THE CHARACTER OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – Chapter 11

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM – With an Examination of DISPENSATIONALISM and the "Scofield Bible"

by Philip Mauro: 1928

My main purpose in the present chapter is to show more fully than has yet been done in the preceding pages that the Sermon on the Mount exhibits in every part thereof the character of grace.

There is the utmost need of making this clear and plain to the people of God because the new popular "Bible" whose teachings we are examining declares in the most unqualified way that–

"The Sermon on the Mount is law, not grace"; and that "The doctrines of grace are to be sought in the Epistles, not in the Gospels" (Ed. of 1909, p. 989).

Further it is stated in the "Bible" referred to that–

"The Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the church" (id., p. 1000).

And again that–

"It is evident that the really dangerous sect in Corinth was that which said 'I am of Christ.' They rejected the new revelation through Paul of the doctrine of grace; grounding themselves probably on the kingdom teachings of our Lord" (id., p. 1230).

It will be seen that, in the last of the above quotations from the "Scofield Bible," not only is the teaching of Paul set in contrast with, and made to appear as a superior to, that of

the Lord Jesus Christ, but the latter is exhibited as that which lays a foundation—not for a true Christian life and character as the Lord Himself declared—but for a "really dangerous sect." Could anything be more subversive of vital truth or fraught with greater possibilities for danger and loss to the household of faith? Is it not therefore the urgent duty of every one who has a thought for the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ and the welfare of His people to cry out against this novel and destructive teaching, and against the "Bible" which contains it?

For what are the points of the doctrine of Christ contained in the Sermon on the Mount? These are the principle ones:

- To let our light shine before men for the glory of our Father in heaven.
- To refrain from the angry thought and word, and from the impure desire and look.
- To submit to injury.
- To give, to lend, to love our enemies.
- To return blessing for cursing, to do good and to pray for those who do us harm.
- To be like our Father in heaven.
- To seek not a reputation for piety or almsgiving, like the Pharisees.
- To give God's things the first and largest place in our prayers.
- To forgive without limit all trespasses against ourselves.
- To lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth.
- To serve God and not Mammon.
- To trust our heavenly Father for the needful things of this life, taking no anxious thought for the morrow.
- To seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.
- To refrain from judging our brethren; and, in a word, to do to others whatsoever we would that men should do to us.

Such is “the doctrine of Christ,” concerning which the apostle John says: “He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the FATHER, and the SON” (comp. the Lord’s words in John I4: 23); and, “If there come any unto you, and bring not THIS DOCTRINE, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 9,10). This is the “doctrine” concerning which the editor of the “Scofield Bible” says that they who grounded themselves upon it were “the really dangerous sect” at Corinth; and concerning which he also says in another publication (“Our Hope” December, 1919), “The Sermon on the Mount is law, and that raised to its highest, most deathful and destructive potency.” What terrible words are these! Surely the first nine verses of the Sermon, the “Beatitudes,” are quite enough to refute this false and injurious statement, and to show that the discourse pertains not to the curse of the law but to the free blessings of the gospel.

We ask careful attention now to the grace of God as marvellously displayed in the Sermon on the Mount: and after that we will examine the reasons which the editor of the Scofield Bible has brought forward in support of his statement that the Sermon on the Mount is “not grace” but “law, and that raised to its highest, most deathful and destructive potency”—a thing to be feared and shunned.

First. The quality of purest grace is seen in the Sermon on the Mount in that the Son of God is therein bringing sinful men into the knowledge of the Father, and into the conscious enjoyment of the relationship, the privileges and the responsibilities of the children of God. Not only is this grace, but it may be said without fear of contradiction that grace can do no more for sinful men than to bring them into the family of God on the footing of children.

The One Who, in this marvellous utterance, brings those who were by nature aliens and enemies of God into intimate and holy relations with God the Father, is the very One Who had to come to offer that Sacrifice without which such relationship

would have been forever an impossibility; without which there would have been nothing for the best of men but death and judgment and the lake of fire. Hence the whole discourse assumes the work of Redemption to have been accomplished. We do not find in it any explanation of the means by which those addressed would be made the children of God; but such explanation is not called for in the address in the form given to it as a part of the written word. In that form it is for those who have come to Christ the crucified and risen One in response to the gospel, and who know already the ground of their acceptance with God. We are not told just what explanations on this point the Lord gave in His oral teaching; but we know that "when they were alone He expounded all things to His disciples" (Mk. 4: 34).

