

Making Ethical Decisions and Determining Values Within the Variety of NT Perspectives

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God offers life: a way of life and resources for life. This is variously perceived and practiced within the New Testament dependent on the backgrounds of the early Christians and perhaps also upon their varied personal and community needs. We will learn most if we can appreciate and appropriate the variety of their perspectives.

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Persons need a value system in order to provide guidance in the many situations of life. To leave all choices up to each time one is faced with the need for a decision may result in a "go with the flow" attitude where ethical principles are not really considered (with resultant societal chaos restrained only by law) or can result in endless struggle over decisions that have no clarity. A value system is not only a mental construct which provides guidance in decision-making and action, but it becomes a psychological construct which ultimately makes one a certain type of person who acts out of what she or he "is". Thus without a value system the question of "who am I?" has minimal definition, to be then understood only in terms of personal history (which may itself contain extensive confusion). A value system is an essential part of identity.

There were times when the value system of a philosophy or a particular religious tradition was generally accepted. Values were generally assumed even if one did not belong to the dominant religion or philosophy. Today the establishment of societal values is made difficult by pluralism within our society (many systems of values), the principle of separation of state and church (where religious traditions cannot teach values within the educational systems), and the relativising of traditional values which, even if inadequate, at least gave life structure.

In the history of Christianity values were often established by the Church (Pope, Councils, bishops, priests or pastors) or by the sacred text of the Bible and the ways in which it was interpreted. The assumption was that either the Church or Scripture, or both, had an infallible authority. Value systems were established from Scripture selectively, using certain passages as primary authority and assuming that most other passages could be made to agree with or support these "clear and obvious" passages. Differences in the approach to the same ethical issues in the varied biblical literature were not given much attention. That different religious groups focused upon different New Testament materials (assuming that other materials

agreed with their favorites), really produced differing value systems (of course, with some elements in common). Since most Christians recognize the Bible as authority, however they would define it or whatever books they chose to use, they would claim the whole Bible as authority for their system. Some churches formed their values from Matthew and the Sermon on the Mount, some used Paul, and some used the literature of John. Some also used such important Old Testament materials as the Ten Commandments and catechisms which had been developed within the religious traditions to teach faith and life.

It has become clear to many today that to form a universally accepted system of values within any religious tradition or social system is very difficult. The only ways this can be done is to force many to give up their insights and opinions or to try to find within the variety some common denominators. Variety of values are to be encountered not only between different religions and philosophies, but are often rooted in different interpretations of the same religious tradition. *It seems that we will have to learn to live with differences both in our values and in our interpretation of our authority, the Bible.* How can we do this? How can we keep the churches from fragmenting over such issues? And how can we provide our religious community, our society, and particularly our children, with a system of values which will enable them to live responsibly and know who they are through the structure of their values?

I have some suggestions to make which comes from what I understand about the Biblical materials and the wisdom produced from the life and struggles of the Moravian Church over 500 years.

Foundational Moravian principles

1. **The Essential.** *The Essential of religion is the relationship with God.* God, in love and grace, offers this relationship without preconditioning this by what we deserve or how well we perform. It is an amazing, gentle, and inclusive love. To know that God offers and establishes a relationship (covenant) with us, and that the God of the cosmos values and loves us, is the foundation for our value system and sense of personal worth and identity. Values and ethical action must grow out of this. Elsewhere in these materials I have tried to establish God's offer of relationship as central both in the biblical materials and the Moravian tradition. To this offer we are called upon to respond in:

- **faith** (trust in God and in God's past disclosure of the offer of relationship)
- **love** (the present response to God which is more than faith/trust - for Moravians "love for the Savior" was the primary expression of faith)
- **hope** (trust in God for the future and belief that what God has promised will be realized)

Think of how values would be shaped by this three-fold response to God

2. **Love.** The love of God for us must be shown by us towards others, and our love towards others cannot bear any preconditions which God does not impose upon God's relationship with us. *This means that next to relationship with God, relationship with others is an ultimate value.* In the history of the Moravian Church this was lived out in the importance of religious community as a support for responsible living. Christians cannot live merely by themselves, facing life only as an individual.

What is necessary for Christians to love another has often been debated. Do we love only those who are like us or who meet all of the requirements we think they should meet -- or do we love without condition, receiving into our community persons in whatever human condition they may find themselves. Do we realize that we are all caught up within the same human predicament, which Christians have traditionally called "sin"? If we love others who are not like us or whom we think are acting inappropriately, then love

is not a feeling (by which we are drawn to those like us) but a decision which is not conditioned by the way others are. It is so easy for the church to become a place only for the "good" people, and so we put on our good masks and pretend, never getting the help we need from others which can only be available when others understand our struggles.

I include in this paper an interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal which helps to define the nature of love.

An important element regarding the rationale for love among 18th century Moravians was the connection of creation and salvation. Moravians believed that God's love was not only shown in what God does for us in Christ, but that the same God who saves us is the God who created us. Thus God has a relationship to us through our creation, even before our salvation. Zinzendorf formulated this in terms of the implications of John 1, Col. 1, and Hebrews 1-2, the New Testament creation stories which connect Christ with creation. These passages assert that God has created the world through Christ. Thus for Zinzendorf the same One who saves us is the One who created us. Since then Christ created us, Christ already knows us and has a plan in mind for us. Christ as creator is already working out a plan in the life of each person which he considers right for that person. Christ will never neglect or refuse to love and care for any soul. This does not mean universal salvation. What it does mean is that Christ has an interest in and connection with us prior to any response that we may make to him. Thus 18th century Moravians had a relationship with all humanity, for all humans belonged to Christ.

3. **Inclusivity.** Paul gives advice in Romans 14:1-12 regarding the need to include within the Christian community those who understand things differently, letting the Lord clear things up in the final judgment.. I will paraphrase this because there is not space for the whole passage (which I advise you to read):

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? We are servants of Christ, not of each other. We are ultimately responsible before our Master. Whatever we do we do in honor of the Lord. We live to the Lord. In the end we will all stand before God's judgment seat and will give an account of ourselves.

The Moravian Church has always been inclusive. Our Ancient Moravian Church (up to the 17th century) formulated the important principle of the *Essential* of religion being the relationship with God/Christ and argued that many of the difficulties within and between churches occurred because people did not distinguish between the *Essential* and the *Ministerials* (that which served the *Essential*) or the *Incidentals* (the different ways people did things. Zinzendorf in the 18th century, sponsor of the Renewed Moravian Church, defined the *Essential* as "*the heart relationship with the Savior*". Thus both the Ancient and Renewed Moravian Churches were able to appreciate the contributions of other Christian traditions and even to formulate or accept different creeds, depending upon the country in which the Moravians lived. Creeds were only the expression of the "heart relationship" appropriate for a particular country and culture. We are perhaps the only Protestant Church that is organized internationally and so embraces not only the variety within our North American Church, but the variety of our international Church. *We are a symbol of inclusiveness.*

Approaches to ethics and values from Scripture: Matthew, Paul and Luke

There are two primary approaches to ethical living presented within Scripture. These can be characterized by the approach in the Gospel of Matthew (as expressed especially in the Sermon on the Mount) and that of Paul, particularly as expressed in Galatians 3-5. The approach in Matthew was strongly attractive to the

Ancient Moravian Church. The approach of Paul was strongly attractive to many of the Moravian Church during the time of Zinzendorf.

