do* something about it.

Jesus does not blame the woman— unlike, for example, Sirach (Si 23.22-27; 26.9,11; 42.9-14), or the ten guys in India who gang-raped and killed a woman who wasn't wearing a veil in 2013. Males must be responsible for themselves, and must exercise self-control. Male infidelity is not excused, and male power is restricted. A woman has her own integrity and men must treat her with dignity— but even that's not specifically the focus here. She will be protected, when her husband is respected. Heaven's regime simply does not allow or excuse men to behave as they like, and then blame women for 'provocation'. And don't mess around in another guy's household!

Mediterraneans in Jesus' day usually envisioned human existence in terms of three 'zones of interaction'. The zone of *emotion and thought* involved the eyes, the heart, liver, innards, etc. The zone of *speech* involved the mouth, ears, tongue, lips, and throat. The zone of *purpose and action* involved the hands, arms, fingers, legs, and feet. To injure one of these bodily zones is to dishonor someone. Jesus addresses the act of 'staring' (5.28), that is, the zone of *emotion and thought*, by speaking of the *eye*.

Plucking out the 'right' eye brings to mind 2Sm 11.2, where Nahash the Ammonite said to the men of Jabesh-Gilead: "'On this condition will I make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel.'"

Jesus is therefore urging his audience to dishonor *themselves* rather than the woman's husband by plucking out their right eye, as Nahash would have dishonored Israel. Even that would be preferable to dishonoring another man by staring at his woman with intent to take her.⁵¹ The peace of the community is that important.

Explanation

5.30b

Why should you pluck out your *eye*? Because dishonoring yourself by throwing away (*ballō, βάλλω*) your right eye is better than dishonoring another man and ending up thrown out (*ballō, βάλλω*) full-body into *gehenna*, the burning trash pit of Jerusalem Renewed.

⁵¹ Again, OSB's comment is unintelligible: 'vivid imagery, not literally... to remove an eye would be to reproach the Creator', citing 18.8-9 and Mk 9.43-48, which say nothing at all about reproaching the Creator.

As in the previous Triad, this supporting Explanation appeals to self-interest. This time, the subordinate clause is introduced by 'for' or 'because' (*gar*, γάρ) instead of 'lest'.

for it's better for you
that one of your members perish
and your whole body
not be thrown
into gehenna.

συμφέρει γάρ σοι
ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου
καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου
βληθῆ
εἰς γέενναν.

Jesus said, 'every male who keeps *staring*' (5.28). 'Staring' is an activity of the zone of *emotion and thought*, and that's why one must pluck out the *eye*, which is part of that zone.

But as we mentioned, 'coveting' (i.e., 'desiring'), in first-century Mediterranean society, was not only a thought but always involved an attempt to take what one desired, Jesus repeats the Prescription with its Explanation in terms of the *hand*, that is, the zone of *purposive action* as well:

30 and if your right hand
traps you,
cut it off and throw it away from you,

for it's better for you
that one of your members perish
and your whole body
not go away
to gehenna.

30 καὶ εἰ ἡ δεξιὰ σου χεῖρ
σκανδαλίζει σε,
ἔκκοψον αὐτήν καὶ βάλε ἀπὸ σοῦ·

συμφέρει γάρ σοι
ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου
καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου
εἰς γέενναν
ἀπέλθῃ.

'If your right *hand* traps you' means, 'if you find yourself reaching out to take'.

In both cases (eye and hand), Jesus uses hyperbole to call for radical and decisive action.

In the case of the eye, one either casts away the eye, or is 'cast away' into gehenna.

In the case of then hand, one either casts away the hand, or 'goes away' (*apelthei*, ἀπέλθη) to the eschatological trash dump. All that does not belong in the restored Jerusalem will be left to burn there.

In the Teaching on the Mountain, Jesus constantly redefines honor. He hasn't said anything about what to do if someone marks *your* woman like that. But if you want to be honorable yourself, 'you' must undertake the vigorous action against *yourself*. The answer is not to make women wear veils, for example, but to stop assuming *you* have the right to stare and grope and possess.

All the Triads address *actions* (cf. 5.28 with 5.32; 5.34, 37; 5.39; and 5.44). This one addresses *males*, and it has to do with humbling *themselves* in order to keep peace in the community.

When we take the second member of the Triad— 'every man who looks at a married woman in order to covet her has already made his dog-mark on her husband's household in his heart'— as a broad and general negative prohibition against entertaining any kind of sexual thoughts, we end up having to explain how Jesus didn't 'really mean' the 'God-given attraction of men and women', and then we have to further explain what he 'really meant'. We then end up with a spirituality that emphasizes passions and tries (often not altogether successfully) to avoid 'thoughts'. Moreover, the 'examples' of plucking out your eye and cutting off you hand only serve to reinforce the negative message, since we're not about to mutilate ourselves,⁵² and yet we can't help but have sexual thoughts. We turn Jesus' good news into an impossibly exacting, guilt-inducing prohibition, and we leave all kinds of questions like, 'how much is too much' unanswered.

⁵² And in any case, when Origen did so, he was condemned by the Church.

But Jesus is describing a very specific attitude problem and corresponding activity. When we miss the social location of his teaching, we miss the ways he's addressing the more basic issue of *pride* through the lens of honor, shame, and desire. The impulse of desire is quite ordinary and natural, and it easily 'traps' us. Jesus knows that 'thoughts' are common. He prescribes therapeutic or corrective *action* to obviate acts of dishonor that destroy communities.

And by addressing the issue of what we somewhat improperly translate as 'adultery' in terms of the Tenth Commandment— that is, in terms of *property*— Jesus exposes the real concern of the Seventh Commandment and shows how it has much broader application.

What you have to overcome, gentlemen, is your *sense of entitlement*.

TRIAD 3— DIVORCE

5.31-32

(1) Tradition

5.31

The third Triad treats of divorce, and does so in terms of 'adultery'. Thus it's closely related to the previous Triad. It begins with the usual introductory formula, although shortened here to a minimal, 'and (*de*) it was said'. In the third of the Four Triads on Traditional Practices (6.1-18), the introductory formula will be shortened in a similar way, and that Triad is related to the preceding one just as this one is related to the Second Triad (both on prayer). This pattern of a third related to a second does not seem to be repeated in the Four Triads on Proverbial Sayings (two masters, 6.24; 7.1, do not judge), but the second of those has an introductory phrase that's different from the others in that series, as well.

The Tradition in the present Triad is again taken from the Torah (Dt 24.1-4), but it is not quoted exactly:

31 And it was said,
whoever would release his woman,
let him give her a notice of setting apart.

31 Ἐρρέθη δέ·
ὅς ἂν ἀπολύσῃ τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ,
δότης αὐτῆ ἀποστάσιον.

(2) Diagnosis

5.32

32 And *I'm* telling you that
every man who is releasing his woman
except for reason of fornication
makes her to get marked on,
and whoever might marry a released woman,
is making that kind of a mark.

32 ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι
πᾶς ὁ ἀπολύων τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ
παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας
ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι,
καὶ ὃς ἂν ἀπολελυμένην γαμήσῃ,
μοιχᾶται.

Jesus begins his commentary on the Torah's prescription, as before, with the legitimation formula, 'And *I'm* telling you'.

Again, he directs his commentary to 'every male'— who engages in the activity, again phrased as a present participle based on the verb used in the Torah passage: 'every man, whoever is dismissing his wife...'

The Diagnosis is that everyone who's 'releasing' his wife, is forcing her— and in view of what we learned in the previous Triad— that means, *himself*— to get 'pissed on' (Mt 5.32ab). And, by the same token, if he marries a 'released' woman, he's 'leaving his mark' on her previous husband's household as well (and go back to the Second Triad for that the problem with that).

This assumes a complex of social practices and a view of marriage that are not at all familiar to us.

In the 21st century developed world, marriage has become the union of two individuals who love each other and want to make a common life. Law and culture recognize them as individual consumers, and even after their marriage they may well retain their own bank accounts, cars, careers, titles to real estate, and even their own names, whether they have joint accounts or joint ownership or not. They may decide to make large purchases, go on vacations, or do anything else, jointly or severally. They get married at their own desire and they freely divorce at their own desire. Children are a complication, of course, but the couple may get married with no intention of ever having children— that, too, is purely a matter of their individual choice. In our society, until recently, the arrangement called 'marriage' was under-

stood to be an arrangement between one man and one woman. However, given the strictly individualistic nature of the institution in our society, we are extending it to same-sex couples as well. At the same time, polygyny (but not polyandry) is gaining favor in Utah and even on tv; and I myself knew a *polyandrous* arrangement that lasted for some years, although the people involved weren't actually married. It dissolved without recrimination when the parties moved on.

By contrast, in Jesus' world, marriage was not really between individuals at all, but between families. In a high-mortality context, it was very important that families reproduce. Families were eager to see their children marry and produce offspring, but since marriage entailed the sharing of property, which belonged to the extended family or clan more than to the individual householder, marriage offered important ways of improving a family's standing if favorable matches could be arranged. Marriages were not generally undertaken for love.

In Uganda—a society not all that different from Jesus' first-century Mediterranean world—a friend of mine became very interested in a girl who was attractive, intelligent, creative, and from a good family. She was apparently also quite aloof, which my friend found fascinating. And, where all others had failed, he actually managed to get to know her and, as it turned out, they came to like each other a good deal. But after a few weeks, he had to tell her that he had no family and was very poor. She broke off the relationship immediately because her family would not have accepted him. Their marriage would have brought 'shame' on them—that is, a loss of social position and connections.

When a suitable match is found, a family offers a male. If accepted, then in company with his family, he must pay a heavy bride-price to take the desired female from her father's clan. A friend in Uganda needs to come up with seven cows, which amounts to about three full years' wages, before he can formally marry. The wedding then integrates the new couple into their larger extended families and formalizes the sharing of property. Marriage was not and is not in such societies a relationship between 'one man and one woman'—that is a romantic fantasy peculiar to late capitalist individualism—but a relationship between two extended families undertaken with a view to their political, economic, and social honor.

Divorce, the dissolution of a marriage, entailed the separation of spouses with the understanding that previous marriage arrangements were no longer binding. If a male were married and another woman came along who offered better connections, divorce was easy enough. Moses said one only had to give a notice of setting apart.

The language of Deuteronomy regarding divorce is somewhat ambiguous:

Dt 24.1 ...if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her...

The rabbis of Jesus' day therefore argued over the conditions under which a man could legally divorce. The *Mishnah* reports three positions. The Shammai the Elder, who lived from around 50 BC to AD 30 and was thus an exact contemporary of Jesus, held that:

A man may divorce his wife *only because he has found grounds for it in unchastity*, since it is said, 'Because he has found *unseemliness* in her regarding something' (Dt 24.1).

Shammai emphasized the term '*unseemliness*' (somewhat vague in Hebrew), interpreting it to mean only the extreme case of 'unchastity'. Jesus seems to side with Shammai when he names *porneia* (sexual immorality) at 5.32 (cf 19.9) as the only grounds for divorce.

By contrast, Hillel the Elder, who lived from about the time of Mark's gospel (70s AD) onward, held that a man may divorce his wife

...even if she (just) broke his plate, since it is said, 'Because he has found unseemliness in her regarding something' (Dt 24.1).

Just about anything a woman might do could serve as grounds for divorce. The Pharisees seem to have this position in mind in Matthew: 'Is it authorized for a man to divorce his wife *for any reason at all (kata pasan aitian)?*' (Mt 19.3).

Rabbi Aqiba (Akiva), who lived from around AD 50 to 135, had yet another opinion:

Even if he found someone prettier, since it is said, 'if she later *finds no favor* in his eyes' (Dt 24.1).

The woman herself doesn't have to do anything. Somehow, she's blameworthy, or at least has to bear the brunt, if her husband wants a 'better deal'. That's why, as I said, if another woman came along who offered better connections at court, more land, or whatever—divorce was easy enough.

However, there were consequences. Divorce insulted (challenged the honor of) the former wife's family, and typically led to feuding. We're not talking about romantic betrayal but the tearing apart of whole social and economic networks as well as grievously injuring the reputation of the woman's father and brothers (their women are 'no good!')—and this had a tendency to make people very angry indeed.

In 19.6, Jesus will say that a married couple is 'no longer two, but one flesh.' He sees marriage as a 'blood' rela-

tionship like the relationship to mother and father (19.5) or to siblings. You can't dissolve a blood relation. God alone determines who your parents are, and likewise, where marriage was undertaken in obedience to parents and in view of family needs, parental and family choices were readily seen as willed by God. Thus it is God who 'joins together' in marriage and the bond is indissoluble.

This is not our world today, and attempts (for instance, among some fundamentalist groups) to live as if it were are no less individualistic and idiosyncratic than the gay marriages that merely mirror their own practices.

But Jesus has said that, except for cases of 'unchastity' (*porneia*, πορνεία), divorce causes the divorced woman to get 'marked', in the sense I talked about above. And again, when a woman gets 'marked', it's the *husband* who is dishonored. So Jesus is saying that when a man divorces his wife, he is making her get 'marked'. Since she's *his* wife, that means he is drawing insult and dishonor upon *himself*.

The man is acting like a pimp and offering his own wife for, or forcing her to undergo, sexual union with other males. This is so because in Jesus' (and Matthew's) context, a woman had no choice but to be associated with a man— i.e., husband, father, or brother— in order to survive. If a man dismisses his wife, she *might* return to her father's house or to a brother— *if* she has one who is still alive, and *if* they're willing and able to take her in— but ultimately she had to find a new husband.

In Uganda, a similar society, it was common enough that fathers and brothers could not support a divorced female, especially one with kids to feed. Yet a single woman, especially one with children, would not survive on the streets, so she *had* to remarry. Yet— Jesus assumes— a union that God himself created is not something that a mere written notice can cancel (see 19.4-6). So when she remarries, she will get 'pissed on'— and *this insults 'you'*. By the same token, a man who marries a woman who has been dismissed 'leaves his mark on' some other 'you'. All of this pimping is deeply shameful.

Part of the concern here in 5.31 (and in 19.9 as well), is with divorce and *remarriage*, or even divorce *in order to* remarry (to acquire higher status, etc). This dishonored the father and other males of her family by a mistreatment of their daughter/sister. Again, that would inevitably lead to feuding.

The phrase 'except for unchastity' (5.32)— not found in the parallel Mk 10.11-12— may refer to to general sexual misconduct, or perhaps to the degrees of kinship catalogued in Lv 18.6-23 (which is directed to males), and forbidden for marriage. At any rate, some scholars surmise that Matthew's church may have known non-

Israelite tribes whose map of 'incest' was somewhat different, and that the occasional cousin-marriage had to be dissolved. There is no proof, but it may be true. On the other hand, if it does refer to the wife's sexual misconduct, the husband has already been 'pissed on'; his honor would be preserved by terminating the relationship in which he has been dishonored. This apparently was what Joseph had in mind in 1.19.

Such are some of the meanings of divorce within the cultures that Jesus and Matthew inhabited. Returning to Matthew's narrative as such, we should recognize that Jesus is not 'forbidding divorce'. He is pointing out *what divorce is, within the honor-shame culture of his day*. It's up to us to work out the implications in our own culture, but it should be obvious from what we've seen that the difference between modern and ancient societies does not allow simple answers.

We make a big issue today of the fact that God made of the two, 'one flesh' (19.3-12). But in part, that's because the 'flesh' of sex and progeny are almost all that's left of the very deep and thick economic and social relations that marriage once entailed. In our society, as I mentioned at the outset, marriages are undertaken by individual consumers, women do not have to be attached to a man to survive, and we simply don't experience divorce as an insult to the woman's father and brothers, as people in Jesus' culture did. Nor in most cases does it entail the tearing apart of a deep and wide social and economic fabric. If I divorce today, I will still keep my job; nothing will change there. If a man divorced in Jesus' day, the two families would no longer have common fields to work or any of the other things that peasants cooperate in doing.

I believe most of us would see the modern arrangement as a net benefit, not as a loss. Yet because marriage in our culture has become fundamentally individualistic, it has become harder to sustain. We also struggle over whether the 'one flesh' designation can be applied to same-sex couples, Muslim polygamists, and so forth.

But none of this is on Jesus' horizon. As mentioned, adultery is 'leaving one's mark' on another male's household. The man 'marks'; the woman is 'marked'. English bibles always translate, 'everyone who divorces his wife... makes her commit adultery'. This suggests that he makes the woman become an *active* party to adultery. That's absurd on the face of it. What if she becomes a nun? Is she still an adulteress? Such a translation/interpretation in fact is harmful to women. But when a woman *must* find a new man because of social conditions, the divorcing husband is forcing her to get

'marked' by another man— and that dog is marking 'your own' household!

(3) Transforming Initiative [missing]

Surprisingly, there's no Prescription in this Triad. Jesus has cited a Tradition (Dt 24.1-4) and diagnosed a problem, but there's nothing about a new behavior to counteract it. This is the only place in all Fourteen Triads where this occurs. Why this glaring omission? and why here? Clearly, we expect something like the first Triad in Mt 5.24: 'Go, and be reconciled to your wife'.

In fact, fifteen or twenty years after Jesus said these words, Paul wrote about this same subject. He said,

1Co 7.10-11 To the married I command— not I, but the Lord— a wife should not be *separated* (*chōrīsthēnai*, χωρισθῆναι) from her husband; but if she is *separated*, she should remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and the husband is not to abandon (*aphienai*, ἀφιέναι) his wife.

Interestingly, KJV translates this as if the woman were the one responsible for what is done to her: 'let not the woman *depart* from her husband, but if she *depart*...' (NKJV and OSB retain this misleading and sexist reading). But Paul is actually talking about divorce in the way that Jesus did— it's something a man does to a woman, and the verb concerning her is passive: she '*is separated*' (*chōrīsthēnai*, χωρισθῆναι).

Paul says this teaching is from Jesus, not from himself (1Co 7.10). And his wording seems in some ways to echo the teaching here— he says 'separate' (*chōrīzō* χωρίζω) twice, where Jesus says 'release' (*apolyo*, ἀπολύω) twice (Mt 5.32ab). But where Matthew's Jesus is silent about any Prescription, Paul orders: 'let her remain unmarried, or let her be reconciled to her husband' (1Co 7.11). Even though the word 'reconciled' (*katallagētō*, καταλλαγῆτω) here reminds us of the command to 'be reconciled' (*diallagēthi*, διαλλάγηθι) with a brother who 'had something against you' in 5.24, this puts the burden on the woman— she is the one who has to be reconciled. Yet Paul seems to preserve the form of the Prescription that the triadic structure of the Teaching on the Mountain leads us to expect here in Matthew— and he does add that 'the *husband* is not to abandon his wife'.

If Jesus had continued speaking of therapeutic measures to the husband, he would have been placing the responsibility for reconciling on him. Maybe he actually did that, and maybe Matthew even quoted it, and maybe a very

early scribe skipped it. We have no way of knowing. We only have Paul's words to fit somewhat into this spot.

Yet there's an important point to be gained from the fact that each of the units in the main part of the Teaching on the Mountain has the same triadic structure. The structure itself makes it clear that Jesus is not issuing a legalistic prohibition here, but pointing to reconciliation, however implicitly. Paul himself explicitly asserts that his teaching against divorce is *from the Lord*, and yet immediately allows divorce in the case of irreconcilable religious differences (1Co 7.12-16):

1Co 7.15 If the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you.

TRIAD 4— TRUTH-TELLING 5.33-37

(1) Tradition 5.33

33 Again

33 Πάλιν

Jesus introduces the next Triad with the word 'again' (5.33). He doesn't use this word anywhere else in the Teaching; it signals a new series. Thus the Fourteen Triads start with two triads of Triads on Torah (5.21-48), and we're now at the second set. This is our program for the next few pages:

'Again' (5.33), three triads—

5.33-37 oaths / truth-telling

5.38-42 eye for eye / nonviolent resistance

5.43-48 hate enemy / bless all

you have heard that it was said to the ancients,

ἤκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις

Another fact that marks the Fourth Triad as a new beginning is that it opens like the First Triad with the full formula, 'you have heard that it was said to the ancients' (cf 5.21).

Thou shalt not swear falsely,

and thou shalt give back to the Lord

your oaths.

οὐκ ἐπιορκήσεις,
ἀποδώσεις δὲ τῷ κυρίῳ
τοὺς ὄρκους σου.

As expected, Jesus recalls a traditional prohibition, again linked it by the word ‘and/but’ (*de, δὲ*) to a secondary traditional commandment, ‘Thou shalt give back (carry out) your oaths’. This is the two-punch approach we saw in the First Triad as well, where he cited, ‘Thou shalt not murder’, and added ‘whoever murders will be liable to judgment’ (5.21); in the Second, he cited the Seventh Commandment and then commented in terms of the Tenth (5.27-28).

Jesus seems to be referring to the Ninth Commandment (Ex 20.16) here, although that passage actually says, ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness (*pseudomartyrēseis, ψευδομαρτυρήσεις*)’. Jesus generalizes this to ‘swear falsely’ (*epiorkēseis, ἐπιορκήσεις*). In line with other Hellenistic Jewish sources, he seem to take the Torah as prohibiting oath-taking altogether. The idea is also similar to Lv 19.12, Nm 30.2-15, and Dt 23.21, but the wording closest to Jesus’ own usage is found in Pseudo-Phocylides’ *Sentences* 16:

Do not swear falsely (*mē d’epiorkēsēis, μὴ δ’ἐπιορκήσης*), whether ignorantly or willingly. The immortal God hates a perjurer, whoever it is who has sworn.

Strictly speaking, then, this is a traditional Hellenistic-Jewish *halakah* (directive) regarded as the sense of the Torah, but not actually a direct quote from the Torah as such.

Oaths were all-pervasive in ancient society. One swore loyalty to Caesar, to a city, to public office, to the judicial system, to business contracts, to clubs, associations, or guilds, for religious activities, and so on. The most common context, however, was buying and selling. Since there were no government regulators, Better Business Bureaux, or EPAs, sellers would call upon God or the gods to witness to the quality of their product. But in doing so, they presumed to make God or the gods into their guarantors. Moreover, false oaths frequently led to conflict.

Literature contemporary with Jesus and Matthew takes great interest in various types and conditions of oaths and perjury. Yet the ‘greater righteousness’ that Jesus teaches (5.20) requires a good deal more than just avoiding perjury. It requires actual integrity.

(2) Diagnosis

5.34-36

As usual, the description of the problematic attitude and associated actions begins with, ‘But I’m telling you’.

In the first three Triads, the verbs in the Diagnosis section were participles, subjunctives, or indicatives, but never imperatives. Here, in our translations, it might seem that Matthew has departed from that format, but he actually hasn’t: the verb for ‘swearing’ in 5.34 is not an imperative, but an infinitive (*omosai, ὁμόσαι*)— literally, ‘But I’m telling you not to swear at all’— and in 5.36 the verb is a negated subjunctive, ‘nor should you swear’ (*homosēis, ὁμόσης*). We can read them as imperatives, but since Matthew is following a program, it would be better to read them literally.

34 But I’m telling you

not to swear at all:

neither by heaven,

because it’s the throne of God,

35 nor by earth,

because it’s the footstool

of his feet,

nor by Jerusalem,

because it’s the city

of the Great King,

36 nor should you swear by your head,

because you can’t make one hair

white or black.

34 ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν

μὴ ὁμόσαι ὅλως·

μήτε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ,

ὅτι θρόνος ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ,

35 μήτε ἐν τῇ γῇ,

ὅτι ὑποπόδιόν ἐστιν

τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ,

μήτε εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα,

ὅτι πόλις ἐστὶν

τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως,

36 μήτε ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ σου ὁμόσης,

ὅτι οὐ δύνασαι μίαν τρίχα

λευκὴν ποιῆσαι ἢ μέλαιναν.

After the introductory 'not to swear at all', there follow four repetitions of 'neither by...' plus a reason why not. The sheer length of these commentary— a description of various kinds of oath in 3 verses / 50 words— shows its importance.

The common point of the first three repetitions is that oath-taking dishonors God, however piously one avoids naming him directly. An oath would certainly dishonor God if it were taken deceitfully, but Jesus is giving reasons why one should not swear 'at all' (*holōs, ὁλως*).

A disciple is 'not to swear by the sky, because it is God's throne'. This recalls

- Ps 10.4 The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in the sky. His eyes focus on the needy; his eyelids examine the sons of men.
- Ps 102.19 The Lord has prepared his throne in the sky, and his regime rules over all.
- Isa 66.1-2 Thus says Yhwh: 'The sky is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares Yhwh. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

It's presumptuous for a beggar to call a king his witness.

A disciple should also not 'swear by the earth, for it is his footstool'. The earth is the Lord's (Ps 24.1), even though the devil and various empires have usurped control of it (see 4.8; 5.3-10). God's will, not man's, is to be done on earth (5.13; 6.10), and a disciple, committed to doing that will on earth, would again not presume to use God for his own ends.

Nor would a disciple 'swear by Jerusalem, since it's the "city of the Great King". The royal imagery— 'throne', 'footstool'— climaxes here in a reference to Ps 48.3 and the Zion tradition. A king is one who has total control over all persons, animals, and objects in a given territory, but 'Great King' was a title for the kings of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia, the first monarchs to hold sway over the 'whole' world (2K 18.19,28; Isa 36.4,13).⁵³ The psalm, either written during that period or referring to it (it's hard to tell), applies this Persian title to God.

But secondly, 'throne', 'footstool', and of course 'king' are not just royal, but imperial images. In the context of the Roman occupation, this isn't just imagery, but a political statement. The real 'city of the great king' was Rome, and the 'great king' himself was Caesar.

The Old Testament was written for the most part during the Babylonian Exile and the subsequent Persian domination, and it claims that Israel had always been monotheistic, at least when it was behaving itself. From archaeology and even from close inspection of the Bible itself, we know that this is a spin given to Israel's story only as empires came to dominate the entire world, and that in fact monotheism really began to permeate the thought of some ancient Middle Eastern people (Jews, Zoroastrians, and others) only in response to the ecumenic stretch of imperial domination, especially Persia's. When the Persian empire broke up and Alexander's empire fall apart after his death, societies once again tended to embrace their own local theisms, because monotheism had no social analogy. There was no all-embracing social, political, and religious structure for the whole world until the rise of Rome. At that point, Yhwh's title of 'Great King' took on renewed significance as an affirmation of Rome's limits, and Israel's sovereignty.

Taking an oath naming 'Jerusalem' instead of God would affirm his inviolable sanctity, as well as his absolute sovereignty as the true Emperor. But the actual psalms which form the background of Jesus' commentary, express Yhwh's concern not only for power and empire, but for the needy, the humble, and the contrite.

So it may be presumptuous for a beggar to call the Great King as his witness— *but it's also not necessary*. This King is the guarantor of truth and justice, and the 'poor in spirit' who serve him in truth and justice.

Also, Jerusalem itself— often fickle and untrustworthy, and now trampled on and occupied— is not a reliable witness. Rome had violated Jerusalem, as did Israel's religious leaders themselves in not welcoming Jesus (see 2.1-3; 4.5-6). Oaths are inappropriate and unnecessary, and human limitations (5.36; recognized also in 6.27) render them useless. 'You cannot make one hair white or black'.

Some magical formulae made use both of the name 'Jerusalem', as well as of the title 'Great King' as an epithet for God. So Jesus seems to be opposing the magical use of oaths, as well.

⁵³ *Melek gadol* in these verses; *melek rab*, which I take to be synonymous, in Ps 48.3 (and Dn 2.10?).

(3) Prescription 5.37a

As it often does, the contrastive particle *de* (δέ) introduces the transformative practice. Here the proper translation would be ‘but’:

37 But let your word be
yes yes, no no.

37 ἔστω δὲ ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν
ναὶ ναί, οὐ οὐ·

The previous section, describing undesirable practices, had a quasi-imperative flavor, but as we noted, the verbs were not actually imperatives. However, we do expect this section to contain positive imperatives— not just prohibitions against taking oaths. And sure enough, it begins with the imperative of the verb ‘to be’— *estō* (ἔστω), ‘be it so’. ‘Be’ doesn’t have an imperative in English, so we have to say, ‘Let [something] be...’.

You don’t have to swear by high heaven about the quality of your goods in order to make a sale. If you’re consistently honest, people will come to recognize that. Deliverance from the deceit and distrust associated with oath-taking— as well as from the presumptuousness of calling God to witness for you— will come from simple truthfulness. The point is therefore *integrity*. There’s no need for oaths, when words are reliable as such.

Relationships of trust and integrity are necessary to sustain society. The Talmud says, ‘If you sit in judgment and you find one of the litigants anxious to verify his statement by taking an oath, have suspicion against that person’ (*Leviticus Rabbah* 6). Relying on oaths to assert your truthfulness already suggests that you’re lying. But Ps 24.4 has already told you that if you want to enter the Holy Place, you must be free of deceitful swearing of any kind. The righteous person— that is, one who is faithful to the covenant— ‘walks blamelessly and does what is right; he speaks truth from his heart’ (Ps 15.2).

In church history, this teaching has sometimes been reduced to a legalistic maxim, ‘a Christian may never swear an oath.’ Jesus’ point is not that we should never swear an oath— in fact, it’s easy to hide dishonesty behind a pious refusal to take an oath. Rather he wants us so to live that the truthfulness of our words renders oath-taking completely unnecessary.

Explanation 5.37b

As we expect, the imperative ‘Let your word be yes, yes, no, no’ (5.37a) is followed by a supporting reason: ‘but more than these is from the evil one’ (5.37b).

but what is more than these
is from the evil one.

τὸ δὲ περισσὸν τούτων
ἔκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστίν.

Speech is an extension of the person speaking. Saying more than the truth itself is the devil speaking.

TRIAD 5— PEACEMAKING 5.38-42

(1) Tradition 5.38

Just as the Fourth Triad began like the First, the Fifth begins like the Second:

38 You have heard that it was said,

38 Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη·

The traditional teaching in this Triad is,

eye for eye
and tooth for tooth

ὄφθαλμὸν ἀντὶ ὀφθαλμοῦ
καὶ ὀδόντα ἀντὶ ὀδόντος.

The Torah passages that Jesus has in mind (Lv 19.17-18; 24.14-22) concern revenge and restitution, and both follow instruction on oaths and using God’s name. So this teaching follows the Triad on oaths also.

We should be aware that the ‘law of talion’ (‘talion’ means ‘equalization’) originally sought to *limit* revenge to the proportion of the offense.⁵⁴ It’s not about *tit-for-tat*; it’s about *only* tit-for-tat— and only *once!*

The OT background⁵⁵ includes ‘life for life’, and puts this in the first place— after that comes ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’. So the principle of equalization begins with

⁵⁴ See Philo, *Spec Leg* 3.181-82.

⁵⁵ Cf Ex 21.23-25; 24.17-21; Dt 19.21.

and includes wrongful death. However, Jesus says only ‘eye for eye and tooth for tooth’, not ‘life for life’. And the Prescriptions in 5.39b-42 suggest that he’s thinking for the moment only of injury— and in particular, of injury within the context of the Roman occupation. He has dealt with murder in the First Triad.

(2) Diagnosis

5.39a

As usual, Jesus begins, ‘But I’m telling you’, a sign of his own authoritative commentary.

39a But I’m telling you,
not to resist by evil means.
39a ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν
μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ.

The usual translation is, ‘Do not resist evil’. But this is wrong, and we need to see why.

The verb *antistēnai* (ἀντιστῆναι)— literally, ‘stand in opposition’— occurs only here in Matthew. It doesn’t just mean ‘resist’ elsewhere, but very often connotes *armed* resistance and violent struggle, especially in battle.⁵⁶

Translations sometimes put this verb in the imperative— ‘do not resist’— but, as in the previous Triad, it’s actually an infinitive in Greek.⁵⁷ The point is not so much to prohibit as to *name* an activity that would have consequences which he’s about to explore.

Moreover, the verb is qualified by another word, ‘evil’ (*ponērōi*, πονηρῷ), in the dative case. The verb generally *does* take the dative rather than the usual accusative for its object, so a perfectly possible translation would be, ‘not to resist evil’.⁵⁸ So should we never stick up for our rights, or retaliate, or resist evil at all?

Well, to begin with, there’s nothing here about rights. No one had a right *not* to carry a soldier’s pack a mile when he forced them (5.41)— any more than Simon had the right to refuse, when the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus’ cross (27.32; same verb). Nor is begging (5.42) an

infringement on rights, nor is giving money to a beggar giving up a right. Why should we suppose (as most commentators do) that these are ‘examples’ of ‘not resisting evil’?

Moreover, would Jesus really say ‘not to resist evil’, when he himself resisted evil every time it challenged him? Many like to translate 6.13b as ‘deliver us from the evil one’; if the word ‘evil’ means ‘evil one’ here, he surely doesn’t mean ‘don’t resist the evil one’— i.e., Satan. He resisted the evil one in 4.1-11, and we *must* resist him too. The NRSV has, ‘Do not resist an *evildoer*’. That would have Jesus forbidding a woman to resist a man trying to rape her, and would align Jesus with Herod Agrippa, who urged the crowds not to resist Rome (Josephus, *JW* 2.345-401).⁵⁹ Would Jesus legitimate evil, and require disciples to collude with it? Jesus demonstrated the arrival of heaven’s regime when he resisted and cast out demons (4.17-25), and he called disciples in order to expand his mission of resisting them (10.7-16). What is more, in the very next verses (5.39-42), he will offer what are in fact scenarios of resistance.

So ‘not to resist evil’ can’t be right, even if it fits the grammar.

Antistēnai does take the dative for its object, but the dative itself has regular use as an indicator of the *means* by which something is done. And this fits perfectly here— ‘But I’m telling you not to resist *by evil means*’.

And this is actually what St Paul says, too:

Rm 12.17-21 Don’t repay anyone evil for evil.... never avenge yourselves.... If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink.... Don’t be overcome by (*hypo*, ὑπὸ) evil, but overcome evil with (*en*, ἐν) good.

1Th 5.15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

Paul is speaking of resisting and even overcoming evil, but not by repaying evil. He is commanding unexpected efforts at peacemaking, just as Jesus did. Not one of these passages says not to resist an evil person, or evil in general, or mentions renouncing rights in a law court, but all emphasize returning good and not evil when persecuted; using good means and not evil means to respond to evil.

Jesus’ teaching thus comes into focus. It’s not about *whether* to resist, but about *how* (not) to resist— *in a*

⁵⁶ In the LXX, it clearly designates thirty-four instances military or violent action (exodus/entry to the land [Lv 26.37; Dt 25.18; Jdg 2.14]; David takes Jerusalem [2 Kgs 5.6]; Nebuchadnezzar, Holofernes, and the Assyrians [Jdt 2.25; 6.4; 11.18; 1 Macc 6.4; 14.29. 32]). Of the LXX’s other 35 instances, many refer to resisting God or wisdom. Cf W. Wink, ‘Beyond Just War’, 199: in Josephus, in 15 of 17 uses; in Philo, in 4 of 10 uses.

⁵⁷ Interestingly, older translations plus NKJV / OSB get this right, but from the ASV on, they turn it into an imperative.

⁵⁸ See, eg, Dt 7.24; 9.2; 11.25; Ac 13.8; Ga 2.11; etc.

⁵⁹ See Rajak, ‘Friends, Romans, Subjects,’ 122-34.

context where plenty of voices were calling for **violent resistance**.

By the law of equalization, the Torah and the Prophets mandate that evil must not be countered by escalation. The rule is only 'an eye for an eye'— that's all you can take! But in fact evil must not go unchecked, and justice must not be set aside. So how can we 'not resist', when the Scriptures teach 'eye for eye'?⁶⁰ But if you're powerless to exact equalization on a Roman soldier who murders a relative or injures you or forces you to carry his heavy military gear, what can you do? Opposing the Roman occupation by evil means is excluded by the situation itself, not by God's command. So, what options do you have?

