

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE PRESENT AGE

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In the extant writings of the Ante Nicene Fathers, there are quotations from all of the books of the New Testament. Of the twenty-six books, Matthew is by far the most frequently cited. Furthermore, the most frequently used portion of Matthew is that portion (chapters 5-7) now called "The Sermon on the Mount." Today, people who have little or no knowledge of the Bible or the contents of the Sermon on the Mount associate it with Jesus and seem to feel that its teaching is the guide for their lives. Most of us have probably had the experience of hearing an unregenerate person say something like the following: "Oh, I don't need to go to church, I believe in living by the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount." Someone has said that if the

proverbial visitor from Mars were to arrive in a characteristic Christian community, having read the Sermon on the Mount en route, he would be bewildered. The gulf between the pattern of the Sermon and the pattern of conventional Christian life is so great that the visitor would suspect he had read the wrong Sermon or visited the wrong community. Yet if he were to express this confusion to the members of the community he would find them bewildered at his bewilderment!¹

While the ethics of Jesus are not exhausted within the confines of the Sermon on the Mount (for example, it does not include His law of Love), nevertheless it is the most concentrated yet comprehensive portion of His ethical teaching. Because of this and because discussion of our Lord's ethics generally converges on the Sermon, this paper will also seek its material at this point. It is not so much the purpose of this paper to analyze the Sermon on the Mount itself as it is to survey the problem of the practical application of its precepts. There seems to be no questioning the fact that the ethics of our Lord as presented in the Sermon on the Mount have wielded a tremendous influence both within and without Christendom.

But how its moral content is to be integrated with the whole of biblical theology and ethics, on the one hand, and correlated with contemporary life, on the other, is a central problem.²

There are some who take the attitude of the famous archbishop of York, Dr. Magee, who once remarked that "a Christian State carrying out in all its relations literally the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount could not exist for a week," to which a Gifford lecturer appended the

comment that "as much could be said with equal truth of a Christian individual." There are others, however, who maintain that the Sermon is the only divinely-forged pattern of national and individual survival. In between these mutually exclusive views there is an array of interpretations all seeking to answer the problem of the application of the Sermon on the Mount.

In view of the fact that H. K. McArthur is able to delineate twelve different interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount, many of them radically differing from the others, one is inclined to agree with the observation that "the Sermon has had to put up with more opposition, distortion, dilution and emasculation than any other writing in the literature of the world."³ Even among those who are in general agreement as to the literal interpretation of Scripture and holding to the dispensational approach there are marked differences of opinion in this matter.

D. J. Pentecost points out that:

The Sermon on the Mount is one of three major discourses spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ in the discharge of His prophetic office while engaged in His ministry on earth. Concerning the Upper Room Discourse and the Olivet Discourse there is little divergence among Bible-believing interpreters as to the period of applicability, the persons addressed, or the principles of action contained in them. There is no such unanimity in the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, even among interpreters who approach Scripture from the same literal and dispensational viewpoint.⁴

In thinking of the age-relationship of the ethical teachings of Jesus, especially as concerns Matthew 5-7, it may be well to consider the remarks of L. D. Huber with respect to its being called a "Sermon."

What is a sermon anyway? (he asks). . . Some note style, some content, some the situation, some the people involved; but all recognize that basically a sermon seeks in some way to influence conduct. Although the Sermon on the Mount hasn't always been called a sermon, its opening verse seems to suggest such a title; and Augustine so terms Matthew 5-7 in his Latin commentary . . . Actually, little is known of the circumstances surrounding Matthew 5-7, the setting of the sermon. Could it be that this material has been called a sermon chiefly because of its intent to influence conduct?⁵

Then he asks:

To what extent does the Sermon attempt to influence conduct? The conduct of whom is another question of importance. Here the student meets a variety of views.⁶

It is the second of these two questions (i.e., the conduct of whom?) that is the special concern of this paper. Is its primary aim at the conduct of the Millennial citizens? Is it

rather pointed at its original auditors? Does it find its fulfillment in the Great Tribulation? Or is its teaching directed to the disciples in this Church age? The thesis of this paper is that there is a definite and intimate relation between the ethical teachings of Jesus and the present age.