When one reads the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7, one encounters three chapters of the sayings of Jesus which are not located together in Luke, thus suggesting that the author of Matthew has arranged Jesus' sayings in this fashion with some intention. The sayings in at least chapters 5-6 are arranged topically. Here, for example, one finds the Lord's Prayer in a collection of sayings on prayer, within a larger collection of sayings on Christian piety. In Luke 11 the Prayer is given a historical context. The Sermon begins with nine beatitudes and some other sayings which might be called "the Christian ten commandments." While the comparable sermon in Luke 6 is on a "level place", in Matthew these three chapters are delivered from a "mountain", thus symbolically presenting Jesus as a new Moses delivering a new Law from a new Mount Sinai. In 5:17ff Jesus says that he comes not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it, quite different from what Jesus says in Luke 16:16-17 about the time of the Law being at an end.

The Sermon on the Mount is then an arrangement of Jesus' sayings which served as the discipline of Matthew's religious community, regarding Jesus' sayings as commandments (see Matt. 28:20). Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew indicates that it came from a semi-monastic Christian community strongly influenced by Pharisaic Judaism and the Pharisaic approach to life. Their values were established by what they understood Jesus' sayings to mean and they sought to obey them, not only as they governed actions but inner feelings and attitudes as well (note the sayings on lust and anger in Matt. 5).

Christians have often tried to settle the issues of life by finding sayings of Jesus which would guide them and provide a set of rules by which life would be clear. One of the difficulties in doing this is that Jesus' public ministry, the period covered in the Gospels, was only about a year and a half long, so Jesus' sayings come from a short and very active ministry. There are also some indications that Jesus spoke to people contextually (according to their thought form, vocabulary, and issues) as did Paul (see I Cor. 9:19-23). Also, Jesus' teaching method was that of an eastern teacher, rather than a western philosopher, and so he told riddles, used hyperbole (exaggeration), and acted out his message as well as speaking it. Thus to simply use the sayings of Jesus is not a simple matter.

The approach of Paul in Galatians 3-4 is different. Paul regards the Jewish Law as given by God as a stop-gap measure until the promise given to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ (3:6-22). The Law was a way to care for humanity's behavior until the time of possible human maturity in Christ came (3:23-25). When persons become children of God in Jesus and receive the Spirit (the gift of relationship, the gift of God's presence and God's self) which God promised to Abraham (3:14), then they have the resources for life which produce the possibility of a new maturity. They know who they are (God's children who have put on Christ 3:26-27) and live by the help which the relationship with God (the Spirit) provides. They walk and live by the Spirit (5:25). This maturity does not use the freedom which accompanies it as an excuse for license, but as an opportunity for love (Gal. 5:13-15). Paul then recognizes a time for living by rules, during the human developmental process, until it is possible to live with an ethical maturity. On the contrary, for Matthew there seems to be no understanding of Law, rules, and commandments as representing a *temporary* stage in human development, to be followed by a time when ethical action flows out of what one is in Christ and out of what God, through the Spirit, brings to life and advises.

As cited above in regards to Rom. 14, and as Paul indicates elsewhere (see I Cor. 13), to be mature does not mean to have all of the answers and all knowledge. *A part of maturity is knowing that it is difficult to have all the answers, but within our limits we must seek to be responsible.*

Moravians have always been concerned about *simplicity*. Zinzendorf believed that if religion got too complex only the intellectuals could have religion. Thus for him the heart relationship with the Savior was the Essential of religion. Thus religion became available to the infant, the retarded child, and the senile old person, as well as the person whose mind could comprehend. Zinzendorf also thought through what a concern for simplicity would mean for ethics.

The simplest way to discover what to do, if one has the crucified Savior continually before one's eyes, is to watch the Savior's eyes as he looks upon us. Morality is "what the Saviour would have us do." While life may be complex and one may not know what to do, the Savior can direct us so that ethics, as well as religion, can be a matter of the heart.

It is this also, beloved in the Lord, which we have to wish each other at the end of this discourse, that we may be looked upon by the Saviour so graciously, so powerfully, so essentially; and that at the same time we may be so blessed, so happy that we turn away our view and our eyes from everything which otherwise seemed to us proper or improper and turn them toward Him with no desire to look at our into anything else; that our eye may not be able to throw a glance anywhere else but to this point.

And when you have once caught sight of the beauty of His suffering, so that in all your life you will not be able to get rid of that sight, then He conducts you with His eyes wherever He will have you; then with His eyes He teaches you what good and evil is. Your knowledge of good and evil lies in His eyes, not in the tree from which Adam poisoned himself, from which Adam ate his curse. But rather in the eyes of the tortured Lamb, there lies your blessed, happy knowledge of good and evil. As far as the same image looks upon you, into the midst of your mortal bodies, so far shall you be changed, pervaded, captivated by the person of Jesus, so that your other brethren perceive you no longer as a man in your denomination, as a brother of the same persuasion only, but rather as a consort ... of the blessed Creator and eternal Husband of the human soul.¹

Luke's understanding of ethics is especially interesting for those interested in finding a biblical basis for social action. Luke reinterprets God's promise to David to restore his kingdom in terms of the presence of God (Spirit) coming upon persons so that God's kingdom will be expressed wherever persons who bear within them the Spirit become responsible for the conditions of their world. Jesus sounds the summons to concern for transformation of the world by announcing his own mission in the Nazareth Synagogue (Luke 4:16-19):

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Is. 61:1-2, 58:6)

¹. George Forell, ed., Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion, pp. 84-87. Note how in the last paragraph of the quote it is asserted that the perspective upon life should not be determined by Adam's fall, but Christ's eyes. Life should be viewed from the perspective of grace.

Paul's Decision Making Process - A Study Particularly of I Corinthians 7

Because Scripture does not provide us with ready-made answers to many of the ethical questions of our time, it is helpful to consider whether we might discover an approach bearing the authority of Scripture which would provide us with a methodology rather than an answer. In the Johannine tradition it is clear that the Spirit is regarded as the teacher of the community, to bring to remembrance the things Jesus said and did, to lead into all truth, even what Jesus did not say while he was with his disciples (John 16:12ff). Thus this community believed in God's guidance in the process of arriving at answers, as did Paul as he worked through his answers to various issues at Corinth (I Cor. 7:40).