(3) Transforming Initiative 5.39b-42

Jesus sums up the problem attitude and actions in four Greek words— 'not to resist with evil' (5.38-42)— and follows with fifty one words about what to do instead.

In fact the triadic structure consistently emphasizes the third member of each Triad, which never gives a negative prohibition but always a *positive* way of changing the *structure* of the situation.

The negative teaching 'not to resist by evil means' was not an imperative; rather, it named a situation that would lead to trouble. In fact it is why the Torah had to specify 'eye for eye' in the first place.

Now the Prescriptions (5.39b-42) include four scenarios with four imperatives, each emphasizing not renunciation of rights but surprising and creative acts of peace-making.

The imperatives are, 'turn the other', 'let him have your coat', 'go with him two', and 'give'— and Jesus adds a fifth, a prohibitive subjunctive that actually has the effect of a positive imperative— 'you mustn't turn him away' (ie, 'you must receive him'). The first four call upon the audience to engage in ways that deliver from the cycle of violence, particularly in the imperial context, and the fifth establishes a new economics based on generosity rather than possession.

⁶⁰ Parts of the scriptural tradition do reject strict retribution; Pr 24.29 and Dt 32.35, for example, leave it to God. Stoics and Cynics (Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus) urged keeping calm and bearing blows and insults without retaliation, although Seneca thinks that physical violence may be necessary to correct (not avenge) evil (*De Const* 12.3). The Jewish Revolt against Rome in 70 was a disaster, but Jesus' alternative was apparently not just to submit. His answers at 22.6-7,15-22 and 17.23-27 are quite wily, as we will see.

All but the first of the previous Prescription sections began with 'but' (*de*, δε); this one uses a stronger word, but it still comes into English as 'but' (*all'*, ἀλλ').

39b But
somebody hits you
on [your] right cheek?
turn the other to him also,
39b ἀλλ'
ὅστις σε ῥαπίζει
εἰς τὴν δεξιὰν σιαγόνα [σου],
στρέψον αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν ἄλλην.

The translations always say, 'if someone strikes you', but Jesus is more direct: 'But— somebody hits you on your right cheek? Turn the other to him also'. This direct language ('somebody hits you?') suggests a gesture with which Matthew's audience and Jesus' own are familiar.

For a right-handed person to hit you on the *right* cheek, he would have to give you the back of his hand— not only a violent act, but a deeply insulting one too.⁶¹ Such a blow expresses the power of a master over a slave, a wealthy landowner over a sharecropper or tradesman, a Roman over a provincial, a wise man over a fool, a government official over a difficult prophet (2Kg 22.24), the religious elite over a dangerous preacher (Mt 26.67), a man over a woman or a child (who like a slave is not considered capable of rational discourse).⁶² This action dishonors and humiliates the inferior. No response except submission is expected.

Herod Agrippa pointed out that the Judeans couldn't possibly prevail against Roman might, and besides,

'...you ought to be submissive to those in authority, and not give them any provocation. When you reproach men greatly for small offenses, you excite those whom you reproach to be your adversaries, and this will only make them leave off hurting you privately, and with some degree of modesty, and openly to lay waste what you have. Now nothing so much damps the force of strokes as bearing them with patience; and the quietness of those who are injured diverts the

⁶¹ See Jb 16.10; Ps 3.7; Lm 3.30; Isa 50.6; *1Esdr* 4.30; *m. B. Qam*. 8.6.

⁶² For a glossary of insulting terms which exemplifies the attitudes of the elite toward the disdained masses, see MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 'The Lexicon of Snobbery,' 138-41. See also Wiedemann, *Adults and Children*, 27-30, citing Seneca, *De Const* 12.3, among others.

injurious persons from afflicting them.’ (Josephus, *JW* 2.350-351).

Is Jesus then saying what Herod said?

The Mishnah, a collection of legal regulations from 3rd century AD rabbinic Judaism can sometimes throw light the New Testament. There we find that the penalty for a slap with the palm of the hand carries a penalty twice as much as a slap with the back of the hand (*Mishnah*, b.K. viii. 6). The palm of the hand (or the fist) to the left side of the face was a man-to-man provocation, and would lead to a brawl, a serious social consequence. You wouldn’t strike a slave that way; and you wouldn’t strike an equal with the back of your hand. So you’ve deliberately picked a fight with an equal by throwing the first punch. This *isn’t* the scenario Jesus is portraying— at first.

Jesus is saying, if someone degrades or shames you with a backhanded slap on the right cheek, turn your left to him and *force him to come at you as an equal*. If not, he’s a coward, he loses face, and you win. But if he does, he has admitted you’re his equal, not his inferior, and he has thereby made himself liable for compensatory damage, which will only get worse if he hits you again, so you win again!

This verse doesn’t say much about pacifism, but it says a lot about the culture of honor and shame. Turning the other cheek defiantly, provokes the other to treat you as equal— one who, as an equal, has every right to defend himself and strike back. If he does strike you, you can still refuse to hit him— for in fact you don’t need to do so, because you’ve made *him* concede your point: you are equals, and he is abusing you. Refusing to fight at this point would be refusing the entire context of the fight; whereas if you strike back after a backhanded blow, you are striking back from the position of a slave. That’s already a sign of compromise.⁶³

Instead of accepting humiliation and being subdued into nonresponsiveness— but equally instead of lashing out in violence and continuing the cycle— Jesus teaches a third response: refusing your so-called ‘superior’ the *power* to humiliate you. You have *resisted*, but *not with evil means*.

By turning the left cheek and exposing your human dignity, you also expose the striker’s *own* act as morally repulsive and improper. In addition, by refusing, man to man, to retaliate, you’ve challenged *him* to react with comparable generosity. If he were to hit you again, he

⁶³ I’m indebted to Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (Verso: London and Brooklyn, 2010), p 127, for these insights.

would dishonor himself by showing that he’s merely a sadistic brute *and* that he’s looking for a fight.

This gives new meaning to the following passage, one of only two in the OT that mention slapping on the cheek:

Isa 50.6: I have given my back to scourges and my cheeks to slaps, but I did not turn away my face from the shame of spittings.⁶⁴

A second example concerns someone who ‘wants for you to be judged, and to take your shirt (*chitón*, χιτῶν)’.

40 καὶ τῷ θέλοντί σοι κριθῆναι
καὶ τὸν χιτῶνά σου λαβεῖν,
ἄφες αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον.

This refers to loan collection. A loan is guaranteed by a pledge. Here, the pledge seems to be the debtor’s *chitōn* (χιτῶν), a light woolen garb that reached from the neck to below the knees and was normally belted— the undergarment, tunic, or shirt worn next to the skin by either sex (cf 10.10; Mk 6.9).

The Torah contemplates a person so poor that he owns, besides the clothes on his back, only a *himation* (ἱμάτιον), an *outergarment*— a piece of material worn like a cape or toga or, in the case of women, an elongated shawl that could cover the head. This would also serve as a bedroll or blanket— to use for a pledge:

Ex 22.25-26 25 If... you take in pledge the neighbor’s *himation*, before the setting of the sun you shall restore it. 26 This is his *himation*; for this alone is the garment for his skin. In what shall he sleep? If then he should cry out to me, I will listen to him, for I am merciful. (See also Dt 24.12-13).

The Torah envisions a poor person, perhaps a peasant farmer, who can’t repay a loan. His land has already been seized, and his creditor is suing him for his *himation*, the

⁶⁴ Isa 50.6: *Tas de siagonas mou eis hratismata*, τὰς δὲ σιαγόνας μου εἰς ῥατίσματα. Mathew’s wording in 5.39 is actually closer to Ho 11.4 LXX. This is part of the same passage that says, ‘out of Egypt have I brought my son’ (2.15). In Ho 11, Yhwh says he treated Israel like an animal, leniently, lifted his yoke (Mt 11.29-30), and enabled him to feed. Alas, Israel did not accept the divine yoke, the burdens placed upon it by Yhwh’s stern but loving care, the love shown in his concern that they should not be too heavy. ‘In the ruin of men, I stretched them out with the bands of my love and I will be to them like a person slapping on his cheeks (ὡς ῥατιζῶν ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τὰς σιαγόνας αὐτοῦ). And I will watch him attentively; I will prevail with him.’ Ho 11.4 LXX differs from the Hebrew and closely parallels this passage in Isaiah.

last thing he owns—the coat off his back— ‘this alone is the garment for his skin’.

Matthew seems to have this passage in mind, but oddly the creditor wants to take the debtor’s *chitōn*, his *undergarment*, and the debtor is to give his *himation*, his *outergarment*, as well. In other words, Matthew’s Jesus says, ‘if someone sues you for your *shirt*, let him have your *coat*!’ Since you have to take off your coat to take off your shirt, this seems backward.

But no commentator that I’m aware of deals with it— not even in view of the fact that Luke gives the sequence in its expected order— if a creditor⁶⁵ takes a debtor’s coat (*himation*), he is to offer his shirt (*chitōn*) as well (Lk 6.29). So why does Matthew’s Jesus order you to give your coat *after* your creditor has taken the *shirt off your back*?

Standing in his boxers before one who now has both garments in his hand, *Luke’s* debtor shames and dishonors his creditor. His nakedness exposes his creditor’s greed, the cruel effect of his action, and the injustice he represents. Also, taking off your clothes, along with all that they represent (status, social relations, power, gender, etc.), unveils the basic humanity that unites creditor and victim, and unmasks the heartless inhumanity of the powerful. Such a situation demands a change! Nothing is guaranteed when it comes to rapacious creditors, but heaven’s regime, implemented by the disciple’s nonviolent resistance, exposes the nature of the present system and invites an alternative, another economic system, which Jesus will get to in a moment.

But we are exploring why Matthew says, first the shirt, then the coat. What is this about?

It turns out that compared to *himation*, *chitōn* is a relatively rare word in the Septuagint, and its contexts mostly seem to be somewhat sacred. *Himation* and its cognate *himatismos* occur 234 times, but *chitōn* occurs only 34 (17 x 2 !) times. *Himation* in the singular means ‘cloak’, but in the plural, along with *himatismos*, it is the general word for ‘clothing’. But here, the fact that Matthew contrasts it with a *chitōn* means that *himation* definitely means the outer garment. But in the singular, *himation* is always used in *covenant-related* contexts. It’s the subject of all kinds of laws regarding ‘leprosy’⁶⁶ as well as ritual

purity. In these contexts, *chitōn* is never mentioned. And of course, as mentioned, the Torah forbids keeping a poor man’s *himation* beyond sunset as pledge for a loan, and a widow’s *himation* was simply not to be taken in pledge at all.⁶⁷

Chitōn, however, is the name of the garment of skins that God made for Adam and Eve after the fall (1 time); the ‘shirt of many colors’ that Joseph wore (7 times), a vestment for priests (13 times), was torn in mourning (7 times), a garment of (royal) luxury (2 times), and a garment of gladness (1 time). Interestingly, in the Torah and Prophets, the garment of skin (replacing the garment of light) made for Adam (Gn 3.1) is the first mention, and the garment of joy (Isa 61.10), the last.

We could investigate the various terms for articles of clothing in Greek and Hebrew and how they map to each other, but based on this very preliminary glance, it strikes me that Matthew’s creditor may be suing for the *chitōn* precisely in order to avoid going after the *himation*, the garment that the Torah specifies he would have to give back. By insisting that he take the *himation* also, the victim would remind him publicly of the covenant God’s concern for the poor. A gentile audience such as Luke’s would have found the point obscure, but by reversing the order of garments, Luke could make more or less the same point in terms of universal humanity.

Someone is on the verge of losing the only shirt he owns. The pressure goes so far as a threat to bring matters before a judge. The victim is a poor man who possesses only a single shirt and a single cloak. The cloak could not be taken away from him—that was established in Exodus 22.25-26—four on cold nights the poor had only their cloaks to cover themselves. Jesus says not to go to court about the shirt. Let it be taken away immediately and even gave your cloak along with it, thus shaming the aggressor.

Matthew is writing for Jews, where the sequence makes sense; Luke reverses it, because his audience is more gentile. In either case, the action of the person unjustly indebted shames the aggressor, without doing violence to him, without seeking revenge.

⁶⁵ Commentators usually assume the one who ends up holding both garments is a robber. This works, but I can’t see any particular reason for thinking that Luke has a robber in mind. Luke is more or less just following Matthew at this point.

⁶⁶ It’s not exactly clear what ‘leprosy’ means, but evidently it was some type of mildew or fungal infestation that affects cloth, buildings, and skin. If a coat got ruined by mildew today, we’d just throw it out and buy a new one. But in the preindustrial world, thread was hard to produce and cloth (woven thread) even harder. Thus because of the

labor needed to produce it, cloth and clothing was a very expensive and socially significant commodity. Hence it was worth taking in pledge against a loan for, say, seed grain.

⁶⁷ Ex 22.25-26 and Dt 24.12-13,17.

41 and whoever will commandeer you
for one mile,
go with him two.

41 και ὅστις σε ἀγγαρεύσει
μίλιον ἕν,
ὑπάγε μετ' αὐτοῦ δύο.

After social (5.39b) and economic indignities (5.40), a third scenario explicitly addresses a practice of Roman power: 'Somebody forces you to go one mile'.

The verb 'will force' (ἀγγαρεύσει, *aggareusei*) is in the future indicative, suggesting not *if* but *when*. Roman army personnel were permitted to commandeer labor, lodging, and transport (animals, ships). Pilate's soldiers 'forced' (same verb) Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross of Jesus, a convicted criminal, to the place of his execution (27.32). In most cases, this would mean being forced to carry a soldier's heavy backpack (Josephus, *JW* 3.95) for 'one mile', as permitted by law.

The power to commandeer was popular with soldiers, but obviously not so popular with the people. Just at the time Matthew was writing, abuses in Syria (where he was writing) were causing so much unrest that the emperor Domitian (81-96 AD) attempted to curtail it by a system of permits.⁶⁸ A soldier could commandeer someone for one mile, and after that, had to let him go. A soldier who abused his power could be punished by flogging, reduced rations, pay, or rank, or discharge— but discipline was inconsistent. Those who lived near a city such as Matthew's Antioch, where several legions were stationed, were especially vulnerable. Matthew is not adding this scenario just to fill the page, but because it was a real sore spot!

Jesus' response to this imposition of imperial power is not violent retaliation, but 'go with him two'. At first glance, it might seem that he is suggesting obsequious complicity, the path of least resistance and maximum cooperation that Epictetus urges as a way of not losing one's peace of mind amid trying circumstances (*Disc* 4.1.79). But, as with the previous examples, Jesus is a good deal more canny. He commands the disciple to respond to humiliation by refusing to be humiliated. By 'going a second mile', the person refuses to play the

game on Rome's terms. The soldier is surprised and put off guard. Why is this person being so nice? If I take him up on his offer— saving me the trouble of forcing someone to take his place— will he turn around and file a complaint for making him go two miles? The soldier doesn't know. And if he refuses a genuine offer to help, he is likely to do so in a more humane way. The subservient has seized the initiative, chosen the action, made the oppressor worry, and perhaps even opened the way to a different relationship, in heaven's regime. Perhaps on that second mile, they'll have a good conversation, and the disciple will win the soldier over to the new regime. Surely this, and not being a doormat, is the point.

Of course, everything depends on having a pure heart while carrying out the practice. Going the second mile with a scowl is not likely to have much good effect.

Explanation

5.42

42 To him who begs from you, give,
and one who wants to borrow from you,
you shouldn't turn away.

42 τῷ αἰτοῦντί σε δός,
καὶ τὸν θέλοντα ἀπὸ σοῦ δανίσασθαι
μὴ ἀποστραφῆς.

The Fifth Triad closes with the two related admonitions, 'Give to one who begs, and do not turn away one who wants to borrow' (5.42). Here, the violence and domination of the previous scenarios are no longer in view— even if some commentators have tried to make the verse fit by suggesting that beggars can be aggressive! Rather, this saying is more general. Also, it starts with the imperative form of a Prescription ('give!'), but ends with a negated subjunctive (literally, 'nor should you turn away'). For these reasons, this double charge works better as the *Explanation* we expect at the end of the Prescription, even without a conjunction such as 'because'.

Jesus requires disciples to give freely. Their actions are to be governed by the righteousness and generosity of heaven's regime.

In the first-century world, giving alms or making loans were things you did to enhance your reputation and social position. They obligated the recipient to enhance your status as patron— something we'll discuss at greater length when we get to almsgiving, the specific topic of 6.2ff. Here Jesus advocates *indiscriminate* giving— that is, giving without considering the usefulness of the recipi-

⁶⁸ Lewis, 'Domitian's Order,' 135-42. Lewis refers to similar orders from Germanicus in 19 AD, from a prefect in 48 AD, and from the prefect of Egypt in 68. Wink ('Beyond Just War,' 203) cites the Theodosian Code which promises severe penalties for abusing this power.

ent, which in turn means, without expecting anything in return.

There are two aspects:

The first involves alleviating the distress caused by the imperial system. To 'give to him who begs' is not a new commandment (cf Dt 15.7-11, though not universal, see Si 12.1-7), but it is a vital expression of mercy and solidarity. To the wealthy, Jesus commands that they share what they have freely and indiscriminately. They must learn to trust not in wealth, but in God alone. To the poor, he commands that they also share what they have freely and indiscriminately, *which means not to fight over scraps*. Oppressed people often turn their humiliation on each other in selfish, violent, greedy, and destructive acts. Jesus requires all of his disciples to do what they can to alleviate one another's suffering.

Among other things, disciples must resist the 'divide and conquer' strategy of the elite, and try to help each other. (See also 6.2-4.)

The second aspect involves creating an alternative system: 'do not turn away one who wants to borrow from you'. This is not new either,⁶⁹ but it's a radical alternative to dominant practices. Jesus sets aside concerns about repayment, interest rates, and default. He requires a system intent not on securing wealth but on ensuring justice and economic equality by providing support for all, by all. One's resources are available not only for oneself but also for others. Such, in fact, were the economic practices of the early church (Ac 2.42-47). We're all in this together. But how seriously do we dare trust this?

In the Prescription and its 'Explanation', Jesus has offered five examples of nonviolent resistance to oppressive power. They exemplify creative, imaginative strategies that break the circle of violence. Slaves refuse to be humiliated, the oppressed actively remind their oppressors of the covenant, the subjugated remind their occupiers of their common humanity, and disciples create a new economic and social structure— such actions manifest the transforming reign of God.

Instead of the law of equalization ('an eye for an eye'), Jesus has commanded equal sharing among brothers.

TRIAD 6— LOVE YOUR ENEMY 5.43-48

(1) Tradition

5.43

43 Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη·
ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου
καὶ μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου.

Since the opening formula of the Fourth Triad was the same as that of the First, and that of the Fifth the same as that of the Second, we expect the Sixth to begin as the Third, 'And it was said'. But instead, it repeats the formula of the previous Triad. Matthew often changes the last member of a series to signal that it is the end.

As the sixth Tradition, Jesus cites Lv 19.18b, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor', but he omits 'as yourself' and adds the contrasting 'and thou shalt hate thine enemy' (5.43). These are not his commandments, but what 'you have heard that it was said'.

'And thou shalt hate thine enemy' is not found in the Hebrew Bible, although somewhat comparable statements appear in Dt 20.1-18, Ps 139.21-22, and in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS 1.10-11). At any rate, by saying, 'You have heard', he implies that this is something familiar to his audience.

In the First and Fourth Triads, then, Jesus made a double citation from tradition, and he does the same here. Thus three Triads feature double citations, and three do not.

First-century Mediterranean persons were extremely group oriented. A meaningful human existence both meant and required total reliance on the group(s) in which one found oneself embedded— kin, village, neighborhood, and/or the factions one might join. In various ways these groups provided a person with a sense of self, a conscience, a self-awareness supported by others. Such first-century Mediterranean persons always needed others to know who they were, and to support or hinder their behavior. The group, in other words, functioned as an external conscience.

The result of such group orientation was an anti-introspective way of being. Persons had little concern for things psychological. Words referring to internal states always connoted corresponding external expressions as well. So when the Sixth Triad speaks of 'love' and 'hate', we have to recognize the anti-psychological group orientation of Jesus and Matthew. 'Love' is best translated 'attachment' or 'loyalty'. There may or may not be affection, but the attachment (for any reason) along with the

⁶⁹ Cf Ex 22.25; Lv 25.36-37; Dt 15.1-3; 4Mc 2.8.

behaviors associated with it is what 'love' is. 'To love God with all one's heart' means to show total attachment through covenant loyalty (22.37). 'To love one's neighbor as oneself' (19.19) is to show similar attachment to the people in one's 'neighbor'-hood (whatever 'hood' was relevant under the circumstances)— to be loyal to them as to your own family— a very normal thing in the group-oriented Mediterranean... unless families were feuding.

Correspondingly, 'hate' would mean 'disattachment, nonattachment, indifference.' Again, there may or may not be feelings of repulsion. But not having any particular stake in, along with behaviors showing non-attachment, is what 'hatred' is. To 'hate' is to 'disattach from', so that Jesus could describe departure from your family for his sake and that of the gospel as 'hating' father, mother, wife, children, and so on (Lk 14.26). You can 'hate' a master (6.24, NRSV translates 'despise'), 'betray one another' (24.10), or 'grow cold in love,' that is, be indifferent (24.12)— all these are examples of 'hating'.

In Lv 19 ('love your neighbor'), the focus is on Israel, parents, the poor and the foreigner, one another, a laborer, the deaf and blind, the poor and great, kin, people, slaves, priests, daughters, and the aged. 'Neighbor' embraces gender, wealth, kin, physical condition, age, and ethnicity. Absent from the OT list were Canaanites, Edomites, Moabites, and other foreigners.

Yet 'enemies' might not just be foreigners (cf Dt 20). The Psalmist lives among the godless and compassionless, the verbally and physically violent who threaten life (see Ps 18,31,41, etc.). For Sirach, distinguishing friends and enemies is difficult (Si 6.8-18; 12.9,17-18). For Plutarch, having enemies was normal, but instead of seeking revenge against them, one should use them to improve one's own life (*Moralia* 86B-92F). Other groups manifested hatred for those who were different, including Jews.

In Matthew, 'enemies' might include those of one's own household (10.36).

Feuding assured most adult males and their families of a good number of enemies. To a peasant, enemies are those who try to get what is rightfully his— those who would destroy his honor, take his land, undermine his family, and threaten his women. It made little difference whether they were Romans, the Jerusalem establishment, creditors, or dangerous neighbors— there were plenty of people not to 'love'.

So, 'You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor— and thou shalt hate thine enemy' (5.43).

(2) Prescription

5.44

In this Triad, which is the last of the second set of three and also the last of the Six on Torah, the *second* section begins as expected with 'But /*m* telling you'— but what follows is the Prescription, not the Diagnosis, which comes last. Fairly consistently, Matthew marks the final member of a series by varying the pattern. We've seen this in the ninth Beatitude (5.11-12), and in fact in the introductory phrase of this Triad ('you have heard that it was said', 5.43a; see above).

As expected, the present Prescription (5.44-45) contains imperatives: 'Love' and 'pray'. And, as expected, a supporting Explanation follows it— 'so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good'.

44 But /*m* telling you,
love your enemies and
pray for those who persecute you

44 ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν·
ἀγαπάτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν καὶ
προσεύχεσθε ὑπὲρ τῶν διωκόντων ὑμᾶς,

Love for enemies rejects the conventional wisdom of helping friends and harming enemies (5.43). This is not an idea unique to Jesus,⁷⁰ but his 'greater righteousness' (5.20) requires it. Ethnicity, gender, social status, appearance, and wealth provide no basis for restricting 'love' (loyalty) (cf 3.9), and even 'enemies' are to be treated as neighbors.

This is not easy. 'Enemies' include those who 'shall revile you and persecute you' (5.10-12). They are opponents of God's purposes enacted in Jesus and his people. They can cause economic sabotage (13.25):

13.25: But while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way....

'Love', like hate, is an action. It seeks the enemy's good in 'praying', and in actions (5.46) and greetings (5.47). Does praying for 'those who persecute you' (so also *T.Jos* 18.2) embrace prayers for the demise of Rome and its supporters (cf *Ps Sol* 2.25-27; 17.22-25)?

⁷⁰ See Ex 23.4-5; 1Kgdm 1 [1Sam LXX] 24.16-20; Pr 24.17-18; 25.21-22; Jon 4.10-11; *T.Iss* 7.6; *T.Zeb* 7.1-3; *T.Gad* 6.1-7; *T.Benj* 4.2-3; *Ep Arist* 227, 232; *Jos Asen* 29.3-4; Seneca, *De Ben* 7.30.2,5.

Love doesn't mean an all-accommodating 'niceness' without conflict. It may involve challenge and harsh words (cf 16.23). Nor is there any guarantee that it will be returned, that you will benefit, that the other will change, or that the action will even be recognized as loyalty. To challenge injustice and oppression and to manifest God's empire (5.3-9, 38-42) may well invite conflict and suffering, and perhaps all great loyalty will be crucified. Yet the early church's willingness to love actively and indiscriminately, especially in relieving the miseries and hardships of urban life suffered by the majority poor in cities like Antioch, was a major factor in its growth.

This command to 'love' is very close to the command in the First Triad, to 'find converging self-interests with your legal opponent' (5.25).

Explanation

5.45

Explaining the love he calls for, Jesus sets forth its purpose—

45 so that you should become
sons of your Father in the skies

45 ὅπως γένησθε
υἱοὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς,

— and he locates the reason for it in the Father's own action—

because
he makes the sun rise
on the wicked and the good,
and rains on the just and the unjust alike'.

ὅτι
τὸν ἥλιον αὐτοῦ ἀνατέλλει
ἐπὶ πονηροὺς καὶ ἀγαθοὺς
καὶ βρέχει ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους.

Acting now as peacemakers (cf 5.9), praying for one's enemies, doing good, and so on, marks the community as God's 'children', in covenant relationship with God as Father (see 5.16; 23.9), constituted not by ethnicity (cf Dt 14.1) but by following Jesus in imitating God (cf Matt 3.9) and sharing in his purposes.

The basis for indiscriminate loyalty is God's gracious and indiscriminate action as creator. God's 'sun rises on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.' God's control of 'sun' and 'rain' was an important theme in Israel's religion.⁷¹ Jesus points out that God's life-giving and loving actions in creation and his treatment of people are the same. Just as he makes the 'sun rise/dawn', Jesus the light 'dawns' (same verb) in the darkness of oppression, sin, and death (4.15-16). Disciples continue his mission as 'light of the world' (5.14).

Through sun and rain, God gives life indiscriminately and mercifully to all (Ps 145.9; Ws 15.1), regardless of moral status. The 'evil' and the 'unrighteous' are enemies of his purposes, but he extends his kindness even to them. Disciples do likewise.

Josephus, who probably knew the gospel of Luke, commented (*JW* 5.407), 'It is surely madness to expect God to show the same treatment to the just and the unjust (δικαίους... ἀδίκους, *dikaiois... adikois*). But Jesus didn't think so.

(3) Diagnosis

5.46-47

The Diagnosis section (5.46-47) of the Sixth Triad concludes the Six Triads on the Torah. The verbs here are either in the subjunctive or indicative, but not the imperative.

Under normal circumstances, 'love' bound parties in reciprocal obligation and secured the patron-client status of each (see 6.2). Jesus denies that such 'love' (or loyalty) does any good by asking two sets of two questions. The first set is—

46 for if you would love
those who love you,
what pay would you have?
Don't the toll-collectors
do the same thing?

46 ἐὰν γὰρ ἀγαπήσητε
τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας ὑμᾶς,
τίνα μισθὸν ἔχετε;
οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ τελῶναι
τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν;

⁷¹ See Gn 1.14-19; 2.4-5; Job 38, esp. vv. 24-30; Pss 19.5-6; 104.19-23; Si 43.2-5; *1 En* 41.4-8.

If you would love (subjunctive) only those who love you, your righteousness doesn't exceed that of the toll collectors and gentiles (people not under the covenant), and you can expect no reward from God— you aren't living in the breakthrough of grace that is heaven's regime.

This is the first reference in Matthew to 'toll collectors' (see 9.10-11; 11.19; 21.31-32). Toll collectors didn't collect personal, poll, income, or land taxes, but worked under government contract as members of the retainer class, to collect tolls on transported goods at commercial centers— that's why Matthew was at a 'toll-booth' (9.9-10). They made their money by adding a surcharge on Rome's already burdensome tax rate, and they had power to enforce their extortion. They were very unpopular, and social outcasts even among Romans (Cicero links them with beggars, thieves, and robbers [*De Off* 150-51]; see also Luke 18.11). But they found support from each other. Disciples certainly must do better than they!

Indiscriminate loving, part of the greater righteousness required of disciples (5.20), is a countercultural practice, undermining, not securing, social hierarchies and obligations (see 5.37).

47 and if you would greet
your brothers only,
what greater thing are you doing?
Don't people from the nations ('gentiles')
do the same thing?

47 καὶ ἂν ἀσπάσησθε
τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν μόνον,
τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε;
οὐχὶ καὶ οἱ ἔθνηκοὶ
τὸ αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν;

The second two questions are parallel, but establish further comparisons: 'if you greet only your brothers'— kin or disciples— 'what 'greater thing do you do than tax collectors?' Instead of imitating God's indiscriminate love, they copy cultural norms: 'do not even the gentiles do the same', whose loyalty was based on kinship or religion. Interestingly, this saying turns Jews into gentiles, for their practice is no different, either.

In 5.20, the central verse of the chiastic Inner Envelope and also the introduction to the Six Triads on Torah, Jesus said, 'unless your covenant faithfulness (righteousness) exceeds (*perisseuei*) that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the regime of the skies'. Here, he

says, 'What exceeding (*perissōn*, περισσὸν) thing have you done' if you only greet your brothers. This suggests that the scribes and Pharisees, in their separatism, are no better than the universally despised *toll-collectors*!

48 Therefore *you* will be perfect
as your father in the skies
is perfect.

48 ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι
ὡς ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος
τέλειός ἐστιν.

The first six Triads ends with a summarizing explanation: 'Therefore you will be complete as your Father in heaven is complete' (perfect, all-inclusive, whole). Jesus does not say, 'Be perfect', as the translations do. He does not demand that we live up to some ideal of moral perfection that God himself adheres to— the very idea that God 'lives up to' an ideal of some kind! He says that if you stop acting like the scribes and Pharisees, you *will be* 'perfect' or 'complete'.

The adjective *téleios*, τέλειος— 'perfect'— derives from the verb 'to complete'. Such wholeness of heart is not natural; it's something that God gives and people do as they discern and perform his will of love (Ws 9.6). Wholeness summarizes the way of life envisioned in the Six Triads (5.21-48) and indeed in all the Triads, which involves the whole person in every sphere doing love toward all, including enemies (5.44), imitating God's love for all, including those who resist God's purposes (5.45). Such 'exceeding' covenant faithfulness (5.20) expresses God's justice and his empire, his regime.

The Six Triads on Torah (5.21-48) have offered a vision of life under heaven's regime, a Torah-righteousness or covenant loyalty that 'exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees' (5.20). These verses illustrate a way of life marked by comprehensive and constant loyalty to the covenant, particularly as expressed in what was handed down through the ancients— the Ten Commandments and related texts. In offering these six triadic *examples*, Jesus trains his audience to embody heaven's regime in numerous *other* situations as well.

Four (1+2+1) Triads on Deeds of ‘Righteousness’ 6.1-18

Judaism singled out three practices in particular— almsgiving, prayer, and fasting— as *ḥesed*, literally, ‘(deeds of) righteousness / justice/ covenant faithfulness’. Although ‘righteousness’ or ‘justice’ is the usual translation of this Hebrew word and of the Greek equivalent that Matthew uses (*dikaïosynē*, δικαιοσύνη), this never means the rational and abstract virtue that it tends to be for us or as defined in philosophy; in Jesus’ and Matthew’s world, it always has a strong connotation of *covenant faithfulness*. Thus, deeds of righteousness would be deeds of justice or right practice mandated by the covenant given through Moses. After Six Triads on *Torah*, Matthew deals with three traditional *practices*, doubling the second to make them into a series of *four*— one on almsgiving (6.2-4), two on prayer (6.5-6, 7-13), and one on fasting (6.16-18).

Looking back, we recall that the central verse of the Inner Envelope was a general statement that ‘your righteousness (or: covenant faithfulness) must be greater than that of the scribes and Pharisees’ (5.20). That verse was not only the center of the chiasmic Inner Envelope; it also introduced the Six Triads on *Torah* that began with 5.21.

A similar general statement concerning ‘righteousness’ (6.1) now introduces the Four Triads on (Deeds of) Righteousness.

The Six Triads followed a consistent format— ‘You have heard it said... but I’m telling you’, etc. Likewise now the Four Triads on Righteous Deeds follow a consistent format, as the following chart shows:

Formula for	Six Triads (5.21-48)	Four Triads (6.1-18)
Tradition	You have heard it said (intro.):	Whenever you (concl.):
Diagnosis	But amen <i>I’m</i> telling you	Amen I tellya, they have their reward.
Prescription	5.21 therefore (<i>oun</i>) 5.29,37,44 But (<i>de</i>) 5.39 but (<i>all’</i>)	But you (<i>sy de</i>) (6.3,6,17) 6.9 therefore (<i>oun</i>)

Tradition: instead of introducing each Triad by saying ‘You have heard’ and quoting the *Torah*, as he did with the Six, Jesus now introduces each Triad with the word ‘whenever’ (*hotan*, ὅταν) and a single verb in the second person (‘you’), singular or plural, naming the practice (give alms, pray, fast). An exception is the Ninth Triad

(the third in this series) which, as a continuation of the topic of praying, has no ‘whenever’, and the verb is a participle (6.7):

Triad	Verse	Introductory Phrase	Verb	N°	
7	6.2a	Thus,	whenever you	give alms	Sg
8	6.5a	And	whenever you	pray	Pl*
9	6.7a	But	—	praying	Pl
10	6.16a	But	whenever you	fast	Sg

* Triad 8 switches to the singular for the Prescription.

The verb in each case is a subjunctive (a participle in 6.7), and simply names a traditional deed of covenant .

Diagnosis: In each case except the third, the Diagnosis is practicing righteousness for show and expecting a reward from God (6.2b,5b,7b,16b). In each case, the warning begins with ‘do not’ (*mē*, μή or *ouk*, οὐκ), but the verb is not imperative, but the subjunctive or indicative— so the translation might be ‘you shouldn’t’ rather than ‘do not’. In each case also, the outcome of practicing improperly is ‘Amen I tellya’ (but not the emphatic ‘Amen I am telling you’) plus ‘they have their reward’. These legitimation formulas appear at the *end* of each of these Diagnosis sections, whereas legitimation formulas *introduced* the Diagnosis sections of the Six Triads. Again, the Ninth Triad differs from the others.

Prescription: In the imperative, as expected, Jesus summons us to practice deeds of righteousness in secret, that is, before God’s knowing, merciful gaze alone.

In each case there is an **Explanation**, ‘so that your Father who sees in secret will reward you will reward you’ (6.4,6,14-15,18). The explanation is very extended in the third of these four Triads (6.15-15), following the Lord’s Prayer. It speaks of what ‘your Father’ will do for you, but it doesn’t mention his ‘seeing in secret’, because forgiving, unlike the others acts of covenant faithfulness, is not done in secret.

Thus in these four Triads, Jesus is reorienting the disciple from public to private piety; and from holding secret grudges to open and public forgiveness.

Not quite surprisingly, this extended explanation appears in the last of the first nine (3 x 3) Triads, which is at the same time the first of the final six (3 x 2) of the Teaching as a whole. Matthew likes triads!

We can look at each section separately now.

INTRODUCTION

6.1

As mentioned, the Four Triads have an introduction:

6.1 [But/and] watch
not to do [acts of] covenant faithfulness
in front of people,
to be seen by them.

