

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

A POWERFUL, THOUGHT-PROVOKING
GUIDE TO LIVING THE LIFE
JESUS INTENDS FOR US

I am struck by many things in *The Divine Conspiracy*. . . .

First, I am struck by the comprehensive nature of this book It provides me with a conceptual philosophy for understanding the meaning and purpose of human existence. . . . The breadth of the issues covered is astonishing: from the soul's redemption and justification to discipleship and our growth in grace to death and the state of our existence in heaven. . . .

Second, I am struck by the accessibility of this book. I'm fully aware that the issues discussed here are of immense importance, yet it is all so understandable, so readable, so applicable. . . .

Third, I am struck by the depth of this book. Willard is a master at capturing the central insight of Jesus' teachings. Perhaps this is because he takes Jesus seriously as an intelligent, fully competent Teacher. He writes "Jesus is not just nice, he is brilliant." . . .

My fourth and final observation . . . I am struck by the warmth of this book. Rarely have I found an author with so penetrating an intellect combined with so generous a spirit. Clearly he has descended with the mind into the heart and from this place he touches us, both mind and heart.

—From the foreword by RICHARD J. FOSTER
author of *Celebration of Discipline*

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WILLARD

THE DIVINE
CONSPIRACY

Harper
San Francisco

THE DIVINE
CONSPIRACY

REDISCOVERING OUR HIDDEN LIFE IN GOD

"A masterpiece and a wonder . . .
the book I have been searching for all my life."
—From the Foreword by RICHARD FOSTER

DALLAS WILLARD

The kingdom of the heavens is similar to a bit of yeast which a woman took and hid in half a bushel of dough. After a while all the dough was pervaded by it.

JESUS OF NAZARETH

You must have often wondered why the enemy [God] does not make more use of his power to be sensibly present to human souls in any degree he chooses and at any moment. But you now see that the irresistible and the indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of his scheme forbids him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will (as his felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. For his ignoble idea is to eat the cake and have it; the creatures are to be one with him, but yet themselves; merely to cancel them, or assimilate them, will not serve. . . . Sooner or later he withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. . . . He cannot “tempt” to virtue as we do to vice. He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away his hand. . . . Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.

UNCLE SCREWTAPE

C. S. LEWIS, THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS

THE DIVINE CONSPIRACY

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HIDDEN LIFE IN GOD



DALLAS WILLARD



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THE RIGHTNESS OF THE KINGDOM HEART: BEYOND THE GOODNESS OF SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

No good tree produces bad fruit, nor any bad tree good fruit. . . . The good person, from the good treasured up in his heart, produces what is good.

LUKE 6:43-45

The command "Be ye perfect" is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command.

C. S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

Master of Moral Understanding

When Jesus deals with moral evil and goodness, he does not begin by theorizing. He plunges immediately (Matt. 5:21-44) into the guts of human existence: raging anger, contempt, hatred, obsessive lust, divorce, verbal manipulation, revenge, slapping, suing, cursing, coercing, and begging. It is the stuff of soap operas and the daily news—and real life.

He takes this concrete approach because his aim is to enable people to be good, not just talk about it. He actually knows how to enable people to be good, and he brings his knowledge to bear upon life as it really is, not some intellectualized and sanctified version thereof.

He knows that people deeply hunger to be good but cannot find their way. No one wishes to do evil for its own sake, we just find it unfortunately "necessary." We want to be good but are ready to do evil, and we come prepared with lengthy justifications.

Accordingly, John Milton correctly put the words "Evil be thou my good" in the mouth of Satan. Satan might be able to take what is evil as his direct and ultimate goal just to oppose God. Those words truly are demonic, not human. By contrast, a little girl in Sunday school expressed the human ambiguity well. When asked what a lie is, she replied, "A lie is an abomination to God and a very present help in time of trouble."

Having illustrated concretely, in situations of grimy realism (Matt. 5:20-44), what it is like to be a really good person—one who has found the kingdom and is living in its ways—Jesus then proceeds, in the immediately following verses, to give his overall picture of moral fulfillment and beauty in the kingdom of the heavens. It is one of heartfelt love toward all, including those who would be happy if we dropped dead. This love does not consist of acts and projects but is a pervasive condition of vision, joy, and love in which we habitually reside. It is a love of the same quality as God's love (Matt. 5:45-48). We are to be "perfect" or whole as our Father, the one in the heavens, is perfect and whole.

Thus in the span of a few words Jesus moves from biting specific reality into the comprehensiveness of theory—a moral theory of great force, fully developed by Christians of later centuries such as Aurelius Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Wesley, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. But he never loses sight of the real-life context in which the theory must translate into action, for his purpose is not to give a theory—he can leave that to others—but to start a historical movement.

Historically Profound Moral Understanding

What Jesus had to say about human good and evil was of sufficient depth, power, and justification to dominate European culture and its offshoots for two millennia. Nobody even has an idea of what "Europe" and the "Western world" would mean apart from Jesus and his words. The historian of morals W. E. H. Lecky describes the teachings of Jesus as "an agency which all men must now admit to have been, for good or for evil, the most powerful moral lever that has ever been applied to the affairs of man."¹

A contemporary historian, Michael Grant, comments,

The most potent figure, not only in the history of religion, but in world history as a whole, is Jesus Christ: the maker of one of the few revolutions which have lasted. Millions of men and women for century after century have found his life and teaching overwhelmingly significant and moving. And there is ample reason . . . in this later twentieth century why this should still be so.²

Friedrich Nietzsche is usually thought of as a bitter opponent of Jesus. But he clearly saw his indispensable role in the civilization into which Nietzsche himself had been born. He also understood that the modern world had moved off of its foundations in the Christian traditions of moral goodness, and that cataclysmic changes were to come because of this. They have come and they are coming.

For over two hundred years now in the Western world, those "advanced thinkers" referred to by Bishop Butler in our previous chapter have tried to make secularized human nature and intellect, free of any dependence upon Jesus and his teachings, serve as the basis for moral understanding and practice.

Leading figures who still thought of themselves as profoundly Christian, such as Immanuel Kant and G. F. W. Hegel, played a major role in this effort. They developed a version of Christianity that, ironically, did not even require Jesus to have existed. They seriously took this to be an advantage for their works.

What Jesus taught was said by them to be contained in human rationality as such. Today it is more likely to be said that it is contained in "the human quest for meaning or wholeness." Moral understanding can, allegedly, be established by careful human thought and experience apart from any historical tradition. But the centuries-long attempt to devise a morality from within merely human resources has now proven itself a failure. We shall have more to say on this point at the close of this chapter.

The Talk on the Hill

Before turning directly to Jesus' powerful picture of the kingdom heart in Matthew 5, however, a few misunderstandings must be cleared away.

First, what is now called his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) should indeed be read as a sermon, as one unified discourse. To be sure, it is not what might be called a sermon today. Neither was it given in the seclusion of a genuine mountain. It is not “preachy,” of course, and is far too dense in content to function as a sermon in contexts where “sermons” now occur. It is “a talk,” we would probably say, and one given for the benefit of a large crowd of common folk, who heard it and enjoyed it on gently rolling pastures by the Sea of Galilee.

Now, to say that this passage in the Gospel of Matthew was a sermon or a talk means that it is organized around one purpose and develops along a single line of thought. This is crucial for a correct understanding of what he is saying here. It was a great day in my own life when I came across some words by the old Princeton homileticist A. W. Blackwood, who stated the necessity of reading the Sermon on the Mount as a sermon. He had discerned its masterful unity.

At the time, I didn’t even think it was permissible so to read it. I had been given to understand that the “sermon” was actually a collection of stray “sayings” that unknown “editors” had thrown together as one might throw marbles into a sack. Hence one could only take up the “sayings” one by one, like marbles or jewels, and ponder what they might mean taken in isolation.

As a result the “sermon” remained a baffling text to me, as it seems to remain for most scholars to this day. Clarence Bauman opens his study of nineteen radically different and opposed interpretations of it with the statement that it is “an enigma to the modern conscience.”³ He goes on to say, “The Sermon on the Mount is the most important and most controversial biblical text” (p. 3).

The implications of this statement are simply staggering, as Bauman himself recognizes. The most important text is an enigma? That this could be so is deeply revelatory of the condition of the church in the modern world. We are scattered, wandering, and have no clear and comprehensive message for life because our most important text is an enigma. It does not function as the clear guide to life that its author intended.

When taken as independent sayings, the various statements the “sermon” contains will certainly be regarded as “laws” dictating what we are to do and not to do. They will then be seen to prescribe

impossibilities and, in some cases, to be simply ridiculous. For example, the comment on cutting off your hands or punching out your eyes (Matt. 5:29–30) is most often presented as a *serious* recommendation from Jesus, though not one to be taken literally. (As we shall see later, he was in fact teaching precisely the futility of any such actions. They would make no difference, because true rightness remains a matter of one’s heart.)

Why, then, is it important that we understand Matthew 5–7 as one talk or sermon? It is important because, unless we understand it as one discourse, purposively organized by its highly competent speaker, its parts—the particular statements made—will be left at the mercy of whatever whims may strike readers as they contemplate each pearl of wisdom. Their meaning cannot then be governed by the unity of the discourse as a whole. And this is, for the most part, exactly what happens today.

The most constant “whim,” historically, has been the disastrous idea just mentioned: that Jesus is here giving *laws*. For if that is all he is doing, they will certainly be laws that are impossible to keep. The keeping of law turns out to be an inherently self-refuting aim; rather, the inner self must be changed. Trying merely to keep the law is not wholly unlike trying to make an apple tree bear peaches by tying peaches to its branches.

Yes, impossible, one standard reaction now has it. That’s what they are—but therefore all the more suited to thoroughly crush human hopes than were the laws of Moses, forcing us to turn to grace for forgiveness. Jesus is presented as more relentless and meaner than Moses. And we have all been subjected to so much well-intentioned meanness that we are prepared to believe it. The holier, the harder, we think. We could hardly be more wrong!

The aim of the sermon—forcefully indicated by its concluding verses—is to help people come to hopeful and realistic terms with their lives here on earth by clarifying, in concrete terms, the nature of the kingdom into which they are now invited by Jesus’ call: “Repent, for life in the kingdom of the heavens is now one of your options.” The separate parts of the discourse are to be interpreted in the light of this single purpose. They are not to be read as one disconnected statement after another. One must discern the overall plan of life within which the separate parts of the discourse make sense.

So far from being additional *laws* to crush us or show us we can’t make it on our own (of course we can’t!), the separate parts are

distinct perspectives on the sweet life of love and power, of truth and grace, that those who count on Jesus can even now lead in his kingdom. "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus the Anointed" (John 1:17). His teachings illustrate how those alive in the kingdom can live, through the days and hours of their ordinary existence, on their way to the full world of God.

The Brilliance of Jesus: One Final Look

To prepare us to appreciate the richness and rigor of the Discourse on the Hill, we must return for one final emphasis upon a theme struck at the end of chapter 3. There we noted a misunderstanding of Jesus that treats him as nice but not very intelligent. That misunderstanding is the death knell of discipleship, for it locates him outside the company of those who have knowledge and therefore deprives us of the practical power of his teachings.

If you play a game of word association today, in almost any setting, you will collect some familiar names around words such as smart, knowledgeable, intelligent, and so forth. Einstein, Bill Gates of Microsoft, and the obligatory rocket scientists, will stand out. But one person who pretty certainly will not come up in this connection is Jesus.

Here is a profoundly significant fact: In our culture, among Christians and non-Christians alike, Jesus Christ is automatically dissociated from brilliance or intellectual capacity. Not one in a thousand will spontaneously think of him in conjunction with words such as well-informed, brilliant, or smart.

Far too often he is regarded as hardly conscious. He is looked on as a mere icon, a wraithlike semblance of a man, fit for the role of sacrificial lamb or alienated social critic, perhaps, but little more.

A well-known "scholarly" picture has him wandering the hills of Palestine, deeply confused about who he was and even about crucial points in his basic topic, the kingdom of the heavens. From time to time he perhaps utters disconnected though profound and vaguely radical irrelevancies, now obscurely preserved in our Gospels.

Would you be able to trust your life to such a person? If this is how he seems to you, are you going to be inclined to become his student? Of course not. We all know that action must be based on knowledge, and we grant the right to lead and teach only to those we believe to know what is real and what is best.

The world has succeeded in opposing intelligence to goodness. A Russian saying speaks of those who are "stupid to the point of sanctity." In other words, you have to be really dumb in order to qualify for saintliness. Centuries ago, even, when Dante assigned the title "master of those who know," he mistakenly gave it to Aristotle, not Jesus, for Jesus is holy.

Tertullian, a famous Christian leader of the second and third centuries, asked rhetorically, "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?"⁴ The correct answer, he supposed, was, "Nothing whatsoever." Devotion to God is independent of human knowledge. Of course, the modern secular outlook rigorously opposes sanctity to intelligence. And today any attempt to combine spirituality or moral purity with great intelligence causes widespread pangs of "cognitive dissonance." Mother Teresa, no more than Jesus, is thought of as smart—nice, of course, but not really smart. "Smart" means good at managing how life "really" is.

