

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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Concerning the overall structure of the first Gospel, nothing close to scholarly unanimity has yet been achieved. At one time, B. W. Bacon's Pentateuchal theory held the assent of many.¹ But it has, in the last two decades or so, suffered much at the hands of determined critics.² More recently, J. D. Kingsbury has set forth his reasons for thinking that the first Gospel should be divided into three major sections: 1:1-4:16, the person of Jesus Messiah; 4:17-16:20, the proclamation of Jesus Messiah; 16:21-28:20, the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Messiah—and there are those who agree with him.³ Telling criticisms, however, have already been leveled against this analysis,⁴ and Kingsbury's work cannot be justly said to have

¹ B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930). In this Bacon argued that a Greek fragment dated by Rendell Harris to the second century referred to our first Gospel in this manner: "Matthew curbs the audacity of the Jews, checking them in five books as it were with bridles. . . ." For discussion, see M. S. Enslin, "The Five Books of Matthew: Bacon on the Gospel of Matthew," *HTR* 24 (1931) 67-97. For scholars in general agreement with Bacon's division of Matthew into five books, see J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 3 n. 13.

² See esp. W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964) 14-25; Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 4-7; and Marianne Meye Thompson, "The Structure of Matthew: An Examination of Two Approaches," in *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 12 (1982) 195-238. This last supplies a helpful introduction and evaluation of several of the more important analyses of Matthew's structure.

³ Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 7-39; see also E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956) 1, 64, 264; E. Krentz, "The Extent of Matthew's Prologue," *JBL* 83 (1964) 409-14; and T. B. Slater, "Notes on Matthew's Structure," *JBL* 99 (1980) 436.

⁴ E.g., with regard to Kingsbury's attempt to hold together 1:1-2:23 and 3:1-4:16, J. P. Meier has written: "Kingsbury puts too much weight in his argument on the weak and ambiguous particle *de* in 3:1. . . . While it can act as a connective, it can just as easily have a disjunctive force. The context is what decides. And the context here is a jump of about thirty years, the introduction of a new character (the Baptist is not included in Matthew's infancy narrative, as opposed to Luke's), and a new eschatological event introduced solemnly by the unique phrase 'now in those days.' Moreover, in 3:2, Matthew shows his special theological view by placing John the Baptist in parallel position to Jesus. He proclaims word-for-word what Jesus will proclaim in 4:17 (supposedly across the great structural divide): 'Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has

begotten a new consensus. Perhaps this should not surprise. Perhaps this state of affairs, that is, the division of critical opinion, will continue indefinitely. How so? Although the Sermon on the Mount and the four other major Matthean discourses (Matthew 10, 13, 18, 24–25)⁵ manifestly reflect an artistic and well-ordered mind, it is not at all evident that the Gospel as a whole still hides some yet-to-be-found structural key or principle. The seeming “architectonic grandeur”⁶ of Matthew’s twenty-eight chapters may simply be an erroneous impression produced by the carefully constructed individual building blocks. In other words, the parts may exhibit something the whole does not. On this view, Matthew would simply follow a rough chronological sequence—birth, baptism, ministry in Galilee, journey to Jerusalem, passion, resurrection—a sequence into which the five long and meticulously crafted sections of teaching material have been regularly inserted.⁷ Yet whether or not this supposition can be persuasively defended need not be established for the purposes of this essay. Herein I should like instead to undertake a more modest, manageable task: What is the structure of one particular portion of Matthew, namely, chaps. 5–7, the Sermon on the Mount?

I. Günther Bornkamm’s Theory

Just as there is no agreement about the overarching scheme of Matthew, so is there none with regard to the structure of the Sermon on the Mount.⁸

drawn near. I would therefore hold that 3:1 marks the end of the prologue and the beginning of the body of the gospel” (*The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* [Theological Inquiries; New York: Paulist, 1979] 56 n. 21). To these criticisms the following may be added. (1) One should keep in mind the question of sources. Although chaps. 3 and 4 come from Mark and Q, chaps. 1 and 2 come from a different source. Now the switching of sources could not but have encouraged Matthew to think of 1–2 and 3–4 as distinct sections; and in confirmation of this he has done little more than place 1–2 and 3–4 side by side—no close seam has been sewn, no continuity of theme emphasized. (2) Kingsbury makes much of the words common to 4:17 and 16:21, namely, ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς. One hesitates, however, to put the required weight on a phrase that hardly calls attention to itself and that has a partial parallel (ἀπὸ τότε) in 26:16. And 4:17 and 16:21 are not the only places where we read that Jesus “began” to do something (see 11:7 and 20).

⁵ Matthew 23 is probably not to be reckoned as one of the major Matthean discourses; it is instead the conclusion of the long narrative section, 19:1–23:39. See Meye Thompson, “Structure.”

⁶ To use the words of Davies (*Setting*, 14).

⁷ Supportive of this estimate is Akira Ogawa, *L’histoire de Jésus chez Matthieu: La signification de l’histoire pour la théologie matthéenne* (Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 23, Theologie 116; Frankfurt a/M: Lang, 1979) 17–21. Ogawa shows how greatly Matthew’s structure is simply a reproduction of Mark’s structure.