Otherwise,
you won't have payment
from your father in the skies.

6.1 Προσέχετε [δέ]
τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν
ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων
πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι αὐτοῖς·
εἰ δὲ μή γε,
μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε
παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν
τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

For 6.1, the KJV has, 'Take heed that ye do not your alms before men'. It then repeats this in 6.2: 'Therefore when thou doest [thine] alms...'. But 6.1 actually says, 'Take heed not to do your *righteousness* before men'. Jesus introduced two sets of three Triads on the Torah with a general call for a '*righteousness* that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees' (5.20). The scribes and Pharisees were teachers of *Torah*, and he taught Six Triads on the Torah after that.

He now introduces four Triads on (Deeds of) Righteousness with another general saying on practicing (deeds of) *righteousness* (6.1). These deeds are, traditionally, three: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

NKJV/OSB translates Matthew's term 'justice/righteousness' (*dikaiosynē*, δικαιοσύνη) as 'charitable deeds'. That's how we conceptualize *almsgiving*, but not prayer, and not fasting. So that translation misses the point that Jesus is making. It also misses the important structural relationship to 5.20. NRSV has 'piety', which again is unhelpful and inconsistent, although it is arguably general enough. We need a translation that surfaces the covenant context, makes Matthew's structure clear, and points the reader to all the other discussions of righteousness / justice / covenant faithfulness in the Bible.

In the Fifth Triad (5.38-42), Jesus' call to 'give to everyone who asks, and do not turn away him who would borrow' implied a restructuring of social relationships

through open sharing of resources. In the present Triads, Jesus shows himself to be concerned with motivation as well— you must not do these things '*in order to be seen*'. The warning is not against being *seen*, but against doing righteousness *in order to be seen*.

To us, this might seem somewhat obvious, although the fact that people insist on putting their names on buildings and bells and stained glass windows suggests that we might not *quite* have gotten the point across to everyone yet. The practice of making tax-deductible 'donations' to a sports club in order to get your corporate name on the stadium is not far afield either. We excuse the latter as paid marketing— surely ticket prices would go up without that donation— and we tolerate the former in order to secure the contribution, and thus we engrave our failure in stone.

But in an honor-shame society, good reputation was sustained by the approval and esteem of others who have benefited from one's public actions, so it was normal to blow your horn in the ancient world, and even necessary if you wanted to maintain or enhance your social status. Against this current, Jesus castigates those who practice their deeds of righteousness in public, so as to gain honor, as 'play-actors' (*hypokritai*, ὑποκριταί). They are not acting out of an human compassion, nor from an acute sense of belonging to the Covenant, but out of sheer self-interest.⁷²

Yet this way of going about it was a fundamental social pattern in Jesus' society. The command to perform (deeds of) righteousness in secret strikes at the heart of it, and it's shocking that Jesus opposes it. Disciples are to witness not to their own honor but to heaven and its regime. And others are not to honor them, but their Father in the skies (5.16).

'Beware' (*prosechete*, προσέχετε) signals danger. In four of the five subsequent uses of this verb, the danger emanates from the synagogue or religious leaders (10.17; 16.6,11,12; in 7.15 from false prophets). So this is not just a general commandment to 'be careful'. Jesus is differentiating his disciples and their practice from the *synagogue's*, and he designates *its* practice as *dangerous*.

The only audience for almsgiving, worship, and for mourning expressed in fasting, is God himself. If you seek to be seen by others as you do these things, you are not seeking his honor, but your own. You may find

⁷² By way of contrast, Buddhist compassion (*karuna*) is fundamentally groundless, being a function of the nature of things as they are. It is interesting to compare this with the Covenant-based notion of compassion in Scripture.

what you're looking for, but why should 'your Father in the skies' reward you for being honored by others?

What exactly God will reward *with*, Jesus does not specify, but first-century Mediterranean non-elites, like poor people everywhere, were very much oriented to the present. First-century Jews and Christians didn't have much concern about grace in the soul or the quality of their personal afterlife. It's true that God would save *Israel* by asserting his reign, which would include raising the dead, and Jesus has declared the *poor*, those who *mourn*, the *unjustly deprived* to be the heirs of heaven's regime. But personal reward from God was something expected in the here and now, even if present benefits portended eschatological blessings. There was no concern about 'going to heaven'. Accordingly, Jesus' disciples fully expected to be rewarded a hundredfold (19.29).

This is not the 'prosperity gospel' because the sufferings of the righteous (the covenant faithful) are part of the story. In fact, by not seeking honor and by practicing deeds of covenant faithfulness in secret, disciples would not only enter heaven's regime, but were likely to find dishonor and suffering as well. But Jesus promises reward from 'your father who sees in secret' to those who avoid practicing in order to be seen.

TRIAD 7— ALMSGIVING 6.2-4

(1) Tradition 6.2a

2 Whenever, therefore,

2 Ὅταν οὖν

'Whenever' (*hotan*, ὅταν) indicates that Jesus is about to discuss a practice common and familiar to everybody.

'Therefore' (*oun*, οὖν) links what he's about to say back to what he's just said, about not practicing (deeds of) righteousness for show (6.1), and introduces the first of the three '(deeds of) righteous' (*ḥesed*) commonly considered together in Judaism.

you would practice almsgiving,

ποιῆς ἐλεημοσύνην,

The first traditional practice is summed up in two words, literally, 'do mercifulness'. This means giving alms. The verb 'do' is a subjunctive in the second person singular—literally, 'would do'. So— 'whenever you would do mercifulness'.

Almsgiving is sharing material resources with the needy. When the imperial wealthy provided relief for some of the poor, they anticipated benefit and honor. You built your reputation and status by conspicuous and calculated acts of kindness (which was actually called 'love-of-honor', *philotimia*), and even if you had actually some concern for compassion, which was not necessarily the case, your own honor-status was your main motivation. Similarly, today, AT&T's executives probably like baseball, but it wasn't baseball that motivated AT&T's generous bestowal of its own name on the ball park in San Francisco. In the ancient world, almsgiving in fact maintained the hierarchical patron-client relation by binding the needy into dependent relationships without addressing economic structures. (We might ask what it's doing in our world, for example, to university research facilities.)

Seneca thought it appropriate to provide relief to the poor, but not to feel pity or sorrow (*De Clem* 2.6.6). And there's no point in helping the 'undeserving' (*De Vita Beata* 24.1). For Plutarch greed and accumulation didn't bring happiness ('On the Love of Wealth', *Moralia* 523C-528B), but giving it to the destitute wasn't anything he'd recommend; after all, he says, 'as far as sufficiency goes, no one is poor; and no one has ever borrowed money to buy barley meal, a cheese, a loaf, or olives' (523F). Obviously he hadn't spent too much time in the vast tenements where the great majority of Romans lived in squalor and malnutrition.⁷³ Generally, the Greco-Roman world sought to maintain, not to overcome, social stratification, with the wealthy dominating, exploiting, and depriving the destitute majority, whom they generally viewed with disgust, but occasionally found useful for purposes of self-aggrandizement.

For the Jews, giving alms was part of what God required, often with prayer, fasting, and other acts of justice,⁷⁴ but in the Greco-Roman world, the notion that a god might actually *require* worshipers to care for each other was highly unusual.⁷⁵ But Jesus was a Jew, so his concern was not *whether* to give alms— he says 'whenever' not 'if ever'— but *how* to practice the indiscriminate love or loyalty that he enjoined in the previous Triads (cf 5.38-47). He assumes that disciples will do this (cf 5.7,43-48), regardless of their economic level.

The word for 'give alms' (*eleēmosynē*, ἐλεημοσύνη) is related to the words 'merciful/mercy' (*eleēmones/eleos*,

⁷³ Plutarch takes a similar attitude to the poor who can't afford education ('Education of Children', *Moralia*, 11E).

⁷⁴ See, eg, Pr 25.21-22; Si 3.30; 7.10; Tb 1.3, 16-17; 4.6-11; 12.8-10; Ps-Phoc 22-30.

⁷⁵ Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 85-88, 147-62 (Antioch). 209-12.

ἐλεήμονες/ἔλεος) in the Beatitudes (5.7). Mercy denotes the presence of God's regime. Rome's regime distributed resources very unequally (so 5.3-12)— it had a huge 'income gap', as many societies do today as well. Seneca attests great poverty in cities: 'how great a majority are the poor' (*To Helvia, on Consolation* 2.1). But sharing is an economic practice that refuses to deny others access to needed resources through greed, selfishness, self-concern, and oppression. Indiscriminate giving (5.43-48) creates a different economy than one based on profit and exploitation. Jesus addresses the structural issues with a radical commandment that eschews self-seeking. The same issues were dealt with under the Covenant also.

(2) Diagnosis

6.2b-c

you shouldn't blow a horn before yourself,
like the hypocrites do
in the synagogues
and in the streets
so that they might be glorified
by people.

μη̄ σαλπίσης ἔμπροσθέν σου,
ὥσπερ οἱ ὑποκριταὶ ποιοῦσιν
ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς
καὶ ἐν ταῖς ῥύμαις,
ὅπως δοξασθῶσιν
ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

The image may be somewhat exaggerated for polemical purposes, but it discloses considerable antagonism between Matthew's community and the 'hypocrites in the synagogues' (the scribes and Pharisees, cf ch 23). It doesn't allow that some in the synagogues might not be hypocrites. It caricatures behaviors that drew attention to the almsgiver such as boasting about one's generosity, memorializing oneself in inscriptions and monuments, etc.

The main verb is another subjunctive, not an imperative: 'you shouldn't trumpet it before you'. A negated subjunctive like this often did function effectively as a negative imperative, but in fact it is not a grammatical imperative. In this case, we have an observation about the (in-)correctness of a practice common enough within an honor-shame culture.

Almsgiving should not be done for show, as the 'hypocrites' do. The 'hypocrites' are the scribes and Pharisees.⁷⁶

'Hypocrite', a term which Matthew uses here for the first of 13 times, is taken from the theater— an actor; one who plays a role. The term also designates a godless person (Jb 34.14; 36.13; Si 1.29; cf *Pss Sol* 4.1-8) who plays a role (4Mc 6.15,17). Aiding others must not have as its real, inner interest one's own honor and reputation. That would be about 'you', not about the other person, nor about God or about justice. How can such self-interest do anything *but* reaffirm the injustice of the client state?

This harsh and repeated verdict about Pharisees and scribes isn't an objective view but a polemical verdict that seems to reflect a bitter conflict with the synagogue. Disciples must practice differently.

Jesus ministers in 'synagogues' (4.23), but there is distance between him and them. Matthew writes '*their* synagogues' five times (4.23, 9.35, 10.17, 12.9, 13.54), whereas Mark uses the expression only twice (Mk 1.23, 2.39), and Luke only once (Lk 4.15). This is the first of several negative references to hypocrisy (6.5; cf 23.6) and resistance (10.17; 12.9; 13.54; 23.34) in synagogues.

'Their' motivation is described as 'so that they might be glorified by others'— not just '*seen*', as in the introductory verse (6.1). Glory should be directed to God (5.16), not to almsgivers. These play-actors, who appear to be generous but are actually self-interested, steal the gratitude and praise due to God, the giver and sustainer of life (5.45; 6.25-34).

Almsgiving, prayer, and fasting were central symbolic concerns of the Pharisees, to whom Matthew refers either in conjunction with the Sadducees, or priestly party, or the scribes, or Torah experts, or alone— always in a posture of challenging criticism.⁷⁷ The Pharisees are the first to decide to do away with Jesus (12.14), and they thus emerge as Jesus' main opponents in his task of revitalizing Israel, although they do not end up themselves engineering his murder.

Their main concern was the sanctification, purity, or 'holiness' of Israel. The avoidance of out-group contaminants was the focus of many of their significant practices. Their intense maintenance of boundaries against out-groups translated into nationalistic exclusiveness. For the

⁷⁶ Cf the contrast in 5.20; subsequently, see 15.7; 22.18; 23.13,14,15,23, 25,27,29.

⁷⁷ With sadducees: 3.7; 16.1,6,11,12; 21.45; 27.62; scribes: 5.20, 12.38; 15.1; 23.2,13,15,23,25,27,29; alone: 9.11,34; 12.2,24; 15.12; 19.3; 22.15; 22.34,41.

Pharisees, out-groups included all other nations ('gentiles') as well as fellow Israelites unconcerned with such exclusiveness. If *henotheism* is the worship of one god, along with the recognition that there might be other gods who are not of concern, then theologically, the Pharisees' image of God was *henotheistic*— 'the Lord is our God' (Dt 6.4); their emphasis on being a 'chosen people' also replicates such exclusiveness. Other people might have other gods, but 'the Lord is our God, and we are his people'. 'Our God', of course, is supreme.

In Matthew's story, Jesus is no less exclusive, but the boundaries he draws are different. He looks 'only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10.6), emphasizes repentance rather than ritual purification, and teaches love of one's 'brothers' that is, of (Israelite) neighbors as oneself. In sociological terms this indicates an inclusion of *all* members of Israel in the in-group— not just the 'pure'— with emphasis on the group attachment of those who choose to obey God within Jesus' vision of a revitalized Israel ('heaven's regime'). The outgroup still consists of all non-Israelites. Theologically, this is still rooted in an image of a henotheistic God— 'the Lord our God'— but the 'chosen people' is broader. . . . until he gives a final decree after his resurrection, surprisingly informing his disciples that membership in his revitalized Israel is not only *open* to 'all nations', but that they are actively to 'go into nations' and bring them in to his revitalized Israel. Matthew does not explain how or why this has happened, as Luke does, in the Acts. But receiving this edict was the first step that would lead Jesus' followers into the true monotheism of one God for all humankind.

The Pharisees in the gospels are the ancestors of the rabbinate of modern Jewry. But 'normative Judaism' and its Talmud— what we think of as 'Judaism' today— did not emerge until the fourth century AD, at the same time that Christian elites were debating the relationship of Jesus to God (the early Christological controversies).

As Christianity diffused into the Roman Empire, 'monotheism'— 'only-one-god-ism'— in contrast to the 'one-god-ism' of henotheistic Judaism, developed as Jesus (Christ) was proclaimed the unique mediator between man and the sole God. This monotheism radically distinguished the Christian tradition from the traditional Israelite henotheism that eventually became 'normative Judaism' in the fourth century.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1992) p 168.

amen I'm telling you,
they're getting their payment.

ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν,
ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν.

Jesus' authoritative 'Amen I'm telling you' declares the reality of the practice of trumpeting your alms before you: 'They're getting their payment' (present tense). Public applause is what they're looking for, and public applause is the 'pay' they're getting— and when they get it, the debt is paid. Thus a statement about a present fact is also an eschatological judgment: there's nothing more for them. It also suggests their *satisfaction* rests in themselves.

When the recipient exists only to honor the giver, there is neither gift nor solidarity nor just relationship. God requires 'deeds of righteousness', but the 'play-actors' in the 'synagogue' mirror imperial practice and its 'justice' rather than the 'greater justice' of heaven's regime (5.20). They put what should be gift on a mercantile basis.

(3) Prescription 6.3-4a

3 But you, when you're giving alms,
don't let your left [hand] know
what your right [hand] is doing,

3 σοῦ δὲ ποιῶντος ἐλεημοσύνην
μὴ γνῶτω ἡ ἀριστερά σου
τί ποιεῖ ἡ δεξιὰ σου,

Jesus introduces the Prescription with the word 'but' (*de*, δὲ), as he does in most of the Triads. The verb 'let it not know' is an imperative⁷⁹— in fact the only one in the whole Triad— just as we've come to expect.

In contrast to the synagogue and the larger imperial society that it mirrors, the disciple (still addressed with a singular pronoun, you) has a different practice. Just as the hyperbole of 'trumpeting' highlighted the wrong practice, hyperbole again highlights the correct way to

⁷⁹ *gnōtō* (γνῶτω) is a 3rd person singular aorist active imperative whose subject is 'your left [hand]'. We don't have 3rd person imperatives in English, so we have to say 'don't let', making 'you' the subject; or 'let not', retaining the hand as subject, but turning the verb into a subjunctive.

do it: 'But when you give alms, don't let your left [hand] know what your right is doing'.

An Explanation follows, also as expected— this time doubled— in the form of a dependent clause.

Explanation

6.4b

4 so that
your merciful alms might be in secret,

4 ὅπως
ἤ σου ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ·

The clause is introduced by the word 'so that' (*hopōs*, ὅπως), and the verb (a subjunctive) and pronoun 'your' are emphatic— 'so that *your* almsgiving might be in secret'.

Why should you 'not let your left hand know what your right is doing'? First, the practice itself should have the social characteristic of secrecy,⁸⁰ which is how God himself acts: 'so that your alms may be done in secret'.

But second, there follows a declarative future indicative:

and your father
who sees in secret
will give back to you.

καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου
ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ
ἀποδώσει σοι.

Instead of performing for the public, the disciples act before God, 'your Father looking on in secret'. Elsewhere, the 'all-seeing' or 'observant' (ἐποπτήης, *epoptēs*) God sees and punishes the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes (2Mc 3.39; 7.35; 9.5).

But the same term is used for the *emperor*. So disciples are to look to God's patronage rather than to the Roman patronage system for honor, favor, and approval, and seek to be noticed by him, and not by other men. Seeking social acclaim would be contrary to their identity. God, not public acclaim or approval, provides their only significant audience as they share material support.

⁸⁰ See Pss 33.13-15; 139.6-16; Pr 25.2; Si 16.17-23; 23.17-21; 42.15-25; TJob 9.7-8; T.Gad 5.3; 2Bar 83.3.

This is the 'greater righteousness'. God 'will give back to you' in the judgment and completion of his own purposes. Jesus does not say, 'God will *pay* you.' He says he will 'give back' to you. If you circulate the gifts you have received precisely as gift, the abundance of the gift will return to bless you.⁸¹

TRIAD 8— PRAYER (1)

6.5-6

The next two Triads discuss prayer, the second of the three traditional 'deeds of righteousness'. Matthew outlines two aspects and two errors concerning it:

- In the Eighth Triad (6.5-6), the error concerns the *practice* of prayer: disciples should not imitate the synagogue in seeking public approval for prayer, but should pray in secret.
- In the Ninth Triad (6.7-15), the error concerns the *theology* of prayer: disciples should not pray as the gentiles do by piling up many magic words, but should speak to the Father directly and for the things mentioned in the Lord's Prayer; moreover, they must forgive if they want his forgiveness.

Again employing polemical language, these Triads distance the disciples' lifestyle from those of the 'synagogue' and of the Greco-Roman world, respectively.

(1) Tradition

6.5a-b

5 And whenever you pray,

5 Καὶ ὅταν προσεύχησθε,

By the word 'and', Jesus links this second Triad back to 6.1, his introductory, general warning against performing (deeds of) righteousness performed for show.

He also introduces the practice, prayer, the same way he introduced almsgiving 6.2, by saying 'whenever'.

However, this time, 'you' is plural— but Jesus will switch to the singular in the Prescription section.

Again, not 'if', but 'when you pray'. The assumption is that disciples do pray.

⁸¹ See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (Vintage: New York, 2007), for a fascinating discussion of the gift economy and its significance. Apparently the book has become an underground classic among artists and other creatives.

(2) Diagnosis

6.5c

you shall not be like the play-actors,
οὐκ ἔσεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταί,

Despite the usual translations, the verb is not actually an imperative here, but a plural future indicative: 'you [pl.] shall not be like the play-actors'. We can, of course, take this as a negative imperative *in effect*, like the Ten Commandments' 'Thou shalt not', but the fact that it's not actually an imperative fits the pattern that reserves imperatives for the third part of the Triad, and never for the second part.

What's the problem with the play-actors, apart from the fact that the do deeds of righteousness to be seen by other people (6.1) and to be glorified by them (6.2)?

because they love
to pray standing
in the synagogues and
on the street corners
so that they might appear to people:

ὅτι φιλοῦσιν
ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ
ἐν ταῖς γωνίαις τῶν πλατειῶν
ἐστῶτες προσεύχεσθαι,
ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις·

'They *love* to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so they might shine before men'. Most of the vocabulary in this Triad repeats that of the previous one (6.2-4) and indeed of the introductory verse (6.1); again the polemic attacks the synagogue in unflattering and generalized terms.

But this time the polemic is intensified by pointing to their *delight* in public display. They '*love* (*philousin*, φιλοῦσιν) to pray standing in synagogues and street-corners'. They *love* to display. They want to 'shine out' (*phanōsin*, φανῶσιν) before others. Like their almsgiving, their prayer is self-serving.

amen I'm telling you,
they're getting their payment.

ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν,
ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν.

Again the verdict is, 'they're getting paid already' by the audience they seek. No more reward for them!

(3) Prescription

6.6a

6 But you, when you would pray,
go into that closet of yours,
and having shut that door of yours,
pray to that father of yours
in secret.

6 σὺ δὲ ὅταν προσεύχη,
εἴσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμειὸν σου
καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου
πρόσευξαι τῷ πατρὶ σου
τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ·

The Triad began in the plural, but finishes with an emphatic singular because going into your closet to pray in secret is a private act.

The Prescription is introduced with 'but' (*de*, δὲ) and its main verbs, 'enter' and 'pray', are imperatives.

The word *tamieion* (ταμειῖον) refers to a storeroom, closet, or inner chamber (Gn 43.30; Ex 8.3 (7.28 LXX and MT); Dt 32.25; Tb 7.15; 8.1: Si 29.12)— in any case, out of the public space and the public's gaze, but in the presence of God 'who sees in secret' (6.6b).

Explanation

6.6b

and that father of yours
who sees in the secret place
will give back to you.
καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου
ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ
ἀποδώσει σοι.

Again, the explanation for recommending this behavior is that your Father who sees in secret will 'give back' you.

Prayer, like almsgiving, is a gift, not a mercantile event, and it invites (and asks for) a 'gift economy' with God.

TRIAD 9— PRAYER (2) 6.7-13

(1) Tradition 6.7a

The Eighth Triad— the first on prayer (6.5-6)— defined the prayer of disciples over against that of the 'synagogue'; the Ninth (6.7-13) now defines it over against that of the 'gentiles'. On one level it concerns the choice and number of words in prayer, on another level, the type of practice itself, and on yet a deeper level the kind of god who is being addressed.

7 But praying,

7 Προσευχόμενοι δὲ

The verse continues to assume the traditional practice of prayer, 'whenever you would pray' (6.5), so it sums up the traditional practice in a single word, 'praying' (*proseuchomenoi*, προσευχόμενοι), which is in the plural.

Because the subject continues from the previous Triad, it lacks the word 'whenever', as in the previous and following Triads. However, the particle 'but' (*de*, δὲ) following the completion of the triadic pattern in 6.6 signals a new beginning, if not quite a new topic.

(2) Diagnosis 6.7b-8a

you shouldn't yammer on like the gentiles,

μὴ βατταλογήσητε ὡσπερ οἱ ἔθνικοί,

Here again the verb is not an imperative but a negated future subjunctive: not, 'don't stutter', but, 'you shouldn't stutter or stammer like the gentiles'. The word *battalogeō* (βατταλογέω) doesn't mean 'empty phrases', much less 'vain repetitions', but something like 'stammer and drool',⁸² or perhaps 'babble, yammer on, etc', as its sound even suggests (meaningless onomatopoeic sound *batta* + *logos*).

KJV's 'use vain [i.e., empty] repetitions' has more to do with 16th-century anti-Catholic polemics than with literal meaning. Even then, the emphasis would have to be on *vain* repetitions, for clearly, the issue is not *repetition*,

since Jesus repeats himself in 26.36-46; nor can it be *long* prayers as such, for he also prays all night in 14.23-25.

The meaningless *batta-* might refer to the 'magic' sounds believed to be the language of the gods in the Greek Magical Papyri, etc. Applied to the use of mantras like 'Om' or 'Namu Amida Butsu', this verse is sometimes used as ammunition in *our* war against 'newage'. If the word addressed Hellenistic magical practices, then it may fit some of that, but it may fit other Eastern practices no better than KJV's 'vain repetitions' covers the Rosary or the Jesus Prayer. So we have to be careful about our polemics, even as we take Jesus' point.

An explanatory clause, introduced with 'for' or 'because' (*gar*, γὰρ), identifies the problematic attitude underlying the practice of *battalogia* in prayer:

for they think that
in their wordiness
they will be listened to.

δοκοῦσιν γὰρ ὅτι
ἐν τῇ πολυλογίᾳ αὐτῶν
εἰσακουσθήσονται.

Luke 18.1-8 tells the story of a widow who kept pestering an unjust judge to render verdict in her favor. Finally the judge says, 'because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, lest she beat me down' (18.5). Why would people think repetition and quantity are needed to get a hearing from the gods? Well, doesn't God or the gods often seem unknowing, reluctant, deaf and uncaring? Don't they behave like the empire (which behaves like its gods)— generally unresponsive and cruel?

Some 'gentiles'— 'people who belonged to the nations' (*ethnikoi*, ἔθνικοι, a literal translation of *goyim*)— did offer prayers of great length in order to *wear down* the divinity so that s/he would grant the favor sought. Also, in traditional Roman and Greek prayer, you had to describe what you wanted as exactly and minutely as you could, lest the deity mistakenly or capriciously grant the wrong favor. 'Be careful what you ask for' is a modern idea that belongs in this category.

The pagan gods were just as capricious, corrupt, vain, cruel, and self-interested as earthly patrons could be, and had to be approached in the same way. Thus relations with God or the gods were relations modeled on the patronage system of the ancient world.

But the divine patron of the Jesus group— 'your Father in the skies'— 'knows what you need before you ask him'.

⁸² Cf Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, s.v.

Prayer is a connection, not a contract, and God is ‘your father’; he’s on *your* side, not looking for ways to trick you.

Again, Jesus’ words are surely something of a polemical exaggeration, not a considered description of all gentile spiritual practice everywhere.⁸³ Plutarch says the priestess at Delphi delivers oracles before the question is put because her god ‘understands the dumb and hears when no man speaks’ (‘On Talkativeness’, *Moralia* 512E).⁸⁴

But polemic is never fair. Nor is Jesus delivering a speech on all the forms of prayer in the pagan world, carefully explaining which are good and which are bad. He is pointing to an undesirable attitude and the practice it motivates, in order to show the solution.

8 Don’t therefore be like them,

8 μὴ οὖν ὁμοιωθῆτε αὐτοῖς·

Since 6.7-8 continues the topic of praying from the previous Triad, it doesn’t complete every detail of the parallel; here it replaces the introductory ‘Amen I’m telling you’ with a simple ‘therefore’ (*oun*, οὖν). But the (negated) verb is still in the subjunctive, as we expect in the second part of each Triad, not the imperative— literally, ‘you shouldn’t therefore be like them’— even though this formation is regularly used as an imperative and I’ve

⁸³ Seneca’s words seem admirable enough: ‘Pray for a sound mind and for good health, first of soul and then of body. And of course you should offer those prayers frequently. Call boldly upon God; you will not be asking him for that which belongs to another. ... It is a true saying which I have found in Athenodorus: “Know that you’re freed from all desires when you’ve reached such a point that you pray to God for nothing but what you can pray for openly.” But how foolish men are now! They whisper the basest of prayers to heaven; but if anyone listens, they are silent at once. That which they are unwilling for men to know, they communicate to God... [But] “Live among men as if God beheld you; speak with God as if men were listening?”’ (*Ep* 10.4-5). See also *De Ben* 2.1.4; Martial, *Epig* 1.39.5. Long prayers tried to force gods to listen and wearied them (Statius, *Thebaid*, 2.244). Pythagoras teaches people to pray simply for ‘all good things’ and ‘not name them...’, as power, strength, beauty and the like’ (Diodorus Siculus 10.9.8). Apollonius urges a short prayer, ‘O ye gods, grant me what I deserve’ (Philostratus. *Life of Apollonius* 1.11; also 4.40). For Jewish texts, see, eg, *Eccl* 5.2-3; *Isa* 1.15; *Si* 7.14.

⁸⁴ Compare Jesus’ prayer with Seneca’s instruction to pray for a sound mind and health of soul and body (*Ep* 10.4), or Plutarch’s instructions to pray for the productivity of the soil, tempering of the seasons, childbearing by wives, and the safety (σωτηρίαν, *sōtērian*) of the offspring (‘Precepts of Statecraft’, *Moralia* 824C-D). Epictetus urges submissive prayer, ‘Use me henceforward for whatever Thou wilt; I am of one mind with Thee; I am Thine’ (*Disc* 2.16.42-43). The Magical Papyri and a shrine of Zeus at Dodona attest numerous petitions for health, wealth, love, favor and fame, friendship, knowledge about the future, choice of occupation, business success, daily plans, travel, revenge, and protection against anger, revenge, disease, and so on.

translated it so here, in order to capture the striking emphasis of the repeated command.

An explanation of *why* ‘you shouldn’t be like them’ follows:

for your father knows

what you have need of

before you ask him.

οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν

ἦν χρεῖαν ἔχετε

πρὸ τοῦ ὑμᾶς αἰτῆσαι αὐτόν.

‘Because (*gar*, γὰρ)’, Jesus explains, ‘your father’ (so 5.16,45,48; 6.4,6) ‘knows what you need before you ask him’ (cf *Isa* 65.24). The God of Jesus and his disciples is the all-seeing father of 6.4,6. This same father, the God who indiscriminately sustains all life (5.45), will indeed meet the ‘needs’ of his children who ask. Their main ‘needs’ will be elaborated shortly, in 6.11-13,25-34: bread, debt-forgiveness, clothing, and indeed, the father’s own regime.

Jesus gives his disciples reason not to assume that their Father is like the gods of the nations. They should imitate the nations in the way they pray no more than God imitates their rulers in the way he is. They can enter into trusting prayer with this ‘father’. Not only in social relations, but in their basic spiritual attitude, their identity and lifestyle contrast with gentile and Pharisaic theology and practice.

But how *do* you pray?

(3) Transforming Initiative

6.8b-15

9 In this way, therefore, pray, yourselves:

9 Οὕτως οὖν προσεύχεσθε ὑμεῖς·

Jesus now shows how disciples should practice, given the alternative theology of 6.8 (‘your Father knows what you need’): ‘Pray then like this’, he says, using the imperative that we’ve come to expect in the third part of a Triad, with an emphatic plural pronoun: ‘*You [all]*, then— pray *this way*’.

The plural verb and the emphatic ‘you’ (pl) indicate group prayer, in contrast with the private prayer ‘in the closet’ mentioned in the previous Triad (6.6).

'Like this' (*houtōs*, οὕτως) suggests that the following prayer is more of an example than a formula, although of course Christians have always strived to make Jesus' words their own.

The Lord's Prayer connects closely with the theological statement about 'the father who knows what you need' just made in 6.8.

So here's *how* we should pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our father
in the skies,

Πάτερ ἡμῶν
ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς;

The prayer begins by addressing 'our father in the skies'.

'Our' indicates a communal prayer. This pronoun is used seven (!) times in the Lord's Prayer, and places all who pray it (especially together) on the same footing before God regardless of social, gender, class, or other roles in a hierarchical world. It draws 'us' into a community in which relationship with God— not cultural markers, leadership roles, or anything else— provides 'our' identity as his 'sons' (and daughters, of course; but saying 'sons' in Jesus' context meant 'heirs').

A 'Father' implies children, and children in the ancient world symbolized not innocence and purity but marginality, vulnerability, threat to and exclusion from the adult (male) world. But they also represented hope and inheritance. Naming ourselves as children of this father, we find that we are *God's* hope, *God's* future in *his* world.

Jupiter/Zeus was also commonly called 'father of gods and men', and the emperor was styled 'father of his fatherland'⁸⁵— but the creator and sovereign God is Jesus' Father and is manifested by him (cf 1.21,23; 2.15; 3.16-17). As God's son, he draws others into his own relationship to God the Father (5.9,45).

This prayer thus sustains the identity and lifestyle of this community. It is not a general, all-purpose expression of human dependence on the divine. In the early church, it was not even taught to catechumens until they were baptized, because we don't become God's 'sons' until we're incorporated through baptism as 'sons' into his Son, Jesus.

The community of 'sons' defined by the practices exemplified in the Fourteen Triads (5.21–7.11) prays a prayer that subverts all kinds of cultural commitments and practices. In praying 'thus', they envision and express their own commitment to the transformation of the current order, and anticipate the completion of God's purposes and the establishment of his regime 'as in the sky, even on the ground'.

As we mentioned when discussing 5.16, the Fourteen Triads contain fourteen (!) references to God as 'your father in the skies'. And as also mentioned, Jewish tradition associated the image of God as 'Father' with the formation and faithfulness of God's people. Despite that, references to God as 'father' are actually quite rare in the OT— Dt 32.6, Isa 63.16,⁸⁶ Jr 3.19,22, and Mal 1.6 are almost the only places where God is referred to as 'father' in the entire OT, and only in Isa 63.16 and Jr 3.22 does any actually *address* God as 'our father'— and not even really there, since in both places the people say, 'you are our father' but do not actually address him as 'our Father'— and Jr 3.19 only says they *will* do so.

But that last passage, Jr 3.12-19, is about the *restoration of Israel and of Jerusalem*. And at the end of those verses, Yhwh says,

Jr 3.19 But I said, How shall I put you among the *sons*, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, *You will call me, My father*; and you will not turn away from me.

Jeremiah teaches that *God* will grant the ability to call God 'father', and that this will be the *basis* of Israel's restoration. Jesus' usage is thus very striking, particularly given that he, a marginal person himself, teaches the fulfillment of that prophecy by encouraging a very non-elite group to adopt this way of speaking to God.

Structure of the Lord's Prayer

Invocation:

Our Father *in the skies!* 6.9a

Three 'you' petitions— God as father and king:

your name be sanctified 6.9b

your regime come 6.10a

your will be done 6.10b

⁸⁵ 'Pater patriae'. Note the polemic in 23.9; Ep 3.14-15.

⁸⁶ The LXX (but not MT) does actually say, 'You, Lord, our father...' (σὺ, κύριε, πάτερ ἡμῶν...).

Scope: covers all three 'you' petitions:
as in the sky
 even on the ground 6.10c

Four 'us' petitions— us as objects of his mercy:

give us our daily bread 6.11
 remit to us our debts 6.12a

Scope: insofar as we behave in covenant loyalty:
as we also have remitted
 to our debtors 6.12b

lead us not into temptation 6.13a
 deliver us from the evil one 6.13b

(The scope of the 'us' petitions will be expanded in the Explanation section of the Triad.)

Doxology (added in some manuscripts):
 Because yours is the reign, the power,
 and the glory, forever.

Already the first three petitions, which are about God himself, have profound implications for how the community lives.

your name— may it be sanctified!

ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου.

'May your name be sanctified'. Referring to God's 'name' is a reverent way of referring to God himself as he revealed his covenant loyalty to Israel in its distress and oppression (see Ex 3.13-15). Similarly, in 1.21 Jesus' own 'name' signifies his mission to save from their sins, that is, their covenant failures.

To 'hallow' or 'sanctify' is to set people, animals, or things apart for service,⁸⁷ and in the Bible, passive verbs often signify divine action. So, 'sanctified be your Name' asks that God honor his own Name by accomplishing the redemption he promised: 'I will sanctify my great name which has been profaned among the nations' (Ez 36.23). He will 'sanctify' his name when he shows himself to be faithful, as the one who gives life to all, as the Judge who demands that people *each* live so that *all* may live, and who executes just retribution on those who rebel. And humans will also honor and sanctify his Name by recognizing his faithful, saving actions (Lv 22.31-32; Isa 29.22-23).

⁸⁷ Ex 19.22, 13.12, 30.28-29; see also 4.5.

According to Ezekiel, God's Name (God) is dishonored, shamed, or profaned when Israel refuses to listen and departs from the covenant, and the result of dishonoring God is exile. However (and this is the marvelous message of the Old Testament), Israel's defeat and exile by the Babylonians in 587 BC shamed God's name before the nations. Rome's triumph in 70 AD was widely recognized as a parallel to the Babylonian situation (2 Baruch; 4 Ezra). Having committed himself to Israel, God **had** to act to assert his own honor. The prayer asks God to sanctify his name by liberating his 'sons' from their captors and returning them home (Ez 36.22-37) in accordance with his promises.

