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## SEVEN

### Jesus' Greatest Salvation Sermon Continues

How many pastors would consider it complimentary if someone labeled them a “holiness preacher”? How many professing Christians would use such a term in a way that is not derogatory? Why is holiness such a negative topic in the minds of so many people who claim to believe in a book that contains the words *holy* or *holiness* over six-hundred times, which promises them a future in a *holy* city where resides the “holy One,” whose very name is *holy*, who gives them His *Holy* Spirit, and whose *holy* throne is surrounded by four living creatures who day and night do not cease to say, “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty*”? (see Rev. 21:2; Is. 40:25; Lev. 22:32; 1 Thes. 4:8; Ps. 47:8; Rev. 4:8, emphasis added).

If the first portion of the Sermon on the Mount has taught us anything, it has taught us that Jesus was a holiness preacher. That was His topic—holiness and how it relates to salvation.

The Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5, 6 and 7. So far we’ve considered only chapter 5. There, in the Beatitudes, we learned the characteristics of the heaven-bound. We also discovered that Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, and that keeping the commandments is as important as ever. We learned that we will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, who kept the letter but ignored the spirit of the Law.

The second part of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6 and the first half of chapter 7, consists of more commandments Christ gave to His followers. Does keeping them have anything to do with salvation? It certainly does. The entire last half of chapter 7 makes that point unmistakably clear, as we will see.

Let's continue reading what Jesus commanded His true followers, those who believed He was God's Son, the Messiah. We can, and should, ask the very revealing question: *If Jesus' audience didn't believe in Him, why else would they obey Him?* Why would they even listen to Him make demands that would affect every area of their lives? The answer is obvious: *Because they believed, they wanted to obey.* They would show their faith by their works.

### **Chapter Six Begins**

Notice in this first section that Jesus assumes His followers will practice righteousness, and warns them to make sure their motive is to please God rather than impress men:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you (Matt. 6:1-4).

Jesus fully expected that His followers would give alms to the poor (as we learned in chapter three of this book). The Law commanded it (see Ex. 23:11; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; 25:35; Deut. 15:7-11), and the scribes and Pharisees did it with the blowing of trumpets, ostensibly to call the poor to their public distributions. Yet how many professing Christians (and professing Christian churches) give *nothing* to the poor? They haven't even made it to the point of needing to examine their motives for alms giving. If selfishness motivated the scribes and Pharisees to

advertise their alms giving, what is it that motivates professing Christians to *ignore* the plight of the poor? Does our righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees?

As Paul would echo in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, we can do good works that will go unrewarded if our motives are not pure. True followers of Christ should have pure motives in every good deed, but not all do. Paul wrote that it is possible even to preach the gospel from impure motives (see Phil. 1:15-17). The best way to be sure our giving is purely motivated is to give as secretly as possible.

Jesus also expected that His followers would pray and fast. That was a given. He did not say, "*If* you pray," but "*When* you pray." The danger was that they might allow their motives to become tainted, as were the motives of unregenerate people who prayed and fasted. If that happened, they would lose the reward they would have received had their motives been pure. So He admonished them:

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him...

And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face, so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you (Matt. 6:5-8, 16-18).

Again, how many professing Christians rarely spend time in prayer and have never fasted? How does their righteousness compare with that of the scribes and Pharisees, who practiced both (albeit for the wrong reasons)?

### Holy Praying

Jesus also told His disciples how they should pray. His model prayer is a telling revelation of His expectations for their devotion, obedience and priorities:<sup>1</sup>

Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:9-11).

The true disciple's foremost concern should be that God's name be hallowed. That is, that God's name be respected, revered, and treated as holy.

Of course, those who pray that God's name be hallowed should *be* holy, hallowing God's name themselves. It would be hypocritical to do otherwise. Thus this prayer reflects our desire that others would submit themselves to God as we have. And, as I asked in a previous chapter, to what degree does a person reflect his longing for God's name to be hallowed when he entertains himself by viewing actors who continually blaspheme the name of God and His Son? According to my observations, this is something that many professing Christians do with regularity. Would you be offended by a movie where the actors used *your* name as a swear word?

The second request of the prayer is similar: "Thy kingdom come." The idea of a kingdom implies the idea of a King who rules His kingdom. The Christian disciple longs to see his King, the one who rules his life, rule over the whole earth. Oh, that everyone would bow their knee to King Jesus in obedient faith!