⁸ According to A. Farrer, the order of the Sermon on the Mount corresponds to the beatitudes: 5:17–48 is a commentary on 5:8–9; 6:1–18 is a commentary on 5:4, 6; and 6:19–7:27 is a commentary on 5:3, 5 (*St. Matthew and St. Mark* [2d ed.; Westminster: Dacre, 1966]). According to Davies, 5:17–7:12 consists of three sections, 5:17–48; 6:1–18; and 6:19–7:12, and

More than one writer, however, has argued that the Lord’s Prayer (6:9–13) is in some sense the heart of Matthew 5–7 and that in it are to be found the organizing principles for a significant part of the evangelist’s great sermon.⁹ G. Bornkamm in particular has made out a detailed case for this, and, before putting forth for consideration a different analysis, his conclusions invite scrutiny, especially as they have been endorsed by R. Guelich’s important commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁰

these correlate with the three pillars of Simeon the Just: the law, the (Temple) service, and “deeds of loving-kindness” (*m. Abot* 1.2) (*Setting*, 304–8). According to J. Jeremias, after the introduction (5:3–19) and a thematic sentence (5:20), 5:21–48 treats of the controversy between Jesus and the theologians concerning the interpretation of scripture; 6:1–18 treats of the controversy with the righteousness of the Pharisees; and 6:19–7:27 develops the new righteousness of the disciples of Jesus (*The Sermon on the Mount* [FBBS; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963] 22–23). See also J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX* (AB 28; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1981) 628–29. He offers a refinement. Agreeing in general with Jeremias, Fitzmyer divides 5:3–20 into (1) Exordium (5:3–12, 13–16) and (2) Proposition (5:17–20). According to O. Hanssen, the first major section of the Sermon on the Mount, 5:21–6:18, has to do with Christianity and Judaism (5:21–48, the new relationship to one’s neighbor; 6:1–18, the new relationship to God) while the second major section, 6:19–7:12, concerns Christianity and the Gentile world (6:19–34, the new relationship to God; 7:1–12, the new relationship to one’s neighbor) (“Zum Verständnis des Bergpredigt,” in *Der Ruf Jesu und die Antwort der Gemeinde* [ed. E. Lohse; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970] 94–111). According to C. Burchard, the sermon is to be divided thus: (I) Introduction (5:3–16); (II) Body of the Sermon (5:17–7:12), consisting of (A) The will of God (5:17–48) and (B) Guidelines for fulfillment (6:1–18 + 6:19–7:12); and (III) Conclusion (7:13–27) (“The Theme of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Essays on the Love Commandment* [ed. R. H. Fuller; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978]). N. J. McEleneay offers this structural analysis: (1) Introduction (4:23–5:2); (2) The Beatitudes (5:3–12); (3) Salt and Light (5:13–16); (4) The Principles of Christian Action (5:17–7:12), these being two and found in 5:17–19 and 5:20, the former introducing 5:21–48, the second 6:1–7:12; (5) Warnings (7:13–27); (6) Conclusion (7:28–29) (“The Principles of the Sermon on the Mount,” *CBQ* 41 [1979] 552–70). J. Lambrecht puts forth this proposal: 5:1–2 is the Narrative beginning; 5:3–7:27 the Sermon proper; and 7:28–29 the Narrative ending. The Sermon proper has three sections: 5:3–16 (prologue); 5:17–7:12 (middle part); and 7:13–27 (epilogue). The middle part consists of 5:17–48 (the antitheses), 6:1–18 (not before men), and 6:19–7:12 (unconcern and commitment) (*The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation* [Good News Studies 14; Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1985] 26–29). For additional analyses, see J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes: Tome I, Le Problème Littéraire* (2d ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1969) 175–84. Dupont himself (p. 181) favors this outline: Exordium: Beatitudes (5:3–12); (I) Perfect justice—general directions (5:17, 20) followed by specific illustrations (5:21–48); (II) Good works—general statement (6:1) followed by three illustrations (6:2–4, 5–6, 16–18); (III) Three admonitions: (1) Do not judge (7:1–2); illustrations (7:3–5); (2) Beware of false prophets (7:15); illustrations (7:16–20); (3) Put profession into practice (7:21); illustrations (7:24–27).

⁹ See W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (THKNT 1; 3d ed.; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1972) 204–6; E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 202; and the works cited in the next note.

¹⁰ G. Bornkamm, “Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt,” *NTS* 24 (1978) 419–32; R. A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 323–25. For qualified acceptance of Bornkamm’s proposal, see Lambrecht, *Sermon*, 155–64.