So ultimately this petition will receive its final, eschatological response when God defeats the empire of this age and establishes his just purposes in full. But those purposes are now being manifested in Jesus (1.21; 4.17-25), and they are being manifested in the four disciples (4.18-23) who have begun to live toward this goal under his tutelage. To pray for God to sanctify his Name is to call for him to display his justice now, once and for all, and forever— and to commit to working with him according to his purposes. God's Name is sanctified in acts of liberation even on our part, and will be hallowed ultimately in a world that honors him as God.

10 your regime— may it come!

10 ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου.

The second petition, 'May your regime/empire/reign come', essentially repeats the first but does so in terms of the *object* of God's covenant promise (the world) rather than its *subject* (God himself and his Name). The God who is a loving Father (5.43-45) is the God who rules and shall rule. Although 'regime' is a word that denotes injustice and oppression, Mt 4.17-25 and 5.43-48 have shown that God's 'regime' is life-giving, not oppressive. It is an 'empire'⁸⁸ that challenges the devil's claim to own the 'regimes' of the world (4.1-11)— including Rome's.

In the time of completion, God will establish his regime over all, including Rome. This will involve destruction for many (7.13), but life for few (7.14).

your will— may it be done!

γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου,

⁸⁸ 'Regime', 'empire', 'kingdom', and 'reign' are all possible translations of *basileia*, βασιλεία.

The third petition is again similar. ‘Your will be done’.

This is followed by a statement of scope:

as in the sky, even on the ground.

ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς·

At the end of the first three petitions, a statement of scope applies to all of them: ‘sanctified be your name, your regime come, your will be done— as in the sky even on the ground’. (This is the word-for-word translation.) Compare here Ps 134.6, ‘all things that the Lord has willed, he has done in heaven and on the ground’ (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐν τῇ γῆ); also see Ps 102.19,21.

That the nations refuse to recognize the father’s regime motivates these petitions. Humans cannot build or bring about God’s regime, but they can build *for* it; they can do God’s will, even if they cannot bring it about; but they beg their father to assert it fully and speedily ‘as in the sky, even on the ground’.

God’s regime is already manifest in the sky. The astronomy is not a metaphor. In the sky, the stars and planets— thought to be living beings, more or less angels— move in their courses without fail. They are never early and never late, nor do they swerve right or left. They are completely obedient to God’s will.

That this will is a saving will (1.21,23) is already being demonstrated in the merciful and transformative ministry of Jesus especially among the poor and desperate (see on 4.17-25). It is continued in and through his disciples (see 5.3-16).⁸⁹ The petition prays that God will actively continue to manifest his regime *as he is already doing in the sky and through Jesus, who teaches this prayer*.

In the Bible, ‘earth’ (gē, γῆ)— or rather, ‘ground’, or ‘land’— usually means the land of Israel in particular. Even though it is his footstool (5.35), God’s will is not being done there. The occupying empire and its local retainers are causing immeasurable suffering (4.23-25) and depriving many of the earth’s resources (5.3-6)— to say nothing of life itself (2.13-23). The murderous puppet Herod, the corrupt and deluded religious leaders (3.7-12), and behind them, the devil (4.1-11)— are in open rebellion against God’s regime. This petition, like the previous

two, resists the will of the elite, the empire, the military, and of an unjust economy. It asserts ‘the ground’, the realm of humans, as the rightful object and space of God’s regime and will (5.13).

The regime of heaven already seen in the sky (cf 5.34), and is demonstrated on earth by the life-giving sun and rain which express God’s indiscriminate love to all (5.45). The ‘birds of the sky’ and the ‘flowers of the field’ live and are clothed in beauty by God (6.26); angels announce his will (1.18-25; 2.1-23), and Jesus himself proclaims and effects heaven’s regime by establishing his band of disciples (4.17-22), by teaching and healing all the people (4.23-25), and ultimately by his death and resurrection. So the petition seeks that the order seen in the stars, be extended everywhere. It is a petition of hope, confident that God’s mercy will overcome evil.

After three petitions concerning God, four petitions focus on human needs.

The first names the most obvious, immediate, and constant need of humanity, that of daily bread (6.11). The second turns to the past and its obligations carried over unredeemed into the present (6.12a). The third shifts to future trials (6.13a), and the last seeks deliverance from all evil (6.13b).

At the *center* of this series of four is not a petition, but a *declaration*: ‘we have remitted to those indebted to us’ (6.12b). In the Explanation section of this Triad, Jesus will expand on this as the key to receiving remission of transgressions, and hence all the other blessings referred to in the Prayer.

11 our bread
of sustenance
give us today

11 τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν
τὸν ἐπιούσιον
δοῦς ἡμῖν σήμερον·

‘Give us this day our daily bread’. For some reason, people have trouble recognizing the word usually translated as ‘daily’ (*epiousion*, ἐπιούσιον).⁹⁰ Some say that the word is extremely rare, and can’t really be determined. Yet St John Chrysostom tells us it means ‘daily’, and the Old Latin translation *quotidianum* means ‘daily’. It’s clearly a participle of *epieinai* (ἐπιεῖναι), which is attested

⁸⁹ On the progressive understanding of God’s reign/empire through the gospel, see WC Carter, “Challenging by Confirming, Renewing by Repeating: The Parables of ‘the Reign of the Heavens’ in Matthew 13 as Embedded Narratives” (*Society of Biblical Literature 1995 Seminar Papers*, SBLSP 34; Scholars Press: Atlanta, 1995), pp 399-424; a revised version appears in W Carter and JP Heil, *Matthew’s Parables: Audience-Oriented Perspectives* (CBQMS 30; Catholic Biblical Association: Washington DC: 1998), pp 36-63.

⁹⁰ Hill, “Our Daily Bread,” 2-10.

well enough, always as a participle, and always referring to— ‘the *next* day’.⁹¹

In fact it seems that *artos epiousios* (here, ‘daily bread’) was a military term referring to the ration that a soldier got in the evening of one day, which he would then have for the next day. So we could translate, ‘our ration of bread give us today’, or perhaps even ‘*tomorrow’s* bread, give us today’, where the ‘bread of Tomorrow’ can also suggest the eucharist. But of course we are asking for enough bread each day. To get by, to survive, to make it, but also to participate in the *coming* Day, that is, in the never-ending Day of heaven’s regime.

The background to this petition is clearly the manna in the desert— note especially Ex 16.15, ‘This is the *bread* which the Lord has *given* you to eat’. The story of the manna, of which only a day’s provision could be gathered at a time, was a potent image of God’s care for his people and their need to depend entirely on him.

‘Bread’ is required for life both in this age and in the forthcoming age of fulfillment. In terms of the present, the thought is conceptually close to Pr 30.8, ‘give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need’ (see also Ps 146.7). It also recalls the daily supply of manna during the exodus (Ex 16). But the church has also always seen this as referring to the Messianic banquet. Indeed, it has always formed the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, in all traditions.

Yet it’s important not to spiritualize and avoid the material meaning. Bread and the other necessities without which life would cease (Pr 30.8) come by way of the human community on earth. But God’s will is not always done on earth (6.10). Basic resources are not justly distributed, many lack access to what they need (cf Si 31.23), and some procure excessive bread in ways that deprive others of it. Asking God to ‘give us our bread’ asks him to ensure that others cooperate in, not hinder, the daily supply of what is necessary. It is a petition against the wealthy and greedy who hoard property, land, and seed-grain, and who through loans, interest, debt, high prices, hoarding, taxes, or tariffs (all of which were serious problems in the ancient world) feast on the bread of injustice (Pr 4.17) while ensuring that others do not have bread for life (12.1-4; 14.13-21). In 25.35-36 God’s saving reign reverses the injustices of the elite and creates a community in which bread is shared, the homeless housed, the

naked clothed, and the divided reconciled (so Isa 58.6-7).⁹²

Life under God’s patronage is often considered in the Bible to be something like a never-ending banquet— an image of great appeal to peasants, for it describes the plentiful harvest that will crown the accomplishment of his promises.

The petition recognizes God as the earth’s sovereign, father, and creator who provides what is necessary today for existence and who will provide the messianic banquet in the oncoming Age. It asks him to be faithful to his covenant promise in the daily lives of his children, Jesus’ disciples.

12 and remit

our debts to us,

12 καὶ ἄφεες ἡμῖν

τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν,

‘Remit our debts to us.’ Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky said that ‘remitting’ was more than ‘forgiveness’, for ‘remitting’ means returning the payment to the payor, whereas ‘forgiving’ simply means cancellation. That might be a little more than the word itself warrants, but the point is not a bad one.

Debt-remission appears in Israel’s sabbath-year regulations— all debts were to be canceled every seven years.⁹³ ‘You shall remit every personal debt which your neighbor owes you, and you shall not ask it back of your brother, because a remission to the Lord your God has been proclaimed’ (Dt 15.2). No Israelite was to be permanently in debt. This gave relief to the poor and needy (Dt 15.11; see also Si 28.2). The Torah recognizes that human beings are deeply enmeshed in sinful activities, relationships, and structures, and are always in need of renewal. Using this language in prayer recalls the prophetic theme that worship and justice go together. The poor must have access to resources, if social structures are to be renewed (cf, eg, Isa 1.10-17; 58.5-9).

The language of ‘debts’ also depicts sin, insofar as human sin is a matter of not meeting one’s obligations (cf 18.21-35). The usual metaphor for sin, seen in 1.21, is, an

⁹¹ See Ac 7.26, 16:11, 20:15, 21:18, also Pr 3:28, 27:1. See also Josephus, *Ap* 1.309; *Ant* 3.30, 4.64.

⁹² Gregory of Nyssa’s fourth-century *On Prayer* interprets the petition in a material sense, with polemic against greed, excess, and injustice to one’s neighbor effected in procuring the necessary bread. (See Graef, *St Gregory of Nyssa: The Lord’s Prayer*, Teaching 4, pp 57-70.)

⁹³ Dt 15; see also Mt 18.21-35; Dt 24.10; 1Mc 15.8.

archery term, *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία), ‘missing the mark’.⁹⁴ Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer has ‘remit to us our sins’ (Lk 11.4). In an honor-shame society, ‘sin’ is a breach of interpersonal relations.

But although the ‘greater righteousness’ required of disciples (5.20) certainly entails forgiveness of sins, and even though it also requires faithfulness to one’s commitments (see 1.19; 3.15)— this petition specifically recognizes that one has not always repaid and cannot always repay, however just the demand may be. It requests God to set aside one’s insupportable debts and to renew relationships and community.

Again, we should avoid spiritualizing this too quickly. Matthew’s Jesus is not just using ‘debt’ as a metaphor for sin, whether in the honor-shame context or in our guilt-based context. The peasantry of first-century Palestine was actively being *crushed* by heavy indebtedness.

The processes by which they fell into debt were many. Population growth affected some: more mouths to feed reduced a farmer’s margin of livelihood and made borrowing a necessity in lean years. Famine occurred in 25 BC during the reign of Herod, and in 46 AD under Claudius (cf Ac 11.28). But the main reason was the empire’s insatiable demand for tithes, taxes, tribute, and tolls.

Thirty five to forty percent of the total agricultural production was extracted in various taxes. But because Roman tribute had to be paid in coin, throughout the first century, *money* gradually replaced harvest shares as a means of paying for tenancy, and peasants ended up having to take out coin (money) loans not only to survive but to pay the taxes (or they would end up in jail till their families paid ‘the last penny’, 5.26). When they couldn’t pay, the large landholders from whom they borrowed would foreclose on the land they had put up as security. If they were lucky, they then ended up as tenant sharecroppers on their own land, but by the late first century, the numbers of peasants fleeing to the cities because of hopeless indebtedness grew so large that laws were decreed to keep them on land left unworked. Few peasants could escape debt without the help of a substantial patron, and that system is all over the pages of the New Testament. In the Lord’s Prayer, the disciple asks God, the supreme Patron, to forgive his debts— as he also has forgiven those indebted to him. This is reinforced in the parable of the unjust debtor (18.23-35), which has close connections both with this clause of the Lord’s Prayer, and with the Explanation forthcoming in 6.14-15.

⁹⁴ Luke has ‘sins’ (*hamartias*, Lk 11.4) where Matthew has ‘debts’. Material indebtedness is surely in view in Matthew, but sins place us in God’s debt.

Loss of land— that is, of the source of livelihood— meant greater and greater poverty. Forgiveness and remission of debts returned the debtor to self-sufficiency and to his place within the community.

Jesus’ teaching contrasts with that of the sage Hillel who, very close to the time Jesus was giving this Teaching, ruled that the wealthy could evade the law of remission by selling their contracts to non-Israelites for the sabbatical year. They didn’t have to cancel debts and restore the land to the original clan, because the foreigner was not under the covenant. Not surprisingly, the first thing the Zealots did when they gained control of Jerusalem at the beginning of the Jewish Revolt in 66 AD, was to burn the debt archives (Josephus, *War* 2.426-27). Other evidence exists in a wide variety of sources, including Hellenistic papyri.

even as we have remitted
to our debtors,

ὥς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν
τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν.

The four ‘us’ petitions are not chiasmic, but between the first two and the last two, a declaration that *we* have remitted the debts owed to us expands the request for remission of *our* debts: ‘remit our debts to us, even as we have remitted to our debtors’ (6.12a). Certainly this *us-us-we-us-us* structure is significant. In fact Jesus will expand it in the Explanation that completes this Triad (6.14-15).

This expansion declares that *we* have kept *our* part of the covenant relationship. If we hope to be the *object* of God’s mercy, we must also be its *subject*, by extending it to others.

That is why the verb is in the past tense: ‘even as we have remitted’. Jesus will explain in 6.14-15 that this *completed activity* is the precondition for receiving the requested blessing.

13 and bring us not to trial,

13 καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν,

The recognition of human frailty continues. The word *peirasmos* (πειρασμός), usually translated ‘temptation’ here and in other contexts, refers to any test, although it is often used in the New Testament period to indicate the sharp ‘test’ of loyalties to which those in covenant with God are subject, and it can also mean a legal ‘trial’.

The writer of Revelation picks up this language in the letter to Christians at Philadelphia: 'I will keep you from the hour of trial (*peirasmos*) that is coming on the whole world to try (*peirasai*, πειράσαι) the inhabitants of the earth' (Rv 3.10).⁹⁵

St James says that 'God tempts/tests/tries no one'; people are tempted by their own desire (Jm 1.13-14). Nevertheless, the Bible tells of many temptations, tests, or trials sent by God— Abraham, in Gn 22; Job (the whole book); Tobit 12.14-15; Si 2.1-18; Wis 3.5-6; 11.9-10; and Jesus himself in 4.1-11. Frequently some educative purpose is claimed for these experiences. This is the tradition Jesus is coming from. God is the one who 'brings to trial'⁹⁶— not Satan or other people and not even ourselves— because the cause of what we can't avoid must ultimately be only God himself. This petition thus leads back to the invocation, 'Our father in the skies' (6.9b), in which the petitioners see themselves confronted with God and no one else.

But the one who leads into temptation is thus, in fact, 'our father in the skies' (6.9b). We must not misinterpret our father's testing as insidious, cruel, or pernicious, as a wager between God and Satan, or as something 'for our education'. Quite uniquely, in the Lord's prayer, Jesus sees temptation as nothing but the lure of existing evil (6.13b). It's not the same as evil, but evil entices and traps into evil deeds. God brings to trial by allowing this evil to persist.

but rescue us from the evil.

ἀλλὰ ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

Evil consists in the absence of justice: the absence of sanctification of the divine name, the absence of God's kingdom, disobedience to God's will, the lack of bread, the unpayable debt, and the character of temptation. The *outcome* of all this— not so much its *origin* as its *effect*— is evil, and from this we beg deliverance. If the

⁹⁵ See Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, p 168; Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount*, pp 405-13.

⁹⁶ On the theological problem, see esp the detailed explanations by Origen *De orat* 29-30 (GCS 3.2.2, pp 381-95). Tertullian *De orat* 8; *Adv Marc* 4.26; Cyprian *De dominica oratione* 25, and others; Augustine *De serm dom in monte* 2.9.30: 'Ne patiaris nos induci in tentationem'. On temptation 'which we cannot bear': See Hilary of Poitiers, 'In Ps. XCVIII,' CSEL 22, p 369; Ps-Ambrose *De sacr* 5.4.29 (PL 16.473); Jerome, 'In Ez 48.16 (PL 25.485). Ps-Clem *Hom* 3.55.2: 'And to those who suppose that God tempts, as the Scriptures say, "He said, "The Tempter is the wicked one"'. Also, *Hom* 3.6-28, 55-57; 15.8; 19.1-25; *Rec* 3.15-23; 9.55-56; 10.3. Tertullian was certainly aware of the theodicy problem when he said that God is without fault, but human beings must ask him for forgiveness (see Chase, *Lord's Prayer*, 133-36).

heavenly patron would grant these petitions, he would eliminate evil forever. By not granting them, he allows this evil to persist and thus to tempt and to test us.

'Rescue' or 'deliver us from' (*hrysaí*, ῥύσαι; 6.13b) is closely related to 'lead us not into' (6.13a); that's why it's introduced with *allà*, ἀλλὰ, meaning 'but instead'. 'Lead us not into' asks to avoid getting tested and hence trapped by evil; 'deliver us' asks to be rescued from the evil we're already trapped in. Given the depth of our entanglement in evil, we need no less than God himself to 'deliver us'.

The word for 'evil' (*ponērou*, πονηροῦ) can be either masculine or neuter— rescue us 'from what is evil', abstractly, or 'from the evil one', the devil. Most Eastern church fathers took the petition to refer to the devil,⁹⁷ while the Western fathers, except for Tertullian, treated it as neuter. The problem is still controversial; most scholars favor the neuter, but ancient Mediterraneans attributed all that happened to personal causes, whether human, divine, or angelic/demonic. It has become somewhat customary in Orthodox circles, to favor this personal sense because of a cultural shift more than any deliberate exegesis. Nevertheless, we should ask whether it's really correct to do so.

In the Teaching on the Mountain, Jesus applies the word 'evil' both to people (5.45; 6.23; 7.11,17,18) and to moral evil (5.11,39). Sometimes, the matter is ambiguous, as in 5.37. The identification of the 'evil one' with the devil appears outside the Teaching only in 13.19,38.

Jewish prayers spoke of 'evil' in a variety of ways, including personal (Satan; men) and impersonal (events). But the Lord's Prayer seems to take a unique point of view within the context of Jewish thought and prayer. For Jesus, '**evil' is the result of God's not yet having completed his work of salvation on earth.** This also is what constitutes temptation or 'testing' for humanity.⁹⁸

Thus the petition, 'deliver us from evil' points not to any evil agent, but to the outcome of the fact of incomplete salvation. With Jesus (for remember, this is *his* prayer before it is ours), we beg that God honor the covenant and complete his work. If he would grant only the first three petitions (6.9b-10c) he would simultaneously also grant the others. Consequently, 6.13b not only interprets 6.13a but the entire Prayer as a whole.

So is it 'evil', or 'the evil one'? Deliberately ambiguous language stimulates thinking. But theologically, the

⁹⁷ For a list, see JB Lightfoot, 'The Last Petition of the Lord's Prayer', in his *On a Fresh Revision of the English New Testament* (Macmillan: London, 1891) passim.

⁹⁸ This assertion is discussed in Betz, *Sermon*, 411-12.

Lord's Prayer tends toward the neuter. Jesus certainly knew of demons, but in general, the Prayer is about *God fulfilling his covenant promises*. So it seems likely that the words mean, 'Deliver us from *evil*'.

The petition for deliverance from evil also defines those who pray 'like this' (6.9a). It tells what living 'on earth' (6.10c) means. We are surrounded by frightful evil, but in our precarious situation we are also surrounded by God 'our father' (6.9b). It is then natural to turn to him for mercy and redemption, and to remind him that our only hope is for him complete what he has committed himself to do.

Some say that the final petition asks God to deliver us from the eschatological woes that precede God's final victory— 'deliver' in the sense of 'keep us from having to experience'. But in 24.13 Jesus calls his disciples to *persevere* through such trials, so with regard to the troubles of the End Time, *deliverance* would mean *perseverance*, but not necessarily *escape*.

Israel tested God at Massah by doubting God's presence with the people and God's promise to deliver them and supply water (Ex 17.1-7; Dt 6-8,16,17). Such a temptation is not far away for Matthew's audience. If God really intends to establish his will, justice, and reign, why hasn't he done so? Are human evil and imperial power too strong for him? The petition prays against despair, against being overwhelmed and paralyzed by the devil's empire (4.8-9), against concluding that God is absent or has been rendered powerless.

'Rescue/save/liberate/deliver' (all meanings of the term used here) is what God did in various earlier settings: from slavery in Egypt (Ex 6.6; 14.30), from exile in Babylon (Isa 44.6; 48.17,20), from the Seleucids (1Mc 12.15), from Rome (*Pss Sol* 17.45). In addition to these imperial situations, the righteous actions of a faithful king 'deliver' the needy and poor from 'oppression and violence' (Ps 72.12-14) and rescues them from the wicked who pursue and hurt them (Ps 71.2,4,11). God 'delivers' from sickness (Ps 22.4,8,20; Matt 4.23-24), from Beliar, the prince of the demons (*T.Reu* 4.9-11), from promiscuity and accusations, and from false brothers (*T.Sim* 2.8; *T.Gad* 2.5) and other personal enemies, difficult circumstances, and vices.⁹⁹

Taught to the disciples in the plural ('you'), and addressing God as 'our' father, Jesus' Prayer expresses and reinforces the existence and identity of a community of 'sons of God' on earth. This community knows God as Father, yearns for the completion of his purposes, does his will in the midst of the threats of sin, evil, and temptation,

⁹⁹ *Jos Asen* 12.7,11,12; 13.12; 27.10; 28.4; *Pss Sol* 4.23; 12.1; 13.4.

and depends on his grace and goodness to sustain its existence.

To pray this prayer is to seek the transformation of life on earth. In a world dominated by imperial rule, praying for the coming regime of our father in the skies and for the accomplishment of his will as in the sky even on the ground was and still is a profoundly subversive act. It sought Rome's demise as part of God's promised cosmic transformation, and those who prayed it committed themselves to embodying his purposes even now in a communal life that went counter to many dominant cultural practices.

In manuscripts of the 'Byzantine' text-type, a doxology concludes the Prayer:

[ΟΤΙ ΣΟΥ ΕΣΤΙΝ Η ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ Η ΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΔΟΞΑ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΑΙΩΝΑΣ ΑΜΗΝ]

'For yours is empire, and power, and glory unto the ages. Amen.'

However, the best and oldest manuscripts do not contain it, and the earliest patristic commentaries on the Lord's Prayer don't know of it. Nor does the parallel in Lk 11.4 include it. And where it does appear, it has a variety of forms. And there are other reasons as well, to say that in language, form, and theology, the doxology came from Jewish and Christian liturgy and was inserted in some manuscripts at a later time. In fact some quite late manuscripts give the full formula still in use today, in the Byzantine Liturgy: 'For yours is empire, and power, and glory, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever an unto ages of ages. Amen'— but even the shorter form should not appear in your bible, since it wasn't original.

Explanation

6.14-15

14 For if you would forgive people their faults, your father in the skies will forgive yours also.

14 Ἐὰν γὰρ ἀφήτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν, ἀφήσει καὶ ὑμῖν ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος·

Jesus introduces the Explanation in this Ninth Triad with the usual 'for/because' (*gar*, γὰρ).

In it he elaborates the declaration of covenant faithfulness that stood between the first two and the last two of the 'us' petitions, which expressed the scope or extent of the remission of debts we were asking for— 'remit to us', it said, 'as we have remitted to our debtors' (6.12b).

In our popular recitation, we say 'as we forgive' (*aphiemen*, ἀφιέμεν), not 'as we have forgiven' (*aphikamen*, ἀφίκαμεν), probably due to a very early manuscript tradition. We should understand the present not as a general and more-or-less accurate characterization of ourselves, but as a *performative*, like when the couple say, 'I do' at a wedding: by saying it, you make it true. But the past tense of the verb, found in what we now realize are likely the best manuscripts, indicates that *our* remission of others' debts is the *precondition* for asking the same for ourselves.

So, having remitted in the past, we ask for remission in the present; now (since we can't change the past), Jesus speaks of remitting in the present, so that we might obtain remission in the future. The verb 'remit' connects these verse back to 6.12, although the concept of 'debts' (*opheilēmata*, ὀφειλήματα) has changed to *paraptōmata* (παρὰπτώματα), which we usually translate as 'trespasses', but it actually means a false step or a stumbling.

As we mentioned, in honor-shame societies, 'sin' is a breach of interpersonal relations, not the breaking of a moral code. What counted was the social rupture, not the introspective wounded conscience. So, to Jesus and Matthew's audiences, God's forgiveness didn't mean psychological healing as it often does for us. It meant being divinely restored to one's position and being freed from fear of loss at the hands of God. Forgiveness by others meant restoration to the community. Our forgiveness meant that we would allow others to resume their place in our lives.

The 'people' (*anthrōpōis*, ἀνθρώποις; usually translated 'men' but not gender-specific) whose trespasses we must forgive are not primarily disciples. *Anthrōpoi* is the usual word for outsiders to whom disciples go in mission (4.19; 5.16). Forgiveness is extended to everyone in imitation of God who causes the sun to shine on just and unjust alike (5.43-45). It is an extension of his regime.

Jesus underscores all this by a negative restatement:

15 But if you wouldn't forgive people,
neither will your father in the skies
forgive your faults.

15 ἔάν δὲ μὴ ἀφῆτε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις,
οὐδὲ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν
ἀφήσει τὰ παραπτώματα ὑμῶν.

Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is not entirely new; it's found already in Si 28.4; and among pagans. Plutarch, for instance, urges mutual forgiveness also (*Moralia* 489C). What's new is that Jesus makes this forgiveness a requirement for, and a manifestation of, the arrival of heaven's regime.

We note again that this all-important Triad, at the center of which is the Lord's Prayer, and at the center of that is the declaration that 'we have remitted to our debtors', is the last of the first nine (3 x 3), and the first of the last six (3 x 2) Triads in the Teaching on the Mount.

TRIAD 10— FASTING 6.16-18

(1) Tradition 6.16a

After his words on almsgiving (6.2-4) and prayer (6.5-15), Jesus offers a third warning against doing deeds of righteousness (*ḥesedakáh*) for social rather than divine approval.

This Triad is connected to the general introduction on traditional practices (6.1) by the weak disjunctive word *de* (δέ), variously translated 'but' or 'and also', etc, but here both marking a shift of topic *and* referring back to the general introduction (6.1), just as the first lines of the Eighth and Ninth Triads (6.2,5) did also.

16 And whenever you would fast,
16 Ὅταν δὲ νηστεύητε,

Again Jesus assumes that disciples fast— '*whenever* (*hotan*, ὅταν) you fast', not '*if* you fast'. Jesus himself fasted (4.2).

Fasting was and is a traditional Jewish religious practice,¹⁰⁰ associated with benefits such as atoning for sin (*Pss Sol* 3.6-8; cf Si 34.31), healing diseases, and casting out demons (*Apoc El* 1.21). Underlying these uses, though, fasting was primarily a form of 'mourning', a response to overwhelming evil. Mourning is characterized by inability to eat or sleep, by unconcern about

¹⁰⁰ Ne 1.4 and *T.Jos.* 4.8 (prayer); Dn 9.3 (confession and forgiveness); 1Kg 21.27-29 (repentance); Tb 12.8 (prayer, almsgiving, and righteousness).

clothing or looks, etc— the shock of grief has rendered you socially and personally non-functional. You ‘can’t even eat’.

The prophets harshly excoriated those who fasted without doing justice.¹⁰¹

(2) Diagnosis

6.16b-c

don't be like the hypocrites,
dismal,
μὴ γίνεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταὶ
σκυθρωποί,

The main verb here is an exception to the rule that the undesirable attitudes and actions contains no imperative. Here Jesus says, ‘do not be’. The same word appears in 6.5, ‘Thou shalt not be like the play-actors, because they love to pray standing...’. There, however, the negating word is *ouk* (οὐκ), indicating that it’s an indicative, ‘You will not be’. Here, it’s *mē* (μὴ), which makes us read the verb as an imperative, ‘Don’t be’. Note that this is the last of the Four Triads on (Deeds of) Covenant Faithfulness, so we expect a variation of the pattern in Matthew’s style. Too, in the last of the Six Triads, the usual order of the Diagnosis and Prescription were reversed; the present case is similar as well.

The verbs are in the plural; this is addressed to the community and to each person in it.

As with almsgiving and prayer, Jesus first distinguishes the practice of the community of disciples by a negative portrayal of the ‘hypocrites’. They’re always ‘dismal’ or ‘sullen’. Again the picture is at least partly hyperbolic.

A reference to the synagogue is missing here, probably because the link was made in 6.2,5. In fact, fasting was very important to the Pharisees (cf 9.14ff), who were the main leaders in the synagogues.

for they darken their faces
in order to shine out before people
as they fast.
ἀφανίζουσιν γὰρ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν
ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις
νηστεύοντες.

The play-actors look ‘dismal’ or ‘sullen’ all the time, suggesting sadness and loss (Gn 40.7; Ne 2.1; Si 25.23). Jesus ridicules them as play-actors by playing on words: They ‘darken’ (‘aphanize’, *aphanizousin*, ἀφανίζουσιν) their faces in order to ‘shine out’ (‘phanize’, *phanōsin*, φανῶσιν) to people as great fasters.

The problem is not with the ‘darkening’. In Jr 14.4, farmers covered their heads in mourning because there was no rain; in 1Mc 3.47, the people put ashes on their heads because of the desolation of Jerusalem. The ‘play-actors’ are doing exactly this. But the problem is their motivation: they’re doing it ‘so that’ (*hopōs*, ὅπως) they will ‘shine out’— ‘to other people’— as fasters.

As we said, fasting in Judaism was primarily a form of mourning. Mourning can be ritualized, for instance on Yom Kippur; and it can also be politicized, just like today people sometimes go on ‘hunger strikes’. Some pious Judeans practiced a kind of ritualized mourning on days other than Yom Kippur, for the restoration of Israel. The Pharisees seem to have been particularly noted for this. All the hallmarks of mourning were involved— fasting (inability to eat), vigil (inability to sleep), sackcloth, ashes on the head, a dirty face, etc (unconcern about clothing or looks).¹⁰²

Mourning expressed in this way makes you look like a beggar. In an honor-shame society, to present yourself as a beggar means you’re afflicted indeed— and in fact the Hebrew name for fasting is *ta`anit*, that is, ‘humiliation’. When you fast, you stand before your peers and before God in abject self-humiliation. The normal reaction to one who has humiliated himself (and his family) in public would be to offer sympathy, help, and solidarity. That is what these fasters are trying to garner, even manipulate.

Political fasting is a form of self-humiliation intended to get the attention of other persons, so that they would stand in solidarity. As in the other Triads of this section, 6.1,2,5, the play actor is seeking solidarity from ‘men’ (*anthrōpoi*, ἄνθρωποι, not gender-specific, but males are most certainly in view), not from God. Fasting then becomes a means of coercing support for the Pharisees’ program of politico-religious liberation.

They are ‘aphanizing’ their faces so that people will see how serious they are about Israel’s humiliation and to join *their program of trying to bring about heaven’s regime*.

¹⁰¹ Cf Isa 58.3-14; Jr 14.12; Si 34.31.

¹⁰² See Isa 58.3-6; Jr 14.12; Jl 1.14; also 1K 21.9,12; 2C 20.3; Ezr 8.21; Es 4.16.

Amen I'm telling you
they're getting their pay.

ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν,
ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν.

Jesus is saying they may get what they're looking for (support and respect), but it's not going to bring about what they want, which is Israel's liberation because they're not really looking for that— they're looking for support and respect for their program.

In 9.14, 'John's disciples came to him saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don't fast?' They want to know why Jesus and his faction don't seem to be with their program, not why they don't 'practice asceticism'. Jesus said that it was not the time for (national) 'mourning' because the bridegroom was present— that is, heaven's regime had already arrived. But because they were busily pursuing their own Israel-restoration agenda, both John's disciples and the Pharisees have failed to recognize it (9.15).

Can we really organize heaven's regime? In what sense? And if so, how? And what would be the result?

(3) Transforming Initiative 6.17-18a

17 But you— fasting—
anoint
your
head
and
the face
of you
wash.

17 σὺ δὲ νηστεύων
ἄλειψαί
σου
τὴν κεφαλὴν
καὶ
τὸ πρόσωπόν
σου
νίψαι,

The alternative practice of the community of Jesus' disciples— that is, of those who recognize that heaven's regime has actually arrived in Jesus— is outlined in another little chiasm. Jesus assumes that you *will* fast, but commands that you fast in secret— in fact, to make your face 'shine' so as to 'darken' the fact that you're fasting. Such bright-faced fasting, surely a novelty, would be noticed by God alone! What Jesus is asking is thus to redirect the *search for support* for the *arrival of God's regime* from other people to God.

As always, the Prescription has been expressed in positive imperatives: 'anoint', and 'wash'. Jesus uses the emphatic singular here, since he's calling on people to fast in secret.

The usual Explanation follows, still in the singular:

Explanation 6.18b

18 so that you might *not* shine out
to men
as fasting—
but to your Father,
the one in secret.

18 ὅπως μὴ φανῆς
τοῖς ἀνθρώποις
νηστεύων
ἀλλὰ τῷ πατρὶ σου
τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυφαίῳ·

The rationale— 'so that'— (*hopōs*, ὅπως) is opposite that of those who 'darken' their faces so that they might 'shine out' to men as fasting.

and your father
who sees in secret
will give back to you.

καὶ ὁ πατὴρ σου
ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυφαίῳ
ἀποδώσει σοι.

In contrast to public attention, 'your Father who sees in secret will give back to you'.

Again Jesus teaches that a deed of righteousness is a gift, not a commodity. God 'will give back' (*apodōsei*, ἀποδώ-

σει)— in spades— what is given to him. Fasting with only God as its audience, attracts God’s gift of light, and that light— not a self-manufactured gloom— is what others will see. And when people see that, they will ‘give *glory* to your Father who is in heaven’ (5.16)— which, again, is the ‘sanctification of the Name’ (6.9) and already an expansion of heaven’s regime ‘as in the sky [where the stars shine out], even on the ground’ (6.10).

Four Triads on Proverbial Wisdom 6.19–7.11

We come now to the last four Triads, that is, the third and final section (6.19–7.11) of the Fourteen Triads of the Teaching on the Mountain (5.21–7.11). This set will cover the following:

- 6.19-23 Treasure
- 6.24-34 Anxiety
- 7.1-5 Judgment
- 7.6-11 Patronage (getting ahead).

Each of these Triads appears to begin with a proverb. Or at any rate, the ‘Tradition’ section in each case has the condensed generality, parallel structure, themes, etc, typical of Hebrew proverbs. However, we can’t identify the source of any of these sayings. Perhaps they were not proverbs as such, but only sayings popular at the time. No matter— from the triadic structure, we expect them to represent ‘Tradition’ in *some* sense, so we will refer to them as Triads on Popular or Proverbial Wisdom.

Matthew introduced the six Triads on Torah (5.21-48) and the four Triads on (Deeds of) Righteousness (6.2-18) with general statements on righteousness (5.20 and 6.1). There is no corresponding general statement to introduce these Triads on Popular Wisdom. However, the form of the Tradition section changes now for the third time, and is consistent throughout all of these final Triads. The Six Triads on Torah began, ‘You have heard it said’, and the Four on Righteousness began, ‘Whenever you’. Each Triad on Popular Wisdom now begins, ‘Don’t (*mē, μῆ*)’— except the second, which has ‘No one who’. Clearly, despite the lack of an introductory verse like 5.20 and 6.1, these four comprise a distinct set.

