



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 27
Matthew 7:21-23

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Greek NT

21 Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι· Κύριε κύριε εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ' ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. 22 πολλοὶ ἐροῦσίν μοι ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ· Κύριε κύριε, οὐ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι ἐπροφητεύσαμεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δαιμόνια ἐξεβάλομεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δυνάμεις πολλὰς ἐποιήσαμεν; 23 καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὐδέποτε ἔγνων ὑμᾶς· ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.

**La Biblia
de las Américas**

21 No todo el que me dice: "Señor, Señor", entrará en el reino de los cielos, sino el que hace la voluntad de mi Padre que está en los cielos. 22 Muchos me dirán en aquel día: "Señor, Señor, ¿no profetizamos en tu nombre, y en tu nombre echamos fuera demonios, y en tu nombre hicimos muchos milagros?" 23 Y entonces les declararé: "Jamás os conocí; APARTADOS DE MI, LOS QUE PRACTICABIS LA INIQUIDAD."

NRSV

21 Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" 23 Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers."

NLT

21 Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven. 22 On judgment day many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' 23 But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.'

The Outline of the Text:¹

If the warning against false prophets in the preceding text of vv. 15-20 is 'politically incorrect' language to the modern world, then the text that follows, vv. 21-23, is several times over 'politically incorrect' language. In fact, to a large percentage of church members today the words of Jesus' here are downright shocking! The bluntness and forcefulness of these words should be unsettling to all professing Christianity. To Jesus' listeners that day these words were a 'wake up call' to genuine discipleship that dared not water down or twist the demands of Jesus for commitment to God in the Kingdom of Heaven. They had the same impact on Matthew's Jewish Christian readers four decades later when read to the different congregations in Syria. They should have similar impact on believers today, who all too often have grown complacent and indifferent in their discipleship commitment.

Additionally the near parallels found in Luke 6:46 and 13:26-27 need to be given consideration as well.

Luke 6:46 (NRSV):² "Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I tell you?"

Luke 13:26-30 (NRSV):³ 26 Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." 27 But he will say, "I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!" 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. 29 Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. 30 Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

The two Lukan texts further underscore the repeated use of these basic concepts by Jesus as an important part of His emphasis on the Day of Judgment. They add even more urgency for correct understanding.

In light of this, we need to study these words carefully in order to fully grasp their impact upon our individual

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²GNT: Τί δέ με καλεῖτε, Κύριε κύριε, καὶ οὐ ποιεῖτε ἃ λέγω;

³GNT: 13.26 τότε ἄρξεσθε λέγειν, Ἐφάγομεν ἐνώπιόν σου καὶ ἐπίομεν, καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις ἡμῶν ἐδίδαξας· 13.27 καὶ ἐρεῖ λέγων ὑμῖν, Οὐκ οἶδα [ὑμᾶς] πόθεν ἐστέ· ἀπόστητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, πάντες ἐργάται ἀδικίας. 13.28 ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων, ὅταν ὄψησθε Ἄβραάμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ καὶ πάντας τοὺς προφήτας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑμᾶς δὲ ἐκβαλλομένους ἔξω. 13.29 καὶ ἤξουσιν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ δυσμῶν καὶ ἀπὸ βορρᾶ καὶ νότου καὶ ἀνακλιθήσονται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ. 13.30 καὶ ἰδοὺ εἰσὶν ἔσχατοι οἱ ἔσονται πρῶτοι καὶ εἰσὶν πρῶτοι οἱ ἔσονται ἔσχατοι.

life, as well as upon the church.

I. How to enter the Kingdom, v. 21

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

Οὐ πᾶς ὁ λέγων μοι· Κύριε κύριε εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

Entrance saying. Whether the saying was originally formed as a unit as we have in Matthew is unclear. The way Luke uses the two elements of this saying suggests that verse 21 existed separately from vv. 22-23 originally and that Matthew has brought the two sayings together from his Q source. Luke also greatly modified the common Q source in 13:26-27, or else he had another version of Q.⁴ Combined here by Matthew, they present a forceful declaration from Jesus about an important aspect of Final Judgment.

Clearly verse 21 is in the form of an Entrance Saying of Jesus, and stands as the last of three such sayings in the Sermon: 5:20; 7:13 and 7:20. Each of these sayings prescribes divine requirements for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. As such they become important signals of what God expects from would-be disciples of Jesus in their faith commitment to Christ. It is a righteousness that far exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). It is a commitment to enter through the narrow gate and to walk on the path of affliction (7:13-14). Now it is the issue of truly doing the will of the Heavenly Father (7:21). Without this there is no entrance into the Kingdom on the day of judgment.