Second. The quality of divine grace is also conspicuously exhibited in the Sermon on the Mount in that those who are there addressed are made the Children of God without works or merit on their part. We have here the greatest possible contrast between God's dealings with the Israelites at Mr. Sinai, and His dealings with the objects of His grace in this dispensation. The position or relationship offered to the children of Israel of Mt. Sinai was expressly conditioned upon their obedience. The offer was made in these words:—

> *"Now, therefore, He will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation."*

And thereupon—

> *"All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:5-8).*

That covenant was, as we know, flagrantly broken by all the people; and hence it became null and void. It is idle

therefore to say that God was under any obligation whatever to "offer" to Israel and any "kingdom" at any time. His purpose for that people, as for all men, must, from the breaking of that covenant, be carried out upon the basis of grace alone.

But, in contrast with the conditional covenant which God made at Mount Sinai with the children of Israel, no conditions whatever are made with the children of God to whom Christ gives His teaching on the Mount; and, if we know the most elementary truths concerning God's dealings with men, we know that this is the great distinguishing difference between law and grace. The Lord Jesus Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, speaks to "children" of God, with never a word of anything to be done by them to bring them into that relationship, or to maintain them therein. Heånce one can fail to see "grace" as distinguished from "law" in this discourse only by closing his eyes to that which is most conspicuously exhibited in it. We know that there is but one way a man can become a child of God, namely by the new birth which is the gift of grace to all who believe in Jesus Christ. We know, too, that, although His own people as a nation "received Him not," yet some individuals did receive Him; and that to "as many as received Him to them GAVE He the power (right or privilege) to become the sons (children) of God, even to them that believe on His Name, who were born . . . of God" (John 1:11-13). It was to those who "received Him," and to whom by grace it was given to become children of God, that the Father's instructions (the Sermon on the Mount) were spoken: and hence that utterance became, and is, the abiding Rock-foundation upon which the members of God's great family are, one and all, to build. This is as plain as words can make it. It follows that they who, for whatever motive and by whatever means, seek to deprive the children of God of the Sermon on the Mount, are striking at the Foundation upon which their all is to be built. Can anything be more serious?

Third. Grace is further displayed in the Sermon on the Mount

in the nature of the motive or inducement offered for the doing of the things commanded therein. For example, our light is to shine in the darkness of this world, not in order that God may see our good works and bless us by making us His children, but that men may see them and glorify our Father Who is in heaven, and who has already made us His children. We are "to do and teach" these commandments, not that we may thereby gain entrance into the Kingdom of heaven, but that (having been brought into it by grace) we may be "called great" therein. We are to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, etc., not in order to gain a place in the family of God, but because, having been freely given that place of highest privilege, we are to be (in all our behaviour) what God has made us. The lesson is precisely that given to the household of God by the apostle Paul in the words: "Be ye, therefore, followers (imitators) of God as beloved children; and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us" (Eph. 5:1,2).

Grace is seen then in the position of eternal dignity and glory into which the Lord Jesus lifts those to whom this message from God the Father was sent. Grace is further seen in the fact that the position of nearness to God known and enjoyed only by the Son Himself is given to guilty rebels freely, without any works on their part. And grace is still further seen in that the commands which the Father here gives to His children afford opportunity to them to gain rich rewards; whereas failure on their part, while it will entail suffering and loss (as all the New Testament teaches), will not involve the forfeiture of their relationship with God.

In view of all this clear truth, what possible reasons can the wit of man devise for setting aside the Sermon on the Mount as "legal," and as having no proper place or part in the dispensation of grace? Is it because it contains commandments? So the editor seems to contend in the article from which I have quoted above. But the Epistles of Paul are full of "the commandments of the Lord," as everyone knows who has read

them. And surely we should all be astonished at any one who would dare assert that it is not in keeping with “grace” for the Father to give commandments to His own children. Would it not be a disgrace to any human father who should fail in that duty? And are we who are, by grace alone, the children of God to refuse every message from Him which demands obedience, and which puts before us the consequences of disobedience? If so, then there are no Scriptures for us, and nothing for us to do in this life but to please ourselves. It is almost unbelievable that anyone would advance such a proposition; yet we have to take notice of the fact that Dr. Scofield, in the article last referred to, argues that the Sermon on the Mount is not for us because it is “couched in the language of authority, rather than in the language of kindly counsel”; and because “nowhere is the phrasing that of good advice, but always imperative requirement.” This certainly implies that our Father in heaven is not permitted to speak to His children in “the language of authority” (though He bids earthly parents thus to command their children and to enforce obedience with the rod), but only in the “language of kindly counsel” and in the phrasing “good advice.” Surely there is no need to discuss such a proposition.

This brings us to the passage by which the editor, both in his “Bible” and his published articles, seeks to support the statement that “the Sermon on the Mount is law and not grace.” That passage is Matthew 6:12,14,15, which reads as follows:

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors . For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Upon this the editor’s note says:

“This is legal ground. Cf. Eph. 4: 32, which is grace. Under law forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us: under grace we are forgiven for Christ’s sake and exhorted to

forgive because we have been forgiven."