Because the three that start with ‘Don’t’, look like negative commandments— ‘Don’t store up’ (6.19), ‘Don’t judge’ (7.1), ‘Don’t give the Holy to the dogs’ (7.6), we tend to treat the other one— ‘No one can serve two masters’ (6.24)— as a negative commandment as well, and we interpret each of the four Tradition sections— the popular saying or traditional proverb— as Jesus’ own teaching to his disciples and to us. ‘Don’t try to serve two

masters!’ But of course, this tends to land us in the same trouble that reading the other triads as ‘antitheses’ does. Who doesn’t, at some point, find him/herself serving both God and mammon?

Well, proverbs are, after all, generally accepted wisdom, and Jesus wouldn’t be inclined to disagree with these statements any more than he disagreed with the commandments he cited in the first six Triads, or with the practices of covenant faithfulness he comments on in the section that has just ended.

But here the triadic structure that we’ve observed in all ten of the preceding Triads— Tradition, Diagnosis, and Prescription with Explanation— shows us that we should not read these as examples of Jesus’ direct teaching. If as in the other ten Triads, Jesus begins by citing tradition, then the opening statement of each is *not* a commandment of Jesus’ own. As before, they would be traditional teachings related to a situation on which Jesus wishes to comment. And once again, Jesus’ own actual commandments are found in the Prescription section. That will prove to be particularly important key to understanding the Fourteenth Triad, which has given much trouble to interpreters over the centuries.

In numerous ways, the Teaching on the Mountain has been addressing the economic structures of the Roman empire which oppressed and subjugated the poor (5.3,4) and deprived them of access to land and resources (5.5) through injustice (5.6). How are disciples to live under or within Rome’s colonial regime? Each of the proverbs with which these triads open expresses traditional wisdom about life in such a society. But the community of disciples is defined by heaven’s regime, not Caesar’s regime. Jesus directs them, in the present to the yet-future completion of God’s empire and his justice / righteousness / covenant faithfulness (6.33).

TRIAD 11— STORING UP

TREASURES

6.19-23

(1) Tradition

6.19a

19 Don’t treasure for yourselves
treasures on the ground,

19 Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν
θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

The picture of gathering treasures was widespread in the traditions of Judaism, and the idea that riches don’t last

was universal in ancient culture. We actually have no way of knowing whether Jesus is quoting a proverb known to his (or Matthew's) audience here, or retailing common wisdom in words of his own, or what. But the material is commonplace and the structure is proverb-like, so we are justified in calling 6.19 a 'traditional saying'. A negative imperative is appropriate here, but it's Jesus' own commandment no more than 'Thou shalt not murder' was his commandment. Rather, he's citing a proverb that he in fact agrees with, in order to make a Diagnosis of something that this traditional proverb brings into view. The Prescription then addresses *that*.

Wealth was a key indicator of social status and respectability in the ancient world, just as it is today. The elder Seneca has Porcius Latro say that wealth (or its lack) reflects a person's virtue. Plutarch, however, describes anxious searching for and greedy accumulation of wealth and attacks greedy rich people who borrow in order to acquire more (sound familiar?).¹⁰³

'Treasuring' denotes both valuing material goods, acquiring them, piling them up, and storing and curating them. The underlying problem is insecurity, which gives rise to greed, and then to hoarding, injustice, and disregard for the needs of others. Note that Jesus speaks of treasuring 'for yourself', pointing to a selfish focus.

Society's wealth is limited, and excessive accumulation by the few means lack and distress for the many, who are thus deprived of what they needed to survive (5.3; 6.11). This was readily apparent in a small agrarian community where a few rich men could readily hoard seed-grain in order to drive up the price, but it may not be so blatantly obvious today, where our village is global, and it's hard to see people on the other side of the continent, or even of the world. Yet we can ask how just it is that in 2014, a mere 85 people owned more wealth than half the human race,¹⁰⁴ the bottom 60 percent of Americans owned only 3.5% of the country's wealth, and the bottom 40% actually owed more than their net worth¹⁰⁵— in

a situation where employment, education, medicine, and even food are increasingly harder to obtain.

The verb 'treasure' or 'store up' (*thēsaurizete*, θησαυρίζετε) is in the plural. Proverbs often address the community as a whole, as well as each person within it, and ask us to think of our own different roles within the situations they point to.

'Treasures' are material goods. In 2.9 the term refers to gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and in 13.44 ('treasure hidden in a field') to something valuable that can be sold.¹⁰⁶ Spiritual writers like to point out that a 'treasure' can be anything the heart is attached to. The meaning is thus, 'Don't be attached to the goods of this life, whatever they are'. Just about anything could be vulnerable to moth, rust, and theft, but the point can be generalized to intangible goods as well.

'Earth'— or rather, 'the ground' in contrast to heaven or the sky— is the place where God's will is often *not* done (see 6.11)— not least because of 'treasuring'. To 'treasure' material goods on earth typifies concern about the future. This concern can develop into anxiety, greed, and hoarding, and hence into neglect and even rejection of God's will. That the community of disciples is not to participate in such injustice is obvious.

But we need not rest content with this universal spiritual truth as the content of Jesus' teaching. That would almost be to turn it into a pious platitude, a broad saying of no particular sharpness. The citation of Tradition doesn't contain the essential message of any Triad. Rather, it serves only as a springboard for a Diagnosis of something related to it, and a Therapeutic Initiative which will address *that*.

(2) Diagnosis

6.19b

Because the verse continues with the word 'where' (*hopou*, ὅπου), and also because the structure is repetitive and formal—

'where' + 2 nouns, 1 verb;

'and'

'where' + 1 noun, 2 verbs

—it seems to continue the proverb itself. The proverb would thus contain its own Diagnosis section.

where
moth and rust
darken

¹⁰³ See, eg, Juvenal, *Sat* 14, eg 14.119-51,284-331; Seneca, *Controversiae* 2.1.17; Plutarch, 'On the Love of Wealth', *Moralia* 523C-528B; 'That We Ought Not to Borrow', *Moralia* 827D-832A.

¹⁰⁴ 'Working for the Few: Political capture and economic inequality', Oxfam Briefing Paper, 20 Jan 2014. Accessed 29 Jan 2014 from oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp-working-for-few-political-capture-economic-inequality-200114-en.pdf. 'In the US, the wealthiest one percent captured 95 percent of post-financial-crisis growth since 2009, while the bottom 90 percent became poorer' (p 3).

¹⁰⁵ David Harris Gershon, "Stark Infographic of Too-Big-to-Fail Banks Represents 1% Consolidation in America", dailykos.com/story/2014/05/30/1303033/-Stark-Infographic-of-Too-Big-to-Fail-Banks-Represents-1-Consolidation-in-America on 1 June 2014.

¹⁰⁶ See also Gn 43.23; Jg 18.7; Pr 3.14.

and
 where
 thieves
 break in and thieve.
 ὅπου
 σῆς καὶ βρώσις
 ἀφανίζει
 καὶ
 ὅπου
 κλέπται
 διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν·

Jesus is not likely to disagree with this description of the problem you face when you ‘treasure treasures’— that ‘moth and rust consume’, and ‘thieves break in and steal’— but it provides an occasion for him to prescribe a solution that will put an end to the problem.

Interestingly, the ‘moth and rust’ do to ‘treasures on the ground’ what the ‘hypocrites’ did to their faces in 6.17— they ‘aphanize’ them— they make them stop shining.

(3) Prescription 6.20

Introducing the Transforming Initiative with the usual ‘but’ (*de*, *δέ*), Jesus applies the vocabulary of valuing and accumulating to ‘treasures in the sky’.¹⁰⁷

20 But treasure for yourselves
 treasures in the sky,
 20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν
 θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ,

He is not talking about life after death. The ‘sky’, or ‘heaven’, is God’s throne, and God’s reign has begun. Don’t be hoarding banknotes in the old currency!

‘Treasures’, more or less equivalent to heavenly gifts (see Mt 6.1,4,6; cf 4Ezr 8.33), and recorded in the heavenly books (2Bar 24.1)— are the *results* that come from doing God’s will. In relation to wealth, this includes actions that

don’t serve accumulation— giving and lending freely (5.42), indiscriminate acts of mercy done in secret to sustain others (see 5.42,45; 6.2-4), and so forth.

Heaven is the sphere where God’s will is done, and from which his reign proceeds. To ‘treasure treasures in heaven’ means to submit yourself to heaven’s regime, so that its wealth and power become available to you (cf 6.22-23,24,33; also 5.8, 7.21, and 12.34).

where
 neither moth nor rust
 darken
 and
 where
 thieves
 do not break in and thieve.
 ὅπου
 οὔτε σῆς οὔτε βρώσις
 ἀφανίζει
 καὶ
 ὅπου
 κλέπται
 οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν·

The ‘treasures’ of heaven are not things we will get in the afterlife for giving up treasures in this life. To change the metaphor to one of ‘reward’, we may say that the ‘reward’ of studying Greek is finding that you can actually read the New Testament with greater understanding. As you learn, you already begin to enjoy the reward. *This* life, where there is injustice, is where the ‘reward’ of ‘treasures in heaven’ show up.

Jesus characterizes these heavenly treasures only in negative terms, but it’s clear that what can’t be corrupted or stolen will be lasting.

Heaven’s regime is characterized by peace, justice, and joy *already* manifest in the renewed community and social relations of those who act as Jesus recommends.

There is, of course, an afterlife, but contrary to what most people seem to think, the New Testament has very little

¹⁰⁷ See Tb 4.8-9; Si 29.8-13; Pss Sol 9.5; 4Ezr 7.77.

to say about it. In any case, it will only make manifest where our treasures have been all along.

Explanation

6.21-22

21 for where
your treasure is,
your heart
will be there also.

21 ὅπου γάρ ἐστιν
ὁ θησαυρός σου,
ἐκεῖ ἔσται
καὶ ἡ καρδιά σου.

At first it looked like Jesus was simply asserting the superiority of imperishable ‘treasures’ over perishable ones, and that is often taken to be his meaning. But his own Explanation turns away from the different kinds of ‘treasure’ (material, or spiritual) that you might acquire, and how lasting or not it is, and points to the heart, the eye, and the body. Where do you want your heart to be? What is your ‘outlook’, and your social presence?

The heart is the center of human commitment and decisions (cf 5.8,28). The unjust accumulation of goods reflects an earnest participation in the regime of the present age. Business coach Simon Sinek points out in one of his publications that the armed forces honor people who sacrifice themselves that others may live, whereas businesses in our world tend lately to honor people who sacrifice others, that they themselves may live better. What kind of person do we want to be? What kind of heart do we want to have?

To this observation about the heart, Jesus adds a further observation that may again start with a proverb (‘the lamp of the body is the eye’). As part of the Explanation, this new statement contains no imperatives, but simply indicatives and subjunctives. It warns against stinginess, jealousy, and greed, which Mediterranean culture still describes as ‘having an evil eye’.

22 The lamp of the body is the eye.
If therefore your eye were simple,
your whole body will be full of light.

23 But if your eye were evil,
your whole body will be full of dark.

If therefore the light that is in you
is darkness,
what darkness it is!

22 Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὁ ὄφθαλμός.
ἐὰν οὖν ᾗ ὁ ὄφθαλμός σου ἀπλοῦς,
ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται.

23 ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ὄφθαλμός σου πονηρὸς ᾗ,
ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται.

εἰ οὖν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ
σκότος ἐστίν,
τὸ σκότος πόσον.

We think of the eye as letting light *into* the body, but the ancients understood the eye to be like a lamp, letting light within the body out (so 6.23) to guide a person’s way.¹⁰⁸ Maybe a better translation would be, ‘the eye is the flashlight of the body’. The eye’s light comes, of course, from the heart, and when people become blind, darkness proceeds from their eyes, indicating something amiss with the heart. For the ancients, darkness was an objective reality— not just an absence of light as it is for us (cf 5.15). Light is the presence of light; dark is the presence of dark.

A healthy eye would be a *sign* that your ‘whole body will be full of light’ (6.22). Note the verbs carefully: ‘If your eye *were* healthy’— suggesting a possibility that may not yet exist, but if it does, it *will* show that you have light inside of you.

The term ‘healthy’ (*haplous*, ἀπλοῦς) is not just physiological but also ethical (‘single, simple, sincere, generous’). An intertestamental text tells us that a ‘healthy’ person ‘does not desire gold... does not defraud his neighbor... long for fancy foods... want fine clothes’, is not distracted by lust, has no envy, malice, or avarice but awaits only the will of God.¹⁰⁹ Such a person has wholehearted focus and integrity. A ‘healthy eye’ reveals a ‘body full of light’. The ‘body’ is not just the physical or medical self but the whole self as the center of social action.

¹⁰⁸ Cf 2Sm 12.11; Dn 10.6; Si 23.19; Jos Asen 14.9. See Betz, *Sermon*, 442-49, on ‘Ancient Greek Theories of Vision’.

¹⁰⁹ *T.Iss.* 4.1,2,6; also 3.1-8; 5.1,8; 6.1; 7.7; *T.Benj* 6.6-7. See also Schramm, ‘ἀπλότης, ἀπλοῦς’, *EDNT* 1.123-24; Bauernfeind, ‘ἀπλοῦς, ἀπλότης’, *TDNT* 1.386-87.

The converse is, 'if your eye were evil'. The adjective 'evil' (*ponēros*, πονηρός) can mean not just 'bad' but malicious (so 5.11,37,39,45); but as we saw in 6.13 ('deliver us from evil') we saw that it had to do with something (there, a world) where heaven's regime was not followed.

An 'evil eye' indicates envy, jealousy, and hostility, but as we saw regarding 'looking at a woman to covet her' (5.28), words for psychological states always connoted a corresponding *action* as well, whether actually accomplished or not. So here, having an 'evil eye' would also mean to hex or to curse. Such evil looking, which is not single-minded (*haplous*, ἀπλοῦς) but divided, envious, jealous, and seeks the destruction of others, would reflect the state of one's 'body'— one's whole social being— and the 'light' within it: 'your whole body will be full of darkness'. If the 'light in you'— that is, in your heart— has become so corrupted that your whole social self is only dark, Jesus laments, 'How great the darkness is!' (6.23).

'Healthy' and 'evil' eyes parallel 'treasures in the sky' and 'treasures on the ground'. Both are a matter of 'light' and 'darkness' inside the 'whole body'. If there is darkness in your heart, your flashlight won't work and you'll lose your way.

Matthew has said, 'A people who walked in darkness have seen great light' (4.16)— God's saving presence and life (Ps 27.1) are now being manifested in the 'darkness' of sinful structures of oppression and exploitation (see 4.15-16). This 'light' defines the worldwide mission (Isa 42.6; 49.6) in which God's people walk or live (Ps 56.13; Isa 2.5). The community of disciples continues this mission as the light of the world (5.14-18).

These verses (6.22-23) connect heaven's regime with how disciples view and use material goods. Not to 'treasure treasures on the ground', but to 'treasure treasures in the sky' (so 6.19-21) requires a single focus. It's to seek the present and yet-future completion of heaven's purposes (6.33).

Such a teaching applies to a wealthy, as to a poor, audience. For the wealthy, it means the end of greedy and exploitative accumulation. It requires divesting of wealth in merciful almsgiving (see 5.7, 19.21). For the poor, it means a lifestyle of trust in God and in one another, free of obsessive anxiety about material provisions, and sharing the scraps you have, not fighting over them.

TRIAD 12—

SERVE HEAVEN'S REGIME

AND JUSTICE FIRST!

6.24-34

(1) Tradition

6.24a-c

24 No one can
be a slave to two lords,
for either he will hate the one
and love the other,
or he will lay hold of one
and disregard the other.

24 Οὐδεις δύναται
δυσι κυρίοις δουλεύειν·
ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἓνα μισήσει
καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσει,
ἢ ἑνὸς ἀνθέξεται
καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου καταφρονήσει.

Because three of these four final Triads have 'Don't' as their introductory expression, it might be tempting to think of 6.24 ('no one can serve two masters') as belonging with 6.19-23 ('treasuring treasures'), and to begin the next unit at 6.25 ('Therefore don't worry'). But three facts show us that 6.24 is in fact the beginning of the Twelfth Triad, which extends through 6.34:

- 'Therefore' (literally, 'on account of this', *dia touto*, διὰ τοῦτο), in 6.25 refers to what *preceded* it, so 6.24 belongs with 6.25.
- Matthew usually uses the phrase *dia touto* (6.25) in a position of climax, not as a beginning.
- 6.25 also begins with 'I tell you,' λέγω ὑμῖν, which we've seen nine times now— but never as the *beginning* of a Triad.
- 'No one can serve two masters' and the rest has the form of a traditional Jewish wisdom proverb. We can't identify it from any source we know of, but
 - the idea that one can't serve God and money was common in antiquity;
 - the somewhat vague or at least non-specific meaning of the statement is a feature of proverbs, which are invoked in a wide variety of situations; and

- o the either/or format of the rest of the verse is common to many proverbs as well.
- o each of the other three Triads in this series apparently begins with a proverb or popular saying also.

So we have to conclude that 6.24 opens a new Triad, the Twelfth.

Here again the triadic structure is important for the interpretation. If 'No man can serve two masters' (6.24) is the Tradition part of the Triad, then it is *not* a point that Jesus himself is particularly making (though he wouldn't disagree with it— that's the point of a proverb, after all— people generally agree with it!). Rather, it's a traditional point that Jesus is about to use as a springboard for something else. Because all the Triads have the form, Tradition, Diagnosis of a related issue, and Transformative Therapy, we expect a diagnosis of undesirable attitudes and actions to follow, after which Jesus will summon the disciples to a new way of living.

As with most of the Triads, the main verb of the Tradition section is a negative indicative ("No one can"), not an imperative or commandment.

To 'be a slave' to a 'lord' is a religious, imperial, and social image. *Douleuō* (δουλεύω), usually translated 'serve', actually suggests 'slavery' more than mere 'service'.

The imagery and language of slavery defined Israel when it was subject to Egypt, Babylon, and Rome.¹¹⁰ The image can also denote a relationship to God or to gods (Ex 23.33; Dt 13.4; Jg 2.7) that evokes the ownership and power of the god, and the worshiper's dependence (see 20.26-27).

Within the Roman empire itself, slavery was perhaps *the* basic social institution upon which the whole system depended. Thirty five to forty percent of Italy's population at the time of Christ were slaves. If they'd been mingling freely with citizens instead of doing hard labor on the farm, every third person you might see on the street would be *owned* by somebody. For the Empire as a whole, the number of slaves was ten to fifteen percent of the 'whole world'. Even more significantly: less than 1.5 percent of the Empire's population owned more than half of all the slaves. About half of all slaves worked in the countryside in hard agricultural production or in mines; the remainder in towns and cities.

Slaves occupied a marginal or liminal position as outsiders to (free, male) society, although necessary to it. They

had no rights, no voice, no appeal. Many suffered terribly, while a very few acquired considerable benefits of power and status-by-association with their powerful owners. Like childhood (see 5.9), slavery was a condition of shame and humiliation. Owners could, and did, use them sexually, at will.

So when Jesus says, 'no one can be the slave of two lords' he is using an image that refers to people living on the edge of society. Startlingly, in his view, their existence is honorable, and in fact God's 'slaves' serve the 'Great King' (5.35) himself. God himself is their owner and patron, and their attachment to him ensures access to his saving power and protection, and a role in the completion of his purposes. To be God's slave is to be honored because God, the most revered lord of all, was one's own lord (cf Philo, *De Cherub* 107). Jesus himself was a 'slave' (20.28).

That 'no one can be a slave to two lords' is elaborated in further general terms: 'he will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other'. As we've said before, love and hate are not about emotions, but about loyalty (Gn 29.30, 31,33; Dt 21.15-17); translations such as 'like' and 'dislike' miss the point, and even verbs like 'be devoted to' and 'despise' can fail to see what's going on. The verse is about commitment, loyalty, and obedience.

'No one can serve two masters' is both a commonsense and a legal principle— and a political agenda in first-century Palestine. In fact, if 6.24d didn't talk about 'mammon' (worldly goods), it would be easy to think that Jesus was talking about Israel's desire to be free of its *Roman* overlords, so that it might serve the Lord God freely.

(2) Diagnosis

6.24d-25

you can't be a slave to God and to mammon.

οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾶ.

Proverbs are general statements with wide application. After the generality of 'no one can serve two masters' and the lines on 'loving one and hating the other' (6.24a-c), the conclusion 'no one can serve God and mammon' (6.24d) is strikingly specific and pointed. It seems Jesus is summing up the proverb and applying it— somewhat unexpectedly— not to God and *Rome*, but to God and *mammon*. Therefore, this seems to be the beginning of the Diagnosis section of the Triad.

¹¹⁰ Egypt: Ex 14.5,12 etc; Babylon: 2K 25.24; Isa 14.3; Jr 25.11, etc; Rome: 'Subjects... of the absolute emperor': Philo, *Gaium* 115; cf Josephus, *JW* 5.364, 422; 2.374-75, 378.

The statement begins with a negative ('you can't'), as often in the Diagnosis sections of the Triads.¹¹¹ As always, this is not a commandment, but an observation. You just can't!

'Mammon' is Aramaic for property, wealth, possessions, material goods. The *proverb* has only pointed out the impossibility of trying to live with divided loyalties. But at this point, Jesus *applies* the proverb to material wealth, which can enslave and usurp the loyalty that rightfully belongs to God.

Jesus is not the first to warn against the danger of wealth, of course. The prophets frequently did so; Plutarch condemns the insatiable greed of the rich;¹¹² the Cynics recognized that wealth is neither necessary nor desirable for the good life. Yet they are minority voices. Juvenal claimed that although *Pecunia* (Money) had no altar, she was the goddess whom the Romans honored most of all (*Sat* 1.112-14; 3.162-63).

As he sometimes does in the Diagnosis section, Jesus introduces further comments with 'For this reason' and 'I tellya'—

25 For this reason, I'm telling you,

25 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν·

As mentioned, the phrase *dia touto* in Matthew is used most frequently in a position of climax.

He then follows with a negative imperative, names 'worry' as the underlying attitude that keeps people from 'serving' God— that is, from participating in heaven's regime. The issue is *anxiety about needs*.

don't worry for your soul/life,
what you might eat [or what drink],
nor for your body, what you will wear.

μη̅ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν
τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε],
μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθηθε.

This 'don't worry' (6.25) is an imperative, which makes it an exception to the pattern that imperatives come only in the Prescriptions. We saw such an imperative in the Tenth Triad, On Fasting— '*don't be* like the play-actors,

sullen...' (6.16)— as well. When negative imperatives occur in the Diagnosis section, the Triad form tells us that they function more as descriptions of the problem than as Jesus' ultimate (and always positive) teaching, which he will signal here with the word 'therefore' (6.9), or 'but (rather)' (6.17). Thus he will say, a few verses later, 'but seek first' (6.33).

So 6.25 is a Diagnosis, not a commandment. Jesus is pointing to 'anxiety' or 'worry' (*merimnān*, μεριμνᾶν) as a problem, and he mentions several kinds. First is anxiety over 'life'. The word here is *psychē* (ψυχή), usually translated 'soul' but sometimes best rendered 'life', as both KJV and others do here. The Hebrew idea underlying this is beautiful and compelling. *Néphesh*— the word usually translated 'soul'— originally meant the *throat*— that organ into which an animal must take what is in the world outside it into itself for nourishment. It is therefore the organ of our *need*. But it is also the organ through which we express ourselves, that is, bring what is inside us into the world outside. We should not worry, Jesus says in effect, about the life of this organ— about our need to consume or express. But how? He'll get to this in a moment.

Into the throat we put food and drink, the second things Jesus mentions as objects of 'anxiety' (some manuscripts don't specifically mention drink, and the word may appear here only as a reflection of 6.29).

The third object of 'worry' is 'your body', and specifically, 'what to dress in'.

Jesus then interrogates the audience's anxiety about life, food, drink, and clothes with a question that demands a 'yes' answer:

Isn't life/soul more than food
and the body [more] than clothing?

οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶν τῆς τροφῆς
καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος;

Subsequent passages in Matthew¹¹³ show that these commodities were often in short supply for the poor majority in imperial economics. In fact political and socio-economic injustice have begun to teach some people even in our society that it can be hard not to worry about food and other necessities.

'*Not worrying*' doesn't mean that nourishment and clothing don't matter; it means losing sight of the fact that life

¹¹¹ Indicatives in 5.34,39, 6.5,16; negative subjunctives in 6.2,7; 7.6b.

¹¹² 'On Love of Wealth', *Moralia* 523E-F, 524C-D, 525C-D, 528B); see also Horace, *Sal* 1.1; 2.3.82-280.

¹¹³ See 14.13-21; 15.32-39; 25.31-46.

and body are more than these. 'Worry' (*merimnate*, μεριμνᾶτε)— the verb that occurs five more times in this Triad (6.27,28,31,34 [twice]) and unifies it— has to do with priorities, with what monopolizes the heart's concern.

Si 29.21 identifies food, drink, clothing, and housing as 'necessities of life'. But the concern to secure life in this world is excessive when the heart is consumed with what you will eat, drink or wear.

Over against a cultural norm (cf 5.3-16, 21-48; 6.1-18; 6.19-24) and perhaps even beyond 'common sense', Jesus reminds the community of disciples of the proper perspective regarding human needs.

Our social location shapes our interaction with this section and with the Prescription that follows. It used to be easy for us to read this saying as an injunction against *neurotic* worry, or the kind of worry that comes from 'overconcern' with material goods when actually you had plenty. Perhaps today, though, it has become more easy for many in our society to relate to the kinds of consuming worry poverty that Jesus is pointing to. The trust that Jesus asks is not easy. For haves, his words can offer great challenge; for have-nots, they can offer great encouragement.

26 Take a good look at the birds of the sky
because they don't sow
nor do they reap
nor do they gather into barns,
and your sky-father skies feeds them:

aren't you more important than they?

26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν
οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν
οὐδὲ συναγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας,
καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά·
οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν;

Jesus doesn't turn to the birds of the air and the lilies of the field as *examples* of an *argument* in 6.25 that *storing up for the future is unnecessary because God provides for the needs of creatures*. He actually hasn't made such an argument. He has pointed to an undesirable *attitude* that attempts to serve God and mammon (6.24d) at the same time and because of worry about life, food, drink and

clothing, ends by defining life only in those terms— 'Isn't life more than food?' (6.25).

In view of such attitudes, Jesus directs the audience (in the imperative) first not just to 'look at', but to 'have a good look at' (*emblemsate*, ἐμβλέψατε) the 'birds of the heaven'. His aim is to restore the proper perspective. 'Heaven' is where God's will is done, and from which he extends his regime (see 4.17; 5.16, 34; 6.11). Discernment of heaven and its workings is crucial for the lifestyle he teaches.

The 'birds', created by God (Gn 1.20-22), perform none of the traditional male roles. They 'neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns'. Instead 'your sky-father feeds them'. The use of 'your' along with the familiar image of the 'sky-father' (see 5.16,45,48; 6.1,9) connects the birds' situation with that of the disciples. God is 'your' provider as much as the birds' —and indeed, more so: 'Are you not more important than they?' Again the question expects a 'yes'. The personal pronoun 'you' is emphatic. If birds can rely on God and not be anxious, disciples may do so as well. The image does not preclude work— the birds do *work*. It does not even preclude storing up for the future, because humans plant and harvest. The issue is worry, and Jesus has called forth an attitude of trust. Now he returns to the issue of worry:

27 who of you, worrying,
can add
to his height / lifespan
one cubit?

27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν
δύναται προσθεῖναι
ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ
πῆχυν ἕνα;

Worrying is not only distrustful; it is futile. This question expects 'no one' for its answer, but the image of adding a cubit to one's lifespan (*or*: 'height'; the Greek can mean either) is absurd on the face of it and suggests a foolish attempt to overreach what a human being can do. Adding years to life (or cubits to height) is something only God can do. Anyone who thought he could do that would be a fool.

However, looking at birds, considering their well-placed trust, and recognizing human limitations are not yet Jesus' ultimate point.

Jesus then takes up the issue of clothing, first mentioned in 6.25:

28 And about clothing why do you worry?

28 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε;

He directs his audience's attention from the sky to the ground:

examine/learn closely from the lilies of the field,
how they grow:

they neither toil nor spin,

καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ

πῶς αὐξάνουσιν·

οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν·

This time the verb is more intense than just 'looking well', or even just 'learning'. 'You' (pl) must not just 'learn', but 'learn closely' (*katamathete*, καταμάθετε). Flowers do not perform the traditional female roles. They 'neither toil nor spin'. Again, he's not saying we have no need to toil or spin. He's moving on to put this in perspective.

29 but I'm telling you that

not even Solomon in all his glory

dressed up like one of these.

29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι

οὐδὲ Σολομών ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ

περιεβάλετο ὡς ἓν τούτων.

Is Jesus saying, as most claim, that God makes the flowers more beautiful even than Solomon's splendid clothing? That's a romantic idea, and maybe a question of personal taste. It's actually more likely that he intends a negative point here:

1. The phrase 'I'm telling you' appears fourteen (!) times in the Teaching on the Mountain,¹¹⁴ and in all the *other* times it appears, it introduces a *contrast*— e.g., 'I'm telling you, *unless your righteousness is greater than* that of the scribes and Pharisees...'.¹¹⁴
2. Solomon received negative mention in the genealogy: he was born 'of Uriah's wife' (1.6)— that is, the offspring of adultery.

3. Solomon was a king, and most references to kings in Matthew are negative (cf 1.6-11; ch 2).

4. 'Glory' is something that rightly belongs to God (4.8; 5.16; 6.2) but can be usurped. The pronoun 'his' suggests Solomon was concerned with his own glory (including clothing), not God's.

And in fact the OT's bottom line about Solomon is actually negative, since he violated God's will for kings.¹¹⁵ We tend to read it as positive, because we admire kings and like to watch the pomp and pageantry of coronations on tv. But it would be different if a king had made slaves of us. Solomon acquired vast numbers of horses, wives, and gold through military conscription, forced labor, requisitioned property, heavy taxation, and slavery. In all this, he was not building up his own personal lavish lifestyle, but engaging in heavy militarism and international political manoeuvring. Horses were the fighter jets of the day. Marriage, as we saw above, is a contract between families; among kings, it's a type of treaty that united houses, and hence kingdoms together. Solomon sought many wives to expand his power. He wanted to be clothed in glory— not by trusting God but by unjust and exploitative imperial strategies— precisely the things that Samuel warned against in 1Sm 8.11-18 and which God had forbidden in Dt 17.16,17,20. And he did prosper— that is, his policies prospered Israel's elite. God clothes the lilies of the field in glory. But, as every Israelite knew, Solomon's path led Israel to disaster and Exile.

So Jesus is not piously 'showing us not to worry about the future'. He is pointing to Solomon's attitude as a *deadly violation of Israel's covenant*. Moreover, *this was a very real political option in his day and in ours*. Matthew's audience would be aware that it had led to the disastrous First Jewish Revolt of 66–70 AD.

But Jesus stresses a different perspective, a different attitude:

30 But if God clothes

the grass of the field like that,

which exists today

and tomorrow is thrown into the oven,

[will he] not much more clothe you,

you of little faith?

¹¹⁴ 5.18,20,22,26,28,32,34,39,44; 6.2,5,16,25,29.

¹¹⁵ Law of the King: Dt 17.15-17b; also 1Sm 8. For Solomon, among numerous other passages, Isa 31.1, Ez 17.15 (Solomon broke the covenant), 1K 11.3,4, Ne 13.26 (he sinned), and so forth.

30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ
 σήμερον ὄντα
 καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον
 ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσιν,
 οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς,
 ὀλιγόπιστοι;

It might seem odd, by the way, that lilies and grass would be used in a furnace. However, in the dry eastern Mediterranean, the gorgeously blooming fields of spring become parched in a just a few weeks as the dry season pushes from the desert across the whole country. Wood is scarce, so dry vegetation was (and still is) gathered, bundled, and burned in ovens to cook bread.

At the end of this verse, Jesus addresses the disciples as 'you of little trust'. This term, *oligópistoι* (ὀλιγόπιστοι) appears three more times in the gospel (8.26; 14.31; 16.8). In each case, the disciples doubt Jesus' power. It indicates the precise issue as *trust*. Having hit the nail of *trust* on the head, he concludes his description of problematic actions and attitudes by returning to the beginning:

31 You shouldn't therefore
 worry, saying,
 What shall we eat?
 or, What shall we drink?
 or, What shall we dress in?
 31 μὴ οὖν
 μερμνήσητε λέγοντες·
 τί φάγωμεν;
 ἢ· τί πίωμεν;
 ἢ· τί περιβαλώμεθα;

The word 'therefore' (*oun*, οὖν) indicates that Jesus has reached the conclusion of his diagnosis as he returns to the central issue of 'worry'. The verb is a subjunctive—'therefore you shouldn't worry'—not technically an imperative. Subjunctives of this type, especially preceded by the negative particle *mē* (μὴ), 'don't!', are often used as imperatives in Greek, and this verse may be translated as an imperative in your bible, but strictly speaking, it's a subjunctive, as we expect in the Diagnosis section.

Jesus summarizes the kinds of worry we should not have by repeating the typical questions he asked at the be-

ginning of the section (6.25), 'What shall we eat?... drink?... dress in?'

However, the last verb, 'dress in' (*peribalōmetha*, περιβαλώμεθα) specifically ties the question to the negative recollection of Solomon in 6.29 (*periebaletō*, περιεβάλετο), rather than the contextless 'wear' (*endysēsthe*, ἐνδύσθητε), which he used in the original question (6.25).

Again a lesser-to-greater argument secures the connection (so 6.26). If God treats disposable grass with such care and splendor, disciples can trust him to provide for them just as he has done since creation (Gn 3.21).

Then Jesus offers two explanations.

32 For, for all these things
 the gentiles are looking;
 32 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα
 τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν·

The first explanation is that the objects of worry, as he has been discussing worry, are the preoccupations of 'gentiles'. This is not a nationalistic or racist putdown, but a reference to those who have no *covenant relationship* with Israel's God.

His second explanation again refers to 'your sky-father', who knows what you need.

for your sky-father
 knows
 that you have need of all of them.
 οἶδεν γὰρ
 ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος
 ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων.

God can be trusted to honor his covenant and to take care of 'you', whom Jesus has just taught to address God as their own Father (6.10).¹¹⁶

Again the distinct practice and identity of disciples is defined in terms of God's 'knowing' their needs within the covenant, that is, his own commitment to them.

¹¹⁶ That masters must provide adequately for slaves is a common theme even in Roman agricultural treatises: see Cato (d. 149 BC) *De Agricultura* 56-59, 107-15; Varro (d. 27 BC) *De Re Rustica* 1.17-18; and Columella, *De Re Rustica* (written 60-65 AD) 1.8. Seneca (*De Ben* 3.21; *Ep* 47.1 1-14) also urges the master's duty of adequate provision. It didn't always happen, of course.

Again, this is not just a negative portrayal of 'gentiles' (5.47; 6.7). The disciples have a different practice because they belong to an Israel which has learned to call God 'father', and they know that he 'knows that you need all these things'.

That God 'knows' is not a theological claim about his omniscience so much as it is a statement about his *covenant faithfulness*.

It also fits with the practice that Jesus urged in 6.8, where disciples were not to yammer on about their needs.

(3) Transforming Initiative 6.33-34a

The Prescription— and therefore the main point Jesus has been getting to about the disciples' behavior is not a negative one but, as always, a positive command to do something.