It may be conceded at the outset that this view does not appear to be the most popular in dispensational circles. James Rand, for example, in an article entitled "Problems in Literal Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount," expresses surprise that Bible scholars seem to shrink from the real problems in the Sermon (i.e., those having to do with its literal interpretation with regard to the Millennium). He is disturbed because those who have written exegetical studies of Matthew 5-7 have turned "instead to analyses of the sermon which stress the application of its spiritual principles to believers of this age." He adds:

Such attempts while productive of great spiritual blessing do not meet the problems of the literal interpretation of this portion of God's Word to Israel and the Messianic kingdom. Indeed some decry such as exclusive interpretation, maintaining that it must be applied not only to Israel but also to the church. Even such a one as A. C. Gaebelain takes such a stand. He assails as a false interpretation "that one, which makes the sermon on the mount exclusively Jewish."⁷

Rand continues:

Such statements are caused by evident confusion in the mind of the writer of the basic hermeneutical difference between interpretation and application. To make application of the words of Scripture is to take the teaching which is developed from a normal, literal interpretation of the words and to derive from this literal interpretation a practical or spiritual application which may be put to use in the life of the interpreter or in the lives of those to whom he will divulge the application he has discovered. To illustrate, consider the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites. The interpretation is that this is a fact of history. An application is that it speaks of our redemption by the power of God. It is axiomatic that there can be only one interpretation but many applications.⁸

But Rand's illustration does not help with the problem at hand for the Sermon on the Mount is not "a fact of history" in the same sense as the crossing of the Red Sea. The Sermon involves teaching which is to be understood and acted upon by men. The interpretation and application of it is much more closely related than in the case of his illustration.

The plan of this paper is to suggest that the ethical teachings of Jesus are for the present age: (1) because they cannot be restricted to the Millennium; (2) because they are not restricted to the days of the "first advent" or to the days of the "great tribulation;" (3) because there are good reasons for holding that such is the case; (4) because they are "supradispensational."

I. THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE FOR THE PRESENT AGE BECAUSE THEY CANNOT BE RESTRICTED TO THE MILLENNIUM.

The most commonly held opinion among dispensationalists is that the people chiefly concerned in the Sermon on the Mount are those who will be the citizens of the future mediatorial kingdom which is to be established in the earth. The clear-cut position may be seen from the following representative statements.

. . . . The Sermon on the Mount has . . . application . . . literally to the kingdom. In this sense it gives the divine constitution for the righteous government of the earth. Whenever the kingdom of heaven is established on earth it will be according to that constitution.⁹

. . . . It was delivered at the time in our Lord's ministry when He was presenting the Kingdom promised of old It is the proclamation of the constitution of that Kingdom, and applies in a particular sense to the government as it will be when Christ returns to reign.¹⁰

The Bible provides three complete and wholly independent rules for human conduct--one for the past age . . . which is known as the Mosaic Law and is crystallized in the Decalogue; one for the future age of the kingdom which is crystallized in the Sermon on the Mount; and one for the present age which appears in the Gospel by John, the Acts, and the Epistles of the New Testament.¹¹

If, then, the Sermon on the Mount be neither the way of life for the sinner, nor the rule of life for the believer, what is it? The answer is that the Sermon on the Mount is the code of laws of the Kingdom of Heaven, which Kingdom, though for the time being rejected and held in abeyance, will one day be set up on this earth In the Sermon on the Mount we have this King, Jehovah-Jesus, formally offering the Kingdom to Israel in His own person. This offer is made in Galilee, for it had been offered through John the Baptist in Judea and rejected. The Anointed King in this great discourse plainly sets forth the nature of the proposed Kingdom and the laws by which He will govern the earth when He re-establishes and occupies the throne of David.¹²

. . . . The Sermon on the Mount is teaching concerning the Kingdom, the magna charta of the Kingdom and all its principles. Such a kingdom in the earth, with subjects who have all the characteristics of the royal requirements laid down in this discourse will yet be. If Israel had accepted the King it would then have come with a righteous nation as a center, but Christendom is not that kingdom. In this wonderful discourse the Lord speaks as the King and as the Lawgiver, who expounds the law which is to rule His Kingdom.¹³

Parenthetically, it should be noted that most of these writers concede that there is a "secondary application" of the Sermon to the church; however, none of them seem to develop this.