The first declaration of this Entrance Saying describes a confession of individuals of Christ as Lord: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” The verbal language here is λέγων μοι. The present tense of the Greek participle stands in contrast to the future tense verb of ἐροῦσίν μοι in verse 22. In verse 21, the thrust is an ongoing claim to know Christ as Lord during this life, whereas in the next verse the emphasis is upon a formal declaration in final judgment at a future time.

The claim in both instances is described as ‘Lord, Lord’ (Κύριε κύριε). The double use of ‘Lord’ here shows up again in Matt. 25:11⁵ and in Luke 6:46.⁶ The repetition of ‘Lord’ is for emphasis and intensity of declaration. These individuals have repeatedly asserted verbally that Jesus is Lord, in the pattern of early Christian confession of faith.⁷ Thus they appear to be true disciples of Jesus outwardly.

⁴“V 21 finds its parallel in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things I say?” (cf Matthew: “the will of my Father in heaven”), which in Luke also directly precedes the final parable of the sermon, concerning the house built upon rock. The Lukan parallels to vv 22–23, however, are found in another context, i.e., Luke 13:25–27. There we encounter a parable concerning an οἰκοδεσπότης, the master of a house, who says to those who knock (addressed in the second person, “you,” and who address him as κύριε, “Lord,” but not the repeated “Lord, Lord” of Matt 7:22), “I do not know where you come from.” They appeal in turn not to various charismatic deeds they had performed but rather to the fact that they had eaten and drunk in his presence and that he had taught in their streets. His reply is again “I do not know where you come from,” and then, as at the end of the Matthean pericope, Ps 6:9a is quoted. Here Luke’s initial verb ἀπόστητε agrees exactly with the LXX, against Matthew’s ἀποχωρεῖτε (both verbs meaning “depart”), as does πάντες (“all” workers of unrighteousness), which is lacking in Matthew’s citation. But in the remainder of the quotation Matthew’s οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν, “workers of iniquity,” agrees exactly with the LXX against Luke’s ἐργάται ἀδικίας, “workers of unrighteousness.” It is difficult to know the relationship between the material as represented in Matthew and Luke. The differences are probably too great to think of both passages as deriving from a common Q (although Matthew may have inserted vv 22–23 into Q as it is seen in Luke 6:46–49), yet that they ultimately trace back to a common source is difficult to deny. This could be an instance (esp given the parabolic form of the Lukan version) in which Jesus said similar, but slightly different, things on separate occasions and both made their way independently into the Gospels.” [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 185]

⁵Mt. 25:11-12 (NRSV): “11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ 12 But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’”

⁶Lk. 6:46 (NRSV): “Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?”

⁷See Romans 10:9 (NRSV): “8 But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because **if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** 10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. 11 The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’”

Phil. 2:11 (NRSV): “9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,** to the glory of God the Father.”

1 Cor. 12:3 (NRSV): “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and **no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.**”

Jesus' words here have a shocking impact with His declaration that not everyone making this confession will enter the Kingdom. The 'will enter the Kingdom...' (είσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν...) points to the consummation of salvation at the close of the age. It also anticipates the following saying in vv. 22-23. Thus Jesus asserts that more than a mere verbal confession is required by God. This does not stand in tension with the Pauline declaration of confession of faith as seen, for example, in Romans 10:9. Paul's "believe in your heart" points to a life-changing commitment that resides deep in the believer and then is verbally acknowledged in public confession. The mistake of these charismatics here is not recognizing that verbal confession, even when buttressed by outward actions, can fail to reflect the profound inward change mandated in the ancient Christian confession.

What *does* count before God in final judgment is "doing the will of my Father in Heaven" (ὁ ποιῶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.). The eschatological moment of judgment will expose whether the individual has genuinely done God's will, or whether he has substituted God's will with his own efforts, even though dramatic and spectacular in nature.

And what is God's will? In the context of the Sermon, the will of God is defined by the spiritual principles set forth by Jesus in the Sermon. The beatitudes (5:3-12) summarize the essence of discipleship. The body of the Sermon (5:13-7:12) spells out the core principles of following God in obedience. Out of this foundation comes then the expansion of the understanding of God's will that is developed in elsewhere in the New Testament. Serious adherence to God's will growing out of confession of Jesus as Lord then becomes the key to entering the Kingdom of Heaven eschatologically.