33 But seek first
the regime [of God]¹¹⁴
and his covenant faithfulness
and all these things
will be added to you.
33 ζητείτε δὲ πρῶτον
τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ]¹¹⁷
καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ,
καὶ ταῦτα πάντα
προσθεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

Jesus begins the Prescription section with 'but' (*de*, δὲ), as we have come to expect.

Then, instead of the kinds of anxiety that led Israel from a military buildup under Solomon to Exile under Jehoiachin, and that will lead to the disastrous Jewish Revolt of 66 AD, he prescribes, 'First, seek the regime [of God]' (6.33).

This Triad is parallel to the previous Triad about storing up treasures in God's regime rather than where moth, rust, and thieves can consume. Where the treasure is, the

heart is (6.21). 'Seeking God's regime first' gets you beyond the anxiety that ends with a divided heart that tries to serve both God and mammon.

We become a part of God's redemptive project and his redemptive force in history by sharing the benefits that heaven has bestowed on us with those who are in need. We don't need to be anxious about them and cling to them. All that we we have comes from God, and sharing it with others not only defeats the enemy, but allows us to enter the Father's regime 'as in the sky, even on the ground'. We can trust in his faithfulness to the covenant. We don't have to be like Solomon, for we are 'more' than grass to be burned, and our justice/righteousness must be more even than his.

Seeking or striving is not passive but active. This means we must *actively* strive for the greater 'justice / righteousness / covenant faithfulness' (see 5.6,10,20; 6.1) that flows from God's saving presence and is faithful to his purposes. These actions seek to return social structures and practices to their right relations within heaven's empire (cf 5.3-12). If we seek this, then 'all these things' (adequate material needs, 6.25,31) 'will be added' (the passive indicates that God gives what is needed for life) 'to you as well'. 'Adding' is what you can't do to your height or lifespan by worrying about it (6.27).

Do we practice this kind of trust, as individuals only? Or is this a call to create the kind of community in which it can actually be true?

Explanation 6.34b

The expected explanation follows the Prescription: today's trouble is enough for today.

34 You shouldn't therefore
worry about tomorrow,
34 μὴ οὖν
μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον,

'Therefore', Jesus says, repeating the negative subjunctives/imperatives of of 6.25,31, 'don't worry about tomorrow'. Only this time, the verb 'worry' is in the future, and in Greek, future verbs refer to completed action. Thus, the sense is not just 'don't generally worry', but 'stop worrying altogether'. It's a subjunctive ('you shouldn't'), which as we've seen often functions as, but technically is not, an imperative.

'Tomorrow' sums up the attempts to secure the future with adequate material provisions (6.25) and to lengthen

¹¹⁷ Some manuscripts add 'of God' after 'kingdom', but this reading is not to be preferred. It is not found in the great codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, and it is not Matthew's style. One would have expected 'seek first *heaven's* regime'. In 4.23, Matthew says Jesus was 'proclaiming the good news of the kingdom' (without 'of the heavens'), so there is precedent for the use of 'regime' by itself in Matthew.

one's life (6.27). Philosophers like Plutarch urged people to meet 'the future without fear or suspicion, with hopes cheerful and bright'— not because of trust in God, but by controlling their emotions and learning to accept whatever Luck brings ('On Tranquility of Mind', *Moralia* 477F). Such an approach reflected the social world of the privileged classes that could well afford the idea of mental tranquility. But the Greek Magical Papyri tell another story, one of constant anxiety about the future. Buddhist dispassion was not the experience of a majority of the gospel's audience. For Jesus, confidence comes because 'your Father in the skies' is actively bringing about his will 'as in the sky, even on the ground' (6.10)

for tomorrow will worry about itself—
sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.

ἡ γὰρ αὐριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς·
ἀρκετὸν τῆ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.

The only thing certain about tomorrow is that it's tomorrow, and 'tomorrow will worry about itself' (another proverb).¹¹⁸

The uncertainties of life are not settled once for all, but confront disciples each day. What is beyond human control, God will take care of. In the midst of the imperial situation, creation still belongs to him, and he is still faithful to his covenant. And we can create a different kind of community by sharing, rather than seeking to pile up for ourselves.

TRIAD 13— JUDGING AND CORRECTING 7.1-5

The structure of the next Triad is straightforward.

(1) Tradition 7.1-2

7.1 Don't judge,
that you might not be judged,
for in what judgment that you judge
you will be judged,
and in what measure you measure out,
it will be measured out to you.

¹¹⁸ On the saying's proverbial nature, see Betz, *Sermon*, 484-85.

7.1 Μὴ κρίνετε,
ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε·
2 ἐν ᾧ γὰρ κρίματι κρίνετε
κριθήσεσθε,
καὶ ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε
μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν.

The Triad opens with a traditional teaching, again to be read as a proverb.¹¹⁹ A negative imperative and a future consequence is typical of proverbs and typical of the opening of these final four Triads (cf 6.19, 7.1,6). The verbs are 'you' plural.

We understand from Matthew's triadic formula— Tradition, Problem, Therapy— that Jesus is not commanding us not to judge others here, but citing a proverb or popular saying to that effect, on which he wishes to comment.

(2) Diagnosis 7.3-4

3 But why are you looking at the speck,
the one in your brother's eye,
and not paying attention
to the beam in your own eye?

3 τί δὲ βλέπεις τὸ κάρφος
τὸ ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου,
τὴν δὲ ἐν τῷ σώ ὀφθαλμῷ δοκὸν
οὐ κατανοεῖς;

The proverb is a good one, and Jesus doesn't disagree with it. But a switch from plural to singular and a disjunctive 'but' (*de*, δὲ) show quite clearly that so far he has only cited a traditional saying, and that only now does he begin his own commentary.

The disjunctive is not a strong one; we could translate it, 'So ok then!— why...', or 'So then, why'.

Obviously, criticizing or trying to correct a brother's misperceptions while having something that grossly prevents you from seeing as you should is nonsense.

And he restates the point for emphasis:

¹¹⁹ For traditional parallels, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.669.

4 Or how will you say to your brother,
 Forgive; let me cast out
 the speck from your eye—
 and look,
 the beam[‘s] in your own eye.

4 ἢ πῶς ἔρεις τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου·
 ἄφες ἐκβάλω
 τὸ κάρφος ἐκ τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ σου,
 καὶ ἰδοὺ
 ἡ δοκὸς ἐν τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ σου;

Here’s a person who’s trying to correct a ‘brother’, that is, a community member. The word ‘let me’ (*aphes*, ἄφες) is the exact form used in ‘forgive is our debts’ (6.12). Ironically, the disciple is asking for ‘forgiveness’ *in order to judge!*

(3) Prescription

7.5a

5 ὑποκριτά,

Jesus addresses anyone who acts like that as a ‘play actor’, a word he previously used in the Teaching for those who give alms, pray, or fast for show (6.2,5,16) and which he uses 13 times altogether¹²⁰ to castigate the scribes and Pharisees for obstructing God’s program.

But he doesn’t reinforce the negative command, ‘Don’t judge’. Instead, he addresses his implied interlocutor with a positive, therapeutic imperative that addresses the root problem whose symptom (false judgment) the proverb aims at preventing:

Cast out first
 the beam
 from your eye.

ἔκβαλε πρῶτον
 ἐκ τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ σοῦ
 τὴν δοκόν,

¹²⁰ See 6.2,5,16; 7.5; 15.7; 22.18; 23.13–15,23,25,27,29; 24.51. If fourteen represents some kind of a fullness or completeness in Matthew, thirteen may represent what is short of full or complete.

‘First,’ (*prōton*, πρῶτον), has occurred also in 5.24, *first* be reconciled, and in 6.33, seek *first* the reign of God—always in the Prescription part of the teaching. The Prescription of the previous Triad said, ‘seek first God’s regime’. The parallels suggests that the work of removing the log from one’s own eye participates in the work of reconciliation and the coming of heaven’s regime.

To do this work *first* implies that the other action mentioned may then be done *second*, that is, in its proper order and perspective, and this is the subject of the Explanation.

Explanation

7.5b

The explanation or rationale for undertaking the therapeutic measure comes as expected:

and then you will see clearly
 to cast out the speck
 from your brother’s eye.

καὶ τότε διαβλέψεις
 ἐκβαλεῖν τὸ κάρφος
 ἐκ τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ
 τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου.

Jesus accepts that you may, after all, have had some motivation to help, but you were just attempting to do so out of the proper order and lacking a good position to do so.

‘Looking’ or ‘seeing’ (*blepō*, βλέπω) and the ‘eye’ have been the subject of a number of verses in the Teaching:

- 5.28 But I say to you that every man who *looks at* a woman to covet her has already put his mark on her in his heart.
- 5.29 If your right eye traps you, *cast it out* and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than with your whole body to be *cast* into gehenna.
- 5.38 You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’
- 6.22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If then your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.
- 6.23 But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be full of darkness.
- 6.26 *Look at* the birds in the sky: They do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

The point of all this is summarized in the Sixth Beatitude, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (5.3).

Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew: 'Judging'* (7.1-5) would be an aggressive, challenging action. Jesus has already proscribed all honor challenges, either physical and verbal assault or sexual aggression (5. 22). Judgment and public criticism of another belongs with those. Jesus here condemns aggressive and challenging speech, which in the public form of ancient social relations would inevitably slight someone's honor. 'Not judging' seems to be quite different from the scenario of rebuking a brother in 18.15. There the person addressed is the victim of aggression ('If your brother sins against you...'), and the rebuke takes place between the two of them alone. Here, 'judging' has the connotation of reproach, fault finding, criticizing, and thus shaming, and is presumably done in public, the normal place for such confrontation.

Curiously, Jesus describes people looking eye-to-eye to find specks or logs; and eyes are the locus of honor and shame, inasmuch as all worthwhile behavior was done in public for all to see and all insults must occur before the eyes of the person challenged. Finding fault in the eyes of another would seem to be the opposite of finding favor in their eyes; thus 'eyes' are the locus of both praise and blame. And judging others is a very challenging action.

TRIAD 14— PATRONAGE AND LOYALTY

7.6-12

(1) Tradition

7.6a

6a	Don't give the Holy Place to dogs—
6b	and don't cast your pearls before swine!
6a	Μὴ δώτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσίν

6b

μηδὲ βάλητε
τοὺς μαργαρίτας ὑμῶν
ἔμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων,

Most people find 7.6 utterly baffling. Jesus has just said 'not to judge'— and now he turns right around and requires you to judge some people as 'dogs' and 'pigs', to deny them 'what is holy', and not to strew 'your pearls' in front of them.

There are various theories as to what this might mean. A popular approach is to read 7.6 with the previous verses ('Don't judge', etc; 7.1-5), and thus some bibles include it in the previous paragraph. Jesus has just said not to judge, but *surely* there are limits; *surely* we can't accept absolutely *everybody!* *Surely* he's is not so unrealistic as *that!*

But 7.1-5 was about 'seeing' and hence judging the 'faults' of a 'brother', whereas 7.6 is not about seeing but about giving, and not about faults or brothers but about something holy, which seems to be equivalent of pearls, and some parties referred to as 'dogs' or 'pigs'. So at least we can say that 7.6 is a new topic— and hence a new Triad.

Another approach is to treat this as an 'independent saying'. Now, nowhere else does Matthew ever throw in a random verse that has no context, but hey, what's to stop him from doing so if he wants? The problem then remains, though— what on earth is this *about?* Why is it so important that Matthew can't *not* include it, even though the way he does so leaves it completely obscure?

Because Jesus seems to call gentiles 'dogs' in the story of the Canaanite woman, and because his words there are vaguely similar to those used here ('It's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs', 15.26), some interpret this as a warning against a gentile mission. After all, in 10.6 he tells the disciples to go 'only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel', and 15.24 he says he himself has been 'sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. So, 'what is holy' would then be his teaching. But at the end of the gospel he sends the disciples to all nations, so we can safely ignore this except for whatever relevance it has to the internal sense of Matthew's story.

The Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, a very early document, interpreted 'the pearls' as teachings not to be taught to outsiders (Ps-Clem, *Rec* 2.3). And the *Didache*, another second-century document that almost made it into the NT canon, understood 'the holy' as the Eucharist, which was not to be given to unbelievers (*Did* 10.6).

But such ideas would be out of context and unexplained here. Indeed, in 28.19-20, Jesus actually does send the

disciples to 'all nations' and instructs them to teach them 'all that I have taught you'. And if *Matthew* is serious about *that*, why would he *insult* the nations (who evidently make up a significant part of his community) as 'pigs' and 'dogs', especially as an absolute statement, without context or explanation? Discipline regarding the sacraments does go back to the earliest times and is still necessary— but is the term 'dogs' really the right thing to call those very people to whom Jesus sent the Church with his Good News (28.19-20)?

So apparently even the early fathers struggled with the meaning of 7.6, almost from the beginning. That suggests a context that readers lost sight of quite early. And inevitably, that would be something Jewish, and at home in the first century.

It's helpful to note that 7.6 starts with a single thought expressed in two *almost* parallel members:

'Don't give ____ the holy to the dogs,
& don't cast *your* pearls (*pl*) before the swine'.

Parallel structures like this are common among Jewish proverbs. Since the previous three Triads also appeared to begin with proverbs or popular sayings, even if we couldn't identify their sources, we may assume that 7.6 is also a proverb or popular saying, a *Tradition* of some kind and, as such, the beginning of a Triad.

Like the Eleventh and Thirteenth Triads on Proverbial Wisdom, the Fourteenth begins with a negative, 'don't' (*mē*, μή). That's why, at least since the *Didache* (2nd c), people have tended to read the verse as a stand-alone *commandment*. But if it's only a *proverb* or *popular saying* that Jesus is *quoting*, it's not a commandment.

Now that we have learned to recognize the triad-form for what it is, though, we know that none of the other Triads ever *began* with a new commandment. The beginning of a Triad was always a Tradition that served as a springboard for further teaching. That, and the proverbial format of 7.6 strongly suggest that it's the beginning of a fourteenth Triad, not an 'independent saying', and that it belongs with what follows, not with the previous Triad.

There's another reason to think that it doesn't belong with the previous material, as well. The Thirteenth Triad began, 'do not judge' (*mē krinete*, μή κρίνετε) (7.1), and that was the first of five repetitions of the verb 'judge', which is one reason we have to take 7.1-5 as a unit. Likewise, 7.6 begins, 'don't give' (*dōte*, δώτε), and five more repetitions of the verb 'give' follow in 7.6-11. So 7.6 comprises with 7.7-11 a single unit.

In 7.3-4, Jesus spoke in the second person singular. Starting with 7.5, he switches to the plural. He continues

in the plural for until we get to 7.12, which we already know is the closing of the chiastic Inner Envelope. Again this shows that 7.5-11 is a unit.

But it tells us more. It tells us that this Triad is directed to the disciples as a *community*, rather than individually.

So now we have a context for 7.6. It's a proverb or popular saying which provides the topic of the Fourteenth Triad, it brings up the relationship of *giving and receiving*, and Jesus is addressing the community.

I mentioned that 7.6 starts with a single thought expressed in two *almost* parallel members. But they are not quite parallel— 'the holy' is singular, and 'pearls' is plural— and proverbs in Jesus' culture tended to be quite strictly parallel. What's more, the owner of 'the holy' is not specified, whereas the pearls are 'your pearls'. The line about pearls also begins with 'nor' or 'and don't' (*mēde*, μηδὲ), which is disjunctive. Proverbs can have disjunctives, but since the parallel is not exact, this looks like a new beginning. And finally, the line about *pearls* is extended by a 'prose' explanation in 7.6c, 'lest they trample' etc, and proverbs don't come with explanations any more than jokes do. So I'm inclined to treat the second line, 'nor should you cast your pearls before the swine' (7.6b), as the beginning of the Diagnosis section— as Jesus' own addition to or comment on the proverb— rather than part of the Traditional Saying itself.

So we will treat 7.6b when we get to the Diagnosis section, below.

Most translations follow KJV in saying, 'Do not give *that which is holy* to the dogs'. Various meanings have been proposed for 'that which is holy' (*to hagion*, τὸ ἅγιον). Perhaps it refers to (scraps from?) the sacrificial offering. After all, in most Jewish sacrifices, portions of the offering were given to the offerer and to the priests as a kind of communion meal. The saying would mean that the sacrificial meat— or at least the bones left over after eating it— should not be thrown to the dogs. Indeed, what other 'holy thing' would dogs be interested in?

However, there are numerous problems with this idea. First of all, the word is singular. Thus it refers to a certain thing, not to something like 'scraps'. Secondly, dogs would ever end up with sacrificial scraps, much less meat. Dogs had some domesticated use in Israel,¹²¹ but they were unclean, had no ritual use, and would not have been permitted near the sanctuary. They attached themselves to villages and towns, patrolling the perimeters, expecting, if not exactly handouts, then garbage. But who would carry sacrificial meat from the Temple to the

¹²¹ Cf Jb 30.1, Tb 5.17, 11.4.

village, or even outside Jerusalem's wall, and then toss it into the garbage? What was left over after a sacrifice was burned, not just thrown out. Dogs would have no contact with holy things. What is the point of a proverb which forbids the obvious? Or even its application?

Moreover, why would Jesus be quoting this rule *here*? He is not generally concerned with directly cultic matters, and does not mention them in the Teaching. If he is citing some kind of cultic rule, then surely he is doing so as a metaphor. But then, a metaphor for *what*?

Jesus' expression is 'Do not give *the holy* to the dogs'. 'The holy' (*to hagion*, τὸ ἅγιον) is a stand-alone singular adjective, not modifying any noun, with a definite article. This *precise expression* is found some 20 times in the OT, and with the sole exception of Lv 22.14, it *always* referring to the *Holy Place*, ie, the *Sanctuary*.¹²² It does not occur with any other meaning. Except for Lv 22.14, whenever *to hagion* (τὸ ἅγιον), 'the holy', refers to sacrificial food, the appurtenances of the Temple, etc, it occurs as an adjective and either the object itself is named and the adjective placed after it,¹²³ or an indefinite *plural* is used (*ta hagia*)— *never* the singular adjective by itself with the definite article (*to hagion*). In fact the Septuagint sometimes uses the plural *ta hagia* (τὰ ἅγια) when the Hebrew uses the singular, apparently just to preserve this

distinction. The LXX does refer to the sacrificial *offerings* with the plural *ta hagia*, but never with the singular *to hagion*.¹²⁴ In Greek, the singular *to hagion* *always* refers to the Sanctuary. So the first half of the proverb would have to mean,

'Don't give the Holy Place to the dogs...'

Well, that sounds reasonable, but who are the 'dogs', and what does 'giving the Sanctuary' to them mean?

Who the 'dogs' are seems fairly easy to answer. Throughout the ancient world, the word 'dog' was fairly commonly applied to enemies or other despicable persons.¹²⁵ In the OT, it always seems to apply to personal enemies, usually individuals, but sometimes groups.¹²⁶ There is one interesting passage in Isaiah that calls Israel's corrupt leadership 'dogs':

Isa 56.10-11 10 His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. 11 Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

Not far from the application of 'dog' to enemies, Jesus seems to call the Canaanite woman a 'dog' in 15.26, as we mentioned. As it turns out, he's not actually calling her a dog; what he *is* doing, we'll discuss when we get there— but nevertheless, Jews of Jesus' time did apply the words 'dog'— as well as 'pig'— to the gentile *nations*, and the sheer number of references in Strack and Billerbeck's ample *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash* shows just how readily they did so— but *not one saying* there applies either 'dog' or 'pig' to any *individual* gentile or even to a *group* of gentiles smaller than a *nation*.¹²⁷ So the 'dogs' and 'pigs' represent gentile *nations*.

So perhaps we may interpret the proverb in 7.6 as,

'Don't give the Holy Place to the gentiles.'

One further point: Jesus does not say 'dogs' or 'pigs' but 'the dogs' and 'the pigs', suggesting that he's got some

¹²² Lv 22.14: 'If a person eats sacred things out of ignorance, he shall then add one-fifth to it and give the sacred thing to the priest'. Note that 'the holy [thing]' here stands in apposition to an instance of the plural usage.

Otherwise, see Ex 28.3,29,30,35; Lv 10.18; 16.2-3,16,20,23,33; 21.23; 2C 31.18; Isa 64.10; Ez 41.21; 45.18; 48.8; Dn 8.14; 9.26; 11.31. Lv 22.14 speaks of someone inadvertently eating 'holy things' (LXX: *hagia*, ἅγια, plural and without the article). The Hebrew is *w'yš ky-y'kl qdš bšggh wysp hmšytw 'lyw wntn lkhn 't-hqdš*. The LXX and all modern translations interpret this as saying that the offender should add one fifth to its value and 'give the holy thing to the priest', reading *eth* as the objective particle, but this makes no sense if he's already eaten it! KJV reads 'give [it] *with* the holy thing to the priest', reading *eth* as the preposition, but there's still the problem of the fact that he's already eaten it. Interestingly, Vulgate has 'give it to the priest in the sanctuary' (*dabit sacerdoti in sanctuarium*), which is the only reading whose sense is actually clear.

To hagion refers to sacrificial food in Lv 2.3, Ezr 2.63, Ne 7.65, but there the expression is always *to hagion tōn hagiōn*, never just *to hagion*. 'It may also be of interest to note that some later MSS read τὰ ἅγια at Mt 7.6. It has been suggested that the variant arises because the Eucharist itself was referred to as τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων' (Stephen Llewelyn, 'Mt 7.6a: Mistranslation or Interpretation?' *NovT*, 31/2 (Apr 1989) 97-103; see p 100— though in note 9 one suspects he means τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις, 'holy things *for* the holy', but the point is the same).

¹²³ Eg, *to didrachmon to hagion* (τὸ διδραχμῶν τὸ ἅγιον), 'the holy shekel' (Ex 30.13), or *to katapetasma to hagion* (τὸ καταπέτασμα τὸ ἅγιον), 'the holy curtain' (Lv 4.6); note Lv 21.12, τὸ ἅγιον ἔλαιον τὸ χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, 'God's holy anointing oil', where τὸ ἅγιον precedes the noun but presumably because another adjective follows it.

¹²⁴ See Ex 29.33; Lv 19.8; 22.10,14; Nm 18:10. Llewelyn, *ibid*, 100.

¹²⁵ Dt 23.18, 1S 17.43, 24.14, 2S 3.8, 9.8, 16.9, 2K 8.13, Ps 22.16,20.

¹²⁶ See Dt 18.33 (gentile prostitutes); *1En* 89.41-50 (the nations); Isa 56.10 (Israel's blind leaders); 1Sm 17.43 (Philistines). For opponents, see 1Sm 24.14; Pr 26.11; Si 13.15-20. In the New Testament, Ph 3.2: Rv 22.15; in the fathers, Ignatius, *Eph* 7.1; for Cynics, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.60; Plutarch, 'On Tranquility of Mind,' *Moralia* 468C.

¹²⁷ See Str-B 1.449f, 725.

particular nation in mind. The only, and obvious candidate would be Rome.

At the time of Jesus, the Romans kept the vestments of the High Priest and allowed him to use them— and thus to perform the covenant worship— only by permission. I'm not suggesting that this is the meaning, but it provides context. In such a context, this statement about not giving the Holy Place to dogs would mean something like, 'Don't let the Romans have such control over the Holy Place. Jesus would then be commenting on a kind of call to arms. That would be consistent, for example, with the reason why the 'hypocrites' sought to garner support by displays of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

From Matthew's point of view, this saying would have a particular barb in the fact that the Holy Place was most certainly 'given to the dogs' in 70 AD, when Rome attacked it and destroyed it.

So in citing this proverb or popular saying, Jesus seems to be bringing up attitudes and actions aimed at reclaiming the Sanctuary from the control of the gentiles. Israel had failed to heed his words, and from Matthew's later perspective, such attitudes and actions had in fact ended in final loss of the Sanctuary to the gentiles altogether.

(2) Diagnosis 7.6b

So the Diagnosis begins in 7.6b, and I'll give it a new translation:

6b	Well then!— don't cast your pearls before the swine, either!
6b	μηδὲ βάλητε τοὺς μαργαρίτας ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων,

Since this line is *more or less* parallel to the previous, it surely means something close to what the first line said.

But it is related to the first line by *mēdè* or *mē dè* (μηδὲ or μὴ δὲ), which KJV translates this as 'neither'— 'do not give...; neither cast your pearls...'; etc. NASB and ESV have 'and do not'; NIV just drops the word altogether in favor of a semicolon. All of these translations create a strict parallelism, especially the NIV.

But *dè* is disjunctive— not always strongly, as we've often seen, but it's there, and it usually indicates a change of topic, or at least of direction. In fact it effected the

shift from the Tradition to the Diagnosis section of all six of the first set of Triads and in the Thirteenth; and from the Diagnosis to the Prescriptions of Triads 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12. We can't just ignore it.

So although 7.6b is roughly parallel to 7.6a, but it seems to be the beginning of an extension, application, or comment on 7.6a. It is not simply 'the second line of the proverb', and in fact, we can build the following diagram:

tradition : PROBLEM

murder : going around angry
adultery : staring at women
hypocrisy : loving to be seen
judging : beam in own eye
give Sanctuary to dogs : throw your pearls before swine

'Throwing your pearls before the swine' thus stands to the Tradition as a *Diagnosis* that has some relationship to 'giving the Sanctuary to the dogs'. And this is where Jesus will make his therapeutic intervention.

The OT doesn't mention pearls at all, and the only other reference to 'pearls' in any of the gospels is the parable of the 'pearl of great price', which is unique to Matthew (13.45-46). St Paul refers to pearls as part of the sumptuous clothing that faithful women should not concern themselves with (1Tm 2.9); in Rv 17.4 and 18.12,16 pearls adorn the Whore of Babylon's attire; and in Rv 21.21, each of the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem is made of a single pearl. But in the gospels, only here and in the parable.

There, Jesus compares heaven's regime to a 'merchant seeking fine pearls', and he says, 'finding one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it' (13.45-46). If Jesus had said here, 'don't throw your *pearl*', we might think that he meant that 'one pearl of great price'. But he says 'pearls'.

But we easily overlook the fact that he doesn't say 'heaven's regime is like a *pearl*'. He actually says, 'heaven's regime is like a *merchant* seeking beautiful *pearls*'. What is more, 'seeking' is *zētounti* (ζητοῦντι), the same verb that appears in the next verse here ('*seek* and you shall find', 7.7). So 'you'— the community of those who are 'poor in spirit' and to whom heaven's regime *belongs*, are like *merchants* who have *sought* and even *found* (7.7) beautiful pearls.

7.6b Well then! Don't cast your heavenly pearls before 'the swine', either!

'Pearls', then, would stand for the things that 'everyone' (7.8), but especially disciples, may seek and find from

God. What are those things? We ask and seek from God the things we pray for— the things mentioned in the Lord’s Prayer, like the sanctification of the father’s name, his empire and will, as well as daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance. We also ‘hunger and thirst for *righteousness / covenant faithfulness*’ (5.6).

The word *emprosthen* (ἐμπροσθεν), ‘in front of, before’, occurs 45 times in the NT.¹²⁸ In all but a few cases, it signifies the position of a person or thing placed in front of someone of higher status, or that of someone of higher status before others of lower status. This suggests that the pearls are not simply thrown ‘to’ the pigs, but somehow presented to them as a kind of honor or gift. In Rv 4.12, the twenty four elders cast their crowns before the throne; although the verb is the same (*ballousin*, βάλλουσιν), Revelation uses a different word for ‘before’ (*enōpion*, ἐνώπιον), but the image is similar to Matthew’s casting of pearls.

So who are these honorable swine, to whom you might cast the things you seek from your sky-father?

We mentioned that Jews commonly applied both ‘dog’ and ‘pig’ to the *gentile nations* in Jesus’ time. But we didn’t mention that pigs were the *Romans’* favorite sacrificial animals. What’s more— and both Jesus’ and Matthew’s audiences would have been only too aware of this— the *Roman legion that occupied Palestine* had a *wild pig* (boar) as its totem animal. In the Talmud, references to *Rome* as ‘swine’ are twice as many as references to the other nations as swine, which is not entirely surprising since Rome was the empire under which the Talmud was written (it was finalized before and after the time of Constantine).

The NT has only a couple of passages about swine. In one, a prodigal son goes into ‘a far country’ where people keep (and hence eat) swine, and attaches himself to one of its ‘citizens’ (*politōn*, πολιτῶν) (Lk 15.15). A ‘far country’ with ‘swine’ and ‘citizens’ fits Rome and its empire quite well.

The other story about swine tells of the healing of demoniac near gentile-dominated Gerasa or Gadara. In Mark’s version (Mk 5.1-13), when Jesus asks the demon its name, it answers: ‘Legion’, as in *Roman Legion*. The Legion begs him to send them into a large *herd* (*agele*) of pigs. Pigs are not herd animals, but a group of Roman recruits could be called a ‘herd’. So when the ‘Legion’ begs to be sent into the large herd of swine, Jesus ‘dis-

misses’ them, and the herd, ‘numbering about two thousand’ (the number of men in a legion), go into the pigs and the pigs ‘charge’ (a military action) into the ‘sea’ (where the Romans came from, from a Palestinian point of view). The association between the Roman Empire, pigs, and demon possession is transparent.¹²⁹ Matthew, in his version of the story, does refer to the pigs as a ‘herd’, but doesn’t mention the ‘Legion’, and fewer of his verbs emphasize the military aspect (8.28-34), but he retains enough to recall the point.

So in Jesus’ day, people *commonly* saw *Israel* as occupied by an army of demonic *swine*! Thus it’s all but impossible to resist the conclusion that the dog-and-swine imagery of 7.6 is meant to suggest Rome and its imperial regime. If we wish to be more specific, we might test whether ‘the dogs’ might mean gentiles/Romans generally, or its social and economic regime, while ‘the swine’ refer specifically to the legions, but we can’t do that here.

At any rate, though, people would have heard Jesus as saying something like,

[They say,] ‘Don’t give the Sanctuary to the Roman dogs’—

—Well then! Don’t (*mē de*) cast those heavenly pearls of yours before the legionary swine, either.

Jesus then continues the Diagnosis by showing what the consequence of casting your pearls before the imperial swine would be:

6c lest
they trample on them
with their feet
and having turned,
they tear you open.

6c μήποτε
καταπατήσουσιν αὐτοὺς
ἐν τοῖς ποσίν αὐτῶν
καὶ στραφέντες
ῥήξωσιν ὑμᾶς.

The third part of 7.6 begins with ‘lest’ (*mēpote*, μήποτε). ‘Lest’ is a negative explanatory, equivalent to ‘because’ (*gar*, γὰρ), which is used fourteen (!) times in the Four-

¹²⁸ Mt 5.16,24; 6.1-2; 7.6; 10.32-33; 11.10,26; 17.2; 18.14; 23.13; 25.32; 26.70; 27.11, 29; Mk 2.12; 9.2; Lk 5.19; 7.27; 10.21; 12.8; 14.2; 19.4, 27-28; 21.36; Jn 1.15,30; 3.28; 10.4; 12.37; Ac 10.4; 18.17; 2Co 5.10; Ga 2.14; Ph 3.13; 1Th 1.3; 2.19; 3.9, 13; 1Jn 3.19; Rv 4.6; 19.10; 22.8.

¹²⁹ See C Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), 190-9; also R Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 157-58.

teen Triads.¹³⁰ It introduces an undesirable consequence. The consequence ought to give further clue as to what Jesus means by ‘not casting those heavenly pearls of yours before the legionary swine’.

After the negative subjunctives (‘don’t give’) of the traditional proverb or popular saying and of its restatement in .6b (‘don’t cast’), the verbs now are a future indicative used as a subjunctive (literally, ‘they will trample’),¹³¹ a participle (‘having turned’), and a subjunctive (‘they tear’). These are all forms we have come to expect in the second section of each Triad.

The warning is double: ‘they will trample your pearls’ and ‘turning back, they would tear you’. The first warning is concerned with the ‘pearls’ that you ‘cast before the swine’; the second is concerned with ‘you’ (pl), who are doing the giving, and endangering yourselves by doing so.

Being ‘trampled’ (*katapateō*, καταπατέω) was the fate of salt when it ‘becomes foolish’ (5.13). When Jesus said that, he was addressing ‘you’ (plural), as here— that is, the disciples— the ‘salt of the earth’. When salt ‘becomes foolish’, it loses its catalytic properties, and is no longer useful in the earthen oven, but is just ‘cast’ out (like ‘casting’ or ‘throwing’ pearls here) and ‘trampled on by people’. Use of the same two verbs now associates the ‘pearls’ also with the ‘salt’, that is, with its active, flavoring, and above all, catalytic properties.

The verb *hrēxōsin* (ρήξωσιν) means to ‘tear open, tear up’.¹³² For some reason, KJV and others translate this verb as ‘throw down, cause to fall to the ground’ in Mark and Luke— ‘Whenever (the evil spirit) possesses him, it throws him down (*hrēssei*, ῥήσσει)’ (Mk 9.18 || Lk 9.42).

But this is just not correct. The demon ‘sieves’ the boy, and ‘breaches’ or ‘bursts’ him (we might say, penetrates or breaks open his psychic defenses, as a force breaking

into or out of the boy’s body). The tearing can occur from the inside out, or from the outside in: wineskins *burst* open, city walls are *breached*, one *tears* a garment.

In the OT,¹³³ this verb refers to *the violation of a boundary, enclosure, or condition that ought to remain integral*. So the problem that Jesus is pointing to is not that the ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’ will ‘attack you’, as some translations have it— though violence is definitely part of the picture— but that they will *destroy your integrity*.

A breaking or a tearing open, either from the outside or from the inside— this is what the legionary ‘pigs’ will do to you— that is, to those who seek fine pearls— if you cast the pearls of heaven’s regime— that is, your covenant faithfulness— before them. And that’s how the Sanctuary will end up in the hands of the dogs.

So let’s try to pull together the whole image: God’s Sanctuary will be given to ‘the dogs’ if you poor but salty-wise merchants who seek and find heaven’s regime and its ‘pearls’— to whom heaven’s regime belongs— become foolish and submit your heavenly values to the imperial swine. The swine will trample them underfoot and destroy you, like the Babylonians tore open the walls of Jerusalem (2K 25.4; Jr 46.2)— and as the Romans would again destroy the Temple in 70 AD.

But what does it mean to throw your pearls / submit your heavenly values / render your loyalty to the imperial swine?

(3) Prescription 7.7-11

7 Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν,
ζητεῖτε καὶ εὐρήσετε,
κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν.

Verse 7 consists of three parallel lines, each of which starts with a positive imperative: ‘ask... seek... knock’ and ends with a promise of result.

In every case, the Prescription has been introduced by a word such as ‘but’ (*de*, δὲ) or ‘therefore’ (*oun*, οὖν), and we don’t find that here. Yet despite the missing connective, ‘ask... seek... knock’ are all positive imperatives, and positive imperatives (not prohibitions) have always characterized the Prescription. So that is what we have here.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Though not always at the same position within the Triad. The list is 5.29, 30, 46; 6.7, 8, 14, 16, 21, 24, 32 (twice), 34; 7.2, 8, 12. In the Inner Envelope (5.17-20 and 7.12) there are three more, for a total of seventeen (!), and in the Discourse Envelope (5.3-16 and 7.13-27), two more, for a total of nineteen in the Teaching as a whole. There are 124 uses of *gar* (γάρ), ‘for/because’, in all of Matthew.

¹³¹ Blass, Debrunner, & Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge and Chicago, 1961) §369 (3); 370: ‘Μή in an expression of apprehension is combined in classical with the subjunctive if the anxiety is directed towards warding off something still dependent on the will, with the indicative of all tenses if directed towards something which has already taken place or is entirely independent of the will’ (my emphasis); citing Mt 7.6, ‘the fut. = the aor. subj.’ Also, BDR, § 369 n.