The theory that the Sermon represents the "constitution of the future millennial Kingdom" will not stand under examination. In the first place, it lacks proof. It seems to be built chiefly on the circumstantial ground that Jesus was addressing Jews who were anticipating the Kingdom and that this discourse is found in a context which relates the genuine "offer" of the Messianic Kingdom. While this might be sufficient to establish the theory if there were no evidence to the contrary, an examination of the Sermon itself seems sufficient, on internal evidence alone, to show that the theory cannot be true.

The age which is characterized by the content of the Sermon does not fit the concept of righteousness, blessing, and peace which the Scriptures give of the Millennium. As one dispensational writer puts it:

. . . . It is difficult to conceive how the sermon on the mount can be intended to apply to the Millennial earthly Kingdom promised to Israel. Persecution for righteousness' sake is hardly likely to take place then. That will not be a period when men will "reproach" and "persecute" the saints, and say all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake. Nor is it likely that conditions at that time will render necessary the command, "Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Nor again can it be imagined that there will be false prophets going about in sheep's clothing, though actually in the character of ravening wolves (Matt. 7:15). Compare, on the other hand, Paul's warning to the elders of the church at Ephesus concerning such men (Acts 28:29). Again, to those who are reproached and persecuted for Christ's sake the Lord promises a "reward in heaven" (5:11, 12). Rewards in heaven do not appertain to Israel's Millennial condition.¹⁴

Another team of dispensational writers, C. F. Hogg and J. B. Watson, summarize the characteristics of the age reflected in the Sermon as follows:

It is sometimes contended that the Sermon on the Mount is to be in force during the Millennial Reign of Christ. But the characteristic of the Millennial Age is that therein righteousness will be maintained by adequate power, whereas today these are in opposite camps. In this age there are two Kingdoms--"the power of darkness" and "the Kingdom of the Son of God's love." In that age there will be but one, for then "the Kingdoms of the world" will have become "the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ" (Col. 1:13; Rev. 11:15).

It is right, then, to ask what may be gathered from the Sermon itself as to the character of the age for which it is intended. Let us see.

Evil is dominant--for those addressed are to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Strife is prevalent--for they are to be peacemakers.

Corruption is widespread--for they are to act as salt for the preservation of society.

Moral darkness covers the people--for they are to be light to the world.

Mammon competes with God for the allegiance of men--for they are warned that it is not possible to serve both.

Theft, adultery and divorce are excused--for they are warned against the thoughts that breed such evils.

Ambition, jealousy and pride rule--for they are told to be poor in spirit.

Hypocrites gain a reputation for holiness, and unrighteousness triumphs--for they may expect to be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Wrongs are done without hope of redress--for they are to cultivate the spirit of forgiveness.

Christ is hated--for they are persecuted for His sake.

The Devil is free--for they are told to pray that they fall not under his power.

The Lord is absent--for they are fasting.

The "world-rulers of this darkness" are in control; the Kingdom of God is not yet--for they are to pray, "Thy Kingdom come."

They are a people with heavenly hopes--for they are to look for their "reward in heaven."

The age of which the Lord spoke, and the age of His Millennial Reign, could not be set in sharper contrast, nor can we fail to recognize in it the characteristics of our own time.¹⁵

In the light of evidence such as this it is understandable that D. J. Pentecost, of Dallas Seminary, also rejects the millennial application of the Sermon's contents. He writes:

It is our conclusion that the presence of evil and evil men, the existence of poverty, famine, hunger, and need, are all contrary to the predictions made in the Old Testament concerning the character of the kingdom. Un-saved will not enter the millennium to run rampant against the righteous (Jer. 25:31-33; Ezek. 36:22-29; Matt. 25:31-46). We thus conclude that the Sermon on the Mount cannot be made to apply to conditions on the earth after the establishment of the kingdom.¹⁶

The certainty of the millennial-mediatorial kingdom is not dependent upon the "futuraity" of the teachings in the Sermon. In fact, it would seem that dispensational lines would be easier to defend, have fewer inconsistencies, and might make more converts if this untenable position would be abandoned.

II. THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE FOR THE PRESENT AGE BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT RESTRICTED TO THE DAYS OF THE FIRST ADVENT OR TO THE DAYS OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION.