Paul provides us in so many ways with knowledge of his process and understanding of theological reflection. As far as authoritative Scripture is concerned, the only Scripture which Paul had was the Old Testament and then the tradition about Jesus, an authority for him but which he knew only in its oral form. Paul's use of the Old Testament seems to be primarily to point to Jesus and events in the life of the church being a fulfillment of O.T. prophecy or that it fulfilled a temporary moral purpose until Christ came (Gal. 3).² The primary authority for him was the life and teachings of Jesus, though in aversion to the approach of Pharisaism he does not continuously quote Jesus lest he create a new Law from Jesus' sayings. Paul's special locus for deriving understanding of the Gospel, the message of God to his contemporaries, is the death and resurrection of Jesus which shapes his understanding of the responsibilities and potentials for human existence released within the life of Jesus.

Paul's attempts to express theology in two cultures (I Cor. 9:19ff), have made him aware that theological expression is always bound up with history and culture. Thus attempts to describe, though hopefully faithful to God, will also in some ways conceal God and God's purpose because they are situationally and culturally bound. Actually, there is no other way this can be for we exist within history and culture, but it also is not tragic because God prefers to be "relevant" in this fashion.

Paul knows that it is important not to let God be "bound" by our language, be limited to our words and descriptions, nor to make idols out of our language (against the first two commandments). In I Corinthians 1 he will not even bind God to Christological language, for he says that we must always know that God is the source, boast of the Lord God, and be hesitant to say "I belong to Christ" without remembering that God is the source. Paul says we need to know that we now know only in part and that it is only in the end time that we will know God as God now knows us (I Cor. 13:12). We must also avoid an approach to knowledge which allows it to inflate our egos, to "puff us up," rather than opting for love which builds up (I Cor. 8:1). Even when we have developed our theologies, it is important to remind ourselves of what Paul says at the end of his grand schema of salvation history in Rom. 9-11:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

2. It could be that Paul does not deal with many moral issues from the Law because knowledge of it was assumed. However, even when he (if he wrote I Timothy) mentions the moral requirements of the Law, he indicates that the Law is only to be used "lawfully" (i.e. appropriate to the limits of the Law) and that conduct is to be judged primarily as it is "in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted." In II Timothy 3:15-17 there is mention of the "Sacred Writings which are able to instruct you for salvation though faith in Christ Jesus" and that Scripture is for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness, to equip the person of God for every good work.

Paul, though at times seeming to function alone out of the authority he felt Christ and his conversion experience gave him, really also highly values the Christian community. In I Cor. 14 he present us with a portrayal of it speaking from the Spirit in tongues and prophecy, seeking to discern the will of God. Paul's own discernment of the appropriate understanding of his religious experience (which affected his understanding of the Gospel) involved relationship with the Jerusalem community (Gal. 1-2, Acts 15), the Damascus community (Acts 9), and the community at Antioch (Gal. 2). This is a history of holding to the legitimacy of his own experience but continuously subjecting it to the discernment of his religious communities.

I Cor. 7 provides a particularly helpful case study of Paul's methodology. Here the major issue is whether persons should get married and whether marriages now existing should be maintained. A second issue is whether sex is still appropriate for those who are married. To understand the reason for the raising of these issues one must keep in mind the Hellenistic tendency to dualism and the dualistic presuppositions of Apocalyptic Judaism out of which the early church came.

Paul in this chapter seems to accept the presuppositions of Apocalyptic Judaism:

1) Satan runs this world and history is moving towards the great time when God will rule this world. However, leading to the establishment of God's rule is the "impending distress," the period of Great Tribulation (vs. 26ff). This will be a hard time for the saints and thus it is better to live as if the world is passing away, without encumbering life with anything--including marriage.

2) Paul speaks of a resurrection body that is "spiritual" in I Cor. 15. This may be his attempt to answer Greek objections to the resurrection of a physical body, but we know that the idea of a spiritual body was already in Jewish Apocalyptic: it was part of their pessimism about this world and human flesh. Flesh, the "material" of the present body, created many difficulties and could not be a vehicle for life in God's kingdom. This spiritual body was to be like that of the angels, and therefore in the afterlife marriage would not exist (nor sex) as the fleshly body would not exist (see Mark 12:25 also).

Avoidance of marriage responsibilities would be one way then of handling without encumbrance the hard times before the coming end. Dissolving marriages and refraining from sex would be one way of anticipating the spiritual conditions of the end-time: living as if it were here. This asceticism would be further supported by dualistic tendencies in Hellenistic religion.

Now, how does Paul deal with this? What are the principles he uses? What are his authorities in giving advice? This will be developed below.

It should be kept in mind that Paul is giving advice in the context of a world that he presupposes is passing away. Thus the advice must equip persons to live in this present world as long as it lasts, but also must take into consideration the new world which is dawning. One might suppose that if Paul had known that the world would last 2,000 years beyond his own life-time, the context for his advice would have changed and his advice would in some ways be changed. For example, would he advise celibacy as an ideal, if so gifted, in a world in which the church would need to live in the world for generations to come?

ISSUES

ADVICE

1-9 Should one abstain from sex.

Paul begins by conceding the basic principle, but affirms that there are practical

considerations:

-sexual needs may lead to temptation
-thus each person should have marriage partner, giving conjugal rights to the other, refusing such only for a time devoted to prayer (both husbands and wives have rights)

-"I say this by way of concession, not command" -some have special gift and may wish to stay celibate (Paul evidently does not know Matt. 19:12).

Principle: There are certain things which ideally should be followed, but practically things may need to be otherwise. We must still live in the world, in the flesh, and therefore in their realities.

Authority: "I say"

10-11 Divorce of believers.

Principle: One should heed a clear command of the Lord.

Authority: The Lord- an allusion to Jesus' saying on divorce (see Mark 10:2ff).

12-16 Divorce of an unbeliever by an believer.

Keep the marriage intact if the unbeliever consents.

-BUT

God has called you to peace: you cannot force an unwanted marriage.

-If you can stay together, your partner may be consecrated through you.

Authority: "I say, not the Lord."

17-24 Should one try to change one's situation in life?

This is the application of a much broader principle to the matter of whether one should stay married or get married:

"Let everyone lead the life which the Lord has assigned."

Remain there with God.

Principle: One may remain in any life-context with God and the life-context need not define one's essence (e.g. slavery), though one may change a life-context where appropriate.

Authority: "my rule in all the churches"

25-35 Concerning the unmarried

In view of the impending distress, the appointed time growing short, the form of this world passing away, the anxiety of the married from worldly concerns, it is well for a person to remain unmarried.