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<sup>1</sup> Some unfortunately claim that this is not a prayer that Christians should employ because it is not prayed "in Jesus' name." Applying this logic, however, we would have to conclude that many prayers of the apostles recorded in the book of Acts and epistles were not "Christian prayers."

The third request echoes the first and second: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Again, how can we sincerely pray such a prayer without being submitted to God’s will in our own lives? The true disciple desires that God’s will be done on earth just as it is in heaven—perfectly and completely.

That God’s name be hallowed, that His will be done, that His kingdom would come, should be more important to us than sustaining food, our “daily bread.” This fourth request is placed fourth for a reason. Even in itself, it reflects a right ordering of our priorities, and no hint of greed is found here. This praying disciple serves God and not mammon.

### **The Model Prayer Continues**

So far the theme of holiness streams from every supplication of the Lord’s Prayer. And it continues to flow from its final lines:

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matt. 6:12-15).

Jesus’ true disciple desires to be holy, so when he sins, it troubles him greatly.<sup>2</sup> He realizes that his disobedience has offended God, and he feels ashamed. He wants the stain of unholiness to be removed, and thankfully, his gracious heavenly Father is willing to forgive him. But he must ask for forgiveness, the fifth request found in the Lord’s prayer.

Our being forgiven, however, is conditional upon our forgiving others. Because we’ve been forgiven of so much, we have an obligation to forgive

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<sup>2</sup> This verse is one of many that tell us that true disciples are not perfect or sinless. However, it also proves that true believers are concerned when they do sin.

everyone who requests our forgiveness, and to love even those who don't. If we refuse to forgive, God won't forgive us. Do unforgiven people gain entrance into God's eternal kingdom? Again we see that this is a sermon about holiness, salvation, and the relationship between the two.

The sixth and final request, too, is one obviously related to holiness: "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil" [or "the evil one"]. So much does the true disciple long for holiness that he asks God not to lead him into a situation where he might be tempted, lest he succumb. Additionally, he requests that God would rescue him from any evil that might entrap him. This final request of Jesus' model prayer is certainly nothing less than a cry for God's help to be holy.

Why are all six requests of this prayer appropriate? The final line tells us: God is a great King who rules over His kingdom in which we are His servants. He is all-powerful, and no one should dare resist His will. All glory will belong to Him forever: "For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever" (Matt. 6:13). He is worthy to be obeyed.

What is the dominant theme of the Lord's prayer? Holiness. Christ's disciples desire that God's name be hallowed, that His reign would be established over the earth, and that His will be perfectly done everywhere. This is more important to them than even their daily bread. They want to be pleasing in His sight, and when they fail, they want forgiveness from Him. As forgiven people, they extend forgiveness to others. They long to be perfectly holy, to the degree that they desire to avoid temptation, because temptation increases their chances of sinning.

### **The Disciple and His Material Possessions**

The next topic of the Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the most disturbing section for professing Christians whose primary motivation in life is the accumulation of things:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where

thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:19-24).

Jesus commanded that we not lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth. What then constitutes a “treasure”? Literal treasures are normally kept in treasure chests, stored away somewhere, never used for anything practical. Jesus defined them as things that attract moths, rust and thieves. Another way of saying it would be, “non-essentials.” Moths eat what is in our attic and the far ends of our closets, not what we wear frequently. Rust eats away at the toys and “tools” we never use, piled in the corners of basements, garages and storage sheds. Thieves break in and steal things people really don’t need: art, jewelry, expensive gadgets, and what can be pawned. They normally don’t take beds, stoves, food or tennis shoes (at least they don’t in wealthy nations such as ours).

The point is that we are God’s and so is everything we “own.” We are stewards of God’s money, so every decision to spend money is a spiritual decision. What we do with our money reflects who is controlling our lives. When we accumulate “treasures,” hoarding money and buying what is not essential, we reveal that Jesus is not in control, because if He was, we would do better things with the money He’s entrusted to us.

What are those better things? Jesus commands us to lay up treasure in heaven. How can we do that? He tells us in Luke’s Gospel: “Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys” (Luke 12:33). By giving to charity, we lay up treasure in heaven. Jesus is telling us to take what is sure to depreciate to the point of being worthless, and invest it in something that will never depreciate. How many professing Christians are doing that? Why do the large majority of professing Christians in North America, who enjoy one

of the highest standards of living in the world, not even give anywhere close to a tenth of their income, which was required under the Law?<sup>3</sup>

### **The Bad Eye**

What did Jesus mean when He spoke about the eye being “the lamp of the body”? His words must have something to do with how we view money and material things, because that is what He was talking about before and after.