Though some dispensational Bible scholars make the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to be pre-millennial in its contents, some of them still prefer to see no direct application to the present age. While recognizing that they cannot be millennial they are still determined to restrict its application to Israel and Israel's earthly kingdom but classify its contents as "the requirements for entrance into the Kingdom."

Rand, who still holds the "millennial-kingdom-view" of the Sermon, also applies it to the "entrance-requirement" idea. He says:

Not only does the sermon contain rules for living in the kingdom, but also it contains requirements or standards for entrance into the Kingdom....¹⁷

Pentecost seems to give the clearest delineation of this more restricted viewpoint:

While we are in total agreement with the interpretation that the Lord at His first advent offered a kingdom to Israel which they rejected and was consequently postponed, we feel that this Sermon on the Mount is to be connected with the offer of the kingdom rather than with the description of the kingdom or the kingdom age itself.

. . . . Our study has shown us that in its primary interpretation the Sermon on the Mount is directly applicable to those of our Lord's own day who by their profession in John's baptism were anticipating the coming of the King and the kingdom. Since Israel rejected the offered King and His kingdom, the same message will be directly applicable, again, when the same "gospel of the kingdom" is proclaimed once more to herald the approach of the King and His kingdom prior to the second advent.

. . . . it was spoken to those who were anticipating the kingdom to show them that that which Christ offered to them was actually what the Old Testament had promised them, that righteousness was the divine requirement for entrance into the kingdom, not the righteousness of the Pharisees, but the true righteousness according to correct interpretation of the law, and that those who would were invited to enter that kingdom. While presenting a secondary application to us, it is primarily applicable in its interpretation to the nation Israel as they anticipate their King.¹⁸

The answer to this restricted "kingdom-anticipation" view would seem to be at least fourfold. In the first place there is the matter of silence. The Scripture has nothing to say about any such restriction in regard to people or in regard to time; i.e., that the sermon is limited to Israel, on the one hand, or is confined to the period immediately prior to the kingdom's appearance, on the other.

Second, there is the matter of ability. If it is difficult to conceive of these teachings

being fulfilled in the life of a regenerate person empowered by the indwelling Spirit of God, how could the unregenerate Jew ever hope to manifest such righteousness in his own strength in order to qualify for entrance to the Kingdom? And, moreover, how would he accomplish these requirements in a period of time when the Holy Spirit would not be present as He is during this age? This would be sheer legalism or works and could result in nothing but hopelessness and despair on the part of the auditors.

Third, there is the matter of celestial reward. Such a viewpoint still leaves unexplained how the sermon can be restricted to Jews when it speaks of a great "reward in heaven." Most dispensationalists see the promises to Israel as linked to "the Land," in connection with the coming kingdom, and heavenly blessings as accruing to the church.

In the fourth place there is the matter of hiatus. If all this ethical teaching of our Lord is restricted in application to the time of Christ's earthly ministry, or is transferred to the last half of the 70th week of Daniel, it would leave the church without an extensive statement of ethical principles from His lips. In closing this section an appropriate comment from Ironside would seem to be in place:

It is not for us to relegate all this to the Jewish remnant in the last days or to disciples before the cross, though fully applicable to both. But we discern here "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tim. 6:3) which we dare not refuse to obey, lest we be proved to be such as are described in the following verse (I Tim. 6:4): "He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings." We need to remember that, though a heavenly people, we have earthly responsibilities, and these are defined for us in this greatest of all sermons having to do with human conduct.¹⁹

III. THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE FOR THE PRESENT AGE BECAUSE THERE ARE POSITIVE REASONS FOR HOLDING THAT SUCH IS THE CASE.

(1) It is the natural way to take the Sermon. This is the obvious inference one receives from the whole tenor of the Lord's teaching throughout the three chapters as well as of His ethical teaching elsewhere. It is also suggested by the way in which He addresses His disciples. On the one hand He is very personal and intimate, addressing with the second person singular; on the other hand He uses the second person plural, and not infrequently He uses the universal "whosoever." But He never restricts His remarks in the Sermon to Israel or the nation of the Jews as such!

(2) The ethics are never formally withdrawn nor is there any suggestion that they should ever be held in abeyance. This is not only true as far as the content of the Sermon on the Mount is concerned, but it is also true for the whole Gospel of Matthew and for ethical teaching throughout the rest of the New Testament.

