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## **BIBLICAL TOPICS FOR STUDY – THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Sermon on the Mount was preached with the intention of showing the kind of life that true children of the Kingdom should live. The central theme of the sermon is the kingdom of heaven. The sermon draws a parallel between the OT law (and the rabbinic traditions created upon it) with the new covenant brought by Jesus, to make His disciples understand the simplicity and responsibility of the new parameters God now requires of them.

At the beginning, the sermon speaks of God's blessings (the Beatitudes) for those who are despised in the eyes of men, but are received and exalted in the Kingdom of Heaven, thus valuing to the importance of humility, mercy and rightness. Then Jesus teaches about the importance of being salt and the light of the world, emphasizing the need to be a positive influence and example to others. Jesus concludes chapter 5 by calling His followers to be perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect. And then He goes on to touch on specific points of Jewish law: murder, adultery, oaths, revenge, love of neighbor, justice, prayer, alms, fasting, judging others, the choice between earthly life and that of heaven, as well as the choice of who would be their true lord (God or material riches), encouraging them to trust in God's provision and not to worry about their physical needs. Jesus confirms the need and value of right prayer to God seeking strength in the Holy Spirit to follow the narrow path of discipleship. He also warns against false prophets who would try to thwart His sound doctrine that is being preached and ends by showing the benefits of building their lives on the doctrine of Christ and the risks of building them on false doctrines.

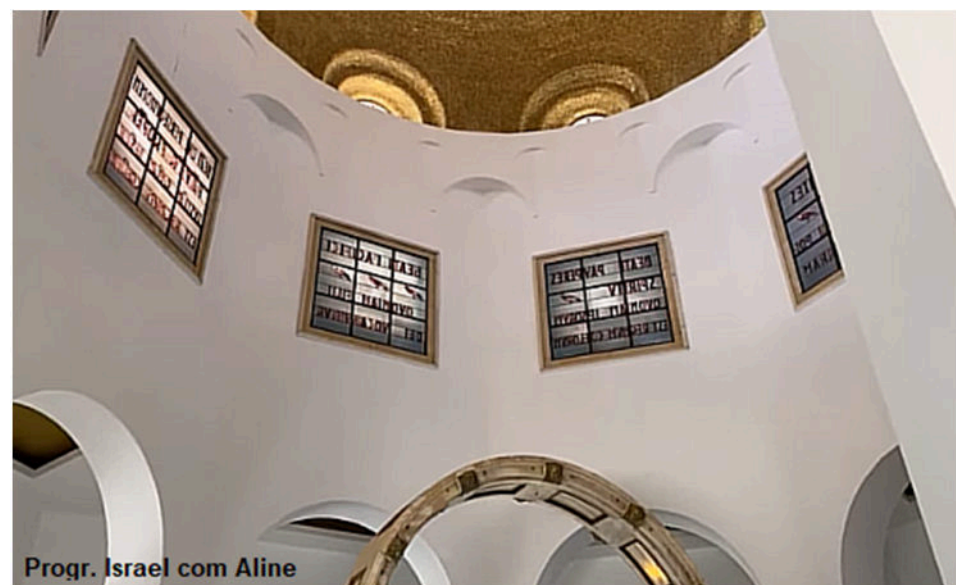
Matthew (Matt. 4: 23–25) mentions that large crowds followed Jesus, coming both from Israel (Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea) and from neighboring nations (Decapolis and beyond the Jordan) to hear Him and be healed, because everyone wanted to meet Him. His words touched the crowds, but here (Matt. 5: 1 and seq.) He saw the need to teach His disciples closely, not just the twelve apostles, but all who believing in Him became His disciples. And it was these that Jesus called aside to instruct. So He went up the mountain and sat down to teach. It was probably a very high hill on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, which must have served as a natural amphitheater. And it was normal for a master to be seated while teaching, having his students around him. His teaching was

something revolutionary that revoked the teachings of the rabbinic tradition and at the same time showed the simplicity of God and the responsibility He left to His disciples. People recognized that Jesus was different from the scribes because He spoke with authority. He knew what He was saying. His words had life.

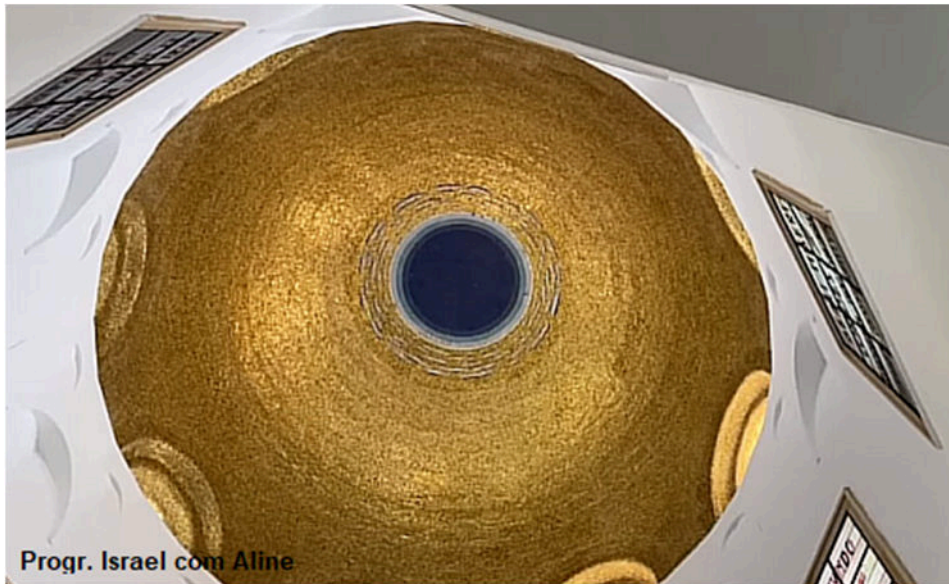


No one knows exactly where Jesus preached, but a Roman Catholic church was built between 1937 and 1938 by the Italian architect Antonio Barluzzi, just above the site of the ruins of an ancient Byzantine church and on a high point near the Sea of Galilee, and is called 'The Church of the Beatitudes.' It has marble walls, an octagonal shape (eight sides) and stained glass windows in the highest part of the walls, where the eight beatitudes spoken by Jesus are drawn (Matt. 5: 3-12; verses 10, 11, 12 are joined). Seen from the inside, the vaulted dome is tall, blue in color and gold mosaic, representing the kingdom of heaven.









In the images above you can see the Sea of Galilee, seen from the top of the Mount of Beatitudes (1); ‘The Church of the Beatitudes’ (2 and 3 – external view); the internal view of the church with the stained glass windows and the dome at the top (4 and 5).

## MATTHEW 5

### The Beatitudes

• Matt. 5: 1-12: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’”

Matthew used the Greek word ‘makarioi’ (μακάριοι, Strong #g3107), which means: happy, blessed, fortunate.

This speech probably caused scandal among the Jews, especially the religious and the rich, because according to the Jewish view of the time, people blessed by God were always healthy, without infirmities, had money and material goods, were honored by acquaintances and praised by other men. How could a poor crowd, without possessions, sick and persecuted, suffering, crying and unable to defend themselves against attacks and insults, feel blessed? But for the people who were there, these were words of great comfort, for it meant that they too were loved and blessed by God. He looked at them with different eyes and what they couldn’t have materially speaking, they had spiritually, and they would still have much more by believing in Jesus and practicing His teachings. They weren’t alone. These people had an advocate: God.

- Matt. 5: 3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Being humble or poor in spirit is to be aware of the lack of God and the dependence on Him. Those who empty themselves of their own self, of the pride of their achievements and of their selfish desires can feel the Holy Spirit filling that void. The humble receive the kingdom of heaven as a reward; and the kingdom of heaven is now, when everything is possible. It is an experience, not a place. The kingdom of God refers to God’s rule. So, humility is to know that we depend on God in all situations, regardless of our position within the Church or the society. It is to be like a child and be aware of the need to learn and grow constantly with Him, knowing that He alone is able to supply us. It should not be confused with servitude, slavery, ignorance, poverty or any other evil situation that can reach our financial life; insecurity, indecision or lack of authority. It does not depend on social class, but on the true spiritual growth that comes from the knowledge of the divine character, acquired in constant contact with the Holy Spirit. Even using all the divine power that He had, Jesus was humble because He knew that as a man, what He did and taught came from the Father and He depended on Him for everything. He Himself said: “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me” (Jn. 7: 16).

In Greek, the word used for ‘humble’ or ‘poor’ [in spirit] is *ptóchos* (πτωχός – Strong #G4434), meaning: poor, beggar, destitute, spiritually poor, either in a good (humble devout persons) or bad sense. It originates from ‘ptosso’ (to crouch); akin to ‘ptoeo’ and the alternate of ‘pipto’; a beggar (as cringing), i.e. pauper (strictly denoting absolute or public mendicancy, although also used in a qualified or relative sense; whereas *penes* properly means only straitened circumstances in private); literally or figuratively: distressed.

- Matt. 5: 4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Blessed are those who mourn, for they receive the consolation from God. And the weep that the Lord speaks here is the weep of repentance that produces desire to change one’s own life, the weep of those who were suffering under God’s work with them, allowing certain undesirable situations because of their sin, but which was a divine healing. It is to cry for divine justice to be established on earth, freeing, healing and bringing back the joy of communion with Him. Blessed are those who mourn because of their separation from Him, because He hears their cry and consoles them, restoring again their relationship and their intimacy with the Father. Blessed are those who weep and are sad over the things that grieve God [sin and all that it brought: the misery of the world, rebellion, disobedience and death (Jn. 11: 35)]. We cannot and must not laugh or excuse that which makes God weep and causes us to go numb. When we commune with God we feel the emotions of His heart; hence we may also experience consolation from Him, which encourages and strengthens us.

- Matt. 5: 5: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”

Meekness [NRSV: Gentleness] means: serenity, tranquility, calm in the certainty of victory, allowing oneself to be shaped by God, being certain that everything has a solution. Being meek is to be submissive to the will of God, to His laws and the divine plan. By being His, the meek shall inherit the earth, the sea, the air and everything contained in them, because everything belongs to Him. Submission to His will brings us power and dominion over Creation. It should not be confused with self-indulgence, laziness or passivity that gives up the authority that God has already delegated to us. Moses was a warrior, however, the bible says he was the meekest man on earth, because he let himself be led by God, despite being a leader and never relinquished the authority He gave him to lead His people. He often took drastic, strong and aggressive steps to keep

order among the Israelites and fulfill his mission to the end. He was not powerless or passive in the face of rebellion of the people, but he let himself be shaped by God in all these situations, exercising his leadership with wisdom and patience.

In the OT we can see the words 'meek' or 'meekness' (KJV) written in Num. 12: 3 and Zeph. 2: 3, translated as 'humble' and 'humility' (NRSV):

"Now the man Moses was very humble (צנוע = humble), more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12: 3 – NRSV).

"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12: 3 – KJV).

Humble or meek (Strong #6035): `anav (Aanayv – צנוע): depressed (figuratively), in mind (gentle) or circumstances (needy, especially saintly); humble, lowly, meek, poor, afflicted. Compare `aniy (עני, Strong #6041: poor, afflicted, humble – Deut. 24: 12; Zeph. 3: 12). From anah (Strong #6031): the idea of looking down or browbeating; be bowed down, be afflicted, be put down or become low; be depressed, downcast; to humble, weaken; be afflicted in discipline by God; to depress literally or figuratively, transitive or intransitive (in various applications, as follows): abase self, chasten self, deal hardly with, defile, exercise, to force, gentleness, humble (self), hurt, ravish, submit self, weaken, be wise, have or show wisdom, experience, knowledge and good sense.

"Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the Lord's wrath." (Zeph. 2: 3 – NRSV).

"Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger" (Zeph. 2: 3 – KJV).

"Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger" (Zeph. 2: 3 – NIV).

Humility (meekness): `anavah (Strong #6038 – ענוה): condescension, human and subjective (modesty), or divine and objective (clemency), gentleness, humility, meekness.