Literary Setting. The chart on the last page emphasizes 7:21-23 as a part of the Conclusion to the Sermon. As such it is a part of four pericopes in vv. 13-27 that appeal to the listener to respond positively to the teaching of Jesus about entering the Kingdom of Heaven. The four sub-units are

7:13-14 -- Enter in through the Narrow Gate and on the afflicted Road

7:15-20 -- Recognize the evil fruit of the false prophets so you can avoid their destiny of ruin

7:21-23 -- Understand clearly that entering the Kingdom depends on truly doing the will of God

7:24-27 -- Build your spiritual house on a solid foundation of obedience to the will of God

One of the contextual issues emerging here is the relationship between vv. 15-20 and 21-23. The false prophets condemned in vv. 15-20 and the charismatics condemned in vv. 21-23 are not the same individuals. Perhaps, the charismatics are disciples of the false prophets, but this is not certain. The distinctly different genre nature of the two pericopes suggests that the interpreter is on safer grounds treating the two passages separately rather than as two units of a single passage.⁸ Only a very tentative proposal for the above linking of the two groups can be legitimately put forth.

The flow of thought in these four units becomes rather logical and understandable. The challenge to become a seriously committed disciple begins the appeal. The second and third units warn against being deceived about the meaning of serious discipleship commitment. The climatic appeal comes then in the fourth unit with the image of two houses built on two different foundations. One passes the test; the other doesn't.

In an age of 'cheap grace,'⁹ much of modern Christianity fails to grasp these words of Jesus and then to

⁸This is a frequently found tendency of modern commentators. By combining the two texts, the temptation to draw questionable conclusions from the literary setting aspects is almost irresistible. A few treat the larger unit so superficially that the assumption of a common identity between the false prophets and the charismatics is taken for granted, but without any presentation of evidence whatsoever. Certainly no indication of awareness of the arguments against such an identity are present. To be certain, the formats of many commentary series is so restrictive that little or no space can be devoted to exploring such issues. But the superficial linking of the two identities reflects scholarly failure to do one's 'homework' prior to writing a summary explanation of the text. Such is inexcusable for credible scholarship.

⁹The term 'cheap grace' was coined by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) who was executed by Hitler toward the end of World War II. The concept surfaces in one of his writings that were smuggled out of prison and published, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Below are some excerpts from this classic book on 'cheap' and 'costly' grace:

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing....[45]

Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian 'conception' of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins.... In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

understand the eternal implications these words possess. My suspicion is that the Day of Judgment will produce many shocking moments! We must take serious what Jesus declares here. Our eternal destiny is at stake.

II. How not to enter the Kingdom, vv. 22-23.

“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’”

πολλοὶ ἐροῦσίν μοι ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ· Κύριε κύριε, οὐ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι ἐπροφητεύσαμεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δαιμόνια ἐξεβάλομεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δυνάμεις πολλὰς ἐποιήσαμεν; καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὐδέποτε ἔγνω ὑμᾶς· ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.

Sentence of Judgment. The Sentence of Judgment genre in verses 22-23 portrays the scene of final judgment and the confession of charismatics (#168) claiming legitimate confession on the basis of their dramatic actions of prophesying, exorcisms, and miracles performed in their ministry. The divine verdict (#169) is a sentence to eternal condemnation based on the declaration that these charismatics have never had at any point in time a saving relationship with the Lord. Both their confession and their actions do not reflect saving relationship. Thus the Lord underscores that entrance into the Kingdom is fundamentally a relationship with Him that is then reflected in the doing of the will of the Heavenly Father genuinely. And the content of that divine will is contained in the principles set forth in the Sermon. Flashy external actions do not necessarily reflect genuine commitment to the will of God.

On that day. The historical markers, i.e., the time/place words in this text, focus on the phrase in verse 22, “**On that day**” (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ). Everything in the pericope revolves around this reference point.¹⁰ This

[45-46]

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. ‘All for sin could not atone.’ Well, then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world’s standards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin....