Principle: The primary responsibility is to be devoted to the Lord and to be holy in body and spirit. All should be subordinated to this, if possible, in this world passing away.

Authority: "I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy."

36-38 Should one marry his betrothed.

If passions necessitate, marry; if not, keep her as betrothed.

Principle: Either marrying or remaining unmarried is all right, depending on what one can humanly manage.

Authority: Paul seems to be giving his own practical advice.

39-40a Should a married woman get remarried if husband dies.

One must recognize that for women this was often a question of survival. The

church seems to have provided for special care of widows and given them some responsibility in the life of the church (e.g. I Tim. 5:3ff). A widow is free to remarry--but only "in the Lord."

Principle: Where one has freedom of choice in marriage, it should be to a Christian. (For many in the early church marriage was contracted before conversion.)

Authority: "in my judgment"

40b (This may be a general statement about the source of Paul's advice.)

Authority for much of the above: "I think I have the Spirit of God."

Out of the above analysis of Paul's methodology one can conclude that Paul would recommend the following in developing ethical advice for the church which the reader then may apply:

1. *Jesus is a primary authority* and where one has a saying of Jesus one must give it sufficient attention and authority. However, from the modern perspective one has to consider critical decisions which need to be made on whether such sayings come from Jesus and what they meant to him.
2. One must *stay close to the contemporary reality of God, the Spirit*, and seek to allow advice to be developed out of this reality and to be directed by the specific advice of God in the Spirit, in-so-far as it can be discerned. This is not just a matter of seeking the guidance of the Spirit, but knowing within human limits the reality and person of God so that advice can be congruous with God and arise out of what God is. I believe that all this is implied by Paul's emphasis upon the Spirit. Thus spirituality or devotionality is at the basis of providing ethical advice.
3. There needs to be *a commitment to the Lord which transcends all else*. This partially means seeking guidance from the resurrected Christ, but has more to do with relationship with the Person who mediates God to us and embodies our ultimate values. Thus this is close to 2.
4. The issues of *the context in which one lives* help to frame values and ethical decisions. From our perspective in the 20th century we can rethink the eschatological (expectation of the near end of the world) and dualistic (negative attitude towards flesh and world) elements of the context of the early church, but that was the context in which they lived and sought to be faithful. They could not frame their ethics other than within this structure until they gained different insights about the truthfulness of that structure. Others in future generations will make critical judgments about the values shaped in our context. We cannot expect to be un- or a-historical.
5. Paul believed that in *whatever situation one finds oneself, one could be there with God*. This is absolutely true. This is no reason, however, for not being critical of the historical contexts in which we are placed.
6. Values and ethical advice should be shaped by *a balance of personal insight and prophetic function (seeking guidance from God's Spirit) -- and responsibility to community*. The fullness of the Spirit is only possessed by the whole community and one cannot always tell whether the best

wisdom lies in one's challenge to other or community insights or with the understandings of others.

7. It must always be remembered that *knowledge of the mysteries of human life and God are, at the best, partial*. We must provide assistance and some type of answers to issues, but it is hard to feel that our advice is the last word. Knowledge is at times dangerous because it "puffs up" while love builds up and love is that which ultimately lasts. We need to take the risk of providing advice without having ultimate confidence in our advice.

8. Because we believe in both the reality of this life and the future and heavenly spiritual life, *we need to help persons with both: how to live in this world and how to live towards the world above/beyond*.

The Parable of the Prodigal

The parable of the prodigal in Luke 15 is, from my perspective, the heart of the Christian Gospel. It is the story of a Father (God) who calls his children to the developmental process by which they may return to him. This is a journey, but it is not to somewhere. Rather is it to Someone. It is not even to somewhere or someone that we have never known or is distant. It is a journey to One who is present. The Father was always at home, waiting, in the heart of the world and in our hearts: a home which is our home. Thus the journey is a *returning* to the home for which we long, the home where we were born and yet from which we fled.

The Parable of the Prodigal is misnamed because it is really about two sons and a father, the father being the central character in the story. Though one may call the younger son "prodigal", so also is the father since the father acts out of character with the customs of his community: he allows his sons a freedom and extends to them a love that the community would judge inappropriate and foolish. The younger son by asking for his share of the inheritance before the death of his father, has effectively wished his father dead, jeopardized his father's future economic security by depriving him of part of his property, and thoroughly embarrassed him before his friends. The older son, though he remained and assumed responsibilities, seems to have no understanding of the love of his father for him, was emotionally absent to his father, and publicly embarrasses him by refusing to act as host at the banquet held for his returned brother. How the neighbors must have nodded their heads at the seeming inability of the father to manage his two children. In a society that emphasizes dignity of the elder and the maintaining of face, the father risked a great deal. To be laughed at is the worst humiliation. The father was willing to endure this for his two sons. One hears no coercion in the story. The father is able to be present fully for his children apart from local custom without personally being destroyed, because he knows who he is and what he wishes to do: i.e. he does not waver, though he undoubtedly endured deep pain.³

The unique character of the action of the father is clearly illustrated by a parable, traced to Buddha, which portrays a father who receives his son back "little by little":

There was a householder's son who went away into a distant country, and while the father accumulated immeasurable riches, the son became miserably poor. And the son while searching for food and clothing happened to come to the country in which his father lived. And the father saw him in his wretchedness, for he was ragged and brutalized by poverty, and ordered some of his servants to call him.

When the son saw the place to which he was conducted, he thought, "I must have evoked the suspicion of a powerful man, and he will throw me into prison." Full of apprehension he made his escape before he had seen his father.

Then the father sent messengers out after his son, who was caught and brought back in spite of his cries and lamentations. Thereupon the father ordered his servants to deal tenderly with his son, and he appointed a laborer of his son's rank and education to employ the lad as a helpmate on the estate. And the son was pleased with his new situation.

³. For many today there is difficulty in identifying God as "Father" because of childhood abuse or because of the patriarchal implications. And yet it must be remembered how radically this father separates himself from cultural roles and how radically he exists for his children.

From the window of the palace the father watched the boy, and when he saw that he was honest and industrious he promoted him higher and higher.

After some time he summoned his son and called together all his servants, and made the secret known to them. Then the poor man was exceedingly glad and he was full of joy at meeting his father.