"But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity" (Ps. 37: 11 – NRSV).

"But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37: 11 – KJV).

"But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace." (Ps. 37: 11 – NIV).

In Hebrew, the word used is `anav (aw-nawv'), connected to the word `anah, with the same meaning described above.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt. 5: 5).

In Greek (Matt. 5: 5) the word used is 'praus' or 'praos' (πραῦς = humble, meek, mild, gentle – Strong #4239). In Gal. 5: 23, the word 'meekness', in Greek, is 'praotés' (πραότης) – Strong #4236, which means: mildness, gentleness, meekness, kindness. From praios; gentleness, by implication, humility.

• Matt. 5: 6: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

It means not to accept the injustices of the world, but to yearn by God's will and love being fulfilled in all men. Those who feel these thirst and hunger will be satisfied. There is no need that Jesus cannot supply. Seeing the righteousness of God in action is to see people accepting His truth in their hearts and receiving salvation and eternal life. To hunger for righteousness is to apply God's righteous standard to our lives, to hunger for what pleases God. By placing our will under the control of the Holy Spirit, we will be

satisfied, satiated, filled with divine contentment. Our human discontent will give way to satisfaction in God.

- Matt. 5: 7: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

Mercy means indulgence, grace and compassion aroused by the misery of others. It is to repay with good, the evil that was received. It is to be like Jesus. But receiving mercy comes after to exercise it. Mercy is like a seed that must be planted first to be harvested later.

- Matt. 5: 8: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.”

To be pure in heart is to maintain the purity and relegate the impurity, is to see God with the heart, is to keep within us the clarity and sincerity of intentions, it's to be transparent, as Jesus said to Philip (Jn. 14: 9b): “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Who sees through the eyes of Jesus sees the Father. The pure in heart do not keep grudge or hurt, but look at the mercy and the divine justice and trust fully in His trial. The pure in heart flee from sin and keep within them the integrity of God's plan for their lives, not getting involved with anything that may divert them of it. They always maintain firm within themselves the pure word from above.

- Matt. 5: 9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

In order to have peace in our soul it's necessary to uproot the other nature in us (the nature of the devil in our flesh) and cultivate Jesus in our hearts. Making peace is to stand on God's side, to be in harmony with Him. The peacemakers are called children of God, for they resemble Him. To bring peace to someone, we must conquer, first of all, the peace within our own being, that is, to be harmonized with the divine plan for us. It means no more fights between our flesh, our spirit and the Holy Spirit. In a way, it is something that arises from meekness, from the fact of giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord with us. A peacemaker is a mediator, who resolves conflicts between individuals or groups, strangers to each other. Peace begins with identifying the truth, addressing the sin, and removing conflict between the parties. God sent His Son to be our mediator, filling the gap created by our sin and granting us peace with Him. It is what He asks of us. Paul translated this as ‘the ministry of reconciliation.’

- Matt. 5: 10-12: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Being persecuted for righteousness' sake is to fight for what belongs to the Lord, it's ‘to pay the price’ for His kingdom and have total rights over it. In Jn. 17: 14-17 Jesus says: “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” Thus, being followers of Jesus brings us, inevitably, the worldly persecution, because the ruler of the world (the devil) is not pleased for having lost us for the Son of God. However, when we are persecuted for being fighting for the truth, we have the guarantee of God's protection and His deliverance. “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm,” says the Lord (Ps. 105: 15). It is also written: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them” (Ps. 34: 7). It is a comfort

to know that if we are persecuted, it is because our name is in the heavenly list of God's children; we have the seal of Jesus on our forehead.

### **The disciples, the salt of the earth**

- Matt. 5: 13: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot."

Salt seasons, gives flavor, preserves food and makes you thirsty. In ancient times, without the refrigeration we have today, people used salt to preserve food. Salting a piece of meat, for example, slowed down its decomposition process.

Chemically speaking, salt cannot lose its salinity since sodium chloride is a stable compound. But much of the salt in the eastern countries of antiquity was derived from salt marshes and not from the evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities, for it was mixed with earth and vegetable substances, and thus became unhealthy. That kind of salt was good for nothing except to cover the roads, the same way we use gravel today, and passers-by would trample on it [according to Albert Barnes, an American Presbyterian theologian (1798–1870)]. However, Jesus may have used this illustration to show what a useless believer is.

Thus, His followers add flavor to the human race, serve as preservers of His word, and make people yearn for the righteousness of God described in the previous verses in the Beatitudes. Living the qualities listed in them and throughout the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6 and 7), the disciples would show this spiritual reality and men would believe in Jesus and follow in His footsteps too. Otherwise, men would trample their testimony underfoot, that is, the world has but contempt for a believer who fails in his position as a disciple of Christ. For a Christian, to lose flavor would be to lose his uniqueness, for he would mix with the values of the world and no longer make a difference, neither in this fallen world nor in the kingdom of God.

### **The disciples, the light of the world**

- Matt. 5: 14-16: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp [KJV: a candle] puts it under the bushel basket [KJV: a bushel; NIV: a bowl], but on the lampstand [KJV: on a candlestick; NIV: on its stand], and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

"A city built on a hill" (Matt. 5: 14) – Often built of white limestone, ancient cities gleamed in the sun and could not be easily hidden. At night, the oil lamps of the inhabitants cast some glow over the surrounding area. As such cities could not be hidden, it is also unthinkable to light a lamp and hide it under a vessel. A lamp is placed in a lampstand to illuminate everything.

"Lamp" – *luchnos*, *λύχνος*, Strong #3088: a portable lamp or other illuminator; candle, light.

"On the lampstand [KJV: on a candlestick; NIV: on its stand]" – *luchnia*, *λυχνία*, Strong #3087: a lamp-stand (literally or figuratively); candlestick. This word can refer to a candlestick or a place dug in the wall, where the lighted lamp was placed at night to illuminate the whole house.

In the image below we can see a lamp from the time of Jesus in its place on the wall of the house, called lampstand [KJV: 'candlestick'; NIV: 'on its stand'] – [Source: 'A vida nos tempos de Jesus 2' – Rodrigo Silva – programa Evidências (2013) – YouTube].





We let the light shine, not so much by what we say, but by what we do. The ‘good works’ (Matt. 5: 16) here refer to righteous and honorable works before God, for they come from Him through His Spirit in us, and which will lead us to practice good works towards our fellow men as well. For example: the correct use of the gifts He bestowed on us, His words in our mouth that encourage and edify us and others; discern right from wrong and correctly judging things and situations that surround us; practice faith in the promises that the Lord has given us and acting in accordance with that faith; letting the Holy Spirit flow unhindered so that He can use us as He wants and where He wants; show the way of salvation to the lost; act daily as a follower of Jesus. These good works shed light and glorify His name. When people see these good works, instead of saying, ‘How good that person is,’ they will glorify that person’s Father, saying, ‘What a great God that person has.’

### **Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill**

- Matt. 5: 17-20: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. [NIV: not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished]. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

v.17 – “The Law or the Prophets” or “that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk. 24: 44) is another way of referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, that is, the entire OT. We could write this text of Matthew (“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill”) as follows: “I came to fulfill what Moses and the prophets said”.

Jesus makes it clear that he did not come to put an end to the Law and the Prophets, but to show its true meaning, to show the true will of God that is behind the commandments. The law was not a means of bringing salvation to humanity, justification of God (Acts 13: 39; Rom. 3: 20a; Gal. 2: 16, 21; Gal. 3: 11), but came to give people the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3: 20b; Rom. 5: 20; Rom. 7: 7; 1 Cor. 15: 56; Gal. 3: 19) and then leads to give them to God for His salvation through His grace, His unmerited favor upon man. The law was given to the nation of Israel, as a sample of the human race. Israel's sin, Israel's guilt, was the reflection of the guilt and sin committed by the entire human race (Rom. 3: 19). The law of sin and death (Rom. 8: 2) which was decreed by God as a curse on man at the time of the fall (the curse of death) would remain on anyone who disobeyed the commandments of the law (Gal. 3: 10). God's justice and holiness demanded that the penalty be paid. That's why Jesus came into the world: although He had no sin, He came to pay the penalty through His death, replacing the guilty offenders. Thus, He did not set aside the law; on the contrary, He fulfilled all its requirements, both in His life and in His death (Rom. 8: 1-4).

The entire law can be summed up in the Ten Commandments given to Moses. And these principles are enduring, for example: it is always wrong to steal, covet or kill. The fact that Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross does not mean that we can go around stealing, killing, adulterating, coveting other people's things. The difference is that they no longer have God's death penalty attached to them, but are given and fulfilled by believers today as a training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3: 16b) and out of love for a God who has delivered us from condemnation and whom we serve with joy, seeking to please Him in everything and striving to imitate. We can see that the Sabbath commandment is the only one not mentioned in the NT as an ordinance of Jesus to His disciples. If all the other commandments are mentioned by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and in other passages of the Gospel, so it is also with the Sabbath of rest and with the tithe, contrary to what some rebellious progressives like to argue, that because it is not mentioned in the NT is no longer required to be practiced. However, the NT (the Apostle Paul in particular) does not stop talking about the money that is owed to those who do the Work of God seriously. And one day a week thinking more about God than about secular work to earn money doesn't even have to be an ordinance; it's something that benefits us, in every way, no matter if it's Saturday or Sunday.

v.18 – “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”

“Until heaven and earth pass away” means “until the end of time”.

“Until all is accomplished” – The original text can also be translated as: “until everything that the Law says is fulfilled.” This means: all the OT prophecies [cf. Matt. 11: 13: “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came”], that is, every divine purpose prophesied in the Scriptures must come to pass; all of God's redemptive purposes for mankind, the realization of which point to Jesus and which will be consummated in His eschatological kingdom.

“For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished [NIV: not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished]” – this shows the infallibility of Scriptures. In Greek, iota; in Hebrew, yod) is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, just as the “The smallest stroke of a pen” is a tiny sign at the end of another Hebrew letter. Translating this: God's revelation in the bible is without error, even in its smallest details. It is totally trustworthy.

v.19 – “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

The expression “these commandments” probably refers to the commandments of the OT Scriptures. But since Jesus Himself says that He fulfilled the law, “these commandments” refer to the way to be obeyed, to the teaching of Jesus, which fulfills the OT revelation. Whoever breaks one of the least of His commandments and His teachings and causes others to err will be considered least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in His kingdom.

v.20 – “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The scribes (teachers of the law) and Pharisees were content with religious ceremonies that gave them a sense of purification, but these rituals were only external; did not change their hearts. They controlled the law and created traditions of men about it, but they lost the holiness required by the law, the basic principles of it: justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23: 23 cf. Matt. 9: 13; Hos. 6: 6; Mic. 6: 8).

Those who accept Jesus as Savior (2 Cor. 5: 21) are seen by God as righteous. And this is the only righteousness, the only perfection that He accepts, besides the practical righteousness that this faith entails (Matt. 7: 24-27 – ‘the house built on the rock’).

## **Murder**

• Mt 5: 21-26: “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister [some manuscripts: ‘without cause’], you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool’, you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

v.21 – “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times” – this phrase refers to the teachings of various rabbis, not to those of Moses. Jesus was questioning the interpretation that Jewish teachers had about the Old Testament.

They knew that murder was forbidden by God and the murderer was subject to punishment (judgment) and they prided themselves on never having committed murder. In fact, before the law was given to Moses, since Noah left the ark, God had already spoken about it (Gen. 9: 6: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.”). Afterwards, this divine order was incorporated into the law (Ex. 20: 13; Deut. 5: 17 – “You shall not murder”).

Then, Jesus complements with the words: “But I say to you”, which means that a person could no longer be proud of never having committed a murder, however, that in the kingdom of God, he (she) shouldn’t even have ‘murderous’ thoughts, i.e. He touches

on the root of murder, which started with anger, in fact, with three forms of unjustified anger:

v.22 – “But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister [without cause], you will be liable to judgment” – his brother: also a follower of Christ. One should not get angry with a brother, that is, for personal mistakes. This act can lead someone to judgment. Anger is only justified when God’s honor is at stake or when someone is being wronged.