For all the vast influence he has exercised on human history, we have to say that Jesus is usually seen as a frankly pathetic individual who lived and still lives on the margins of "real life." What lies at the heart of the astonishing disregard of Jesus found in the moment-to-moment existence of multitudes of professing Christians is a simple lack of respect for him. He is not seriously considered or presented as a person of great ability. What, then, can devotion or worship mean, if simple respect is not included in it? Not much.

The picture the ordinary person today has of Jesus' surroundings in his earthly lifetime seems largely determined by what his homeland, Palestine, looked like to famous nineteenth-century tourists such as Mark Twain. Their impressions of Jesus' social setting remains today in the minds of most people. We imagine a desolate land of ruins, perhaps with a few peasants and ignorant villagers, Jesus among them. But there is no truth in this. In fact, his own society should be thought of as the equivalent in its world to Israel's place in the world today.

In Jesus' day Jerusalem was a glorious city, routinely flooded by hundreds of thousands of visitors, including multitudes of brilliant people from all over the "known" world. It was a cosmopolitan environment, interacting with the entire Roman world and more. What was known and discussed anywhere was known and discussed

there. It was in such surroundings that, already as a lad of twelve, he held spellbound for several days some of the best minds in the land. Thankfully, recent archeological and historical work has done much to give us a correct picture of the rich culture in which Jesus worked and lived, and of which he was a part.⁵

Outlining the "Sermon"

The brilliance and profundity of Jesus stand out in the overall structure and outline of The Discourse on the Hill, as he forcefully conveys an understanding of human life that actually works. The talk as a whole is given, of course, under the assumption of the availability of the kingdom he proclaimed. Within that framework, the first part of the talk (on the "blesseds" and the light and salt of the earth) revises prevailing assumptions about human well-being by presenting unlikely kinds of people who in fact found and still find blessedness in the kingdom. We dealt with this part of the sermon in the previous chapter.

The radical shift of perspective with regard to "the good life" and who has it led Jesus' hearers to begin suspecting that "the law" was irrelevant to their life in God's world. On the one hand, they were sure that their own lives fell short of the law, and those "in charge" never let them forget it. But, on the other hand, Jesus had said that blessedness was still theirs in the kingdom. It sounded to them as if Jesus had set the law aside.

However, "the law" they had in mind and that they rubbed up against every day was not the law of God. It was a contemporary version of religious respectability, very harsh and oppressive in application, that Jesus referred to as "the goodness of scribes and Pharisees" (5:20). Law as God intended it remains forever essential to the kingdom, and Jesus made it clear to his hearers that his aim is to bring those who follow him into fulfillment of the true law. The fulfillment he had in mind was not for the purpose of making them humanly acceptable. That is quite another matter. But fulfillment of God's law is important because the law is good. It is right for human life. And the presence of the kingdom brings us all that is right for human life.

In Matt. 5:20-48, then, we find out precisely what fulfillment of the law would look like in daily life. In this crucial passage, where the rightness of the kingdom heart is most fully displayed, there is a

sequence of contrasts between the older teaching about what the good person would do—for example, not murder—and Jesus' picture of the kingdom heart. That heart would live with full tenderness toward everyone it deals with. This passage in Matthew 5 moves from the deepest roots of human evil, burning anger and obsessive desire, to the pinnacle of human fulfillment in *agape*, or divine love. In this way the entire edifice of human corruption is undermined by eliminating its foundations in human personality.

The remainder of the Discourse on the Hill, chapters 6 and 7, then provides a sequence of warnings about practices and attitudes that will deflect us from living from the kingdom. First there is a warning about trying to secure ourselves by depending on realities other than the kingdom: on our religious/moral reputation before human beings (6:1-18) and on material goods or wealth (6:19-34). This is "the mind of the flesh," which in Romans 8 the apostle Paul called, simply, "death." We will deal with these matters in chapter 6.

Then there is a warning about trying to control others by "judging," blaming, condemning them. The apostle Paul later contrasted the "ministry of condemnation" with the "ministry of the Spirit" or "ministry of righteousness" (2 Cor. 3:6-10). Jesus was fully aware of the "ministry" of condemnation and its futility. By contrast, he shows us how we can really help our loved ones and others in "The Community of Prayerful Love" (the title for chapter 7).

Finally, Jesus gives us urgent warnings about failing to actually do what he calls us to do in his teachings and mentions the specific things that are most likely to trip us up in this regard. Dietrich Bonhoeffer forcefully states, "The only proper response to this word which Jesus brings with him from eternity is simply to do it."⁶ Remarkably, almost one sixth of the entire Discourse (fifteen of ninety-two verses) is devoted to emphasizing the importance of actually doing what it says. Doing and not just hearing and talking about it is how we know the reality of the kingdom and integrate our life into it. This final section therefore concludes with the well-known images of the wise man who builds his house upon the rock (he is the one doing the words of Jesus), as compared with the other man, who does not.

The simple but powerful structure of the Discourse on the Hill can therefore be represented as follows:

1. Background assumption: life in the kingdom through reliance upon Jesus (Matt. 4:17-25; chapters 1 through 3 of this book are devoted to this topic).
2. It is ordinary people who are the light and salt of the world as they live the blessed life in the kingdom (5:1-20, and chapter 4 of this book).
3. The kingdom heart of goodness concretely portrayed as the kind of love that is in God (5:21-48, and the present chapter of this book).
4. Warning: against false securities—reputation and wealth (Matt. 6, and chapter 6 of this book).
5. Warning: against “condemnation engineering” as a plan for helping people. A call to the community of prayerful love (Matt. 7:1-12, and chapter 7 of this book).
6. Warnings: about how we may fail actually to do what the Discourse requires, and the effects thereof (7:13-27).

The Sequential Order in the Discourse Must Be Respected

To understand correctly what Jesus is teaching us to do in his Discourse, we must keep the *order* of the treatment in mind and recognize its importance. That is what we would naturally expect when we realize that we are hearing from someone who has absolute mastery of the subject matter with which he is dealing and is absolute master of how to present it. The later parts of the Discourse presuppose the earlier parts and simply cannot be understood unless their dependence upon the earlier parts is clearly seen.

For example, receiving the teaching about anger and contempt (5:21-26) depends upon our having received the teaching about our well-being and blessedness. Conversely, having received the teaching about well-being, the teaching about anger and contempt will be recognized as good and right.

Again, if I have been freed from anger, contempt, and obsessive desire and am pervaded by the love that is the family resemblance of those alive in the kingdom of the Father, I am freed from the need to secure myself by reputation or wealth. Conversely, if I am not immersed in the reality of this kingdom of love, it will not seem good or right to me to forgo reputation, pride, vanity, and wealth, and I will inescapably be driven to pursue them.

If we do not keep the *sequential order* of kingdom life in mind, as

Jesus certainly did, it will seem that each new topic in his Discourse is being taken up on its own, with no connection to what has already been dealt with. The Discourse will therefore make little or no sense as a guide to what to do. This is the predicament of those who, for example, from the viewpoint of the current state of their own chaotic souls, look with bewilderment at, say, the “command” to offer the other cheek for a slapping or to do good to those who hate them. They quite naturally see this as impossible or as something that would make their life wretched. For they are thinking of their life as the one they now have, untouched by the more fundamental parts of Jesus’ teaching, given earlier.

The various scenes and situations that Jesus discusses in his Discourse on the Hill are actually *stages* in a progression toward a life of *agape* love. They progressively presuppose that we know where our well-being really lies, that we have laid aside anger and obsessive desire, that we do not try to mislead people to get our way, and so on. Then loving and helping those who hurt us and hate us, for example, will come as a natural progression. Doing so will seem quite right, and we will be able to do so.

A similar point is to be made with reference to not performing to be seen, not relying on wealth, not using condemnation to straighten people out, and so forth. When these things are taken in the order Jesus presents them, but only then, they provide the foundation for a practical strategy for becoming the beings God created us to be. As we hear him teach, we must constantly review and remember them until they form a part of our conscious minds.

The Law and the Soul

The “Beyond” of Actual Obedience

It is precisely Jesus’ grasp of the structure in the human soul that also leads him to deal primarily with the *sources* of wrongdoing and not to focus on actions themselves. He thus avoids the futility, which we have already pointed out, of making law ultimate. Wrong action, he well knew, is not the problem in human existence, though it is constantly taken to be so. It is only a symptom, which from time to time produces vast evils in its own right.

Going to the source of action is a major part of what he has in mind by saying that one must “go beyond the goodness of scribes

and Pharisees." One must surpass humanly contrived religious respectability "if one is to mesh their life with the flow of the kingdom of the heavens" (5:20).

True enough, he also meant that we are actually to do what the law, as God intended it, says to do. And that too was quite "beyond" the goodness of the scribes and Pharisees.⁷ They talked a lot of law, but they did not keep it. Thus Jesus told his hearers to do what the religious authorities say, "for they sit in Moses' seat. But beware of doing what they do. They say and do not" (Matt. 23:3).

Now confidence in the Christ is, correctly understood, inseparable from the fulfilling of the law. People came to him on one occasion and asked, "What shall we do to work the works of God?" (John 6:28). His reply was, "You do the work of God when you place your confidence in the one he sent." We would now say, and say correctly, "Trust Jesus Christ." But we have already seen in previous chapters how the idea of having faith in Jesus has come to be totally isolated from being his apprentice and learning how to do what he said.

The tragic result of this separation is seen all around us today. What we are looking at in the contemporary Western world is precisely what he himself foretold. We have heard him. For almost two millennia we have heard him, as already noted. But we have chosen to not do what he said. He warned that this would make us "like a silly man who built his house on a sand foundation. The rain poured down, and the rivers and winds beat upon that house, and it collapsed into a total disaster" (Matt. 7:26-27). We today stand in the midst of precisely the disaster he foretold, "flying upside down" but satisfied to be stoutly preaching against "works" righteousness.

If people in our Christian fellowships today were to announce that they had decided to keep God's law, we would probably be skeptical and alarmed. We probably would take them aside for counseling and possibly alert other responsible people in the group to keep an eye on them. We would be sure nothing good would come of it. We know that one is not saved by keeping the law and can think of no other reason why one should try to do it.

This leaves us caught in a strange inversion of the work of the Judaizing teachers who dogged the footsteps of Paul in New Testament days. As they wanted to add obedience to ritual law to faith in Christ, we want to subtract moral law from faith in Christ. How to combine faith with obedience is surely the essential task of the church as it enters the twenty-first century.

The Centrality of God's True Law to Human Life

The law that God had truly given to Israel was, until the coming of Messiah, the most precious possession of human beings on earth. That law consisted of fundamental teachings such as the Ten Commandments, the "Hear, O Israel . . ." of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the great passage on neighbor love in Leviticus 19:9-18, and the elaborations and applications of them by the Jewish prophets up to John the Baptizer.

"What great nation is there," Moses exclaims, "that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law that I am setting before you today?" (Deut. 4:8). The ancient writers knew well the desperate human problem of knowing how to live, and they recognized the law revealed by Jehovah, Israel's covenant-making God, to be the only real solution to this problem.

God's true law also possessed an inherent beauty in its own right, as an expression of the beautiful mind of God. It is profound truth and therefore precious in its own right. In Psalm 119 and elsewhere, we see how the devotee of the law, Jehovah's precious gift, was ravished by its goodness and power, finding it to be the perfect guide into the blessed life in God. It was a constant delight to the mind and the heart.

We must understand that Jesus, the faithful Son, does not deviate at all from this understanding of the law that is truly God's law. He could easily have written Psalm 119 himself. When asked by an earnest though misguided young man what he should do to receive eternal life, Jesus replies, "Keep the law" (Mark 10:19). There was no double entendre whatsoever here, as so many "saving interpretations" would have it. The same response is given to a professional expert in the law who asked the same question in the process of giving Jesus a test for orthodoxy and ability (Luke 10:28).

In both cases, as it turned out, the inquirer wanted to get by with the cut-down and distorted version of the law that dominated their social setting. But this "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees," as Jesus called it, was not the law of God, as we have indicated. And Jesus, in his firm but gentle way, would not cooperate with their delusions.

When he confronted them with the law that was truly God's, they each in their own way flunked the test they professed to have passed. But this does not in the least detract from the fact that God's law is an unspeakably good and precious thing, and that to live

within it is to live the life that is eternal. To be sure, law is not the source of rightness, but it is forever the course of rightness.

Accordingly, in his Discourse on the Hill Jesus responds to his hearers' emerging idea that the law is to be abolished (Matt. 5:17) by making the strongest possible statement to the contrary. So long as creation stands, not the least element of the law—not "one jot or one tittle" of what God intended with it—will be retracted (5:18). This must be, simply because the law is good. It is right. That, and not some sense of his offended dignity, is why God stands behind it.

A time will come in human history when human beings will follow the Ten Commandments and so on as regularly as they now fall to the ground when they step off a roof. They will then be more astonished that someone would lie or steal or covet than they now are when someone will not. The law of God will then be written in their hearts, as the prophets foretold (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 10:16). This is an essential part of the future triumph of Christ and the deliverance of humankind in history and beyond.

From the viewpoint of the kingdom of the heavens or from God's perspective, Jesus points out, those who do the commandments and teach them are the greatest among human beings, whereas those who break the least of the genuine commandments of God and teach others to do so are the worst of human beings (Matt. 5:19).