Little by little must the minds of men be trained for higher truths.⁴

The Context

Though in a sense the parable has its context in the whole of the Gospel and is related to Luke's understanding of the Gospel, the immediate context is Luke 15. This chapter contains three interrelated parables preceded by a brief historical setting. The tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to hear Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes complained that "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Here it is important to keep in mind that "sinners" did not mean to the Pharisees "someone who has done something terribly wrong to someone". It merely meant someone who did not know or did not obey all the Law. Thus it was almost a synonym for the common and uneducated folk. The issue then was that Jesus associated with those who were regarded as unclean by the religious establishment. One must be kind to the Pharisees, however, because they felt that those who did not obey the Law were jeopardizing the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. This anxiety was augmented by the tragedies of Israel's history which they interpreted as due to Israel's unfaithfulness and impurity, much as an individual who experiences a number of tragedies wonders why "God is doing this to me", and tries to evade further tragedy.

To answer their accusation, Jesus replies with three parables which are cleverly arranged to move the Pharisees to confrontation with the central issues of the situation. The first two parables are told in such a way that the Pharisees would basically agree. One is about a lost sheep and another is about a lost coin. The point of each parable is essentially that "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents". The Pharisees, though rejecting contact with sinners, would have been willing to accept that a repentant sinner was a different matter. They could understand the joy of God and the religious community over one repentant. However, the third parable is different. Though the younger son plans to give to his father his half-hearted repentance, the father receives him before he gets a chance to repent and the joy of the father is not dependent on the repentance. The elder brother also fails the father by refusing his wishes, his proper place at the feast, and above all by not understanding his father's love. The father speaks of his love without asking repentance from either.

Thus the father accepts both children prior to and without repentance. Whereas the Pharisees could agree with the first two parables, they could not with the third. We might wonder how long it took them to realize that the third was different from the first two, or whether they were nodding their heads in approval when suddenly they realized Jesus did not mean what they thought he meant. It is important to note that the older brother only enters as a significant character at the end of the story. Thus the Pharisees could not realize the direction of the parable until its end. His protestation of faithful service to his father and disowning of his brother make him the paradigm of the Pharisees. Suddenly, at the end of the story, they find themselves.

⁴. Robert M. May, *Physicians of the Soul*, NY: Crossroad, 1982, p. 136.

The stories of the younger and elder brothers are not finished in the parable. We don't know whether the younger came to truly relate to and understand his father and we don't know what the elder brother finally did. For the sinner and the Pharisee the parable is unfinished, for the listener must complete it. Thus the whole complex of introduction and parables leads to a climactic story in which the listeners find themselves and where the completion of the story is up to them. It is masterfully conceived.

The Parable

What follows now will be an interpretation of the parable which is based in the parable, but which is also affected by contemporary response to the parable. It is an interpretation as I see it and respond to it. Perhaps this moves somewhat beyond the historical meaning, but that is what interpretation must always do to be a "creative remembrance" of the tradition about Jesus.⁵ I will interpret the parable as not only speaking of younger and older brothers as separate persons, but as a part of each person, our personal styles sometimes being weighted in the direction of the younger or the elder.

The father is asked by the younger to give him his share of the property that would fall to him at the death of the father. He must be free to go away, to find himself, to express his inner drives and needs, to do all that he cannot under the wing of the father. The story says that the father then divided his property between "them" (the two). This means that he split his property, probably selling part of it or allowing the younger son to sell part of it. To fully understand this one must sense the feelings for property in the Ancient Near-East and its relationship to the ancestors from whom it had likely been inherited. The elder brother then became master of the rest. The text indicates that the father divided "his living", which makes clear that this act jeopardized his economic security. The fact that the rest of his property was given to the elder brother indicates that he really placed himself at the mercy of this son, of which the son, to his credit, did not take advantage. Thus the father risks his existence and because of his action publicly embarrasses himself before his community. This is the nature of his love. It is also important to note that the father is psychologically and spiritually free of his estate, able to divest himself of it. The children are of more value than the estate.

Why did the children have such difficulties with a father who loved them in this way? Why did they not realize his love sooner? One might guess that part of the reason is the developmental process of each person which necessitates some form of freedom and rebellion towards parents in order to gain identity. But part of the problem was the estate which provided the context for their life. This context included the opportunities and obligations of property, a community with its customs and restrictions, a family with its dreams, expectations and traditions. Our contexts, besides providing us with a home, may entrap us. They determine and limit what we become and present various types of issues. In real life one must live somewhere, and the context into which we are born is never chosen, only given. New contexts, even if chosen (or fled to), present issues of their own, as the younger child discovered. The father was free of his context. He stayed in it by choice, but freed himself of it by divesting himself of it. He found a way of being himself in it. By being himself in it, he helped pose for his two children the most crucial question: what would they do with their father? For their home was not a place, but Him.

The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, at the conclusion of his highly autobiographical novel, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, describes the burden of context. The love which existed in his and in many a home is the love of expectation which by its demands smothers life. He says:

⁵. Creative remembrance is a term sometimes applied to the handling of the Jesus' tradition in the Johannine community, which has a consciousness of the Spirit's role in remembering the tradition : e.g. John 16:12-15.

It would be difficult to persuade me that the story of the Prodigal Son is not the legend of a man who didn't want to be loved. When he was a child, everyone in the house loved him. He grew up not knowing it could be any other way and got used to their tenderness, when he was a child.

But as a boy he tried to lay aside these habits. He wouldn't have been able to say it, but when he spent the whole day roaming around outside and didn't even want to have the dogs with him, it was because they too loved him; because in their eyes he could see observation and sympathy, expectation, concern; because in their presence too he couldn't do anything without giving pleasure or pain. But what he wanted in those days was that profound indifference of heart which sometimes, early in the morning, in the fields, seized him with such purity that he had to start running, in order to have no time or breath to be more than a weightless moment in which the morning becomes conscious of itself.

The secret of that life of his which had never yet come into being, spread out before him. Involuntarily he left the footpath and went running across the fields, with outstretched arms, as if in this wide reach he would be able to master several directions at once. And then he flung himself down behind some bush and didn't matter to anyone. He peeled himself a willow flute, threw a pebble at some small animal, he leaned over and forced a beetle to turn around: none of this became fate, and the sky passed over him as over nature. Finally afternoon came with all its inspirations; you could become a buccaneer on the isle of Tortuga, and there was no obligation to be that; you could besiege Campeche, take Vera Cruz by storm; you could be a whole army or an officer on horseback or a ship on the ocean: according to the way you felt. If you thought of kneeling, right away you were Deodatus of Gozon and had slain the dragon and understood that this heroism was pure arrogance, without an obedient heart. For you didn't spare yourself anything that belonged to the game. But no matter how many scenes arose in your imagination, in between them there was always enough time to be nothing but a bird, you didn't even know what kind. Though afterward, you had to go home.