‘**Angry**’ in this text, in Greek, is *orgizó* (Strong #3710 – ὀργίζω), which means: to irritate, provoke, be angry; and comes from the verb ‘orge’; to provoke or enrage, i.e. (passively) become exasperated; be angry (wroth).

- “and if you **insult** a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council” – it is a sin to insult a brother. ‘Insult’, in Greek: *ῥακά* (rhaka – Strong #G4469) means: empty, foolish, ‘O empty one’, i.e. ‘Thou worthless’ (as a term of **utter vilification**). It is the transliteration of the Aramaic word *rōq*, ‘empty’ (of Chaldean origin ‘reyq רִיק – Strong #H7386), which means: empty, vain, useless, properly, empty-headed. This term expressed contempt for a man’s head, viewing him as stupid (a senseless) – i.e. a ‘numbskull’ who acts presumptuously and thoughtlessly. It was a term of reproach used by the Jews in Jesus’ time, as a word of contempt and abuse. Jesus said that those who used that word were at risk of being tried by the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the country, for defamation.

- “and if you say, ‘You fool’, you will be liable to the hell of fire.” – the third form of unjust anger mentioned by Jesus was calling the brother a ‘fool’ (*móros*, μωρός – Strong #G3474), which means: stupid, foolish (adj.), fool or foolishness (noun), probably originating from the Greek word ‘musterion’; dull or stupid (as if shut up), i.e. Heedless (showing a reckless lack of care or attention), (morally) blockhead, (apparently) absurd, stupid, ‘head-headed.’ Here, the word fool means more than just a ‘stupid.’ It means a moral fool who should be dead, and expresses the wish that he were. It is as if the person were saying to him, “God curse you!”, which suggests that the person saying this is asking God to deliver the cursed one to hell. So, Jesus said that whoever utters such a **curse** risks the fire of hell. In other words, slandering someone would lead the slanderer to a bad situation on the Day of Judgment. ‘Hell’ in this text, in Greek is *geenna* (γέεννα – Strong #1067), originally the name of a valley or cavity near Jerusalem, a place underneath the earth, a place of punishment for evil. The name is of Hebrew origin ‘Ge-Hinnom’ (valley of the son of Hinnom) or Gehenna (ge-henna), used figuratively as a name for the place or state of everlasting punishment. The bodies of executed criminals were often thrown in a burning dump outside Jerusalem known as the Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna. This was a figure of hellfire that will never be quenched.

**Anger** contains the seeds of murder, **abusive language** contains the spirit of murder, and **cursing** implies the very desire to kill. The progressive aggravation of the crimes requires three degrees of punishment: the judgment, the council (Sanhedrin) and the hell of fire. On the Day of Judgment, Jesus will deal with sins according to severity.

v.23-24: “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.”

If a person offends another (the bible writes ‘brother’, a follower of Christ too), whether out of anger or any other cause, it is no use bringing an offering to God, for that does not please him. The offender must first go and correct what is wrong. Only then will the offering be acceptable to the Lord. And here, the Lord no longer speaks of the anger of a person who was provoked by another, but of the offense of the one who provoked

the grudge of the brother (v. 23-24) or the adversary (v. 25-26).

v.25-26 – “Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Now, Jesus urges haste to settle matters with an offended adversary while ‘you are on the way to court with him.’ In the ancient world, debtors were imprisoned until debts were paid. Therefore, the Lord insists on immediate action: malicious anger is so evil and God’s judgment so certain (v. 22) that we must do everything in our power to end it (cf. Eph. 4: 26-27).

## Adultery

• Matt. 5: 27-32: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. ‘It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of infidelity [NVI: except for marital unfaithfulness], causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

v.27-30: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out [NIV: gouge it out] and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”

In figurative language in this text, Jesus advises that every temptation to evil be taken away (tear it out, gouge it out, throw it away, cut it off), no matter how much it costs. And the temptation most often starts with the look, which awakens greed: “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (v.28). He mentions the eyes and the heart.

Therefore, in the AT, when speaking of the Tallit, of the prayer shawl, the Lord mentions two important organs of the human body, as generators of sin: the heart and the eyes [Num. 15: 37-41: “The Lord said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make fringes on the corners of their garments throughout their generations and to put a blue cord on the fringe at each corner. You have the fringe so that, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and not follow the lust of your own **heart** and your own **eyes**. So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and you shall be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.”].

The eye, in the ancient Jewish concept, was a ‘door’ through which material things came into a person's life, because what he desired with his eyes he would have. The eye generated the desire, and the heart devised the plan to make it a reality. The heart is the seat of wisdom, the center of moral and intellectual decision. That’s why Jesus said,



“everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

Why the right eye and not the left? Why the right hand and not the left? Because the right side, according to psychology, corresponds to the rational, assertive, active, masculine side, with the impulse to act. The left side is the emotional, receptive, passive, moderate, feminine side. Thus, an effort was needed to master the force of temptation, which is often strong, dominant, impulsive and insistent.

From a biblical perspective, the right side is a symbol of blessing, strength, privilege, honor, power, authority, the side of God, while the left side is the human and finite side.

The warning about hell (v. 22 and 29) shows us that those whose lifestyle is marked by immorality are not heirs of the Kingdom (1 Cor. 6: 9-10). Cutting off or gouging out the offensive part is a way of saying that Jesus' disciples must radically deal with sin aiming at a greater good, which is eternal life (Matt. 18: 8-9; Mk. 9: 43-47).

v.31-32 – “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife [KJV: put away his wife], let him give her a certificate of divorce [KJV: a writing of divorcement].’ But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife [KJV: put away his wife], except on the ground of infidelity [NVI: except for marital unfaithfulness; KJV: For the cause of fornication], causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

“It was also said” is a summary of Deut. 24: 1-4. From the divorce certificate there was no going back; therefore, it would be correct to think before handing over the certificate. But the teaching of the rabbis was that a person could be divorced as long as he gave a certificate of divorce. The saying was, “You can get divorced as long as you give a divorce certificate.” The law said that this certificate or letter of divorce should be given if a man, in marrying a woman, found “some indecent about her” (NIV), where “some indecent about her” or “some uncleanness in her” (KJV) or “something objectionable about her” (NRSV), was written in Hebrew as ‘ervah’ (Strong #6172), which means: nakedness, shame, unclean, uncleanness and, in short, referred to the lack of virginity [fornication during the engagement period, for example], for the bride was expected to be a virgin.

In all phrases here, the verb ‘divorce’ or ‘put away’ in this text is *apoluó* (ἀπολύω – Strong #630), which means: to release, let go, send away, divorce, be rid; to depart; to free fully, dismiss or (specially) divorce, let go, loose, put (send) away, release, set at liberty.

And the word ‘divorce’ in Greek is: *apostasion*, ἀποστάσιον, Strong #647, which means: repudiation, divorce; bill of divorce (writing of) divorcement); from a derivative of *aphistemi*; properly, something separative, i.e. (specially) divorce.

But Jesus said: “Anyone who divorces his wife [KJV: put away his wife], except on the ground of infidelity [NVI: except for marital unfaithfulness; KJV: For the cause of fornication], causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

“On the ground of infidelity” [NRSV] or “except for marital unfaithfulness” [NIV], or else, “For the cause of fornication” [KJV], in Greek is *porneia*, πορνεία, Strong #4202, a generic term for illicit sexual practices, which could be fornication, prostitution, adultery, etc.

Thus, if a man divorced (repudiated) his wife for marital infidelity, he should give her a bill of divorce. This meant, according to the law, that there was no going back. But if he repudiated her for another cause, he forced her to become an adulteress; and whoever married a divorced woman would be committing adultery, for in truth there would be no

good reason for the separation and they would remain married in the eyes of God. Relationship with another person would be considered adultery (μοιχαό, μοιχάομαι, Strong #3429).

- There is a similar passage in Matt. 19: 7-9: “They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?’ He said to them, ‘It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for infidelity, and marries another commits adultery.’”

In this passage, Jesus was not referring to divorce that was permitted because of a spouse’s adultery (Deut. 24: 1-4), but rather divorce due to antipathy or incompatibility. In the first century, marriage provided a woman with the necessary economic support. And if a husband repudiated her unjustly, he was forcing her to live with another man because she would need her means of subsistence. And since this was not a divorce approved by God, whoever married such a woman would commit adultery, because the first relationship still had not been settled, neither before God nor before men. Why would Jesus have defended the adulteress from being stoned? Was He against the Law of Moses or against human legalism?

## Oaths

- Matt. 5: 33-37: “Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord’ (cf. Lev. 19: 12). But I say to you, ‘Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.’” (cf. Jam. 5: 12).

Lev. 19: 12: “And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.” A false oath is an oath that is not kept consciously or unconsciously.

The summary of Lev. 19: 12 is: “Do not break your promise”. But now compare this verse with cf. Num. 30: 2; Deut. 23: 21. Here, it is a vow or oath made to the Lord, not in His name as in Lev. 19: 12.

But Jesus said: “Do not swear at all” (v.34), that is, do not swear by anything, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; because God made all things and whoever swears by them is indirectly swearing by Him. In other words, heaven (Matt. 23: 22; Isa. 66: 1), earth (Isa. 66: 1) or Jerusalem (Ps. 48: 2) are just different names for the name of God. And this should not be used as a guarantee of a promise or a word spoken to anyone. Such oaths demonstrate that one’s words are unreliable and therefore one needs to swear in the name of someone, something or God Himself. This refers to the oaths that people usually take in normal conversation, not in official oaths in a court, for example.

“Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.” (Matt. 5: 37). For the followers of Jesus, it is enough to say “yes” or “no” and nothing else (Jam. 5: 12), as they always speak the truth (cf. Lev. 19: 11: “You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another”). This passage also forbids any deceit or shadow around the truth (“anything more than this”, that is “perhaps”), since doubt and deceit proceed from the devil.

## An eye for an eye

• Matt. 5: 38-42 (Lk. 6: 27-30): “<sup>38</sup> You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; <sup>40</sup> and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; <sup>41</sup> and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. <sup>42</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” – cf. Lev. 19: 18: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” and Deut. 32: 35: “Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; because the day of their calamity is at hand, their doom comes swiftly.”

This excerpt refers to vengeance and we can see that God’s measure is different from man’s:

• Matt. 5: 38: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’” This item placed in the law, about violence, was known as ‘lex talionis’, ‘the law of talion’ or ‘of retaliation’. ‘Talionis’ means ‘such as.’

• Ex. 21: 23-25: “<sup>23</sup> If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”

• Lev. 24: 19-21: “<sup>19</sup> Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered. <sup>21</sup> One who kills an animal shall make restitution for it; but one who kills a human being shall be put to death.”

• Deut. 19: 21 (in the case of a false witness against a brother): “Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

The law of talion was not created to encourage revenge. Its aim was to prevent the punishment from being worse than the crime. In other words: it punished the crime and limited the punishment, and the authority to do this was vested in the government (the judges, the elders who tried cases), not the individual who had been wronged.

“But I say to you” – Jesus shows a better way, the way of love, leaving revenge and just retribution in the hands of God. And that also broadened the heart and way of thinking of those people (and ours as well), resolving many situations in a friendly way, with compassionate and cordial attitudes towards those in need; consequently closing the gaps for Satan’s destruction. While vengeance was legally permissible, non-resistance was possible through the grace of God. Thus, Jesus taught the true attitude of a servant (including those who mistreat him) and presented this teaching in various ways: physical attacks (Matt. 5: 39), legal matters (Matt. 5: 40), civil issues (Matt. 5 : 41) and borrowing (Matt. 5: 42). Only when a person is controlled by the Holy Spirit can he live a life of self-denial, feeling compensated by the love of God in greater proportion than the insult (v. 39), the injustice (v. 40), the inconvenience (v. 41) and the voluntary donation of material goods.

v.39: “But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.”

