

## Newsletter, March 2014

In this Newsletter we shall utilize edited excerpts taken from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 9.1. That portion of Jesus' teaching, known generally as the "Sermon on the Mount," is found in Matthew Chapters 5–7. Quite similar teaching is found in Luke Chapter 6; the discourse in Luke's Gospel is generally known as the "Sermon on the Plain." Jesus very likely gave this address at various times and places because of the importance of the message. We must understand that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed exclusively to the Jews in Israel while the Kingdom of Heaven on earth was still being offered to them and prior to their violent rejection of it. What we have here is a statement of intent by King Jesus concerning the laws and stipulations of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Therefore, it was not so much intended to instruct or exhort to obedience and performance, as it was a spoken platform proclaiming Kingdom principles, aims, and conditions as well as describing the necessary spiritual qualifications of any who would enter and live within it.

God had already given his high standard of conduct for his people in the Decalogue. Unfortunately, the Jew had come to see it as only requiring an outward ceremonial observance. We find within the Sermon on the Mount a restatement of the Ten Commandments in such a way that it reveals the necessity of total obedience of heart and mind as well as outward action. As we shall observe in the first part of the discourse (the Beatitudes), the keeping of the Law must first originate from an inward spiritual disposition and desire to please God that the "natural" man does not have, neither can he attain it even through his most diligent efforts. Although delivered directly to the Jewish nation, the Kingdom proclamation is also applicable to Christians living in this present interim spiritual state of the Kingdom, as we shall put forth below.

Although the Jews ultimately rejected the Kingdom such that it was not established on the earth in any physical sense at that time, the Kingdom in its present interim state, which we may also refer to as a "provisional state," was established regardless of man's sinful nature (cf. Jn.18:36). The word "provisional" as we use it here denotes the fact that God provides fully for his righteousness to be imputed to men through grace alone — made possible through the atoning blood of the King Himself as He died a substitutional sacrificial death for his Kingdom subjects on the cross. It also refers to the spiritual quality of the present state of the Kingdom, inasmuch as it exists within the hearts of redeemed men and women, not within the laws of a nation or in regulations established by human institutions and organizations. The future Kingdom on earth is not in any way contingent upon a perfect spiritual performance of mankind in this present state of grace inasmuch as God has already preordained the Kingdom age to come to pass at the time He has allotted for it. The provisional Kingdom is a preparatory interim state preceding the complete and perfect Kingdom, which is to come into existence on earth when Christ personally returns to the earth to establish it (cf. Book III, Chapter 20.7). During this present age, strict enforcement of Kingdom Law has been temporarily suspended; the fierce and powerful judgments of the Old Covenant are greatly tempered by mercy. God, while freely providing for man's righteousness by his divine grace, withholds immediate judgment on earth until the end-time events of the last days come to pass (cf. Book III, Chapter 20.6, *The Day of God's Wrath*).

In the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount known as the "beatitudes," which means "blessedness," Jesus explains the state of expectant hope and joy that those who are accepted into the Kingdom will possess (cf. Mt.5:3–10; as detailed in Book II, pages 16-26). Those eight verses form one complete description of character that begins and ends with "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (verse 3 and verse 10). The word "blessed" as it is used here does not refer to a present state of perpetual happiness inasmuch as the content of verses 4 through 9 clearly include mourning and suffering that must take place even as they work and live within that blessed state of being. The blessed state is something that God sees as existing within them throughout their many trials such that He favors them as his own. Therefore, the blessing comes from the internal joy that we as Christians have in knowing that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Ro.8:28).