In Bornkamm's judgment, 6:9–13, the Lord's Prayer, supplies the clue to the ordering of 6:19–7:12, for the latter is a sort of continuation of the former. Thus, 6:19–24 (on treasure in heaven, on the sound eye, and on God and mammon) emphasizes honoring God and putting him first, which corresponds to the three "Thou" petitions of the *Pater Noster*: "Hallowed be Thy name," "Thy kingdom come," "Thy will be done." Furthermore, the contrast between "treasure in heaven" and "treasure on earth" (6:19, 20) may be intended to recall 6:10c, "on earth as it is in heaven." As for 6:25–34, which focuses on the day-to-day material needs of the disciples, it matches 6:11, the petition for bread, while 7:1–5, a paragraph on judging others, lines up well with the prayer for forgiveness, 6:12. Finally, Bornkamm interprets the enigmatic 7:6 ("Do not give to dogs what is holy . . .") in terms of apostasy and thereby connects it with the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, the request for deliverance from the evil one, 6:13. But what then of 7:7–11 ("Ask and it will be given you . . .")? This section nicely follows 6:19–7:6 because with 7:6 the commentary on the Lord's Prayer is concluded, and this naturally leads to a unit of promises about God's hearing his children's prayers.

Although I have only displayed the bare bones of Bornkamm's thesis, the foregoing paragraph is of itself sufficient to raise a number of awkward questions. To begin with, is it not strange that while there is allegedly a one-to-one correspondence between the three individual "we" petitions and three following units, 6:25–34; 7:1–5; 7:6, this is not true of the three "Thou" petitions? 6:25–34 is said to complement 6:11; 7:1–5 to complement 6:12; and 7:6 to complement 6:13. But 6:19–21 does not line up with 6:9c; 6:22–23 does not line up with 6:10a; and 6:24 does not line up with 6:10b. Rather, the "Thou" petitions are simply correlated quite generally with the three units in 6:19–23; that is, 6:9c–10b and the sayings on treasure, the sound eye, and mammon all have to do with honoring God and with making his will the great priority. Yet if Bornkamm were correct, should not 6:9c, 10a, and 10b be, like 6:11, 12, and 13, sequentially correlated with three subsequent paragraphs?

There is an additional difficulty with regard to Bornkamm's suggestion about 6:9c–10 and its supposed connection with 6:19–24. The first three petitions of the Our Father are usually thought of as pertaining to eschatology; and, according to most modern commentators, "Hallowed be Thy name," "Thy kingdom come," and "Thy will be done" are in essence one petition: each looks to—and prays for—the *telos* of history, the fitting culmination of God's work.¹¹ But if this be the case—and there is no good reason to doubt that it is¹²—a question mark should be placed against any

¹¹ See esp. A. Vögtle, "Der 'eschatologische' Bezug der Wir-Bitten des Vaterunsers," in *Jesus und Paulus* (ed. E. E. Ellis and E. Grässer; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975) 344–62.

¹² R. H. Gundry has, admittedly, argued that, since the doing of God's will in Matthew elsewhere applies to the present (see esp. 7:21 and 26:42), the eschatological interpretation is incorrect, at least as regards the Matthean viewpoint (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary*

correlation between 6:9c–10b on the one hand and 6:19–24 on the other, for it cannot be said of the latter that it has much to do with the coming of God's eschatological kingdom.

A third criticism of Bornkamm's proposal involves his reading of 7:6. "Do not give what is holy to dogs" and "Do not cast your pearls before swine" refer, in his view, to a situation in which apostasy is a sore temptation. Now the possibility of this interpretation cannot, admittedly, be dismissed out of hand. Nonetheless, this is only because the first evangelist has not been very helpful in making plain what he took 6:7 to mean. In addition, one suspects that Bornkamm's exegesis is more a reading in than a reading out. If he were not already set on finding some link between 6:13 and 7:6, the latter would not likely be seen as referring to apostasy. This is particularly true as 7:6 can be rendered intelligible by considering its more immediate context—to wit: having warned his readers about judging others, Matthew now adds a verse in order to counteract what he foresees might be an extreme interpretation: if there must not be too much severity (7:1–5), there must at the same time not be too much laxity (7:6).¹³

The last point to be raised with reference to Bornkamm's theory is this: it implausibly separates 6:19–24 from 6:25–34. As the vast majority of exegetes have recognized, a thematic thread runs through the sayings about treasure, the sound eye, and mammon (6:19–24) and continues on into the verses on care and anxiety (6:25–34). If one is storing up treasure in heaven, being generous, and serving God rather than mammon, how are life's necessities—food, drink, and clothing—to be obtained? How is it possible not to worry? These questions, raised by 6:19–24, are answered by 6:25–34. Yet, in Bornkamm's scheme, 6:25–34 belongs not with what goes before it but with what comes after, 7:1–5 + 7:6; for 6:25–7:6 is construed as the commentary on the three "we" petitions. Surely this breaking up of 6:19–34, this separation of what naturally goes together, does not recommend itself.

The four points just made are sufficient to render implausible Bornkamm's hypothesis that the Lord's Prayer contains the structural key to

and *Theological Art* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 106). Further, since 6:10b–c concerns the present, so must 6:9c–10a. Thus, none of the "Thou" petitions looks forward to the future. Against this, three points may be made: (1) Gundry does not give sufficient force to the aorists, which imply a one-time act, an *Einmaligkeit* as the Germans would put it. (2) The eschatological interpretation and that of Gundry are not necessarily antagonistic; indeed, the former entails the latter. For if one sincerely prays for the realization of certain eschatological hopes, the present cannot but be implicated: one must live in accordance with that future ideal for which one prays and prepare oneself and others for it. (3) We cannot believe that Matthew was ignorant of the original eschatological thrust of the Lord's Prayer, particularly since he must have known the Jewish parallels, such as the familiar line from the *Kaddish*—"May he let his kingdom rule in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon."