Striking here is not just a physical blow to cause injury, but also a gross insult. A slap in the face was a great insult to a Jew, as it still is today to anyone, especially a servant of God. And the same happens with all kinds of physical or moral aggression, through insults and affronts, simply for following Jesus. The teaching here was the opposite of the law of talion. But for a disciple to reach the point of Jesus, suffering what He suffered at the

hands of the Romans without fighting back (cf. 2 Cor. 11: 20), this disciple needs an empowerment of the Holy Spirit and a greater understanding of the divine reward with this attitude. I think a comment is pertinent here so that there is no confusion of interpretation. Jesus was not teaching sadomasochism or submission to abuse, but a coherent and conscious attitude on the part of a disciple. A person who is convinced of his (her) moral position and God's call for him (her) is less likely to act in the flesh, returning the offense on the same physical, moral or spiritual level, even because he (she) knows he (she) has a defender, a greater advocate in heaven. It's like he (she) got a slap but said to his (her) aggressor, "Okay. If hitting me or humiliating me makes you happy or if you think that solves the problem, hit me again, but I will not change my mind or deny my faith or position on this matter." So, it is not a passive attitude of someone who conforms and accepts aggression with the excuse of pleasing God, but a conscious passive attitude of non-resistance and personal revenge on the part of a person who knows the will and power of the Holy Spirit within him (her). In summary: this verse talks about not fighting back, not taking revenge; to leave it in God's hands.

v.40: "and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat [NIV: tunic], give your cloak as well."

No Jew in the first century would go home wearing only a loincloth. The tunic was an inner garment; and the cloak, an outer garment, also used to cover oneself at night. Under the Mosaic law the outer garment was a non-transferable possession. If borrowed, it should be returned before sunset (Ex. 22: 26; Deut. 24: 13). Jesus was not revoking this law or justifying the guilty of doing such a thing, but it was a symbolic teaching about legal disputes. And even if His disciples had to enter into a legal demand for their inner garment, it would be better to give the outer garment as well, instead of being trapped in an undesirable and exhausting situation for something that in the eyes of God did not have so much value and could be easily restored by Him, without His own having to depend on carnal and worldly resources to resolve disputes. Once again, we must emphasize that we are not obliged to give up legal causes that are ours by right, but 'weigh in the balance' the risks and benefits of such an action, lest we waste our precious time and be trapped in the enemy's plots because of earthly things instead of using it for the things of God. In short: this verse talks about not pleading, not disputing.

v.41: "and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile."

Here the Lord addresses civil issues, no longer legal matters. The Romans could command civilians to carry their luggage (their backpacks) for a distance of up to one Roman mile, approximately 1,479 meters (the American mile corresponds to 1,609 meters). And this provoked indignation on the part of the Jews, with a resentful and even vindictive attitude. It was an attitude of 'forced servitude'; however, Jesus told His disciples to go beyond a mile; two miles if necessary, because for the children of the Kingdom, willingness to serve anyone should be seen not as an attitude of humiliation, but of exaltation. Jesus Himself said that in His kingdom, the greatest is as one who serves, and that He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. This did not mean submitting to abuse, as in the first example given, but a voluntary service, as if done for the Lord (Col. 3: 23-25), for He Himself sets the limits. In short: not to be stingy but learn to serve.

v.42: "Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."

This refers to interest-free loans requests. The law spoke about lending money without interest to brothers and charging interest from foreigners (Ex. 22: 25; Lev. 25: 35-38; Deut. 23: 19-20):

- Ex. 22: 25: “If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them.”

- Lev. 25: 35-38: “If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.”

- Deut. 23: 19-20: “You shall not charge interest on loans to another Israelite, interest on money, interest on provisions, interest on anything that is lent. On loans to a foreigner you may charge interest, but on loans to another Israelite you may not charge interest, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings in the land that you are about to enter and possess.”

But Jesus went further, reminding them not just interest-free loans, but a generous spirit (cf. Ps. 37: 26; Ps. 112: 5; Deut. 15: 7-11: lend to the poor brother, without having the stingy heart of wait for the year of remission). In this example of Jesus, the person asked sincerely, not with deceit or malice, and he cannot give back what he took; then, one should release, not charge interest; not even expect to get back what he lent, because the person has no way to pay it back. In summary: not to ignore a genuine request for help from a brother in Christ, from someone close to us, even from someone we do not know so deeply, but who, in a great moment of affliction and need, comes to ask for financial help.

Here again comes the active participation of the Holy Spirit of God, both in the act of free giving on the part of the child of God and in his sensitivity to perceive a real need, rather than being deceived or robbed.

However, even if the servant of God is deceived without knowing it, the control of everything will remain in His hands and His justice will be impartial, even because the title of this section speaks of Jesus’ teachings on revenge. And the Lord is not forcing His disciples to give infinite amounts of money to anyone, simply because those who abuse it like to earn without working or use the cunning of emotional blackmail.

### **Love for enemies**

- Matt. 5: 43-48: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’” (Matt. 5: 43) – in fact, the second part of the verse was not written in the law. In Lev. 19: 18 it is written: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

“You shall... hate your enemy” seems to have been the popular way of quoting the commandment or a rabbinical teaching of the time. The OT view of those who persecuted



God's people generated an attitude of hostility. David himself had written, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies." (Ps. 139: 21-22). Even because God's guidelines against all the enemies of Israel in the OT, since Abraham (God's prophecy against the Canaanite nations – Gen. 15: 18), since the exit from Egypt and the entry into the land of Canaan were to completely destroy the pagan peoples so as not to contaminate His people with idolatry (Ex. 34: 11-17; Lev. 19: 31; Lev. 26: 6-7; Num. 33: 51-52). Amalek was an example of this (Deut. 25: 19; 1 Sam. 15: 2-3).

As in Lev. 19: 18 it is written: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord", the natural conclusion for many Jews was that they could hate their enemy.

v.44 – "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" – Jesus then completely removed that thought, telling them to love their enemies too and to pray for those who persecuted them. To do so was a simple reflection of His heavenly Father's character (v.45; 48): "so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

God did not just show kindness to His chosen people; He also showed it to other peoples, as He still does today to those who are not yet His. He extends common grace to all, which means that there are certain blessings that He gives to all people, like the natural blessings of nature (sun, air, water, food).

The disciples of Jesus should be different from the wicked in this respect, that is, they should not only love the brothers in the faith or the people close to them who they naturally liked, but also the Gentiles, whom the Jews repudiated, for example, the Romans who overpowered and persecuted them. In the power of the Holy Spirit this would be possible, for He would help them to think otherwise, seeking the best interests of the Gentiles and the wicked, as a reflection of the character of God, equally seeking their well-being, their salvation and even feeling another kind of feeling for them, other than hatred or disgust; perhaps a feeling of compassion for another human being also liable to sin and in need of God's light and intervention and a 'second chance'; or else, an understanding that even if it is someone wicked, God did not create a human being to suffer or to perish so atrociously at the hands of the devil. In short, in the strength of God, wish for an enemy the same thing that God has given for us. The kind of love that Jesus is talking about here is something different and greater than the simple natural affection of human flesh, because it is not natural to love someone that a person hates and does him harm. It is the kind of love shown by Jesus on the cross for all mankind, the love of God, the agape, the divine love of giving, without favoritism, without respect of persons, without regard to natural human affinities. Loving only those who love us does not require divine power, for even publicans and Gentiles did the same for those who were similar to them, so what was their reward before God?

Salvation can only come through God's grace, not by good works, however, as an effect of this salvation by grace is that the saved are able to perform good works, such as loving people outside their close relationship.

By practicing the words of Jesus thus far (Matt. 5: 17-47), they would be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. It is interesting that in the AT God always called them to holiness, to separation from the idolatry of pagan peoples, and that He called 'perfection' (Lev. 11: 45; Lev. 20: 26; Deut. 18: 13). In this context, the Lord calls 'perfection' the maturity of love that Jesus was talking about, the spiritual maturity that enables a Christian to imitate God in dispensing blessings to all without partiality.

## MATTHEW 6

### Giving to the Needy

- Matt. 6: 1: “Beware of practicing your piety [NIV: ‘acts of righteousness’] before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

So far, Jesus has told His disciples what God the Father expected of them, that is, how they should act to please God, practicing His righteousness. From Matt. 6: 1, the Lord begins to warn them about the danger of hypocrisy.

“Your piety” (NIV: “your acts of righteousness”) referred to the traditions and doctrine of Sadducees, Pharisees and scribes (or ‘teachers of the law’) to fulfill the rectitude of the law, but with the eagerness to receive human applause. Therefore, what happened was a distortion of this rectitude. As it was written in Matt. 5: 20, they were content with religious ceremonies that gave them a sense of purification, but these rituals were only external; did not change their hearts. They controlled the law and created traditions of men about it, but they lost the holiness required by the law, the basic principles of it: justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23: 23 cf. Matt. 9: 13; Hos. 6: 6; Mic. 6: 8).

In fact, Jesus was concerned with the motives behind righteous living. Expecting human applause was not the reward that should be expected from the heavenly Father. The good works that the disciples of Christ should practice would serve to glorify the name of God, simply to please Him, not to receive the glory of men.

From verses 2 to 18, Jesus touches on three main acts of Jewish piety: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. But they shouldn’t do any of these acts to be praised by human beings; and whoever made them for that purpose alone would receive only human support and applause as a reward, nothing more. Another warning given by Jesus was the instruction to perform the act of piety secretly, without public demonstrations, because they could be sure that the Father who sees in secret would openly reward them.

### Almsgiving

- Matt. 6: 2-4: “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you” means not to draw attention so noisily to themselves while they gave offerings in the synagogues or alms to beggars in the streets, as if there were a herald going before them to announce what they were doing.

“Truly I tell you, they have received their reward” means: their only reward is the reputation they gain while on earth. In heaven they will have none.

“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” – that means to do an act of charity in secret, without ostentation and without attracting the attention of others. This act of charity should be for the Father to see and be glorified by this, not for the giver to be known for his goodness. Giving must be motivated by obedience to God and compassion for others.

The heavenly reward that we will receive from Christ will be very different from the applause of men (2 Cor. 5: 10; Rev. 22: 12), because it is about eternal life.

## Prayer

• Matt. 6: 5-8: “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

The second act of Jewish piety after almsgiving was prayer. And here, Jesus gives the same guidelines: pray to the Father and not to be praised by human beings, for that would be the only reward they would have; and to pray in secret, without public demonstrations, because they could be sure that the Father who sees in secret would hear them and answer their prayers.

Jesus said the Father knows our needs even before we put our knees on the ground to pray. He also tells us that praying does not need to be a public and scandalous act, but something that requires reverence and concentration on our part, since not only our spirit will be involved, as well as our soul and our body. Therefore, it is useless to pray carelessly to end soon. Prayer is not an act of war or shouting where we put Satan on focus, giving him the glory, just talking about him. None of this is true prayer.

First, Jesus tells us that it is to get in our room and pray in secret because the Father who sees in secret will reward us; this means: privacy and reverence. In other words, to enter our ‘room’ (in our soul and our spirit) and ‘shut the door’ without external interference and without distractions, in the depths of our being, where the altar is; and there, where everything is known to God, we should expose and tell Him what we want, think or feel, not only for us but also for our brothers, for whom we are interceding.

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them.”

Jesus was talking about not to repeat prayer, mechanically, like the Gentiles did, for they actually prayed to their gods, not the true God, and had no intimacy with Him. Their gods were fearsome, but they did not understand their needs as the heavenly Father understands His children. ‘Empty phrases’ is an expression that can be exchanged for others words: ‘to recite a prayer’, that is, simply read something written by someone.

In a very practical way, we can explain it this way: reciting a prayer is to repeat a prayer or supplication; however, without putting our being entirely in what we are doing. In other words, without the soul can express itself freely before God as it wants. When we only recite a prayer written by someone, there is formality in our communication, because we only speak with the lips while the heart stays without expressing the distorted and sick emotions that need of healing. It is there that the Lord needs to touch, so that we feel whole again and may remove what is bringing us inner conflict.

