

## Matthew Chapters 5-7 – Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount

Grant Osborn has one of the most widely used commentaries on the Book of Matthew. In his commentary, he has this to say about the Sermon on the Mount:

One of the best-known and loved passages in Scripture, the Sermon on the Mount, has been considered Jesus' magnum opus. The amount of literature on it is incredible, and as many as thirty-six different interpretations have been made; there is a general consensus for nine major interpretations:

1. Since medieval times two levels of ethics have been seen, with the Sermon reflecting a higher moral code for clergy and monastic orders.

No Comment, just no.

2. For Martin Luther and his followers, the sermon functions like the law in Paul, disclosing our depravity and bringing about repentance.

We will come back to this view.

3. Many Anabaptists take the commands literally in terms of pacifism in the civil sphere.

No Comment, just no.

4. Some liberals label it a paradigm for the social gospel as a call to produce the kingdom of heaven on earth.

We have discussed the kingdom of heaven enough and completely reject this approach.

5. Existentialists see it not as absolute but as a challenge to a personal decision in light of human finitude.

“Simply keeping the commandments does not relieve us of responsibility for our actions. For God demands the whole person and not merely specific acts from a person.”

For Existentialists (many Catholics and Anglicans fit here), the whole of the self in submission to God's ideal is required for God to accept you into His kingdom.

6. Albert Schweitzer's interim ethic saw it as a temporary set of injunctions meant only for the short time before the kingdom arrived.

He believed that Jesus' extreme ethic was in the light of the world coming to an end, and a call to extreme repentance was needed to prevent the world from ending.

7. Similar to Schweitzer, classical dispensationalists (e.g., the Scofield Bible) have limited the sermon's ethics to the millennial period.

This was my position for a while. I hate that Osborn equates Schweitzer to Scofield, but I see what he was looking at. Many dispensationalists believe that the Sermon on the Mount has nothing to do with us.

Others believe this to be the ideal legal system and that it would be in place during the millennial reign, but it still had relevance today as we see God's desired character, but that character was not a requirement for entrance. All enter into the kingdom by grace through faith.

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Osborn misses the variances within the dispensational camps and misrepresents the whole because of the few.

8. The current tendency is to see the Sermon through the lens of inaugurated eschatology, that keeping the commands should be the goal of all believers, but that they will be fully observed only after Christ has returned.
9. Some believe that this exemplifies Jesus as “a sage who expressed His eschatological convictions in wisdom forms,” so this is a set of wisdom teachings.

Grant Osborn prefers a combination of 8 and 9. “There is a distinct wisdom flavor in the sermon, but primarily it is the new laws for the kingdom age, intended as an ethical model to be followed by the new citizens of the kingdom community.”

“The Sermon on the Mount is a call for the church to live according to the values of the kingdom of God. As citizens of the kingdom, disciples live under the rule of God, not society.”

1. Participates in restoring the broken world to its natural order in Christ
2. Is dependent on God and aware of its spiritual poverty without Christ
3. Pursues righteousness as God’s way of ‘setting all things right’
4. Endures suffering for the sake of what is right

This is the primary view in Christendom today. As we viewed last week, this is a “Mountain Manifesto.”

For those who take a Dispensational approach, there are a few variants. Jerry Hullinger (1024Project) -

### The Millennial View (aka the Kingdom View)

This view applies the Sermon primarily to the future earthly kingdom which the Lord announced as being at hand and has been held by numerous dispensationalists. Since the Sermon was delivered during the time when the kingdom was being offered, **its prime referent point is the time of the kingdom.** Since the kingdom was rejected, its application today becomes secondary.

Last week we looked at seven verses within Chapters 5-7 that prove that this view is not defensible. But some of the points have merit (there are similarities in this section with the economy in the Millennium), but to state that Matthew 5-7 is the economy of the Millennial Kingdom is not accurate.

### The Penitential View

Those who subscribe to this position view the Sermon as a body of law that makes an individual cognizant of his sin and drives him to God. It shows the need of depending on Jesus alone for salvation. “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew does not picture the Pharisees as the most righteous people of their day. Jesus holds them as hypocritical. John the Baptist also chided the Pharisees (Matt. 3:7-12).

Jesus was addressing the disciples, those who had already believed in Him. Also, this section (7:24-29) concludes with Jesus saying that those who hear and respond are wise. The conclusion does not have

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any language that would indicate that Jesus wanted the people to not rely upon the Law for eternal life. Finally, the response of the people is not shame and coming to Jesus for deliverance from the law, sin, and death. An eternal-life approach (Penitential View) is theologically defensible, but I am convinced that it is interpretationally inaccurate.

### The Discipleship Ethic View

The view is for the believer and is viewed as the rules for the one who would be a dedicated learner and follower of Jesus. This would take the Sermon on the Mount to be categorically for today, as well as for any dispensation.

This ignores the context, the initial audience, the Jewish cultural and Old Testament understanding, and the kingdom of heaven references. Can believers take some principles from this passage and have some understanding of God's desire of character? Sure, but there are some statements that are absolutely not to be applied to believers (Matthew 6:14-15, 16-18, 31-33, 7:7, 13).

### Interim Ethic View

This is an adaptation of Albert Schweitzer's belief. This holds that Schweitzer had some initial good thoughts, but it was not Jesus preventing the end of the world, but Him establishing the kingdom. This approach views the Sermon as a new and interim ethic for the time immediately before the kingdom (Sandy Toussaint).

This implies that Jesus is instituting a new ethic, a higher law, an enhanced charter for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. We will see that Jesus is not enhancing but properly explaining the Law.

### My View – Properly Explained Law View: Jesus is not establishing a new understanding.

This is the King's message to the Kingdom of Israel explaining their constitution and the godly requirements so that they can prepare themselves to be a restored people. Both in the Hebrew Scriptures and this section where Jesus corrects the understating of the Law and Word of God, we can always learn and understand what God's desired character is (e.g., Law and Proverbs).

Based upon the context of Matthew and how it is addressed to Israel about the promise of their restoration and the hope of the Messiah King, these are lessons to Israel to correct their understanding of the Law and to get prepared for the kingdom of heaven (Millennial Reign).

We must remember that Jesus functioned under Law (Galatians 4:4-5). After Jesus was crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended, the economy of grace was instituted (Romans 6:14). Grace has always been the method of reconciliation, but the economy of how God interacts with believers and the world has changed multiple times. We typically only focus on two economies (Law and Grace). When the rapture occurs, the economy is changed back to Law. This is not for being reconciled to God, but rather the system of blessings and curses by means of the Law will be reinstated.

Eric calls this a Contextual Time Interpretation. This maintains a Literal (Normal), Grammatical, and Historical (Cultural) approach and eliminates allegorical interpretation and improper application. There will still be questions that are difficult, and we will answer them with the text.