My God, how much there was then to leave behind and forget. For you really had to forget; otherwise you would betray yourself when they insisted. No matter how much you lingered and looked around, the gable always came into sight at last. The first window up there kept its eye on you; someone might be standing there. The dogs, in whom expectation had been growing all day long, ran through the hedges and drove you together into the one they recognized. And the house did the rest. Once you walked in to its full smell, most matters were already decided. A few details might still be changed; but on the whole you were already the person they thought you were; the person for whom they had long ago fashioned a life, out of his small past and their own desires; the creature belonging to them all, who stood day and night under the influence of their love, between their hope and their mistrust, before their approval or their blame.⁶

Each person engages in a different life journey. For some the journey is more like the younger or the older brother, but there are ways in which we can identify with the experience of both. If we have not left home as the younger brother, there are parts of ourselves that long to be free of the responsibilities and constraints of context, to live our humanity and individuality to the fullest, experiencing what responsibility and limit have prevented. If we leave home and live with greater freedom, there are inner longings for the voices of childhood and the home to which we once belonged with its security and

⁶. Stephen Mitchell, *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Vintage Books, Random House, 1989, pp. 107-109.

structure. *Fundamental to all human issues is the need to come to terms with the longing for a home and a foundational relationship.* Development leads us away from and returns us to this. The soul remains restless until returning, in some way, to the source from which it was born.

The father loves each child and gives each the freedom to be what they can, but he cannot give them freedom they will not take nor adequately understand. The father seems to realize, beyond the customs of his society, the need of his children to be themselves. But he also knows their need for his love and a "home". Thus he provides a place to be loved and come back to while each goes on a journey, the younger going physically away and the elder going psychologically away. Though the younger rehearses repentance, the father goes to meet him and sweeps him into his arms before he has a chance to repent and calls for a feast. He rejoices that his child is found. To the elder he says, "Son you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." *That the father so loves his children gives them the power and freedom to complete the stories of their lives.* How their stories will be completed is up to them. The fact that the parable is not completed makes it certain that the father's love is not dependent upon an appropriate completion of the story. The father's love is only dependent on himself and remains part of his character. As Shakespeare says in a Sonnet: "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."

If we see some of each child in us all, then we will understand how some of the issues of later life are determined by how we have earlier reacted to our context. It has been indicated that in human development there is often a crisis in which we long for what we have not chosen or been allowed to choose. The one who has left home longs for the home that has been left. The one that has stayed longs for the freedom and life experiences missed.

The essential message of the parable is that whatever our issues, whatever the path we have taken, whatever we feel we have missed when we choose to re-view our life, whatever in us is incomplete, there is a home to come back to or rediscover. Because the father divested himself of the estate, the home is no longer the place to which we reacted. We are also called upon to divest ourselves of the issues related to our early life context. The home is not a place, but in the heart of the father. We are called upon to allow ourselves to be swept up by the arms of the father and clasped to his breast, as portrayed in oil so movingly by Rembrandt. This is the home from which our soul came forth into the world.

Perhaps one significance of the unfinished nature of the story is that for most of us the story is never finished. We never completely leave behind the influences of our childhood or the consequence of past choices, nor do we lose the ambiguity of our desire for structure and freedom. Moreover, the need continually to remake the choices we once made is never left behind. Life and its issues draw us to our home and draw us away from our home, and we constantly confuse life contexts with our home. But the Father is always there. As we become more rooted in his heart, however we are drawn away, we carry him in ours. And home becomes where we are.

At some point in our journey to the Father we need to begin to become for others what the Father is for us. This is part of our maturing and what is meant by "love." I have been intrigued with the way some, in meditation upon this parable, are drawn to identify with the Father. A friend said to Henri Nouwen, "Whether you are the younger son or the elder son, you have to realize that you are called to become the father."⁷

7. Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, N.Y: Doubleday, 1992, p. 19. In this excellent presentation of the parable, and his meditation on Rembrandt's portrayal of *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Nouwen presents us with a significant personal model for the spiritual journey.

Household Codes in the New Testament Epistles

In four epistles (Col. 3:1-4:6, Ephes. 4:1-6:20, I Peter 2:1-4:11, and somewhat similarly in Titus 2:1-3:2) one finds what have been called "household codes," description of Christian ethics within the Christian household (which would include husbands-wives, parents-children, servants/slaves-masters). I Peter moves beyond treatment of behavior only in the "household" because it is written from the perspective of the behavior of the Christian to non-Christians and so the non-Christian state is included. Paul deals with the state in Rom. 13 and in his treatment of principalities, powers, elementals (structures of the world provided by God for the care of humanity until its maturity -- see Gal. 4:1-11, I Cor. 2:6-9, Col. 2:15,20, Ephes. 3:10). Since this material was probably a part of the catechetical material of the early church (note that in Titus 2:1-3:2 Paul advises Titus about teaching this code), scholars frequently examine its role in this, noting that common categories and approaches were used in the various epistles though individual treatment of common categories is varied. A similar collection of catechetical material is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, though this does not focus on the "household code." The usual outline to be found in the Household Code is:

- I Basis for ethical behavior in Christ's death and resurrection and the Christian Baptismal experience (frequently in the language of putting off or dying to (renunciation) and putting on or rising to (affirmation) is borrowed from images provided by actions in the Baptismal rite, such as putting off an old garment symbolizing putting off the old life and putting on a new white garment signifying putting on Christ.
- II General ethical theme setting the tone for the section (often in terms of "subjection")
- III Civic Responsibility (only in I Peter)
- IV Household Responsibilities
 - Husband-wife relationships
 - Parent-child relationships
 - Slave-master relationships
- V Finally - concluding various ethical exhortations

Though the "tone" of these sections is often "*subjection*," one has to remember that this is the way that social relationships were defined in the ancient world -- life was not democratic but hierarchical. *The early church seems to have accepted the general definition of social roles in its world, but then to have humanized and Christianized them.* Their Christianization was in terms of distinguishing between social roles, which might be expressed in the traditional terms of subjection, and what persons are "in essence", "in Christ". What persons are in Christ then produced *Christian qualifiers* to the traditional codes. An interesting example of this is in I Peter where although wives are told to be submissive to their husbands, husbands are reminded that their wives are, along with them, "joint heirs of the grace of life" and that their prayers would be hindered if they did not recognize this (I Peter 3:7). One finds the same type of distinction in Paul. Thus to understand the particularly *Christian* part of the household codes one must look for the Christian qualifiers.

The Household Code in Ephesians provides a helpful illustration of this, for it has the most "Christian qualifiers." These qualifiers are in bold type:

5:21 Be subject to one another **out of reverence for Christ.**

5:22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, **as to the Lord**. 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife **as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior**. 5:24 **As the church is subject to Christ**, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

5:25 Husbands, **love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her**, 5:26 **that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word**, 5:27 **that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish**. 5:28 **Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself**. 5:29 **For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church**, 5:30 **because we are members of his body**. 5:31 **"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."** 5:32 **This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church**; 5:33 **however, let each one of you love his wife as himself**, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

6:1 Children, obey your parents **in the Lord**, for this is right. 6:2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 6:3 "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."