¹³ See Davies, *Setting*, 392.

6:19–7:11. But, given this conclusion, how does one explain the apparent links between 6:11 and 6:25–34 and between 6:12 and 7:1–5 (not disputed above)? They are, without hesitation, to be treated as happenstance, the fruit of coincidence. One of the most difficult problems facing NT scholars is that of deciding when a seeming allusion is a real allusion, a possible parallel a true parallel. Correlations are often less than they seem to be. Telling in this regard is the fact that another scholar, J. C. Fenton, has uncovered a set of verbal and thematic connections not between the Lord's Prayer and 6:19–7:11 but between the Lord's Prayer and 6:25–34: kingdom (6:10, 33), God's will/God's righteousness (6:11, 25, 31), today (6:11, 34), tomorrow (6:10, 34).¹⁴ One can make additions to this list: Father in heaven/heavenly Father (6:9, 26), bread/eat (6:11, 25, 31), today—tomorrow (6:11, 30), the evil one/evil (6:13, 34). What is thereby proved? Is Bornkamm wrong and Fenton right? Is the Lord's Prayer the key not to 6:19–7:11 but to 6:25–34? Hardly. The true inference is this: similarities between two texts are not always of weighty consequence.¹⁵

Let us take another example. What of the parallels—heretofore unnoticed, I presume—between the Lord's Prayer and Matt 4:1–11, the temptation story? These are no less notable than those between 6:9–13 and 6:19–7:11. Both have as central themes or motifs the following: temptation (4:3; 6:13), the devil or the evil one (4:5; 6:13), bread (4:3–4; 6:11), God's kingdom or the kingdoms of the world (4:8; 6:9), obedience to God's will (4:8–10; 6:10), and those who do God's will in heaven, the angels (4:6, 11; 6:10).¹⁶ Particularly impressive is the common vocabulary:

4:1–11	6:9–13
ἡμέρας	σήμερον
πειράζων	πειρασμόν
ἄρτοι, ἄρτω	ἄρτον
ἀγίαν	ἀγιασθήτω
βασιλείας	βασιλεία

¹⁴ J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1963) 107.

¹⁵ See further D. C. Allison, Jr., "The Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels: The Pattern of the Parallels," *NTS* 28 (1982) 6–9. Helpful for this question is C. L. Blomberg, "Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke's Central Section," in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983) 3, 217–61. In discounting the parallels so often detected between Luke 9:51–18:14 and Deuteronomy, Blomberg shows how easy it is to draw up lists of resemblances between two random texts by supplying a chart of twenty parallels between Psalms 1–10 and the first ten *sidrôt* of Luke (taken in order) according to D. M. Goulder's divisions!

¹⁶ On "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" see now Lars Hartman's article by that name in the *African Journal of Theology* 11 (1982) 209–18.

Yet should one infer anything about Matthew's compositional intention from these correlations between the *Pater Noster* and a second Gospel text chosen at random? The answer must be negative. And likewise must one respond negatively to the attempt to find meaningful parallels between Matt 6:9–13 and 6:19–7:11.

II. The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

(1) 4:23–5:2 and 7:28–8:1. Turning now from criticism to construction, the first observation to be made about the Sermon on the Mount is that it has an introduction and a conclusion that correspond to each other. 4:23–5:2 and 7:28–8:1 have the following several words or phrases in common:

4:23–5:2	7:28–8:1
"great crowds followed him" (4:25)	"great crowds followed him" (8:1)
the crowds (5:1)	the crowds (7:28)
the mountain (5:1)	the mountain (8:1)
"going up" (5:1)	"going down" (8:1)
"teaching" (5:2)	"teaching" (7:28)

In addition, "opening his mouth" (5:2) has for its counterpart "when Jesus finished these words" (7:28).

The result of a beginning and an end that mirror each other is the creation of an inclusion. Sandwiched between 4:23–5:2 and 7:28–8:1 like the books between two bookends, 5:3–7:27 is marked off as a distinct literary unit. This in turn implies that the simplest outline of the sermon is this: Introduction (4:23–5:2); Discourse (5:3–7:27); Conclusion (7:28–8:1).

(2) 5:3–12 and 7:13–27. An analysis of the discourse proper, 5:3–7:27, reveals that it likewise has an opening section that should be correlated with its conclusion. The sermon is headed by nine beatitudes, 5:3–12.¹⁷ These are to be understood, as R. Guelich has persuasively argued in some detail, not firstly as entrance requirements for the kingdom but rather primarily as