The law of God marks the movements of God's kingdom, of his own actions and of how that kingdom works. When we keep the law, we step into his ways and drink in his power. Jesus shows us those ways even more fully and leads us into them. "If you love me," he said, "do what I have said. And I will ask the Father and he will give you an additional strengthener, who will never leave you" (John 14:15-16).

The Deeper "Beyond" from Which Actions Come

But the question is, How can one keep the law? Jesus well knew the answer to this question, and that is why he told those who wanted to know how to work the works of God to put their confidence in the one God had sent (John 6:29). He knew that we cannot keep the law by trying to keep the law. To succeed in keeping the law one must aim at something other and something more. One must aim to become the kind of person from whom the deeds of the law naturally

- internalization + externalization of the law
- The Spirit of the law written on the heart
- key the Spirit of God

flow. The apple tree naturally and easily produces apples because of its inner nature. This is the most crucial thing to remember if we would understand Jesus' picture of the kingdom heart given in the Sermon on the Mount.

And here also lies the fundamental mistake of the scribe and the Pharisee. They focus on the actions that the law requires and make elaborate specifications of exactly what those actions are and of the manner in which they are to be done. They also generate immense social pressure to force conformity of action to the law as they interpret it. They are intensely self-conscious about doing the right thing and about being thought to have done the right thing.

But the inner dimensions of their personality, their heart and character, are left to remain contrary to what God has required. That heart will, of course, ultimately triumph over their conscious intentions and arrangements, and they will in fact do what they know to be wrong. Their words, especially, will reveal the contents of their heart (Matt. 12:34). And their need to appear righteous "before men" (Luke 15:15) then forces them into hypocrisy. Hypocrisy becomes the spirit, or "yeast," that pervades and colors their entire existence (Luke 12:1).

One can hardly exaggerate the extent to which this deadly "yeast" infects human relationships all around us. One could wish only religious people were subject to it.

A Lesson from the Dishwasher and the Farmer

In his efforts to help us understand the connection between the inner dimensions of personality and the outward revelations of it in action, and thus build a strategy for becoming the persons God knows we ought to be, Jesus brings lessons from the common knowledge of life, as was his manner (Matt. 13:52).

First from the dishwasher: "You fine folk," he says to the religiously proper, "are in real trouble! Ever so carefully you wipe clean the outside of the cup or dish. But that leaves the inside full of criminality and self-indulgence. When, by contrast, you first scrub the inside of a cup, the outside becomes clean in the process" (Matt. 23:25-26).

It is easy to clean the outside of a cup without washing the inside, but it is hard to wash the inside thoroughly and leave the

outside dirty. Washing the inside has as its natural accompaniment the cleansing of the outside. Only a spot here or there may be left.

Another lesson comes from the farmer. It is one that Jesus refers to repeatedly, and others in the New Testament take it up as well. A good tree, he notes, produces good fruit, and a bad tree bad fruit (Luke 6:43-45). His little brother James extends the point by observing that the fig tree does not bear olives, nor a grapevine figs (James 3:12).

Actions do not emerge from nothing. They faithfully reveal what is in the heart, and we can know what is in the heart that they depend upon. Indeed, everyone does know. That is a part of what it is to be a mentally competent human being. The heart is not a mystery at the level of ordinary human interactions. We discern one another quite well.

When we hear the daily litany of evil deeds that comes to us through the media, for example, we all know well enough, if we can stand to think of it, what kind of inner life and character produces those deeds—even though in a certain sense we still may say we “just can’t understand how anyone could do such things.” The same is true of behavior in the home or at work.

It is the inner life of the soul that we must aim to transform, and then behavior will naturally and easily follow. But not the reverse. A special term is used in the New Testament to mark the character of the inner life when it is as it should be. This is the term *dikaiosune*.

Dikaiosune

Jesus’ account of *dikaiosune*, or of being a really good person, is given in Matt. 5:20-48. We need to stop for a comment on this special term that plays such a large part in the thought world of classical and Hellenistic Greek culture, as well as in the language of the Bible and in the early form of Christianity that emerged to conquer the Greco-Roman world of the second and third centuries.

The human need to know how to live is perennial. It has never been more desperate than it is today, of course—in Los Angeles and New York, in London, Paris, and Berlin. But this need is *always* desperate. That is an unalterable part of the human condition. It is especially urgent in times and places where there is social instability. Such instability does not allow us to maintain the illusion that being a good Jones or Catholic or American or Armenian or Jew solves the problem. We have to have something deeper.

The search for something deeper had become a serious intellectual and spiritual project in the Mediterranean world by the fifth century B.C. or even earlier. That search was, in fact, worldwide in scope,⁸ but nowhere did it achieve a higher result than in the great prophets of Israel, such as Amos, Micah, and Isaiah.

Its first thorough and systematic treatment within the powers of human reason is found in Plato’s *Republic*, which would be more accurately translated *The City*. This book is really a study of the human soul and of the condition in which the soul must be in order for human beings to live well and manage to do what is right. The condition required is called, precisely, *dikaiosune* in the *Republic*. This is exactly the term that Jesus centers on in his Discourse on the Hill, as we have it in the Greek language. It is usually translated “justice” in Plato’s texts. But this is, once again, an unfortunate translation, for *dikaiosune* is only indirectly related to what we today understand by justice.

The best translation of *dikaiosune* would be a paraphrase: something like “what that is about a person that makes him or her really right or good.” For short, we might say “true inner goodness.” Plato (following Socrates) tries to give a precise and full account of what this true inner goodness is.

In establishing the central term of ethical understanding, Aristotle replaced his teacher Plato’s word, *dikaiosune*, with *arete*, usually translated “virtue.” Historically, Aristotle won the terminological battle, and *virtue* has, more than any other term, stood through the ages for the heart of human rightness. It represents a combination of skill, wisdom, power, and steadfastness for good that makes it very attractive.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs is actually more focused on *arete* than upon *dikaiosune*, and *arete* also occurs in the New Testament writings: for example, in Phil. 4:8 and 2 Pet. 1:3-5. Still, in the Hebrew and New Testament traditions, *dikaiosune* remains preferred. Perhaps this is because it retains a note of emphasis upon relationship of the soul to God, whereas *arete* predominantly stresses human ability and fulfillment by itself. Of course no contemporary ethical expert would be caught dead discussing “righteousness,” though *virtue* has recently experienced something of a revival in the field.

A couple of centuries after Plato—certainly beginning sometime prior to 285 B.C.—the Old Testament began to be translated into Greek, yielding the text we call the Septuagint. The term *dikaiosune* was

both dikaiosune and arete

used to translate the Hebrew terms *tsedawkaw* and *tsehdek*, usually rendered in English as "righteousness." Thus, a great central text of the Old Testament, Gen. 15:6, tells us, "And Abram believed God, and it was counted to him for *dikaosune*." And we see in Isaiah: "All our *dikaosune* is like filthy rags" (64:6). And again in Amos: "But let judgment roll down as water, and *dikaosune* as an impassable flood" (5:24).

As a result, the two greatest traditions of moral reflection in the ancient world are brought together in the term *dikaosune*. It reemerges in the teachings of Jesus, three centuries after the creation of the Greek Old Testament, and becomes the central term in the understanding of Christian salvation represented in the New Testament. Indeed, for Paul, the redemptive act of Jesus becomes the key to understanding the very *dikaosune* of God himself (Rom. 1-8). It is the person of Jesus and his death for us that makes clear what it is about God that makes him "really good."

Six Contrasts of the Old and the New Moral Reality

In Matthew, chapter 5, Jesus works us through six situations in which the goodness that lives from the heart and through The Kingdom Among Us is contrasted with the old *dikaosune* focused merely on "doing the right thing."

Situation	Old Dikaosune	Kingdom Dikaosune
1. Irritation with one's associates. (vv. 21-26)	No murder.	Intense desire to be of help. No anger or contempt.
2. Sexual attraction. (vv. 27-30)	No intercourse.	No cultivation of lust.
3. Unhappiness with marriage partner. (vv. 31-32)	If you divorce, give "pink slip."	No divorce, as then practiced.
4. Wanting someone to believe something. (vv. 33-37)	Keep vows or oaths made to convince.	Only say how things are or are not. No verbal manipulation.
5. Being personally injured. (vv. 38-42)	Inflict exactly the same injury on the offender.	Don't harm, but help, the one who has damaged you.
6. Having an enemy. (vv. 43-48)	Hate your enemy.	Love and bless your enemy, as the heavenly Father does.

↑
 ?
 These were all present in the OT to some degree

And now with the preliminaries about the structure and progress of the Discourse on the Hillside before us, we can begin to immerse ourselves in the substance of Jesus' teachings on the rightness of the kingdom heart. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to examining each of these situations in depth. Having worked through these contrasts in well-known and frequent life situations, one should be able to see very clearly the kind of inner character or heart that belongs to those whose life truly flows from the kingdom of God.

In the Caldron of Anger and Contempt

The Primacy of Anger in the Order of Evil

The first illustration of kingdom *dikaosune* is drawn from cases in which we are displeased with our "brother" and may allow ourselves to treat him with anger or contempt.

When we trace wrongdoing back to its roots in the human heart, we find that in the overwhelming number of cases it involves some form of anger. Close beside anger you will find its twin brother, contempt. Jesus' understanding of them and their role in life becomes the basis of his strategy for establishing kingdom goodness. It is the elimination of anger and contempt that he presents as the first and fundamental step toward the rightness of the kingdom heart.

Pointing to the moral inadequacy of the commandment not to kill as a guide to relationships with others who anger us, Jesus goes deeper, and yet deeper, into the texture of human personality: "But what I say is that anyone who becomes intensely angry [*orgizomenos*] with those around them shall stand condemned before the law" (5:22). He uses exactly the same phrase, "shall stand condemned before the law," to apply to anger as the old teaching applied to murder.

What Anger Is

And when we look carefully at anger we can see why such a strong statement is justified. In its simplest form, anger is a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life. As such, it is not wrong. It is a feeling that seizes us in our body and immediately impels us toward interfering with, and possibly even harming, those who have thwarted our will and interfered with our life.

Indeed, anger is in its own right—quite apart from “acting it out” and further consequences—an injury to others. When I discover your anger at me, I am *already* wounded. Your anger alone will very likely be enough to stop me or make me change my course, and it will also raise the stress level of everyone around us. It may also evoke my anger in return. Usually it does, precisely because your anger places a restraint on me. It crosses my will. Thus anger feeds on anger. The primary function of anger in life is to alert me to an obstruction to my will, and immediately raise alarm and resistance, before I even have time to think about it.

And if that were all there was to anger, all would be well. Anger in this sense is no sin, even though it is still better avoided where possible. (Headaches are no sin, but do we really need them?) Anger would then perform its vital function, as physical pain does, and pass with the occasion. But the anger that is a reality among us is much more than this and quickly turns into something that is inherently evil.

To understand why, we need to take a still closer look at what anger is. It is primarily a function of the human will, and this in several respects. It spontaneously arises in us, as just noted, when our will is obstructed. That is what occasions it. But as a response toward those who have interfered with us, it includes a will to harm them, or the beginnings thereof. Some degree of malice is contained in every degree of anger.⁹ That is why it always hurts us when someone is angry at us.

Consequently, we would not choose to have others angry at us unless some ulterior end were to be gained by it. We know that people who are angry at us will our harm, and by just their look (or refusal to look) or the raising of their voice (or not speaking at all) they intend to make a painful impression on us. They certainly succeed.

Anger and the Wounded Ego

But it is a third possible involvement of the will in anger that makes it so deadly as to deserve the censure Jesus places upon it. We can and usually do choose or will to be angry. Anger first arises spontaneously. But we can actively receive it and decide to indulge it, and we usually do. We may even become an angry person, and any incident can evoke from us a torrent of rage that is kept in constant readiness.

This is actually the case with those who are caught up in the current epidemic of “road rage.” The explosion of anger never simply comes from the incident. Most people carry a supply of anger around with them. Perhaps it comes along with that “quiet desperation” that, according to Henry David Thoreau, characterizes the life of most people. Increasingly, now, the desperation is not so quiet.

But why, one might ask, would people embrace anger and indulge it? Why would they, as they do so often, bloat their bodies with anger or wear it like a badge of honor while it radiates real and potential harm, not only to its proper object, the one who thwarted their will in the first place, but to others standing by—often with deadly effects on their own life and health and happiness? It is well established today that many people are killed by their own anger.¹⁰ Untold many others die of secondhand anger, like secondhand smoke. In Los Angeles and other cities, hardly a week goes by without the death of a child from bullets fired at others in anger.

The answer to this question of why people embrace anger and cultivate it is one we must not miss if we are to understand the ways of the human heart. Anger indulged, instead of simply waved off, always has in it an element of self-righteousness and vanity. Find a person who has embraced anger, and you find a person with a wounded ego.

The importance of the self and the real or imaginary wound done to it is blown out of all proportion by those who indulge anger. Then anger can become anything from a low-burning resentment to a holy crusade to inflict harm on the one who has thwarted me or my wishes or bruised my sense of propriety. It may explode on anything and anyone within reach. I may become addicted to the adrenaline rush and never feel really alive except when my anger is pumping.