¹³² Taking *hrēsō* (ῥήσω) and the closely related form *hrēgnymi* (ῥήγνυμι) together: Mt 9.17 (ῥήγνυνται) and Mk 2.22 (old wineskins); 9.18 (epileptic demoniac); Lk 5.37 (old wineskins); 9.42 (epileptic demoniac); Ga 4.27 (‘break forth’ in fecundity and joy).

¹³³ Gn 7.11; Ex 14.16; 28.28; Nm 16.31; Js 9.13; 1K 1.40; 11.31; 12.24; 13.3, 5; 2K 25.4; Ne 9.11; Pr 3.20; Qo 3.7; Jb 2.12; 6.5; 15.13; 17.11; 26.8; 28.10; 31.37; 32.19; Wis 4.19; Si 19.10; Hk 3.9; Isa 5.27; 33.23; 35.6; 49.13; 52.9; 54.1; 58.8; 59.5; Jr 46.2; Eze 13.11, 13; 38.20.

¹³⁴ See 5.11-12; 5.43-48; 6.7-15; 7.6-12.

This series of three imperatives-plus-result (a triad!) may itself be a proverb— it displays the kind of precise poetic parallelism we often find in proverbs— and proverbs are usually transmitted more or less intact. This would explain the missing connective. Also, Matthew regularly alters the symmetry of the climactic or final member of a series, as a way of shifting gears for his largely aural audience.

Since the therapy must fit the disease, we should be able to tell what the disease of ‘casting your pearls before the swine’ is from its therapy.

‘Heaven’s regime is like a merchant *seeking* beautiful pearls’ (13.45-46). But how does this merchant seek? ‘Asking’, ‘seeking’, and ‘knocking’ (7.7-11) are the activities of a beggar, one of the truly ‘poor in spirit’ (5.3). They are also activities that would characterize such a person within the *Roman patronage system*, that is, the system of ‘dogs’ and ‘pigs’. And that’s where we will look for our Easter egg.

The Patronage System in Roman Palestine¹³⁵

When people of low status regularly have to seek and find the wherewithal for their economic and sometimes even survival needs from higher-status, well-off people in return for loyalty and support, this is called a ‘patron-client system’. Whole societies can be organized on this basis, and in fact patron-client societies existed throughout the Mediterranean and exist in many societies today. Probably every dictatorship is a type of patron-client system, because the retainers depend on the dictator’s favor, and others depend on the retainers’ favor, and so on down the ladder.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ This is more or less plagiarized from Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1992) pp 74-76.

¹³⁶ A very insightful glimpse of the patronage system, which hardly if ever uses the actual terms, is JJ Maquet, ‘The Kingdom of Ruanda’, in Daryll Forde, *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples* (International African Institute / Oxford University Press: London, 1954) pp 164-189.

The New Testament’s language of ‘grace’ is the language of patronage. God is the ultimate patron, whose ‘favor’ (*charis*, χάρις, ‘grace’) Jesus mediates, as broker. Note the comment that Jesus spoke and acted with the ‘authority’ (*exousia*, ἐξουσία)— not ‘power’, as in KJV; the same word is used in 7.29— of his patron (9.8).

Matthew expects the rich of his community to be generous patrons, and is intensely critical when they are not (5.42; 10.8).

The church has always functioned in large part as a patron-client system. The bishop is the key patron at whose sole discretion certain key benefits are distributed, such as ordinations, leadership positions, charity, etc. He may or may not choose to be assisted by brokers (‘assistants’) or by a council, and he determines what level of assistance the council is to render. The parish replicates this at the local level.

So for instance, a poor man may seek a plot of land from a wealthy man. By granting the favor, the patron signals that he is open to later requests, and by receiving the favor, the client obligates himself to pay back the patron in whatever manner and at whatever time the patron needs him. The patron functions as a powerful kinsman; the client functions as his dependent and supporter.

In Rome’s early days the ‘patricians’— those whose ancestors (*patres*) had originally settled the Seven Hills along the Tiber— typically had freeborn retainers called *clientes* (‘clients’, from the word *clinare*, ‘to lean’). These ‘leaners’ tended their flocks, produced various goods, and helped to farm the land of the *patronus*. In return they could rely on the patron’s protection and generosity. They had no political rights and were inferior to ‘citizens’, but they did share in the increase of herds or goods they helped to produce. The mutual obligations of patrons and clients were considered sacred and often hereditary. Great houses boasted of the number of their clients and sought to increase them from generation to generation.

In the late years of the Republic, a flood of conquered peoples overwhelmed Rome’s formal patronage system. Large numbers of people torn from their previous patronage relations sought similar ties with the great Roman patrician families. As they did so, the system spread rapidly into the provinces, though in a less structured form. The urban poor and village peasants were forced to survive by asking, seeking, and knocking at the doors of those who controlled the society’s economic and political resources.

By the time of Jesus, especially in the provinces, the formal reciprocities of earlier times had degenerated into petty favor-seeking and manipulation. The newly rich competed for the honor and support of a long train of client dependents, and clients began to compete with one another for patrons in an often desperate struggle to gain economic or political advantage. This is the context Jesus addresses in several of the Triads, including the present one.

Patrons were powerful individuals who controlled resources and were expected to use their positions to hand out generous favors to cities, villages, or clients based on ‘friendship’, personal knowledge, and favoritism. The emperor was the main patron, and from the emperor on down, connections were everything. Having few connections was shameful; that is, it would lead to loss of status.

Brokers mediated between patrons and clients. Patrons controlled the land, jobs, goods, funds, and power; brokers controlled strategic access to the patrons and their benefits. City officials brokered imperial resources. Holy men or prophets acted as brokers of divine power or

benefits. In 8.13, Jesus brokers God the patron's benefits to the centurion for his servant.

Clients were dependent on patrons and brokers to survive well in their society. They owed loyalty, public acclaim, and support in return for the favors they received. The patron-client relationship was voluntary, but it was hard, if not impossible, to get along outside of it, and ideally it was a lifelong relationship. In early Rome a client had only one patron, but eventually clients learned to play patrons off against each other. Note that according to Matthew, one cannot 'serve', that is, be the client of both God and the wealth/greed system (6.24).

Clients boasted of being 'friends' of their patrons. For example, in what even seems to be a kind of title, Pilate was 'Friend of Caesar' (Jn 19.12). But *friends* are actually social *equals* obligated to help each other freely and ongoingly; patrons, brokers, and clients were not equals at all, and patrons were not obligated to them, so clients had to cultivate their brokers and patrons. Jesus' enemies call him a 'friend' of tax collectors and sinners (Mt 11.19), that is, a client of persons whose loyalties were not with Israel.

Clients, in other words, were obligated to bring gifts, show loyalty in various ways, and so forth, in order to gain the attention and favor of their patrons. In other words, they would have to 'cast their pearls before' them. The image of the twenty four elders casting their crowns before the throne in Rv 4.10 provides a good picture of an imperial patron-client relationship.

So in 7.6, Jesus apparently quotes a popular saying which means that the community should not give the Sanctuary to gentile dogs; and then he immediately describes the problem that will lead to that disastrous sacrilege as throwing the pearls (values) of heaven's regime before the swine of the militaristic imperial patronage system. 'Casting pearls' is about loyalty owed and paid. If Israel is involved in this, the system will trample on whatever they present to it, and tear open— that is, destroy—the integrity of their community.

One interesting usage of *ballō*, βάλλω is to *entrust money to a banker for interest, deposit money*, as we see in 25.27. Maybe we get at the sense of this saying by translating it, 'Do not invest your pearls with the swine'.

Just as in 6.19-34 Jesus taught us to give trust and loyalty to God rather than to treasures and mammon, and just as in 6.1-18 he taught us to give trust and loyalty to God rather than to seek honor in the eyes of others (6.1,2), so now in 7.6-11 he teaches us to 'ask, seek, and knock' at God's door rather than those of the emperor

and of the system that derives from him; and we are not to 'invest' our 'pearls', that is, the things we seek and find, with the swinish system of military occupation.

Jesus has very consistently been teaching his audience a lifestyle that's out of step with and resistant to the imperial system of jockeying for prestige, honor, and favor. His audience consists of the four men whom he has just called as the nucleus of his faction, that is, the 'disciples' whose task it will be to organize and extend his *ekklesia*, or community (cf 16.19; 18.18), and the crowds beyond them, whose loyalties are not yet certain (5.1; 7.28; 8.1).

As in the previous teachings, the Prescription shows that participation in the regime of their heavenly father is dependent in part on their own action within the regime of this world. They should ask, seek, and knock at the door of the patron who graciously gives good things, and who is worthy of all trust and loyalty.

So, do not cast your pearls before 'dogs and pigs', but rather, ask, seek, and pray for your heavenly father's patronage alone. The kingdom that belongs to the 'tester' and 'slanderer' (4.3,5,9) offers many pearls— security, wealth, political power, social status, patronage, and even family loyalties, but these are not the concerns or goals of those who live in heaven's regime, that is, in conscious dependence on the heavenly father and king. No more than Jesus did, are they to become that slanderer's clients, nor foolishly expend or invest what they've found on him. If they are to resist the injustice and extortion of the present regime, they must not seek, and must even refuse, wealth and worldly power. If they fail to do so, they will cast their pearls (values) before swine and their integrity will be destroyed.

If they end up as victims of injustice and persecution at the hands of the powerful, they should 'rejoice exceedingly, for theirs is heaven's regime' (5.10-12)— just as the man rejoiced, who found the treasure hidden in the field (13.44), and presumably the merchant also, who found the pearl of great price (13.45-46).

Explanation

7.8-11

8 πᾶς γὰρ ὁ αἰτῶν λαμβάνει
καὶ ὁ ζητῶν εὕρισκει
καὶ τῷ κρούοντι ἀνοίγεται.

Then Jesus introduces the explanation for the therapeutic action with the usual 'because' or 'for' (*gar*, γάρ), repeating all three verbs— 'for everyone who asks receives, and who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it is opened'.

We usually understand this exhortation as a kind of metaphor for prayer. That has nothing to do, of course, with the context established by 7.6 ('Do not give the Holy Place to the dogs...'), and it's this tendency to read 7.7-8 ('ask/receive', 'seek/find') as much in terms of prayer as of anything else that leads us to separate 7.6 from the rest of the Triad. But at this point we have to recognize that prayer is only a *secondary* point being made. If we 'ask... seek... knock' at God's door, then prayer will certainly be in order, but that is not the point Jesus is directly making. Instead, he is still talking about the Holy Place, the pearls, and the patron-client relationship.

That is to say, if 7.6 were not beginning of the Fourteenth Triad but an addition to the previous Triad or an independent saying, then 'ask, and it will be given to you' etc (7.7) would be a general statement, and the explanation, 'for everyone who asks receives' (7.8) would mean that all you have to do is pray, and you'll get what you want. And if you don't get it, then maybe you 'just don't have enough faith'— or some other guilt-inducing rationale. But even on the face of it, such an interpretation, however popular it may be, is simply wrong, for even Jesus himself asked that the cup pass from him, and it didn't (26.39).

In the context of the full Triad, though, the Explanation means that the community can trust God and each other, whereas it can't really trust the imperial/militaristic Roman patronage structure. If you put your trust in the system of dogs and pigs, it will trample you under foot like salt that has become foolish, destroy your integrity, and tear you to pieces (as they did to Israel in 70 AD) because patronage is all about loyalty and payback. But God will hear and answer those who are faithful to him.

Matthew's Jesus is not teaching the general, context-free abstraction that God gives whatever anyone asks in prayer but a context-specific claim that God is more loyal, dependable, and compassionate than the Roman patron-client relationship, and that Israel should focus its loyalty on him. If we owe and pay our loyalty to the imperial structure, sooner or later we will find that it has turned on us and make a breach in our covenant life. But Jesus is calling his disciples— his Israel-renewal movement— to be a new community outside the empire's patronage structure.

Isn't it uncertain for the poor to depend on the poor? 'Your heavenly father, who makes the sun shine on just and unjust alike (5.45), 'will give'— not: 'might give'— 'good gifts to those who ask'.

9 Or who is the person among you
whom his son will ask bread—
would he give him a stone?

9 ἢ τίς ἐστὶν ἐξ ὑμῶν ἀνθρώπος,
ὃν αἰτήσῃ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ἄρτον,
μὴ λίθον ἐπιδώσῃ αὐτῷ;

Jesus now reinforces this idea with two images comparing the heavenly father to an earthly father. Is this just a sentimental image, or is there something more to it?

As it happens, social interactions in agrarian societies like that of first-century Israel fit into a spectrum that runs from mutual reciprocity to (largely upward) redistribution.

- *Reciprocal* relations, typical of families, friends, associations of 'brothers', small villages and so forth, involved back-and-forth exchanges that generally followed three patterns:
 - (1) Generalized reciprocity: open sharing based on generosity or need. Return was often postponed or forgotten.
 - (2) Balanced reciprocity: exchange based on symmetrical concern for the interests of both parties, as in business relations or relations with known persons who are not in any kin or fictive kin relationship.
 - (3) Negative reciprocity: based on the interests of only one party, who expected to gain without having to compensate in return, as with strangers, enemies, unknown persons.
- *Redistributive* relations, typical of large-scale agrarian societies of antiquity (Egypt, Palestine, Rome), involved pooling resources in a central storehouse (usually via taxation and tribute) under the control of a hierarchical elite which could then redistribute them through the mechanisms of political and elite kinship. Redistribution relations are always asymmetrical and primarily benefit those in control. The Temple system of first-century Judea functioned as a system of redistributive relations, and so, of course, did the Roman Empire itself.

Add this picture to what we saw earlier regarding patronage systems and you have some useful background for understanding Jesus' comparison of 'your heavenly father' to an earthly father who would surely not give a stone instead of bread to his hungry son. You don't have to 'ask... seek... knock' at the doors of the wealthy who are basically engaged in plundering society through var-

ious upward redistribution schemes. Instead you can trust 'your heavenly father's' compassionate liberality *if you live in the way envisioned in the entire Teaching on the Mountain* and indeed, in the entire Gospel.

10 And/or will ask for a fish—
would he give him a snake?

10 ἢ καὶ ἰχθὺν αἰτήσῃ,
μὴ ὄφιν ἐπιδώσῃ αὐτῷ;

No one would give a stone instead of bread, or a snake instead of a fish to his hungry son. How much more will the heavenly father care for you!

Seeking, asking, and knocking at the heavenly father and patron's door is not a matter of magically producing bread out of nothing, however.

If Jesus had done as the tempter suggested, he would have shortcut the task that he came to do, which was to bring about true community among the people. That's why, when 'sons' are mentioned elsewhere in the Teaching on the Mountain, the context refers always to 'horizontal' relations with others:

5.9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the *sons* of God.

5.44-45 Love your enemies... that ye may be the *sons* of your Father who is in heaven....

11 If therefore you, being evil,
know to give good gifts
to your children,
how much more
will your father in the skies
give good things to those who ask him!

11 εἰ οὖν ὑμεῖς πονηροὶ ὄντες
οἴδατε δόματα ἀγαθὰ διδόναι
τοῖς τέκνοις ὑμῶν,
πόσῳ μᾶλλον
ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς
δώσει ἀγαθὰ τοῖς αἰτουσίν αὐτόν.

So the meaning of the Fourteenth Triad is finally clear: *give your trust, your loyalty, and your prayers, to your Father in Heaven.*

This Triad is not about 'the power of prayer'; it's about how trustworthy, merciful, and caring your Father in heaven is— in contrast to the patronage system presided over by the emperor. God deserves trust and loyalty much more than the 'dogs' and 'pigs' do.

What is more, trying to be client of both God and the wealth/greed system (6.24), seeking honor in the eyes of others while hoping to obtain favor from God (6.1,2), and now bestowing honor on / investing in the system of the 'swine' will only bring the viciousness of the pigs against the community to tear open and destroy it.

The 'good gifts' that 'you Father in the skies' will give are not specified, but in the context of chapters 5-6, they include everything disciples need to live the challenging identity and lifestyle created by the presence and future completion of God's reign.

If the Triad is addressed to Israel in the pre-Revolt period, it works very well as a warning that collaboration with the imperial system would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. To a great extent, this would have been the program of separatists like the Pharisees, that is, of people who would have quoted the proverb about not giving the Holy Place to the dogs.

In Matthew's context, it would warn the new community that was called to embody Israel and what Jerusalem and its Temple were against the misguided involvement with the imperial system. Jesus' disciples, and the crowds behind them, are called to embody heaven's regime, not Caesar's.

It seems, though, that behind Jesus' strange proverb about giving the sanctuary to the dogs and strewing heavenly pearls before swine, St Paul's assertion is exactly relevant: 'Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against leaders, against authorities, against the world rulers (*kosmokratoras*) of this darkness, against the spiritual wickedness in the skies' (Ep 6.12). Or, translated into today's language: 'Our struggle is not against actual corrupt individuals, but against power in general, against authority, against the global/imperial order and the ideological mystifications that sustain it.'¹³⁷

So, as the meaning of the Triads as a whole, this is secure: '[T]he ekklesia ['church'] must learn to recognise what "glory" looks like in the present age,... modelling that of the Messiah himself, rather than... the flashy or showy

¹³⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (Verso: London and Brooklyn, 2010), p xiv.

self-presentation which would model the wisdom of the world, or even the cunning of the satan'.¹³⁸

C. Inner Envelope:

Torah and Prophets 5.17-20/7.12

Prescription: The Golden Rule 7.12

12 Πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν θέλητε
ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι,
οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιεῖτε αὐτοῖς·
οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν
ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται.

7.12 consists of two parts. The first is a positive imperative linked to the foregoing material by the word 'therefore' (*oun*, οὖν). This is followed by an explanation introduced by the word 'for' or 'because' (*gar*, γάρ). A positive imperative plus an explanation is the structure of the Prescription section of a triad— so, looking back at the opening of the Inner Envelope (5.17-20), we now see that the Inner Envelope (5.17-20 and 7.12) has a triadic structure, which is also a chiasm (A-B-C-B-A structure). Here's the whole thing:

- 5.17-18 is a **Statement on Tradition**: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the *Torah and the Prophets*' / 'I have come not to abolish but to fulfill' / 'Not one jot will pass away till all is fulfilled'.
 - 5.19 **diagnoses** an attitude problem leading to judgment: whoever loosens and teaches *people* (*anthrōpous*, ἀνθρώπους) the same will suffer shame in heaven's regime; whoever *does* and teaches will be honored in heaven's regime.

5.20 defines this further, after a formula of authority ('for amen I'm telling you'), as the need to practice a covenant faithfulness ('righteousness') that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Then the **FOURTEEN TRIADS** (5.21–7.11) serve as an extended Diagnosis.
 - 7.12a, the Golden Rule, provides a concluding **Prescription** summing up the whole peroration:

'All that you wish *people* (*anthrōpoi*, ἄνθρωποι) to *do* for you, *do* for them'.

- 7.12b is an **Explanation** or Rationale for the Positive Initiative: 'For this is the *Torah and the Prophets*'.

The Tradition and Diagnosis sections of this chiasmic triadic Inner Envelope were doubled:

- 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets' (5.17a) suggests that someone is thinking such a thing. This would be the 'Tradition' on which Jesus wishes to comment. He follows this with—
- 'I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them' (5.17b), a response followed by an explanation—
- 'For amen I'm telling you', the legitimation formula that introduced the Diagnosis section in eleven of the fourteen Triads), followed by—
- 'Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all of it happens' (5.18);
- A second Diagnosis follows the word 'therefore'— 'whoever looses one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the regime of the skies, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the regime of the skies' (5.19).
- The legitimation formula again introduces an explanation: 'for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds what of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the regime of the skies' (5.20); this is followed by the Fourteen Triads (5.21–7.11) as extended Prescription.
- And now, in 7.12 (the 'Golden Rule') provides the grand concluding Prescription, with a verb in the imperative.

A literal translation of the Golden Rule would highlight the words 'everything' and 'you yourselves': '*Everything*, therefore, that you might ever want that people should do for you, thus also *you yourselves* do for them'.

'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'— this universal ethical principle is not Jesus' unique creation. It appears in positive ('do to others...') and negative ('do not do...') forms in Jewish and Hellenistic literature and far beyond.¹³⁹ But apart from its importance as a

¹³⁸ NT Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, p. 441.

¹³⁹ Cf. Lv 19.18, ('you shall love your neighbor as yourself'); Tob 4.15; *Ep Arist* 207; Sir 31.15; Herodotus, *Hist* 3.142; Isocrates, *Demonicus* 14; *Nicoles* 61; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 5.21 (Aristotle). It also appears in subsequent rabbinic writings and other religious traditions; Confucius famously gives an almost identical version ('Whatever you would *not* have people do to you, do *not* do to them'). See Betz, *Sermon*, 508-19,

universal ethic, it has a specific meaning in *the context of Matthew's story* as Jesus wraps up his Teaching on how those to whom heaven's regime belongs are to live.

The Golden Rule is thus not a mere continuation of 7.6-11, as its opening 'therefore' might suggest. Rather, it follows and closes 5.20, on the need for a covenant faithfulness ('righteousness') greater than that of the Pharisees. We need to read, 'Therefore—' (7.12) after a deep breath as the General Prescription of the whole series of Fourteen Triads (5.21–7.11); and conversely, the entire set of Fourteen Triads can be read as one extended Prescription section, leading up to the Golden Rule as its overall therapeutic.

It also suggests that, taken as a whole, the issue on which the scribes' and Pharisees' righteousness was inadequate had to do with *not* treating others as they would like to be treated. Instead, as 'play actors' who sought public acclaim, their interest was really in winning at the honor game.

So, putting it all together:

1. Recall that the first Tradition part of each triad addresses either a Torah verse, a traditional practice, or a traditional/popular proverb or saying. Its main verb is typically a future indicative or a subjunctive, and in the first Six Triads on Torah, as well as the final Four Triads on Proverbs, the verb is negated ('thou shalt not...' or 'don't...').

5.17 You should not think (*mē nomisēte*, μὴ νομίσητε— subjunctive, negated) that I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

2. Also recall that the second, or Diagnosis part of the triad presents a *undesirable attitudes or actions, with an attending judgment*. Its purpose is to demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship between behaviors and outcomes. Its main verbs are typically participles, infinitives, subjunctives, or indicatives, and all but never imperatives. This section begins with 'but', 'therefore', 'for this reason', 'lest', 'don't', or 'not' (*de, oun, dia touto, mepotē, mē, or ouk*), and may be modified with 'but I say to you'.

5.18 *For amen I'm telling you*, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

5.19 *Whoever therefore* shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but *whoever* shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

5.20 *For I'm telling you*, that unless your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. Thus 5.20 is the center of the chiasm and introduces—

5.21–7.11 THE FOURTEEN TRIADS.

3. (3) Finally, recall that the last section of the triad, the therapeutic Prescription, is always a positive imperative of constructive behavior that counters the destructive behavior diagnosed in the previous section. It often begins with *de*, 'but'; and it always contains, as a subordinate clause, an Explanation, usually introduced by 'for' or 'because' (*gar, γὰρ*).

7.12a *Therefore* (*oun, οὖν*) whatever you would have people to do for you, *do* (imperative) also to them,

7.12b *for* (*gar, γὰρ*) this is the Torah and the Prophets.

B. Discourse Envelope:

Three Warnings 5.3-12/7.13-27

We recall the structure of the Discourse Envelope of the Teaching on the Mountain:

5.3-16 Three Encouragements

5.3-12 Nine (3 x 3) Beatitudes

5.13-14 Salt of the earth

5.15-16 Light of the world / lamp in house

7.13-27 Three Warnings

7.13-14 Two gates and two roads

7.15-23 False prophets and two trees/fruits

7.24-27 Two houses and foundations

The contents of the outer, Narrative Envelope— the actual Teaching on the Mountain as a whole— opened with Three Encouragements (5.3-16). It now closes with Three Warnings (7.13-27). These Encouragements and Warnings do not have a chiasmic structure, but they are tied together by the keywords 'heaven's regime' (5.3,10; 7.21), 'foolish' (5.13; 7.26), 'cast out/into' (5.13; 7.19), and 'father in the skies' (5.16; 7.21).

for bibliography and discussion; also Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 1.425-32, for history of interpretation.

DISCOURSE ENVELOPE

Opening: Encouragements	Closing: Warnings
In 5.3,10, the poor in spirit and those persecuted for the sake of covenant justice will inherit heaven's <i>regime</i> .	In 7.21, he warns that only those who do his father's will will actually enter heaven's <i>regime</i> .
In 5.13 the disciples are the 'salt of the earth', but warns that 'if salt becomes <i>foolish</i> , it is no longer good for anything except to be <i>cast</i> out and trampled under people's feet'.	In 7.19, he warns that 'every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and <i>cast</i> into the fire. In 7.26, he warns that 'everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a <i>foolish</i> man who built his house on the sand.
In 5.16 disciples are to let their light shine before men so that they will glorify their (the disciples') <i>father</i> in the skies.	In 7.21, he warns that only those who do his own <i>father's</i> will, will enter heaven's <i>regime</i> .

The Beatitudes identified and consoled those to whom heaven's regime belongs. But, as the Inner Envelope taught us, to participate in it, you need a 'greater covenant faithfulness (righteousness)' than that of the scribes and Pharisees (5.20, 7.12). So the core of the Teaching, the Fourteen Triads (5.21–7.11), taught this 'greater righteousness'. Corresponding now to the Beatitudes, the Warnings now describe the difference between those who practice the 'greater covenant faithfulness' by following Jesus' teachings, and those who do not do so, by a triad of double figures:

- 7.13-14 Two gates and two roads
- 7.15-23 False prophets and two trees/fruits
- 7.24-27 Two houses and foundations

As we read the Warnings, we should ask whether Jesus is threatening us or trying to persuade and motivate us. We should also ask whether entry into heaven's regime is a *reward* for obedience, and exclusion from it a *punishment* for disobedience, or whether the connection between practice and reward is somehow *organic* rather than *legalistic*.

1. TWO GATES AND TWO ROADS

7.13-14

The first warning is addressed to the disciples about the consequences of the path they choose. Remember that this verse really continues from where the opening of the Discourse Envelope left us, at 5.15-16, where Jesus was addressing them (and the crowds behind them) as *Israel*:

13 Enter through the narrow gate,
because the gate is wide
and the road is broad
that leads off to perdition,
and many are they
who enter through it.

13 Εἰσελθατε διὰ τῆς στενῆς πύλης·
ὅτι πλατεῖα ἡ πύλη
καὶ εὐρύχωρος ἡ ὁδὸς
ἢ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν
καὶ πολλοὶ εἰσιν
οἱ εἰσερχόμενοι δι' αὐτῆς·

'Enter through the narrow gate.' Because he used the word 'enter' (*eiserchomai*, εἰσερχομαι) in 5.20— your covenant faithfulness has to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if you want to 'enter' the regime of the skies', we naturally assume that the 'gate' is that of heaven's regime.

The disciples and crowds are already encountering heaven's regime in Jesus' ministry (4.17-22; 5.3,10) and they may enter and participate in it themselves, as long as they practice that greater covenant faithfulness (5.20). Since the disciples have *not yet* arrived at their destination (envisioned as a walled city with a gate), there is not only a gate but a road.

Jesus immediately contrasts the 'narrow gate' with another, which is 'broad'. Leading to that gate is a corresponding 'road', which is 'spacious'. There are many who 'enter' by that road, but what they enter is 'destruction' or 'loss' (*apoleia*, ἀπώλεια). This is a common term in Christian writings for condemnation at the final judgment.

14 How narrow the gate
and constricted the road
that leads off to life,
and few are they
who find it.

14 τί στενή ἡ πύλη
καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς
ἢ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν
καὶ ὀλίγοι εἰσὶν
οἱ εὐρίσκοντες αὐτήν.

The metaphor of two 'roads/ways' was a commonplace, and often a metaphor for the afterlife, but that is not really the focus here. It was also a metaphor for someone's loyalties and practices.¹⁴⁰ 'Life' (*zōē*, ζωή) is a metaphor for participation in heaven's regime, not only in the next life, but in the present one, in which that regime has already arrived.¹⁴¹

The road that leads to 'life' is 'hard', that is, oppressed, afflicted, or distressed. Matthew uses the related noun, 'oppression, affliction, tribulation' (*thlipsis*, θλιψις) for the persecution or hardship that will come about because of the word and mission (13.21; 24.9), and for the troubles that will come at the end of the present age (24.21,29). Elsewhere in the NT, the corresponding verb indicates personal danger and persecution.¹⁴²

In Jesus' and Matthew's world, roads and gates were built for commercial and military use, and were familiar instruments of Roman control and propaganda. Titus displayed the spoils of Jerusalem's temple over one of the gates of Antioch. Roman roads, built by the slave labor of subjugated peoples, carried Roman troops, ensured Roman control, and were an important part of violent and enforced exploitation of the empire. They were of course wider and easier to use than those of the village. Heaven's regime shapes a way of life that differs greatly from what the empire's highways facilitated and, interestingly, it encouraged local networks, rather than global commerce. Yet at the same time, Romans roads proved very useful in the spread of Christianity; Phoebe, a wealthy deaconess in Corinth, could carry a letter from

St Paul to the Roman churches in relative safety and ease (Rm 16.1-2).

Jesus is urging his disciples to enter heaven's regime within the Roman context. As they practice the 'greater covenant faithfulness' that he has taught, they may experience trials or persecutions. On this road and through this 'gate' they will enter into 'life'.

'Life' appears here for the first time in Matthew. What is usually translated 'eternal life' (19.16,17,29; 25.46) is a synonym for 'entering heaven's regime' (5.20). Its antonyms are 'destruction', 'gehenna of fire', and 'age-long punishment' (18.8,9; 25.46). 'Life' is the characteristic of heaven's regime and the goal of the disciple's path. Jesus assures those who take the narrow path of affliction that 'life' is their goal. The word *aiōnios* (αἰώνιος) does not mean 'eternal' so much as belonging to the *age* (*aiōn*, αἰών) of God's regime.

But there is a warning: 'few find it'. The verb 'find' recalls those who 'ask, seek, knock' (7.7-8) and who 'seek first the regime' (6.33). The 'few' are the marginal and minority community of disciples out of step with the majority, living against the grain, often in tension or conflict with, or oppressed by, the majority.

The first Warning (7.13-14) has presented the journey that began with the call of Jesus (4.18-22) as ending in 'life', that is, in 'heaven's regime'. That regime is already on the move in Jesus' ministry, and it will eventually be consummated 'as in the sky, even on the ground' (6.10). Disciples must discern the hard and narrow path that leads to the city on a mountaintop (5.14). Matthew continues to elaborate this vision of discipleship, of life in and toward God's reign, throughout the gospel.

2. FALSE PROPHETS AND TWO TREES/FRUITS 7.15-23

The second Warning is addressed to the disciples about false prophets.

Some treat this Warning (7.15-23) as two units, 7.15-20 ('Beware of false prophets...' and the trees and fruits) and 7.21-23 ('Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord...'), but the second part actually continues the theme of the false prophets:

- The 'many' condemned in 7.21-23 have all the characteristics of the 'false prophets', who are 'many' in 24.5,11. They will come in the Messiah's 'name' (24.5) and do great 'signs and wonders' (24.24) and speak ignorantly of things that will happen on 'that day' (24.36)— just as here in 7.15-20 as well.

¹⁴⁰ Dt 11.26; 30.15-20; Js 24.15; Ps 1.6; Jr 21.8-10; Ws 5.7; Si 15.14-17. For Babylonian, Egyptian, Homeric, and Jewish uses, see Jeremias, "πύλη," TDNT 6.924.

¹⁴¹ Jn 17.12; Rm 9.22; Ph 1.28; 3.19; Rv 17.8,11.

¹⁴² Mk 3.9; 2Co 1.6; 4.8; 7.8; 1Th 3.4; 2Th 1.6-7; Hb 11.37.

- In 7.22, the rejected ask, 'Lord, did we not *prophesy* in your name...'. This takes up the language of Jr 14.4 ('The prophets are prophesying in my name; I did not send them') and Jr 27.15 (LXX 34.12) ('I have not sent them, says the Lord, but they are prophesying falsely in my name'). This OT background shows that the second part of this Warning (7.21-23) concerns *false prophets* just as much as the first (7.15-20) does.
- The 'wolves in sheep's clothing' (7.15) are like those who *say* 'Lord, Lord'— i.e., seem to be loyal— but *are not* truly Jesus' own (7.21-23). Both the 'wolves' and 'those who say' seem to be one thing, and are in fact another— play actors, 'hypocrites'.
- This passage is closely related to the preaching of John the Baptist against the scribes and Pharisees in 3.8-10. They '*say*... we have Abraham as our father' (3.9) but fail to bring forth 'good fruit', that is, 'fruit worthy of repentance' (3.8). Here, the false prophets *say*... "Lord, Lord" (7.21). Both passages say that they 'will be cut down and thrown into the fire' (3.10, 7.19).

We should therefore understand this section about prophets and trees as a single unit, with several subunits:

- | | | |
|---------|-------------|---|
| 7.15a | Theme: | <i>False prophets—</i> |
| 7.15b | Appearance: | <i>Wolves in sheeps' clothing.</i> |
| 7.16-20 | Fruits: | <i>Rotten.</i> |
| 7.21-22 | Delusions: | <i>Relationship to Jesus as eschatological judge ('say to me'),</i> |
| 7.23 | Rejection: | <i>Jesus' utter rejection of them.</i> |

a. Theme: False prophets 7.15a

15 Watch out for false prophets,

15 Προσέχετε ἀπὸ τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν,

b. Their appearance 7.15b

who come to you
in the clothing of sheep,
but inside they are like snatching wolves.

οἵτινες ἔρχονται πρὸς ὑμᾶς
ἐν ἐνδύμασιν προβάτων,
ἔσωθεν δέ εἰσιν λύκοι ἄρπαγες.

In Matthew, Jesus uses the word 'beware' (*prosechete*, προσέχετε) six times,¹⁴³ and he mentions 'wolves' only twice— both times in connection with the warning to 'beware'. In all cases except the present one, there also some connection with scribes and Pharisees, which suggests that he may have the scribes and Pharisees in mind here as well. After all, disciples should not distribute alms as the 'hypocrites in the synagogues do' (6.1), or have anything to do with the 'leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees' (16.6,11,12). Here in 7.15 he warns, *Beware* of false prophets who come dressed like *sheep*, but they're really *wolves*; and in 10.16-17, he says, 'I send you forth as *sheep* in the midst of *wolves*', warning, as here, *Beware* of men, for they will deliver you up and scourge you in 'their synagogues'.

To change the metaphor yet again, the concern that all of these passages seem to express seems to be the importation 'not of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees' (16.12) into the community's belief and practice.

c. Recognize them by their fruits 7.16-20

Jesus then switches to the metaphor of fruits and the plants that bear them, distinguishing two kinds of trees (noble and rotten) and two kinds of fruits (beautiful and evil), wrapping this treatment in an envelope stating, 'By their fruits you will recognize them':

(1) Envelope: Recognize them by their fruits 7.16a

16 By their fruits
you will recognize them.

16 ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν
ἐπιγνώσεσθε αὐτούς.

(a) Thorns : grapes :: thistles : figs 7.16b

Do they gather
grapes from thorns
or figs from thistles?

¹⁴³ 6.1; 7.15; 10.17; 16.6, 11-12.

μήτι συλλέγουσιν
ἀπὸ ἀκανθῶν σταφυλᾶς
ἢ ἀπὸ τριβόλων σῦκα;

(b) Tree : fruit 7.17-19

17 Thus

every noble tree makes beautiful fruits,
but the rotten tree makes evil fruits.

18 A noble tree cannot make evil fruits,
nor can a rotten tree produce beautiful fruits.

19 Every tree not making beautiful fruit
will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

17 οὕτως

πᾶν δένδρον ἀγαθὸν καρποὺς καλοὺς ποιεῖ,
τὸ δὲ σαπρὸν δένδρον καρποὺς
πονηροὺς ποιεῖ.