Just as He first contrasted the person who lays up earthly treasures with the person who lays up heavenly treasures, Jesus was again contrasting two kinds of people, one with a clear eye whose body is full of light, and one with a bad eye whose body is full of darkness. In the verses that immediately follow, He also contrasts two people, saved and unsaved, one who serves God and one who serves money. Thus it is safe to conclude that the person with the clear eye corresponds to the one who lays up treasures in heaven and who serves God, while the one with the bad eye corresponds to the one who lays up treasures on earth and serves money.

From other scriptures, we learn that an “evil eye” is an idiom for having a greedy heart (see Matt. 20:15 and Prov. 28:22). A “clear eye” is the opposite, so it must signify one who does not have a greedy heart. A person with a clear eye is full of light, that is, truth, whereas the person with the evil eye is full of darkness. Remember, he is the same person who is laying up treasures on earth. He is the same person whose god is money.

What does it mean to have money as your god? It means that money has a place in your life that only God should rightfully have. Money is directing your life. It consumes your energy, thoughts and time. It is the main source of your

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<sup>3</sup> According to a Gallup poll, only 25% of evangelical Christians tithe. Forty percent claim that God is the most important thing in their lives, yet those who make between \$50-75,000 per year give an average of 1.5 percent of their incomes to charity, including religious charity. Meanwhile, they spend an average of 12% of their incomes on leisure pursuits. George Barna reports in his book, *The Second Coming of the Church*, that his polls indicate that non-Christians are actually more likely than born-again Christians to give to nonprofit organizations and the poor.

joy. You love it.<sup>4</sup> That is why Paul equated greed with idolatry, stating that no greedy person will inherit God's kingdom (see Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5-6).

In this passage, Jesus is not contrasting two kinds of Christians. He is contrasting a true believer with an unbeliever. Those who are laying up treasures on earth are full of darkness and not serving God, but money. They reveal their unbelief by what they do. Again, this is a sermon about holiness, salvation, and the relationship between them.

### **The Covetous Poor**

A preoccupation with material things is not only wrong if those things are luxury items. A person can be wrongly preoccupied with material things even when those things are basic necessities. Jesus continued:

For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "With what shall we clothe ourselves?" For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness;

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<sup>4</sup> On another occasion, Jesus made the same statement about the impossibility of serving God and mammon, and Luke tells us, "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things, and they were scoffing at Him" (Luke 16:14).

and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matt. 6:25-34).

Most readers of this book will not be able to relate at all to the people Jesus was addressing. When was the last time you worried about having food, drink or clothing?

However, Jesus' words certainly have application to us. If it is wrong to be preoccupied with the *essentials* of life, how much more wrong is it to be preoccupied with *nonessentials*? Jesus expects His disciples to be primarily focused on seeking two things: His kingdom and His righteousness. When a professing Christian can't afford to tithe, but *can* afford dog food, cable TV, payments on a new car or furniture, designer fashions, or junk food, is he living up to Christ's standard of seeking first His kingdom and righteousness? No, he's only fooling himself if he thinks he's a follower of Jesus.

### **Specks and Logs**

Jesus' next set of commandments to His followers concerns the sins of judging and fault finding:

Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

What does it mean to judge another person? A judge is someone who looks for faults in people who are brought to court. That's the judge's job, and there's nothing wrong about what he does, as long as he judges according to proven facts. Judges are *supposed* to judge people, measuring them by the standard of the

law of the land. If there were no judges, criminals would never be brought to justice.

Many people seem to think, however, that they have been appointed as judges, and thus they are always looking for faults in others. *That* is wrong. Furthermore, they often judge people without knowing all the facts, jumping to wrong conclusions. To make matters worse, these self-appointed judges usually measure people by standards that they themselves fall short of, making themselves hypocrites. “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone” (John 8:7).

This is the kind of behavior Jesus was talking about. The apostle James wrote, “Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door” (Jas. 5:9). This is one of the most prevalent sins in the church, and those who are guilty of judging others place themselves in a dangerous position of being judged. When we speak against a fellow believer, pointing out his faults to others, we’re playing the part of a judge. We’re breaking the golden rule, because we don’t want others to speak ill of us in our absence. And when we speak to a fellow believer about his faults while we have greater faults, we are the man with the *log in his eye*.