Only this element of self-righteousness can support me as I retain my anger long after the occasion of it or allow its intensity to heat to the point of totally senseless rage. To rage on I must regard myself as mistreated or as engaged in the rectification of an unbearable wrong, which I all too easily do.

Anger embraced is, accordingly, inherently disintegrative of human personality and life. It does not have to be specifically “acted out” to poison the world. Because of what it is, and the way it seizes upon the body and its environment just by being there, it cannot be

hidden. All our mental and emotional resources are marshaled to nurture and tend the anger, and our body throbs with it. Energy is dedicated to keeping the anger alive: we constantly remind ourselves of how wrongly we have been treated. And when it is allowed to govern our actions, of course, its evil is quickly multiplied in heart-rending consequences and in the replication of anger and rage in the hearts and bodies of everyone it touches.

Anger As Now Practiced and Encouraged

In the United States there are around 25,000 murders each year. There are 1,000 murders in the workplace, and a million people are injured in the workplace by violent attacks from co-workers.¹¹ Most of the workplace murders occur after long periods of open rage and threats, and many involve multiple murders of innocent bystanders. It is a simple fact that none of the 25,000 murders, or only a negligible number of them, would have occurred but for an anger that the killers chose to embrace and indulge.

Anger and contempt are the twin scourges of the earth. Mingled with greed and sexual lust (to be discussed later), these bitter emotions form the poisonous brew in which human existence stands suspended. Few people ever get free of them in this life, and for most of us even old age does not bring relief.

Once you see those emotions for what they are, the constant stream of human disasters that history and life bring before us can also be seen for what they are: the natural outcome of human choice, of people choosing to be angry and contemptuous. It is a miracle there are not more and greater disasters. We have to remember this when we read what Jesus and other biblical writers say about anger. To cut the root of anger is to wither the tree of human evil. That is why Paul says simply, "Lay aside anger" (Col. 3:8).

Yet influential people tell us today that we must be angry, that it is necessary to be angry to oppose social evil. The idea goes deep into our thinking. I was once counseling a Christian couple about family matters and suggested that they should not discipline their child in anger. They replied in amazement, "You mean we should just punish him in cold blood?" They had no idea of how their sense of righteousness had become intertwined with anger.

A leading social commentator now teaches that despair and rage are an essential element in the struggle for justice.¹² He and others

who teach this are sowing the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind, the tornado. Indeed, we are reaping it now in a nation increasingly sick with rage and resentment of citizen toward citizen. And often the rage and resentment is upheld as justified in the name of God.

But there is nothing that can be done with anger that cannot be done better without it. The sense of self-righteousness that comes with our anger simply provokes more anger and self-righteousness on the other side. Of course, when nothing is done about things that are wrong, anger naturally builds and finally will break into action, whether in a family or a nation. That is inevitable and even necessary outside The Kingdom Among Us.

But the answer is to right the wrong in persistent love, not to harbor anger, and thus to right it without adding further real or imaginary wrongs. To retain anger and to cultivate it is, by contrast, "to give the devil a chance" (Eph. 4:26-27). He will take the chance, and there will be hell to pay. The delicious morsel of self-righteousness that anger cultivated always contains comes at a high price in the self-righteous reaction of those we cherish anger toward. And the cycle is endless as long as anger has sway.

Contempt Is Worse Than Anger

But contempt is a greater evil than anger and so is deserving of greater condemnation. Unlike innocent anger, at least, it is a kind of studied degradation of another, and it also is more pervasive in life than anger. It is never justifiable or good. Therefore Jesus tells us, "Whoever says 'Raca' to his brother shall stand condemned before the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the land" (v. 22).

The Aramaic term *raca* was current in Jesus' day to express contempt for someone and to mark out him or her as contemptible. It may have originated from the sound one makes to collect spittle from the throat in order to spit. In anger I want to hurt you. In contempt, I don't care whether you are hurt or not. Or at least so I say. You are not worth consideration one way or the other. We can be angry at someone without denying their worth. But contempt makes it easier for us to hurt them or see them further degraded.

Today, of course, we would not say, "Raca." But we might call someone a twit or a twerp, maybe a dork or a nerd. These are the gentler words in our vocabulary of contempt; when it really gets

going, it becomes filthy. Our verbal arsenal is loaded with contemptuous terms, some with sexual, racial, or cultural bearing, others just personally degrading. They should never be uttered.

The intent and the effect of contempt is always to exclude someone, push them away, leave them out and isolated. This explains why filth is so constantly invoked in expressing contempt and why contempt is so cruel, so serious. It breaks the social bond more severely than anger. Yet it may also be done with such refinement.

How often we see it, in the schoolyard, at a party, even in the home or church sanctuary! Someone is being put down or oh so precisely omitted, left out. It is a constant in most of human life. In the course of normal life one is rarely in a situation where contempt is not at least hovering in the wings. And everyone lives in terror of it. It is never quite beyond the margins of our consciousness.

But those who are "excluded" are thereby made fair game for worse treatment. Conversely, respect automatically builds a wall against mistreatment. In family battles the progression is nearly always from anger to contempt (always expressed in vile language) to physical brutality. Once contempt is established, however, it justifies the initial anger and increases its force.

Recently cultural observers have noted the overwhelming rise in the use of filthy language, especially among young people. Curiously, few have been able to find any grounds for condemning it other than personal taste. How strange! Can it be that they actually find contempt acceptable, or are unable to recognize it? Filthy language and name calling are *always* an expression of contempt. The current swarm of filthy language floats upon the sea of contempt in which our society is now adrift.

Some attention has recently been paid to twelve- or fourteen-year-old children who kill people for no apparent reason. Commentators have remarked on the lack of feeling in these young killers. But when you observe them accurately, you will see that they are indeed actuated by a feeling. Watch their faces. It is contempt. They are richly contemptuous of others—and at the same time terrified and enraged at being "dissed," which is their language for contempt.

Jesus' comment here (Matt. 5:22) is that anyone who says, "Raca," to an associate is rightly to be singled out by the highest authorities in the land—"the council," or Sanhedrin—for appropriate and obviously serious penalties. Contemptuous actions and atti-

tudes are a knife in the heart that permanently harms and mutilates people's souls. That they are so common does not ease their destructiveness. In most professional circles and "high" society, where one might hope for the highest moral sensitivity, contempt is a fine art. Practicing it is even a part of being "in good standing." Not to know whom and how to despise is one of the surest of signs that you are not quite with it and are yourself mildly contemptible.

In his marvelous little talk "The Inner Ring," C. S. Lewis comments that "in all men's lives at certain periods, and in many men's lives at all periods between infancy and extreme old age, one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside."¹³

To *belong* is a vital need based in the spiritual nature of the human being. Contempt spits on this pathetically deep need. And, like anger, contempt does not have to be acted out in special ways to be evil. It is inherently poisonous. Just by being what it is, it is withering to the human soul. But when expressed in the contemptuous phrase—in its thousands of forms—or in the equally powerful gesture or look, it stabs the soul to its core and deflates its powers of life. It can hurt so badly and destroy so deeply that murder would almost be a mercy. Its power is also seen in the intensity of the resentment and rage it always evokes.

"You Fool!"

But Jesus notes one stage further in the progression of internal evil that may be there without murder occurring: "And whoever says 'You fool!' shall merit condemnation to the fires of gehenna" (v. 22).

"You fool!" said with that characteristic combination of freezing contempt and withering anger that Jesus had in mind, is a deeper harm than either anger or contempt alone. *Twerp* or *twit* usually is not said in anger but even with a certain amusement. *Fool*, on the other hand, in the biblical sense, is an expression of malice as well as contempt.

Actually, that word will no longer do to capture the sense of Jesus' teaching here and, in fact, is now closer to *twerp* than it is to what he had in mind. Thus one who would follow Jesus' "law" by not calling people fools today gets off easy. We have plenty of other terminology that would allow us to go ahead and do exactly what he was in fact condemning, without using the word *fool*.

The dominant sense of *fool* in our culture is that of a benign folly, as in "Feast of Fools," an ancient idea that became the title of a popular book some years back. Excuse the crudity, but the nearest equivalent of the biblical *fool* in today's language would be something more like *stupid bastard* or *f—jerk*, as said to someone who either has just messed up something important we were doing to meet a deadline or has just cut us off in traffic. One would hardly speak of a "Feast of Stupid Bastards" in the same celebratory sense.

The fool, in biblical language, is a combination of stupid perversity and rebellion against God and all that sensible people stand for. He is willfully perverted, rebellious, knowingly wicked to his own harm. The Old Testament book of Proverbs carefully delineates his soul. "The fool," we are told, "is arrogant and careless" (Prov. 14:16). "A fool doesn't care about understanding, but only in displaying his own heart" (18:2). "Like a dog that re-eats its own vomit, a fool repeats his folly over and over" (26:11). And so on and so on.

To brand someone "fool" in this biblical sense was a violation of the soul so devastating, of such great harm, that, as Jesus saw, it would justify consigning the offender to the smoldering garbage dump of human existence, *gehenna*. It combines all that is evil in anger as well as in contempt. It is not possible for people with such attitudes toward others to live in the movements of God's kingdom, for they are totally out of harmony with it.

These Three Prohibitions Are Not Laws

Today one is apt to feel that Jesus is taking all this too seriously. But what is it, exactly, that is being done in the delineation of this threefold progression of prohibitions from anger to contempt to verbal desecration? The answer is that Jesus is giving us a revelation of the preciousness of human beings. He means to reveal the value of persons. Obviously merely not killing others cannot begin to do justice to that.

By no means, however, is he simply giving here three more things not to do, three more points on a "list" of things to be avoided. Certainly, we are not to do them, but that is not the point. If that were all, the enterprising human mind would soon find its way around them. Don't we already know that not getting angry is the way some people have of winning? And don't we hear people say, "I don't get mad. I just get even"? One doesn't have to be mad to be mean.

So here as elsewhere in his lovely Discourse on the Hillside, we

need to put the idea of *laws* entirely out of our minds. Jesus is working, as already indicated, at the much deeper level of the *source* of actions, good and bad. He is taking us deeper into the kind of beings we are, the kind of love God has for us, and the kind of love that, as we share it, brings us into harmony with his life. No one can be "right" in the kingdom sense who is not transformed at this level. And then, of course, the issue of *not* being wrongly angry, *not* expressing contempt, *not* calling people "stupid bastards," and so on is automatically taken care of.

When I go to New York City, I do not have to think about *not* going to London or Atlanta. People do not meet me at the airport or station and exclaim over what a great thing I did in *not* going somewhere else. I took the steps to go to New York City, and that took care of everything.

Likewise, when I treasure those around me and see them as God's creatures designed for his eternal purposes, I do not make an additional point of *not* hating them or calling them twerps or fools. *Not* doing those things is simply a part of the package. "He that loves has fulfilled the law," Paul said (Rom. 13:8). Really.

On the other hand, *not* going to London or Atlanta is a poor plan for going to New York. And *not* being wrongly angry and so on is a poor plan for treating people with love. It will not work. And, of course, Jesus never intended it to be such a plan. For all their necessity, goodness, and beauty, laws that deal only with actions, such as the Ten Commandments, simply cannot reach the human heart, the *source* of actions. "If a law had been given capable of bringing people to life," Paul said, "then righteousness would have come from that law" (Gal. 3:21). But law, for all its magnificence, cannot do that. Graceful relationship sustained with the masterful Christ certainly can.

We learn this in our discipleship to Christ.

Positive Illustrations of the Kingdom Heart

But the revelation of kingdom goodness relative to our interactions with others is not yet complete. Showing that anger and contempt are such serious matters only lays a foundation for the final move in this first contrast that Jesus makes between the kingdom heart and the older teaching about "rightness." Now he states a remarkable "therefore" that leads us out of mere negations or prohibitions into

an astonishing positive regard for our neighbor, whom we are to love as God loves.

Referring to what has just been made clear, Jesus says "therefore" (v. 23). Because the reality of the human soul and God's regard for it in his kingdom are so great, what kind of positive caring makes us at home in the kingdom life? Two illustrations are given of what, once again, law could never capture:

First, you are with the Temple officials before the altar, about to present your sacrifice to God (Matt. 5:23-24). It is one of the holiest moments in the ritual life of the faithful. The practice was that nothing should interrupt this ritual except some more important ceremonial matter that required immediate attention.

Suddenly, right in the midst of it all, you remember a brother who is mad at you. Realizing how important it is for his soul to find release, and pained by the break between yourself and him, you stop the ritual. You walk out of it to find him and make up. That illustrates the positive goodness of the kingdom heart.

To get the full impact of this illustration we have to imagine ourselves being married or baptized or ordained to some special role, such as pastor. In the midst of the proceedings, we walk out to seek reconciliation with someone who is not even there. That pictures the kingdom love that is kingdom rightness.