¹⁷ The beatitude in 5:11–12 should not be, as it sometimes is, excluded from the total number of beatitudes and joined not with 5:3–10 but with 5:13–16. 5:11–12 is, admittedly, different in form from the preceding beatitudes—it is much longer, it contains imperatives, and it is addressed directly to the reader (the second person is used). And it also serves as a transition from 5:3–10 to what follows. Yet these facts do not tell the whole story. The eight other beatitudes all begin with μακάριοι, and the appearance of this word at the beginning of 5:11 most naturally indicates a continuation of the series. It would be strange indeed if 5:11–12 introduced a new section. Beyond this, there is, as D. Daube has noticed, good precedent for making the last member of a series much longer than the preceding members and for the abrupt switch from the third to the second person. Both things can be found in English literature, in Jewish prayer texts, and in the Bible (see Isa 63:10–14; Sir 47:12–22; 48:1–11; Matt 1:2–16; 23:13–36; Luke 1:68–79; 6:37–38); see Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956) 196–201. Hence, 5:11–12, which is thematically so closely related to 5:10 (both concern persecution), should not be separated from 5:3–10. This means there are nine beatitudes.

eschatological blessings that characterize the faithful.¹⁸ They do not make demands so much as offer comfort and give promise to the poor in spirit, to the meek, and to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Before hearing Jesus' hard imperatives, the Christian reader is first built up, encouraged, and consoled.

If Jesus' commands come after beatitudes, they are in turn followed by warnings. (Compare the blessings and curses connected with the law in Deuteronomy 27–29.) 7:13–14 (on the two ways), 7:15–23 (on false prophets),¹⁹ and 7:24–27 (on hearers and doers of the word) confront the Matthean audience with strong exhortations that underscore the importance of doing the will of the Father in heaven as this has been set forth in 5:13–7:12. "Enter by the narrow gate." In other words, follow the way set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.²⁰ "Beware of false prophets." That is, pay heed to the

¹⁸ R. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" *JBL* 95 (1976) 415–34; cf. Burchard, "Theme," 62. To Guelich's observations these may be added: (1) The very form of the Matthean beatitudes speaks against the theory that the evangelist has "ethicized" them. Above all, and to state the obvious, there are no explicit imperatives—save in 5:11–12, where the reader is called to rejoice and be glad. Moreover, the eschatological content in the second member of each beatitude is crystal clear, which inclines one to place 5:3–12 not in the wisdom stream but rather in the apocalyptic tradition, where consolation is the priority. (2) It is striking that the qualities upheld in the beatitudes appear so very infrequently in NT virtue lists. (3) In 5:10–12 those who are persecuted are blessed. Yet persecution is hardly a virtue in itself, and it certainly cannot be attained on one's own. If one is being persecuted, it is because someone else is doing it. So 5:10–12 does not fall in line with any alleged tendency to "ethicize" 5:3–12. (4) The last two beatitudes (5:10–12) presuppose the reader's present state of suffering and persecution and supply consolation. Thus, the reader is directly addressed and given promises. No change in behavior is envisioned.

¹⁹ 7:15–23 is one unit, not two, for these reasons: (1) 7:15–20, as the opening sentence makes plain, has to do with false prophets: "Beware of false prophets" (7:15a). But so does 7:21–23, as can be concluded from a comparison of 7:22 ("On that day *many* will say to me 'Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'") with certain verses in chap. 24. In these last the false prophets (24:24), who are *many* (24:5, 11), will come in *Christ's name* (24:5) and do great signs and wonders (24:24). Those who are condemned in 7:21–23 have the characteristics of false prophets. (2) 7:22 (just quoted) seems to borrow the language of Jer 14:4 ("The prophets are prophesying in my name; I did not send them") and 27:15 (34:12) ("I have not sent them, says the Lord, but they are prophesying falsely in my name"). Again this underlines the unity of theme between 7:15–20 and 21–23: both concern false prophets. (3) The connection between the two sections is further upheld by three additional correlations. (a) The "wolves in sheep's clothing" (7:15) are just like those who say "Lord, Lord" but are not truly Jesus' own (7:21–23). (b) Those who have prophesied in Christ's name and yet suffer condemnation (7:22–23) surely deserve the label "false prophets" (7:15). (c) Just as every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (7:19), so those who claim to have done great things in Christ's name are rejected by the eschatological judge as evildoers (7:22–23). For the case that 7:15–23 is two units instead of one, see D. Hill, "False Prophets and Charismatics: Structure and Interpretation in Mt 7:15–23," *Bib* 57 (1976) 327–48.

²⁰ See H. D. Betz, "The Sermon on the Mount: Its Literary Genre and Function," *JR* 59 (1979) 286–87.

truth as revealed in the gospel and do not be deceived by those whose teachings contradict it.²¹ Lastly, be like the wise man who built his house upon the rock, which is to say: hear Jesus' words and do them. Do not go down the road to perdition. Do not listen to heretical teachers. Do not fail to act on Jesus' words and therewith become like the fool whose ill-planned dwelling was demolished by a storm.

The antithetical correspondence between the beginning of the sermon and its conclusion should now be evident. Blessings come first, warnings last. Schematically: Nine blessings (5:3–12); Core of the sermon (5:13–7:12); Three warnings (7:13–27).