18 οὐ δύναται δένδρον ἀγαθὸν καρποὺς
πονηροὺς ποιεῖν
οὐδὲ δένδρον σαπρὸν
καρποὺς καλοὺς ποιεῖν.

19 πᾶν δένδρον μὴ ποιοῦν καρπὸν καλὸν
ἐκκόπτεται καὶ εἰς πῦρ βάλλεται.

**(2) Envelope: Recognize
them by their fruits 7.20**

20 And so from their fruits
you will recognize them.

20 ἄρα γε ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν
ἐπιγνώσεσθε αὐτούς.

We can first look at the *structure* of the passage. The envelope, 'you will recognize them by their fruits' (7.16a), exactly repeated in 7.20, draws attention to 'fruits'. The

word 'fruit' (*karpós*, καρπός) occurs fourteen (!) times in Matthew, suggesting that it's a key concept.¹⁴⁴

The contents of the envelope come in two parts. In a kind of preamble, Jesus asks, 'Do they gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?' (7.16b). At this point he mentions two specific *plants* (thorns and thistles) and two specific fruits (grapes and figs), but not trees. Both kinds of plant and both kinds of fruit have very profound OT connections. Grapes appear 30 times in the OT; maybe the most relevant passage is Isa 5.1-7, a prophetic love-song addressed by Yhwh to Israel, known as the 'Song of the Vineyard':

Isa 5.1-7 1 Now will I sing to my beloved a song of my beloved about his vineyard. My beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill:¹⁴⁵

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

3 And now, O enthroned one of Jerusalem, and man of Judah,¹⁴⁶ judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.

4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Why, when I looked for it to bring forth grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled on:

6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned or dug; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds to rain no rain on it.

7 For the vineyard of YHWH of hosts is the house of Israel, and the man of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

¹⁴⁴ 3.8, 10; 7.16-20; 12.33; 13.8, 26; 21.19, 34, 41, 43.

¹⁴⁵ In Hebrew, 'my beloved' is *dwdy*, a pun on *dwd*, 'David'. In the rest of this extended metaphor, the 'hill' would be Mt Zion; the 'fence' in the next verse, the wall of Jerusalem; the 'tower', the Temple; and the 'winepress', the royal palace and the economy.

¹⁴⁶ The translations are usually plural, but the Hebrew is singular. 'Enthroned one' is *yošeb*, literally 'sitter', which can mean either 'dweller' or 'enthroned'. Since it's singular and the parallel 'man' is singular, I take this to be addressed to the king.

Hosea makes a similar lament:

Ho 9.10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first-ripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were just as they wanted.

Figs appear 17 (!) times in the OT; we can select Jr 24.1-10 as the most important:

Jr 24.1-10 Yhwh showed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs set before the temple of Yhwh, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jecooniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon.

2 One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first-ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad.

3 Then said Yhwh to me, What do you see, Jeremiah? I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad, that can't be eaten, they are so bad.

4 The word of Yhwh came to me, saying,

5 Thus says Yhwh, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so will I regard the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for good.

6 For I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up.

7 I will give them a heart to know me, that I am Yhwh: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God; for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

8 As the bad figs, which can't be eaten, they are so bad, surely thus says Yhwh, So will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt,

9 I will even give them up to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth for evil; to be a reproach

and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them.

10 I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, until they be consumed from off the land that I gave to them and to their fathers.

This is after Yhwh also said of Israel,

Jr 8.13 I will surely consume them, says Yhwh: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.

So we see that Jesus' words here speak deeply of judgment on *Israel*.

Recall now that the opening of the Discourse Envelope, the Three Encouragements, also spoke of the disciples' vocation to *be Israel*: 'You are the light of the world... the salt of the earth(-oven)... a city built on a mountain can't be hidden...' (5.13-16).

After the logical connector, 'thus' (*houtōs*, οὕτως), the main part of the contents consist of a triad of parallel lines contrasting two kinds of trees— 'noble' (*agathos*, ἀγαθός) and 'rotten' (*sapros*, σαπρός)— that make 'beautiful' (*kalos*, καλός) and 'evil' (*ponēros*, πονηρός) fruit (7.17) respectively. The types of tree and the types of fruit are not specified. Two parallel lines assert what kind of fruit 'every tree' of the specified kind makes; two assert what kind each tree *cannot* make (7.18); and two final lines describe the fate of 'every tree that does not make beautiful fruit'— to be 'cut down and thrown into the fire' (7.19)— which exactly quotes what John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees (3.10). Both the first and the last verse begin 'every tree'; the first speaks of those that bear beautiful fruit, and the last speaks of those that do not.

The envelope closes by emphatically reaffirming, 'you will recognize them by their fruits' (7.20).

John the Baptist (3.8-10) called the *Pharisees and Sadducees* (3.7) a 'brood of vipers' and castigated them for saying, 'We have Abraham for our father'. He told them, 'God can raise up sons for Abraham from these stones' (3.9). In 8.11, Jesus will say that '*many* shall come from the east and west, and sit down with *Abraham*, and Isaac, and Jacob, in heaven's regime' (and thus prove to be Abraham's sons).

John also told the Pharisees and Sadducees, 'Bring forth *fruit* worthy of repentance!... Even now the axe lies at the root of the *trees*. Therefore, *every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire*' (3.8,10).

Now, after a warning about false prophets who come as wolves in sheeps' clothing (7.15)— who, as such, would be 'play-actors' (*hypokritai*)— and Jesus specifically identifies the scribes and Pharisees as 'play actors' in all further uses of the word in Matthew except the last¹⁴⁷— there follows an extended discourse on *noble* and *rotten* trees, their *beautiful* and *evil* fruits, and the destruction by *fire* (7.16-20) of the rotten trees that bring forth evil fruit.

Later, in a controversy about casting out demons (12.22,24), Jesus will recognize the Pharisees' inner dialogue (12.25), insist they bring forth good *fruit* from a good *tree*, and refer to them, like John did, as a 'brood of vipers', saying, 'how can you, being *evil*, speak *good* things? For out of the abundance of the *heart*, the mouth speaks' (12.34-37).

In 7.22, Jesus will refer to the day of final judgment by the expression, 'on that day' (*en ekeinēi tēi hēmerāi, ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρῃ*). In 13.1, Matthew will tell us that 'on that day' Jesus sat in a boat by the sea and told the parable of the sower (13.3-23), the point of which is that abundant *fruit* (13.8) comes from hearing and *understanding* the *word* (13.23). But he speaks in parables because the *heart* of the people has grown thick and ceased to *understand* (13.15).

As part of that same day of teaching, while telling the parable of the wheat and the tares (13.24-30), Jesus makes the point that the tares appear at the same time as the wheat begins to bear *fruit* (13.26), and they will not be separated till the harvest, when the tares will be *burned* (13.30). Explaining this parable, he will also say, 'The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his regime... those who do *lawlessness*, and will cast them into the furnace of *fire*' (13.41-42); immediately after this discourse on recognizing them by their fruits (7.16-20), Jesus, the Son of Man (cf 25.31), announces that *many* will say "'Lord, Lord'" to him, but he will respond, 'Depart from me, all you workers of *lawlessness*' (7.23).

In the present passage on good and rotten *fruit* (7.16-20), Jesus has asked, 'Do they gather... *figs* from thistles?' In 21.18-19, returning to Jerusalem the day after his triumphal entry, Jesus will curse a barren *fig* tree, saying 'May no *fruit* ever come from you again!' (21.19).

In controversy with the the chief priests and the elders of the people, Jesus tells a parable about some wicked sharecroppers who refused to deliver the *fruits* of the

vineyard to its owner (21.34). After referring to *John the Baptist* (21.25,32), Jesus gets the leaders to pronounce their own doom when they say, "'He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the *fruits* in their seasons'" (21.41), whereupon he will announce, 'God's regime will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its *fruits*' (21.43).

In 7.19, the fate of 'every tree that does not make beautiful fruit' is double: first, it is 'cut down'. Prophets use this image to describe the fall of powerful nations.¹⁴⁸ Then it is 'thrown into the fire', another prophetic and apocalyptic figure.¹⁴⁹ God, not disciples, carries out the judgment, as the passive verbs indicate. So the emphasis of the present passage falls on *discerning* false prophets, not on condemning or punishing them. Jesus will speak of their condemnation in the following verses (7.21-23).

These verses comprise a kind of tour-de-force of images and themes that come up again and again throughout the gospel. Whenever you come across a word, phrase, or idea keeps recurring in Scripture, it's good to check the cross-references or, better yet, to get out a concordance (good bibles include them in an appendix) and look up all the passages where the word or idea occurs. You always learn a good deal from doing so. There are useful online tools to help you do so, as well.

d. Their delusions and their condemnation 7.21-22

21 Not everyone who says to me,
Lord, Lord,
will enter the regime of the skies,
but the one who does the will
of my father in the skies.

21 Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι·
κύριε κύριε,
εἰσελεύσεται
εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν,
ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα
τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

¹⁴⁷ Play-actors: 6.2, 5, 16; 7.5; = scribes and Pharisees: 15.7; 22.18; 23.13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29; = wicked servant: 24.51.

¹⁴⁸ eg, Isa 10.33-34 ('the lofty' Assyrians); Ez 31.11-12 (Assyria); Dn 4.9-27 (the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar).

¹⁴⁹ For prophetic, cf eg, Isa 10.15-19 (Israel); Am 7.4 (Israel); Ez 38.22 (Gog); for apocalyptic, eg, Zp 1.18; 1En 90.24-27; 48.9; 54.1-2 ('kings and potentates').

At this point— often taken to be the beginning of a new section, but actually still part of the previous, as we saw above— Jesus switches from talking about the false prophets themselves (wolves in sheeps' clothing, rotten trees with evil fruits, to be burned in fire), to their relation to him (saying without doing, claiming wonders) and his relation to them (utter rejection).

In these verses, he presents himself for the first time as the eschatological judge 'on that day' (7.22)— that is, on the day of the 'Son of Man' who 'shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him' (25.31), who will 'gather out of his regime... those who do *lawlessness*, and cast them into the furnace of *fire*' (13.41-42):

7.21-22 announce a principle that Jesus will employ, as eschatological judge 'on that day', to determine whether people shall enter heaven's regime. '*Many* will say, Lord, Lord' (7.22), and in fact '*many* crowds' have come to hear Jesus' teaching (4.25). But 'not everyone' who says this will 'enter heaven's regime' (7.21). This recalls the central verse of the Inner Envelope— 'unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter heaven's regime' (5.20).

The formulation 'not everyone' leaves open the possibility that some who say, 'Lord, Lord' will in fact enter. Those who say, 'Lord, Lord' as part of 'doing the will of my Father in heaven', that is, whose 'righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees', will enter. Not the *crowds*, but the *disciples* will enter.

Jesus has referred to God as 'your father' fourteen (!) times in this Teaching,¹⁵⁰ but now for the first time, he refers to him as '*my* father'. He will always refer to him as '*my* father' from now on, except for the last time, when he says 'and as father, call no one yours on earth, for One is your father, the one in the sky' (23.9).

'Son of God' was a title of Israel (Hos 11.1) and of the king (Ps 2.7), who was not only Israel's representative but God's own chosen agent or representative as well. 'Son of God' was an epithet also applied to a wise person as an agent of God's will (Ws 2.13,15,18). But in the birth and baptism narratives (Mt 1-3), it was God himself who called Jesus his 'son' (2.15; 3.17). So Jesus rightfully claims God as his own Father.

In this capacity, he is the executor of God's judgment. In speaking of 'my father', he underlines his closeness to God. He is not only God's revealer and the interpreter of his will, but also, on that basis, the eschatological judge who will ultimately decide who has 'entered heaven's

regime'. He has made known his father's will in what he has said in the Teaching. As the one who reveals the Father's will, he is the judge of those who do it or not.

22 Many will say to me
on that day,
Lord, Lord,
didn't we prophecy
in your name?
and weren't we casting out demons
in your name?
and didn't we do many powers
in your name?

22 πολλοὶ ἐροῦσίν μοι
ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ·
κύριε κύριε,
οὐ τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι
ἐπροφητεύσαμεν,
καὶ τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι
δαίμονια ἐξεβάλομεν,
καὶ τῷ σῷ ὀνόματι
δυνάμεις πολλὰς
ἐποιήσαμεν;

Jesus now explains the basis on which 'many' will say "'Lord, Lord'" to *him* (ie, 'to *me*') 'on that day' (*en ekeinēi tēi hēmerāi*, ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ)— they will point to the great signs and wonders they did in his name.

False prophets aren't people who just talk. They may even have amazing fruits to show (7.22), but they and their fruits are rotten (7.18). They may even do great works in the name of Jesus, things that Jesus himself does. But what does it mean? What regime are they part of? Whom do they serve? The criterion is not prophesying, casting out demons, or doing works of power. He has already told us that it's 'doing the will of my Father in heaven'. In fact John the Baptist has already said that the fruits of the religious elite are not 'fruits worthy of repentance' (3.8). That is why they must be 'cut down and cast into the fire' (3.10, 7.19).

In 22.23, Matthew says that '*on that day*', that is, the same day that he defeated the Pharisees (22.15ff), the Sadducees came, denying the resurrection. Jesus slaps them down and enforces the point, 'have you not read

¹⁵⁰ 'Your father': 5.16,45,48; 6.1,4,6,8,9,14,15,18,26,32; 7.11; 'my father': 7.21; 10.32-33; 11.27; 12.50; 16.17; 'your father': 23.9.

what was spoken to you by God?— “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’ So the issue ‘on that day’— the day of teaching (13.1), the day in the temple (22.23), and the day of judgment (7.23)— will be who the ‘sons of Abraham’ really are.

Many will say “‘Lord, Lord’” and point to amazing works (7.22). Others will claim Abraham for their father (3.9). But the criterion is ‘doing my father’s will’ (7.21).

e. Jesus rejects them 7.23

23 And then I will confess to them that

I have never known you:
get away from me,
you workers of lawlessness!

23 καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι
οὐδέποτε ἔγνω ὑμᾶς·
ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ
οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.

Those whom Jesus will reject ‘on that day’ will have done amazing works, but these won’t have been matched by the merciful and transformative actions envisioned throughout the Teaching. Miracles alone aren’t enough to enter heaven’s regime.

It’s interesting that prophesying, casting out demons, and works of power are assumed to be possible even *apart from* God’s will. They are not necessarily a sign that the agent is from God!

The condemnation that will fall upon the false prophets consists of Jesus’ disowning and dismissing them. He disowns by saying, ‘I have never known you’. And he excludes and dismisses them from heaven’s regime by saying, ‘Depart from me, you workers of *lawlessness*’.

He is quoting Ps 6.8a:

Ps 6.8-10: 8 Depart from me,
all you workers of lawlessness,
for the LORD has heard
the sound of my weeping;
9 the LORD has heard my pleading,
the LORD has accepted my prayer.
10 All my enemies shall be ashamed
and greatly troubled;
they shall turned back
and put to shame in a moment.

Interestingly, by alluding to this OT background, Jesus suggests that the scribes and Pharisees, the play-actors, wolves in sheeps’ clothing, who give alms, pray, and fast in order to be seen as righteous, covenant-keeping Israelites, who even manage to prophesy and perform miracles in his name, are the ones who will bring him down to death (Ps 6.5). In Greek this reads as if they are without *nomos*— that is, they are ‘Law-less’— they have no *Torah*!

3. TWO HOUSES AND TWO FOUNDATIONS 7.24-27

A third and final warning again addresses the disciples about consequences, this time with a building metaphor. Again we should not lose sight of the equation, ‘building’ = ‘Temple’.

In the second of the three Warnings that seal the Discourse Envelope (5.3-12, 7.13-27), Jesus spoke of the importance of ‘doing the will of my father in the skies’ (7.21). Now he gives a parable about the consequences of hearing, and then either ‘doing’ or ‘not doing’ Jesus’ words.

Accordingly, the section starts with ‘everyone therefore’ (*pas oun, pās oūn*), signaling that what follows are the consequences, for every person without exception, who has heard his words. This recalls 7.17,19, in which Jesus spoke of ‘every tree’.

The Greek strongly emphasizes ‘everyone, whoever hears these *my* words’. Jesus is the source of the saving words. He is also the eschatological judge (7.21-23) who himself has provided the teaching that will lead to vindication, not condemnation, in the judgment.

24 Everyone therefore whoever hears
these my words
and does them,
shall be compared to a wise man
who built his house
upon the bedrock:

24 Πᾶς οὖν ὅστις ἀκούει
μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους
καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτούς,
ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ,
ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν
ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν·

Jesus doesn't say just 'who hears these my words' but, 'who hears these my words, and *does* them'. To 'hear' is inseparable from 'doing', as we saw in the call of the first disciples (4.18,22). 'Doing' (*poiei*, ποιεῖ) was also the verb he used for the trees— literally, 'every tree that *does* (makes) beautiful fruit'. Such words tie this section on houses and foundations to the section on trees.

The one who does Jesus' words 'shall be compared'— by God, ever the subject of the 'divine passive'— 'to a wise man— whoever has built his house on rock'.

The house-building metaphor may look straightforwardly natural, and maybe it is. After all, building a house on a good foundation is a common human experience, and building a house is a common metaphor for building a life. Sirach uses construction as an image of human thoughts (Si 22.16). In wisdom literature the 'house' depicts human life as part of the larger world which is ordered either according or in opposition to the divine will. Lady Wisdom builds a house (Pr 9.1-6; 14.1; 24.3) wherein are understanding (Pr 9.6; 14.8; 24.3-4), righteous living (14.2), life and insight (9.6), and the fear of the Lord (9.10). Her house is to be sought (Si 14.20-27). The house (extending the meaning of 'house' to family) of the righteous endures (Ps 127; Pr 12.7; 15.6).

25 and the rain came down
and the floods came
and the winds blew
and they fell upon that house
and it did not fall,
for it was founded on the bedrock.
25 καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ
καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ
καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι

καὶ προσέπεσαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ,
καὶ οὐκ ἔπεσεν,
τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν.

This 'rain' isn't the merciful, life-giving rain that God graciously and indiscriminately sends to all (5.45). Here, a triad of storm images depicts the difficulties not just of the righteous, assailed by the wicked, but of Israel, assailed by the nations; it depicts God's judgment, including the approaching end.¹⁵¹ Recalling this verse, 24.39 will refer to Noah's flood. But the house did not fall, because it was founded on rock.

We always personalize this. Discipleship comes under attack, just as much as it entails a narrow road (7.13-14). Disciples must remain faithful amid overwhelming challenges. Jesus' teaching provides the foundation for a life that endures through judgment. The present lives of disciples are to be consistent with the future judgment.

But our penchant for individualizing does not capture all that Jesus is saying. The expression 'build a house' (*oikodomeō + oikos*, οἰκοδομέω + οἶκος) appears literally *hundreds* of times in the OT in connection with the building of the *Temple* (which is called a 'house'), and a only handful of other times in connection with building some other house— usually a king's palace or dynasty ('house' in that sense).¹⁵² Jesus speaks here of a 'wise' (*phronimos*, φρόνιμος)¹⁵³ man who builds on rock; Solomon, who actually built the temple in Jerusalem, is referred to as a 'wise' man (*phronimos*) in 1K 4.29; LXX 1K 2.35.a,b,g.

The image of 'rivers' coming and sweeping away the house makes us think of Isa 8.5-10, already referred to in the birth narrative. There Isaiah said to Ahab,

Isa 8.7-8 7 ...behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory.

¹⁵¹ The wicked: eg, Ps 69.1-4; Pr 28.3; judgment: Isa 28.2,17-18; 29.6; Ez 13.11-13; 38.20-22; Ws 16.16,22-24; Si 40.13; the end: 2Bar 53; 4Ezra 13.1-3.

¹⁵² See 2Sm 7.5,7,11,13,27; 1K 2.35-36,46-3.2; 5.14,17,19; 6.2-3,7,9-16,36; 7.38-39; 8.1,16-20,27,43-44,48,53,65; 9.1,3. Note that the LXX adds several sentences pertaining to the *foundation* of the house to 1K 6.1 that **do not appear in the Hebrew**. Also see 1Ch 5.36; 6.17; 14.1; 17.4,6,10,12,25; 22.2,5-8,10-11,19; 28.2-3,6,10; 29.16; 2Ch 1.18; 2.2-5,8,11; 3.1,3; 6.2,5,7-10,18,33-34,38; 35.3; 36.23. After the exile, 1Esd 1.3; 2.2-3,5; 4.55; 5.67; 6.2,4,8,10,13,16,19,23,26-27; Ezra 1.2-3,5; 3.10; 4.1,3; 5.2-3,8-9,11,13,16-17; 6.3,7-8. Isa 44.28 LXX speaks of Yhwh 'who tells Cyrus to be wise (*phronein*, φρονεῖν)...; who says to Jerusalem, "You shall be built, and I will lay the foundations of my holy house."'

¹⁵³ *Phronimos* is 'wise' in the sense of having sound judgment— a 'sensible' person.

And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, 8 and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

This is part of the sequence in Isaiah (chs 7–9) that included the ‘virgin with child’ prophecy (Isa 7.14). Israel’s repeated failure to do God’s will would lead ultimately to destruction and exile. So this passage in Matthew is about more than the mere vicissitudes of personal life. It also addresses the ‘house’ of Israel (Isa 7.2,13,17; 8.14,17).

The account of ‘building the house’ (i.e., of the Lord) in 1 Kings treats of *foundations* in some detail. 1K 5.17 says, ‘they brought great stones (*lithoi*, λίθοι), costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the *foundation* of the house’.

In Jesus’ own day, Herod’s temple-rebuilding project was only about half-finished, a fact of which all Jews would have been very aware; the disciples will later show him the buildings (*oikodomas*, οικοδομάς) of the temple (24.1), and in response (24.2ff), Jesus will speak of the ‘stones’ (*lithoi*, λίθοι) used for construction. But in this parable he uses *petra* (πέτρα, ‘bedrock’). Thus in 16.18 he will speak of ‘building’ (same verb) his *church* on the ‘bedrock’ (same word) of Peter and his recognition of Jesus as ‘the Messiah, the son of the living God’.

In pointing to the covenant faithfulness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5.20), Jesus was calling into question the kinds of foundations Israel is relying on for its Temple-centered existence.

‘Everyone’ who hears Jesus’ words would be sensible to heed them in any context, but it now emerges that all along, Jesus has been offering a critique of Israel’s ongoing *Temple* practice and talking about building a *new Temple*.

The Temple was the center of Israel’s life— *Israel as the people through whom God is seeking to realize his regime*. Jesus is laying down the terms on which this will actually come about ‘as in the sky, even on the ground’ (6.10).

He doesn’t speak of a *lithos* (‘stone’) here, although he will do so, referring to himself and his teaching, at 21.42— ‘The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner’. He will also announce concerning Jerusalem’s temple that ‘There shall not be left here one stone (*lithos*) upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ (24.2). As Messiah, son of God, teacher, and eschatological judge, Jesus will tear down the *lithoi* of the Temple and build a new House on bedrock (*petra*) in the three days of his passion and resurrection (26.61;

27.40). God’s ‘house’ should be a house of true prayer (21.13) with himself as its new completion-stone.¹⁵⁴

Again using the word ‘every’, which recalls 7.17,19,24, Jesus then contrasts the ‘wise’ man who builds on bedrock with the ‘fool’ who hears his words but does not do them:

26 And everyone who hears
these my words
and doesn’t do them
will be likened to a foolish man
who built his house
on the sand:

26 καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων
μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους
καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς
ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ,
ὅστις ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν
ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον·

In the opening of the Discourse envelope, we learned the fate of salt that ‘became foolish’— it would be thrown out and trampled underfoot (5.13). Those who go around blasting other people as ‘fools’ would also suffer the fate of fools (5.22). In the OT, the ‘fool’ is one who lacks understanding (Si 21.14, 22.11), is senseless and misguided (Si 16.23), abusive (Si 18.18), full of empty gossip and chatter (Si 19.12; 21.16,20,26; 27.13), without resolve (Si 22.18)— and above all, one who ‘says in his heart, “There is no God”’ (Ps 14.1; 53.1; cf Si 22.12). The fool doesn’t seek Wisdom’s house but Lady Folly and her house; he goes to the wicked woman (adulteress or prostitute), who builds a house of death (Pr 9.13-18) and evil (Pr 2.18; 5.3-10; 7.5-27).

Such a person lacks the traits of a disciple (see 5.13). In the parable of the ten bridesmaids, the five ‘foolish’ ones are not ready or looking for the bridegroom’s return (25.2,3,8) and are excluded from heaven’s regime. Not surprisingly, ‘the foolish man built his house on sand’, not the solid foundation of Jesus’ teaching.

‘Sand’ does not appear to evoke any OT context.

¹⁵⁴ The ‘head of the corner’ is the last stone to be laid, completing the building.

27 And the rain came down
and the floods came
and the winds blew

and they struck against that house
and it fell
and its failure was great.

27 καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ
καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ
καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι

καὶ προσέκοψαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκεῖνῃ,
καὶ ἔπεσεν
καὶ ἦν ἡ πτώσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη.

In 5.22, 'whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the gehenna of fire'. Disciples do not go around judging others as fools, but the storm sent by God will reveal the lack of an adequate foundation. The fool's journey on the broad path to destruction is completed (7.13) with separation from Jesus and God's presence (7.23). For disciples this is both a warning of the terrible consequences of hearing and not doing, and encouragement that if they hear and do Jesus' teaching, they will be vindicated through the judgment.

We saw above that the Nine Beatitudes were not 'requirements' for entering heaven's regime. They contained no imperatives except to 'rejoice and be glad' (5.11-12). They addressed a suffering community with eschatological promises. Above all, they *described* those to whom heaven's regime belongs.

In these warnings, Jesus has issued no commands either. The Warnings (7.13-27) have completed and balanced the Encouragements that opened (5.13-19) the Discourse Envelope.

Dt 30.19: I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live.

A. Narrative Envelope 4.23–5.2/7.28–8.1

Down the mountain 7.28–8.1

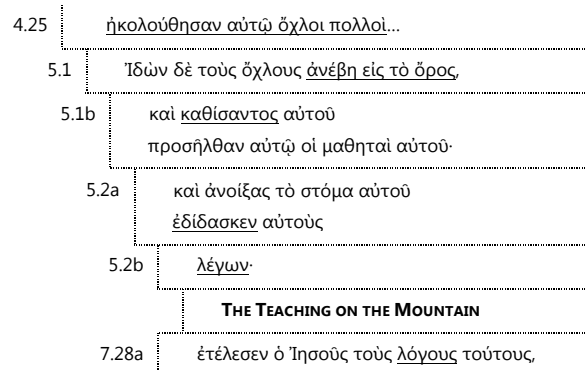
28 Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς
τοὺς λόγους τούτους,
ἔξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ·

29 ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοῦς
ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων
καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν.

8.1 Καταβάντος δὲ αὐτοῦ
ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους
ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί.

As we mentioned at 5.1, when Matthew narrated Jesus' going up the mountain to teach, he quoted Ex 19.3 exactly, but in saying, 'coming down from the mountain', he alludes to but does not quote Ex 32.15: 'Moses... came down from the mountain'.¹⁵⁵

In Exodus, the people did not go up on the mountain with Moses, but here they have done so. Thus as Jesus descends, not simply he, but the disciples and the crowds behind them have the new tables of witness in their hands—the teachings of Jesus, God's son.



¹⁵⁵ Compare 'Καταβάντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους' (8.1) with 'Μωσῆς κατέβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους' (Ex 32.15).

Ex 19.14, 32.1, and 34.29 also speak of Moses 'coming down' from the mountain. However, only 32.15 uses the preposition 'from' (*apo*, ἀπὸ) instead of 'out of' (*ek*, ἐκ). Unlike the reference in 5.1, the verb form here differs from the cited verse, presumably due to the grammatical requirements of the rest of Matthew's sentence.

7.28b	ἐξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδασκίᾳ αὐτοῦ· (7.29a) ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοῦς
7.29b	ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων καὶ οὐχ ὡς οἱ γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν.
8.1a	Καταβάντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους
8.1c	ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί.
4.25	many crowds followed him
5.1	he went up the mountain
5.1b	and sitting down [position of authority]
5.2a	he taught them
5.2b	saying
	THE TEACHING ON THE MOUNTAIN
7.28a	Jesus finished these sayings
7.28b	the crowds were amazed at his teaching (7.29a) teaching them
7.29b	as one having authority
8.1a	coming down from the mountain
8.1c	many crowds followed him

After the Teaching on the Mountain, Matthew places a transitional formula that brings us back into narrative space:

7.28 *And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,*

This closure and transition recalls that of the great cycle of speeches in Deuteronomy— ‘And Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel’ (Dt 32.45).

The Teaching on the Mountain (5.3–7.27) was the first of five lengthy discourses in the gospel. Each of these will end with this same transitional formula:

- 11.1 *When Jesus had finished organizing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim in their cities.*
- 13.53 *And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there...*
- 19.1 *Now when Jesus had finished these words, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.*
- 26.1 *When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,...*

Each of them also ends with material relating its content to the coming judgment and addressed quite specifically to Matthew’s community.¹⁵⁶

By repeating it *five* times— think *Five Books of Torah*— Matthew emphasizes in one more way that Jesus is Israel’s new Moses. Matthew refers to the speech we have just studied as a ‘Teaching’ (5.2; 7.28,29), not a ‘Sermon’, which is why we have referred to it as the ‘Teaching on the Mountain’ rather than the ‘Sermon on the Mount’. ‘Teaching’, not ‘Law’, is the meaning of the Hebrew word ‘Torah’ (from *yarah*, ‘teach’), and Matthew’s Jesus has shown us the Torah in terms of a ‘covenant faithfulness (righteousness) [that] exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees’ (5.20).

In mentioning the response of the overhearing ‘crowds’, (*ochloi*, ὄχλοι) rather than that of the disciples to whom Jesus actually addressed the Teaching (see 4.25; 5.1-2), Matthew highlights the the crowds and the disciples as distinct groups.

The crowds are not disciples, but they are open to Jesus’ teaching, as also in 4.23-25. The word ‘his’ keeps Jesus center stage, as does their response itself. But their astonishment doesn’t lead them to engage him any further, as it will do for the ‘astonished’ synagogue in 13.54 and the ‘astonished’ disciples in 19.25,27; nor does it motivate obedience (see 7.24-27). This isn’t surprising, since Jesus has just said that the ‘many’— and remember, the crowds are ‘many’, 4.25— will take the wide and easy road, not the hard or oppressed road (7.13-14).

They do, however, praise Jesus ‘as one having authority’. The religious leaders will debate and dispute this ‘authority’ (9.6,8; 21.23–24,27; 28.18). Jesus will also delegate it to his disciples (10.1). But the opening chapters have clarified its origin and goal: Jesus’ authority is from God his father in the skies (7.21), who has commissioned him to save from sin (1.21-23), who has designated him as his ‘son’ (3.15-17), and sent him and to manifest heaven’s saving regime (9.8; 11.27; 28.18). God gives Jesus a share in his authority and in fact has made him eschatological judge (7.21-27; 28.18). Jesus has emphasized his authority as the revealer of God’s will throughout the Teaching through expressions like ‘but I’m telling you’ (5.22,28,32,34,39,44) and ‘my words’ (7.24-27), but he doesn’t exercise his authority in the oppressive manner of the imperial gentiles (20.25-28). He is redefining what authority is, and the goals to which it’s directed.

¹⁵⁶ See G. Bornkamm, ‘End-Expectation and Church in Matthew’, in Bornkamm, Barth, and Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (trans. P. Scott; SCM, London: 1963) pp 15-51 (15-24); Green, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New Clarendon Bible; Oxford Univ Press, Oxford: 1975) pp 19-20.

Thus the 'crowds' discern that there is something different about Jesus, even if they cannot name it (so 9.8). He is superior to the religious elite. He teaches 'with authority, and not as their scribes' (see 2.4). The 'scribes' not only lack 'righteousness' (5.20) and are 'play-actors' (6.1-18), they lack 'authority' as well. Without 'authority' from God, they are illegitimate (see also 15.12-14), wolves in sheeps' clothing, whose power comes from their association with the chief priests, Pharisees, and elders;¹⁵⁷ and they have power over people's lives along with them. But divine authority isn't based on birth, like the priests, on training, like the scribes, or on social position, like the elders. Jesus demonstrates God's authentic commission in words (chs 5-7) and healing deeds (chs 8-9).

Jesus will continue to be in conflict with the religious leaders throughout the gospel until the blistering and harsh denunciations of 22.29 and chapter 23. And the scribes' participation in his crucifixion (26.57; 27.41) will show once and for all that they are enemies of God's purposes.

By referring to the scribes as '*their* scribes', Matthew distances the crowds from the disciples and Jesus. But at the same time, the crowds' openness to Jesus also distances them from the scribes and from the rest of the political and religious elite who have not taken an interest in Jesus' ministry and in fact have already opposed it (2.4). The crowds thus occupy a middle position between disciples and opponents. But in 27.15-26, they will call for Jesus' death.

The cleansing of a leper, etc 8.2-4...

After Jesus comes down from the mountain, a leper approaches him and asks to be cleansed. Jesus cleanses him, and tells him to show himself to the priest, 'and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a witness to them' (8.4). This cleansing corresponds to the opening verses of the outer, Narrative Envelope, where Jesus healed 'every illness and every disease among the people' (4.23-24). However, this episode is already part of the next section, and we will deal with it there. For the moment, it is only important to note that in sending the leper to the temple to fulfill what Moses commanded, Jesus is making good on his insistence that not one jot or tittle would pass from the Torah until all had come to pass (5.18).

¹⁵⁷ Chief priests: 2.4; 16.21; 20.18; 21.15; 26.57; 27.41; Pharisees: 5.20; 12.38; 15.1; elders: 16.21; 26.57; 27.41.

The Fourteen Triads of the Teaching on the Mountain

Traditional Text / Practice / Saying	Comment / Observation / Diagnosis	Prescription
1. You shall not murder	Being angry, or saying, You fool! will land you in court; excluded from the renewed Jerusalem	Go, be reconciled; take opponent's interests to heart.
2. You shall not commit adultery	Looking in order to covet is already to mark another man's territory in your heart	Remove the cause of temptation (cf. Mark 9.43ff.)
3. To divorce, give a certificate	Dismiss your wife and you invite another dog to mark your territory; marry a divorced woman, and you mark her former husband's territory.	[Be reconciled: 1 Cor 7.11]
4. You shall not swear falsely	Swearing involves you in false claims	Enough to say, Yes yes; No no
5. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Not to violently/vengefully resisting by evil means	Turn the other cheek Give your tunic and cloak Go the second mile Give to beggar and borrower
6. Love your neighbor and hate your enemy	If you love those who love you, what more is that than the gentiles do?	Love enemies, pray for persecutors; be all-inclusive as your Father in heaven is
7. Whenever you give alms	hypocrites blow trumpets	Give in secret, and your Father will reward you
8. Whenever you pray,	hypocrites like to show off	Pray in secret, and your Father will reward you
9. Praying,	gentiles babble on, thinking their wordiness will be heard	Therefore pray like this: Our Father...
10. Whenever you fast,	hypocrites darken their faces so as to shine out to others as fasters	Fast in secret, and your Father will reward you
11. 'Don't pile up treasures on earth' (Luke 12.16-31)	Moth and rust destroy, and thieves enter and steal	Pile up treasures in heaven
12. 'No one can serve two masters'	You can't serve God and mammon; why be anxious about food and clothes	Seek first God's reign and God's justice / righteousness / covenant faithfulness
13. 'Don't judge, lest you be judged'	By the measure with which you judge, you will be judged	First take the beam out of your own eye
14. 'Don't give the Holy Place to the [gentile] dogs.'	And don't cast your heavenly pearls before the imperial military swine.	Ask, seek, knock from your heavenly patron.