The true prayer goes further: it leads us to a meditation on the Word of God, putting our thoughts and feelings in confrontation with it and thus, showing us where we need to change to get what we are seeking. Through the sincere opening of our heart before Him we reach His heart, and begin to know Him in His fullness. Prayer creates intimacy with the Lord, and makes Him, increasingly, a partaker in our lives. Prayer allows us the free expression of our heart at that moment. The words written before us are nothing but guides so that our mouth can translate our feelings, and so that our mind can bring up our deepest thoughts. Prayer opens the doors of our hearts to God’s throne.

## The Lord’s Prayer (Our Father)

• Matt. 6: 9-15: “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one [NIV, ‘and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’]. [Some later manuscripts bring, ‘but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen’]. For if you forgive others their trespasses\* [NIV, sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses [NIV, sins].”

Note: \* the word trespasses does not only mean transgression, sin, but also offense, insult, affront.

The Lord’s Prayer, like the Ten Commandments, can be divided into two parts, being that, in the first, we magnify the name of the Lord, and in the second, we show Him our earthly requests.

The Lord teaches us to say, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

This means that, first of all, we must have the awareness that our true Father is in heaven. And our Father in heaven is perfect; His dominion is exercised by love, placing mercy in the center of judgment.

What does “hallowed be your name” mean?

The word ‘Holy’ or ‘Saint’ (Hagios, Greek) means sacred, pure, blameless, consecrated, set apart, worthy of being honored, to be like God, to have the innermost nature of God, be separated and reserved to God and for His service. God is Holy, and we must ask Him to sanctify His own name, that is, that He reveal Himself to us, that He show us His purity and greatness and how worthy He is of honor. This phrase implies a deep respect and reverence for the name of God, preventing it from being used in a vain or profane way. And the prayer asks that He reveal Himself to all men and creatures in heaven and on earth so that His name may be recognized and treated with reverence and respect, glorified, praised and the only one to be worshipped, as the supreme being that He is. He who seeks Him with sincerity receives His revelation and knows His holiness. In this way, the closer we approach Him in prayer, the more we know His character, which is manifested through a revealing spiritual experience of the word of God in our own spirit; then, we can see how imperfect we are and radically change our concept of holiness. To have access to the Father it’s necessary to be covered by the blood of His Son. Being covered by the blood of Jesus means to let the power of the cross touch us entirely, not only in our spirit by an act of faith, but in a deeper way in our flesh, cleaning our soul of all types of deformation and distortion that bring pain and wound, whether by sin or by other external spiritual actions, which implies being touched on the emotions and thoughts, even in the body, breaking the bonds of the devil on our lives. Hence, it is so important to pray before the cross, for there we can make an exchange with Him, really allowing Him to take our pain upon Him and release us, shedding His cleansing blood over everything that ties us. Therefore, the act of prayer requires reverence because we are doing something that has spiritual implications. The true prayer is the one which takes place with our soul free, naked, without armor and prostrated before the cross or the throne of God. There, He makes us see who we are and tells us who He is. We can perceive, then, that the very deformed nature of our flesh is already, in itself, a contradiction with the true holiness of God. When He tells us: “Be holy because I am holy”, He refers to behave as He behaves, i.e., full transparency and sincerity between what is preached and what is being lived. May we show God’s holiness to others through our actions.

Another comment here is about perfection. God told to Abraham, “Walk before me and be blameless” (Gen. 17: 1). Therefore, we can think that perfection to God is something completely different than our human vision can achieve. In fact, it means to be complete in Him, to be true because He fills us and makes us spiritually in His image and likeness. It is not the absence of sin, but indicates fullness, maturity, by exercising the law of love for God and man.

The next sentence is: “Your kingdom come” or “Come to us your kingdom” (Greek, *Basilea*), that is, His dominion, His power, His royalty and His authority over us. This means to be willing to give up everything, in order to have God; it means both praying for the present moment, that people may bow in submission to Him, and crying out for the consummation of the kingdom at the second coming of Christ. This kingdom is coming into being under Jesus’ ministry, but it will only be consummated at the end of time, on the day when He reigns sovereignly in justice over all things.

After this the prayer says: “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”; in other words, His will must be done on earth as it is in heaven. And in heaven there is peace, fullness, perfection, joy and absence of pain, sorrow and tears. In heaven, where God’s government is happy and unconditionally accepted by all, His will is spontaneous and cheerfully obeyed by everyone and all occasions. Therefore, the will of God for us is good, it is the best and it is within our reach. He demands the best we can give, but nothing beyond this. We should not be afraid to ask Him to do His will in our lives, because He will do the best. Just as it is obeyed in heaven it must be obeyed on earth.

The second part of Lord’s Prayer teaches us to ask for our material needs (“Give us this day our daily bread”), in addition to speak about forgiveness as a special condition, not only to the true praise to God but for our supply on earth in all areas (“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, [for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen]”). The word ‘bread’ in this case symbolizes all that we really need for our earthly existence so that we can sanctify His name and do His will on earth as it is practiced in heaven. We need material support, day by day, in order to serve God fully because a sick and ill-nourished person does not have even strength to pray. Therefore, the Lord teaches us to ask Him to help us in this area, also giving Him all our afflictions and trusting that He will take care of our supply; we do not depend on men, but on Him.

After asking for this, Jesus reminds us that we must ask the Father to forgive our debts or trespasses (means transgression, sin, offense, insult, affront), because when we disobey His commandments, we hurt and offend Him by our sin, what creates a debt in the spiritual world and this is the open gap by where Satan can touch us. Therefore, when we ask Him to forgive our sins, His blood covers us and our debts are paid, closing our gaps. In Matt. 6: 12 (“Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”) the word debts in Greek, *opheilemata* or *opheiléma* (ὀφείλημα, Strong #g3783), is the word that describes our sins as those things that make us guilty and load us with debts before God and that we can never pay off, but only His Son. *Opheiléma* means: a debt, offense, sin; something owed, i.e. (figuratively) due morally, a fault. As seen above, debt or trespass means: transgression, sin, offense, insult or affront. And in Jn. 20: 23 (‘sins’, in our bible versions) the Greek word is *hamartias* (ἁμαρτία, Strong #g266), which has the primary meaning of “to err the target”, “missing the mark”; hence: (a) guilt, sin, (b) a fault, failure (in an ethical sense), sinful deed; and therefore “to act wrongly” and “to break the law of God.” In Matt. 6: 14 (“For if you forgive others their trespasses [NIV, sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you”), the Greek word translated as trespasses is *paraptomata* or *paraptóma* (*paraptōmata*,



παράπτωμα or paraptóma παράπτωμα Strong #g3900 = a falling away, lapse, slip, false step, trespass, sin; therefore: fall, fault, offence, sin, transgression, trespass).

One interesting thing is that Jesus makes a connection directly proportional between being forgiven by God and also release forgiveness to those who owe us something. “As we also have forgiven our debtors” or “for we also forgive [verb in present tense] whoever owe us” does not mean that we should ask for forgiveness on the basis of forgiveness with that we had forgiven others, i.e., in the same quantity or quality that we can forgive someone. We can only receive forgiveness by grace. But in order to pray to God for forgiveness, sincerely and without any hypocrisy, we must be free from any feeling of hatred and revenge. Only when God gives us the grace to truly forgive our debtors is that we will be prepared to make a true prayer. Forgiveness here is not connected to feeling, but to our willingness to obey the commandment of the Lord and use the power of our words to open the paths to each other (Having been already forgiven by Him); only then His action of blessing will be completed: “For if you forgive others their trespasses [NIV, sins], your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses [NIV, sins].” In other words, the willingness to forgive within us brings us closer to God’s character, so we can also feel His forgiveness when we come to Him with our problems and sins. On the other hand, without the willingness to forgive others, access to the Father in prayer is blocked. If God forgave us for much bigger things on the cross, why not forgive our brothers for simpler things? (Matt. 18: 15; 21-22). If we release forgiveness, lives will be released, but if we withhold them, not only will others no longer have the chance to be forgiven by God, but we will also not have the release of our lives, spiritually speaking.

There is an important comment here. In Jn. 20: 23 He said to His disciples: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The disciples knew that Jesus’ words did not give them power to forgive sins (Acts 8: 22), for only God can do that (Mk. 2: 7; Lk. 5: 21). Neither the apostles nor the Church have power to forgive any sin whatsoever or to deny forgiveness to any individual; in other words: judging whether someone will be saved or not by the sins he has committed. What Jesus was talking about was the responsibility He was giving His Church to spread the gospel throughout the world, so that whoever believes in Him may find God’s forgiveness (cf. Matt. 16: 19 – the keys of the kingdom of heaven – open the door of evangelization), as John the Baptist came to prepare hearts for salvation. However, we can see, both in the OT and in the NT, some passages where servants of God, under a strong anointing of the Holy Spirit, uttered strong words of God’s judgment: Jeremiah, for example, prophesying the death of the false prophet Hananiah (Jer. 28: 15-17); Ezekiel against Israel’s leaders (Ezek. 11: 1-13), and the death of Pelatiah, while he was prophesying; Peter, with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11); Paul, with Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13: 4-12).

Finally, Jesus teaches us to ask God to lead us not into temptation and deliver us from all evil that may befall our lives, whether from the world, the darkness or the flesh. This means that those who pray sincerely for forgiveness of sins yearn for the ability to sin no more. The Greek word *peirasmos*, translated as temptation means: ‘do not allow us to fall into situations where we will be exposed to the temptation of evil.’ The expression “deliver us from evil” (‘*rusai hEmas apo tou ponerou*’ or ‘*rusai êmas apo tou ponêrou*’) means: ‘protect, shield, guard (*rhyesthai*), deliver (*rhuomai*, *ῥύομαι*, Strong #4506; to rescue, deliver from danger or destruction) against the assaults of the devil (*tou ponerou*, namely, evil, the evil one)’. The phrase enclosed in brackets [for yours is the kingdom

and the power and the glory forever. Amen] was placed later in the manuscripts, but it was not told by Jesus.

## Fasting

- Matt. 6: 16-18: “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The third act of Jewish piety after almsgiving and prayer was fasting. Again, Jesus gives the same guidelines: fasting to seek the Father and not to be seen by human beings, for that would be the only reward they would have. No one needed to know they were fasting, for the Father who sees in secret would respond to them, honor their fasting, their consecration to Him.

“They disfigure their faces” (literally “they cover the face”) – the verb ‘disfigure’ in Greek ‘aphanizō’ (ἀφανίζω – Strong #853), means; disappear, to cause to disappear, hide, remove; to disfigure (probably by leaving unwashed for a long period), destroy or be destroyed, consume (becloud), corrupt, disfigure, perish, vanish away.

Jesus said that the third form of religious hypocrisy was deliberately creating the appearance of fasting. Hypocrites disfigured their faces when they fasted to look downcast and sad. That would be a ridiculous act, an unsuccessful attempt to appear holy. In everyday life the Jews used to wash their faces and anoint their hair, so they showed a good appearance to others.

The fast of the Day of Atonement was established by the Mosaic law (Lev. 16: 1-34). In Lev. 16: 29-31 it is written: “This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves [NIV: you must deny yourselves (Or must fast; also in verse 31)], and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord. It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves [NIV: you must deny yourselves (Or must fast; also in verse 29)]; it is a statute forever.”

There was also voluntary fasting. Some devout people, like Anna, fasted frequently (Lk. 2: 37). The Pharisees added two days of fasting to the week (Lk. 18: 12) to show the people their piety and appeared in the synagogues dressed sloppily. But the true purpose of fasting was contrition and fellowship with God (2 Sam. 12: 16; 18; 22; 23; Dan. 9: 3; Matt. 11: 21), a means of subduing the flesh and overcoming temptation (Is. 58: 6) and this was done with sackcloth and ashes (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Jl. 1: 8, Job 16: 15), very common to see in times of mourning (Isa. 61: 3) for the dead (Gen. 37: 34; 2 Sam. 3: 31; Jl. 1: 8) or of lamentation over national or personal disaster (Job 16: 15; Isa. 3: 24 [sackcloth]; Isa. 7: 20; Isa. 15: 2-3; Isa. 20: 2 [“Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet”]; Isa. 22: 12-13; Jer. 16: 6; Jl. 1: 13; Jon. 3: 5; Mic. 1: 8; Mic. 1: 16).