Jesus' selection of this scene to illustrate the quality of the kingdom heart continues the long-established prophetic emphasis in Israel, which always weighted the moral over the ritual. "Behold, I would have mercy and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6:6). Eduard Schweizer comments, "When a cultic act is stopped for the sake of one's brother, as Jesus requires, cultic ideology has been fundamentally overcome."¹⁴

Now just think of what the quality of life and character must be in a person who would routinely interrupt sacred rituals to pursue reconciliation with a fellow human being. What kind of thought life, what feeling tones and moods, what habits of body and mind, what kinds of deliberations and choices would you find in such a person? When you answer these questions, you will have a vision of the true "rightness beyond" that is at home in God's kingdom of power and love.

Of course the legalistic tendency in the human self will immediately go to work. It seems never to rest. It will ask, What if my brother refuses to be reconciled? Am I never to go to church again? ("First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.") Do I

always have to do this, no matter what else is at issue in the situation? The answer is, Obviously not! Jesus is not here giving a law that you must never carry through with your religious practice if an associate has something against you. He is not stating a law like "Thou shalt not kill." The aim of his illustration—and it is an illustration—is to bring us to terms with what is in our hearts and, simultaneously, to show us the rightness of the kingdom heart.

We do not control outcomes and are not responsible for them, but only for our contribution to them. Does our heart long for reconciliation? Have we done what we can? Honestly? Do we refuse to substitute ritual behaviors for genuine acts of love? Do we mourn for the harm that our brother's anger is doing to his own soul, to us, and to others around us? If so, we are beyond "the righteousness of scribes and Pharisees" and immersed in God's ways. We can certainly find an appropriate way to act from such a heart without being given a list of things to do.

The second illustration of an action typical of the kingdom heart is drawn from the case in which we have an adversary before the legal system. Today it would probably mean someone is suing us.

Here Jesus tells us to be well disposed or kindly minded (*eunoon*) toward our adversary in the preliminary interactions that might lead up to a trial. Try, with genuine love for the adversary, to resolve the matter before it comes to trial. We might cordially meet with him or her, for example, and just ask with sincerity what we could do to help. That is the sort of thing the kingdom heart will do.

By truly loving our adversary, we stand within the reality of God's kingdom and resources, and it is very likely we will draw our adversary into it also. Things are really different there, and a resolution manifesting the divine presence becomes possible. See what will happen. Venture on the kingdom. That is how we "seek" it.

If we do not approach our "adversary" in this way, we limit ourselves and our adversary to the human system and its laws, and we will endure the bitter fruit of it. We probably will not escape it until it has totally drained us. How realistic Jesus' description is of a process we constantly see about us today! Currently some of our courts are imprisoning children because they refuse to visit their father who has left the family. Such a system, one can only say, may be unavoidable now, but it is too crude for human existence by anyone's thoughtful standards.

It is crucial to realize that Jesus does not here say that we should simply give in to the demands of an adversary. To be of a kindly or favorable mind toward an adversary or anyone else does not mean to do what they demand. It means to be genuinely committed to what is good for them, to seek their well-being. This may even require that we not give in to them. But there are many ways of holding the line, some of God, some not.

Likewise, he does not forbid us to go to court. Yet how many people, looking for a law, have falsely supposed he does. But that is simply not there in his words. Nevertheless, a man of my acquaintance was in business with someone who took ruinous advantage of him. This man gave in to his partner's illegitimate demands and actions and did not go to law over the matter. He presumed that Jesus had laid down a law to that effect. As it turned out, he was expecting God to see to it that he suffered no loss. But he suffered a great loss. And now he is very angry at God, and not at God alone.

Jesus here gives us a second illustration, then, of how the kingdom heart will respond. He does not tell us what to do, but how to do it. Indeed, go to court or not—as makes sense in the circumstances. But do whatever you do without hostility, bitterness, and the merciless drive to win. Be prepared to sacrifice your interest for that of another if that seems wise. And keep a joyous confidence in God regardless of what happens.

Standing in the kingdom, we make responsible decisions in love, with assurance that how things turn out for us does not really matter that much because, in any case, we are in the kingdom of the heavens. In that kingdom nothing that can happen to us is "the end of the world."

Through these two illustrations we finally see the kingdom goodness placed side by side with the mere goodness of not killing, which then looks quite empty by contrast. If we made laws of these illustrations and followed them, would that make us right toward our brother or sister? Not at all. We could do these things and yet find many other ways to hate and hurt our neighbor. We would miss the whole point.

The Destructiveness of Fantasized Desire

The Poison of Sexual Desire Indulged and Fantasized

In his Discourse on the Hillside Jesus treats hostility at greater length than any of the other matters he takes up. This is certainly because it

is most fundamental. If you pull contempt and unrestrained anger out of human life, you have thereby rid it of by far the greater part of wrong acts that actually get carried out.

But in this first concretely displayed contrast between the old and the new *dikaiousune* Jesus also gives us space to pick up on how he is treating his subject matter. Now it will be possible to deal somewhat more briefly with the five remaining contrasts brought up in his exposition of kingdom rightness.

The second contrast he deals with concerns sex. Of course he is right on target for today. Sex and violence are the two things that are repeatedly cited as the areas of our greatest problems, in life as in the media. Violence is the sure overflow of anger and contempt in the heart. Anger and contempt constantly intermingle, both with each other and with the torrents of fantasized gratifications that also inhabit the human heart: such as those for fame, drugs and alcohol, power, and money. Hungers for these dominate a social framework in which a seemingly unlimited range of desires are constantly pushing their claims for "liberation" into unlimited satisfaction.

In dealing with sex, as with verbal and physical violence, Jesus takes for the point of contrast one of the Ten Commandments as used in the current setting: "You shall not commit adultery." Strictly speaking, this prohibits a married person's having sexual intercourse with someone other than his or her spouse. As with murder, it is an absolute prohibition, and there is no question of its being right under any circumstances to murder or to commit adultery.

Yet, as we have seen with murder, the mere fact that you do not commit adultery with a certain man or woman does not mean that your relation to that person in the domain of sexuality is as it should be or that you yourself are what you ought to be with reference to your sexuality.

Jesus was confronted with multitudes of men who thought of themselves as good, as right, in their sexual life because they did not do the specific thing forbidden by the commandment. They were like those who thought they were right in relation to their fellow men because they had not killed them.

But Jesus was aware, as we may easily notice today, that the very same people who thought of themselves as sexually pure and right would follow a woman with their eyes, lavishing their lookings upon her, tracing out by sight the lineaments of her body with a

look of absorbed lusting upon their face and posture. They obviously take great pleasure in this activity, fantasizing what touching, caressing, and entering this body would be like.

Everyone knows about this kind of activity, and there are few who have not at some time engaged in it to some degree. No doubt the same was true even in Jesus' day. But it goes on among all types of men, including ministers and university professors, and, in this day of equal opportunity, among women as well and between members of the same sex. Jesus' teaching here is that a person who cultivates lusting in this manner is not the kind of person who is at home in the goodness of God's kingdom.

Job's Eyes

In the book of Job, dated by some as the oldest book in the Bible, there is a very analytic statement of the course of sexual involvement (Job 31). As is well known, Job is protesting his integrity on all fronts. He is aware of the issue Jesus is addressing and has a well-thought-out policy concerning it. "I made a covenant with my eyes," he says. He had, as it were, an understanding with them that they would not engage in lusting. "How," he asks, "could I ogle a young woman," a "virgin"? The salacious gaze would be seen by God. And it would certainly lead into deceitful actions (v. 5). But God knows that none of this is a part of his life (v. 6).

Job is so emphatic about his purity in this area that he goes into great detail concerning the all-too-familiar course of wrong sexual involvement and its consequences. Obviously he knew exactly what goes on. "If my feet have carried me to the wrong places," he says, "or if my heart has walked after my eyes, or my hand is defiled because it has touched what it ought not to touch, then let my children belong to others. And if my heart has been captured by the wife of another, and I have sought for an opportunity with her, then may my wife be possessed by other men" (Job 31:5-8).

To be right sexually before God is to be precisely as Job was. It is to be the kind of person who has a detailed and established practice of not engaging his or her bodily parts and perceptions, thoughts, and desires in activities of sexual trifling, dalliance, and titillation. It is to be the kind of person whose feet, eyes, hands, heart, and all the rest simply walk within the good policy that he or she has adopted because of the knowledge that it is good and right.

Adultery "in the Heart"

So in this area Jesus is not exactly making points unheard of among human beings. All except those committed to a course of self-justification will understand clearly what he is talking about and will recognize that it is not good. He says simply that those who "look upon a woman for the purpose of lusting for her—using her visual presence as a means of savoring the fantasized act—has thereby committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

In other words, all the elements of a genuine act of adultery other than the overt movements of the body are present in such a case. The heart elements are there. Usually the only thing lacking for overt action is the occasion. When the heart is ready, the action will occur as occasion offers. Just as the thief is the person who would steal if circumstances were right, so the adulterer is the one who would have wrongful sex if the circumstances were right. Usually that means if he or she could be sure it would not be found out. This is what Jesus calls "adultery in the heart." In it, the person is not caring for, but using, the other. The condition is wrong even though sexual relations do not occur.

When one is inhabited by fantasizing visual lusting, it, like anger and contempt, makes its presence known. It is detectable in one's "body language" and expressions. As a result it has pervasive effects on everyone in the situation, even though it is not "acted out." Indeed, being what it is, a condition of the embodied social self, it is always acted out to some degree and simply cannot be kept a private reality. "The look" is a public act with public effects that restructure the entire framework of personal relations where it occurs.¹⁵

The person subjected to the fantasy, as well as others alongside, is deeply affected by such lusting. And it nearly always produces some degree of inappropriate action, including all of the behavior now classified as sexual harassment. Indeed, it is in itself a form of harassment unless it is invited. The person subjected to it and everyone else nearby must "deal with it," often by constant planning and managing. Sexual harassment as we know it would simply disappear under Jesus' ethic of sexuality.

Also eliminated would be the unfair treatment of those who do not attract the lusting look. They do not have the "sexual edge" that facilitates others, often quite subtly, on the path of life: favorable attention, a more "forgiving" application of standards of perfor-

mance, advancement in position, and financial reward. And of course they cannot usually say anything about this because it would be a humiliating admission of their "unattractiveness." In silence they suffer.

But Actual Adultery Is Worse

Accordingly, no one can be in harmony with The Kingdom Among Us who indulges and cultivates this type of absorbing desire. That they do not actually commit adultery is, however, important. Actual adultery involves all the wrong of "adultery in the heart" and much more besides. Jesus never suggests that actual adultery is acceptable if it is only done "in the right way," or that if you are already engaged in heart adultery you might just as well go all the way. He knew how terribly disruptive it was of life. The classical moralist Aristotle, who lived four centuries before Jesus, also held that adultery was simply wrong. There is no such thing, he says, as "committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, for it is . . . simply wrong."¹⁶ And until the mid-twentieth century it was generally assumed that this was the correct view.

Today, of course, this view has almost totally changed. It would be hard to find any current writer in ethics who would regard adultery as simply wrong. Actually, almost anything in the way of sexual relations is now regarded as correct as long as both parties consent to it. You will now hear it explained that adultery is not even committed as long as no child is conceived. For the "real" prohibition all along, some say, was not against sexual relations, but against fathering a child on someone else's wife or by someone else's husband, and thus "adulterating" the man's family lineage.

More commonly, now, it is thought that sex is right with anyone you love in the sense of a "romantic" involvement. And on the other hand sex without romantic feelings is thought to be wrong even if the sexual partners are married. Often the "romantic love" in question turns out upon examination to be nothing more than precisely that fantasized lust that Jesus called "adultery in the heart." One is not in love but in lust, which glorifies itself as something deeper in order to have its way.

It is almost inconceivable today that the rightness or wrongness of sexual intercourse would have nothing whatsoever to do with what now passes for romantic love. Yet that is the biblical view gen-

erally: the rightness of sex is tied instead to a solemn and public covenant for life between two individuals, and sexual arousal and delight is a response to the gift of a uniquely personal intimacy with the whole person that each partner has conferred in enduring faithfulness upon the other.

Intimacy is the mutual mingling of souls who are taking each other into themselves to ever increasing depths. The truly erotic is the mingling of souls. Because we are free beings, intimacy cannot be passive or forced. And because we are extremely finite, it must be exclusive. This is the metaphysical and spiritual reality that underlies the bitter violation of self experienced by the betrayed mate. It also makes clear the scarred and shallow condition of those who betray.

The profound misunderstandings of the erotic that prevail today actually represent the inability of humanity in its current Western edition to give itself to others and receive them in abiding faithfulness.¹⁷ Personal relationship has been emptied out to the point where intimacy is impossible. Quite naturally, then, we say, "Why not?" when contemplating adultery. If there is nothing there to be broken, why worry about breaking it?

One of the most telling things about contemporary human beings is that they cannot find a reason for not committing adultery. Yet intimacy is a spiritual hunger of the human soul, and we cannot escape it. This has always been true and remains true today. We now keep hammering the sex button in the hope that a little intimacy might finally dribble out. In vain. For intimacy comes only within the framework of an individualized faithfulness within the kingdom of God. Such faithfulness is violated by "adultery in the heart" as well as by adultery in the body.