Notice, however, that Jesus did not forbid spiritually appraising other people. He said in the very next verse:

Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces (Matt. 7:6).

In order to obey this commandment, we must appraise if someone is a “spiritual dog” or “spiritual pig.” that is, someone who does not appreciate valuable spiritual things, such as God’s Word. And we will shortly read how Jesus commanded His followers to appraise all spiritual leaders by examining their fruit.

### **Encouragement to Pray**

Finally we come to the last section of Jesus' sermon. It begins with some encouraging prayer promises:

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him (Matt. 7:7-11).

"Aha!" a reader somewhere is saying. "Here's a part of the Sermon on the Mount that has nothing to do with holiness."

That all depends on what it is we're asking, knocking and seeking for in prayer. As those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness," we long to obey all that Jesus has commanded in the preceding sermon, and that longing is certainly reflected in our prayers. In fact, the model prayer that Jesus previously shared in this same sermon was the expression of a desire for God's will to be done and for holiness. Additionally, Luke's version of these same prayer promises under consideration ends with, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the *Holy Spirit* to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). Apparently, Jesus was not thinking of motor homes and sailboats when He promised us "good gifts." In His mind, the Holy Spirit is a "good gift," because the Holy Spirit makes us holy and helps us spread the gospel that makes other people holy. And holy people go to heaven.

### **A Summarizing Statement**

Now we arrive at a verse that should be considered a statement that summarizes practically everything Jesus said up to this point. Many commentators miss this, but it is important that we don't. This particular verse is obviously a summarizing statement, as it begins with the word *therefore*. It is thus

connected to previous instructions, and the question is: How much of what Jesus has said does it summarize? Let's read it and think:

Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12).

This statement can't be a summary of just the few verses before it about prayer, otherwise it would make no sense.

Remember that early in His sermon, Jesus had warned against the error of thinking that He had come to abolish *the Law or the Prophets* (see Matt. 5:17). From that point in His sermon until the verse at which we've now arrived, He did essentially nothing but endorse, explain and expand God's Old Testament commandments. Thus, He now summarizes *everything* He's commanded, all of which He derived from the Law and Prophets: "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them, for this is *the Law and the Prophets*" (7:12). The phrase, "the Law and the Prophets," connects everything Jesus said between Matthew 5:17 and 7:12.

The relation between salvation and keeping what we now know as "the golden rule" is made clear in the two verses that follow:

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it (Matt. 7:13-14).

Obviously the narrow gate and the way that leads to life, which few find, is symbolic of salvation. The wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction, the route of the majority, symbolizes damnation. If everything Jesus said prior to this statement means anything, if this sermon has any logical progression, if Jesus possessed any intelligence as a communicator, then the most natural interpretation would be that the narrow way is the way of following Jesus, obeying His commandments. The broad way would be the opposite. How many professing Christians are traveling the narrow way that Jesus revealed from

Matthew 5:17 to 7:12? If you are going along with the crowds, you can be sure you are on the broad way.

It is disturbing to many professing Christians that Jesus said nothing about faith or believing in Him in this salvation sermon. However, to those who understand the inseparable correlation between belief and behavior, faith and works, this sermon presents no problem. People who obey Jesus show their faith by their works. Those who don't obey Him don't believe He is the Son of God. Not only is our salvation an indication of God's grace toward us, so is the transformation that has taken place in our lives. Our holiness is really His holiness.

### **How to Recognize False Religious Leaders**

Next, Jesus warned His audience about false prophets, religious leaders who lead the unsuspecting down the broad road to destruction. They are those whose message is not truly from God, and so false teachers fall under this category as well. How can they be recognized as being false? By the same way a person can be recognized as being a false believer:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:15-23).

False teachers are very deceptive. They have some exterior indications of being genuine. They may call Jesus their Lord, prophesy, cast out demons and perform miracles. But the “sheep’s clothing” only hides the “ravenous wolf.” They aren’t of the true sheep. How can it be known if they are true or false? Their true character can be known by examining their “fruits.”