In Matt. 9: 14-15 (cf. Lk. 5: 33-35), Jesus used the metaphor of a marriage as an example of God’s relationship with Israel (Isa. 54: 1-8; Jer. 3: 1-13; Hos. 2: 16). By referring to Himself as the Bridegroom, He was asserting that He was the Messiah. The phrase “the bridegroom is taken away from them” refers to His violent death on the cross and burial (Jn. 16: 19-22). After His ascension, He was physically absent from His disciples (Jn. 16: 23-24). Probably, the disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to question Him about fasting, because John was already in prison. But He told them that

while He was with them, His disciples (as guests at a wedding, which had a feast for seven days) would not need to fast, for that was not a time of mourning but of joy.

### **Treasures in Heaven**

- Matt. 6: 19-23: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy [NIV: If your eyes are good], your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy [NIV: But if your eyes are bad], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

v.19 – “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal” – the treasures on earth that can be gnawed or corroded or consumed by moth and rust, may refer to clothes attacked by moths either because they deteriorated with time or because of rats, mildew, and other agents that destroyed them; or, then, to metals that rusted, such as household items and other objects made of metal, and that had some value and some use for their owner. Metaphorically speaking, ‘treasures’ mean good and precious things; ‘rust’ means weakening, deterioration; ‘moths’ can refer to deceptive people or knowledge that slowly eroded one’s values. Treasures that had monetary value, such as money or jewelry, could be stolen by thieves. None of these treasures are of any value to God, for they are things liable to corruption and loss of some kind.

But Jesus guided them to gather treasures that were really important for God, in a place inaccessible to any earthly agent or element, that is, in heaven. Heaven means the dwelling place of God, the place where things are not visible, above matter: “but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” (v. 20).

In v.21 (“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”), He touches on the main point that makes a person keep his treasure in one place or another, the heart. The most precious things, those that are most valuable to someone, occupy that person’s heart, because the heart is the seat of wisdom, the center of moral and intellectual decision, the center of the personality (mind, emotions and will); thus, a person’s most cherished treasure ends up controlling all his values and his entire life direction.

### **Light and darkness (good and bad eyes)**

- Matt. 6: 22-23: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy [NIV: If your eyes are good], your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy [NIV: But if your eyes are bad], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

In the ancient Jewish concept, the eyes were ‘windows’ through which light entered the body, the mind; more than that, the eyes were ‘doors’ through which material things came into a person’s life, because what he desired with his eyes he would have. The eye generated the desire, and the heart devised the plan to make it a reality.

Let’s look at the Greek words used here (Matt 6: 22-23). They are a little different from one another:

“The eye is [Strong #3788, *ophthalmos*, ὀφθαλμός – the physical eye; the mind’s eye; vision; sight; figuratively, envy (from the jealous side-glance)]...

... the lamp [Strong #3088, luchnos, λύχνος (de leukos) – candle, light; a portable lamp or other illuminator] of the body...

... So, if your eye is healthy (NIV: If your eyes are good) [Strong #573, haplous, ἀπλοῦς – single, simple, sound, perfect, clear, generous],...

... your whole body will be full of light [Strong #5460, phóteinos, φωτεινός – bright, luminous, full of light, lustrous, i.e. Transparent or well-illuminated (figuratively); bright, full of light];...

... but if your eye is unhealthy (NIV: But if your eyes are bad) [Strong #4190, ponéros, πονηρός – evil, bad, wicked, malicious, slothful; hurtful, evil, calamitous; ill, diseased; (morally) culpable, vicious, facinorous; mischief, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked],...

... your whole body will be full of darkness [Strong #4652, skoteinos, σκοτεινός – full of darkness, dark; opaque, i.e. (figuratively) benighted (in a state of regrettable or despicable intellectual or moral ignorance, typically due to lack of opportunity), full of darkness]...

... If then the light [Strong #5457, phós, φῶς – fire, light, a source of light, radiance. From an obsolete root, ‘phao’ (to shine or make manifest, especially by rays); luminousness (in the widest application, natural or artificial, abstract or concrete, literal or figurative)]...

... in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” – here, the two words ‘darkness’, in Greek, are the same: Strong #4655, skotos, σκότος – darkness, either physical or moral; obscurity (literally or figuratively).

Like a window of light, through the eye the body finds its way. The good eye [single, simple, sound, perfect, clear, healthy, generous (the context is about treasures, like money)] lets light in, and thus the whole body is illuminated, that is, the mind ends up being clear in purpose, in understanding, revelation and true knowledge of God.

But the evil eye [evil, bad, wicked, malicious, slothful; morally culpable, vicious, harmful, unhealthy, greedy] doesn’t let the light in, and the body will be in darkness (v. 23: lack of understanding, of revelation, of knowledge true of God), because he sees things in a distorted way and always with a bad, perverted connotation.

## The two masters

- Matt. 6: 24: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth [NIV: Money].”

- Lk. 16: 13 [NRSV]: “No slave [NIV: no servant] can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth [NIV: ‘both God and Money’].”

- Lk. 16: 13 KJV: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [money, in Greek, is mammon, which was understood as the ‘god of riches’].”

After Jesus talks about choosing between two treasures (on earth and in heaven), He talks about choosing between two masters: God or money (riches or material goods). In fact, Jesus presents them as slave owners. To be a slave is to be owned by one person, full time; and it is not possible to serve two slave owners at the same time. Either we serve God sincerely or we don’t serve Him at all.

In the NT, the word ‘servant’ appears as a translation of the Hebrew words (in the masculine, ‘ebhedh or ‘ebed; in the feminine, ‘amah; Shiphchah = maidservants – Gen.

33: 2; sharath – Ex. 33: 11, ‘servant’ or ‘young aide’ or ‘young assistant’), meaning ‘a servant of the house’, ‘a domestic servant’, or ‘a lad’, or else, ‘a subordinate officer’, but most of the times the term refers to ‘a slave.’

‘No servant’ or ‘no slave’, ‘oiketes’ (Strong #g3610), means: a fellow resident, i.e. menial domestic; household servant.

‘Serve’, ‘douleuo’ (Strong #g1398) means: to be a slave (literal or figurative, involuntary or voluntary): to be in bondage, subjection or subservience, serve, do service.

In Matt. 8: 9 and Jn. 15: 15, ‘Servant’ is ‘doulos’ (Strong #g1401). In Matt. 8: 6, ‘servant’, in Greek is ‘pais’ (Strong #g3816). In Matt. 26: 58, ‘servants’ or ‘guards’ is ‘huperetes’ (Strong #g5257).

Jesus did not say that it was a sin to be rich, nor did He say that to follow Him it was necessary to be poor. What He meant was that we should not be slaves of money. Money must be our slave.

In Hebrew, the word for money is keseph (= silver). In Greek, the word for ‘money’ or ‘wealth’ is ‘mammonas’ (Strong #g3126, mamónas, μαμωνᾶς), which is a word of Chaldean origin (Aramaic), meaning: confidence, i.e. wealth; riches; money; property; avarice; Mammon (a god; deified wealth). In the NT, this Greek word appears 4 times, where our bible writes the word ‘wealth’ or ‘riches’: Matt. 6: 24 (wealth – NRSV; money – NIV); Lk. 16: 9 (wealth – NRSV and NIV); Lk. 16: 11 (wealth and riches – NRSV and NIV); Lk. 16: 13 (wealth – NRSV; money – NIV). KJV uses the word mammon in all of them.

Wealth or money, however, because it is something that has received so much honor and priority by men, it was put in place of a god; therefore, it seems to have an identity, even competing with the true God for the possession of a soul, that is, money acquired life. This is why Jesus said we could not serve God and mammon (wealth). He did not put in this verse any other god that men tend to worship: pleasure, power, fame and knowledge; He did not talk about diseases, nor on other works of the flesh besides greed, nor about other spiritual entities. We can think, then, that the god who most competes with the real God is money. With him all the other gods are ‘bought’, except Jesus. In addition, the scales usually have two plates. Money weighs toward the material side, preventing the spiritual side from being manifested in a person. He becomes blind to the truths of Jesus, taking the risk of losing his salvation (Lk. 12: 13-21). God and Mammon are mutually exclusive, they are completely opposite to each other.

Anyone who says he serves God, but his life shows that he lives for earthly things, denies his relationship with Him. Therefore, money must be under the control of the Spirit in our lives, so that it can be our slave, not our master.

### **Do not worry**

- Matt 6: 25-34: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? [NIV: Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?] And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven [NIV: is thrown into the fire], will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What



will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today [NIV: for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.]” Luke adds (Lk. 12: 32-34): “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

v.25-26: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink [KJV: Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

After talking about accumulating material possessions, Jesus now addresses an equally dangerous tendency: worry or anxiety.

“Do not worry about your life” – the verb ‘to worry’ in Greek is *merimnaō* (μεριμνάω – Strong #3309), which means, to be careful, have care, take thought, to be anxious (about something), to be over-anxious with; to care for, get too anxious, get distracted.

Anxiety is an exaggerated and harmful preoccupation with our immediate needs, especially with something that has not yet happened or with the possibility of something unexpected happening; it is to live in advance. It’s different from being careful, having caution and faith. Therefore, even the poor need not worry about what they will eat, drink or wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? This means that mental and inner balance must come from man’s spirit and not from material provision. To put the heart on material goods and worry about the lack of them is to live always insecure and deprive ourselves of receiving God’s spiritual blessings.

v.26: “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

God’s natural creation teaches us to live without worries and bears witness to His providence. Although birds work for their sustenance too, they don’t worry like men do, for they instinctively know that nature is there to provide for them. And then, Jesus asks another question: “Are you not of more value than they?” God is the Creator of nature, but the caring Father of His children. If He takes care of animals and plants, will He not take care of His children? Children of God are worth much more than birds. This is a trust that must be developed in man, an awareness of God’s care, far more than a rational concern for how to provide for ourselves. It’s making sure that somehow God will give direction and not abandon us in a moment of need. He’s the one who has to worry about how to get the supply for us, even when we don’t see a possible way.

v.27: “And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? [NIV: Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? – Note: or a single cubit to his height?]” In Lk. 12: 25 (NIV) it is written: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? – Note: or a single cubit to his height?”

“A single hour to your span of life” or “a single cubit to his height” probably refers to the length of life or age. A cubit, though a measure of distance, here alludes to a period of time. And it can mean that worry shortens a person’s life; therefore, it would be better to leave the matters mentioned above (food, material needs) in God’s hands. Trusting Him should be enough.

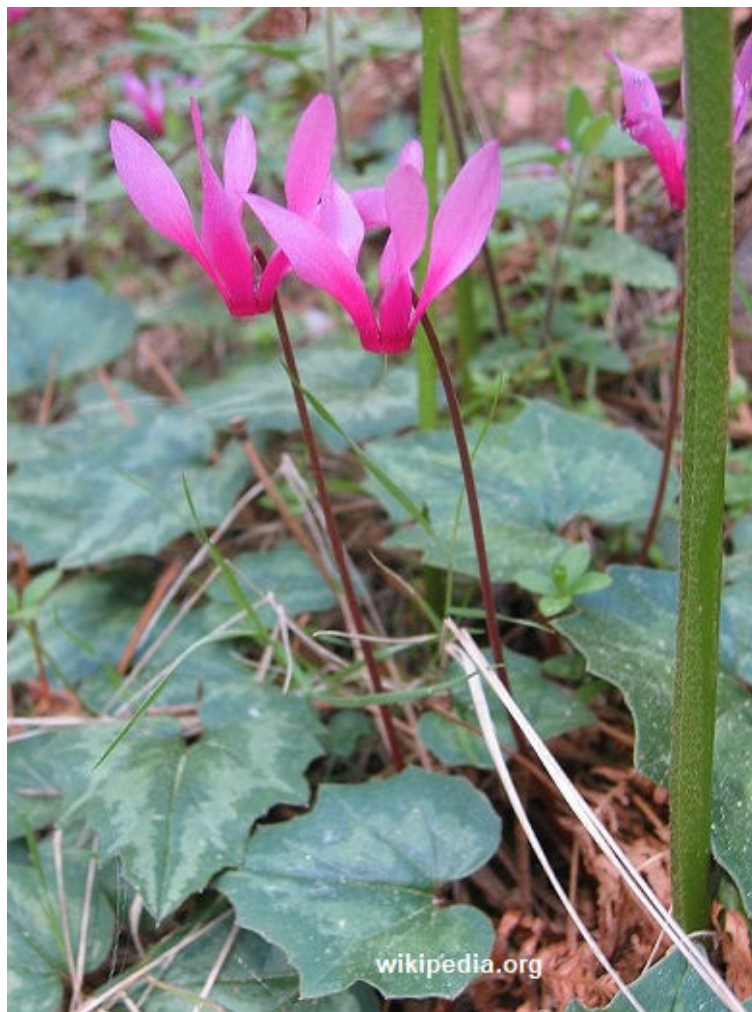
v.28-30: “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven [NIV: is thrown into the fire], will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?”