(3) The example and precept of our Lord furnishes another reason for holding on to His

teaching in this realm. Hogg and Watson have a penetrating observation in this connection.

Towards the close of His ministry the Lord spoke "to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, The Scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not" (Mt. 23:1-3). It is not conceivable that the Lord should come under His own condemnation! Rather His peculiar glory is this, a glory not shared by any other teacher the world has ever known, that He was Himself the embodiment of the things He taught. In a larger than the immediate sense of the word, the Evangelists record "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). The order is significant. He lived the Sermon for thirty years before He preached it.

On one occasion when the Jews asked Him, "Who art Thou?" the Lord replied, "Even that which I have also spoken unto you from the beginning." His last words to the world again identify Himself with His teaching, "He that rejecteth Me, and . . . receiveth not My sayings, . . . the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (Jn. 8:25; 12:48). The Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's self-portraiture; not of His physical appearance, indeed, but of His character, and, therefore, of the character the attainment of which is to be the ambition of His people. It is what He was, and hence is what we ought to be. The subjects of the Kingdom are to reflect the character of the King.

Long afterwards Peter wrote to persons who had become obedient to the faith in distant lands: "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow His steps" (I Pet. 2:21). words which may be paraphrased, "setting a copy line for you to follow," since that is the literal meaning of hupogrammatos, which appears here only in the New Testament. Those who enter His Kingdom are to keep to the tracks He made, or, as John expresses it, "to walk even as He walked," and like the Thessalonians, are to become "imitators . . . of the Lord." This pattern, this "copy line", is most clearly discernible in the Sermon on the Mount.²⁰

(4) The Lord's encouragement in the promise of reward and His warnings to heed "these commandments" and "sayings," (especially his warning against breaking the least of them and teaching others to do the same), should give anyone great pause before he presumes to break, or even ignore these words of our Lord.

(5) The language of the great commission. The Lord had given the teachings, injunctions, yes, "commands" of the Sermon on the Mount to the twelve disciples. In the closing verses of Matthew the disciples are commissioned to make other disciples of all nations. They are to baptize these disciples and they are to teach them to observe all the things which Jesus had commanded them.

The responsibility did not stop with evangelization; it included baptism and then continu-

ous instruction in and continuous keeping of all the will of God. (Note present tense of the participle didaskontes and the present tense of the infinitive tērein which underline the prominence and the persistence that this aspect of the commission was to have.) There was to be no "selection" of things to be taught and observed. The "all things" is clear and compulsory. Furthermore, as though He anticipated that some would later seek to explain away the abiding force of His words, He adds a phrase which indicates that the commission in its completeness is to be in force for this entire dispensation: "Lo I am with you alway even unto the end of the age." Now the consummation of the age has not yet taken place and the Lord has plainly indicated that this commission and His presence to help carry it out is in continuous force "all the days" till the present age has run its course.

It should be kept clearly in mind that the incentive for "observing all things whatsoever He has commanded" is not that by doing so one becomes a disciple, or earns salvation, or wins eternal life, for this is the "free gift of God . . . through Jesus Christ our Lord." The motivation force or incentive is the desire (wrought in the Christian by the Holy Spirit) "to walk even as He walked" (I Jn. 2:6), to "walk and to please God" (I Thess. 4:1). This is the test of our love and the condition of His, even as the Lord said, "he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him (Jn. 14:21)" . . . "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (Jn. 15:10). "For this is the love of God," says John, "that we keep His commandments" (I Jn. 5:3).