Anger and Contempt in Sex

Of course such covenant-framed intimacy as just referred to is an expression of the same heart of love that Jesus refers to in his earlier discussion of anger, contempt, and associated feelings. And the orderly progression of his Discourse comes immediately into play here. The sexual delight that goes naturally with the unique covenantal intimacy of marriage is totally destroyed by anger and contempt. How many marriage unions are fatally undermined because of contempt that one mate has for the other? Sometimes it is for the body, sometimes for the mind, talents, or family, or for something he or she has done. The

contempt always elicits anger, which elicits anger in turn, and so on. It's a familiar story. These wounds seldom heal, but instead fester and grow. Further "sex" under such contempt-filled conditions usually will only deepen them.

Anger and contempt between mates makes sexual delight between them impossible, and when such an important need is unmet, people are, almost invariably, drawn into the realm of fantasy. Dissatisfied mates project fantasy images that the real people in their lives are forced, in one way or another, to fit into—or fall short of. This leads to increased frustration, producing more anger and contempt.

Hostile feelings may even become essential to sexual stimulation. Then straightforward sexual stimulation and gratification become impossible. "Kinkiness" and degradation (humiliation, bondage, etc.) become necessary for sexual arousal to occur. Finally, the anger and contempt cycle comes back into play again, this time turned against those who do not approve of abnormal sexual needs and behavior, or even against oneself.

The overt sexiness of supermarket checkout stand magazines, advertising, romance novels, and nearly all movie and television productions is always an exercise in fantasy sexuality, and it feeds into the path of frustration, anger, and contempt just described. In charting one's course in life, it is important never to forget that many things that cannot be called wrong or evil are nevertheless not good for us.

Of course when we arrive at outright pornography we can see, if we have eyes and brains left, that it always involves some element of contempt or even disgust. Those presented in it are *obviously* being used, hence are even regarded by the viewer as "deserving" disgust or even pain. There is no question of an appropriate human relation to them.

The idea of "girl next door" pornography, pushed so hard by publications in recent years, is simply an absurdity. Pornography lives in the hostile and degraded imagination along with "adultery in the heart." Jesus' teaching here reaches the depths of the human soul and body and makes us aware of dimensions of real or possible darkness within us that, like Job, we must simply stay away from.

But Merely to Think or Desire Is Not Wrong

On the other hand, we must be careful to recognize that sexual desire is not wrong as a natural, uncultivated response, any more

than anger is, or pain. It has a vital function in life, and as long as it performs that function it is a good and proper thing.

Moreover, when we only think of sex with someone we see, or simply find him or her attractive, that is not wrong, and certainly is not what Jesus calls "adultery in the heart." Merely to be *tempted* sexually requires that we think of sex with someone we are not married to, and that we desire the other person—usually, of course, someone we see. But temptation also is not wrong, though it should not be willfully entered. Jesus himself came under it, experienced it, and understood it.

Therefore those translations of Matt. 5:28 that say, "Everyone who looks at a woman and desires her," or "everyone who looks at a woman with desire," are terribly mistaken. They do much harm, especially to young people. For they totally change the meaning of the text and present "adultery in the heart" as something one cannot avoid, as something that just happens to people with no collusion of their will.

That on this reading to be tempted would be to sin should have been enough, by itself, to show that such translations are mistaken. No translation of scripture can be correct that contradicts basic principles of biblical teaching as a whole.

The terminology of 5:28 is quite clear if we will but attend to it, and many translations do get it right. The Greek preposition *pros* and the dative case are used here. The wording refers to looking at a woman with the purpose of desiring her. That is, we desire to desire. We indulge and cultivate desiring because we enjoy fantasizing about sex with the one seen. Desiring sex is the purpose for which we are looking.

Another New Testament passage very graphically speaks of those who have "eyes full of adultery" (2 Pet. 2:14). These are people who, when they see a sexually attractive person, do not see the person but see themselves sexually engaging him or her. They see adultery occurring in their imagination. Such a condition is one we can and should avoid. It is a choice.

For many people, unfortunately, it has become a chosen habit. But it still is not something that merely happens to them. These are not unwilling victims without any choice in the matter. It isn't like the law of gravity. The desire is desired, embraced, indulged, elaborated, fantasized. It is the purposeful entertaining and stimulation of desire

that Jesus marks as the manifestation of a sexually improper condition of the soul. No one has to do this or be this, unless perhaps he or she has already advanced to a stage of compulsive disorder or possession. In that case, of course, the person needs help that goes beyond instruction and advice.

Not Enough Just to Avoid Adultery in the Heart

But can we then make Jesus' teaching about adultery in the heart a law that states what rightness is in the sexual domain? Would we certainly have a right heart in this domain if we did not commit adultery and did not visually indulge absorbing lust?

Not at all. This would be, once again, to take his illustration of sexual wrongness and turn it into a law of righteousness. And that will make us miss the point of his teaching altogether, which is the condition of the inmost self, or "heart."

The case of obsessive lusting illustrates a wrongness of the inner self that may still be there even if no outward act of adultery is committed. Yes, but sexual wrongness can still be present when one does not look on persons to fantasize sex with them. To avoid just this is no guarantee of being sexually sound. And to make a law that says, "Don't look to lust," and assume that obeying it is to be righteous is a mistake. It all depends on how it is done and what else is going on in the heart.

For example, there have been men, even groups of men, who made it their goal not to look lustfully at a woman. (They thus made the typically pharisaical mistake of trying to control the act instead of changing the source.) And they have achieved that goal. They did not look at a woman for years, not even their mother or sister. They would not allow themselves to be in the company of a woman or see one under any circumstances. They would not allow themselves to be where a woman was visible.¹⁸

Well, one might say, that would certainly solve the problem of conforming to Jesus' new law on sexual rightness. If you don't see a woman at all, you cannot look at her to cultivate desire of her. Or suppose I train myself to hate women in order not to desire them? This also has been done. Am I therefore right sexually? Is this the way of The Kingdom Among Us?

One hardly has to ask the question to know how misguided it is. Could one possibly say that this would constitute a loving relationship to women, including those in one's family circle? Obviously

not. Historically such a "solution" has been associated with regarding the woman as the problem, or even as inherently evil. Though there no doubt are times when, man or woman, we can only run from temptation, or simply avoid the possibility, that must be regarded as a temporary expedient. It cannot serve as a permanent solution. It cannot change who we are. One cannot live by it.

Reductio ad Absurdum of Rightness in Terms of Acts

Indeed, the attempt to solve the problem of right sexual behavior by a law or laws that govern specific behaviors is what Jesus is addressing in Matt. 5:29-30: "If your right eye makes you sin, gouge it out and fling it from you. Better that one of your bodily parts rot than that your whole body rot in *gehenna*" (v. 29). And likewise for your right hand (v. 30).

Jesus is saying that if you think that laws can eliminate being wrong you would, to be consistent, cut off your hand or gouge out your eye so that you could not possibly do the acts the law forbids.

Now, truly, if you blind yourself, you cannot look at a woman to lust after her, because you cannot look on her at all. And if you sufficiently dismember yourself, you will not be able to do any wrong action. This is the logic by which Jesus reduces the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees to the absurd.

In their view, the law could be satisfied, and thus goodness attained, if you avoided sinning. You are right if you have done nothing wrong. You could avoid sinning if you simply eliminated the bodily parts that make sinful actions possible. Then you would roll into heaven a mutilated stump.

Of course being acceptable to God is so important that, if cutting bodily parts off could achieve it, one would be wise to cut them off. Jesus seems to have made this very point on some occasions (Matt. 18:8-9; Mark 9:43). But so far from suggesting that any advantage before God could actually be gained in this way, Jesus' teaching in this passage is exactly the opposite. The mutilated stump could still have a wicked heart. The deeper question always concerns who you are, not what you did do or can do. What would you do if you could?¹⁹ Eliminating bodily parts will not change that.

If you dismember your body to the point where you could never murder or even look hatefully at another, never commit adultery, or even look to lust, your heart could still be full of anger, contempt, and

obsessive desire for what is wrong, no matter how thoroughly stifled or suppressed it may be. "From within, out of the heart of men, the thoughts of evil proceed: fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, acts of greed and iniquity, as well as deceit, lewdness, the envious glare, blasphemy, arrogance and foolishness—all of these evils come from inside and pollute the person" (Mark 7:21–23).

The goodness of the kingdom heart, by contrast, is the positive love of God and of those around us that fills it and crowds out the many forms of evil. From that goodness come deeds of respect and purity that characterize a sexuality as it was meant by God to be.

Beyond the Divorce Papers

Now we come to arrangements that did not quite have the status of law in the fullest sense, but nonetheless are understandings that in important ways defined the "old" rightness being displaced by the presence of the kingdom. And the first of these arrangements concerns divorce.

One of the most important things in the male mind of Jesus' day, and perhaps every day, was to be able to get rid of a woman who did not please him. And on this point the man really had great discretion, whereas from the woman's point of view divorce was simply brutal and, practically speaking, could not be chosen. When Jesus gave his teaching that divorce as then practiced was unacceptable, the men who were his closest students responded by saying, "If that is how things are, it's better not to marry at all!" (Matt. 19:10).

A man was generally thought to be righteous or good in the matter of divorce if, when he sent his wife away, he gave her a written statement that declared her to be divorced. She at least had, then, a certificate to prove her status as unmarried. This allowed her to defend herself against a charge of adultery if found with a man, for such a charge could result in her death. It also made it possible for her to seek marriage to another, or, if all else failed, to make her living as a prostitute.

Certainly there was long-standing disagreement among the interpreters of the law as to whether the man was free to divorce his wife "for every reason whatsoever" (Matt. 19:3), or only for adultery. The Pharisees dragged Jesus into this controversy, and he clearly took the highly restrictive position of the school of Shammai, which allowed divorce only on "moral" grounds. The school of Hillel, by

contrast, permitted it "for every reason." For example, if the wife burned the food or merely oversalted it. Rabbi Akibah even allowed divorce if the husband merely saw a woman whose appearance pleased him better and he wanted her as wife instead of a wife he had.²⁰

In practice, however, a woman knew very well that she could be divorced for any reason her husband chose. The law as practiced was entirely favorable to the husband's slightest whim, even though the Mosaic codes, chiefly found in Deuteronomy 22–24, are obviously much more restrictive and require some sort of sexual impropriety in the woman. They also specify conditions under which a man entirely loses the right to divorce a woman.

When Jesus himself comes to deal with the rightness of persons in divorce, he does not forbid divorce absolutely, but he makes it very clear that divorce was never God's intent for men and women in a marriage. The intent in marriage is a union of two people that is even deeper than the union of parents and children or any other human relationship. They are to become "one flesh," one natural unit, building one life, which therefore could never lose or substitute for one member and remain a whole life (Matt. 19:5; Gen. 2:24).

The Principle of Hardness of Heart

Yet he does not say that divorce is never permissible. To begin with, he accepts the Mosaic exception of "uncleanness," which may have covered a number of things but chiefly referred to adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:8–9). His interpretation of the grounds of the Mosaic exception is not, however, simply that adultery and the like are intrinsically so horrible that a marriage relationship cannot survive them. That, of course, is really not true. Many marriages have survived them. Misunderstanding this point, some people even today think that where there is adultery divorce is required by the biblical teachings. But it is not.

Rather, it is the hardness of the human heart that Jesus cites as grounds for permitting divorce in case of adultery. In other words, the ultimate grounds for divorce is human meanness. If it weren't for that, even adultery would not legitimate divorce. No doubt what was foremost in his mind was the fact that the woman could quite well wind up dead, or brutally abused, if the man could not "dump" her.

It is still so today, of course. Such is "our hardness of heart." Better, then, that a divorce occur than life be made unbearable. Jesus does nothing to retract this principle.

But though not absolutely ruling out divorce, he makes very incisive comments about what divorce does to people. First of all, he insists, as already noted, that divorce was never God's intention for men and women in a marriage. Divorce disrupts a natural unit in a way that harms its members for life, no matter how much worse it would have been for them to stay together. Marriage means that "they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mark 10:8). This is an arrangement in nature that God has established, and no human act can change that order.

Perhaps one of the hardest things for the contemporary mind to accept is that life runs in natural cycles that cannot be disrupted without indelible damage to the individuals involved. For example, a child that does not receive proper nutrition in its early years will suffer negative effects for the rest of its life. The deficiency cannot be made up later. And failure of a newborn baby to bond with its mother in its early weeks is thought by many researchers to do irreparable psychological damage.²¹

These are representative of a wide range of natural cycles to be found in human life. We now know that even the physical structure of the brain will never develop in certain crucial directions unless it does so within a particular period of the individual's life. In the order of nature some things can simply never be regained if they are lost.

Divorce also powerfully disrupts one of the major natural cycles of human existence. And the individuals involved can never be the same—whether or not a divorce was, everything considered, justifiable. That is why no one regards a divorce as something to be chosen for its own sake, a "great experience," perhaps. But of course a brutal marriage is not a good thing either, and we must resist any attempt to classify divorce as a special, irredeemable form of wickedness. It is not. It is sometimes the right thing to do, everything considered.

Second—and this is the main point of the teaching in Matt. 5:31–32—just the fact that a man (or woman) has given the woman (or man) a "pink slip" and "done everything legally" does not mean that he or she has done right or has been a good person with regard to the relationship. This is what Jesus is denying with his teaching

here, for that is precisely what the old *dikaion*, as operative among the men of his time, affirmed.

Forced into "Adultery"

Third, he very clearly gives his reasons for rejecting the old view of rightness in divorce by saying that anyone who sends away his wife on grounds other than "uncleanness" forces her into adultery, and whoever takes as wife a woman who has been sent away from another engages in adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9).²² This is not to forbid divorce, but it is to make clear what its effects are. What, exactly, do these statements mean?

In the Jewish society of Jesus' day, as for most times and places in human history, the consequences of divorce were devastating for the woman. Except for some highly unlikely circumstances, her life was, simply, ruined. No harm was done to the man, by contrast, except from time to time a small financial loss and perhaps bitter relationships with the ex-wife's family members.

For the woman, however, there were only three realistic possibilities in Jesus' day. She might find a place in the home of a generous relative, but usually on grudging terms and as little more than a servant. She might find a man who would marry her, but always as "damaged goods" and sustained in a degraded relationship. Or she might, finally, make a place in the community as a prostitute. Society simply would not then, as ours does today, support a divorced woman to any degree or allow her to support herself in a decent fashion.

These circumstances explain why Jesus says that to divorce a woman causes her to commit adultery and to marry a divorced woman is to commit adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). To not marry again was a terrible prospect for the woman. It meant, in nearly every case, to grow old with no children as well as with no social position, a perpetual failure as a human being. But to marry was to live in a degraded sexual relationship the rest of her life, and precious few husbands would allow her to forget it. As in the phrase "adultery in the heart," Jesus speaks of being forced into "adultery" to point out the degraded sexual condition that was, then if not now, sure to be the result of divorce.

Is It Then Better Not to Marry?

As noted already, when his apprentices heard what Jesus said about divorce, they immediately concluded that it was better not to marry at all than to be unable to get rid of a woman easily (Matt. 19:10).

But Jesus, like Paul later (1 Cor. 7:9), points out that not marrying can also force one into an impossible situation. It is, accordingly, an option only for those especially qualified for it (vv. 11–12). More important, of course, he knew that the resources of the kingdom of the heavens were sufficient to resolve difficulties between husband and wife and to make their union rich and good before God and man—provided, of course, that both are prepared to seek and find these resources.

And we must remember, of course, what we have been saying all along about the order in the Sermon on the Mount. It is not an accident that Jesus deals with divorce *after* having dealt with anger, contempt, and obsessive desire. Just ask yourself how many divorces would occur, and in how many cases the question of divorce would never even have arisen, if anger, contempt, and obsessive fantasized desire were eliminated. The answer is, of course, hardly any at all.

In particular, the brutal treatment that women received in divorce in Jesus' day—and now men too in our day—would simply not happen. Hard hearts may make divorce necessary to avoid greater harm, and hence make it permissible. But kingdom hearts are not hard, and they together can find ways to bear with each other, to speak truth in love, to change—often through times of great pain and distress—until the tender intimacy of mutual, covenant-framed love finds a way for the two lives to remain one, beautifully and increasingly.

Is, then, divorce ever justifiable for Jesus? I think it clearly is. His principle of the hardness of hearts allows it, though its application would require great care. Perhaps divorce must be viewed somewhat as the practice of triage in medical care. Decisions must be made as to who cannot, under the circumstances, be helped. They are then left to die so that those who can be helped should live. A similar point applies to some marriages. But just as with the case of going to trial, discussed earlier, it is *never* right to divorce as divorce was then done and as it is now usually done. And it makes no difference today whether you are a man or a woman.

Divorce, if it were rightly done, would be done as an act of love. It would be dictated by love and done for the honest good of the people involved. Such divorce, though rare, remains nonetheless possible and may be necessary. If it were truly done on this basis, it would be rightly done, in spite of the heartbreak and loss it is sure to involve.

This position certainly represents a change on my part. I recall with embarrassment sitting around a seminar table at the University of Wisconsin in the early sixties. The professor had not yet arrived for our seminar in formal logic, and one of the class members was talking about his divorce proceedings. Without being asked for my opinion, I ventured to say, "Divorce is always wrong."

Looking back on it, the strangest thing of all was that no one objected to what I said or even to my saying it. Everyone *seemed* accepting of it. Of course that was because my words represented a cultural assumption of those days. But in fact I was vastly ignorant of the things men and women do to one another.

Later I came across the situation of a devout woman whose husband had married her as a cover for his homosexuality. He consummated the marriage so it couldn't be annulled, and after that he had nothing to do with her. They had no personal relationship at all. He would bring his male friends home and, in her presence, have sex in the living room or wherever else they pleased any time they pleased. Her religious guides continued to tell her that she must stay in "the marriage," while she died a further death every day, year after year.

I was simply an ignorant young man full of self-righteous ideas. This and later episodes of discovery educated me in the hardness of the human heart. But Jesus, of course, always knew.

Transparent Words and Unquenchable Love

A Yes That Is Just a Yes

The fourth point upon which Jesus contrasts the older rightness with the rightness of the kingdom concerns the practice of giving oaths or *swearing* by something of importance, especially God himself, in order to lend weight to a statement one is making. In a society like our own, where the sacred is not real—not *really* real—oaths may only have the effect of a legal formality that makes possible the crime of perjury, of lying "under oath." But in a world where people actually believe, "the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to any dispute" (Heb. 6:16).

Thus even today you hear people say, "I swear by all that's holy," for example. We say, "By God." We "swear on a stack of Bibles." And so forth. We invoke God to damn. We cry out, "Jeeezuss Kuuriiist!" Why is it we do this? Obviously, habit. But where did the habit come from? Something pretty deep, no doubt.

In this matter of invoking God or other things associated with him, the old rightness held that you could cite high and holy things as much as you pleased, as long as not obviously "in vain" or foolishly, of course (Exod. 20:7). The one thing you had to be careful about was fulfilling anything you said you would do "before God." "You shall fulfill your oaths to the Lord" (Matt. 5:33).

But Jesus goes right to the heart of why people swear oaths. He knew that they do it to impress others with their sincerity and reliability and thus gain acceptance of what they are saying and what they want. It is a method for getting their way. They are declaring some promise or purpose or some point of information or knowledge dear to them. They want their hearers to accept what they say and do what they want. So they say, "By God!" or, "God knows!" to lend weight to their words and presence. It is simply a device of manipulation, designed to override the judgment and will of the ones they are focusing upon, to push them aside, rather than respecting them and leaving their decision and action strictly up to them.

The problem with "swearing" or the making of oaths—which was really a huge part of life in Jesus' world—is not just that it involves taking the name of God in vain, or using it lightly and without love and respect for him. It does that often, no doubt, but not always. The evil of it that he addresses is that it is an inherently wrong approach to other human beings.

Thus Jesus says simply, "Swear not at all. Not by heaven, for it is God's to reside in, his 'throne,' nor by the earth, for that too is God's, his 'footstool,' nor by Jerusalem, the holy city, for it is his city. Don't even make an oath upon your head, for it too is not under your power. You cannot make one hair on it white or black" (5:34–36).

Little brother James echoes this point, as he does so many others in the Sermon on the Mount: "But above all, brothers, don't swear, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor any other oath. Let the yes be yes and the no be no, that you not fall under condemnation" (5:12).

The essence of swearing or making oaths is to try to use something that, though impressive, is irrelevant to the issues at hand to get others to believe you and let you have your way. This is wrong. It is unlike God. And just making sure you perform on any promises made to God in the course of it (the old rightness) does not make it right. Of course you should keep promises you make to God in any circumstances. But the wrongness of swearing lies deeper. We are

making use of people, trying to bypass their understanding and judgment to trigger their will and possess them for our purposes. Whatever consent they give to us will be uninformed because we have short-circuited their understanding of what is going on.

Swearing is, then, a version of what is often called a "song and dance." It is very common in people who are "selling" something, either figuratively, as in political life, or really. In Southern California there is a well-known car salesman who uses running chatter on TV about him and his "dog, Spot." "Spot" may be anything, such as an ostrich or a hippopotamus, that this man is riding or strolling along with in front of his acres of more or less used cars.

Why does he do this? To create an atmosphere for prospective buyers that will incline them to buy from him. (Perhaps they will trust him more if he seems jolly or doesn't look too smart.) It certainly is not for the purpose of respecting or serving his customers. There are many ways he could do that if he chose, but he would rather do things that would help him sell cars.

Many people make a good living doing nothing but uttering in attractive or coercive ways "yeses" that are not really yeses at all, and "noes" that are not noes. In social or political contexts, we now call them "spin doctors."

The inherent wrongness of such projects makes Jesus simply say, "Don't do it." Swearing, or the "song and dance" in general, does not respect those upon whom it is directed. As God's free creatures, people are to be left to make their decisions without coercion or manipulation. Hence, "let your affirmation be just an affirmation," a yes, and your denial be just a denial, a no. Anything more than this "comes from evil"—the evil intent to get one's way by verbal manipulation of the thoughts and choices of others.

Kingdom rightness respects the soul need of human beings to make their judgments and decisions solely from what they have concluded is best. It is a vital, a biological need. We do not thrive, nor does our character develop well, when this need is not respected,²³ and this thwarts the purpose of God in our creation.

Responding to Personal Injury

The fifth contrast of the two rightnesses concerns retaliation for harm done. The wrongs in question are clearly personal injuries, not institutional or social evils. How do we know that? It is clear from

the parts of the old law referred to. Therefore the application of this particular passage to war and other social evils, by Tolstoy and others, which has done much damage to the understanding of Jesus' teaching, is simply a misreading.

The old rightness for the cases in question was that injurers should be injured in *exactly the same way*, so far as possible, as they had injured. This was a completely general statement to cover any kind of injury done, even to cover intended evil and property damage (Lev. 24:17-21; Deut. 19:14-21). The intent of the *lex talionis*, or law of retaliation, as it came to be called, was that reciprocity would be achieved through equalization.

There was to be redress of injury by injury being done to the doer. But more was not to be done than the injurer did. That was a major point of the old law and a great advance of civilization. If someone broke your arm, you were not to break both arms in return, or even one arm and a finger. There was to be equalization of injury, and then a stop to injury and counterinjury. No insignificant or easy task, of course, as contemporary life around the world or in our homes and workplaces shows. And in fact it rarely succeeds. Obviously a better approach is needed.

So what, in the situation of personal injury, is the rightness of the kingdom heart? Here we must once again recall the point about order: that we have *already* heard and received the word of the kingdom, and that anger, contempt, and absorbing desire have been dealt with so that our lives are not being run by them. If they occasionally test us still, that is very natural. But they do not control us and leave us unable to reliably and happily carry through with our sober intention to do what is good and avoid what is evil.

This being so, when we are personally injured our world does not suddenly become our injury. We have a larger view of our life and our place in God's world. We see God; we see ourselves in his hands. And we see our injurer as more than that one who has imposed on us or hurt us. We recognize his humanity, his pitiful limitations (shared with us), and we also see him under God. This vision, and the grace that comes with it, enables the prayer: "Father forgive them, for they do not really understand what they are doing." And in fact they don't, as Jesus well knew when he prayed this prayer over his murderers.

Some Cases of Nonresistance

What are characteristic ways in which one fully alive in and to The Kingdom Among Us may respond to personal affronts, injuries, and impositions? Jesus mentions four different types of kingdom responses:

1. They will "turn the other cheek" (Matt. 5:39). That is, they will remain vulnerable. Negatively, they will not take their defense into their own hands and do whatever they may regard as necessary to protect themselves.
So long as it strictly concerns themselves alone—and Jesus never suggests that we turn *someone else's* cheek or make someone else vulnerable—they will allow themselves to be injured by others who mean to hurt them rather than injure the would-be injurer. This will be characteristic, predictable behavior for them.
2. "Let him have your shirt" (5:40). They will conscientiously try to help, as is appropriate, those who have won legal cases against them in court. Or: they will meet someone about to sue them in the spirit of love and may even give them more than they are about to sue for. They are, after all, deeply interested in what the other person needs and are prepared to help that person as much as they can.
3. "Go with him two" (5:41). If a policeman or other responsible official exercises a right to require assistance from them, they will do more than is strictly required of them, as an expression of their goodwill toward the official and his or her responsibility. They will have regard for the person involved and act from the kingdom in their behalf. They will consider the problem of the official to be something of importance to themselves.
4. "Give to him who asks of you" (5:42). They will often give to people who have no prior claim of any kind to what they are asking for. The request itself is the only claim required to move them. And they will not evade, ignore, or "turn away from" those who would borrow from them. The parallel passage in Luke's Gospel says, "Whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back" (6:30).

I think it is perhaps these four statements, more than any others in the Discourse, that cause people to throw up their hands in despair or sink into the pit of grinding legalism. This is because the situations referred to are familiar, and they can only imagine that

Jesus is laying down laws about what they *have* to do regardless of what else may be at issue.

All is changed when we realize that these are illustrations of what a certain kind of person, the kingdom person, will characteristically do in such situations. They are not laws of "righteous behavior" for those personally imposed upon or injured. They are not laws for the obvious reason that they do not cover the many cases. Additionally, if you read them as laws you will immediately see that we could "obey" them in the wrong spirit. For example, as is often actually said, "I'll turn the other cheek, but then I'll knock your head off."

Will there, then, be cases in which persons of kingdom *dikaioisune* will not do what is said here by way of illustration? Quite certainly, but they will be very rare, so long as it is only an individual injury that is at stake and no issues of a larger good are concerned. After all, this is characteristic behavior of the person with the kingdom heart and it does express who that person is at the core of his or her being. Though we are not talking about things one must do to "be Christian" or "go to heaven when we die," we are looking at how people live who stand in the flow of God's life now. We see the interior rightness of those who are living—as a matter of course, not just in exceptional moments—beyond the rightness of the scribe and Pharisee.

Reversing the Presumption

We have already spoken of "the great inversion" between the human order and the kingdom order. In the light of this inversion of realities, we can now understand the corresponding reversal of presumptions governing human action. Within the human order, the presumption is that you return harm for harm ("resist evil"), that you do only what legal force requires you to, and that you give only to those who have some prior claim on you (those who are "family" or have done you a favor, etc.).

The presumption is precisely reversed once we stand within the kingdom. There the presumption is that I will return good for evil and "resist" only for compelling reasons, that I will do more than I strictly must in order to help others, and that I give to people merely because they have asked me for something they need.

If someone has taken something valuable from me through the courts, I will, as appropriate, give him something else (my shirt) if he needs it. I will still help him in other ways, as I reasonably can.

If a government official compels me to carry a burden for one mile to aid him in his work—as any Roman soldier could require of a Jew in Jesus' day—I will, again "as appropriate," assist him further in his need. Perhaps he has a mile yet to go, and I am free to assist him. If so, I will. I will not say, "This is all you can make me do," and drop the burden on his foot. I also will not carry it another mile whether he wants me to or not, and say, "Because Jesus said to."

If I know people want to borrow something they need, I will not avoid them and their request, and I may, as appropriate, give to those who ask me for something even though they have no "claim" on me at all—no claim, that is, other than their need and their simple request. That is how God does it, and he invites us to join him.

Of course in each case I must determine if the gift of my vulnerability, goods, time, and strength is, precisely, *appropriate*. That is my responsibility before God. As a child of the King, I always live in his presence. By contrast, the way of law avoids individual responsibility for decision. It pushes the responsibility and possible blame onto God. That is one reason why people who must have a law for all their actions lead such pinched and impoverished lives and develop very little in the way of genuine depth in godly character.

If, for example, I am a heart surgeon on the way to do a transplant, I must not go a second mile with someone. I must say no and leave at the end of the first mile with best wishes and a hasty farewell. I have other things I know I must do, and I must make the decision. I cannot cite a law and thus evade my responsibility of judging.

If I owe money to a shopkeeper whose goods I have already consumed, I am not at liberty to give that money to "someone who asks of me"—unless, once again, there are very special factors involved.

If turning the other cheek means I will then be dead, or that others will suffer great harm, I have to consider this larger context. Much more than my personal pain or humiliation is involved. Does that mean I will "shoot first"? Not necessarily, but it means I can't just invoke a presumed "law of required vulnerability." I must decide before God what to do, and there may be grounds for some measure of resistance.

Of course the grounds will never be personal retaliation. And there will never, as I live in the kingdom, be room for "getting even." We do not "render evil for evil," as the early Christians clearly understood and practiced (Rom. 12:17; 1 Pet. 3:9). That is out of the question as far as our life is kingdom living. That is the point Jesus is making here.

If someone has taken my coat by lawsuit, I or someone else may well have a greater need of my shirt than he does. If not, I give it with generous love and blessing. Or perhaps the other's need is so great I should give my shirt even if I suffer greatly. But what if the other doesn't need it at all? Then I won't impose it "because Jesus said so" and I must keep this "law."

In every concrete situation we have to ask ourselves, not "Did I do the specific things in Jesus' illustrations?" but "Am I being the kind of person Jesus' illustrations are illustrations of?"

Shifting the Scene

What actually happens when one derives one's response from the reality of the kingdom is that the dynamics of personal interaction are transformed. What does the person do who has been offered the other cheek? Or perhaps has now slapped it? Keep on slapping? For how long? And then what? We must always be alert for acceptable ways of removing ourselves from the situation. In the case of abuse of any kind, one should begin by involving others, and especially appointed authorities.

Our tormentors, no doubt, count on our resistance and anger to support their continuation of the evil that is in them. If we respond as Jesus indicates, the force of their own actions pulls them off their stance and forces them to question what kind of people they are. Of course they are acting from anger, and worse. But now with our other cheek facing them, slapped already or soon to be slapped, the justification of their anger and evil that they were counting on has been removed. As anger feeds on anger, so patient goodness will normally deflate it. Whether it does or not, the larger community should be appropriately involved.

And we, for our part, following the order of Jesus' teaching and example, have already dealt with our anger, contempt, and fantasized desire, so they do not come into play. Our response allows the kingdom of God, with all its resources, to begin its work. We "venture on

the kingdom," as we have already said, and suddenly our attackers or the ones imposing upon us sense that they are not playing the game they thought they were, that they are not in control. Their behavior will, in most cases, undergo a radical change and will always be profoundly affected. That is why one who stands with Jesus in his kingdom need never worry about becoming a "doormat."

And if it doesn't change? If they just harden themselves the more and keep on coming at us? Well, then we must act or not act as we judge best. Here, as in the other situations Jesus uses to exhibit the kingdom heart, we know there are certain types of attitudes, with corresponding responses, that we are not to slip into. But what action we are to take is something we must decide. We will decide, as best we know how, on the basis of love for all involved and with a readiness to sacrifice what we simply want. And in every situation we have the larger view. We are not passive, but we act always with clear-eyed and resolute love.

We know what is really happening, seeing it from the point of view of eternity. And we know that we will be taken care of, no matter what. We can be vulnerable because we are, in the end, simply invulnerable. And once we have broken the power of anger and desire over our lives, we know that the way of Christ in response to personal injury and imposition is always the easier way. It is the only way that allows us to move serenely in the midst of harm and beyond it.

What to Do with Enemies

Few of us manage to go through life without collecting a group of individuals who would not be sorry to learn we have died. By far most of the people who have lived on earth have been confronted with certain kinds of other people—other "tribes"—who would gladly kill them. There is a standard list of "enemies" in the daily news, which in fact hardly scratches the surface of the reality of standing hatreds that define people as enemies over against one another in this world.

The final illustrative contrast between the old rightness and the rightness of the kingdom heart has to do with our attitude toward our enemies: those with standing contempt and hatred for us who regularly fantasize our pain and destruction. Here the old "rightness" was very simple. It was really just another application of the *lex*

talionis. They seek our destruction, so we seek theirs in the same way. They hate us, so we hate them. It is only right to do so (Matt. 5:43).

Jesus, on the other hand, tells us to love our enemies and to carry that love through with the highest act of love, prayer. "Love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you. In this way you take on the nature of your Father, the one in the heavens, who routinely gives good things, such as sunshine and rain, to both the evil and the good, to those who are godly and those who spit in his face" (Matt. 5:44-45).

Loving those who love us and lavishing care and honor on those of our own group is something that traitorous oppressors, the Mafia, and terrorists do. How, then, could that serve to distinguish the goodness of someone born into God's family or the presence of a different kind of reality and life? Even those with no knowledge of God at all, "the gentiles," do it.

But, Jesus says to his disciples, because you are living from God as citizens of the kingdom, have the kind of wholeness, of full functionality, that he has. "Be perfect [teleioi] in the way your Father, the one in the heavens, is perfect" (5:48).

Goodness Is Love

Completing the Picture of the Kingdom Heart: *Agape* Love

With this contrast Jesus brings to completion his exposition of the kind of "goodness beyond" that goes hand in hand with the blessedness of the eternal kind of life. When he thus comes to completion in the *agape* love that characterizes the Father, he has moved beyond specific acts and illustrations of kingdom goodness. Love does not illustrate, it simply is the goodness beyond the goodness of scribes and Pharisees. All the illustrations he has given in the various situations discussed in 5:20-48 are illustrations of it.

In it we achieve living union with, have fully entered into, the kingdom of the heavens. We have sought and found the reigning of God and the kind of *dikaioisune* he himself has (6:33). Out of that union we discover love as a life power that has the marvelous, many-sided expression spelled out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. But this beautiful statement by Paul is commonly misunderstood in exactly the same legalistic way as is Jesus' Discourse on the Hill.

Love, Paul there tells us, is patient, kind, free of jealousy and arrogance, is not rude or self-seeking, is not easily angered and keeps

no record of wrongs, takes no joy in things that are wrong but instead in what is true. It always protects, always accepts, always hopes, and endures everything. And it never quits (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

People usually read this, and are taught to read it, as telling them to be patient, kind, free of jealousy, and so on—just as they read Jesus' Discourse as telling them to not call others fools, not look on a woman to lust, not swear, to go the second mile, and so forth.

But Paul is plainly saying—look at his words—that it is love that does these things, not us, and that what we are to do is to "pursue love" (1 Cor. 14:1). As we "catch" love, we then find that these things are after all actually being done by us. These things, these godly actions and behaviors, are the result of dwelling in love. We have become the kind of person who is patient, kind, free of jealousy, and so on. Paul's message is exactly the same as Jesus' message. And no wonder, for as Paul was always the first to say, he learned what he taught from Jesus (Gal. 1:12).

Are These Things Hard to Do?

Is it then hard to do the things with which Jesus illustrates the kingdom heart of love? Or the things that Paul says love does? It is very hard indeed if you have not been substantially transformed in the depths of your being, in the intricacies of your thoughts, feelings, assurances, and dispositions, in such a way that you are permeated with love. Once that happens, then it is not hard. What would be hard is to act the way you acted before.

When Jesus hung on the cross and prayed, "Father, forgive them because they do not understand what they are doing," that was not hard for him. What would have been hard for him would have been to curse his enemies and spew forth vileness and evil upon everyone, God and the world, as those crucified with him did, at least for a while. He calls us to him to impart himself to us. He does not call us to do what he did, but to be as he was, permeated with love. Then the doing of what he did and said becomes the natural expression of who we are in him.

Bertrand Russell, a well-known British philosopher of this century, was raised a Christian, though he later adopted atheism. He was familiar with the teachings of Jesus, if not their actual meaning. In one place he comments, "The Christian principle, 'Love your enemies' is good. . . . There is nothing to be said against it except that it is too difficult for most of us to practise sincerely."²⁴

He was, of course, right as he understood it, for he was thinking of himself and others remaining what they were inwardly and nevertheless trying to love their enemies as occasion arose. Of course, they would fail, at least most of the time. As for Russell personally, some of long acquaintance with him and Russell himself knew he was filled with hatred. No wonder he found love difficult.²⁵

Russell's fallacy is the fallacy of the Pharisee. By now it should be recognizable. The Pharisee takes as his aim keeping the law rather than becoming the kind of person whose deeds naturally conform to the law. Jesus knew the human heart better than Bertrand Russell did. Thus he concludes his exposition of the kingdom kind of goodness by contrasting the ordinary way human beings love, loving those who love them, with God's *agape* love. This is a love that reaches everyone we deal with. It is not in their power to change that. It is the very core of what we are or can become in his fellowship, not something we do. Then the *deeds* of love, including loving our enemies, are what that *agape* love does in us and what we do as the new persons we have become.

The Intellectual Vacuum of Current Moral Thought

Toward the beginning of this chapter we made the statement that the centuries-long attempt to devise a morality from within merely human resources has now proven itself a failure. Now we want to return to this point in the light of Jesus' exposition of the rightness of the kingdom heart.

What is the basis of such a statement? Simply this: that, as noted in the opening of chapter 1, there is in fact no body of moral knowledge now operative in the institutions of knowledge in our culture. This is the outcome of the now centuries-long effort to develop a moral guide to life within the framework of human thought and experience alone, unassisted by revelation.

By contrast, the Christian teaching about moral goodness that derives from the principles laid down by Jesus does have a historical, theoretical, and practical claim to constitute the true body of moral knowledge. This is not said to encourage blind acceptance but precisely the opposite. It is said to encourage the toughest of testing for those teachings in all areas of thought and real life.

We saw in chapter 1 the young lady who went to Professor Coles on her way out of Harvard and said to him, "I've been taking all

these philosophy courses, and we talk about what's true, what's important, what's good. Well, how do you teach people to be good?" Then she added, "What's the point of *knowing* good, if you don't keep trying to *become* a good person?" But, as we pointed out, *knowing* good is not seriously proposed in college or university courses today. Any "knowing" in such matters is thought to be totally impossible.

In fact, both knowing good and being good are for the most part treated with open scorn in the academic settings which determine so much of our lives. That is the outcome of the long effort to establish a secular ethic in the modern period. But the concern for becoming good and being good remains, as the words of both President Bok and Professor Coles show, for it is a real-life issue that will never go away.

And it is with regard to this issue of what kind of people we are to be that the teachings of Jesus about the rightness of the kingdom heart show him to be the unrivaled master of human life. Any serious inquirer can validate those teachings in his or her own experience. But they cannot invalidate them by simply refusing to consider them and hiding behind the dogmas of modern intellect.