(3) 5:13–7:12. What I have just designated the core or heart of the discourse, 5:13–7:12, has a heading. In 5:13, would-be disciples are told that they are the salt of the earth and in 5:14–16 that they are the light of the world. The statements are quite general. The reader is not told how to become salt or light. This is because 5:13–16, as a general heading or superscription, stands above the detailed paraenesis proper. It is a transitional passage in which the speaker moves from the life of the blessed future (promised in 5:3–12) to the demands of life in the present (5:17–7:12), in which the theme switches from gift to task, and in which those who live as 5:17–7:12 will direct are summarily characterized.²²

How is the lengthy section introduced by 5:13–16, that is, 5:17–7:12, to be broadly divided? There is, as is generally recognized, first of all a section on the Torah, 5:17–48. Next there is a little "cult-didache"²³ in which instructions for almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are detailed (6:1–18). In the third place there is 6:19–7:12, the first half of which has to do with worldly goods and cares (6:19–34), the second with, primarily, attitude toward others (7:1–12)—two topics which, as shall be affirmed later, may be joined together under the one rubric "social issues." This leads to the following scheme:

The task of the people of God in the world (5:13–16)

1. Summary: salt and light (5:13–16)

2. The three pillars (5:17–7:12)

A. Jesus and the Torah (5:17–48)

²¹ Despite the attempts to identify precisely who the false prophets might be for Matthew, we remain mostly in the dark; see D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 222–24. For a review of critical opinion, see Hill, "False Prophets."

²² "You are the salt of the earth" and "you are the light of the world" would probably have struck most Jewish ears as being at least implicitly polemical. For it is not the Torah or the Temple or Jerusalem or Israel or some group within Israel (such as the Pharisees) that is the salt or light of the world (see Isa 60:1–3; Bar 4:2; *Liv. Pro. Hab.* 10; *Sop.* 15:8; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 21:5; *Str-B* 1. 237) but Jesus' followers (the "you" is emphatic).

²³ This is the terminology of H. D. Betz, "Eine judenchristliche Kult-Didache in Matthäus 6:1–18," in *Jesus Christus in Historie und Theologie* (ed. G. Strecker; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1975) 445–57.

B. The Christian cult (6:1–18)

C. Social issues (6:19–7:12)

(4) 5:17–48. Into the many exegetical conundrums raised by Matt 5:17–48 I thankfully need not enter at this time. Herein it suffices to call attention to two facts about the structure of the passage, the first being this: the six paragraphs, 5:21–48, are prefaced with a general statement of principles, 5:17–20. (Compare the structure of Lev 18:1–23 and Ecclus 3:1–9 and recall the rabbinic *kēlāl*, which is a summary rule or declaration that heads a section consisting of various particular cases or instances, *pērāṭōt*, as in *m. B. Qam.* 8:1; *m. Ed.* 3:1; and *b. Hag* 6a–b.²⁴) The passage has two functions, one negative, the other positive. Negatively, 5:17–19 is *prokatalēpsis*: it anticipates an incorrect interpretation of 5:21–48 (namely, that Jesus' words contradict the Torah) and states in advance the truth (that Jesus came not to abolish but to fulfill the law).²⁵ Positively, 5:20 announces what 5:21–48 is really all about—the greater righteousness, a righteousness that goes beyond that of the scribes and Pharisees.²⁶

The second fact about the structure of 5:17–48 is that the six so-called antitheses (5:21–26, 27–30, 31–32, 33–37, 38–42, 43–48) are divided into two sets of three. Verses 20 and 27 begin with *ἡκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη*; v 31 with *ἐρρέθη δέ*. And then comes v 33, the opening line of the fourth unit in the series. It begins *πάλιν ἡκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη*. Why the adverb? (It occurs nowhere else in the Sermon on the Mount.) The word's presence, which in no way affects the content of the surrounding material but which does break the rhythm of chap. 5, becomes explicable only if Matthew wished to indicate that with v 33 he was in some sense making Jesus start over or begin a new series. That is, *πάλιν* marks an editorial dividing line. Jesus first speaks to three issues, murder (5:21–26), adultery (5:27–30), and divorce (5:31–32). He then (*πάλιν*) moves on to consider three more issues, oaths (5:33–37), retaliation (5:38–42), and love (5:43–48). So the evangelist is thinking in terms of triads. Rather than there being six so-called antitheses, there are actually two sets of three: 5:21–32 and 5:33–48. As a consequence, 5:17–48 should be analyzed in this fashion:

²⁴ See further Daube, *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 63–66.

²⁵ None of the six so-called antitheses was ever intended to overthrow the Torah. So, rightly, Gundry, *Commentary*, 78–100; and D. J. Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *JSNT* 20 (1984) 17–23.

²⁶ On the meaning of "righteousness" in 5:20, see esp. B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (SNTSMS 41; Cambridge: University Press, 1980) 80–87; and H. Giesen, *Christliches Handeln: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung zum δικαιοσύνη-Begriff im Matthäus-Evangelium* (Europäische Hochschulschriften: Reihe 23, Theologie 181; Frankfurt a/M: Lang, 1982) 122–45. Against Giesen, Przybylski is right in holding that "righteousness" in 5:20 is a term that refers to conduct according to a norm.