The lilies Jesus are referring are probably wild anemones (*Anemone coronaria*), red and purple in color, abundant in the fields of Galilee, or else, the *Cyclamen repandum*. Red and purple are the colors of kings’ robes. Solomon, in all his glory, dressed in his royal robes, did not have the splendid appearance of those humble little flowers, who neither toil nor spin, but have a natural beauty that rivals a king in all his glory. More than beauty, they have purity and totally depend on God to be where they are; and in His strength they endure excessive sun, winds and rains, for their Creator keeps them intact. If God lavishes so much beauty on flowers that bloom today and are burned tomorrow, won’t He care about the needs of His children?



*Anemone coronaria*



*Cyclamen repandum*



“You of little faith” (cf. Matt. 8: 26; Matt. 16: 8) – they are those who believe in Jesus, but are anxious about material things. We prove that we have little faith when we worry, grieve and strive in a ceaseless struggle to obtain more and more material goods. We waste our lives doing what God would have done for us if we had given more of our time and talents to Him.

v.31-34: “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today [NIV: for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.]” Luke adds (Lk. 12: 32-34): “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

v.32: The word ‘Gentiles’ here refers to non-Jews, those who do not know God. The Jewish people thought very differently from the Gentiles, who used to worry, constantly asking: ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ Therefore, the Lord told His disciples to live a life different from people who do not trust in God’s fatherly care and have no other goals than material things. When we have faith in God, we live one day at a time with the innocence of the creatures of nature, because we know that tomorrow He will provide. The Father knows that we need material things.

v.33: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

The Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God (Matt. 3: 2; Matt. 4: 17) are the terms used in the NT to refer to the establishment of the heavenly Kingdom of God on earth through Jesus Christ. That Kingdom was very close because it was offered to Israel in the person of the Messiah.

Striving for His kingdom and His righteousness means to want God’s righteousness to reign on this earth.

In this context of Matt. 6: 33, striving for His kingdom and His righteousness is to seek the rightness of life in total submission to the will of God, instead of human righteousness as the Pharisees sought through their works (Matt. 6: 1).

Thus, Jesus’ disciples would have the assurance that all the things they needed would be given to them by their heavenly Father.

v.34: “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today [NIV: for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.]”

The Lord warns us not to worry about tomorrow because each day is under His control and brings something to occupy our attention. Each day He pours out His grace on us so that we can manage the problems and tasks to be accomplished. Each day is a new day, and tomorrow is therefore different from today. If tomorrow brings new problems, there will be new grace to face them.

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lam. 3: 22-23).

## MATTHEW 7

### Judging Others

• Matt. 7: 1-5: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck [NIV = speck of sawdust] in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log [NIV = plank] in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”

v.1-2: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get” [NIV: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you].

Compare with:

• Lk. 6: 37-38: “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

• Mk. 4: 24-25: “And he said to them, ‘Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. For to those who have [*treasures in heaven, a life with God – my note*], more will be given; and from those who have nothing [*treasures in heaven, a life with God – my note*], even what they have will be taken away.”

The word above (Matt. 7: 1: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged”) is linked to that of Lk. 6: 37-38 and Mk. 4: 24-25, and it teaches us also about the true sowing in the material, emotional and spiritual area. Who has the authority to judge is God; it’s no use to condemn anyone that God judged innocent, so in this area (spiritual), instead of judging, the seed is to pray. In the emotional area the seeds are emotional support, the word of encouragement and forgiveness. Withholding forgiveness kills our seed. In the financial (material) area, the Lord advises us to give the best we have, because who will do the calculations is He Himself and His weights will be fair. He adds in Mk. 4: 24-25 saying that, according to our way of behaving, both in prayers and in dealing with our neighbors, we’ll have credit or debit in heaven.

The main point of Matt. 7: 1-2 is that the Christian must not have an accusing spirit, which leads him to judge and condemn people, that is, a false judgment of those who walk in the flesh, for he himself will be judged by God (Rom. 14: 10-13). Every judgment made by someone becomes the basis of his own judgment (cf. Jam. 3: 1-2).

Justice is linked to the trial or judgment that, at principle, is prerogative of God (Isa. 33: 22: “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us”); hence, He guides us with respect not to judge our brothers in faith without really knowing what goes on in their heart or their life: Matt. 7: 1-5; Lk. 6: 37-38; Rom. 2: 1; Rom. 14: 4; 1 Cor. 4: 3-5; Jam. 4: 11.

He did not give us permission to judge people by what we imagine of them. An example is the adulteress who was to be stoned (Jn. 8: 1-11) and Jesus said, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (v.7). What Jesus meant is that no one has the right to judge someone for the reasons that are behind their attitudes

and that are hidden from the eyes of men; so they had no right to judge her, stoning her without hearing her reasons first. They were exercising the Law in a blind and hard way, accusing the adulteress, but without examining the whole situation because they were judging according to the flesh, not by the Spirit. Therefore, the Lord guides us to leave the judgment to Him, for only He knows the whole truth.

Despite everything we read above, however, the Word shows us many examples where Jesus teaches us how to judge, not by flesh but by the Spirit, that is, not according to appearance, but by the straight righteousness (Jn. 7: 24: “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment”; Lk. 12: 57: “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?”). The bible also tells us to judge all things and keep only what is good (1 The. 5: 21: “but test everything; hold fast to what is good”).

This makes us think that to judge means to discriminate, that is, to separate right from wrong. Thus, we understand that He has given us the ability to judge evil, the situations that surround us, false doctrines, false prophecies and false teaching, what we choose for our life, etc., as Paul says in 1 Cor. 14: 20, “Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.” ARA writes “judgment” in place of thinking.

God has used servants as Paul and Peter to exercise severe trial and judgment on some people as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11) and Elymas the magician (Acts 13: 4-12). However, they were not in the flesh, but acting through the Spirit of God:

Therefore, a true prophet of God, moved by His Spirit, even unintentionally, as happened many times with Jeremiah, can utter harsh words of divine rebuke, judging the errors of brothers in the faith or not and that violate the law of God and cause damage to many people. But only the Lord holds the authority to determine a person’s salvation.

Other texts where we read about to judge are the ones where Jesus says that the Father has given Him authority to judge and those that say that He judges no one (seemingly contradictory), but came to save: Jn. 5: 22-30; Jn. 8: 15-18; Jn. 12: 31-32; Jn. 12: 47-50.

This brings us back to God’s justice, which is linked to salvation and the Last Day when it will be completed. In the first coming Jesus came to save (to do justice). In the second coming He’ll come to judge (to exercise judgment on those who rejected His justice).

God does not omit to enforce human justice (from legal point of view, for example), since He Himself placed the human authorities on earth to be respected: Rom. 13: 1-10.

v.3-5: “Why do you see the speck [NIV = speck of sawdust] in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log [NIV = plank] in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”

The speck (speck of sawdust), which represents the sin of others, is not our responsibility to correct; and our sins are like a log (plank) that prevents us from seeing. The speck is a particle of straw or hay or a splinter of wood. A log (plank) is a beam, used as a crossbeam in a roof or floor; and here it represents a reproachful spirit.

Jesus’ illustration was intentionally exaggerated to show the ridiculous position of one who sets himself up as a judge of others. Such a person is called a hypocrite, because he pretends to act like a doctor when he himself is sick. This order, however, does not exempt believers from making moral distinctions (‘to judge’, as we read above in v. 1).

Jesus exposed our tendency to see a small flaw in someone else while ignoring the same flaw in ourselves. It is hypocritical to assume that we can help someone with a fault

when we ourselves have a greater fault. We must remedy our own flaws before criticizing them in others:

- Rom. 2: 1: “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things.”

### **Not to give what is holy to dogs**

- Matt. 7: 6: “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.”

Among the Jews of that time, dogs were not pets; pigs were considered unclean (Lev. 11: 7; Deut. 14: 8). This is a way of talking about people who cannot or do not want to value spiritual truths, the preciousness of the word of God (Matt. 13: 10-17 – the parable of the sower) and even become declared enemies of the gospel, on the contrary from those who are simply ‘gentiles’, who haven’t had a chance to hear it.

Pearls: the pearl was the most precious thing for the Orientals (Matt. 13: 45-46 – the parable of the pearl). Giving pearls to pigs as if they were peas (or carob pods – Lk. 15: 16) would irritate them, as they cannot eat pearls.

The Lord warns us against giving sacred things to those who do not value them, especially if they respond to our words with abuse and violence. The insight to discern these people comes from the Holy Spirit. Thus, we cannot talk or discuss the word of God on equal terms with those who do not yet understand it, because they would mock it and would scorn it. We must preach to sinners, but it is useless for us to go on preaching the truth to those who refuse it. Insisting on this only brings more problems, not only for us but also for them, that is, condemnation:

- Matt. 10: 40: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”

- Lk. 10: 16: “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

- Jn. 3: 18: “Those who believe in him [*Jesus*] are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

- Jn. 12: 48: “The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge.”

Some, after receiving the word of God and salvation, voluntarily forsake it, for they yield to the seduction of the world, and their state becomes to be worse than the first:

- 2 Pet. 2: 20-22: “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment that was passed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, ‘The dog turns back to its own vomit,’ and, ‘The sow is washed only to wallow in the mud.’”

### **Ask, Seek, Knock**

- Matt. 7: 7-12: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a



fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! [If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! – Lk. 11: 13] In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”

v.7-8: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

We must ask Him what we need, but also to search and knock, which makes us think about a scale of factors: at first a petition (prayer); afterwards, the deeper search for the answers from God and then, to knock on His throne for the solutions we need, being the main one the knowledge of His will and the understanding of His way of thinking. This means that it's not just about asking God for just the simple things we need for our lives; however, ask for greater things like the strength of the Holy Spirit in us and His gifts with a view to his service and for our deficiencies to be supplied by the divine provision. Verbs in increasing order suggest persistence, perseverance and frequent prayer for any and all needs, especially what the Lord has mentioned so far in the Sermon on the Mount: righteousness, sincerity, humility, purity, and love expected of Jesus' followers; such gifts are theirs if they are sought through prayer.

v.9-11: “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” [Lk. 11: 13: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”]

‘Good gifts’, in Greek in this verse, is written as ‘doma’, δόμα, Strong #1390, meaning a gift, present; protection. This word appears three times in the NT:

- Matt. 7: 11: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give **good gifts** to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”
- Lk. 11: 13: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give **good gifts** to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
- Eph. 4: 8: “Therefore it is said, ‘When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave **gifts** (doma) to his people.’”

Protection here comes directly from the Father, not from the Holy Spirit.

‘Good things’ (Matt. 7:11) – the Greek word here is a very generic word (agathos, ἀγαθός, Strong #18), meaning: intrinsically good (noun), good in nature, good, benefit, good, good things, well; literally: naïve. Agathós describes what originates from God and is empowered by Him in their lives, through faith.