And in the article referred to above he says that in the Sermon on the Mount "Every blessing is conditional upon works, not faith."

I have already amply shown that this last statement is directly contrary to the truth. We have, therefore, only to inquire, is Matthew 6:12-15 "legal ground"? and if so does it follow that the entire Sermon on the Mount belongs to another "dispensation"?

In regard to these questions I submit as follows, taking them in reverse order:

t. Whatever view may be taken of the words of Matthew 6:12-15, the main question as to the "dispensational" place of the Sermon on the Mount remains unaffected. For I have shown by the clearest proofs that the message is the Father's message to His own children. Hence if we find anything" legal" in that message we must conclude that it properly belongs there. For the children to reject their Father's commandment because it contains a clause which they choose to regard as "legal," would be a most presumptuous thing.

2. I Maintain, however, that the words of the passage in question are not only consistent with God's grace in making believing sinners His children, but that they tend to emphasize strongly the fact that the Kingdom to which the Sermon on the Mount pertains is that of grace. For it is clear that the conspicuous feature of this day of grace is the forgiveness of sins, which is preached in the Name of Jesus Christ and on the ground of His atoning Sacrifice, to all the world. Hence everyone who enters the Kingdom of God is a forgiven sinner. He has been fully and freely pardoned and justified from all things. Therefore, he is required, and most properly required—seeing that the character of the Kingdom into which God's grace has brought him imperatively demands

it—to forgive others their “debts” or “trespasses” against himself. The passage has nothing whatever to do with the man’s sins, which were all forgiven when he was made a child of God. It relates to a very different matter, that of debts or trespasses; and it is truly an amazing thing that any one who considers himself fitted to comment upon the whole Bible should fail to distinguish between things so widely different in their nature as God’s forgiveness of the repentant sinner and the Father’s forgiveness of the trespasses of His own children.

It is a truth of great practical importance for every child of God to know that if he, who has received by grace the free pardon of all his sins, should refuse to forgive the “trespasses” of others against himself (the greatest of which would be a relatively trifling thing), he will be left now in this present life to the consequences of his own “trespasses” (and does not everyone of us know by experience something of what that means?) with the possibility of future loss besides.

I feel bound, moreover, to enter the most serious objection to the statement that “under the law of the kingdom no one may hope for forgiveness who has not first forgiven.” Even in the dispensation of law God did not deal with men on that basis. One needs but slight knowledge of Scripture to be aware that God ever and always forgave the penitent sinner upon confession and faith alone. THERE NEVER HAS BEEN, IS NOT NOW, NOR EVER WILL BE, BUT ONE BASIS UPON WHICH GOD FORGIVES THE SINNER; and we are bound to protest that it not only assails the foundation truth of Redemption, but also does deep dishonor to the Lord Jesus Christ, to say that in the Kingdom announced and introduced by Himself no one may hope for forgiveness who has not first forgiven. For David lived during the era of the law, yet he is conspicuously the man who knew by experience the blessedness of those “whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered” (Rom. 4: 6,7). The very coats of skin, wherewith God in His pardoning mercy covered

the nakedness of the first pair of sinners, bore witness to the eternal truth that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

The words of Matthew 6:12 are of immense practical value: for if we use the prayer-pattern given by the Lord (not as a form, but as a pattern) praying in our closets "after this manner," the clause "as we forgive our debtors" will cause us to search our hearts in His very presence for any unforgiving or resentful thought ere we can seek or expect to enjoy the forgiveness of our own trespasses.

Near the end of our Lord's ministry—long after the kingdom had been "postponed" according to the editor's theory —He repeated this lesson, saying:

"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11: 24-26).

The editor cannot, consistently with his own teaching, assign these words of the Lord to the category of His "kingdom teachings," for they were spoken but a few days before His death. Hence the same doctrine found in the Sermon on the Mount cannot, even by the editor's own theory, mark it as belonging to the dispensation of law. On what then does the theory rest? Clearly it is entirely destitute of support.

To sum up: there is an important difference between the sinner's sins and the believer's trespasses. The sinner, when he comes to Christ, receives the forgiveness of all his sins through the merit of Christ's atoning Sacrifice, and upon the sole condition of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The believer's trespasses, committed after

he has been forgiven and accepted as a child of God, are forgiven through confession (1 John 1:9), through the intercession of the Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous at God’s right hand (1 John 2:2), and upon the ground of the same Sacrifice. The believer, however, cannot count upon this forgiveness of his trespasses (but on the contrary may expect to suffer the consequences of them) if he refuses or fails to forgive the trespasses of others against himself. It is with this matter that our Lord’s teaching, which we have examined in this chapter, has to do.