Hogg and Watson's comment at this point is:

If not in the Sermon on the Mount, and kindred passages, where are these "commandments" to be found? Assuredly not exclusively in the Discourses in the Upper Room. The Gospels must be taken as complementary one of the other. (Important in this connection are the words of Dr. H. C. G. Moule in his book Jesus and the Resurrection, p. 17, "I cannot help seeing . . . the many details in which St. John in his Gospel, takes for granted the main Evangelic narrative, and passingly and without anxiety, uses his readers' knowledge of it." . . .) It would be more than precarious to exclude from the sayings recorded in one Gospel all reference to sayings recorded in another, and impossible to justify attaching a different meaning to the identical phrase "all things" in the two passages, Matt. 28:20 and John 15:15, "ye are My friends if ye do the things which I command you . . . all things that I heard from My Father I have made known unto you," and, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I command you." The words are the words of the Father, the voice is the voice of the Shepherd; His sheep hear it and they follow Him" (Jn. 10:27).²¹

(6) The practice of the apostolic church indicates that they understood the force of the "great commission" in the manner indicated above. The apostles made and baptized disciples and followed this with the continuous instruction that had been enjoined by the Lord. The new disciples persisted continuously in the teaching of the apostles and thus were keeping all things which Jesus had commanded (cf. Acts 2:41, 42). All this occurred after the birth of the Church and in the age of grace. The Apostle Paul (not one of the twelve), in Acts 20:27, reminded the Ephesian elders that he had not shunned to declare unto them "all the counsel of God."

(7) This attitude carried right on, without a break, into the period of the Ante Nicene Fathers. The view of the earliest Church Fathers, as reflected in their quotations and use of the New Testament, was that the Sermon on the Mount and the ethical teachings of Jesus were to be applied. They did not have to defend such usage. There was no question in their minds but that the words of the Lord were to be received and acted upon. As mentioned earlier in this paper, Matthew was the Gospel most frequently quoted; and the most frequently used part of Matthew was the portion covering what is now called the Sermon on the Mount.

(8) The teaching of Paul gives additional support for applying Jesus' ethical teaching to this present age. The Epistles of Paul with their doctrines (whether theological or practical) in no wise contradict the teachings of the Savior. There is no difference between the soteriology of Paul and Jesus as imagined by the liberals; nor is there a difference in the ethics of either as imagined by some dispensationalists. Paul does not teach a different way of salvation. He does not teach a reduced code of behavior. As a matter of fact, in his last epistle, he calls attention to the inspiration and profitableness of all Scripture for the purpose of furnishing unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16, 17). In Titus 1:1 he calls attention to "the faith of God's elect and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness." In I Tim. 1:4 he would divert his reader from the things which minister questions and center his attention on "godly edifying which is in faith." The most direct passage in which the apostle specifically enjoins adherence to the ethical teachings of our Lord seems to be I Tim. 6:3, 4. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words. . . ."

That the ethics of Paul are in agreement with the ethics of Jesus may be seen by the fact that almost every admonition of the Sermon on the Mount is repeated in one form or another in the Epistles. (See Hogg and Watson's little book for a chapter devoted to the display of these striking parallels.)

IV. THE ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF JESUS ARE FOR PRESENT AGE BECAUSE THEY ARE SUPRADISPENSATIONAL.

The synoptic gospels record the statement of Jesus that heaven and earth would pass away but that His words would not (ou mē, emphatic double negative) pass away. It would seem that His words rise above dispensational boundaries. He tells men that the words which He spake would form the basis for their judgment. This is true not only with respect to His words about His own person, and His words about prophetic truths; it is also true with regard

to His words about ethics. Saving and moral truths rise above, bridge across and outlast dispensational divisions. This is true of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Before the birth of the Church, it was meant for the twelve who heard it during the time when the Kingdom was being proffered; after the day of Pentecost, it was meant for the early Church which received it in the apostolic teaching; and, later, it was still meant for the Church when she obtained it in a permanently recorded form when the inspired Gospel of Matthew was given to her. No doubt the Sermon will have application in the future, after the rapture of the Church, when the saints of the Tribulation period will apply its teaching to themselves.

It may be claimed of the Sermon on the Mount that it is intended for the guidance of regenerate persons in an unregenerate world. And because the gifts and empowerment of the Gospel are his who trusts and serves His Lord, these words of Christ stand. Their revelation has never been withdrawn: they set forth the true standard of Christian morality. They describe the conduct produced by the life of Christ in His believing people: they abide in full moral applicability to us: they are superdispensational and reveal the moral laws upon which the judgments of the Day of Christ are founded. Thus they should be studied and taken to heart by the follower of Christ who would learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart.²²

DOCUMENTATION

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20. Hogg and Watson, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
21. Hogg and Watson, op. cit., pp. 23-24.
22. Hogg and Watson, op. cit., from the jacket of the book.