

WRITINGS OF AREND REMMERS

by Arend Remmers

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Arend Remmers, compiled for study and devotional reading.

29 Chapters

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01.00. The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount by

Arend Remmers

01.01. The Sermon on the Mount (9)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (9)

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matthew 5:11-12) Sufferings for Christ's sake The last of the nine beatitudes also forms the transition to the following part of the "Sermon on the Mount." The Lord no longer speaks generally of the disciples in the third person, but addresses them directly with the personal "ye," as He does in Luke 6:20-26 throughout. At the same time He applies to them His words of verse 10. He sees His disciples, knows already what they will have to go through and gives them a wonderful promise.

Although this beatitude is similar to the previous one, there is a difference. Here the Lord does not speak of sufferings for righteousness' sake, but of abuses, persecutions and evil words for His sake. This is connected with the Person of our Lord and the confession of His Name. Suffering for righteousness is a consequence of our moral attitude and actions; suffering for Jesus' sake is a consequence of our confession of Him.

Confession of Jesus In democratically ruled countries there is not official persecution of Christians as there still is in some other countries. As an example, according to the German constitution nobody may be placed at a disadvantage because of their faith and religious views; freedom of faith, of conscience and freedom of religious and ideological confession are guarded. This does not mean, however, that everyone is well disposed towards Christians. Many a young believer has experienced mockery and abuse when, upon starting work, they have confessed, "I believe in the Lord Jesus as my Saviour." It may even be that there is not only abuse and slander, i.e. words, but acts of persecution. By using the word "when" the Lord shows that He is not hinting at something that may possibly happen, but is pointing to a fact that is certainly to be expected. Those who take the side of our Lord and Saviour, openly and courageously confessing Him, will reap contempt, mockery and scorn. Suffering for Jesus' sake and for righteousness' sake often coalesce. Sometimes people react with scorn and contempt when the Name of the Lord Jesus is frankly confessed. Such a confession may even be met with a pitiful smile, but as soon as the believer shows himself to be a Christian by his practical conduct as well, there is rejection and hatred.

Satan always tries to prevent the disciples of the Lord from confessing His Name. He whispers to the soul, "Is it really necessary to speak of the Lord Jesus now? You do not always have to witness to the gospel!" He doesn't only want to prevent the confession of Christ as Lord, but also the spreading of the glad tidings of His grace. For one who really loves the Lord there should not be any silence. Neither can there be any consideration of one's own position or the position of one's family. Is the Lord not worthy of our unreserved confession of Himself, even if supposed disadvantages go along with it? In Acts 4:1-37; Acts 5:1-42 the apostles give an example of this suffering for the sake of the Lord Jesus. After they had healed many and led them to the Lord, they were taken captive by the leaders of the Jews and told not to speak in the Name of Jesus any

more (Acts 4:18; Acts 5:28). But they could not and would not be silent. And when, after their second imprisonment and miraculous deliverance, they were again attacked and even beaten, how did they depart from the presence of the council? Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name (Acts 5:41 -See J.N.D. Trans.).

Joy

Thus the Lord Jesus adds to His beatitude: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven." What a privilege to possess and confess Christ as Saviour and Lord! He is worthy that we should openly confess Him. For a fearful soul and for the flesh the supposedly disadvantageous consequences of a faithful confession of our Saviour carry a lot of weight. Here the Lord says something else. The disciples of the Lord should rejoice not in spite of, but because of the sufferings connected with their confession (see Romans 5:3; James 1:2). Even if the confession of the Name of the Lord does result in disadvantages here on earth-which is not always the case-the reward in the heavens which He has promised is incomparably greater! To know that we walk in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus already gives us joy, and this joy is increased by the promised reward which is not connected with earth but with heaven (Compare Matthew 6:19).

Examples The Lord then refers to the Old Testament prophets as examples. They had once been persecuted because they witnessed for God. Elijah (1 Kings 19:2), the prophet Zechariah at the time of king Joash (2 Chronicles 24:21), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:2) and many more (compare Nehemiah 9:26; Acts 7:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:15) are examples of this. Moses too, who calls himself a prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15; Deuteronomy 18:18) suffered for the sake of his God by the Egyptians as well as by his own people. In the New Testament the remarkable words are written of him that he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense..." (Hebrews 11:26).

It is not mentioned here in Matthew 5:11-12 that the Lord Jesus Himself was persecuted and going to be killed. Nevertheless every disciple may remind himself constantly that He is the great example of suffering and patience. By comparing His disciples, who would be persecuted for His sake, with the prophets who had been persecuted for God's sake, He silently testifies to His deity and thus gives the highest motive for enduring persecution for His Name's sake.

Summary This last beatitude concludes the first part of the so-called "Sermon on the Mount." In it the Lord Jesus as the King who would soon be rejected by His own people, announces the principles of the Kingdom of God as guidelines and encouragement for His disciples. When we look at the individual utterances we see in them a clear order. In the first three beatitudes the self-knowledge and humility which are first of all necessary for the disciple of the Lord, are mentioned. In the following four verses we see the striving for righteousness and a life which is pleasing to God. Finally, in the last two we see the trial which in this world is the result of a life with the Lord Jesus, and the suffering for Him which this entails.

01.02. The Sermon on the Mount (10)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (10)

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men (Matthew 5:13) In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-48; Matthew 6:1-34; Matthew 7:1-29), Matthew 5:13-16 represents a kind of insert. In these verses the Lord Jesus speaks about the position of His disciples in the world. When He says "ye," He does not only mean His disciples or future leaders in the Kingdom of God, but, as in the preceding beatitudes, all His disciples at all times and therefore also us!

Here the Lord Jesus uses two illustrations: salt and light. Both are so commonly known that they do not need further explanation to be understood and yet, as is the case with almost all illustrations in the New Testament, a few considerations are appropriate. The nature of salt is to be salty and the characteristic of light is to shine. But in spiritual life nothing comes automatically! Sadly, it happens far too often that divine power is hindered or concealed by our fleshly actions. It is for this reason that we get so many exhortations in the New Testament. But without the new life in us these exhortations would not be of any use. This is why the Lord does not say, "Ye should be the salt and the light," but, "Ye are the salt of the earth,... the light of the world."

Salt In ancient times salt was the most important agent for seasoning and preserving foods. Salt is pungent, bitter; but it keeps what is good and prevents corruption. In the Old Testament, the "salt of the covenant" had, on God's order, to be added to all sacrifices (Leviticus 2:13). Thus salt is a clear symbol of the sanctifying, keeping power of God which should be expressed in us. We are not sugar or honey, but the salt of the earth. If we witness mockery concerning divine things at school, at work or in other situations and we do not ignore it, but reprimand the scoffers in the right way, and if we do not laugh at certain jokes, then we are the salt of the earth. Often our mere presence will exercise a moderating influence on unbelievers. Two further passages make clear that this "salt" should not be confounded with human pungency or even cutting remarks. The Lord says in Mark 9:50 to His disciples: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Paul writes to the Colossians: "Let your word be always with grace, seasoned with salt." (Colossians 4:6) Grace and peace therefore are not opposed to salt but complementary to it.

Salt is ordinary and commonplace, but it has a strong effect. This is not easily noticed outwardly, but takes place more in secret and in the long term. We might consider it useless to be the only ones in our surroundings who take a stand for the things of our Lord, but let us remember: "Ye are the salt of the earth!" In contradistinction to the following verse, the Lord says: "Ye are the salt of the earth." "Earth" is not the same as "world." The Greek can mean "land" as well as "earth," and here it seems to point to the scene where witness is borne to God. Firstly this was Israel, to which the disciples belonged. But then we can see in it also the wider sphere of the testimony to God in Christianity today, which in its broadest scope corresponds to the Kingdom of the heavens. Here where the light of the gospel and the truth of God shone brightest, the greatest apostasy of all

times will take place in the future. This the Lord points out with his following words.

Useless

"But if the salt have become insipid, wherewith shall it be salted? It is no longer fit for anything, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot by men." The salt known in ancient times did not have the purity of modern salt. In particular the salt gained from the Dead Sea contained considerable amounts of minerals. If the salt got too wet, i.e. when it was stored for a long time under wrong conditions, the salt could be washed out. Thus the salt became "insipid" because only the useless ingredients remained, which were then cast out to be carelessly trodden under foot by men. The Lord speaks in this passage of the position of the disciples in the Kingdom of God. Salt is a picture of the influence going out from the testimony to the holiness of God. Somebody whose testimony does not have this power is useless. For this reason Jerusalem, the city that rejected its own King, will be trodden under foot by the nations (Luke 21:24). And Christendom, which for centuries possessed the tidings of grace and salvation in Christ, will apostatise from God and come under His judgment. This passage does not deal with whether or not a born again Christian can be lost. God's Word does not leave this question open. He who believes on the Son of God has eternal life. And nobody can or will seize out of His and the Father's hand those to whom He has given eternal life. (John 3:36; John 10:28-29). An admonition The words of the Lord contain a serious admonition for each one of those who belong to Him. Is not our spiritual life and our witness often "insipid" and without power? Then we are, practically speaking, useless for the Lord! We are like the salt that has lost its taste and power. If we do not have fellowship with our Lord daily, by prayer and the reading of His Word, our spiritual life will be dry and without joy and power.

If we think we have always to be only gentle, patient and nice, the power of the salt will be lacking in us. There are situations in which we have to take a decided stand for our Lord and for His rights, even if this causes offence. We have already pointed out that in such moments grace and peace should not be forgotten. But the greatest danger is conformity to this world. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was a believer who settled down in the godless town of Sodom. When at the end he wanted to warn his sons-in-law of the threatening judgment of God he was in their eyes "as if he jested" (Genesis 19:14).

Some Christians think one could gather from this verse that we have to get together within Christendom and its organisations, or even with the world, and actively work together. By this means, it is said, we are able to exercise, to a greater degree, a Christian influence on the government and its legislation, and on our fellow men. But this is not meant by the words of the Lord Jesus, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Our influence on our surroundings and our testimony for the Lord does not work through numerical strength, but through our moral behaviour in separation from evil (cf. Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Timothy 2:21; Hebrews 13:13). On the other hand, our necessary separation must not degenerate into unspiritual isolation, because then we cannot be what we should be: the salt of the earth.

01.03. The Sermon on the Mount (11)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (11)

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16)

One of the two characteristics of true disciples of the Lord in Matthew 5:13-16 is light: "Ye are the light of the world." In our daily lives we are so dependent on light that everyone will understand the meaning and the importance of this expression. Light is synonymous with brightness and clarity, with seeing and recognising, but also with warmth and life. Think only of the source of light on which all the life on our planet depends, the sun. Without this light everything would be dark, cold and dead.

God is light In the Bible, light is often mentioned in connection with God. We read in Psalms 36:9 : "in Thy light shall we see light," but when the Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples in Matthew 5:1-48, Matthew 6:1-34, Matthew 7:1-29, the simple but striking words: "God is light," were not yet known. John, one of the disciples, would write them decades later (1 John 1:5). The nature of God cannot be described in a shorter or clearer way. That God also dwells "in the light which no man can approach" emphasises His absolute purity, holiness and glory even more (1 Timothy 6:16). God's light is a wonderful light. It is a light that brings life. In contrast, darkness in the New Testament always characterises sin and distance from God. When the Lord Jesus said to His disciples: "Ye are the light of the world," He Himself was still the true light here. The eternal Son of God, the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His substance, had come into the world as the light in order to reveal God (cf. John 1:4-9; John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:46).

Everyone who accepts Him in faith is now brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light. Furthermore, instead of darkness, he is now light in the Lord (1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 5:8).

Ye are the light The depth of the meaning of the word "light" was certainly not yet known to the disciples when the Lord said to them: "Ye are the light of the world," but they could understand that He meant their testimony in the world. While salt works invisibly and internally, light is visible afar off.

"A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." Whether an enemy was planning an attack or a traveller was seeking accommodation, a city on a hill in Israel would be visible for everyone-during the day by the bright shining of its white walls and buildings, and by night by the lights of the houses. Thus the walk of the disciples of the Lord ought to be a light in this world, seen by everyone.

"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." The relatively small oil-lamps of ancient times, thousands of which have been found in the rubble of excavation sites, could only give poor light. Therefore they were,

individually or in groups, put on a lamp-stand which was either suspended from the ceiling, fixed to the wall, or stood on the floor. The candlestick of the tabernacle, which had seven branches, was one of those lamp-stands. In this way the best possible distribution of light was effected.

How absurd it would have been to put such a light under a bushel, i.e. to hide it! A bushel was a vessel of approximately 2 gallons capacity used to measure corn. If one had put it over a lamp it would not only have hidden the small flame and thus made it ineffective, but would, in the long run, also have smothered it. In Mark 4:21 the Lord Jesus mentions, besides the bushel, also the bed. Both would hinder the shining out of the light. Does not this contain a two-fold warning-on the one hand of business (the light under the bushel) and on the other of laziness and sleep (the light under the bed)?

Let your light shine

Like the city on the hill, the light should be visible to everyone. "Let your light so shine before men." This light is the disciple's confession of his Lord. By this it becomes evident to whom he belongs. Let us therefore confess Christ everywhere and in all circumstances. When we go out to a restaurant, do we confess by giving thanks before the meal without embarrassment, that we belong to Him, even if those at other tables continue their conversations loudly or show their disdain? Sometimes unbelievers ask for our opinions regarding worldly entertainments like the cinema, theatre or discotheque, or on topics such as homosexuality, relationships outside marriage or abortion. Do we then confess the Lord, or do we give evasive answers? Are we friendly, helpful, peaceable and righteous in our dealings with colleagues, neighbours and other people? In this way we can let our light shine before men. "Do all things without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may be harmless and simple, irreproachable children of God in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights (heavenly lights) in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Php 2:14-15 J.N.D. Trans.). To let our light shine means that as well as our spoken testimony for our Lord in the world, our new nature and our position as children of God are expressed by our behaviour.

Good works

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The Lord Jesus does not speak in these verses of the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of the lost. The entire "sermon on the mount" does not deal with this, but with the Christ-like walk of the disciples of the Lord. Although the people of this world are mentioned frequently, it is not the purpose of the "sermon on the mount" that they may receive blessing or be led to the Lord, but that the character of the Kingdom of God may be expressed in His disciples.

Here, the good works are the fruit of the working of divine light in the soul. If we let our light shine, good works will also be connected with it. But they are not the focus of our attention here. In this world many good works are being done by different individuals and groups. For example, the Red Cross and other organisations providing humanitarian aid have, especially recently, been able to do much good to needy people. If we as children of God purpose to do such good works, we are not necessarily a testimony to our Lord. He wants us to be a testimony to Him. Therefore He does not exhort us here to do good works, but to let our light shine. We should not think of "our" works, but of Him. Good works will then be the result. The apostle Paul speaks of the fruit of the light

which is in all goodness, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9).

"... And glorify your Father which is in heaven." If good works bear the character of heavenly, divine light, then people will not say, "What a good person this is," but rather they may be led to glorify God. If the light shines, the actions will be seen as in connection with this light. This is the first time in the New Testament that God is called "your Father." The Name "Father," standing for God, occurs also in the Old Testament but it does not refer to the personal relationship of an Israelite to God. Jehovah was the Father and Israel, the nation, was the son (cf. Exodus 4:23; Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16).

Only when the Son of God came to this earth to reveal the Father could believers be brought into this wonderful relationship of children and receive the spirit of adoption by which they cry: "Abba, Father." For this it was necessary that the Lord should die and rise again. After His resurrection he gave Mary Magdalene the wonderful message: "but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God" (John 20:17). This was, at the time of the "sermon on the mount," yet future. Nevertheless, the Lord speaks to the disciples already of "your Father which is in heaven," although they knew neither the basis of this new relationship-the work of Christ-nor its intimacy and power through the Holy Spirit.

01.04. The Sermon on the Mount (12)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (12)

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18) The teaching and works of the Lord Jesus were so entirely different from those of the scribes and Pharisees that some of His audience might have thought He would put an end to everything they had known as Jews. The Lord counters these thoughts in this passage of the "sermon on the mount," only recorded in Matthew's Gospel, in which He speaks about the law (Matthew 5:17-48). The Law Of Sinai

Before entering upon the contents of these verses, I want to occupy you briefly with the term "law," which often occurs in the Old as well as in the New Testament. Apart from meaning "human rules or orders" (Daniel 6:8; Romans 7:1-2) the word "law" occurs in the New Testament meaning "the legal principle" (Romans 7:21; Romans 8:2). Also, in view of the divine law in the Old Testament, there are differences in meaning.

1. The law of Sinai (Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:17).
2. The five books of Moses (the Torah), according to an old division, the first of the three parts of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44).
3. The entire Old Testament (John 10:34), several times also called the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17; Matthew 7:12; Matthew 11:13).

God gave the Sinaitic law to His people Israel after their liberation from Egypt. With its juridical, ceremonial and moral commandments it was from the beginning meant for that people only (Deuteronomy 4:8; Romans 9:4), just as the Old Covenant was only made with Israel. Christians often overlook this fact. The law of Sinai was a God-given system of claims on, and promises for, His earthly people. The moral laws were, so to speak, God's minimal claims on natural, unregenerate men. The ceremonial laws regulated the worship and service of the people and were at the same time a shadow of things to come which became reality in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

Since the law was from God, it was holy and just and good (Romans 7:12). If the Israelites had been able to keep it, it would have led them to life and righteousness (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 5:29). But this was impossible since natural man lacks the power to fulfil God's claims. Thus the law could only bring knowledge of sin without imparting the power to overcome it (Romans 3:20). It revealed sin and this led to death and condemnation (Romans 7:10; Romans 8:3). The Lord Jesus took upon Himself the curse of the law when He died upon the cross. In this way He has redeemed from its curse all those who believe in Him. Every believing Jew is therefore no longer under the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13), and he is also free from the law because Christ is the end of the law for righteousness (Romans 6:14; Romans 7:4; Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:24-25).

It is contrary to God's revealed will if Christians put themselves under the law. Usually they do not mean the whole law including its judicial and ceremonial orders, but only its moral commandments, i.e. the 10 commandments. For the observance of these the reason given is that a Christian is not allowed to kill, steal, etc. But a believer will avoid these and all other sins, not because he observes the law, but because he has received a new life and possesses the Holy Spirit as a source of strength which enables him to go beyond the minimal requirements of the law.¹

Yet again and again it is taught in Christendom that although the law was given to the people of Israel, it is still valid for all peoples and therefore also for Christians, since God would not operate a double standard for mankind. Apart from Matthew 5:17-48, Scriptures such as Deuteronomy 4:5-8, Isaiah 2:2-3 and Romans 3:19 are quoted as reason, but, among other things, history and prophecy are being mixed up. God is unchangeable in His nature but His relationships to men are not at all times and in all circumstances the same.

Destroy-Fulfil In Matthew 5:17 the Lord Jesus spoke to those belonging to the earthly people of God. His disciples and the multitudes of men surrounding Him were Jews. The kingdom of heaven had been promised to the "sons of the kingdom." Therefore He first turned only to this people (Matthew 15:24). As we saw when considering the beatitudes, we can apply His words also to the present time of "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." But we must not forget that the Lord Jesus first of all addressed only His own people, to whom God had once, at Sinai, given His law.

"Think not that I am come to make void the law or the prophets; I am not come to make void, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). The preaching of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, and his call to repentance, as well as the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, announced something completely new. But this did not mean that everything that preceded this had become invalid. The law and the prophets (i.e. the entire Old Testament) were not destroyed by Christ. Quite the opposite, He was come to fulfil them. "Fulfilling" does not only mean obedience to the Word of God, because this could only have referred to the law, and not to the prophets. "Fulfilling" therefore means here "to confirm" and "to bring to fulfilment." The entire Old Testament testified of Christ and He was its fulfilment (John 5:39).

¹ The fact that the literal fulfilment of the fourth commandment, which demands the observance of the Sabbath, is not required, is a peculiar inconsistency of Christian supporters of the law. This shows that one does not want to put oneself completely under the system of the law, but in this point resorts to the grace of God.

Iota And Tittle

"For verily I say unto you, Until the heaven and the earth pass away, one iota or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all come to pass" (Matthew 5:18; cf. Luke 16:17). In this verse the Lord Jesus speaks only of the law. This does not, as in Matthew 5:17, mean the five books of Moses, but the commandments of the law of Sinai.