Jesus and the Torah (5:17–48)

i. General principles (5:17–20)

ii. Two triads of specific instruction (5:21–48)

a. The first triad (5:21–32)

1. On murder (5:21–26)
2. On adultery (5:27–30)
3. On divorce (5:31–32)

b. The second triad (5:33–48)

1. Do not swear (5:33–37)
2. Turn the other cheek (5:38–42)
3. Love your enemy (5:43–48)

Confirmation of this analysis is to be gleaned from three additional facts. (a) In 5:21–32, the threefold "But I say to you" is in each instance followed by the Greek *ἔτι*. In 5:33–48 this construction does not occur. (b) The full phrase "You have heard that it was said to the men of old" appears only in 5:21 and 5:33, in the two verses that head the two triads. (c) Whereas in 5:21–32 "But I say to you" prefaces a legal ordinance that employs *ἔτι*, in 5:33–48 the expression prefaces straightforward imperatives.²⁷

(5) 6:1–18. The structure of this section is remarkably close to its predecessor. Both have a general introduction employing *δικαιοσύνη* (5:17–20; 6:1).²⁸ In both, this is followed by specific examples (5:21–48; 6:2–18). Further, the examples in both, which consistently begin in similar fashion ("You have heard that it was said" or "It was said" for 5:21–48, "Whenever you" + verb for 6:1–18), are formulated with *δέ* constructions, with statements about traditional teachings and practices preceding contrasting positives. And while the positive statements in 5:21–48 commence with "But I say to you," those in 6:2–18 are introduced by "Amen, I say to you." The only significant structural difference between 5:17–48 and 6:1–18 is that whereas the former has six (= 3 x 2) examples, the latter has only three:

The Christian cult (6:1–18)

i. General principle (6:1)

ii. A triad of specific instruction (6:2–18)

- a. Almsgiving (6:2–4)
- b. Prayer (6:5–15)
- c. Fasting (6:16–18)

(6) 6:5–15. It is necessary to take a closer look at the middle portion of 6:1–18, Matthew's "cult-didache." 6:2–4 (Do not give alms as do the "hypocrites" in the synagogues), 6:5–6 (Do not pray as do the "hypocrites"

²⁷ See R. Guelich, "The Antitheses of Matthew V. 21–48: Traditional and/or Redactional?" *NTS* 22 (1976) 445.

²⁸ See on this E. Klostermann, "Zum Verständnis von Mt 6.2," *ZNW* 47 (1956) 280–81.

in the synagogues), and 6:16–18 (Do not fast as do the “hypocrites”) stand in almost perfect parallelism.²⁹ This parallelism is interrupted by 6:7–15, which expands the teaching on prayer:³⁰ The reader is told to pray not as the Gentiles (6:7–8) but instead to utter the Lord’s Prayer (6:9–13) and to forgive others (6:14–15).³¹ The remarkable fact is that, as with the other units so far examined, this one also has triadic subunits: 6:7–8 + 9–13 + 14–15. Furthermore, it is to be observed that in Matthew, as contrasted with Luke, the Lord’s Prayer consists of (i) an address (6:9b), (ii) three “Thou” petitions (6:9c–10), and (iii) three “we” petitions (6:11–13)—three more triads in all. This entails the following analysis:

On Prayer (6:5–15)

1. How to pray: not as the “hypocrites” in the synagogues (6:5–6)
2. How to pray, continued (6:7–15)
 - (a) Not as the Gentiles (6:7–8)
 - (b) The Lord’s Prayer (6:9–13)
 - i. The address (6:9b)
 - ii. Three “Thou” petitions (6:9c–10)
 - iii. Three “we” petitions (6:11–13)
 - (c) On forgiveness (6:14–15)

(7) 6:19–7:12. The disparity among scholars who have attempted to fathom the structure and theme of 6:19–7:12 could hardly be greater.³² Some, in fact, have despaired altogether of comprehending Matthew’s procedure in this section. K. Stendahl, for example, confessed: “VI 19–VII 29 offers material which has been brought together into the Sermon on the Mount by Mt. in such a manner that we find no clue as to its arrangement.”³³ There is, however, no need to be nonplussed about the redactor’s procedure. The structure of 6:19–7:12 is, as shall now be argued, no less obvious than that of 5:17–48 or 6:1–18.

²⁹ See for the details Betz, “Kult-Didache”; and Giesen, *Christliches Handeln*, 147–48.

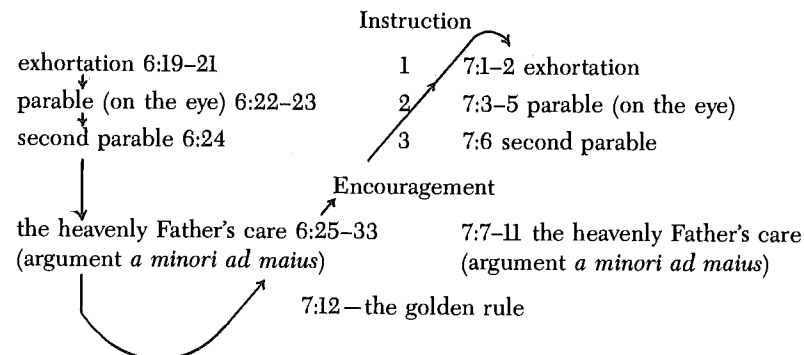
³⁰ If, with Betz (“Kult-Didache”) but against Gundry (*Commentary*, 100–11), 6:1–18 is based on a pre-Matthean piece, then the insertion of 6:7–15 is probably Matthew’s major contribution to the section. See E. Schweizer, “Der Jude im Verborgenen . . . , dessen Lob nicht von Menschen, sondern von Gott kommt: Zu Röm 2,28f und Mt 6,1–18,” in *Neues Testament und Kirche* (ed. J. Gnllka; Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 115–16.