We notice that Jesus never suggests in his discourse how such a blessed state of being can be achieved through human effort since that is clearly impossible. The divine guidance and loving restraint of the Holy Spirit is required of any that would enter into the Kingdom. The pure character of Kingdom subjects is such that only the indwelling Holy Spirit declaring the righteousness of Christ within him can allow him any claim to the

certainty of it as a child of God. As Jesus told Nicodemus, without a spiritual rebirth (cf. Jn.3:1-7; Newsletter, November 2012) it is not even possible for a man to see the Kingdom of Heaven; entering into it would therefore be unthinkable. God himself must supply that blessed state of being by infusing the mind of Christ into his Kingdom subjects.

In his discourse, Jesus impresses upon us the need to remain steadfast in the faith. If we do not preserve that which is true in our own lives, how can we ever hope to preserve that which is good in others? Jesus said to the Jews, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Mt.5:13). The Jewish nation had failed to live up to the divine standard that was required of it and thus would soon be cast aside while Gentile nations would receive the Gospel that the Jew had rejected. As Christians, we must hold Truth within ourselves with great care and integrity, otherwise we also shall find ourselves castaway as worthless in witnessing to a fallen world. The liberal churches of today would do well to heed this message.

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Mt.5:14). This is what God had intended for the Jewish nation, but it had largely failed in that mission. God, by redeeming us in this age, has lit us like a candle that we may become a positive example and witness to the rest of the world. We are constantly being held up to public display for the sake of our bright and hopeful belief in Christ. Why should we ever consider hiding who we are and what we believe? This light of spiritual truth is intended to reveal that which is genuine in the midst of a world of darkness and should therefore be placed in a high position so that truth may be clearly seen by others (cf. Mt.5:15). In this, God desires the same of us as he did the Jewish nation. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Mt.5:16). We should give out the Truth freely to all, and through our good works, to which the Holy Spirit inspires and enables us, bring testimony to men of God’s glory, grace, and mercy that they may be drawn to the light and come to know Christ and the redemption that He offers to all who come to Him.

Those who have received the Spirit of Christ in response to God’s love and mercy have an inner desire to do those things contained in the moral Law without the rigid adherence to the letter of the Law itself. In Jesus’ own words, “For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mt.5:20). Outwardly, the Scribes and Pharisees were zealous keepers of the Law, checking off each of the Commandments on their fingers through strict ritual observance, but inwardly they were men of poor spiritual perception and totally lacking in the qualities of love and mercy. Therefore, Jesus revealed the purpose of the moral Law by demonstrating that even the most outwardly “righteous” of the Jewish nation of that day, could not fulfill them. Violations of divine Law are a consequence of an inward spiritual fault that makes every man fall short in his ability to adhere to them. Jesus demonstrated this fact by lifting Law-keeping far above the level of ritual or methodical effort to an extremely high spiritual plane. He did that through restating the commandments of the moral Law prohibiting murder, adultery, and the use of God’s Name in vain; although it is most certain that He could have made similar applications from the other commandments as well. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill...” (Mt.5:21; cf. Ex.20:13). Jesus said that if we have only contemplated harm to others in our hearts, we have already broken this law (cf. Mt.5:22). “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mt.5:27,28; cf. Ex.20:14). We discover that from our fallen nature we cannot fulfill the intent of divine Law, because of the weakness of the flesh (cf. Ro.7:14-21). God not only abhors the evil act, but He looks inwardly upon the corruption from which such acts spring forth with extreme displeasure and therefore deserving of wrath.

Could we ever effectively swear to the absolute truth of our own statements considering our corrupt nature (cf. Mt.5:33; Le.19:12)? Jesus surely refers in this passage in Matthew to using the name of God in vain—not only when delivering curses accompanied by expletives, which are obvious violations, but in a careless, meaningless way, or in a frivolous disrespectful manner through jesting (cf. Ex.20:7). If we default in the words that we speak, can we hope to deliver up God in exchange for them? Or can we offer up Heaven, or God’s throne as collateral for our words (cf. Mt.5:34)? We cannot swear by the things of this earth since they are all

God's by creation (cf. Mt.5:35). We cannot even swear by our own head (cf. Mt.5:36) inasmuch as even our own life is in the providence of God alone. Therefore, we should merely answer "yes" or "no" while speaking the truth as best we understand it, since only evil can come from doing more than that (cf. Mt.5:37). The word of a born-again Christian should carry its own assurance of truth as coming forth from a child of God.