Heaven and earth will pass away after the end of the thousand-year reign of the Lord Jesus (2 Peter 3:11). Then there will be a new creation with new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). But before this, during the millennium, Israel as a people will be accepted again by God on the ground of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-35; Ezekiel 36:24-27). God will put

His law into their inward parts and write it on their hearts, and Israel, in contrast to previous times as well as today, will be happy to observe it. Also the instructions for the feasts and the sacrifices will again be followed. But instead of being apart and separated from the nations, as previously, Israel will be the centre and model for all peoples (Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 14:16). The iota is the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet (like the yod in Hebrew), and the tittle is a hook-shaped mark which in Hebrew distinguishes various letters which would otherwise be the same. If according to the words of our Lord not even the smallest parts of the written law will pass away, how much less the instructions once given by God! What a testimony to the verbal inspiration of this part of the Word of God, the Bible! Nothing of the law will pass away until it has been fulfilled in the millennium in a way that has never before been the case in the history of Israel. The words "till all be fulfilled" (cf. Luke 21:32) point to the future time of the glorious reign of Christ as King, in which all the Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled and all the words of the law will be observed.

01.05. The Sermon on the Mount (13)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (13)

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 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 (Matthew 5:19-20) Contempt For The Word Of God The Lord Jesus had explained His own relationship to the law and the prophets in Matthew 5:17-18. The word He uses here, "Whosoever," now introduces a general and very serious appeal. The meaning of this verse is not easy to grasp. What are the "least commandments"? Does the Lord here differentiate between the moral law (the ten commandments) and the ceremonial law, or does he refer to the iota (A.V.-jot) and the tittle of the law (Matthew 5:18)? And lastly, does He teach here that the law of Sinai is still valid for the Christian? Before we try to find answers to these questions we have to remember that the Lord Jesus here speaks to His own people and had not yet been rejected by them. When He said in Matthew 5:17 that He was not come to make void the law or the prophets but to fulfil, this must have consequences for His audience and the Jewish nation. But while the Lord Jesus said of Himself that He had come to fulfil the law and the prophets, He now speaks of practising the commandments.

Among the Jews there were teachers of the law who considered their own traditions more important than the commandments of God. He later said to them, the scribes and Pharisees, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matthew 15:6). Just as He adds there: "Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13), He says to the Jews here that everyone who thinks he can do away with any of the law, which then was still valid, would be called the least in His kingdom. Comparing the two Scriptures we see that He speaks of mere professors who outwardly take a place in the kingdom of the heavens but have not really "entered in" (Matthew 5:20). At His appearing in glory these will be removed from His kingdom through judgment (Matthew 13:41). As long as the law was valid according to God's will, i.e. until Christ's death (cf. Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:24; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14), it had to be observed by the Jews, as Deuteronomy 27:26 says: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them." The scribes, who counted altogether 613 commandments in the Old Testament, distinguished between what in their opinion were important and less important laws. The Lord also points out a difference when He calls the commandment to love God the great and first commandment, although He immediately puts the commandment to love one's neighbour on the same level (Matthew 22:36-40). In Matthew 23:23 He accuses the scribes and Pharisees of leaving the more important matters of the law aside-judgment and mercy and faith-while putting great emphasis on applying the law of the tithes to such little things as garden herbs. The scribes and Pharisees thus, on the one hand set their human traditions above the laws of God, and on the other insisted on outward observance of the smallest details of the law. But the Lord distinguishes between the mere outward observance of the law and the attitude

of the heart towards the commandments of God, which is far more important. It is the ordinances which commanded love towards God and one's neighbour which especially show that it is impossible for natural man to lead a life that is pleasing to God and that not the law but faith is the only way to God.

We who are not under law but under grace and the leading of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:18) can receive spiritual exhortations from the Old Testament laws of God. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). But it is also possible that the Lord, when speaking here about "commandments," was not thinking of the Sinaitic law but of His own new commandments which He was just about to announce in the "sermon on the mount." Later, in Matthew 28:20, He told His disciples to teach what He had commanded them. Here in Matthew 5:19-20 He no longer speaks of the "law," as in Matthew 5:17-18, but of "these... commandments." They might still have seemed "least" to His audience, yet they were the guidelines for the behaviour of the disciples of Christ in the kingdom of the heavens. This explanation is supported by the words of the Lord in Matthew 24:35 : "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." The law may pass away with the end of the present creation (Matthew 5:18) but the words of the Lord shall never pass away. The end of Matthew 5:19 again shows the contrast with the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord later says of them: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matthew 23:3). In Matthew 5:19 He links His promise to the agreement between actions and doctrine.

Righteousness

"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" (Matthew 5:20). Since the time of the Babylonian captivity a large collection of interpretations and ordinances has been added by the Talmud, in addition to the law. In the New Testament these are called "the tradition of the elders." The scribes were those best acquainted with the law and these human ordinances, whereas the Pharisees were their strictest observers. In Matthew 23:1-39 the Lord Jesus utters a sevenfold "woe" over these men and their behaviour which was marked by egoism and emphasising outward appearance (Matthew 23:5-7; Matthew 23:25-28. Matthew 23:14 is omitted in the J.N.D. Trans.). They might appear pious and righteous before men but before God their attitude could not stand. This is why the Lord says here: "except your righteousness shall exceed..." Obviously He does not mean the righteousness of God which is imputed to those believing on Him. The Lord Jesus, in the "sermon on the mount," does not preach the gospel to the lost, but speaks to His disciples. "Your righteousness" therefore is the practical righteousness shown in the lives of those who have been justified by faith in Him and who follow Him by doing God's will (Matthew 7:21). This is practical righteousness and the only one that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. For the real, born again believer, to enter into the kingdom of the heavens means to be united with the Lord as a true disciple and to be owned by Him as such. The New Testament speaks at least 14 times of entering into the kingdom.¹ Some of these Scriptures clearly indicate that this is something in the future, while others are not clear as to the time. But all of them show that entering into the kingdom is reserved for the true disciples of Jesus. Unrighteous persons shall not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9).

1 Matthew 5:20; Matthew 7:21; Matthew 18:3; Matthew 19:23; Matthew 21:31; Matthew 23:13; Mark 9:47; Mark 10:23-24; Luke 16:16; Luke 18:24; John 3:5; Acts 14:22; 2 Peter 1:11. A mere religious profession and the doing of certain "good works," even if they leave a deep impression on other people, are not sufficient to be able to stand before God. But he who feels sincere sorrow for his sins and repents, who believes that the Lord Jesus has suffered for him and his sins the righteous punishment of God on the cross of Calvary, who then leads a new life in faith, following the Lord and being obedient to the Scriptures, he will be one of the righteous that shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father (Matthew 13:43).

01.06. The Sermon on the Mount (14)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (14) Hatred Among Brethren (Matthew 5:21-26) In Matthew 5:21-48 the Lord Jesus gives six examples in which He warns against wrong interpretation and application of the commandments by the scribes and Pharisees. He does not set aside the law as such but in this way shows His disciples various important details.

Firstly, He reminds them that many of the commandments which God gave to Israel only referred to outward conduct.

Secondly, He points out that by their interpretations the scribes had narrowed down the application of these commandments so that sometimes little remained of their true meaning.

Thirdly, He shows them that it was not only the outward keeping of the commandments that mattered but the desire of the heart to live in accordance with God's thoughts and to His glory. The sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill" The Lord Jesus begins the first of the six examples with the words, "Ye have heard that it was said to the ancients" (A.V.-"them of old time"). The "ancients" here are not only the contemporaries of Moses, since the following text contains an addition to the original commandment. The audience of the Lord Jesus had heard two things: First, that the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," was given by God, and second, what they knew had probably been added by the scribes since the Babylonian captivity, "and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment." It would seem that "judgment" here means the judges and officers mentioned for example in Deuteronomy 16:18 who were to be appointed in every town in Israel.

"But I say unto you" The Lord Jesus now sets His own words over against this commandment with its human addition: "But I say unto you." These words occur five times in this part of the fifth chapter. He speaks with the same authority as the One who had once given the law, for He is the Son of God. Yet He does not set aside the law by His words but extends its application to man's condition of heart. Whilst the commandment only forbade the extreme manifestation of hatred, i.e. killing a person, the Lord shows that anger with a brother (which means the Jewish "brother" here) deserves the same punishment as killing itself.

If in the opinion of the Rabbis only the murderer was subject to this judgment, the Lord's words show that the one who was angry with his brother for no reason was subject to the same judgment. The one who called his brother "Raca" (Aramaic: "reka"-fool, lunatic) was subject to be called before the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish court at that time), and whosoever should say "fool" was to be subject to hell ("Gehenna"): eternal damnation. If the last of these three sins, which hardly differ from one another, led to eternal damnation, then the others would do so as well. God does not look at the outward appearance but into our hearts. The following two examples in Matthew 5:23-26 then deal with the right condition of heart. The first one shows how necessary it is to have a good conscience and the second one teaches us that time for repentance is limited.

First example: "Be reconciled to thy brother"

"Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). We should remember that the Lord Jesus was addressing His disciples and still had the sacrificial system of the temple before Him. Nevertheless, His words have something to say to us too.

It cannot be pleasing to God if we come before Him in worship without having first put our relationship with our brother in order. How easily relationships can be broken! Perhaps it was only a misunderstanding, or I may have deliberately hurt a child of God, a brother or sister. Anyway, he or she has something against me. The Lord says in this case, "Go." The disturbed relationship between believers can only be put in order again by reconciliation and this is unlikely to be achieved without an honest confession. Only then can brotherly love flow again freely. Our fellowship with our God and Father is then restored as well: "And then come and offer thy gift."

Second example: Use the time

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say to thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing" (Matthew 5:25-26). In the past it was common to leave a convicted debtor in prison until all his debts were paid (cf. Matthew 18:30; Matthew 18:34). The Lord says here in symbolical language: "There is the opportunity to be reconciled with the adverse party in a peaceful manner before it is too late, even though one might find this difficult. But the time for reconciliation will cease. The one who is not prepared to act in this way, however, will have to bear the consequences." The very serious nature of the Lord's teaching in this place becomes clear when comparing the passage with a similar one in Matthew 18:34-35.

Wrong spiritual applications of the latter part of this example (Matthew 18:26, cf. Luke 12:57-59) have led to much confusion, of which the doctrine of "purgatory" is probably the saddest proof. Nowhere in Scripture is it taught that a man must suffer a temporal punishment of God, after his death, in order to be eternally saved. No; once death has come in the eternal destiny of the soul is decided: one is either eternally and perfectly saved or eternally lost! This verse therefore can only refer to circumstances on earth.

These words of the Lord Jesus are in agreement with various Old Testament prophecies concerning the people of Israel. When the future time of Jacob's trouble has come to an end the word of the prophet Isaiah will be fulfilled: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1-2). When their King and Saviour was with them to deliver them the Jews were not prepared to receive Him or to respond to the call to repentance. Therefore God had to reject this unbelieving people (Romans 11:25). The setting aside of Israel, which will climax in the great tribulation, will last until He has completed His whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem (Isaiah 10:12; Zechariah 13:8-9).

01.07. The Sermon on the Mount (15)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (15) Thou shalt not commit adultery (Matthew 5:27-30)

Following upon the other references to the law, the Lord Jesus now quotes the seventh commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). Marriage is something into which two persons enter for life, and ever since creation it has enjoyed God's special care. According to the New Testament it is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His assembly, marked by divine love and human devotion. But what has become of marriage through sin! It was not the will of God that Lamech, Abraham, Jacob, Solomon and other men of the Old Testament should have several wives at the same time, and this only brought distress into their families. How serious was the adultery David committed with Bathsheba! And how are things today with regard to matrimonial morals-not only in the world, but also among Christians? In recent decades Biblical standards in society have been systematically done away with in this area too. In God's sight immoral behaviour is so abominable that Paul had to write to Ephesus: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Ephesians 5:3). This means that we should not mention these things frivolously and so make little of them. The Bible speaks very clearly as to God's judgment about these sins. Holy Scripture not only calls prostitution fornication, but all extramarital intercourse, even where there may be the intention to get married, and even if it is done only once (cf. Genesis 34:1-31; Genesis 38:1-30). In the world today the word fornication is only used in connection with the first meaning. In the New Testament, however, extramarital intercourse in general is called fornication, that of married persons is called adultery, and both are condemned as abominable sin (Matthew 15:19; 1 Corinthians 6:9; Hebrews 13:4). In the Old Testament, adultery, unfaithfulness towards the spouse for the satisfaction of lust, was to be dealt with most severely. According to the law of Sinai this sin had to be punished with death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24). In the first place the law contained God's regulations for the outward and social life of His earthly people, and for this reason only the accomplished offence was to be punished, even though the tenth commandment forbade the coveting of the neighbour's wife (as well as all his possessions. Exodus 20:17). If a Jew kept the commandment not to commit adultery, he was acting according to God's will and contributed towards the maintenance of the people's community according to God's order. Fear of the punishment threatened certainly contributed to this. However, the mere outward observance of this and all the other commandments could not justify him before God.

"But I say unto you" In His own authority the Lord Jesus contrasts the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," with His words, "But I say unto you." He does not speak against an interpretation which is more favourable to man and a weakening of the divine commandment, (unlike Romans 2:22), and certainly not against the commandment itself, for He was not come to destroy but to fulfil. For that reason the Lord now says, "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Because of the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, the Jews thought the mere outward observance of the law was the way to be justified before God. Here, the Lord points to the

human heart and shows that adultery has its source there. This is not a "spiritualisation of the law," as is sometimes said. He reveals for the first time something which had to become clear by experience to every honest Israelite, namely, that everyone who endeavoured to keep the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," had within themselves those very lusts which led to the actions forbidden by God, and had not the strength to overcome them. The lusts were even provoked by the commandment: "... for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7-11). The law of Sinai did contain commandments directed at the attitude and heart, for example the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house," etc. (Exodus 20:17). Other passages have a similar bearing: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart... but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself..." (Leviticus 19:17-18); "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart..." (Deuteronomy 6:5). However, most by far of the commandments regulated the outward conduct of the Israelites.

Adultery in the heart The Lord Jesus now explains that before God it is not just the accomplished act that is sin, but the looking with lust on a woman, for this is adultery in the heart. The word "adultery" shows that either the man or both are married. Nevertheless, no unmarried believer should think that these words of the Lord have nothing to say to him. The Lord is not speaking here about accidental, unintentional looks which can hardly be avoided, but about the conscious covetous looking: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her..." The intentional look is therefore preceded by the sinful thought in the heart. This distinction is very important. Nowadays we can hardly move in this world without, unintentionally, continually witnessing the moral depravity of our time. We are easily defiled by this. The intentional covetous and sinful look is something completely different. No Christian can avoid unclean thoughts rising up in his mind but they only become sin when instead of turning away from them he consciously gives himself to them. If covetous looks and unclean lines of thought are sin, then it is also sin if believing women and girls cause and provoke this by their dress and behaviour. The more casual and free contact between the sexes, especially with the younger generation and the negative example of most of their peers of the world, can lead to carelessness and great dangers. God-fearing Job said: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1). However, there are also over-sensitive and over-anxious Christians whose consciences are heavily burdened by involuntary looks and thoughts. I would like to remind such of the well-known words of Martin Luther which he wrote on this verse: "I cannot prevent a bird flying over my head, but what I can prevent is it building a nest in my hair or biting off my nose."

"And if thy right eye offend thee"

How serious the Lord judged the lustful looks and thoughts to be becomes obvious from His next words: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). In the next verse He says nearly the same with regard to the right hand (cf. Matthew 18:8). The Lord is not calling for self-mutilation or asceticism in these words. The Creator will never demand that His creature mutilate the body he has received from Himself. Even if someone plucked out both his eyes, the lust would still remain in his heart. Rather, the Lord here extends the teaching to the question of self-judgment. The mention of the right hand points to this.

Self-judgment The eye, the light of the body, can rightly be called the "mirror of the soul."¹ Furthermore, in the Bible the right eye is often described as something very precious (1 Samuel 11:2; Zechariah 11:17). The right hand, the "organ of action," is mentioned much more often in the Holy Scriptures.² The right eye and the right hand are symbols of attitudes and actions, but at the same time also of the precious and important things in human life. If these offend us, i.e. are a cause of sin or stumbling, then we should not even spare the most precious and important things in our lives, but honestly and strictly judge ourselves, and if necessary separate from them. Even if they are not bad in themselves, this does not mean that they are not dangerous!

¹ Cf. Matthew 6:22-23; Proverbs 21:4; Ecclesiastes 11:9; Ezekiel 6:9; Ezekiel 18:12; Ezekiel 20:8; ² Peter 2:14.

² For example Genesis 48:17; Exodus 29:20; Psalms 73:23; Psalms 121:5; Revelation 1:16; Revelation 10:5; Revelation 13:16. The Word of God again and again points out that there are only two pathways on earth and two termini, either following the Lord Jesus with glory as the end, or a life of sin which leads to hell. It is the same here in the "sermon on the mount." The apostle Paul was a disciple of the Lord, who recognised the consequences of completely surrendering and following the Lord and who put this into practice: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:27). He wrote to the assembly at Corinth: "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers... shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

01.08. The Sermon on the Mount (16)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (16) Divorce and Remarriage (Matthew 5:31-32) In the "Sermon on the Mount" the Lord Jesus addresses many subjects which are of as much interest now as they were then. This also applies to the subject of divorce, a problem with which even true Christians are being confronted more and more. In Matthew 5:27-30 He had spoken about the sin of adultery and also condemned carnal coveting. Matthew 5:31-32, in which He speaks about divorce and remarriage, stand in close connection with this passage. Not only adultery and the preceding carnal coveting are contrary to God's thoughts concerning marriage, but also divorce. The common main thought-the relationship between man and woman-and the fact that adultery is mentioned twice in Matthew 5:32, indicates a connection. On the other hand the introductory words, "It was said" and, "But I say unto you," show that the Lord here again confronts the old traditions with His Word and will (cf. Matthew 5:27, Matthew 5:27, Matthew 5:33, Matthew 5:38, Matthew 5:43). And yet, some view Matthew 5:31-32 as a kin of appendix to the previous passage. The writing of divorcement The Lord Jesus does not refer to a commandment from the Old Testament, but to a habit of the Jews which was likely to have existed before the giving of the law at Sinai-that of the writing of a letter of divorce. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement."

It is said in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 : "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife, Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD." The commandment in these verses is therefore that a woman who remarried following a divorce from her first husband, could under no circumstances return to him. But the fact that a writing of divorcement is mentioned twice does in no way mean that God commanded divorce or even approved of it. In Matthew 19:8 the Lord Jesus explains to the Pharisees that Moses only allowed them to put away their wives because of their hardness of heart. He adds, "But from the beginning (i.e. according to the creatorial order) it was not so." When the people of Israel received the law at Sinai, the habit of divorce by a writing of divorcement obviously already existed. Moses left it like that, perhaps even for the protection of the wife from a hard-hearted and malicious husband who could cause great harm to her if they continued to live together.

Yet from this allowance in Deuteronomy 24:1-22 the Jews had derived a permission for divorce and a commandment for giving a writing of divorcement. We can see this from the Pharisees' question in Matthew 19:7 : "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" The only disagreement among them was about the reasons for divorce. One school of rabbis taught that "uncleanness" in Deuteronomy 24:1 was adultery or some other form

of immoral behaviour, while other rabbis accepted anything a husband did not like about his wife as a reason for divorce. In Matthew 19:3 the Pharisees seem to refer to these disagreements among their teachers, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

Marriage is a covenant for life

It is with the following serious words that the Lord Jesus opposes this thoughtlessness concerning divorce, thoughtlessness among the Jews then and within Christendom today: "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:32).

First we must note that these words do not only apply to the man, but also to the woman. In Mark 10:11-12 the Lord expressly mentions the woman in the same context. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery."

According to God's will marriage is indissoluble. The Lord Jesus says this clearly in Matthew 19:6 : "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This not only applies to marriages made "in the Lord," but to every marriage. Already in the Old Testament God had said to the Jews who were divorced from their wives, "For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that He hateth putting away" (Malachi 2:16).

According to the creatorial order of God every marriage, not only that of Christians, is for life. Divorce is in every case a result of sin and a departure from the divine standard. In our times, when between a quarter and a third of marriages end in divorce, the godlessness of the world becomes apparent in this area as well. Divorce among Christians is therefore an especially sad evidence of conformity to the world.

I therefore put forward some very serious advice for young believers. Through prayer and searching the Word of God seek first to be sure whether your intended marriage can really be entered into "in the Lord," i.e. in accordance with His will (1 Corinthians 7:39). A marriage entered into without much thought is just as valid before God as any other marriage and must be honoured by both partners. "Let marriage be held every way in honour, and the bed be undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers will God judge" (Hebrews 13:4, J.N.D. Trans.).

Divorce leads to adultery With one sentence the Lord sweeps to one side the subtle explanations of the scribes: "Whosoever shall put away his wife,... causeth her to commit adultery." Whatever the faults and weaknesses of the wife may be, he who puts her away, i.e. divorces her, exposes her to the danger of being bound to another husband afterwards. The Lord here calls such a relationship adultery. This implies that the first marriage is still valid before God. The marriage entered into before God and man is not violated merely by a divorce carried out before men (i.e. at a court), but by the sexual union with another partner afterwards-even when this takes place in a new marriage! It hardly needs to be said that this also applies to the spouse who "puts away" the other, i.e. divorces him/her.

It becomes evident from the last part of His explanations that the Lord does not only speak about extra-marital relations after divorce: "and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery." According to God's thoughts he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery

because he violates a marriage existing before Him. In agreement with these words of the Lord, the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband. But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). The only exception so far we have left out of our consideration is the fact that the Lord Jesus here gives room for one exception, which clearly excludes any other exception: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication..." Yet this one and only exception is missing in Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:1-40 does not mention it either. We only find it again in Matthew 19:9, albeit in a slightly different wording ("except it be for fornication"). The Lord does not say that divorce is unavoidable in the case of one partner committing fornication, but only that in such a case the remarriage of the other partner after a divorce is not adultery.

According to Scripture, the sin of fornication not only refers to prostitution, but to any pre- or extramarital intercourse. We saw this earlier when we considered Matthew 5:27-30. Fornication is also adultery when at least one of the persons involved is married. Here the general term, "fornication," is used, although the verse deals especially with adultery. It seems rather far-fetched to interpret "fornication" here as implying immoral behaviour before the marriage, of which the husband learns only after the wedding.

According to the law, adulterers were to be put to death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22; John 8:4-5). When adultery was merely suspected there was another way, involving "Bitter water that causeth the curse" (Numbers 5:11-31). Yet in practice the Jews had got into the habit of putting away where adultery was not proven but only suspected (cf. Matthew 1:19). When the Pharisees and Scribes once confronted the Lord with an adulteress, He in His grace did not condemn the obviously repenting woman, but said to her, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Here we see again that the Lord Jesus in His kingdom does not demand the literal fulfilling of the law of Sinai, but rather seeks that His own might follow Him genuinely and in a wholehearted way. For that reason He does not speak about the death penalty for the woman who had committed fornication, or more precisely, adultery. He warns His disciples about divorce and the sins caused by it. At the same time He in His grace makes room for the possible exception, that a marriage can be dissolved before God when it has been attacked in its spiritual, mental and physical unity by the terrible sin of adultery. The latter is not a commandment, but an exception by which God meets the defrauded partner in his spiritual or emotional weakness. However, it should not be forgotten that the sin of adultery can and should be forgiven if an honest confession has been made, and does not necessarily have to lead to divorce.

How serious and clear are the words of our Lord with regard to behaviour in His kingdom! The apostle Paul also writes that fornicators and adulterers will have no part in the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5). Could it be any other way than that His revealed will is done in His kingdom? Though the world under Satan's dominion rebels against the blessed commandments of God, it should still be the deep desire of all true disciples of Jesus not only to know His will, but also to do it.

01.09. The Sermon on the Mount (17)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (17) To Take an Oath (Matthew 5:33-37) In the time and society in which we live, swearing, i.e. taking an oath, is uncommon. It is only in a court of law or in other very limited circumstances that an oath is required. In our everyday lives taking an oath is not something many of us encounter. But in the "Sermon on the Mount," His first great discourse in Matthew's Gospel, the Lord Jesus mentions this subject. He does so again later, in more detail, in Matthew 23:16-22. There must be a reason for this. The Lord has a certain aim for all His words. He says in Matthew 12:36 that, in the day of judgment, men shall give account before God for every idle word. If we keep this in mind while considering this passage, the words of the Lord Jesus on this point will have something to say to us too. The law and swearing The Lord begins this fourth passage in the series of His examples (Matthew 5:21-26; Matthew 5:21-26; Matthew 5:27-30; Matthew 5:31-32; Matthew 5:33-37) with the words: "Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths." As in the previous example concerning divorce, this passage does not deal with an express commandment of God, but with one of the traditions of the elders and scribes, most of which arose after the Babylonian captivity. Although these were meant to explain the divine commandments, some, in the course of time, became more important to the Jews than the Word of God itself. Therefore the Lord had to say to them: "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men," and, "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:8-9). The third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain," and also the ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," contained the moral basis for the command not to swear falsely, i.e. to commit perjury. But there are other passages in the Old Testament in which the people of Israel are warned of thoughtless swearing. Leviticus 19:12 says: "And ye shall not swear by My name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God" (cf. Numbers 30:3-4; Deuteronomy 23:22; Zechariah 8:17). On the other hand there were several occasions where, according to the law, an oath had to be taken and in such cases God required of His people that they swear by His name (Deuteronomy 6:13; cf. Exodus 22:11; Leviticus 5:1; Numbers 5:19-21). The oath then not only served as confirmation of the truth, but was also a solemn vow in the knowledge of the presence of Jehovah, who had once Himself taken an oath before Abraham (Genesis 22:16; Hebrews 6:13-20).

All this is summarised in the declaration, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."

Thoughtless swearing The Jews loved to swear on all possible occasions in order to emphasise their words, and in this connection they used all kinds of impressive phrases. They swore by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, by the temple, etc. Obviously, the scribes thought that only such oaths in which the name of God was expressly mentioned were "real" oaths and therefore binding for the swearer. In addition they made further distinctions between the temple and the gold of the temple, the altar and the gift on the altar (Matthew 23:16-22). The thoughtless swearing of

oaths, vows and promises, which were not kept, was hardly considered sin by the Jews, as long as the name of God was not mentioned. As we look into our own hearts do we not see there the "divers weights" of which we read in Proverbs (Proverbs 20:10; Proverbs 20:23)? Do we not sometimes distinguish between "everyday" conversation, (as if this did not require the weighing of every single word), so-called "white lies" (which nevertheless are lies), and those occasions which are particularly serious, when we have to give our "word of honour" as we say? How many promises and declarations made, even by Christians, would be left unsaid if we kept in mind that we must give account of every idle word we speak.

"Swear not at all"

Human doctrines, such as those of the scribes, will in some way or other always be welcome to the flesh. Here something is taken away, there something is added to, the Word of God. This not only deprives it of its sharpness and power, but hinders the direct, personal application to the soul of this word of grace. The Lord Jesus opposes such human teaching with His divine, "But I say unto you, Swear not at all." The disciples of the Lord Jesus must learn that it is not the torrent of words and excessive affirmations and repetitions which give weight to their words, but that God delights in "truth in the inward parts" (Psalms 51:6), as well as outwardly. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Wherefore putting away lying (i.e. everything that is false and untrue), speak every man truth with his neighbour" (Ephesians 4:25). In the words that follow the Lord refers to the various phrases the Jews used to confirm their many oaths. "Swear not at all: neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." It was a wrong idea to think one could happily use these substitute phrases, as long as one did not mention the name of God. Heaven is God's throne, the earth is God's footstool (Isaiah 66:1) and Jerusalem is the city of God and of His King (Psalms 48:1-2). He who swore by his head, i.e. wanted to deposit his life as security against his oath, ought well to remember that God alone is Lord over life and death, and that he himself does not even have the power to change the colour of one hair of his head.

"But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil." If our words are honest and true, they need no other confirmation than "yes" or "no." The sense of this double mention of yes and no becomes clear from a very similar passage in James 5:12 : "Yes" should really mean "Yes," and "No" should really mean "No." All that is more than that is only a sign that one generally does not take the truth too seriously, and therefore "cometh of evil." Is a Christian allowed to swear?

Many of the old church fathers like Justin, Irenaeus, Origen and Jerome, understood the Lord's words, "swear not at all," to mean that a Christian ought not to take an oath under any circumstances. In addition many sects like the Quakers and Jehovah's Witnesses reject the taking of any kind of oath. It is therefore understandable that children of God repeatedly ask, "Is a Christian allowed to swear?"

If the oath only serves as confirmation of ones own words, because one fears that they are not believed, it is not allowed. As children of God, we should always speak the truth (Ephesians 4:25). This should not need any additional confirmation.

If an oath is required by the government or before a court, it is different. In the world, lying is nearly the order of the day. It is therefore very understandable if, for example in court, evidence is given under oath. This underlines in a serious way the search for the truth. Even if the government does not acknowledge God, the Christian ought to respect the powers that be as coming from God (Romans 13:1 ff). In such a case a Christian may take an oath. A vow, which civil servants or soldiers may have to make, should be considered in the same way. When our Lord stood before the council, He did not reply to any of the false accusations made against Him. But when the High Priest put Him under oath with the words, "I adjure Thee by the living God," He was no longer silent, but submitted to the authorities ordained by God and testified of the truth, "Thou hast said" (Matthew 26:63 ff; cf. Leviticus 5:1).

01.10. The Sermon on the Mount (18)

The Sermon on the Mount (18) An Eye for an Eye (Matthew 5:38-42)

Fair Requit The "law of requital" is the fifth of those the Lord Jesus refers to from the law and the traditions of those of old. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). This well known expression of requital is often considered as characteristic of the law of Moses. However, this is too simple a way of looking at the law which had been given by God Himself on Mount Sinai, and which Paul considers not only just, but also holy and good (Romans 7:12). This law contained moral directions for the life of each Israelite, ceremonial directions (i.e. the laws of the offerings) for the children of Israel to serve God and also legal directions to regulate the daily life of the people. The principle of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" belongs to the latter group. It is not a principle for the conscience of a particular individual but a legal direction for the authorities and judges of Israel. This is clear from Exodus 21:22 and Deuteronomy 19:18 where the judges are expressly mentioned. The direction was based on the principle of absolute fairness in requiting the deed and was to be a warning and deterrent to the people (Deuteronomy 19:20). That the principle, "an eye for an eye," was only valid before the judges in Israel is also seen in the fact that vengeance was not permitted to the Jew. "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18). It is not correct to suppose the Lord Jesus was referring to it because the Pharisees might have allowed it.

Grace and Mercy The Lord Jesus does not speak against a false exposition of this part of the law, but He sets it against a totally different principle: "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." The Lord Jesus in His grace does not speak of a less harsh requital or renunciation of requital. He teaches the exact opposite of requital: not to recompense evil for evil but to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:17-21). In this world which is full of injustice, the disciples of the Lord Jesus are to exhibit the same attitude of grace and mercy which their Lord, the rejected King, has shown in His life. We have already seen this in the Beatitudes which show us the features of those who have entered the Kingdom of God by new birth.

Nothing could show more clearly than these words of our Lord that the "Sermon on the Mount" was never intended to be a programme for governing authorities in the world. What chaos would arise if, in a society which consists mostly of sinners, grace instead of justice were to rule! But the Lord Jesus did not at all intend to do away with justice in this world. Romans 13:1; Romans 13:4 tell us that "the powers that be are ordained of God" and that "he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The natural man, that is, one who is not born again, cannot live his life by these guidelines. It is true that we find philosophical schools of thought down through history (i.e. the Stoics in Greece) which demanded of men a certain attitude of calmness.

But this was often linked with arrogance and pride and in reality cannot be attained by human efforts.

Some Christians would like to take away a little of the sharpness (for the flesh) of these words of the Lord Jesus and to practice them only in certain circumstances. They seek to prove their view from John 18:22-23, saying that the Lord Jesus rebuked the officer but did not turn the other cheek to him. They add that on certain occasions in the Book of Acts Paul claimed his rights as a Roman (Acts 16:35-40; Acts 25:11). But the Lord Jesus put His justified rebuke in the form of a mere question, and bore all other abuses silently (Matthew 27:27-31; John 19:1-3). It also remains to be seen if the attitude of the apostle Paul in Philippi and before Festus was according to the will of the Lord. Some argue that a Christian ought to report injustice done to him in order to prevent criminality. But as Christians in this present evil world, from which we have been delivered according to Galatians 1:4, we are not called to seek justice for ourselves. Of course, we must not renounce our duty in relation to others if the authorities so demand it (i.e. as a witness in court, etc.) We must submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, as Peter writes in his epistle (1 Peter 2:13).

Nevertheless the Lord says: "Resist not evil." The word used for "evil" here (Greek: poneros) does not mean Satan (as in Matthew 13:19; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 2:13), but it is not very clear whether the correct translation is "evil," that is sin (Luke 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:22), or "the evil," that is the offender (Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 5:13). As everywhere in the New Testament we are told here too not to resist and not to seek justice for ourselves when evil is done to us by men of the world. We are, by grace, able and called to follow in the steps of our Lord "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23; compare also 1 Peter 2:19; 1 Peter 3:14; 1 Peter 3:17; 1 Peter 4:13). As to our attitude to believers Paul's words to the Corinthians are still valid (1 Corinthians 6:7): "Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?"

How is it with us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus? Do we not have to confess how little we practise this mind and attitude of suffering and love when we are wronged? Yet our God desires humility, meekness, long-suffering, grace and mercy to be reflected in the lives of those He has redeemed and who profess to follow His Son as Lord. He wants to and will give us the strength to learn of Him, who says, "learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Four examples The Lord Jesus uses four examples to make His words clear to us. The first one is: "But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." At that time a slap in the face was deeply insulting and was even more humiliating if it was given with the back of the hand and therefore landed on the right cheek. According to the Jewish Talmud this offence "weighed double" compared to an ordinary slap. The disciples of the Lord Jesus ought not to look for reparation before men but to suffer offences (cf. 1 Peter 2:20). We are reminded of the words Isaiah spoke prophetically concerning our Lord: "I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).

"And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." In this second example we see that the Lord does not allow different guidelines for public life and life in the personal sphere. Under the law it was forbidden to take as pledge a poor debtor's cloke

overnight. The debtor had to have his cloke returned so that he might have a covering for the night (Exodus 22:26; Deuteronomy 24:12-13). This is probably that to which the Lord Jesus was referring. He instructs His disciples not to resist and to give even more than what is demanded. This is grace. In the parallel reference in Luke 6:29 we find the sequence is reversed-first the cloke is mentioned and then the coat: "and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also." The taking away mentioned there may be by an act of robbery. The Lord then gives the third example: "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." The word used for "compel" (greek: angareuo) means originally to requisition for a service. It is thus that Simon of Cyrene was compelled to bear the cross of the Lord Jesus. So even if a service is undesired and unpleasant, the disciple should not only fulfil it willingly, but do even more than what is required. The last example shows once more that the Lord Jesus is speaking to the hearts of His disciples: "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." Even under the law the Jew was forbidden to lend anything to his brother upon usury (Leviticus 25:35 ff; Deuteronomy 23:19); rather, he was to open his hand wide to him (Deuteronomy 15:7-8). The Lord Jesus here makes no restrictions regarding giving and lending. For God, the great Giver, has not spared His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. He, who with Him, freely gives us all things, loves a cheerful giver (Romans 8:32; 2 Corinthians 9:7).

01.11. The Sermon on the Mount (19)

The Sermon on the Mount (19) Love your Enemies (Matthew 5:43-48) The Lord starts the last of His six examples from the law again with the words: "Ye have heard that it hath been said..." He does not once say: "It is written," not even when He quotes a commandment of the Old Testament such as in Matthew 5:27 and Matthew 5:38. The Lord Jesus did not want to put aside the inspired commandments of God with His sixfold reply, "But I say unto you." Rather, He intended to bring to light and judge the false interpretations and distortions of the scribes and "the tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:3) which they esteemed so highly. Above all the Lord Jesus showed His disciples the inner attitude and outward behaviour which pleases God. The commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour" (Leviticus 19:18), is the verse from the Old Testament most quoted in the New Testament (see Matthew 19:19; Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). The law of Mount Sinai which is called holy, just and good in Romans 7:12 culminates in the two commandments to love God and your neighbour (see Matthew 22:35-40). These two commandments have therefore not wrongly been called the quintessence of the Ten Commandments.

Distortion of the Word of God The question of the scribe in Luke 10:29, "And who is my neighbour?" shows that the Jews had restricted the meaning of this commandment. They did not want to see a neighbour in every fellow-man, as God had intended, but only considered their own people (the Jews) as their neighbours. In this way the Gentiles, the "uncircumcised," were excluded from their love. The strict scribes and Pharisees went even further than that and did not want to consider the simple Jews as their neighbours. They considered them cursed because they did not know the law (John 7:49). Finally they also excluded personal enemies from this commandment so that only a very few "privileged" remained to be considered and treated as "neighbours." In addition to this false restriction upon loving one's neighbour the Rabbis even concluded that if the neighbour was to be loved, the enemies, that is all other men (the nations, the unlearned Jews and also personal enemies) were to be hated. To support this they referred to passages such as Deuteronomy 7:2 where God forbids the people of Israel to join with the Canaanites and commands them not to show any mercy to them but to destroy them. This led to the conclusion "... and hate thine enemy" (which is not found in the Talmud, but is here referred to as a Jewish-made commandment by the Lord). Out of the commandment of love, which is the fulfilling of the law according to Romans 13:10, men had made the exact opposite. One only had to love the very few who shared the same views and could meet all others with arrogance, contempt and hatred. But I say unto you, Love your enemies But the Jews deliberately overlooked that God had also commanded them in the law to love their enemies (see Exodus 23:4-5; Leviticus 19:33-34). By continuing, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you," the Lord Jesus does not give new commandments to His disciples but judges the fleshly restriction of the old commandment and the human addition. According to God's thoughts every fellow human being with whom we have to do is our neighbour, even if he or she turns out to be our personal

enemy. The Lord Jesus demands, not an emotional love, nor a friendly affection for enemies, but rather the much higher divine love (Greek: agapao). The Lord Jesus was the revelation of this love of God: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-10). While He hung on the cross He prayed for His tormentors: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Our Lord therefore is also the perfect example for His commandment, "Love your enemies... and pray for them which. persecute you."

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (the J.N.D. Translation gives "sons" rather than "children"). The Lord here presents a high standard. As we have already seen in our study of Matthew 5:9 and Matthew 5:16 the word "son" in the "Sermon on the Mount" has a practical meaning. The Lord Jesus is not speaking of the gospel here or how to become a child or son of God. Rather, He shows His disciples, who were already born again, how they could be imitators of their Father in heaven by loving their enemies and therefore practically demonstrate that they were His sons. The proper sonship of the New Testament was only revealed after the redemptive work of Christ had been accomplished (Romans 8:14-15; Galatians 4:5-7; Ephesians 1:5). The Lord Jesus first of all directs His disciples to love their enemies. By doing so they would demonstrate that they are sons of their Father in heaven. He then reminds them of the attitude of the Creator towards all men's attitude towards men. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." It is true that the love of God to His creatures found its highest expression in giving His beloved Son (John 3:16). But everyone who wants to can recognise His indiscriminating love towards all in that He makes His sun to rise both on the evil and the good every morning and sends the vital rain on both the just and the unjust. He has the right to condemn the evil and the unjust. Instead of doing so He shows them His goodness during their life on earth in the same way that He does to the good and the just. The love of the eternal Creator-God for His enemies could not be manifested more touchingly. The disciples of Jesus ought to follow this example. To prevent any misunderstanding let it be mentioned however that God does not show His love without distinction. God is a Saviour (JND: Preserver) of all men, specially of those that believe (1 Timothy 4:10). Believers too are invited to love one another (to have brotherly love) and to love all men (to have love for their fellow-men) (1 Thessalonians 3:12; Galatians 6:10). And the moment will come when those who despised the goodness of God which was meant to lead them to repentance, will receive eternal punishment.