What Jesus wanted to teach here is that we can have complete confidence that God will hear and answer our prayers because of His character (Tit. 1: 2: “God, who never lies”):

- Jn. 14: 13-14: “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.”
- Mk. 11: 24: “So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

- 1 Jn. 5: 14-15: “And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.”

Here, Jesus makes the comparison between God and an earthly father who, even though he is imperfect (“you then, who are evil” is a reference to the sinful nature of man), does not fail to give a child what it needs; he does not deceive it with something else, nor with anything that could cause it pain.

Similar to oriental breads, small, round and flat, so was the stone. The fish He is referring to was probably the eel, which resembles a snake, and which can reach 3.5 meters in length and generate strong electrical charges. Therefore, they are also known as ‘electric fish.’ Eels are one of the oldest animals on the planet and swim in rivers and seas.

If human parents respond to their children’s requests with what’s best for them, how much more will our Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Doing to others what we want to be done to us is the core of the Law and the teachings of the prophets (Lev. 19: 18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” cf. Matt. 22: 36-40; Rom. 13: 8-10), that is, thinking about the good of others, aiming at the fulfillment of truth and justice.

### **The Narrow and the Wide Gates**

- Matt. 7: 13-14: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

“The narrow gate” refers to the gate of discipleship, which is narrow and the way is difficult (the way of faith, discipline, perseverance, self-denial; also of persecution and opposition). But those who faithfully follow His teachings find the abundant life, the way to heaven.

On the other hand, the wide gate concerns the life of self-indulgence and pleasure, very characteristic of the crowd, but not advisable for disciples. The end of such a life is destruction, eternal ruin (Prov. 16: 25). But God the Father also leads men to find the gate and the way (Jn. 6: 37; 44; 65).

Jesus is the gate (Jn. 10: 7b; 9) and the way (Jn. 14: 6), so the phrase fits very well with what He expects from His followers.

Early Christians were known by the nickname ‘those who belonged to the Way’ (Acts 9: 2; Acts 19: 9; Acts 19: 23; Acts 22: 4; Acts 24: 14; 22).

### **The Tree and Its Fruit (The False Prophets)**

- Matt. 7: 15-23: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

v.15-20: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.”

Jesus now warns His disciples against false prophets, which has already been spoken about in the OT (Deut. 13: 1-11; Deut. 18: 20-22 – both how to recognize them and what should be done with them). And the way to distinguish a false prophet from a true prophet is by his fruits, not only through his actions and his life testimony, but also his doctrine (Matt. 16: 12; 1 Jn. 4: 1-3), what comes from his mouth. Many speak softly and kindly and follow religious practices (v.15: “they come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves”), but their lying words of seduction steal people’s faith.

A tree or plant bears fruit according to its character. Thorns cannot bear grapes; thistles (NIV: ‘weeds’) do not bear figs. A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit. This principle is true in the natural world and in the spiritual world.

The lives and teachings of those who claim to speak for God must be in accordance with His word; otherwise, what results from their words and their actions will prove by itself that they have no part with Jesus (2 Jn. 1: 9-11: “Everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God; whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching; for to welcome is to participate in the evil deeds of such a person.”)

In the time of NT, false prophets were Judaizers or Gnostics, which can be inferred from 2 Cor. 11: 13; 22; 1 Jn. 4: 1; 1 Tim. 4: 1.

The Judaizers were Christians, both of Jewish and non-Jewish origins, who tried to obey the rituals of the Torah, but they were no longer part of traditional Judaism. The term was used in the NT to refer to Jewish Christians who require Gentile Christians to follow Mosaic laws, especially circumcision and the dietary laws of the OT. Thus, they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but did not want to abandon the traditional religious practices of the Old Covenant Judaism.

And Gnosticism is a philosophical-religious doctrine which arose at the beginning of our era and diversified into many sects, seeking to reconcile all religions and explain to them their deepest meaning through gnosis (Greek: knowledge). Gnosis teaches esoteric and perfect knowledge of deity and that is transmitted by tradition and through rites of initiation. Gnosticism is related to Kabbalah, Neoplatonism and Eastern religions.

v.19-20: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.” – This means that the fate of false prophets is to be thrown into the fire, that is, condemnation on the Day of Judgment.

v.21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” – Many claimed to be disciples, but did not do the Father’s will from the heart, because they never really converted. Here, Jesus confirms His divine nature as the Son of God.

v. 22-23: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’” – false prophets can even perform miracles, but their motivation and their fruits are not the same

as Jesus' (Gal. 5: 22-23) and on the Day of Judgment they will be judged. Jesus knows the secrets of everyone's heart, and he knows those who do evil.

Not all miracles are of divine origin (Deut. 13: 1-5; 2 The. 2: 8-12; Matt. 24: 24). A miracle simply means that supernatural power is at work. This power can be divine or satanic, simply to deceive people. In this case, Satan only plans worse things for the future:

- 2 The. 2: 9: "The coming of the lawless one [*probably refers to the Antichrist*] is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all **power**, signs, lying wonders".

The word 'power' here, in Greek is *dunamis* (δύναμις, or *dunamai*, δύναμι – Strong #g1411; power to perform miracles, physical power, force, might, ability, efficacy, energy; in the plural: powerful deeds, deeds showing (physical) power, marvelous works – for example, Lk. 24: 49, in relation to Pentecost, which the disciples would experience). The devil has 'dunamis', that is, because he is an angel created by God, with power (Ps. 103: 20), he can perform miracles, even healing. But he cures one disease and brings another. It's what we see in places of idolatry where people seek healing for their physical and emotional problems, instead of seeking it in the one true God. They receive 'a miracle', that is, they are freed from that disease, but soon after the disease returns with another name and in a worse way.

In 2 The. 2: 9, wasn't Paul talking about the Antichrist? The Hebrew equivalent of this Greek word (*dunamis*) is *koach* or *kowach* (כֹּחַ – Strong #3581), which means ability, to be firm; vigor, literally (force, in a good or a bad sense) or figuratively (capacity, means, produce); able, force, fruits, might (great and impressive power or strength, especially of a nation, large organization, or natural force), power (the ability to do something or act in a particular way, especially as a faculty or quality), powerful, strength (with physical action), substance, wealth, chameleon, lizard (by its hardness). This word, *koach* or *kowach*, was used in Dan. 11: 6: "After some years, they will become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her **power** (*koach* or *kowach*), and he and his power will not last. In those days she will be betrayed, together with her royal escort and her father and the one who supported her."

It can also be seen in Ps. 103: 20: "Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you **mighty** (*koach* or *kowach*) ones who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word." [KJV: "Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in **strength** (*koach* or *kowach*), that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word."]

### The Wise and the Foolish Builders (The Two Foundations)

- Matt. 7: 24-27: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

Jesus not only showed the two ways, but also showed here that there are two foundations, two ways to build one's life. It is not enough to listen to His teachings; it is necessary to live according to them (Jam. 1: 22; Jam. 2: 17).

Building the house on the rock means to build our lives on the teachings of Jesus, thus resisting the devastating action of time and eternity: trials, temptations and judgment. Christ is the rock.

Building a house on the sand means not to practice Jesus' teachings; on the contrary, to build our life on foundations and human and worldly values: money, culture, titles, fame, age, etc., which, like sand, do not resist the demolishing action of the final judgment.

v. 24-25: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock."

'Rain, floods and wind' are pictures of the trials, the temptations one faces in life and the final judgment of God; of the things that come to destroy. Every house here looks safe when the weather is good, but when the weather is bad, its solidity is tested.

In Palestine, the torrential rains that fall on dry riverbeds can turn into floods. Thus, the wise man builds a house to withstand anything, for he foresees the future and circumstances. Rains can mean an adversity that comes from time to time and destroys, but when it stops, it gives a chance of restoration.

"The floods" symbolize a more continuous and growing pressure, as happened in a more prolonged way with some characters in the bible: David, for example, when Saul pursued him for so many years. Or Noah, who saw the rain increase, turning into an overwhelming flood, displacing the ark from its point of origin and leaving it adrift for a long time until it ceased completely.

The people of Israel experienced similar trials, especially from the beginning of the exile in Babylon until the coming of Christ, being increasingly subjected to the yoke of heathen nations. Isaiah (Isa. 43: 2b) writes: "and through the rivers (NIV: 'when you pass through the rivers'), they shall not overwhelm you." The rivers would be a new test for those returning from exile, for they would need to rebuild their own lives and take possession of their homeland again. The rivers could also symbolize the trials they still had to go through at the hands of the Persians and the Greeks and all the situations of the Intertestamental Period in order to strengthen their faith in the Lord and acquire not only a sense of patriotism, of unity among them as a nation, but also a test for them to be prepared for the doctrine of the Messiah. He would bring God's way of thinking to the world, not man's.

"The winds blew" – winds mean something that passes quickly, but drags and often leaves great destruction, such as, for example, doctrines foreign to the Word of God ("wind of doctrine" – Eph. 4: 14). Paul spoke to Timothy about "deceitful spirits and teachings of demons" (1 Tim. 4: 1) who would do anything to enter the lives of men to corrode and destroy their faith. This has happened frequently in Christianity until today, since the time of the apostles. Paul tells Timothy that the Word is trustworthy and that he must put his hope in the living God and care for true doctrine (1 Tim. 4: 9-10; 16).

Wind can also mean what has no control, nor depends on someone's will; or, then, something futile, without fruit or compensation (Hos. 12: 1 – Israel's alliance with Assyria). In this same verse the prophet mentions the east wind. The east wind coming from the desert (Job 1: 19; Job 15: 2) is very dry and causes herbs wrinkle and wither. Often, it blows violently, which is a great metaphor for Assyria. Some Jewish scholars explain that this east wind refers to the Simoon (in Arabic, 'to poison' or 'poisonous wind'), a strong wind, of high temperature, dry and dust-laden, which moves in a circular shape like a cyclone and produces a stifling effect on humans and animals. It is a local wind blowing in the Sahara desert and in the east of Palestine, in Jordan, Syria and the

deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. It is of short duration (twenty minutes, more or less), but it lasts enough to destroy.

Winds can also mean destructive powers (Rev. 7: 1-3).

v.26-27: “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

Unlike the wise man, who builds his house to resist anything, for he foresees the future and circumstances, the fool builds his house on sand, that is, he does not practice the teachings of Jesus and builds his life on the foundations of worldly values: money, culture, titles, fame, age, etc., which, like sand, do not resist the demolishing action of the final judgment.

All these elements (rain, floods and winds) beat against the house of a person's life, as Jesus said, with violence. No one escapes the test.

v.28-29: “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”



People were astounded at the doctrine of Jesus because His teaching was something revolutionary that revoked the teachings of the rabbinic tradition and at the same time showed the simplicity of God and the responsibility He left to His disciples. And they recognized that Jesus was different from the scribes because He spoke with authority. The teachers of the law could have civic and religious authority, but it was only human authority, not spiritual, like that which came from the Master. His words were alive and able to move hearts and the spiritual world.

The word ‘authority’ in this text, in Greek is ‘exousia’ (Strong #1849, ἐξουσία), which means: power, authority, weight, influence, an earthly power, a spiritual power, a supernatural power, strength, force, capacity, competency, freedom, mastery, delegated influence, jurisdiction, liberty, right.

In the bible, the word 'power' has three meanings in Greek: exsousia (Strong #g1849; authority, jurisdiction – Jn. 1: 12); dunamis (δύναμις, or dunamei, δυνάμει – Strong #g1411; power to perform miracles, mighty work, wonderful work – Lk. 24: 49; 1 Cor. 2: 4-5) and this is given to us by the Holy Spirit; and a third word, used more rarely (only 9 times in the NT), which is kratos (κράτος – Strong #g2904), and which means: great vigor, glory, dominion, power, strength, a mighty deed; possession generally over something physical, material, such as leased land, homestead (Lk. 1: 51; Acts 19: 20; Col. 1: 11; 1 Tim. 6: 16; Heb. 2: 14; 1 Pet. 4: 11; 1 Pet. 5: 11; Jude 1: 25; Rev. 1: 6)].

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