In all of this, Jesus demonstrated the need for a personal state of righteousness that exceeded that of the most religious and highly regarded men of Israel — the Scribes and Pharisees (cf. Mt.5:20). As with the Decalogue itself, there is a moral relevance of the Sermon on the Mount that is applicable to all Christians in this age of grace. Although we are not presently under the strict mandate of Kingdom Law, we can benefit greatly from studying it since it emphatically states God's requirements for his acceptance of mankind. The Law of God is pure and irrevocable. Consequently, any of the redeemed who through arrogant ignorance breaks the Law of God, and teaches others to do so, shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven, while those that do the things contained in the Law from a spiritually regenerated mind and so teach others by their example shall be exalted (cf. Mt.5:19). Here we see the amazing power of grace in that even those who have broken God's law through ignorance and have even taught others to do so are still to be found in God's Kingdom though their status there is greatly diminished in the eyes of God.

Rather than say, as some have, that by Jesus' explanation of the spiritual depth of the Law in his discourse we can now readily accomplish in the flesh those things contained in the moral Law, we should instead be brought to our knees! Jesus' words demonstrate that the moral Law of God cannot be fulfilled by outward actions, but can only be fulfilled within the depths of our own heart, which in the natural man is totally corrupt. The Law requires us to be "perfect even as God is perfect" (cf. Mt.5:48)! Even if we consider perfect here to mean completeness or full maturity, it is still a command that we cannot ever hope to satisfy. God is infinitely complete and infinitely mature having had no prior state of being that was ever any less. Therefore, we must bow down to the infinite perfection of God and beg for mercy for we, as sinners, can do no more than that. Nevertheless, we find that Christ fulfilled the Law, and justification to God by Jesus' perfection is our sure hope through the on-going regeneration of our minds and hearts from his Spirit living within us until the redemption of our bodies take place in the physical resurrection of his redeemed. In that future day we shall receive a new spiritually compliant body that is free from sin and in full harmony with our redeemed spirit.

For the Jew of that day, the acceptance of the laws of the Kingdom of Heaven was not possible. They lacked the spiritual discernment necessary to even see the Kingdom of Heaven let alone enter into it. So it was, that the only way any could be brought into the Kingdom was by the way of a cross. It was necessary that the King should die for his people and not just for the Jew only, but for all the peoples of the earth. Today, there are two ways opening before us — a wide easy way that leads to destruction in route, and a strait narrow way that leads onward to eternal life (cf. Re.21:2; Mt.7:13,14). We should beware of the many false teachers who constantly point to the broad way of religion and moral living as the path to eternal life as so many do today. They only seek to devour us along the way, and at the end of that broad path is eternal destruction for us as well as for them (cf. Mt.7:15). The narrow path that we must follow is a way of pure grace that is not tainted in any way by man's faulty works. There is only one door opening into that narrow path: Jesus Christ, the Son of God and savior of the world (cf. Jn.14:6). He is the narrow door opening into the strait path of grace, which we must walk daily along with God's Spirit living within our hearts and minds that we may not stray from it. There is no other door, no other way, and no other name by which we must be saved (cf. Ac.4:12).

The Sermon on the Mount truly expresses the Law of the future Kingdom Age, but it also demonstrates the great need we have today for a savior to deliver us from moral decay and the consequences of disobedience to the perfect Law of God. As children of the interim provisional Kingdom, it is what we should constantly desire to achieve even though we must always fall short of the mark because of the weakness of our flesh. Here is "the way, the Truth, and the life:" Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6). He is the only way into today's provisional Kingdom, even as He is the undisputed King of that future Kingdom on earth coming forth in the last days.