"Be ye therefore perfect" The Lord Jesus then mentions two examples in Matthew 5:46-47 which show that the practice of loving one's neighbour according to the Pharisees did not at all differ from the behaviour of the world. Even the Publicans, those despised people who enriched themselves at the expense of their own people (being willing servants of the Romans), knew how to love their friends. And the Gentiles (J.N.D.) also saluted their brethren, that is all those they knew well. There was nothing about this behaviour that would lead to the expectation of a reward. Neither the practice referred to in such examples nor the teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees could be authoritative to the disciples of Jesus. They need and do have a much higher example. This higher example is mentioned in the last verse of this paragraph, in which the Lord Jesus spoke of the false righteousness of the Pharisees and the more excellent practical righteousness of His true disciples. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." God is the perfect example of true love for one's enemies. As the heavenly Father He is not only

our example in this but in all things. In the parallel reference in Luke 6:36 we read: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful," and in 1 Peter 1:16 we find the reference to Leviticus 19:2 : "Be ye holy; for I am holy." God is love and He is light (1 John 4:8; 1 John 4:16; 1 John 1:5). Mercy is an expression of love, and holiness is a characteristic of light. In our verse both are linked together in the words, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The word "perfect" (Greek: teleios) in the Gospels only appears here and in Matthew 19:21. It is stated of God in this verse in Matthew 5:1-48. It is no difficulty for the believer to see that God is perfect in every respect. But how can weak and by nature sinful men be as perfect as He is? The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us the wonderful fact that the Lord Jesus by one offering has perfected for ever every believer (Hebrews 10:14). But this perfection which is based on the completed redemptive work of Christ is not talked about here. Neither is the perfection of growing faith considered (as we find it in 1 Corinthians 2:6 or in a different way in Php 3:15).

Surely Old Testament men of faith are already called "perfect," such as Noah (Genesis 6:9) and Job (Job 1:1); Abram was encouraged by God to "walk before Me, and be perfect" (Genesis 17:1). And yet these men were not "perfect." They had their weak points and sinned, but they had the deep desire in their hearts to live honestly and blamelessly before God and men. This practical perfection is talked about here. It is only possible through the complete deliverance of faith. The Lord Jesus here presents His disciples such a life of deliverance as the aim of His practical teachings. In this the apostle Paul later followed Him by writing to the Corinthians: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ," and to the Ephesians: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1).

01.12. The Sermon on the Mount (20)

The Sermon on the Mount (20)

Alms

(Matthew 6:1-4) Practical Righteousness In Matthew 6:1-18 the Lord Jesus refers back to the practical righteousness already mentioned in chapter Matthew 5:20. There we read: "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." The Pharisees and Scribes are often depicted in the New Testament as men whose religious activities were for a pretence only (Mark 12:40), and carried out before men. They loved and sought the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 5:44; John 12:43). In Matthew 23:1-39 the Lord Jesus calls them hypocrites several times. Hypocrisy is the endeavour to appear better than one (really) is. Hypocrisy was the great sin of the Pharisees. This is why the Lord Jesus speaks of the leaven of the Pharisees as of something totally evil (Luke 12:1). Their righteousness was only an outward one and had no value before God.

Three Examples The Lord Jesus refers to the righteousness which is more excellent than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, in three examples at the beginning of Matthew 6:1-34. This is true practical righteousness: alms, prayer and fasting. As every detail in Scripture is inspired of the Holy Spirit it is not without meaning that these three paragraphs show a similar structure:

1. In every example the Lord Jesus first of all mentions what His disciples ought not to do. In this way He warns them against the detestable doings of the hypocrites who only looked for the glory of men.
2. The same judgment follows in every case: "Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."
3. Then the Lord Jesus gives His positive instruction which starts with direct speech and the words, "But Thou" (see J.N.D. Trans., Matthew 6:3, Matthew 6:6, Matthew 6:177).
4. Finally, each of the three examples ends with the same encouraging words: "And thy Father, which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee." The similar structure of these teachings of our Lord gives them a special character and particular importance.

Matthew 6:1 is as it were the general heading: "Take heed not to do your righteousness before men to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward with your Father who is in the heavens" (see footnote in J.N.D. Trans.). The Lord Jesus calls on His disciples to consider their motives. If they do their righteous deeds before men to be seen of them they are only seeking human recognition. This would be their "reward." Furthermore, the Lord affirms that those who seek the praise of men receive no reward of the Father which is in heaven. On the other hand, those who look for His reward (see Hebrews 11:26) do not seek human recognition. This is not contradicted by the earlier words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:16 : "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." There He was

speaking to His disciples who ought to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. If their good works were seen, God would be glorified by them, and not men. In our paragraph in Matthew 6:1-34 the result is just the reverse.

We sometimes find it difficult to judge whether we really do a thing for the Lord's sake or as seeking the praise of men, because our motives are often mixed. It is true that we would like to do something for the Lord but we like men to see us doing it! The world has a saying: "Do good and do speak of it!" As our verse shows, such an attitude does not become a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus. We therefore need to examine and judge ourselves continuously.

Alms: Mercy towards the needy The Lord Jesus now explains the warning of verse 1 by three examples. The first of these speaks of giving alms. "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward." The word "alms" is derived from the biblical-Greek word eleemosyne, which in turn comes from the word for "mercy." It is used in the New Testament only in the sense of a good deed or deed of mercy. In Scripture it never has the lesser meaning of a small gift to a beggar as it has in today's language. On the contrary, not only are Dorcas' alms-deeds mentioned with her good works (Acts 9:36), but it is also said that the many alms which the Roman centurion, Cornelius, gave to the poor of the Jews, came up for a memorial before God (Acts 10:2; Acts 10:4).

Help in material need was a much greater necessity in former times when there were no social benefits, no unemployment benefits, no pensions, etc. But how much need is there still today, if we only open our eyes and hearts to it! How much good can be done even today, if only we are prepared to put our hands in our pockets! (see Galatians 2:10; Ephesians 4:28; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:17). The Lord Jesus however does not say, "Ye shall do good to the poor," but: "when thou doest alms..." He does not give a commandment. As He mentions alms first of all He wants to tell us that He cares for the needy. Therefore we too ought to have open hearts for them.

God Looks at the Heart

If we do good deeds we ought to do them as He desires, without even mentioning them. Those who sound a trumpet before them (Matthew 6:2) to have glory of men the Lord Jesus calls hypocrites. This is a severe word which shows how detestable such insincerity is. But one might say, "If someone does good to others the results will remain, even if everybody sees it!" This nobody can deny, but it is not in question here at all. The Lord Jesus speaks of men who pretend to do something for God, but in reality look for recognition and glory from men (as their reward) for their alms. So the Lord Jesus says if they are admired for it by men they do have their reward. They shall not receive any reward from God. God does not primarily honour the results-even if they are most blessed-but the motives of our actions. He desires so much our love for Him (and for our needy fellow-men) to be the motive for our deeds. In sharp contrast to this hypocritical attitude stands the attitude to which the Lord Jesus encourages every single disciple (Matthew 6:3-4): "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly." Everyone is called to see how and where he may help. As we said earlier, the Lord does not command the giving of alms. But if we do give alms, it is to be done in secret and without being noticed. For this the Lord Jesus uses an expression which seems to say something humanly impossible: "Let not

thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." If my left hand is not to know what my right hand does how much less ought my brethren and fellow-men to know it! But there is someone who knows my secret doings and the attitude of my heart. "Thy Father, which seeth in secret, Himself shall reward thee (KJV: openly)." As in Matthew 5:16 and Matthew 5:45 the Lord Jesus places His disciples in their new relationship to God as their Father. Though they could not yet understand the full depth of its significance, He told them that Jehovah of the Old Testament had now become their loving, good, but also just Father, who takes notice of every deed and thought of His sons with fatherly interest. He will also reward every one in a day to come.

01.13. The Sermon on the Mount (21)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (21)

Praying (Matthew 6:5-15) In Matthew 6:1-18 the Lord Jesus speaks about the practical righteousness of His people. Practical righteousness is the correct behaviour of the disciples of Jesus in the daily life of faith. The Lord Jesus first of all mentions the giving of alms (Matthew 6:2-4), which shows our attitude towards people in need. He then speaks about prayer (Matthew 6:5-15), which reveals our relationship to God. Finally He mentions fasting (Matthew 6:16-18), which concerns everybody personally. In each of these areas danger is lurking. It does not come from outside but from within, from our fallen nature. It is the danger of hypocrisy, and it is against this the Lord Jesus is warning us.

Hypocritical Prayers

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matthew 6:5).

Prayer has been called "the breathing of the soul." Through prayer we may thank God, our Father, for His kindness and His blessings (Colossians 1:12). By it we may bring Him our requests and sorrows (Php 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7), and may also pray with supplication for ourselves, for all saints, and even for all men (Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1). Our total dependence on God, and at the same time our fellowship with Him, is manifested in our prayers. Prayer is therefore as important for our life of faith as breathing is for the body. But prayer can become a mere religious exercise or show. This danger arises especially in public prayer-in the family circle, but especially in the assembly. A child once said to his father: "You always pray in a different manner when we have visitors!" Some prayers in the gatherings-uttered in a sanctimonious tone or a gushing flood of words-raise the question if they are not rather directed to those present than to God. The Lord refers to such dangers when He speaks to His disciples about the hypocrites who loved to pray publicly in order to be seen of men and to be admired for their piety. The Jews of that time had the habit of praying at certain fixed times of the day (Acts 3:1). This generally took place in the temple or in the synagogue but if this was not possible they were allowed to pray just wherever they might be. The Lord Jesus is probably primarily referring to this. Yet His words do not mean that He judged every public prayer as hypocrisy. Various references in the New Testament show that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed in public (Matthew 14:19; Matthew 15:36). It was the practice of the first Christians to pray in public too (Acts 12:5; Acts 20:36; Acts 27:35; 1 Timothy 2:8). The Lord Jesus therefore does not refer to the place but to our inward attitude and the motive for prayer. For God knows our hearts through and through. "For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether" (Psalms 139:4). Knowing that we cannot pretend anything before God we should not try to do so with our listeners either. They will, however, always be able to say a hearty "amen" to a simple, heartfelt prayer.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6). Let us repeat that the Lord Jesus does not want to judge public prayer as such. He does not only approve of secret prayer. He rather contrasts the danger of hypocrisy in public prayer with the prayer where there are no witnesses. In the privacy of our closet we are alone with our Father where we may pray straight from our hearts. We are aware that even our hidden thoughts, our needs and sorrows, are known to Him. Now we should show the same sincerity in public prayer, though we won't be able to utter in public all that we utter in our closet. This difference between private and public prayer is at times overlooked or misunderstood. But sincerity and simplicity should characterise both.

Prayer in Abundance of Words

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him" (Matthew 6:7-8).

If the Lord had to accuse the Jews of hypocrisy, He had to judge the heathen nations for their vain repetitions and much speaking in prayer (see 1 Kings 18:26-29). Beyond that He also warns His disciples of senseless prayers. He knew beforehand what would develop in Christianity. The vain repetition of "pre-formulated" prayers is not only known in heathen religions but is also practised in Christian churches.

This, however, does not mean that we are not allowed to repeat certain requests in our prayers which are a real burden on our hearts. We have to make a distinction between vain repetition of constantly repeated "formulas," and the intensive fervent prayer of a believer who in his trouble constantly repeats his request. Did not the Lord Jesus Himself present the parable of the widow to His disciples, that they ought always to pray, and not to faint? He then explicitly said: "shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?" (Luke 18:1-8; Acts 12:5; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18).

"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." That our Father knows what we have need of is one side; the other side is that He wants us to constantly realise our own weakness and dependence on Him, and wants to maintain us in the enjoyment of communion with Him. Nothing helps the furtherance of this more than personal, confidential prayer. The "Lord's Prayer"

"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (KJV adds: "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen"). After warning His disciples against hypocritical and vain prayer the Lord Jesus tells them how they ought to pray. According to Luke 11:2-4 He answered their request, "Lord, teach us to pray," similarly, but with a slightly different wording and in a shorter form. Although it is a prayer out of the mouth of the Son of God and is therefore perfect, these differences ought to be a warning not to make a "fixed form of prayer" out of it. And yet the so-called "Lord's Prayer" has become the most repeated prayer in Christendom. The Catholic Church uses the wording of Luke 11:1-54 and the

Protestant Church the one of Matthew 6:1-34! As many Greek manuscripts of the New Testament show the copyists soon added a doxology to give it a worthy end ("For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen").

We must not forget at what time the Lord Jesus said this to His disciples. Messiah had come but the law of Sinai was still valid. The remnant of Israel was expecting the kingdom, but Christ had not yet fulfilled His work of redemption on the cross and the Holy Spirit had not yet come down. It was during this time the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The prayer therefore answers their situation at that time. It is true that the Lord's Supper and Baptism were also instituted during His life on earth, but there is an enormous difference between these two institutions and the "Lord's Prayer." The former are in relation to His work of redemption which is not even mentioned in the "Lord's Prayer." As Christians we are now allowed to pray to God, our Father in Christ, by the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:20). By the Spirit we have boldness to let our requests be made known unto God by prayer and supplication (Php 4:6). In Matthew 6:1-34 the disciples did not yet know this privilege. The most important teaching of the "Lord's Prayer" for us today is in its structure. In the first three requests God, the Father, is the centre (compare with Matthew 5:16, Matthew 5:45, Matthew 5:48): His Name, His kingdom and His will are in the foreground. Only after this do the four requests follow which are related to our needs: our food, our debts, our temptations, our deliverance. Often our prayers are so different to this! How little thought we give to the honour and glory of our Lord and our God, and how much we think about our needs! Let us give more importance to bringing Him honour and worship in our personal as well as in our collective prayers. The Spirit of Forgiveness

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). In these verses the Lord Jesus refers to the fifth request of the "Lord's Prayer." The Father in heaven in His governmental ways with His children cannot suffer a heart which is not ready to forgive. What difficulty we often have in wholeheartedly forgiving others' trespasses (which we might exaggerate or even imagine). And yet this might make us feel very miserable. But even more our Father in heaven cannot forgive His children if they are not ready to forgive men their trespasses.

What a wonderful and perfect forgiveness we once received, as sinners, from God! Did we confess to Him all our trespasses upon our conversion? That is impossible. And yet God has forgiven all our sins in Christ for ever, because He saw our hearts and our sincere repentance. This perfect and eternal forgiveness by God (see Hebrews 10:17-18) is later presented by Paul to the Ephesians as an example for them to follow in their walk with one another: "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). Here the Lord Jesus could not speak of this divine, eternal forgiveness, because He had not yet accomplished His work. But He exhorts His disciples-and therefore us too-to always be ready to forgive, so that our Father in heaven can also forgive us, in order to restore our practical fellowship with Him.

01.14. The Sermon on the Mount (22)

"The Sermon on the Mount" (22)

Fasting (Matthew 6:16-18) No Commandment to Fast

Fasting means to abstain from eating and drinking for a certain time. It is mentioned several times in Scripture and is known until now in many parts of Christendom. Yet when we open our Bibles we will not find a commandment for it either in the Old or in the New Testament. Nor does the Lord Jesus command His disciples to fast in Matthew 6:16-18, just as He did not command the giving of alms in Matthew 6:2-4. But He presupposes simply that His disciples are doing it.

Nowadays we hardly know what biblical fasting means. Most of us probably have to confess that we do not give it much thought. Yet let us not make light of it but ask ourselves what this short passage in the "Sermon on the Mount" has to tell us today.

Fasting in the Old Testament

We read in Exodus 34:28 that Moses did not eat bread or drink water for forty days when he was on the mountain of God. This is the first occasion in Scripture where fasting is mentioned. The Lord Jesus too began His ministry on earth with fasting for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:2). As a nation, the people of Israel fasted for the first time before they went to war with their brethren, the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20:26).

We also read in different passages that an Israelite or the whole people fasted in connection with earnest prayer (Nehemiah 1:4; Daniel 9:3), but also to humble themselves in mourning and repentance (1 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21). After the Babylonian captivity several yearly fastings were appointed to remember the captivity of Judah (Zechariah 7:5; Zechariah 8:19). The significance of fasting is most clearly seen in Psalms 35:13 : "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting." So we see that the fasting which pleased God in the Old Testament was the expression of an inward humbling. Although it is not said explicitly the Jews take the words, "afflict your souls," in Leviticus 16:29 as a commandment of God to fast on the great day of atonement. But already Isaiah the prophet had to reprove in God's Name hypocritical fasting, and call for real fasting and true repentance (Isaiah 58:1-7). The Israelites fasted and practised the most horrible sins at the same time. Such hypocritical and wicked conduct could not please God. The Lord Jesus also condemned it.

Fasting in the New Testament

We find the habit of fasting with the Jews in the New Testament too. The prophetess Anna served God with fastings and prayers night and day (Luke 2:37). In contrast to the disciples of the Lord Jesus the disciples of John and the Pharisees fasted often (Matthew 9:14). The Lord Jesus, in His parable of the Pharisee and the publican in the temple, lets the former speak self-complacent words: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican: I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (Luke 18:11-12). From

this we see that in New Testament times too fasting as a religious "exercise" was a tradition, as it still is today in certain Christian churches and various religions (in Islam for instance).

"Moreover, when ye fast,..." As already mentioned, the Lord Jesus neither gives a commandment to fast, nor does He forbid it here. He leaves fasting as a personal exercise of the heart but gives the warning not to do it in a hypocritical manner (as with giving alms and praying). The hypocrites are of sad countenance in order to appear as pious as possible (cp. Luke 24:17), and to make people see how earnest they are. But as we have already seen in Matthew 6:2 and Matthew 6:5, our God and Father won't give us any reward if we seek to obtain it through the mere appearance of piety, and recognition by men. The real source of strength in faith lies in the hidden relationship with our God and Father. Someone once said: "We cannot confess the Lord publicly if we have not been in secret communion with Him on our knees." This is why the Lord judges so sharply our tendency to give our brethren and fellow-men an impression which does not at all agree with our heart and soul's true condition. At one time God had to say to Samuel: "for it is not as man seeth; for man looketh upon the outward appearance, but Jehovah looketh upon the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7, J.N.D. Trans.). This is why the Lord Jesus says: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." The Lord Jesus does not mention when and how the Father will reward, but we know that God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Fasting for today?

Before closing let us mention something about fasting today. The fact that in certain circles of Christendom fasting has become a mere religious exercise must not turn away our eyes from the first Christians who fasted with great earnestness (see 2 Corinthians 6:5). Before Paul and Barnabas set off on their first missionary journey the brethren fasted and prayed (Acts 13:3). And when these two, on their journey back, had ordained elders in the various assemblies of Asia Minor, they prayed with fasting and commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed (Acts 14:23).

We may also learn much from the words of the Lord Jesus about prayer and fasting in Matthew 17:21. A French brother wrote as to this in the "Messager Evangélique 1864":

"Fasting means a conscious taking of distance from earthly and natural things so that the heart can be engaged in prayer with spiritual and heavenly things. Fasting is a means to interrupt the link between our natural being and the world which surrounds us; prayer is the means to maintain the link between our spirit and heaven. The former is the holy negation of natural man, the latter the expression of full dependence of the renewed man. But we ought to be on our guard against a monkish, ascetic and lawful spirit which tends to exalt the flesh."

01.15. The Sermon on the Mount (23)

'The Sermon on the Mount' (23) by Arend Remmers Two Kinds of Treasures

Matthew 6:19-21

Matthew 6:19-34 form a new section of the Sermon on the Mount in which the Lord Jesus speaks about the situation of His disciples in this world. He first of all warns them against striving after earthly treasures (Matthew 6:16-24). His disciples must not have set their interests and affections in directions contrary to their confession and commission. They cannot lay up two kinds of treasures, they cannot have two ranges of sights and cannot serve two masters either. On the other hand the Lord Jesus wants to take off the disciples the pressure of worries for the necessities of daily life (Matthew 6:25-34). He points them out to the loving care of their Father in heaven and to their value in His eyes. At the same time He appeals to their hearts with urgent words: 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Earthly Treasures

'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Matthew 6:19-21).

Everybody knows what treasures are: accumulations of costly things or worthy possessions with a great personal value. In former times such treasures mostly consisted of cloths, materials and precious metals. One heaped up such a padding to be able to look quietly and assuredly into an uncertain future, but also to show one's wealth (see 2 Kings 20:13; Luke 12:16-21). With the Jews the thought might easily have crept in that great wealth was in any case a proof of God's blessing and that striving after wealth was well pleasing in God's sight. God had promised to Israel wealth and prosperity; if He had even given them earthly promises most of all (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). In this paragraph heaven, from whence comes the rain which is necessary for growth and life, is typically enough called 'His good treasure' (Deuteronomy 28:12). And in this connection Moses plainly says that the promised prosperity would only be given to Israel by God if they were to keep His commandments.

'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.' The warning of the Lord Jesus however-which was first of all directed to His disciples-does not refer to the wished-for blessing of God. It is referring to something totally different, that is to the greedy striving for wealth and earthly security. About this we read already in Proverbs 23:4-5 : 'Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.'

Apparent Security

Earthly wealth and earthly treasures are transient and therefore very insecure. This the Lord Jesus presents to His disciples here. The moth, a little, insignificant creature, can ruin the most costly materials within a very short time. Rust¹ can destroy the apparently most durable and worthiest things (cf. James 5:2-3) and thieves can steal all at once. How many people-also children of God-have had to experience through war, escape and inflation in the first half of this century that their apparent earthly securities vanished as vapour. The Apostle Paul also warns them that are rich amongst the believers not to trust in the uncertainty of riches (1 Timothy 6:17). But not only may material possessions be considered as desirable treasures, but also progress, honour and reputation in the world, yes, even all that captures our heart and all which might distract us from a faithful imitation of our Lord. If striving for such things occupies our minds the true condition of our heart will be manifested. 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever' (1 John 2:15-17).

All these apparent 'treasures' are fugitive and vain. Who reaches out for them is deceiving himself. But even sadder than this is that the heart will be distracted and diverted from the true treasures.

Lasting Treasures

'But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.' These lasting and true treasures are not to be found on earth, that is in this world, but in heaven. It is there the Lord Jesus is now directing the eyes of the disciples.

Indeed there are heavenly treasures the possession of which we are only brought in to by divine grace. He has made the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shine in the face of Jesus Christ into our hearts and this 'treasure' every child of God possesses already now (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). God has also 'begotten us again unto a lively hope to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,' which is reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3-4). These heavenly treasures of Christian blessings were not yet known while the Lord Jesus lived down here. The Lord Jesus therefore must speak about something else when saying 'but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven'. He is speaking about treasures which every disciple now and then is able to lay up for himself. But how is it possible to lay up such treasures in heaven? In Matthew 19:21 the Lord Jesus says to the rich young man: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' Similarly Paul is writing to Timothy: 'Charge them that are rich in this world, ... that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life'

(1 Timothy 6:17-19). These scriptures contain a simple, unmistakable teaching. Everyone who wants to follow the Lord and does not consider his earthly possessions as 'treasure' but uses them according to God's will and to His honour in doing good with them is in this way gaining other and better treasures. He therefore does not become poorer but richer in the eyes of God!

Every believer who is ready to give to the needy and for the Lord's work acquires a treasure in heaven: the good pleasure of God, for 'God loveth a cheerful giver' (Hebrews 13:16; 2 Corinthians 9:7). But this pleasure of God's (well-pleasing) is not only for the one doing good, but also for

everyone who loves Him, who does His will and walks worthy of the Lord (cf. John 14:23; Colossians 1:10). The Greatest Treasure

Nevertheless the largest treasures we can lay up are found in Christ, our Lord Himself. The more we are engaged with Him, the more we see His love in all the circumstances of our lives and therefore come to know Him better, the more He will become our true treasure in heaven. Paul possessed many inherited and gained advantages which were of great value to him before his conversion. But from the hour of his conversion when the Lord Jesus appeared to him, all these 'treasures' were but loss and dung compared to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus His Lord (cf. Php 3:7-8). From now on Paul compared everything to Him and measured all by His beloved Saviour and Lord. It was Him alone he wanted to know always more and always better! This is why he so much wanted the Colossians to attain the full assurance of understanding and the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2-3). This mystery of God is no one else but the glorified Christ, the head of His assembly.

'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' It is obvious that treasures have an irresistible attraction to the human heart. Our own thoughts indicate where we are looking for our treasures. If our thoughts are too much involved with earthly things or if they are even centred around worldly things it shows us where our treasures are. But if as risen with Christ we do not pursue what is on earth, but are seeking those things which are above, where He sitteth at the right hand of God, then we truly lay up treasures in heaven.

01.16. The Sermon on the Mount (24)

The Sermon on the Mount (24) The Single and the Evil Eye

Matthew 6:22-23 The Eye as Mirror of the Human Heart

'The light of the body is the eye.' In Matthew 6:19-21 the Lord Jesus spoke of two kinds of treasures the human heart may hang on to. Now he is talking about two kinds of 'heart-conditions'. He therefore uses the picture of the eye and this again he compares to a lamp.

Lamps are used to give light. Now we cannot say of the eye that it gives light but rather that it takes in the light. The parallel drawn by the Lord Jesus between the lamp and the eye is that the functioning of a shining lamp and that of a good eye lead up to similar results: both of them help men to recognise their surroundings. The better the lamp the brighter the lamp shines and the better the eye the better one can see. Of course the opposite is just a true: as a bad lamp gives poor light so a man with bad eyesight or even blind eyes is not able to see much or even nothing at all. This will be very detrimental to his whole body. Such is the first meaning of the introductory words of the Lord: 'The light of the body is the eye.' But the Lord Jesus does not teach his disciples about the human eye but rather about the heart which he did already mention in John 6:21 : 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' In Scripture the eye is very often used to depict the inner condition of men. The Word of God speaks of 'haughty eyes' (JND) and of 'high looks' (Psalms 18:27; Psalms 101:5), of 'blinded eyes' (1 John 2:11), of 'eyes with no fear of God' (Psalms 36:1), of 'evil eyes' (Matthew 20:15; Mark 7:22) and of 'eyes that are not satisfied with riches' (Ecclesiastes 4:8), but also of 'enlightened eyes' (Psalms 19:8) and of a 'bountiful eye' (Proverbs 22:9). The eye therefore does not only take in impressions from the outside but it also reflects-and often clearly visible-the condition of the human heart. The following references will make clear the link between the heart and the eye: 'Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.' (Psalms 101:5)-'Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty.' (Psalms 131:1) 'An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing (JND: lamp, tillage, prosperity) of the wicked, is sin.' (Proverbs 21:4). So here the eye is seen as mirror and expression of the human heart. The Single Heart

'If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.' The word 'single' must be understood as 'plain, pure'. In the whole New Testament it only appears here and in the parallel-reference in Luke 11:34-36. The corresponding noun 'singleness' (JND: simplicity) appears more often. Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22 speak of the singleness of the heart and in 2 Corinthians 1:12; 2 Corinthians 11:3 of the simplicity before God and the Christ. These references show clearly what the words 'single' and 'simplicity' mean. It is the simplicity and singleness of the heart marked by love and confidence which will not suffer any sin (and be it doubting or wicked ulterior motives) to mar our relation with our Lord and our God and Father. If the look of our eyes is unclouded the whole body will be profiting of it and if the heart is single towards Christ the spiritual life will be full of light. This very light has its source in God. It helps the youngest believer to understand the Word of God and to put it into practice in his life. It gives

clarity and strength to follow a path step by step. It helps us in the difficulties of life (which will not be spared to any disciple of the Lord) to recognise his leading and his hand in them. He will bestow this divine light upon every disciple of his who has the sincere desire to follow him in faithfulness and whose heart is filled with 'the simplicity as to the Christ' (JND).

Surely the apostle Paul thought of the simplicity of heart when he prayed that God may enlighten the eyes of the Ephesians' heart (JND) so that they would know more and more what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of his inheritance and the greatness of his power (Ephesians 1:18). In 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15 Paul encourages his readers to do good works we find a special kind of simplicity of heart. Three times 'liberality' (JND only) is mentioned in this connection where it should literally read 'simplicity'. Does this not shade special light on our paragraph where the disciples are warned against striving after treasures and riches upon earth and where they are encouraged to put their trust in their Father which is in heaven? The Evil Body

'But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!' These words remind us of the verse we already mentioned in Proverbs 21:4 which says that a high look and a proud heart are the 'lamp of the wicked, that is the sinner. What a terrible fate if a man is able to see his surroundings only in this 'light'! The Lord Jesus mentions the expression 'an evil eye' in other connections also (see Matthew 20:15; Mark 7:22). There the evil eye is the visible proof for an envious, jealous heart. If our heart is filled with envy, pride or other evil things then our entire life is, so to speak, 'clouded' with darkness. We do not only deprive ourselves of every true joy in the Lord but we also lose the discernment as to ourselves and our surroundings. This is the significance of the figurative words of the Lord: 'But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.'

'If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!' Each born again disciple of the Lord has received the light of life by God. This light enlightens his own life and it shines as a testimony for God. In order for it to shine the heart needs to be single. But if the heart of the believer is filled with evil thoughts darkness does indeed prevail instead of light. The light which is in the believer has so to speak become darkness. Of the unbelievers the Word of God says that they are in the darkness and are themselves darkness. But a man who (and has by grace received the light of God and is in this wonderful light) stands in opposition to it will be even more condemned because he knows better or should know better. Experience however shows: If the light that is in a child of God has become darkness he will be able to do things which even a morally upright unbeliever would be ashamed of. Are we honestly able to say while looking at the glory and at Christ: 'This one thing I do'? What does your eye look upon? Which way do you go? God only has the one way which is Christ.

A. Remmers

1 As the Greek word *brw/sij* (translated: 'rust') first of all describes the action of eating (for men or animals) some translators would translate it as an devouring insect (in connection with the moth mentioned in the previous verse).

01.17. The Sermon on the Mount (25)

The Sermon on the Mount (25) No man can serve two masters

Matthew 6:24 In Matthew 6:19-24 the Lord Jesus warns His disciples against striving for earthly treasures but also against undivided affections. He sums it all up in the last verse: 'No man can serve two masters...' This utterance and many other words of the Bible have become proverbial sayings. Every reasonable man in this world knows that one cannot at the same time put his interests and his energy into two opposite goals. The Disciple as a Servant of God The Lord Jesus here speaks of masters and of serving. We read in the parallel passage in Luke 16:13 'No servant can serve two masters.' With this illustration the Lord Jesus expresses that man is not his own master but he is a servant. By nature every man is a servant of sin (Romans 6:17) and unable to serve God. But now every believer on the Lord Jesus has become his purchased property and has therefore also become his and God's 'slave'. And yet the disciple's relation to his master is not that of a servant. No, as a matter of fact, it is as the Lord Jesus said to His disciples already before His death on the cross: 'Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you' (John 15:15). After His redemption-work the Lord even called the disciples His brethren because henceforth all who receive Him in faith become children of God and sons of His Father. Are these not unique and high spiritual privileges? And for this reason a true disciple's aim for his life is 'to serve the living and true God' (1 Thessalonians 1:9). The Attitude of our Heart The words 'No one can serve two masters' are a general principle which the Lord Jesus then explains. In the last part of the verse He addresses His disciples personally and says plainly: 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' As already mentioned in Matthew 6:21 the heart is spoken of much more than the outward appearance. This is why the Lord Jesus speaks of hating and loving and then of holding and despising. Thus we see that hatred and love point out the attitude of heart which is revealed in despising or holding. There is no middle path.

Elijah the prophet had to call out to the Israelites who professed Jehovah as God but at the same time wanted to serve Baal: 'How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him' (1 Kings 18:21). In the New Testament the Apostle Paul underlines his warning not to be in an unequal yoke with the words: 'For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?' (2 Corinthians 6:14-16). James writes: 'Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God' (James 4:4).

We recognise that our verse speaks of the attitude of the heart because the Lord Jesus speaks of hatred and love. Love to Him as the characteristic of the new life will be seen in obedience and readiness to serve him. There will be no room for another 'master' then. As the adversary makes enticing offers to the flesh he will be hated. Yet this hating is not a reaction of the old nature but of

the new. The new nature is revealed by deeply despising all evil (see Romans 7:15; Jude 1:23). On the other hand a man living in darkness and far from God cannot love Him but only hate Him, just as he hates God's light (John 3:20; John 15:24).

God or Mammon The last words of the paragraph are: 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' As disciples of the Lord Jesus we are called to follow him and to serve God. Together with this high calling it cannot be suffered to serve another master, 'mammon'. This is simply impossible. So there is no middle road in this connection! And yet the human heart is inclined to look for such a way repeatedly. But the Word of God warns us against it and our own experience will confirm it if we are honest. The exact origin of the word 'mammon' is uncertain. Generally it is said to be an Aramaic word meaning fortune, property. Others see it derives from another Semitic tongue (Phoenician-punian or Syrian). In any case it does not stand for an idol's name but stands for a word which the ancient Jews already understood as the essence of money and property. The writers of the New Testament left this word untranslated as they did with many other expressions. (At the time of the Lord Jesus Aramaic was the used and spoken language in Palestine. The New Testament however is written in Greek). So by means of the Bible 'mammon' has become a derogatory expression for money. In the New Testament the word only appears here and in Luke 16:9; Luke 11:1-54; Luke 13:1-35. The Lord Jesus had already forcefully warned his disciples against laying up earthly treasures in the Matthew 6:19-21. With the words 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon' he most clearly stresses that laying up money and property is a sign of an evil attitude of heart and therefore idolatry (see Colossians 3:5). But the disciple whose heart is filled with unbelieving worry about tomorrow is serving-although perhaps unknowingly-mammon. This the Lord Jesus will go into in the following verses.

01.18. The Sermon on the Mount (26)

The Sermon on the Mount (26) Take No Thought for Your Life

Matthew 6:25-34 The Lord Jesus has just warned His disciples against laying up earthly treasures and concluded with the words: 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' The now following teaching is in direct connection with the preceding: 'Therefore I say unto you; Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?' (Matthew 6:25) Provision or Worry?

Worry and even fear as to the future burden many people more than ever. Worries seem to be a natural thing to our hearts but how much more so when economic and political stability seem to stagger! The Lord Jesus tells His disciples that these worries are the characteristic of the Gentiles (Matthew 6:32). This is why he encourages them in this heart-touching paragraph not to worry (see Matthew 6:25, Matthew 6:27-28, Matthew 6:31, Matthew 6:1-34). The one who worries about earthly necessities or the future in fact does not think differently to the one who wants to become rich! Such a conclusion may appear exaggerated but it clearly comes out of the context. 'Therefore', because God does not want us to serve mammon, we shall not take thought of eating, drinking and raiment (that are the necessities of earthly life). For life does not consist of daily nourishment only and the body is not meant to be raid only. As disciples of the Lord we shall and ought to be to His disposition and service with body and soul. This does not infer that we should not work diligently and so earn our living. But we must not confound responsible providence for ourselves and others with fearful, tormenting worries in regard to job, living and the future! Some time later the Paul writes to the Ephesians: 'Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth' (Ephesians 4:28). Paul himself was a living example of it to the saints (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12).

Two Examples

'Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?' (Matthew 6:26). The Lord Jesus points His disciples to the fowls of the air as example of God's care in feeding His creatures. The fowls do not sow, neither reap, nor gather into barns. But this does not imply that we (that is men) are not in need of doing it. Already in Proverbs 6:6 the sluggard is presented the ant as a picture of diligence. The fowls also have to look for their food. But they do not know any sorrow. And yet, God who feedeth them (Psalms 147:9), is not called 'their' but 'your heavenly Father'. He is here not called the Father of all men not to mention of all animals, but he is called the heavenly Father of His children (see Matthew 5:16; Matthew 5:45; Matthew 5:48).

'Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?' (John 6:27). No-one can change anything by his own strength or worry in regard to his stature as in Luke 19:3 or his age as in John 9:21 and Hebrews 11:11 (where the same expression is used in the original). And it would

not be of any profit either. The second example is of nature too, but this time the Lord speaks of flora. 'And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?' (Matthew 6:28-30) The fowls at least have to do something for finding their food; but the lilies do not toil for their 'raiment'! They grow and develop so to speak 'by themselves'. It is solely and only the glorious grandeur of our creator which is displayed in the manifold colours, the beauty and tenderness of flora-and this is so to our joy as well. Not even king Solomon's glory as described in 1 Chronicles 9:1-44 can compare with the beauty of blossoming nature. And yet this splendour only lasts for a short time, and especially so in the hot climate of the Orient. Stalks and leaves of faded flowers used to be gathered in these countries to fuel an oven. God the creator of all fauna and flora has fitted them in such admirable manner and sustains them. He will also provide for His children, who are much better than they, in fatherly manner with food and clothing. Yet how often do we also show little faith in this respect!

'But Seek Ye first the Kingdom of God...' This is why the Lord Jesus summarises His teaching in the conclusion: 'Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' (Matthew 6:31-32)

What counts in this world are the things we can see and 'this side of life'. We are meant to get on and to take care for wealth and good standing. So it was in Bible times and so it is still today. In contrary to the heathen nations the Jews had God's promises for material and spiritual blessings, especially those of the future Kingdom of God. But how was it in everyday-life? The striving for earthly things and the worries linked with them are a disease that every nation encounters. And we Christians also have to confess, that there is often hardly any difference between us and the people around us. And yet we have received much greater blessings than Israel. Furthermore we have a loving Father in heaven who knows our needs and wants to give us all that is good for us with his beloved son, who is the greatest of all gifts (Romans 8:32; 1 Peter 5:7). This is why the Lord Jesus draws his disciples' attention to the essential thing in the centre verse of this paragraph: 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' (Matthew 6:33)-With this positive invitation he shows the goal at which the disciple should aim first of all. It is the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The Lord Jesus does not say: 'Seek ye only the kingdom of God...', but: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God...', for he does not want us to forsake our other duties. Nevertheless he clearly points His disciples to what ought to be first in their lives.

Generally the Lord Jesus uses the expression 'kingdom of heaven' in Matthew's gospel (in contrast to the other gospels). The expression 'kingdom of God' only appears five times (Matthew 12:28; Matthew 19:24; Matthew 21:31; Matthew 21:43). The reason for it is as follows: Matthew's gospel especially answers the Jewish expectations and presents the Lord Jesus as king of Israel. With the expression 'kingdom of heaven' the heavenly character of this last dispensation (era of God's salvation) is stressed. With the promised kingdom of God the Jews had hoped for liberation from the Roman yoke and also for earthly blessing. In comparison the expression 'kingdom of God' in this gospel stresses the general character of God's government in power through the Lord

Jesus Himself or through the Holy Spirit during the Lord's absence (compare Romans 14:17).

'First...'

What is the practical meaning for us in the words 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God'? They invite us to give the Lord Jesus the first place in our earthly relationships, tasks and interests. Be it our time, our energy or our money, the Lord Jesus would like to be in the first place in everything:

How much time do we daily use for prayer, for reading the Word of God, for fellowship with brethren? Do we take the opportunity and gather with the brethren when they gather to His name? Do we use the means he has entrusted us for ourselves or for him and his work on earth also? And yet the most important question is: Do we make our decisions, be they small or great, in dependence upon him, that is praying and waiting upon him, and do we so really let him rule our lives? This is the only way to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The righteousness of God here, different to the one in Romans, is the practical deportment which answers to the authority and rule of God through the person of the Lord Jesus in our lives (see Matthew 5:20; Matthew 6:1 especially footnote N.Tr.). But will this not lead to neglecting our earthly duties and therefore to self-inflicted misery and even greater worries? Let us read the promise of the Lord Jesus again: '... and all these things shall be added unto you.' To him who has recognised the most important thing and seeks after it, the Lord will even add all else! The only thing is to set the priorities right. The Lord concludes this paragraph with nearly the same words with which he began in Matthew 6:25 : 'Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' (Matthew 6:34) -How often our self-made inward needs and worries have proved totally without reason the next day already! How often have we been put to shame by it and had to confess our little faith to the Lord. This is why the Lord reminds us as His disciples finally once again not to worry for the morrow.

YESTERDAY is gone TOMORROW has not yet come the Lord helps us TODAY.

01.19. The Sermon on the Mount (27)

The Sermon on the Mount (27) A Judgmental spirit

Matthew 7:1-5 The subject of Matthew 7:1-6 is the disciple's relation to his neighbour. First of all the Lord Jesus speaks of judging falsely (Matthew 7:1-5) and then of being able to discern (Matthew 7:6).

Necessary Judgment

'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' (Matthew 7:1) This is a well-known verse! It has - as many others too - nearly become a saying. But it is sad to say that often even true believers do misunderstand and misuse it. For the Lord Jesus does not at all forbid his disciples to have a healthy, spiritual judgment. On the contrary the Lord presupposes in his following words (Matthew 7:6) that they are able to discern what to do and what not to do. The apostle Paul also encouraged his readers to judge what he wrote to them (1 Corinthians 10:15).