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.[47]

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

Costly grace is the sanctuary of God; it has to be protected from the world, and not thrown to the dogs. It is therefore the living word, the Word of God, which he speaks as it pleases him. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus. It comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

On two separate occasions Peter received the call, “Follow me.” It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1.17; John 21.22). A whole life lies between these two calls. The first occasion was by the lake of Gennesareth, when Peter left his nets and his craft and followed Jesus at his word. The second occasion is when the Risen Lord finds him back again at his old trade. Once again it is by the lake of Gennesareth, and once again the call is: “Follow me.” Between the two calls lay a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ. Half-way between them comes Peter’s confession, when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ of God....[48]

This grace was certainly not self-bestowed. It was the grace of Christ himself, now prevailing upon the disciple to leave all and follow him, now working in him that confession which to the world must sound like the ultimate blasphemy, now inviting Peter to the supreme fellowship of martyrdom for the Lord he had denied, and thereby forgiving him all his sins. In the life of Peter grace and discipleship are inseparable. He had received the grace which costs.[49]

As Christianity spread, and the Church became more secularized, this realization of the costliness of grace gradually faded. The world was Christianized, and grace became its common property. It was to be had at low cost.[49]

¹⁰The terminology for final judgment in the Bible is varied, but all refer to the same essential event understood to take place at the end of human history and as a transition from this world into the eternal order. Cf., Leon Morris, “Judgment, Day of,” *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*:

“Judgment day may be referred to in any one of a number of ways. It may be spoken of strictly as ‘the day of judgment’ (Matt

theme is one of the prominent emphases both in the teaching of Jesus and in the writings of the apostles. The portrayal of the details of final judgment varies throughout the pages of the New Testament and together present something of a kaleidoscopic picture with each text stressing one aspect or another of this event. Consequently, in the history of biblical interpretation differing ideas have surfaced, the majority tending to emphasize one aspect to the neglect of the others.¹¹ Religious artists over the centuries have struggled to capture the essence of this event in pictorial portrayal. Most classical religious art on this theme will follow the medieval Roman Catholic perspective on final judgment, which contains some biblical elements but is made up of mostly Roman Catholic traditional concepts largely based on extra-canonical sources.

Leon Morris provides a helpful summation of Jesus' teachings:¹²

Jesus emphasized the importance of final judgment. He told the Twelve that they were to warn their hearers that it would be "more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah" on the day of judgment than for them (Matt 10:15). He himself had a similar message for the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida: It will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on judgment day than for them (Matt 11:22 ; Luke 10:14). On both occasions he warned that the people of Capernaum should not think of heaven as their final destination; that would rather be Hades. "The men of Nineveh" and "The Queen of the South" will stand up and condemn Jesus' hearers at the day of judgment because they responded to the wisdom of Solomon and the preaching of Jonah and those hearers did not (Matt 12:41-42). We should be clear that Jesus unhesitatingly spoke of judgment day and of what would happen on it.

Jesus also related the words uttered by his hearers to what will happen at the day of judgment. It is what goes on in our hearts that determines what we say and thus our words are important; our words reveal what we are. On the day of judgment we will be called onto give account of "every careless word" we have spoken and it is this that will determine our acquittal or our condemnation (Matt 12:34-37).

S. H. Travis supplements Morris' summary with greater detail that is also helpful in its summation of Jesus' teaching:¹³

2.2. *The Final Judgment.* Jesus speaks of a judgment of all people on the "day" when the Son of man comes to establish his kingdom in its fullness (Mt 7:22; Lk 17:30-35; see Kingdom of God). God is the judge (Mt 10:28). Jesus' own role at the judgment is sometimes that of witness for or against the person judged (Mt 10:32-33), but sometimes he is the judge (Mt 7:21-23; 16:27). There is some force in the argument that in the earliest Son of man sayings Jesus is witness rather than judge, and that the depiction of him as judge is therefore a later development. Yet the fact that the Son of man sits at God's right hand (Mk 14:62) shows how easily one concept could pass over into the other.

2.2.1. *Judgment as Separation.* The judgment involves a division between two kinds of people—"sons of the kingdom" and "sons of the evil one" (Mt 13:38), "wise" and "foolish" (Mt 7:24-27), "sheep" and "goats" (Mt 25:31-46), those who "enter into life" and those who are "thrown into hell" (Mk 9:42-48). This reflects the radical distinction between "the righteous" and "the wicked" found in much apocalyptic literature and in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

2.2.2. *The Criterion and the Outcome of Judgment.* Jesus maintains the Jewish emphasis on judgment according to works (Mt 7:21-23; 12:36-37; 25:31-46). He provides examples of particular kinds of deeds which will seal a person's condemnation—e.g., causing "little ones" to sin (Mk 9:42), lack of care for the poor (Lk 16:19-31; Mt 25:31-46), failure to forgive (Mt 18:21-35), being judgmental toward others (Mt 7:1-2). His warnings of condemnation are almost never directed at those who, for example, commit adultery (see Marriage and Divorce), collect taxes dishonestly, but at the pious who would exclude such people from the community (Mt 23:33; Lk 18:9-14).