6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in **the discipline and instruction of the Lord**.

6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, **as to Christ**; 6:6 **not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart**, 6:7 **rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men**, 6:8 **knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free**.

6:9 Masters, **do the same to them, and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him**.

6:10 **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might**. 6:11 **Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil**. 6:12 **For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places**. 6:13 **Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand**. 6:14 **Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness**, 6:15 **and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace**; 6:16 **besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one**. 6:17 **And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**.

Woman in the N.T.

The understanding of woman in the N.T. shows the impact of God's action in Christ, through which it is recognized that existence and identity depend on grace and not societal values. But it was also affected by other considerations, such as the following:

1) The understanding of woman in Judaism. Christianity was born in a cultural context and was variously affected by this context. Though the Jewish woman was highly respected, the view of her was affected by:

-The Creation mythology-Whereas Gen. 1 describes woman/man as being created at once, Gen. 2-3 describes woman as derivative and as the initiator of sin. Much of Judaism picked up on the Gen. 2-3 material(see I Tim. 2-11-15).

-Gen. 6 describes angels who were tempted by women. The temptation of women and the danger of the lustful glance was a major ethical problem in Judaism (see. Matt. 5:27-28, I Cor. 11:10 and the angels). Thus too much contact between women and men created difficulties. Unfortunately the woman was often made responsible for stirring up male feelings. Thus covering and social restriction became important.

-Judaism was a patriarchal society in which woman was expected to be subordinate (note I Pet. 3:5-6).

-Because of birthing children and menstrual flow woman was frequently unclean.

2) Identity/Essence of woman is distinguished from Social Role of woman. While it is frequently recognized that in her essence she may be equal to man, there is also the matter of what is practical and necessary within one's society, particularly so that Christian women may appear as ethical and responsible. Thus early Christians might understand the subordination of a woman to her husband as something which was an appropriate role in their society, but as having little to do with the essence and identity of a woman. Paul has an interesting discussion in I Cor. 9 where he speaks of having rights, but on behalf of others deciding not to exercise them. Paul applies this to himself on another issue, but he would seem to say that everyone has to consider how and whether to exercise one's rights on a number of issues, and for him the good of the Gospel is the primary consideration. I Peter 3:1-7 is a good example of woman's identity being placed alongside a seeming contradictory social role.

3) As in the case of most revolutionary movements, Christianity was more radical socially at its outset than it was later as it struggled for acceptance within the society where it had to live. Thus there is an observable developing social conservatism in the later N.T. materials which resulted in adding to or reworking earlier materials in a more conservative direction. I Tim. 2:8-15 identifies woman as the source of the Fall and so gives her no public role or authority over a man. I Timothy 5:9-16 indicates that a woman under sixty should not be received into the order of widows because her sexual desires will alienate her from Christ. I Cor. 14:33b-36 on head covering and I Cor. 11:3-16 concerning women being silent in church are clear examples of later conservative additions to an otherwise authentic Pauline letter. Remove them and see how much better the text reads. Poor Paul comes off badly with regard to women unless it is recognized that the later church changed him and used his voice to give their views authority.

Jesus attitude to Women

-It has been pointed out that many of Jesus' parables use household illustrations which would indicate an appreciation of women and their life.

-Jesus seems to have frequently associated with women and not to have been anxious about the "sexual dangers" of women. Women followed him and supported him. The Gospels of Luke and John seem to place an especially strong emphasis on the role of women in Jesus' ministry.

-There is the centrality of Mary and Elizabeth in the Lukan Infancy Narrative, while in Matthew the story is focused on Joseph.

-Mark 7:24-30 Syrophenecian woman

-In the Gospel of John there is the mother of Jesus 2:3ff, 19:25-27; the Samaritan woman 4, the

anointing 12 (and Lk. 10:38ff, Mk. 14:3-9, Matt. 26:6-13); Mary and Martha in John 11-12; Presence of women at crucifixion and at the empty tomb (true of all Gospels, but Matt. and Jn. have an appearance to women.)

Paul's Attitude to Women

This needs to be determined from what is authentically Pauline, not what has been written in his name or changed by the later church.

-I Cor. 11:3-16 may not have been by Paul, but though it mouths traditional "truths" about women, it contains a number of qualifiers: vs. 11-12.

- Gal. 3:28, in Christ there is no male, female, is a major statement on Paul's understanding of human identity as determined by Christ and not by national background, social role, or sex.

-Col. and Ephes. contain "Household Ethical Codes". It is debated as to whether these are by Paul. Here women are advised to be subject to their husbands, Ephesians 5:22ff has a great deal of material (Christian qualifiers) which decidedly changes the nature of subjection.

-Extremely important is Paul's association with women in the mission of the early church. If Paul at all advocated what is said in I Tim. and I Cor. 14 about women playing no public role, he certainly did not practice this.

-Phil. 4:2-3 Euodia and Syntyche

-I Cor, 16:19, Rom. 16:3 and Acts-Priscilla (and Aquilla)

-Rom. 16:1-Phoebe-a "deacon"

-Rom, 16:12,15-other women

I Peter

Though women are to be submissive to their husbands, husbands are to live considerately with them, not making inordinate demands on them sexually, and to honor them as "joint heirs of the grace of life", "in order that your prayers may not be hindered."

Sociological Analysis of the Gospels and Other N.T. Material

It is interesting to do an analysis of the social structures of a Christian community implied in its literature. The Gospels then become sources for understanding the life and structures of various early Christian communities besides sources for the life and teachings of Jesus. The Pauline epistles in which the later additions on women are placed reflect the sociological change in the role of women in the church under the influence of the more traditional role of woman outside the Christian community. One also needs to recognize that the early church functioned in several societal or cultural contexts, the Palestinian undoubtedly being a more conservative climate than major cities in Greece or Asia Minor. Sometimes a Christian community might react adversely to a very liberal climate (e.g. Corinth) rather than being affected by it in a liberal direction.

The Johannine community is an interesting example. Women fill a major role in this community according to the way it preserved tradition about women in its Gospel. The Samaritan woman in Jn. 4 and Mary Magdalene in John 20 are even paradigms of women evangelists and Mary Magdalene fulfills all the requirements for an apostle. However, there seems to be a change in chapter 21 which is likely the work of the editor of the Gospel's present form, mentioned in 21:24. In chapter 21 there are no women. Does this represent the type of change found in the later additions to some of Paul's letters which remove women from public role? Three influences would have been crucial in maintaining the early Christian view of woman:

- 1) The community's staying close to the transcendent source of its life (Christ in the Spirit, the Father) so that its life was more determined by this "radical" foundational reality than other factors.
- 2) Its view of the church did not lead to a great deal of institutionalization and structuring of the community (e.g. the Johannine community seems to have had a very modest community structure).
- 3) Its anti-world and culture stance would mean that it would be less likely to be influenced by more conservative roles for women in the society.