One could argue that discern and judge cannot possibly be the same. And yet the Greek word (krinein) has not only this meaning but others also. The spectrum reaches from 'discerning' over 'judging' to 'sentencing, condemning'. As disciples of the Lord we ought not only to judge ourselves in God's light and if necessary condemn things (Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 11:31) but we ought to judge arising spiritual matters as well (1 Corinthians 12:10; 1 John 4:1). On top of this the assembly of God bears the responsibility to condemn evil with determination and to judge those who persevere in an obviously wicked conviction or wicked state: 'Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person' (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

These kinds of judgment are absolutely necessary in the life and fellowship of believers. They are necessary for the honour and holiness of God but also for our own spiritual well-being and growth. They are therefore indispensable and helpful supports of the life of faith. Where this biblical judging lacks indifference and worldliness are 'invited to come in'.

False Spirit of Judgment And yet this so unpleasant being occupied with the evil has to happen in the spirit of love, grace and humbleness, for the first aim is to reach and win the heart and conscience. When brethren have to speak with someone who has sinned, will not do it in such a spirit but in a judging spirit, they cannot possibly a help but will make the situation even worse. The end of it will often be bitterness and hardening. In Galatians 6:1 we read of how to react in such a case: 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.' (Compare also with Matthew 18:15-18)

'Judge not...' does therefore not mean judging sin in the right spirit and attitude. The Lord Jesus here judges something totally different, that is the spirit of judgment, the 'Pharisaic' inclination to constantly elevate ourselves above others and to judge not only their deeds but also their motives

in a negative light and loveless manner. This spirit of judgment reveals:

Rashness, because one judges before knowing all the circumstances;

Injustice, not knowing the motives of the other before having spoken to him in brotherly love;

Arrogance, because the judging one elevates himself above the brother;

Hypocrisy, because one takes love and zeal for the Lord as cloak for one's own reputation

Merciless, because open weaknesses are all too easily interpreted as 'evil'.

It is of such dangers the Lord Jesus is warning us here with all forcefulness/urgency. The apostle Paul also warns the Corinthians of hastily judging (1 Corinthians 4:5) and the Romans of narrow-mindedly judging (Romans 14:3; Romans 10:1-21; Romans 13:1-14). At the same time he encourages the Romans to judge themselves. With what Measure do we mete? The Lord Jesus then adds: '... that ye be not judged'. These words may be understood as follows: One who judges others without authorisation does not need to wonder when his fellowmen and brethren do the same to him. But the following shows that this judgment goes farther and that in the end God is the judge here.

Everyone who does not want to accept the Son of God as his Saviour does only await a fearful judgment and eternal condemnation. But everyone who believes on him knows that he will not see judgment. And yet he knows that God chastens his children in their lives upon earth as a Father and without respect of persons (Hebrews 12:4-11; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Corinthians 11:32). Likewise all believers will one day be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ and receive reward or suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

These serious/earnest thoughts ought to preserve all disciples of the Lord of a haughty spirit of judgment, 'for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again' (Matthew 7:2). Of course this explanation does not mean that God will deal with someone who judges unrighteously in an unrighteous manner as well, but every man will be judged by him according to his perfect righteousness. With this goes the assurance that the disciple who judges in love and grace will also receive a loving 'treatment?' of his heavenly judge. This is why we ought to mete in reverse with the measure with which we are measured by God and with the judgment with which we are judged by him. In this the sonship of God will be practically manifest: 'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matthew 5:7; Matthew 5:48). 'And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.' (Ephesians 4:32) Mote and Beam in the Eye

'And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?' (Matthew 7:3-4) The Lord Jesus now shows his disciples with a most distinct picture how foolish the one is, who thinks to judge his brother/neighbour looking down on him. The mote in the brother's eye is the false (thing) which one thinks to recognise with him. But the beam in the eye is the evil in the own heart which one oversees deliberately and which is yet clearly to recognise. An experienced brother once said: 'I do not know as much evil of anyone as of my own self. This makes me careful in judging others.'

The picture of the eye points to the state of the heart as is does in Matthew 6:22-23. The Lord seems to especially think of the spiritual ability to judge. How could someone whose ability to judge is badly hindered by own, unjudged sin, be helpful to another who may have been overtaken in a fault by spiritual unwatchfulness? This is just impossible. The Lord has already used the expression 'hypocrite' three times in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:2, Matthew 6:5, Matthew 6:16). In contrary to his disciples he is always speaking of the religious hypocrites amongst the Jews. As he uses this expression again it shows that even the disciples are not safeguarded against the danger of hypocrisy. 'Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.' (Matthew 7:5)

We will only be able to judge others if we have recognised and confessed our own sins in the light of God. Only by living conscious of the grace by which God has forgiven us all sins (and as Father is forgiving us again and again) we shall be of real spiritual help to our errant brethren.

01.20. The Sermon on the Mount (28)

The Sermon on the Mount (28) Casting Pearls before Swine

Matthew 7:6

'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.' This verse is the counterpart to the first five verses of the chapter. There the Lord Jesus warns his disciples against a wrong judgement and about a judgmental spirit. Here He warns about a lack of spiritual discernment in certain situations, into which they might come as they follow their master.

Divine Blessings The Lord Jesus first of all mentions the 'holy' and the 'pearls'. Holiness is primarily an attribute of God, a hallmark of His pure, glorious, eternal being (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). Therefore all that comes from him is holy. This is why Jude calls the Christian faith 'your most holy faith' (Jude 1:20).

Pearls in the Scriptures are a picture of preciousness and beauty. We are reminded of the 'one pearl of great price' in the fifth parable of the kingdom of the heavens in Matthew 13:45-46. There we see the assembly of the living God from the point of view of her value to the Lord Jesus. In Revelation 21:21 the twelve gates of the new Jerusalem, the holy city (which is previously called 'the bride, the Lamb's wife') consist of twelve pearls. The expressions 'holy' and 'pearls' are therefore used to describe divine, precious truths and blessings in connection with the kingdom of God. Note that when the Lord Jesus spoke these words the time had not yet come for the revelation of the special spiritual blessings of Christendom. And yet He points to many things in His 'talks' before the cross. Think for example of what He says about the name of the Father in the Sermon on the Mount and the one pearl of great price in Matthew 13:1-58. This is why the unique blessings and privileges of believers in the present time of grace are included in the expressions 'holy' and 'pearls'.

Christ has offered Himself on the cross for the salvation of lost men and the glory of God. And in Christ the Father has bestowed upon the redeemed all spiritual and heavenly blessings as well as the greatest and precious promises (Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:4 JND).

- He has given us new and eternal life and by it made us his own precious children and has translated us into the elevated position of sons in Christ.
- He has also given us his holy Spirit as guide, earnest and seal. And by this seal he will accomplish all his promises.
- And by the holy Spirit all believers have been joined together in the assembly of God, and are now forming the body of Christ, the temple of God and the bride of the lamb.

These are a few of the wonderful spiritual blessings the Father has given us in Christ. All these riches, and the privileges connected with them, are holy and precious treasures. We ought to keep

them faithfully in order that we might not lose them and the enjoyment of them.

What do the expressions 'Dogs' and 'Swine' signify?

According to the law of mount Sinai dogs and swine are unclean animals. The Jews were explicitly forbidden to eat swine (pork) and the price of a dog was not to be brought into the house of the Lord (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 23:18). The Greeks, who did not know the holy standards of God, considered both animals as symbols of uncleanness and greediness. Dogs and swine in antiquity were not tamed pets or fully domesticated animals we know today, but they were generally free living, half-wild animals. The dog especially in the word of God is a picture of unclean, evil and detestable people (see Psalms 22:16; Php 3:2; Revelation 22:15). Peter, writing to those who have a knowledge of Christianity but have turned away from it, quotes the proverb: 'The dog (is) turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire' (2 Peter 2:22). Dog and swine here represent natural men, who will not change, even after having known to a certain outward degree the grace of God. How different indeed are the sheep who are tame, quiet and dependant on the shepherd's care. That is why Scripture so often uses them as a picture of believers in the Lord Jesus, (see Psalms 23:1-6; John 10:1-42). But Who is Meant? The Jews not only considered those of the Gentiles but also Jewish publicans, who served the Roman occupying power, as unclean and far away from God (see Matthew 11:19; Acts 10:28). They therefore avoided any contact with them. We might think that the Lord Jesus took the same view when a Canaanite, that is, gentile woman, asked Him to have pity on her daughter, He said to his disciples: 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel' and to the woman: 'It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.' But when He saw the poor woman's great faith He graciously answered her wish (Matthew 15:21-28). He also entered the publican Zacchaeus' house to dine with him when many of the Jews murmured about this (Luke 19:7). No the Lord Jesus did not take this view, although as the promised King of Israel He at first sent his twelve disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and commanded them not to go to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Matthew 10:5-6). He said: 'And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet,' (Matthew 10:13-14). Later on when He sent out seventy other disciples He said: 'Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves' (Luke 10:3; Luke 8:1-56; Luke 9:1-62; Luke 10:1-42; Luke 11:1-54)! So it is clear that the Lord Jesus did not refer to national or social groups of people when He spoke about 'dogs' and 'swine' even if the Jews and maybe at first, His disciples thought so. The gospel of the kingdom goes out to all men without regard to their origin. So it was then and so it will be in the coming day (Matthew 24:14). The same applies for the gospel of grace in our day. Among the believers in Corinth there were people who had been fornicators, adulterers and drunkards, and yet Paul was able to write to them: 'And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Corinthians 6:11). It is not the origin or the past of a man, but God takes into account his response of heart when he knows the truth. Does the Gospel not go forth to Everyone?

Everyone who accepts the judgement of God upon sin and who genuinely believes His message will be accepted by him, whoever he may be. The messengers of Christ are not to constrain those who shut themselves up and drag God's message in the mire. The things that are holy are not

intended for such persons. This does not mean at all that the gospel should not be preached to everyone. Indeed the commission after His resurrection still stands: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15). But the apostles realised later what the Lord foresaw when he sent out the twelve and seventy disciples. The Jews in Antioch blasphemed, such that Paul and his companions left the city, and the same happened again in Corinth (Acts 13:45-51; Acts 18:6). They shook off the dust of their feet and their garments against them. This indicated that no communion of the Spirit was possible at all. Had they continued to preach the precious gospel of salvation in the face of this fierce refusal they would have given the holy unto the dogs and cast their pearls before the swine. The pearls are trampled upon where the gospel is laughed at and blasphemed. The persecutions the apostles suffered and many servants of the Lord still suffer today show the meaning of the Lord's words: '... lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you.' Does this imply that we cannot or ought not to be a witness for our Lord where there is mockery? Not at all! But in these very situations we need spiritual discernment to know what is the right thing to do. In such events we can call upon our Lord and implore him for wisdom and help. It might then be that he will tell us to reply the mockers with an earnest appeal: 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked.' Or we might have to suffer the mockery quietly. Lastly it might even be that we have to turn our back with sadness because the Lord reminds us of his words: 'Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.' An Application to Christendom

It is surely not without reason that Peter applies the behaviour of dogs and swine to people who have come to know the way of salvation and then have turned their back on it. For down the ages the holy things in Christendom have been given to unredeemed people, things which are destined only for the children of God. These people profess faith outwardly only, for many of them are baptised without being born again and many of them partake of the Lord's supper without being a member of his body! Consider for an example what has been made out of the truth of the priesthood of believers in Christendom! In this respect also holy things have been given to the dogs and pearls have been cast before swine. This has led to misuse of the truth of God and to despising the Lord. Especially in Europe where the gospel has been preached for over 1000 years and where God has given so much blessing through the Reformation nearly 500 years ago) Theologians trample the precious pearls of the truth as they spread false teachings and mock those who wish to keep the truth in singleness of faith. This means our Lord's warning remains valid today.

01.21. The Sermon on the Mount (29)

The Sermon on the Mount (29) Prayer Once More

Matthew 7:7-12 In this section of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus speaks again -seemingly abruptly-about prayer, that is asking from God. He had already given His disciples teaching on prayer in chapter 6:5-13 which contains the so-called 'Lord's prayer'. Whilst warning them against outward appearance in that chapter, He also showed them the kind of confidence they ought to have in God as the source of strength and provider of help for the path of

Fervent Prayer

'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you' (Matthew 7:7). Although the Lord Jesus does not mention the word 'pray', but speaks of asking, seeking and knocking, the following verses make clear that he is encouraging the disciples-who He speaks to first-to pray fervently. Luke, who records the events of the Lord's life and His words in their inner moral sense, lets the passage follow as His answer to the disciple's plea: 'Lord, teach us to pray' (Luke 11:1-13). An increasing intensity is recognisable in the three verbs 'ask, seek, knock'

'Ask' will be found in various references in the Word of God as a special form of prayer (for example John 11:22; John 14:13; Colossians 1:9; James 1:5)

'Seek' is the upright, earnest endeavour to find something (see Psalms 34:4; Isaiah 55:6)

'Knock' indicates that outward hindrances and shyness can be overcome as well.

Asking reveals the desire of the one praying. Seeking and knocking however indicate that prayers will not always be answered immediately. We are all in danger of becoming tired and weary in our prayers. But the Lord gives a definite promise to all: 'it shall be given you ... ye shall find, ... it shall be opened unto you'. What an illustration these three phrases give of the divine answer to ceaseless and fervent prayer (Acts 12:5; James 5:16). And they hold true for every follower of the Lord today as well as the disciples of the Lord at the time He spoke to them.

He shows us this in the following verse: 'For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened' (Matthew 7:8). These words appear to be a repetition of the previous verse but in reality they extend their application to all believers, for the Lord only speaks to believers in the Sermon on the Mount. A Comparison

Matthew 7:9-10 : 'Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?' The Lord Jesus uses an illustration which everybody can understand. He speaks of the normal relation between a son and his father which is marked by love and confidence. The son is in trouble and asks his father for bread or a fish, that is things necessary for daily living. He does not demand as the son in Luke 15:12 did. Neither does he ask amiss, that is to fulfil his fleshly lusts (about which James 4:3 warns us). No, he asks

his father trustingly and without doubting, for what he is really in need. The Lord teaches in such a way that the father's answer to the son's request is 'yes'. He will not disappoint his son's confidence by giving him a stone instead of a bread, neither will he endanger him by giving a serpent instead of a fish.

Matthew 7:11 : 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' This is the application of the illustration in regard to the relation between the disciples and God. To start with, the Lord Jesus reminds them of the fact that every man is evil by nature, a fact which has been so since the fall. God had said already at the time of Noah that the thought of man's heart is evil from his youth (Genesis 8:21). David reveals a deep understanding of God's assessment of men as he says in Psalms 51:5 : 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.' But when men judged the only sinless one on the cross of Calvary as a criminal the total depravity of human nature was revealed in its entirety. The nature of the 'old man', that is of the flesh, is incorrigible, and this is why God gives new and everlasting life and a new nature to every one who believes. As long as we live here we shall carry the old, evil nature with us and to repeatedly call to mind the sad judgment 'that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing' and the admonishment to 'walk in newness of life' (Romans 7:18; Romans 6:4).

None of the disciples could know these things until their Lord and master had accomplished His work of redemption. The Lord mentions the evil of the human heart to stress the difference between the love of the kindest of human fathers and the perfect love of God. If even imperfect and naturally evil men like to fulfil requests of their children, how much more will God, the great giver, do so! Every good gift and every perfect gift comes from him, who gives liberally to all men and does not upbraid (James 1:1-27). This is the very God the Lord Jesus presents to his disciples as their 'father, which is in heaven'. He has done so on more than one occasion in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:16; Matthew 5:48, etc.). And yet the full wealth of the relationship could only be revealed after the Lord Jesus had accomplished his redemptive work (John 20:17; Romans 8:14-17). However the disciples could start to rejoice in the fact already. A 'Golden Rule'

'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets' (Matthew 7:12). This verse which has been called the 'golden rule' of love does not only conclude the first paragraph of chapter 7 but also concludes the whole of the teaching which began in Matthew 5:17 with the words of the Lord: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.' The law and the prophets here stand for the whole of the Old Testament and its teachings (compare other references: Luke 16:16; Acts 13:15). In contrast to what most of the scribes and Pharisees made out of it the Lord Jesus had come to display it in its fullness. In the next part of the sermon He had repeatedly pointed to the fact that the outward, apparent righteousness of the scribes was reprehensible. Most of what he said concerned his disciples' relationship to their fellowmen, and these teachings he summarises with the words: 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'

What a contrast to the well-known saying: 'Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you.' Even the Rabbis and the Greeks had a similar saying! It contains no more than the negative warning not to do evil to our fellowman. In contrast the Lord Jesus summarises his teaching by the

positive command to do for one's fellowman all that we would like to receive ourselves. We can only do this in the strength of God's love. Paul later writes to the Romans: 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 13:10). This is also an encouragement for us to exercise godly love in order to be real disciples of our Lord.

01.22. The Sermon on the Mount (30)

The Sermon on the Mount (30) The Broad and the Narrow Way

Matthew 7:13-14

'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' (Matthew 7:13-14) Only Two Possibilities The illustration is simple and easy to understand: there are only two gates, two ways, two groups and two destinies for all mankind. It is not said directly what the two gates and ways mean. But the two ultimate destinies to which they lead - either destruction or life are clear. None can doubt the seriousness of these well-known words. To start with there is a decision. The Lord calls for a decision to enter in at the strait gate and walk in the narrow way of obedience that leads to life. It is much easier to follow the masses through the wide gate on the broad way of disobedience, but it is disastrous to do so because this leads to destruction! The word used for 'destruction' in this passage signifies eternal damnation. The Way of Discipleship: following Jesus The Lord's counsel is: 'Enter ye in at the strait gate.' He says this following the warning about the broad way and on to explain, 'Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'

We see in this that everybody is invited to enter in at the narrow gate. The way of discipleship, however, is 'narrow' because it is a way of self-denial and surrender, as well as being full of opposition that may even bring persecution. But it is the entrance unto life. The Lord already has said in Matthew 5:20, 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom heaven.' Later Paul and Barnabas exhorted the believers in Minor Asia 'that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22). In Luke 13:24 the Lord says only, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' The warning about the broad way is omitted there. This emphasizes the seriousness of the invitation to His disciples.

We must always remember in the Sermon on the Mount that it does not yet speak of the gospel of grace but of the personal decision to follow the Lord as a faithful disciple. The Lord Jesus does not present the grace of God and the way of salvation, but human responsibility and the way of discipleship. The grace of God together with man's responsibility form the two 'lanes' of the one way. For on the other side there is only one way, which is the way leading to eternal damnation. The disciple's personal responsibility could not possibly be stressed in a more serious way.

'Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' These words of the Lord are bitter for the flesh, but they express in the clearest manner the seriousness of the situation. The decision to be taken has eternal consequences. This is why we must not look for a conflict between these verses and Matthew 11:30 : 'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' The natural, unregenerate man is without strength; he is ungodly, a sinner and

an enemy of God (according to Romans 5:6-10). For such a one to follow Christ is an indescribable hardship. This is why he needs the love, grace and mercy of God to draw him. In contrast, it is easy for the born again man to follow his Master. He has received a new nature from God, and this has the sole desire to do His will, although the old nature remains and continues to resist the new one. The Broad Way

It is axiomatic for the natural man (that is a man without new life from God) to go in at the wide gate and walking in the broad way. On this way there are no restrictions. For everything is allowed on this way. But it ends in eternal destruction. We see it today just as the Lord describes then: many are blinded and misled by the inviting, wide entrance. They shut their eyes in respect of their ultimate destination. Generally one does not board a train or plane without knowing exactly when and where the journey is meant to end. But when it comes to the most important journey, the journey of life, multitudes do not even think about the end or their destiny, and lull themselves into a false sense of security.

Let us remember again that the subject here is not the gospel but the responsibility of the disciple, the follower of Christ. The danger also exists for him to be allured by the apparent comforts of life on to the broad way. Let no one who confesses the Lord fool himself by thinking that his manner of life does not matter much and that 'the main thing is faith'. There is not a single word in Scripture to support the view that living in sin, that is to walk in the broad way, will end in glory. Actually the Word of God says unmistakably that walking such a way will lead to damnation (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; Php 3:18-19). From this we must not conclude that born again Christians can lose his salvation. Scripture speaks of men saved by the grace of God, for we read: 'No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.' (John 10:29). But in respect of our testimony it must be proved to be genuine by our way of life in following the Lord. Such are the two sides of our relationship to God. Together they make up the divine seal of 2 Timothy 2:19, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'

Therefore the Lord's invitation in these verses is very serious. It is addressed to everybody who confesses the Lord.

01.23. The Sermon on the Mount (31)

The Sermon on the Mount (31) by Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them

Matthew 7:15-20

False Prophets

'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves' (Matthew 7:15). The Lord Jesus at a very early stage warns His disciples against false prophets. However they did not appear immediately; they are rather a feature of the last days. He also refers to them in the Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:11; Matthew 24:24), but there He speaks about the last days still to come. The grievous wolves against which Paul warned only entered among the flock after his departing (Acts 20:29), and the apostle John wrote of false prophets at a time when the first deviations from the truth of the gospel were already manifest (1 John 4:1). The characteristic of false prophets is that they come in sheep's clothing but in truth are ravening wolves. They pass for believers (and some might even be such) and yet their true intention is only manifested when they have entered among the flock: they are have come to steal and to scatter the sheep (John 10:12). They are able to deceive unwatchful children of God by cunningly transforming themselves into apostles of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

We find false prophets come up with new 'revelations'. And yet every Christian ought to ponder over the numerous so-called 'revelations' of modern prophets which have never been fulfilled. The beginning of the time of tribulation, for example, or the appearing of the Antichrist or the coming of the Lord have often been falsely 'prophesied' by leaders of various sects. And thousands have left home and family in a false hope - and have been bitterly disappointed! The Word of God, however, does not give us a single clue for such calculations! We ought to expect our Lord at any moment. And yet false prophets repeatedly succeed in deluding even true children of God.

There is another kind of false prophecy which can ensnare the hearts of believers. Sometimes men arise who speak about so-called hidden sins or entanglements of believers and bring real or supposed sins to light. By doing this they appeal to the feelings of many believers and seek to influence them. Often they not only say false things but some true things as well. And so many hardly recognise that they are false prophets. The Lord Jesus says: 'Beware of false prophets.' The best way to discern the false from the true in spiritual matters is not to know the false but to know the true. The believer does not need to be able to refute every false doctrine, but should turn away as soon as he recognises that there is something that does not glorify his lord and Redeemer. And to recognise a false prophet one must know the features of a true prophet. A true prophet speaks out of communion with God to the hearts and consciences of his listeners. He will lead them into the light of God, to a deeper knowledge of Him and closer fellowship with Him. A prophetic ministry is characterised by ministering 'oracles of God' (1 Peter 4:11), by reaching the hearts and consciences of the listeners and by working edification, exhortation and comfort or encouragement (1 Corinthians 14:3).

What is meant by Fruits?

'Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.' (Matthew 7:16-18) To substantiate his warning against false prophets the Lord Jesus uses an illustration from creation. If you have good knowledge of nature you will often be able to recognise a tree from a distance by its shape and its leaves. But even someone who does not know nature as well as this will be generally able to identify a tree by its fruit. This is an illustration from daily life the Lord Jesus uses here. The fruits are first of all the words of the prophets. True prophets of God also may fail in their manner of life and their deeds. Whereas false prophets are often characterised by an especially amiable nature. This is why the fruits in this case are not only deeds but particularly the teaching which is brought. By them the disciples of Jesus will recognise if the Spirit of God or a false spirit is speaking. The Word of God says: 'Try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.' and 'He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed' (1 John 4:1 and 2 John 1:9-10).

Thorns and thistles are symbolic of what the ground brings forth as a result of the fall of the first couple. Surely no one expects refreshing grapes or figs, which the Old Testament refers to as signs of God's blessing (see Zechariah 3:10), to come forth from such plants. No, only a good tree can bring forth good fruit, and only a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit. The word 'evil' (or 'bad' in JND) is used in a figurative sense. The fish in Matthew 13:48 are probably not bad either but inedible. The Lord sets up a general principle which says that the quality of the tree is decisive for the quality of the fruit: 'Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.' (Matthew 7:17) To stress this principle he adds that there are no exceptions: 'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit' (Matthew 7:18). This principle from nature has a spiritual application. It is a simple but clear 'either ... or' which helps the disciple to discern the spring from which the message he is hearing is coming.

God's Judgment

'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire' (Matthew 7:19). Already John the Baptist had uttered the same words when warning the Jews against the coming wrath and summoning them to repentance (Matthew 3:10). How this twofold warning against God's judgment stresses the seriousness of the Lord Jesus' words! The judgment awaiting the false prophets is according to the holiness and justice of God, and yet it ought to be a warning to the listeners as well so that eternal destruction might not engulf them too. Will all false prophets be lost, even those who have preached a message that was partially false but have tried to cling to the word of God in other respects? The seal of God in 2 Timothy 2:19 helps us answer this, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity!'

We may not be certain, if someone bringing false teaching is a true child of God or not. But the Lord knows it. He sees the heart and knows if the evil is based upon an error or a proof that there has been no new birth. This is God's side of the seal. If such false prophets are truly born again they will not be lost. Their future is described in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. Their work will be burned

but they themselves shall be saved, yet so as by fire. The other side of the seal is connected with our responsibility as men, who confess the name of the Lord Jesus. The Lord expects us to depart from any iniquity, that is from all that displeases God and that we bring forth fruit for him which corresponds to this confession. No one leading a life in contradiction to the will of God ought to take comfort in the thought that he is saved. This is why the paragraph ends with the repetition of the words: 'Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them' (Matthew 7:20).

01.24. The Sermon on the Mount (32)

The Sermon on the Mount (32) A Worthless Profession

Matthew 7:21-23 False and True Profession

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven' (Matthew 7:21).

We are reaching the end of the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus is addressing the consciences of the disciples in a very serious way. He had spoken of entering into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). And now He comes back on to this important matter. A mere confession of lips is not sufficient to have part in the blessings of the kingdom, be it now on earth or in a future day in heaven. Likewise a mere acquaintance with the name of the Lord Jesus or an infrequent use of that name will not do. Man's religion falls far short of what is needed, and by it many have been deceived and lost for eternity. Our faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for Him ought to be recognised by our keeping His Word and by doing His and the Father's will from the heart (cf. John 14:21; John 14:23; Ephesians 6:6). Every disciple who honestly professes to follow his Lord will admit that he is often falls in doing so, but the Lord knows our hearts and our desires to serve Him as we should.

We sometimes cannot say with certainty if someone who professes the Lord Jesus is a true believer or not. But the Lord is not only the saviour of sinners but the one who knows the heart and will one day be the incorruptible judge. Not only does he see the outward appearance but also the inner reality.

We are not say that profession does not have any importance. However, it should go further than this, 'For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation' (Romans 10:10). A true disciple of Jesus will confess his Lord wherever he can. But in our verse in Matthew the Lord is warning about mere profession without true faith.

More than once the Lord Jesus has been talking to his disciples about God as their father (Matthew 5:16, etc.). In our Matthew 7:21 it is the first time the Lord Jesus calls God 'my Father'. It was grace alone to bring the disciples into this relationship, riches of which the Lord opened up to them after his redemptive work on the cross. But as the Son of God only He knows God as His Father from eternity. He is and will always be the Son of His love. He was so when He came from heaven and being man upon earth revealed God and accomplished the work that was necessary for our salvation in greatest humility. Can the Devil Perform Miracles?

'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?' (Matthew 7:22) The Lord Jesus warns those who are lead religious lives, and even perform great deeds in His name and yet are lost for eternity. He does not speak of a few in this connection but of 'many' who have performed extraordinary things by calling upon his name and yet have to be condemned by him as

wrongdoers.

Many believing readers of the Scriptures may ask, 'How is such a thing possible? Is it possible for men who are not born again but who wear a religious garment to perform miracles in the name of the Lord?' or they say, 'Is it possible for men doing great things in Christ's name to be lost?' The Lord had already spoken of false prophets in verses 15 to 20. Balaam (2 Peter 2:15-16), Saul (1 Samuel 10:11) and Caiaphas (John 11:51-52) were prophets who had not been born again. And among the Lord's own disciples we find Judas Iscariot! (Note that the Lord Jesus had given his disciples power to cast out unclean spirits. See Matthew 10:1). Even amongst the Jews were such who cast out demons (Matthew 12:27). In Acts 19:13-16 we are told that seven sons of the Jewish high priest Sceva called on those who had wicked spirits in name of the Lord. In this case the wicked spirit was not submissive but prevailed against the 'would be' exorcists. But in how many other cases Satan has brought men under his spell! As Paul mentions in one of his letters, '...false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works' (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

These things have not been restricted to the beginning of Christendom only. In our days we will find - and especially so in charismatic circles - false prophets, healers and preachers, who perform miracles 'in the name of Christ'. And yet these men are not truly converted. The source of these miracles - if they are miracles at all, is none else than Satan himself. Every child of God should be most careful in judging extraordinary phenomena in Christian circles. By writing this we do not want to give the impression that all who distinguish themselves by sensational doings are not saved. Satan is able to beguile the heart of a believer also. The Judgment

Men who have performed sensational miracles 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' but have not been converted will one day stand before him as their judge. Then it will be clear where that stand in regard to Him.

'That day' is not a single day but the whole time in which Christ as Son of man will execute a just judgment. In the Old Testament this day is called the day of the Lord (Isaiah 2:11; Zechariah 14:1-9). As we study through the New Testament we learn that 'that day' includes the whole time from the believers' appearing before the judgment seat of Christ up to the end of the millennium:

The raptured saints will be made manifest in 'that day' before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 4:8).

The Lord Jesus will come on earth 'in that day' and His glory will be seen in all His saints (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

'In that day' He will execute judgment upon earth over the living. These will include mere professors who are without the life of God and who will receive their judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).

The 1000-years reign of Christ with it's blessings and joys belongs to 'that day' as well (Matthew 26:29; cf. Mark 14:25).

Lastly all unbelievers will receive their eternal and just sentence to damnation 'in that day' (Matthew 7:22).

'And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' (Matthew 7:23) This awful moment will take place when these false professors will appear before the throne of Christ to receive their final sentence to damnation (Revelation 20:11-15). The judge is the Lord Jesus to whom the Father has given all judgment because he is the Son of man (John 5:22; John 5:27). He will no longer be the gracious Saviour of sinners but the Judge seated upon a great white throne. The sentence will be as follows, 'I never knew you.' It is not that these men are not known to the omniscient Lord but that He cannot accept them and their deeds. They may often have used his name and therefore in a certain sense have 'professed' Him but He will testify to them that they have not believed in him and therefore have no relationship with him.

What a proof these words are that a true believer cannot be lost again, for otherwise the Lord would have to say to them. 'It is true that I have known you but now I do not know you any more.' But no, he will say to these people:, 'I never knew you.' On the other hand He will say to those who have taken refuge in faith with Him, 'I know those that are mine and am known of those that are mine' (John 10:14, N. Tr.). The righteous judge will pronounce the terrible punishment, 'Depart from me'. Those who have made a false profession and pretended a nearness to Christ will be seen to have always been a stranger to him and will receive their punishment: eternal damnation from the presence of God and his glory (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Here the Lord calls they who are eternally damned 'ye that work iniquity.' Literally it means 'workers of lawlessness'. For the Jews listening to His words in this passage are disregarding and trespassing the law of Sinai. Such is also the meaning of this word in Hebrews 10:17 where it is mentioned together with 'sin'. In other references lawlessness signifies more than that, for example in 1 John 3:4, where we read: 'Sin is lawlessness' (N.Tr.). Lawlessness in this verse is rebellion against the will of God which is binding upon every man. Lawlessness therefore is the true character of every sin. So 'those who work iniquity' are not the only guilty ones but all who do not want to submit to the will of God even if they have accomplished great things in the name of the Lord during their lives.

What a serious warning for the whole of Christendom!

01.25. Sermon on the Mount (33)

Sermon on the Mount (33) Hearing and Doing

Matthew 7:24-27 The Lord Jesus concludes His teachings with the well-known picture of the wise man who built his house upon the rock and the foolish man who built his upon the sand (compare the parallel reference in Luke 6:47-49). Later on in the gospel He speaks of the same contrast again in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), and Paul exhorts the Ephesians, 'Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is' (Ephesians 5:17). The wise or understanding man is someone who knows and does the will of the Lord, the foolish man, who hears the words of the Lord but does not do them. The House upon the Rock

'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock' (Matthew 7:24). As we have learnt in the previous passage a mere profession of the lips that we belong to the Lord Jesus is not sufficient to be accepted by Him. Now He explains what really matters in the lives of those who call themselves His disciples: not only to hear but also to do His words. We are often reminded of what the Lord Jesus says here when we read the words of James, 'But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves' (James 1:22-27). The Lord Jesus uses the symbol of a house to illustrate a human life. Just as every house requires a solid foundation to keep standing so every man needs a sure foundation for his life. The best foundation for a house is rock. The rock upon which a wise man builds his life's 'house' is Christ. He is the 'rock' which accompanied the people of Israel during their wilderness journey (1 Corinthians 10:4), the 'rock' upon which his church is built (Matthew 16:18) and the living stone to whom we come when we believe on him (1 Peter 2:4). And here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount He is also the unshakeable foundation of the practical life of faith. In building his life's house upon the rock Jesus Christ the wise man finds it does not fall but it stands eternally. It means he directs his life according to the Lord Jesus and his word, which is the only way we can prove our love for Him. 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me... If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' (John 14:21; John 14:23).

'And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock' (Matthew 7:25). It is often only a crisis that reveals if the house has been built upon a solid foundation or not. From a superficial point of view it may appear that a house is built on firm ground but a storm can prove otherwise.

Southern countries like Israel, for example, can suffer very heavy rainfall which transforms the wadis (rivers dried out during summertime) into rapid torrents within a very short time. The rain pouring down, the floods pressing on the foundations and the storm blowing against the walls will prove the worth of the foundations of houses. If they are laid on an elevated rock the storm may well damage the house but it will not be able to destroy it.

'For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again' (Proverbs 24:16). A disciple wanting to be faithful to the Lord and obey his word - that is the wise man in our parable - can fail also. Nor will he be spared trials. There are happenings and events that will shake the life of even the strongest believer to it's very foundation, but he knows that his house is built upon a solid rock and won't fall. And he has the full and unshakeable security of salvation in respect of eternity as well. The House upon the Sand

'And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.' (Matthew 7:26-27) The foolish man's thoughts do not go very deep. He builds a house as it pleases him without considering the foundation. There is a great temptation in 'building our lives' to put importance on those things that we can see outwardly and neglect the deeper matter of the foundation that is essential to a life for God. Everyone who hears and knows the words of scripture, the commandments of the Lord, and yet does not follow them is acting like the foolish man. The rain pours down, the floods come and the winds blow against the walls of the house. The house is unable to stand up to it, '...and great was the fall of it'. Clearly this goes beyond the failures of daily life. The rock upon which the wise man builds his house is not temporary but the eternal Son of God and His everlasting word (Matthew 16:16-18). This is why the house stands the attack of the elements whereas the efforts in the life of the foolish man end in a great fall. Both have heard the word of the Lord but only one of them has lived accordingly. This parable does not teach salvation by works. No one can stand before God on the basis of his own works but only as he has faith in the Lord Jesus. Then the life will be followed by works of faith. Such is one of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. A mere profession without faith is worthless but on the other hand there is no true faith without works. The Lord puts the sad fate of the foolish man at the end and concludes His lengthy sermon with the words: '... and great was the fall of it.' This stresses in a remarkable way the eternal weight of His words and impresses the seriousness of our responsibility on our hearts and minds again - as it did on the hearts of His listeners at the time.

01.26. The Sermon on the Mount (34)

The Sermon on the Mount (34) The End

Matthew 7:28-29

'And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine' (Matthew 7:28). The sermon of the Lord has come to an end. Although his words were directed to his disciples in the first place (see Matthew 5:1), the crowd of listeners was much greater. Many had listened to the serious and clear teachings, and were astonished at them. We read of such astonishment on the part of the listeners at the doctrine of our Lord in Matthew 13:54; Matthew 22:33 etc. as well. It was different from what they were used to hearing from the Jewish scribes. His words were filled with authority, wisdom and grace (Mark 1:22; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:22).

Many are still impressed today by the words of the Sermon on the Mount but they think they can use them to lead mankind out of the misery and injustice of our world! How many there are who admire the human greatness of Jesus of Nazareth without accepting him, the Son of God, as Saviour and Lord in faith! Others are astonished at the uniqueness, greatness and literary value of the Bible without recognising it as the Word of God, which shows the way out of darkness (and distance from God) into his wonderful light!

'For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' (Matthew 7:29) The Lord Jesus spoke with His own, incontestable authority. His words were the words of God, and therefore sharper than any two-edged sword (compare with Hebrews 4:12). As Son of God he revealed the thoughts of God, but he also knew how the heart of man, into which his words pierced as a sword, would respond to them. In contrast the Jewish scribes relied on the authority of well-known Rabbis who had lived before them for all they taught. This is why their explanations were often lengthy and dry. Many of the schools of Jewish teaching from the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes had grown up in the 400 years after the last prophets of the Old Testament. They disputed over basic questions but were often taken up with debates about trifling matters. It is difficult to follow the arguments of the scribes, but many a sermon of our own day is not much better.

Certainly there were those listening to the Lord who were astonished and yet remained in unbelief as their fathers did in Isaiah's time. The prophet complains: 'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' (Isaiah 53:1). But many must have left for their homes after this sermon with serious and deep thoughts about their lives because they had been touched in their innermost soul. The words of the Lord Jesus are words of eternal life (John 6:68) and those who follow them in faith will only find blessing.

S. The Seven Feasts of Jehovah

The Seven Feasts of Jehovah - Leviticus 23:1-44

Arend Remmers Address given at the Plumstead Conference 1996 Leviticus 23:1-6, Leviticus 23:9-11, Leviticus 23:15-17, Leviticus 23:23-27, Leviticus 23:33-36 The Old Testament has often be called the picture book of the New Testament and I think that everyone of us knows that we have many, many types in the Old Testament, images of truths which have only been revealed in the New Testament. We have persons like Isaac as a figure of Christ and so forth, we have, especially in the people of Israel after their liberation from Egypt, many types, I only take the tabernacle which is an apt type of Christ and His assembly without going into any detail. If we think of the offerings, the sacrifices which all speak of the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. And we have also in the seven feasts of Jehovah of which we have been reading this evening a typical description, I would say, of the entire spiritual history of the world and being that we are occupied with the future, the prophecy, I think it might be an apt filling up of the end of the conference to occupy ourselves for some moments with these seven feasts of the Lord.

These seven feasts were naturally, as it is said in the Darby translation, set feasts or feast times, as John says, for drawing near to God. That was the idea, the thought of God, to have fixed times to draw His people toward Himself. But not only was this the idea, the thought of God, but He wanted to give instruction not to the Israelites, as Paul writes in his first epistle to the Corinthians when He gave the commandment that the threshing oxen should not be muzzled, he did not think of the oxen alone, He thought of us. And the same is true when we consider the feasts of Jehovah. If we have paid attention somebody might say but there were eight feasts mentioned, the first being in Leviticus 23:3 which is the sabbath and indeed if we count all these occasions, these set occasions, there are these eight but the sabbath not being a yearly feast but a weekly recurring occasion. It is on the one hand counted among those feasts but on the other hand it is clearly detached from the seven feasts which only occurred once a year and this sabbath shows us perhaps the idea which we find already in this first chapter of the Bible and which we find in the last book of the Bible of which we have been speaking during our conference today, the eternal rest of Jehovah. The thought of God was, is and shall always be: rest for the soul. For Himself, when He had finished the creation, God rested on the seventh day, and He sanctified this day to detach it from all the other days in which He had accomplished the creatorial work. But then came sin. Many thousand years later when the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, was on this earth, walking over the scene, He said, and He worked on the sabbath, He healed on the sabbath, He was the Lord of the sabbath. And when the Pharisees reproached Him He said 'Man was not created for the sabbath but the sabbath for man' and then He added in another Gospel, He said until that time, even today, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." There was no real rest, sin had entered into this world, God could not find rest in this world, He cannot find it. So, what was to be done? He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus came to give us rest and He has brought rest to everybody. I don't know whether everybody tonight gathered with us here, has already found this rest for the soul but the Lord said in Matthew 11:1-30, the now very well-known words 'Come to Me, all ye burdened

and heavy laden and I shall give you rest.' That is the idea of the sabbath, God wants man to have rest and wants to enjoy this rest together with His creatures but this can only be today after sin had entered into this world on the ground of the atoning work of Christ. So this idea of the rest is still there and therefore the author of the epistle to the Hebrews writes 'there remains yet a sabbath rest or a sabbatism for the people of God. But this rest can be looked at from two sides, it can be looked at from the inward rest which the Lord has in store for everybody who believes in His word now to find rest or peace for his conscience and for his soul but it has also the other respect that there shall be an outward scene of rest for all those who belong to Him. It will be fulfilled in a preliminary way in the millennium but it will be fulfilled in the most perfect way in all eternity. This sabbath rest for the people of God is yet remaining. We are waiting for it but we see that, can well understand that this thought of rest was the underlying thought of God in all His works and that is why every week we term the sabbath, the day of rest when the Israelite was not allowed to work. For us we will find this in the course of these feasts, this sabbath has given place to the first day of the week which also had its place already in the Old Testament without any Israelite being able to understand what was the real meaning of that first day, the new beginning which we find even in the first group of feasts. So we turn now to these seven yearly returning feasts in Israel most of which are well-known especially the first one, the passover of which we have read in Leviticus 23:4 "These are the set feasts of Jehovah, holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons; In the first month, on the fourteenth of the month, between the two evenings, is the passover to Jehovah." All these Israelites who received this commandment probably had celebrated this first passover already in Egypt. We all know that what was the occasion of this passover, this as it is in Hebrew and the English translation is even in phonetically a little bit in accord with the Hebrew which is not the case in German and in French, because it really means, passing over. The occasion was the judgement of God on all the first born, representatives of the whole people in Egypt. And for every Israelite there was this possibility of being spared of this judgement by slaughtering the passover lamb, taking the blood of this lamb and putting it on the door posts and the lintel of the door and by that means being saved from the judgement. And the wonderful thing which also has a very touching voice for us is that not the Israelites, the first born, had to see the blood, it was to be on the outside of the house. And God said 'When I see the blood I will pass over you'. It is not our appreciation of the blood of Christ - which will never reach that height which God has for it - but it is His appreciation of the precious blood of Christ. So the passover which was celebrated in the beginning of the month and if we turn to Exodus 12:1-51 we will see that God really instituted a new beginning. The normal Hebrew or Jewish year begins in Autumn, in September/October, that is the normal, the civil year but in Exodus 12:1-51, in the Darby Bible I think there is a note when it says there 'this is to be the beginning of your months', that is he said 'the beginning of the holy year'. It was actually a new beginning starting with the sacrifice of the passover lamb with freedom from judgement and the beginning of salvation, the beginning of a new life. We see that in the New Testament just to explain that the passover is really a type of the work of the Lord Jesus, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 the apostle explained it expressly, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 1 Corinthians 5:7 at the end "For also our passover Christ has been sacrificed". It is always important to find a New Testament explanation for an Old Testament type so it is easier to understand that we don't stray from the meaning of Scripture. The Holy Spirit explains in the New Testament that the passover is really a type of the work of Christ in freeing us from the judgement which we had deserved. But then the second feast which follows immediately after the passover

which was celebrated on the fourteenth of the first month was in 1 Corinthians 5:6 the day the feast of unleavened bread which started on the fifteenth day of the first month of the holy year and which lasted for one complete week. And having opened 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 we can just continue in 1 Corinthians 5:8 "So that let us celebrate the feast not with old leaven nor with leaven of malice and wickedness but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." So we have in these two verses, 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, the full explanation of the two first feasts of Jehovah, the passover which was one day, reminiscent of the memorial of the freedom from judgement by the blood of the lamb, and then this seven day feast of unleavened bread. Well, these seven days, one week, speak of a period, seven being the divine number of perfection, completion, which shows that, and it is exactly in this way that Paul by the Holy Spirit explains this, it is an image of our life 'let us celebrate the feast' is not to be understood to celebrate the feast of the Supper as sometimes is being said. No, the feast is here the feast of unleavened bread which is the whole week which follows the passover, the whole week and week after week after week, it is an image of our, a type, of our entire lives, life marked by unleavened bread. Now, leaven in the New Testament and also in the Old Testament, is always, if it is taken typically, a type of sin, of sin allowed in one's life and not judged. And it was absolutely forbidden to have any leaven in the house of a Jew for one week after the passover and so God says in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 that it is not apt for the Christian to have any leaven of old leaven which speaks of our lives of the old man, our lives before our conversion nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, we still have our old nature, the old man has been crucified, Romans 6:1-23, Romans 6:6, but the flesh is still there and the flesh has not changed the law, and it has no right of existence, put it away, self judgement is the thing for our everyday life. And so we can see that we have to put away this leaven of malice and wickedness and to live our lives with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, things which were represented in perfection by the Lord Jesus and we are to follow Him. So this second feast of Israel or the feast of Jehovah rather is a type of the entire life of a believer.

Then we continue to the third feast in Leviticus 23:9 "Jehovah spoke to Moses saying 'Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, When ye come into the land that I give unto you, and ye reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest. And he shall wave the sheaf before Jehovah to be accepted for you; on the next day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.'" This was the third feast of Jehovah, the feast of the first-fruits or the feast of the wave-sheaf. Now, this might be a little bit more difficult because it was in very close connection with the first two feasts. It was eaten exactly on the first day of the week, there we have for the first time the first day of the week in those feasts typically mentioned. Now if we take the passover, it was to be held on the fourteenth day of the month which could be any weekday. And then started seven days of unleavened bread, type of the life of the Christian. But then we have here a fixed day of the week, the first day after the sabbath naturally following the passover so if the passover was on a Monday then exactly seven days later on the Lord's day, the first day of the week after the sabbath this feast of the wave-sheaf or the first-fruits was to be celebrated. But when the real Passover was sacrificed the first day of the week followed three days and three nights after the sacrificing of the Passover, the death of the Lord. And what happened on this first day of the next week after the death of our Lord? He was raised from the dead, He was as 1 Corinthians 15:1-58 says, 1 Corinthians 15:20, He was the real firstfruits, the firstfruits of those fallen asleep, He is the first born of those who have been dead, nobody has been raised by God Himself without human intermediation except the Lord Jesus and all people

who have been raised before, even by Himself, had been raised only, that we say, to die a second time but the Lord Jesus was raised in a life marked by incorruptibility. And that is why we find here that this feast was only to be celebrated when they came into the land of Canaan because the land of Canaan brings us into the heavenly sphere, into the heavenly places, that is the type of heavenly places. And if we study the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul exactly, then we shall find that the resurrection of the Lord and our resurrection with Him is only mentioned in the Ephesians and Colossians and once I think in Timothy but in no other letter of the apostle Paul is our resurrection with Him, our spiritual not our future resurrection, but our dying with Him and our being raised with Him spiritually mentioned. And these are exactly those epistles in which our heavenly position is presented. When the Lord was raised from the dead He did not belong anymore to this earth. In one sense virtually He never belonged to this earth, He was always the heavenly Stranger, but He came down and He took part in our condition. He became man, not the sinful condition but our creature condition. I know that this is some discussion here in the English speaking world about the terms 'condition' and 'state', but what I mean is simply that the Lord Jesus became the perfect man except sin, sin excepted. He came down, He was on this earth and He was surrounded by all the marks of the human state, sin excepted. He was hungry, He was thirsty, He was tired but after the accomplishment of His work, after His resurrection, He did no longer belong to this earth, He belonged now as man to heaven where He went forty days afterwards. And that is why we find here that this feast is connected with the land, not with the desert 'When ye come into the land'. In the desert there are no first-fruits, there is no crop to be raised, only in the land, and they should bring the sheaf of the first-fruits of which we find in just to mention the exact passage, 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, should I perhaps mention other passages, but I take this one from the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15:1-58, 1 Corinthians 15:20 "But now Christ is raised from among the dead, firstfruits of those fallen asleep". This is the fulfilment of the feast of the wave-sheaf which was to be presented in the land which brings the people of God in the full possession and enjoyment of what He has given to us. He doesn't want us to be poor and joyless Christians, He wants to see us in connection and relation with the Lord and in the enjoyment of all the blessings He has procured for us. But this was not yet the last feast. The first three feasts which belong very closely together which all have, as we can easily see from the New Testament quotations, found their fulfilment in the work of Christ. But then we have the fourth feast which is mentioned from Leviticus 23:15-17

"And ye shall count from the morning after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering, seven weeks; they shall be complete; even unto the morning after the seventh sabbath shall ye count fifty days; and ye shall present a new oblation to Jehovah. Out of your dwelling shall ye bring two wave-loaves and of two tenths of fine flour; with leaven shall they be baken; [as] first-fruits to Jehovah."

Fifty days after the resurrection day, after the waving of the first-fruits, the wave-sheaf, was another feast of which we find the fulfilment also in the New Testament. If we take the Greek exactly, it says in Acts 2:1-47, Acts 2:1 'And when the feast of the fiftieth was fulfilled', the fifty days mentioned here, seven weeks plus one day, the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is simply the Greek word for 'fifty'. The day of Pentecost was the fulfilling of the feast of the weeks which was to take place seven weeks after the presenting of the firstfruits, this wave sheaf and when we go to the New Testament and ask what was the meaning, what happened on this day of Pentecost, we see

that it was the foundation day of the assembly. So we have in these four feasts, passover, unleavened bread, the wave sheaf and the feast of the weeks the whole, one could say, the entire plan of God for the salvation and the union of His own brought about by the work of the Lord. And it is interesting that these types in many respects and here especially fall short of the reality because on the day of Pentecost, as Paul explains it later, all the believers, these at least one hundred and twenty believers who were together there in the upper room, were baptised according to 1 Corinthians 12:1-31, 1 Corinthians 12:13 by one Spirit to one body which is expressed every Lord's day in the breaking of bread, one loaf, one body, "Because we, [being] many, are one loaf, one body; for we all partake of that one loaf." But here the type falls short, they had to bring not one loaf but two loaves. There are many types of the assembly in the Old Testament, take for example the tabernacle, but there is not a type of this wonderful oneness of the Church of God to the present day. The people of Israel is also a type of the heavenly people, twelve tribes, and here we have two loaves, two loaves, Leviticus 23:17, which are characterised that they contain leaven.

Now, we have just heard that leaven is not to be allowed in the lives of the Christians but here we see that they have been baked with leaven. Leaven which is not baked works but the moment it is exposed to fire the working, the energy of this leaven, stops, it is only the memory that there was leaven in this loaf but it has finished. And this is exactly the state, the assembly, consisting of believers, is in because every believer knows that he was once leavened but due to the judgement undergone by the Lord Jesus this leaven, the old man, has been taken away, the working of sin has finished - not in practice but with regard to our position. This feast of weeks is also connected with first-fruits brought to Jehovah, these two loaves of bread, the nearest, the closest approach to the oneness of the assembly in the Old Testament, two loaves. In the tabernacle there were twelve loaves, speaking of the twelve tribes, but here we have two loaves, not one. This type falls short in that respect but there we find again this word 'first-fruits' but in the Darby translation, in the note and it is very important that we find it here, this word for first-fruits is another word than that which we have had in Leviticus 23:10, as the note says which is the same word as in Leviticus 2:12 in connection with the meat offering. We are also first-fruits, as James says in his first chapter, James 1:18 "According to His own will begat He us by the word of truth, that we should be a certain firstfruits of His creatures", firstfruits of the new creation. If you look around you see the old creation, everybody by nature is the old creation, this earth is the old creation but in this old creation lying under sin there are new creatures, every believer is the part of the new creation. Paul says this and it is also the very precious thing to remember this: we do not any longer belong to this old creation, we are in it but Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:1-21 2 Corinthians 5:17 'if anyone be in Christ there is a new creation; the old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.' Isn't that a wonderful thing, we ought to be able to say 'I belong to the new creation, I'm a new creature'. But why are we firstfruits? Because of everything of which we have been speaking, the remnant, the millennium, everything is future but we are living at present and that is why we are really the firstfruits of the new creation and everything in this old creation will undergo judgement except the believers, they were taken out of this old creation to be really, to enter as firstfruits into the new state of things. And then comes a pause, an interval. We see that all the first four feasts have a relation to the passover which is the beginning of the old year, a new beginning, passover, and even the feast of weeks was seven weeks after the first day of the week, after the resurrection of the Lord. And then comes a time of several months until the seventh month as we

have read in Leviticus 23:24 :

"Speak unto the children of Israel saying, 'In the seventh month, on the first of the month, shall ye have a rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets'".

What we have considered until now was actually the work of Christ for everybody who believes whether Jew or Gentile and the result even including the building, the making of the assembly. But now comes an interval of many months and what we have here, the seventh month, if we turn back to Exodus 12:1-51 where we have found that God has reversed the order of the months we shall find that this was the seventh month in actually the normal beginning of the normal year which is here called the seventh because here we have the holy year. But, what I want to say is that now God, by these feasts turns back to the normal order and we can say to the earthly order to His earthly people. What we have had now is the formation of the heavenly people by the first four feasts but the last three feasts which are firstly separated by a longer interval from the first four, secondly bring us back into the earthly and, let me say, normal order of things, show us that something must be changing here and I think we can say that was in the first place it is the returning to the people of Israel, that the last three feasts have to do with the development of Israel and secondly that they, this is indicated by the interval which was not to be even fixed by a certain number of days because this interval was always changing from the day of Pentecost until the first of the seventh year you only have to take several calendars you will see that every year the number of days will be different showing that this difference is not a fixed distance. That's why we don't know when the Lord will take up His relations with Israel. He will do it as certainly - and this is one lesson which we can draw from these seven feasts - as four of these feasts have already been fulfilled two thousand years ago and God has given them one thousand five hundred years before they were fulfilled. They have all been fulfilled. Prophecy fulfilled, typology fulfilled, four of the seven feasts are fulfilled: should not that be for everybody a very earnest and serious hint that there will be no doubt - and there can be no doubt - that the last three feasts will also find their fulfilment? The Bible is full of these things. How many prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus, actual prophecies, have been fulfilled, undeniably fulfilled? And still man does not believe. But for us who believe in that which has happened we know we can infer that that which has been prophesied, prophecy, and is not yet fulfilled will as certainly be fulfilled as that which has been fulfilled. So we turn to these last three feasts. The seventh month the Lord will speak to Israel and He will do it by means of a trumpet. It is not the trumpet which will take the saint up, this would belong to the first four feasts but it is not mentioned. This is a new beginning in the new setting with His own people, with Israel, and I only mention Joel 2:1-32, Joel 2:1 : "Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of Jehovah cometh, for it is at hand; a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and gross darkness, as the dawn spreads upon the mountains;- a great people and strong". 'Blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm because the day of Jehovah is at hand': that is exactly the meaning of these trumpets in Leviticus 23:24 :

"In the seventh month, on the first of the month" the beginning of this month "shall ye have a rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. No manner of servile work shall ye do".

We read this commandment to do no manner of servile work practically at every feast and it shows us, we read it here a very close connection with blowing of the trumpet, it shows that in all the

dealings of God with man, with His heavenly people or with His earthly people we can do nothing. It is not our work and it will not be the work of the Jew that they return, it will be the work of God Who will blow the trumpet and we can say that between Leviticus 23:22-23 (just as in the Revelation where we have no direct indication of the rapture of the assembly after chapter 3) so here we have no indication of the rapture but it is there, it should be here between Leviticus 23:22-23 and then after the assembly, the believers asleep and alive have been taken away the Old Testament and the New Testament and every believer have been caught up to be for ever with the Lord then this trumpet for Israel shall be sounded and Israel will be spiritually awakened. Now, there could be lots of things said as to the state of Israel. We see that outwardly a great part, not the greater part, I think that in New York alone there are more Jews than in the whole state of Israel, more than three million, but a great part of this people who have in our days been returned to Israel after two thousand years of absence but it is not yet the trumpet. It is what we find perhaps in Ezekiel 37:1-28, the dead bones have been gathered in the valley but there is no life in it and for the spiritual life, the waiting for the Messiah. They have sinned and that's what we had this afternoon that the woman has to flee into the desert (Revelation 12:1-17). This is something which has not yet appeared in Israel and which will probably, very probably, openly come to life after the rapture of the assembly and not before because this will be to my mind the effect of the sounding of the trumpet that the people of Israel open their ears again to the word of God, to the voice of His prophets. And then we have the second of the second group, the sixth feast in Leviticus 23:26 "And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Also on the tenth of this seventh month is the day of atonement: a holy convocation shall it be unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and present an offering by fire to Jehovah." Now, this day of atonement is explained very largely in Leviticus 16:1-34. And it shows us it is very often, rightly so, applied to ourselves, Hebrews does so, Hebrews 9:1-28 and partly Hebrews 10:1-39 is a biblical explanation where Scripture explains Scripture, of the day of atonement and the apostle who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews writes that Christ is the fulfilment of the work of the High Priest, the fulfilment also of this sacrifice of the two goats and the other offerings by His offering which has taken place once for all whereas in the day of atonement the only time the High Priest was allowed to enter into the Holiest of Holies once a year, Hebrews 9:1-28 says, this shows that it was not yet a complete salvation but it's this once a year is also a type of the work done once and for all by the Lord Jesus. We apply this to ourselves and we can do it because the work of the Lord is universal, it is for every man, it is for the believers of the Old Testament times, Romans 3:25 it says there that God "passed by the sins that had taken place before through the forbearance..." God looked over the sins in the past days with a view to Calvary, it is, it has been fulfilled for us in the present time and it will be the foundation of the New Covenant which will be made with the people of Israel. And here we see that Israel will have their own day of atonement, that after the sound of the trumpet, it's not an exact historical description, but that the main thing for Israel after the call of God to come back to Him by the trumpets the main thing will be that Israel as people will see that the Lord Jesus, our Saviour, is also their goat of atonement, that He has also taken their sins, that He is the One Whose blood was brought two thousand years ago into the heavenly sanctuary, that He is the One Who was sent away as Azazel.... 'His blood be on us and on our children' but then they will see that their sins were on Him, that their children's sin were put on Him and they will look at Him Whom they have pierced: that is the day of atonement for Israel. I don't say that this is given in a sense or in view to any historical exact description but just to show us the main thrust of what God will be

doing with His people, His earthly people. And then we come to the seventh feast, the last feast, which cannot be anything else than the great rest of God for His earthly people, the millennium, which is described in Leviticus 23:33-36

"And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the feast of booths seven days to Jehovah. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation: no manner of servile work shall ye do. Seven days ye shall present an offering by fire to Jehovah; on the eighth day shall be a holy convocation unto you; and ye shall present an offering by fire to Jehovah: it is a solemn assembly; no manner of servile work shall ye do." This feast which also lasted one week is a picture, an apt image of the millennium, a feast of joy where Israel was bidden to make huts of leaves and of branches and to rejoice in what God had done for them and this will be true for Israel in the millennium, that will be the true feast of tabernacles as it is given here. But it does not end there. Even as we had a new beginning right from the beginning after the passover the first day of the week the resurrection day of the Lord, also here we have not the first day of the week but the eighth day which in reality is again the first day of a new week. And this opens our eyes and our view towards a time which will follow after the millennium, the eighth day is the day of eternity, the eternal day where we will in a way continue what has begun in the millennium. The millennium has a double meaning, it is on the one hand the glorious end of the ways of God with the old creation. It will not tumble down as it is now. God will in the thousand years reign of Christ by a man demonstrate gloriously that peace and justice are possible on this poor earth. If we look around us now we would hardly believe that this is possible but God will close the history of the last thousand years of this world's history with this demonstration, a thousand years of peace and justice. In one sense this is the end of the present world but in one sense which shows already even if it's the old creation, it shows a glimpse of what will be eternal although it is imperfect and so we see here that the eighth day is in a way the continuation, it is a new beginning on the one hand but on the other hand it is the continuation of the reign because even if we take the thousand years reign, reigning, ruling will not end after the millennium. In Revelation 22:1-21 we see that the servants of the Lord will reign with Him in all eternity. This is in one chapter marvellously put, I only could give a short overview, if we look into all these feasts we will receive much more instruction but in one chapter, three thousand five hundred years ago given to us the moral, or let us say the divine, view of the history of the world. The work of the Lord at Calvary and the history of His earthly people which... led to a glorious end which will not be the end but which will lead us on to this eternal state for which we may now wait and even as Peter says (2 Peter 3:12) we can hasten that day, hasten the day of God although it is after the day of the Lord in the millennium but because the one follows to the other. So we see that God in His word wants us to be informed about His thoughts, this is His thoughts for His children to take us as it were into His arms and say 'Look here, this is what I have in store for everybody who believes in the Lord Jesus, for everybody who belongs to My earthly people' and in a way it is a call to all those, if anybody should be here tonight who says 'Well, I don't understand a thing' - you can understand that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him may not perish but have life eternal.

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