What are the fruits of which Jesus was speaking? They are the fruits of obedience to all He has taught. Those who are true, teach and do the will of the Father. Those who are false, teach what is not true and “practice lawlessness” (7:23). Our responsibility, then, is to compare their teaching and lives with what Jesus taught and commanded.

False teachers abound today in the church, and we should not be surprised, because both Jesus and Paul forewarned us that, as the end approaches, we should expect nothing less (see Matt. 24:11; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). The most prevalent false prophets of our day are those who teach that heaven awaits the unholy. They are responsible for the eternal damnation of millions of people. Of them, John Wesley wrote,

How terrible is this!—when the ambassadors of God turn agents for the devil!—when they who are commissioned to teach men the way to heaven do in fact teach them the way to hell....If it be asked, “Why, who ever did...this?” ...I answer, Ten thousand wise and honourable men; even all those, of whatever denomination, who encourage the proud, the trifler, the passionate, the lover of the world, the man of pleasure, the unjust or unkind, the easy, careless, harmless, useless creatures, the man who suffers no reproach for righteousness’ sake, to imagine he is in the way to heaven. These are false prophets in the highest sense of the word. These are traitors both to God and man....They are continually peopling the realms of the night; and whenever they follow the poor souls they have destroyed, “hell shall be moved from beneath to meet them at their coming!”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Works of John Wesley* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1996), by John Wesley, reprinted from the 1872 edition issued by the Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, London, pp. 441, 416.

Interestingly, Wesley was specifically commenting about the false teachers whom Jesus warned against in Matthew 7:15-23.

Notice that Jesus again plainly said, contrary to what so many false teachers tell us today, that those who don't bear good fruit will be cast into hell (see 7:19). This applies not just to teachers and prophets, but to everyone. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Forgive me for saying it again, but this is a sermon about the correlation between salvation and holiness. People who aren't obeying Jesus are heading for hell.

Also notice the connection Jesus made between what a person is inwardly and what he is outwardly. "Good" trees produce good fruit. "Bad" trees *can't* produce good fruit. The source of the good fruit that shows up on the outside is the nature of the person. God has changed the nature of those who have truly believed in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Final Summary**

Jesus concludes His entire sermon with a summarizing example. As you would expect, it is an illustration of the relation between obedience and salvation:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them [literally, "does them"], may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the

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<sup>6</sup> I can't resist taking the opportunity to also comment here about a common expression people use when trying to excuse sins in others: "We don't know what is in their hearts." In contradiction to this, Jesus said that the outside reveals the inside. In another place, He told us that "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt. 12:34). When a person speaks words of hate, it indicates hatred fills his heart. Jesus also told us that "from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness" (Mark 7:21-22). When a person commits adultery, we *do* know what is in his heart: adultery.

winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them [literally, “does not do them”], will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall (Matt. 7:24-27).

Jesus’ final illustration is not a formula for “success in life” as some use it. The topic of the context is not how to prosper financially during tough times by having faith in Jesus’ promises. This is the summary of all that Jesus has said in His Sermon on the Mount. Those who do what He says are wise and will endure; they need not fear the wrath of God. Those who don’t obey Him are foolish and will suffer greatly, paying “the penalty of eternal destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9).

### **Answer to an Objection**

Is it not possible that Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was only applicable to those followers of His who lived prior to His sacrificial death and resurrection? Were they not under the Law as their temporary means of salvation, but after Jesus died for their sins, were then saved by faith, thus invalidating the means of salvation expounded in this sermon?

This theory is a bad one. No one has ever been saved by his works. It has always been by faith, prior to and during the Old Covenant. Paul argues in Romans 4 that Abraham and David were justified by faith and not works.

Moreover, it was an impossibility that any of Jesus’ audience could be saved by works, because they had all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (see Rom. 3:23). Only God’s grace could save them, and only faith can receive His grace.

Unfortunately, too many in the church today view all of Jesus’ commandments as serving no higher purpose than to make us feel guilty so we’ll see the impossibility of earning salvation by works. Now that we’ve “gotten the message” and have been saved by faith, we can ignore most of His commandments. Unless, of course, we want to get others “saved.” Then we can

pull out the commandments again to show people how sinful they are so they will be saved by a "faith" that is void of works.

Jesus did not tell His disciples, "Go into all the world and make disciples, and make sure they realize that, once they've felt guilty and are then saved by faith, My commandments have served their purpose in their lives." Rather, He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...*teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...*" (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis added)