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount was likely constructed to present Jesus as a new Moses delivering a new Torah, and this collection of Jesus's sayings served as a discipline for the Matthaean Christian community, preserving these sayings as Jesus's commandments (as indicated in the Great Commission in Matt. 28).

Setting

5:1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 5:2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

The Heart of Ethics and Life: God blesses those who depend upon him

5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 5:11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 5:12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 5:13 "

Salt and Light

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 5:15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The Law and the Prophets: A Higher Righteousness

5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. 5:18 For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. 5:19 Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Antitheses: The Higher Righteousness

Anger and Failure to Reconcile

5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' 5:22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire. 5:23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 5:25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 5:26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Lust

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5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell. 5:31 "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' 5:32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Swearing and Honesty

5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' 5:34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 5:35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 5:36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 5:37 Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

Love Rather Than Revenge

5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 5:39 But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; 5:40 and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; 5:41 and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 5:42 Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 5:44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 5:45 so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Summation

5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Piety

Theme

6:1 "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Alms

6:2 "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6:3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 6:4 so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Prayer

6:5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6:6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 6:7 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. 6:8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 6:9 "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 6:10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread. 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 6:13 And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 6:15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Fasting

6:16 "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6:17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 6:18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Singularity

Investing Your Treasure

6:19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 6:20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Healthy Eye

6:22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; 6:23 but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

One Master - Kingdom First

6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 6:26 Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 6:27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 6:28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 6:29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 6:30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you--you of little faith? 6:31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 6:32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 6:33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 6:34 "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Varia

Do Not Judge

7:1 "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 7:2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 7:3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 7:4 Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? 7:5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Preserve What Is Holy

7:6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.

Ask, Seek, Knock

7:7 "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 7:8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Parable of the Good Father

7:9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 7:10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 7:11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Do to Others As You Would

7:12 "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Narrow Gate

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7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. 7:14 For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

False Prophets

7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 7:16 You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? 7:17 In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 7:18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 7:19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 7:20 Thus you will know them by their fruits. 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 7:22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' 7:23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'

Concluding Parable

7:24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 7:25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 7:26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 7:27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell--and great was its fall!" 7:28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 7:29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Living From God - A Model

THE BEGINNING IS NOT WITH ACTION, BUT WITH GOD

THERE IS **ONE GOD**

WHO HAS TURNED TOWARDS US IN LOVE

AND CALLS US TO ENGAGE IN THE PROCESS OF TURNING
TOWARDS GOD AND TOWARDS OTHERS

WHO HAS DEFINED SELF AND REACHED OUT IN GENEROUS LOVE

IN **JESUS**

AS EXPRESSED IN HIS MINISTRY AND CROSS

WHO DEFINED HIMSELF AS SERVANT

THIS JESUS IS OUR **ONE LORD** (TO WHOM WE GIVE ALLEGIANCE)

HISTORICALLY BY HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY

CONTEMPORARILY BY HIS RESURRECTION

THIS GOD HAS PROVIDED RELATIONSHIP AND RESOURCE IN **ONE SPIRIT** AND IN THIS
RELATIONSHIP WE ALL SAY, "**ABBA, FATHER**"

AND HAS PROVIDED **ONE SELF UNDERSTANDING** EXPRESSED IN **ONE GOSPEL** AND
ONE BAPTISM (WE PUT ON CHRIST AND HIS MEANING) AND THAT WE BE NOURISHED BY
ONE BREAD

FROM THIS

WE

MAKE DECISIONS ESTABLISH VALUES FIND HOW TO LIVE AND BE

AS INDIVIDUALS AND GATHERED COMMUNITY

SEEKING GUIDANCE OF CONTEMPORARY GOD AND CHRIST

SEEKING THE RESOURCE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (SPIRIT)

SEEKING THE RESOURCE OF COMMUNITY

USING BIBLICAL GUIDELINES BUT RECOGNIZING THEIR VARIETY

SEEKING TO LOVE AS GOD HAS LOVED US

KNOWING THAT WE WILL DIFFER
BY OUR DIFFERENCES AND BECAUSE OF OUR LIMITS

THOUGH LIVING FROM ONE GOD, LORD, AND SPIRIT
THUS WE RESPECT VARIETY AND SEEK INCLUSIVITY
WHILE AFFIRMING UNITY AND SEEKING AGREEMENT

WE RECOGNIZE A **FORCE OF EVIL** IN THE WORLD
WHICH AFFECTS OUR DECISIONS AND ABUSES OUR INTENTIONS

WE RECOGNIZE ALSO THAT WE LIVE WITHIN **WORLD, NATION, AND CULTURE** WHICH
HOLD VALUES NOT NECESSARILY OURS, INFLUENCE OUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS,
AND YET CONSTITUTE **THE PLACES WHERE WE HAVE BEEN PLACED TO LIVE FROM
GOD AND BE RESPONSIBLE TO GOD.**

THE MEANING OF THE ENDING OF MARK: **Jesus goes before us.**

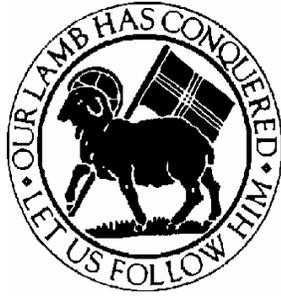
16:1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Mag'dalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salo'me, bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. 16:2 And very early on the first day of the week they went to the tomb when the sun had risen. 16:3 And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the door of the tomb?" 16:4 And looking up, they saw that the stone was rolled back; -- it was very large.

16:5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe; and they were amazed. 16:6 And he said to them, "**Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. 16:7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee** [there you will see him]* **as he told you.**" 16:8 And they went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid.

* The phrase "there you will see him" seems to have been added, as two different endings were also added in the ancient MSS. Here the young man/angel refers to something Jesus previously said, to be found in Mark 14:27-28:

14:27 And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away; for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." 14:28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

Here Jesus says that though he as the shepherd will be stricken, he will again lead (go before) his sheep. Thus the young man is not indicating that Jesus will go first to Galilee and his disciples should follow and meet him there, but that Jesus will again lead them as their shepherd and they should be ready to follow him. Galilee in Aramaic means "outskirts", "limits," and this may mean that Jesus will lead them to the limits of the world rather than to the geographical location Galilee. In Matthew the Great Commission says that the disciples should make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey Jesus' commandments. **In Mark the call is to follow Jesus into the world, responding to his leading.**



ETHICS IN ITS SIMPLEST IS: