

The Sermon on the Mount (2)

Examples and Applications

Matthew 5:20–6:34

Introduction

Beginning with verse 20 in Matthew 5, through the end of chapter 6, Jesus gives examples of how people can learn to cultivate, from the heart, those principles taught in the beatitudes. You will notice that each life-example has its beginning with the heart, and you can see that in all the examples, the spiritual is contrasted against physical. To see how this fits with the beatitudes, we will look at some of the examples to find which of the beatitudes best fits each. (Some of them fulfill more than one beatitude). As we go through these examples, it is helpful to consider that the overall goal of Christ's instruction is love, which comes from a pure heart, good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5).

Synopsis some of the more difficult beatitudes:

Before we begin with our examples, it might be helpful to review the subtle differences between some of the beatitudes.

Poor in spirit—*Attitude of dependency upon God* for all things, but especially related to our attitude toward earthly possessions. The brethren who sold their possessions, in Acts 2 and 4, were poor in spirit; the “rich, young ruler” was not.

Those who mourn—*sorrow directed toward God for sins* (2 Cor. 5:2); not just one's own sin, but also for the sins of brethren, country, family, and society. One who mourns for sin feels a sorrow for God—not for self. When Josiah mourned for the sins of Israel and Judah, God honored his attitude and postponed his destruction of Jerusalem until after Josiah's death. 2 K 22 is one of the most heart-rending passages in Bible that demonstrates mourning for sin. Psalm 51 is another one. The Corinthians were arrogant instead of mournful toward their collective sin (1 Cor. 5:2).

The meek (or gentle)—One who *waits for the Lord*, yields to His will, gives place to God's judgment. A person who loses his temper or takes matters into his own hand lacks meekness.

The merciful—*an action of compassion*. A person who, having the right to treat another adversely, instead acts favorably toward him. No one would have blamed the Samaritan for passing by an injured Jew, but the Good Samaritan extended mercy. A person who lacks mercy lacks compassion.

Pure in heart. Without guile or deceit; thinks no evil. This is the over-riding quality of heart that must be developed over time.

Example of how some of these work together

There is a difference between fearing the consequences of our sins and mourning over them. Some people are motivated to obedience out of fear. While fear is a proper motivation, if one is to grow in love, he must genuinely *mourn for his sins*, so that his sorrow is directed toward God, not himself. In this way, fear is being replaced by love. Peter mourned for his sin because he loved Christ and had let Him down; Judas mourned for himself. One repented and the other hung himself. Similarly, a Christian must continue to *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, learn to be *meek* and lowly and not lose his temper or take things into his own hands. Even conversion, one may have already a heart of *compassion* toward others (mercy), and a heart of honesty and integrity (*purity of heart*), but if not, he will develop it as he grows in Christ. But perhaps the hardest for most, is learning not to return evil for evil (*meekness*), but rather returning good for evil (peacemaker).

Questions

Part One: “The actions of our hearts” (Matt. 5:20–48)

Matt. 5:20 is the verse that transitions between the principles and the examples. Jesus makes this transition first, by pointing out that the hearts of the scribes and Pharisees—by whom most of His followers had been taught—are corrupt, and then by “reteaching” them according to the heart. “They say this, but I say this...”

Who will you choose to follow? If a person has the will to follow Jesus, then the Lord can begin to shape his heart by modifying his behavior to conform to the law of love. The following examples emphasize the actions that would result from the heart. Remember, we can learn as much from negative examples as positive ones, so some of these actions are examples of what not to do. Thus, by modifying our actions to conform to His will, we are also allowing “heart-modification,” as long as we have the desire to allow Him to have His way with us.

Matt. 5:21–26

1. What is the difference between committing murder and being passionately angry toward one's brother?

2. In the illustration of worshipping in vv. 22–24, why does the worshipper's brother have something against him? [hint: “therefore”]

3. What should the worshipper do under these circumstances? Why?

4. *What is certain to happen if the wrong-doer does not try to reconcile himself to his brother?*
5. *What would happen to the worshipper if his brother refused to forgive him? [Hint: Rom. 12:18]*
6. *What two beatitudes are involved in these verses (1-losing temper; 2-seeking to be reconciled to another)*

Vv. 27–32

7. *What new principle does Jesus add to the commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”? What beatitude goes well with this?*
8. *How does plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand solve the problem?*
9. *What new principle does Jesus add to the law of divorce and remarriage as stated in Deut. 24:1–4? [NOTE: this topic will be more fully covered when we discuss Matt. 19:3–12 and corresponding passages. However, the understanding of the principle Jesus is teaching in Matt. 5:27–32 will help us in our understanding of the other passages later on.]*
10. *In vv. 33–37, what beatitude is violated when someone breaks an oath? [Where do lies come from—Lk. 6:45, Rev. 21:8]*

Vv. 38–48

11. *What beatitudes are involved in these verses?*

12. *In our free society, how can someone force us to give us our coat, or force us to “go with him one mile?”*

13. *How do we carry out that command without allowing someone to take unfair advantage of us?*

14. *Reread vv. 17–19. In verse 43–44, is Jesus contradicting the law, or adding something to the law?*

15. *How are we to love our enemies?*

16. *Why does God want us to love our enemies?*

17. *How are verses 46–48 related to 5:20?*

Part Two: “The heart of our actions” (Matt. 6)

Just as the previous examples teach us how to conform our *actions* to the Lord’s standard, Jesus now emphasizes the heart, from which the action flows. Thus, the examples that follow are principles of virtue, or moral-excellence (2 Pt. 1:5), and they involve a one-on-one relationship between God and the person, independent from—and preceding—the action. That is, the action is not performed toward others, but toward God. The real test of faith and fidelity is this: What are we like and what do we do when we are alone and no one but God sees or knows?

The opening statement in verse 1 sets the tone for the examples to follow: Let your actions be for God’s glory, and God’s reward.

Giving

18. *Not like this...*

19. *But like this...*

20. *What is meant by not letting your right hand know what your left hand is doing?*

21. *Why should someone give like this?*

Vv. 5–15: Prayer

22. *What are “meaningless repetitions”? Who were doing that?*

23. *What is implied by saying the following:*

a. *Our Father...*

b. *In heaven...*

c. *Hallowed be Your name.*

24. *How may God’s will be done “on earth, as it is in heaven?”*

25. *What should we ask for?*

26. *Upon what does forgiveness depend?*

27. *Of all the items contained in the “Lord’s prayer,” what is the one thing that Jesus comments about? Why?*

Fasting (Vv. 16–18)

28. *What is the purpose of fasting?*

29. *How should it be done?* [Food for thought: should we fast today, as they did then? See Acts 13:2, 14:23, for example.]

The desires of life (vv. 19–24)

30. *How does Jesus address these things:*

a. *Possessions*

b. *“Treasures:” Storing up, holding on to things*

c. *Incomes, houses and automobiles*

31. *What is the “all-or-nothing” verse that ties all these things together?*

32. *How does the illustration of the eye (vv. 22–23) fit into these things?*

33. *What does it mean to worry?*

34. *What is wrong with worrying about the things Jesus mentions in vv. 25–32?*

35. *What are two key verses that show us how we can avoid worrying about these things by addressing the following:*

a. *First things first*

b. *Putting things in perspective*