In some judgment sayings, works are bound up with relationship or response to Jesus. In Matthew 7:24-27 we read, "everyone who hears *these words of mine* and does them is like a wise man . . ." In Matthew 25:31-46 care for the needy (or lack of it) is taken as evidence of people's reaction to Jesus. Other sayings declare that reaction to Jesus will be the key criterion at the judgment. "All who acknowledge me before other people, the Son of Man will acknowledge them before the angels of God. Those who disown me before other people will be disowned before the angels of God" (Lk 12:8-9; cf. Mk 8:38; Lk 10:8-16; 11:29-32).

Luke 12:8-9 also indicates that, just as the *criterion* of judgment is relationship to Jesus, so the *outcome* of judgment will be expressed in terms of relationship to Jesus or to God. It will involve acceptance into fellowship with God or rejection from that fellowship. Those who do not know him—who are not in genuine, obedient relationship to him—now, will not know him then. In the parables of Matthew 25 and Luke 13:25-27 the outcome of the judgment is also expressed in terms of coming into or departing from God's presence.

Apart from the language of relationship, Jesus uses other more pictorial language to depict human destiny beyond the

10:15; 1 John 4:17), or with reference to its chronological place as 'the last day' (John 6:39). Mostly John's references to this day refer to Jesus' raising of people but he also tells us that Jesus said that the word that he spoke would on the last day judge anyone who despised him and refused to hear his words (John 12:48). The most common way of referring to it appears to be simply 'that day' (Luke 21:34); the day of judgment was so outstanding that nothing more was needed to draw attention to it. Indeed, it may be called 'the great Day' (Jude 6), or simply 'the Day' (Heb 10:25; 2 Peter 1:19)."

¹¹For an interesting summation of this varied and frequently distorted picture, see "Last Judgment," Wikipedia online.

¹²Leon Morris, "Judgment, Day of," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

¹³S.H. Travis, "Judgment," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 408

judgment. God's family will sit at the Father's table, while others are thrown outside (Lk 13:28–29). They will see God (Mt 5:8) and experience eternal life (Mk 10:30). A negative outcome is described as unquenchable fire or Gehenna (Mk 9:43, 45, 48; Mt 5:22; Lk 12:5). Those excluded from God's kingdom will "weep and gnash their teeth" (Mt 13:42, 50; Lk 13:28). It is not clear whether such language can be taken to imply eternal torment as traditionally understood. Such imagery, together with the reference to "eternal punishment" in Matthew 25:46, may be intended not so much to describe the specific character of punishment as to underline the irreversible and negative force of separation from God's presence.

It must also be noted that, in comparison with much Jewish literature (e.g., *1 Enoch* 21–22), Jesus' references to the destiny of the wicked are remarkably allusive and unspecific; and that such references occur mostly in exhortations to the hearer to respond to Jesus' message, not in descriptions of the fate of someone else.

2.2.3. The Main Thrust: Relationship Rather Than Retribution. The evidence suggests that Jesus' understanding of judgment focuses not on a strictly retributive justice, whereby rewards and punishments are recompense for human deeds. Rather, the focus is on relationship to Jesus, or to God through him. The relationship chosen by people when confronted by the message of God's kingdom will be confirmed at the final judgment. When the language of judgment according to works is used, the character of the works is understood as evidence of a person's relationship to God, or as showing whether the basic direction of one's life is toward him or away from him.

This perspective on Jesus' message is reinforced by three other images of judgment. The motif of the Two Ways, already familiar in Judaism (e.g., *1 Enoch* 94:1–4; *1QS* 3:13–4:26), suggests that human destinies are not rewards or punishments imposed from outside, but the inherent outcome of the choices people make (Mt 7:13–14). The image of treasure in heaven (Tob 4:3–10; *Pss. Sol.* 9:9; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 14:12; 24:1) pictures people's destinies as the end-result of their desires. Those whose hearts are fixed on submission to God's rule will gain the riches of his kingdom (Mt 6:19–21; Lk 12:33–34). Finally, in the image of the banquet invitation (Lk 14:16–24), everything turns on the refusal of those invited to come to the feast. They have excluded themselves while the poor are open to the insistent gift of the host.

2.2.4. Conclusion. Jesus rejects speculation about many aspects of final judgment and its outcome. He is silent about the geography of God's kingdom or of Gehenna (see Heaven and Hell). Rather than speculate about the number of those saved (2 Esdr 8:1), he urges his hearers to make sure of their own entry into the kingdom (Lk 13:23–24). And he tempers stern warnings of judgment with a greater emphasis on the infinite care of God for his creatures (Lk 12:4–12). There are also hints that his own suffering and death involve taking on himself the judgment of God on behalf of others (Mk 10:45; 14:36; 15:34).

Thus, Matthew 7:21–23 must be interpreted against the backdrop of the larger teaching in the Bible on final judgment. The passage becomes one angle of the many found in the New Testament with its kaleidoscopic portrayal.

A second historical issue connected to this passage is the identity of the individuals standing before God in final judgment. Are they the same people as the 'false prophets' mentioned in 7:15? Probably not, since the bad fruit of the false prophets stands in dramatic contrast with the ability of the individuals in 7:22–23 to prophecy, cast out demons, and perform miracles. Perhaps they are the self-deluded disciples of these false prophets, but even that connection is not certain. Most modern commentators will take the reference to dramatic ministry action mentioned in verse 22 as signaling 'charismatic' individuals whose Christian orientation focused on doing dramatic, spectacular actions as a signal of genuineness of commitment. What becomes clear is that even such actions with their persuasive indication of genuine faith commitment were false and misleading both to the individuals and to others observing them.

Any effort to place a historical label on these people miserably fails because of lack of real evidence. Some streams of modern interpretive history with their origin in the old F.C. Baur Tübingen School¹⁴ from the 1800s tries to see an anti-pauline implication in this text. But such conclusions have no foundation in the biblical text and project an outmoded and misleading tension between Pauline Gentile Christianity and Petrine Jewish Christianity in the second half of the first century back into the first century. In the presence of no signals of whom Matthew may have had in mind historically by the time of the writing of his gospel in the early 70s, not to mention whom Jesus may have been alluding to originally, one is on safer grounds interpretively to simply assert the character and actions of unnamed individuals from these verses. To be sure, the indication from the text is that either Matthew and/or Jesus did have specific individuals in mind. But we have no clear way of identifying who these people may have been.

What constitutes genuine obedience to God's will? The claim to faith confession in verse 22 by some in standing before God in final judgment rings false and brings about a failure to gain entrance into the Kingdom. The charismatics' claim to faith went from public confession of faith, "Lord, Lord," to the performing of dramatic actions of ministry to others: prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles.

Jesus declares that 'many' (πολλοὶ) will attempt to enter the Kingdom in this false way. The uncomfortable

¹⁴"Ferdinand Christian Baur (June 21, 1792 – December 2, 1860) was a German theologian and leader of the Tübingen school of theology (named for University of Tübingen). Following Hegel's theory of dialectic, Baur argued that 2nd century Christianity represented the synthesis of two opposing theses: Jewish Christianity and Pauline Christianity."

aspect here is that such failed efforts will not be isolated and atypical. Instead, this will be the approach of a considerable percentage of those seeking entrance into the Kingdom. The Greek adjective πολλοὶ can readily suggest a majority of individuals who stand before God in judgment.

Their verbal confession both in this life is repeated formally before God on judgment day: “Jesus is Lord indeed!” Their assumption is that this confession can be validated by their actions that have been performed in service to Jesus during their spiritual journey. When they sense that confession is not going to work, they appeal to their previous actions of prophesying, performing exorcisms, and miracles (οὐ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι ἐπροφητεύσαμεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δαιμόνια ἐξεβάλομεν, καὶ τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι δυνάμεις πολλὰς ἐποιήσαμεν;).

Note carefully the wording of the original Greek text; English translations cannot preserve the intensity and emphasis of the Greek. Each of these actions was done “in your name” (τῷ σῶ ὀνόματι), and this is the first point of stress in their statement. Three specific actions are mentioned, all of which stand as spectacular, dramatic ministry actions. Craig Blomberg offers some helpful insights here:

Verses 21–22 enumerate some of the ways in which individuals can masquerade as Christians. They may verbally affirm that Jesus is their Master, perhaps even with great joy and enthusiasm, but such claims must issue in lives of obedience (an important qualification of Rom 10:10–13). Some may be preachers. Others perform exorcisms (see comments under 8:28–34), and some work various kinds of miracles (see comments under chaps. 8–9 *passim*). We are reminded that signs and wonders can come from sources other than God, including both the demonic world and human manufacture (cf. Acts 19:13–16; Rev 13:13–14). According to Allison and Davies, “The call to righteousness encompasses personal virtue, private devotion, and unselfish social behavior; and to these things seemingly supernatural powers are incidental.”¹⁵ It also is interesting that prophecy, exorcisms, and miracle workings all characterize “charismatic” activity, which has a tendency, by no means universal, to substitute enthusiasm and the spectacular for more unglamorous obedience in the midst of suffering. But these external demonstrations prove nothing. The question is whether one’s heart has been cleansed inwardly (v. 15) or whether apparent acts of ministry still serve only self, *rapaciously* (Greek *harpages*; NIV “ferocious”) using others for one’s own ends (cf. Acts 20:29–30).

The verdict is delivered with solemn declaration in verse 23: “Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’” (καὶ τότε ὁμολογήσω αὐτοῖς ὅτι Οὐδέποτε ἔγνων ὑμᾶς· ἀποχωρεῖτε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν.). The verdict is irreversible and final; no appeal, no changing it. Eternal damnation is the fate of these individuals. The heart of the verdict here is separation from the presence of God. Other pictures elsewhere stress the punishment aspect.¹⁶ The perpetual existence of both Heaven and Hell are stressed by Jesus in Matt. 25:46 (NRSV): “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Just as long as people remain in Heaven, others will remain in Hell. These who claimed to be servants of Christ by performing dramatic ministry actions are now labeled as ‘evil doers’ (οἱ ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν) by the Lord in final judgment. The Greek expression emphasizes intentional rejection of God’s will in disobedience to His principles of behavior. They had no character; thus their actions were in reality evil rather than righteous.

The fundamental point of this passage is to dramatically stress that genuine discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven must be based on a life-transforming commitment to Christ that changes who we are deep down inside. That transformation of character cannot be replaced by superficial outward ‘religious’ actions. These can be easily faked and thus do not reflect what is present down inside us.

Here is where many go astray into self-deception, and entire Christian denominations are built off this false understanding. Spiritual math doesn’t work like regular math. *One plus one doesn’t equal two*. That is, faith plus works don’t equal salvation, as James 2:14–26 dramatically underscores. Instead, Jesus’ point that James emphasizes is that saving faith flows into deeds of obedience which equals salvation. That is, only a working faith saves, and for faith to ‘work’ it must inherently be life changing commitment to God through Christ. Anything less will spell spiritual disaster on the Day of Judgment! “One (faith) + one (works) = two (salvation)” is actually the

¹⁵Allison and Davies, *Matthew* 1:729.

¹⁶For example, Rev. 20:9–15 (NRSV): “9 They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. 10 And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. 11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

formula that lands one in Hell, rather than Heaven!

Diagram of the Sermon on the Mount Mt. 5:21-26

The block diagram of the original Greek text, as reflected in the rather literal English translation below, will highlight visually the organization of the ideas in 7:21-23.

166 ^{7:21} **Not everyone . . . will enter**
 who says to me, into the Kingdom of Heaven
 Lord,
 Lord
 instead,
167 **the one doing the will of my Father . . . will enter**
 who is in Heaven into the Kingdom
 of Heaven

168 ^{7:22} **Many will say to me,**
 on that day
 Lord,
 Lord,
 did we not prophesy in your name?
 and
 did we not cast out demons in your name?
 and
 did we not do miracles in your name?

 7:23 And
 then
169 **I will declare to them,**
 Not at any time have I ever known you;
 depart from me,
 you workers of lawlessness.

Quite clearly the text divides into two sections: #s 166-167 and #s 168-169. Both sections are comprised of a positive / negative expression.

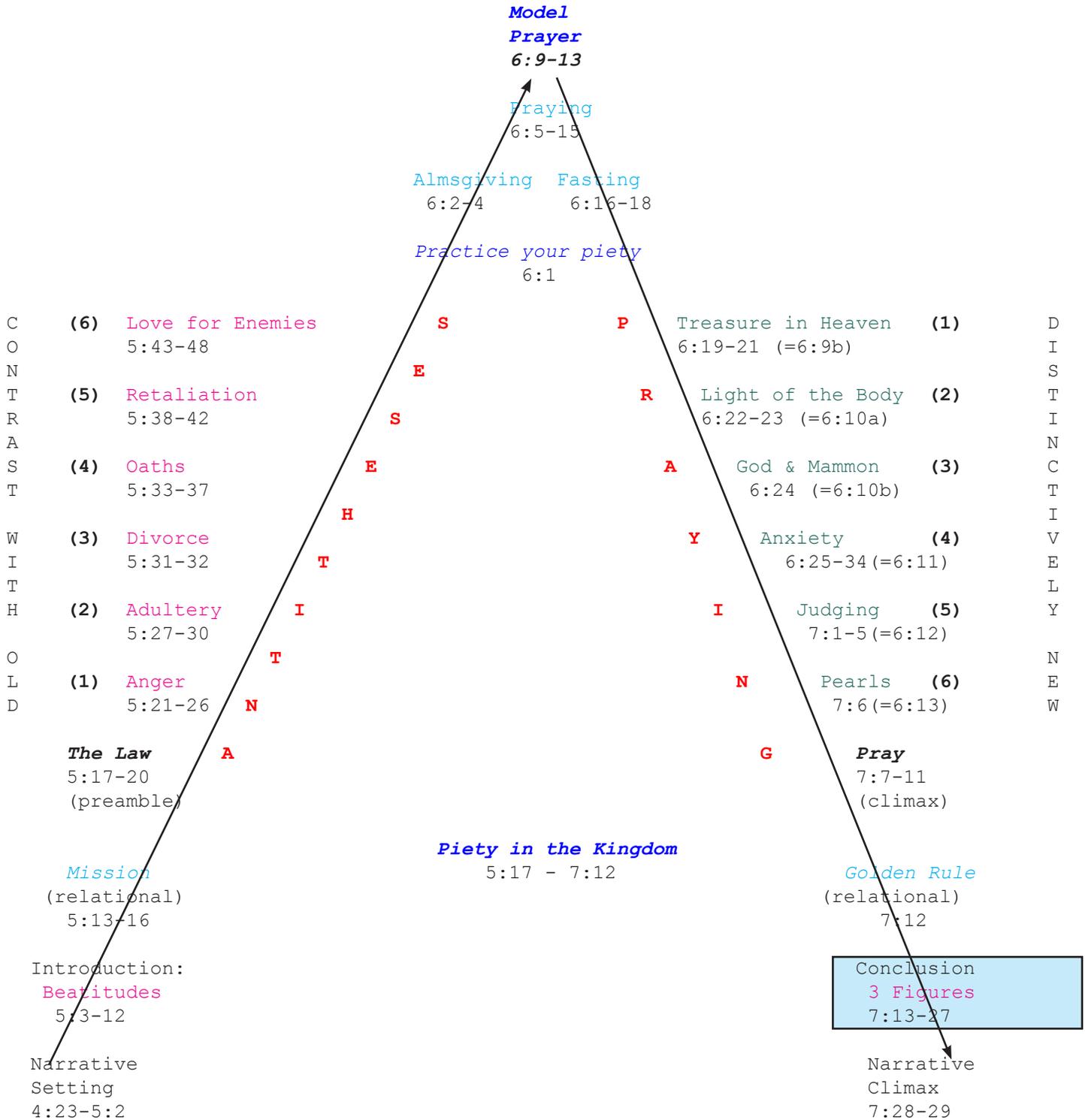
The Entrance Saying of verse 21 begins with the negative disavowal of entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven based merely on profession of Jesus as Lord. Confession must be validated by actions if the confession is genuine. And actions mean 'doing the will of the Heavenly Father.' This is the same point as found in James 2:14-26 in the faith and works text, as well as in the emphasis upon the necessity of 'good works' found throughout the prison letters and the pastoral letters of Paul.¹⁷

The Sentence of Judgment in verses 22-23 portrays the scene of final judgment and the confession of charismatics (# 168) claiming legitimate confession on the basis of their dramatic actions of prophesying, exorcisms, and miracles performed in their ministry. The divine verdict (# 169) is a sentence to eternal condemnation based on the declaration that these charismatics have never had at any point in time a saving relationship with the Lord. Both their confession and their actions do not reflect saving relationship. Thus the Lord underscores that entrance into the Kingdom is fundamentally a relationship with Him that is then reflected in the doing of the will of the Heavenly Father genuinely. And the content of that divine will is contained in the principles set forth in the Sermon.

¹⁷Cf. Rom. 2:13; Eph. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:18; Titus 2:7, 3:8; 14, Jas 1:22, 25; 2:14; 1 John 2:17 for some examples.

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.