³¹ On the interpretation of 6:14–15, see the unfortunately neglected article by K. Stendahl, “Prayer and Forgiveness,” *SEÅ* 22 (1957) 75–86.

³² Despite this, the formal unity of the passage has seemed evident to most. This is because 6:16–18 obviously ends the section on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1–18) and because 7:12, forming an inclusion with 5:17, marks a conclusion. Also, with 7:13 the subject becomes eschatological warnings.

³³ K. Stendahl, “Matthew,” in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (ed. M. Black and H. H. Rowley; Middlesex: Nelson, 1962) 779. Fitzmyer refers to 6:19–7:12 as simply “a series of loosely related sayings” (*Luke I*, 620). Meier affirms that, after 6:18, “Matthew’s concern about architectonic structure in the sermon lessens” (*Vision*, 65).

6:19–7:12 begins with an exhortation to gather treasure not on earth but in heaven (6:19–21). This is followed by a parable about the eye (6:22–23)³⁴ which is in turn followed by a second parable, that of the two masters (6:24). These three relatively short units, which are thematically linked (store up treasure in heaven, have a good eye [= be generous], and serve God, not mammon), are then followed by 6:25–34, an extended section that offers encouragement by reference to the care of the Father in heaven: despite what 6:19–24 might imply, there is no need to worry or be anxious about food or drink or clothing. What then of 7:1–12? It is the structural twin of 6:19–34. It, like 6:19–34, opens with an exhortation: Do not judge (7:1–2; cf. 6:19–21). Then, continuing the theme, there is, as in 6:22–23, a parable about the eye, 7:3–5: Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye and not the log in your own? Next follows a second parable, that about giving holy things to dogs and casting pearls before swine (7:6; cf. 6:24). 7:1–6 is then succeeded by 7:7–11, a passage that, like 6:25–34, offers encouragement by reference to the care of the Father in heaven: Ask and you will receive. 7:7–11 and 6:25–34 are further alike in that (1) both are based on arguments *a minori ad maius* (“If God so clothes the grass of the field . . . will he not much more clothe you”; “If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?”); (2) both have been constructed around key words that are repeated (*μη μεριμνατε* in 6:25, 31, and 34; *αιτεετε/αιτων/αιτησει/αιτουσιν* in 7:7, 8, 9, 10, and 11); and (3) both use two major illustrations to make their respective cases (the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, the son who asks his father for bread and the son who asks his father for fish). Hence, the structure of 6:19–7:12 may be set forth thus:



Four additional comments are in order. (i) 6:25–34 and 7:7–11 distinguish themselves from the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Between the opening beatitudes (5:3–12) and the closing warnings (7:13–27), the

³⁴ See D. C. Allison, Jr., “The Eye is the Lamp of the Body,” *NTS* 33 (1987) 61–83.

disciples are constantly bombarded by uncompromising demands. Respite comes only in two places, in 6:25–34 and in 7:7–11—these two places being also the only two to break Matthew’s triadic patterns. Admittedly, even in 6:25–34 and 7:7–11 there are imperatives. But *μη μεριμνάτε* really means, as the context proves, “You need not worry at all.” Similarly, *αίτεῖτε* does not hang heavy upon the readers’ shoulders; instead it introduces good news: “It shall be given you.” So 6:25–34 and 7:7–11 proffer encouragement. They are inserted because of Matthew’s pastoral concern. He knows how hard the instruction delivered in Matthew 5–7 really is and therefore how much need there is to be reminded of the Father in heaven who gives good gifts to his children.

(ii) 6:19–7:12, on my proposed analysis, contains two triadic units, 6:19–24 and 7:1–6. In this it resembles 5:17–48, where the six so-called antitheses are actually two sets of three. Thus, the first and third sections of the core of the Sermon on the Mount are structurally very similar.

5:17–48	6:1–18	6:19–7:12
two triads	one triad	two triads
5:21–26 + 27–30 + 31–32		6:19–21 + 22–23 + 24
	6:2–4 + 5–15 + 16–18	
5:33–37 + 38–42 + 43–48		7:1–2 + 3–5 + 6

(iii) If one asks after the theme common to 6:19–34 and 7:1–12, an answer is easily returned. The issue of 6:19–34—What should I do with and about wealth?—and that of 7:1–12—How should I treat my neighbor?—are both about life in the temporal “secular” world. This means that 6:19–7:12 deals with what may be called “social issues.” The appropriateness of this cannot be missed. Having received in 5:17–48 instruction on the Torah and in 6:1–18 on the cult, the true disciple next learns in 6:19–7:12 how to behave in the world at large. The comprehensive nature of the Sermon on the Mount is thereby indicated.

(iv) The golden rule sums up in one sentence the right conduct toward others and therefore appropriately closes 6:19–7:12, a section that concerns social behavior. But 7:12 is not simply the conclusion of 6:19–7:12 (or of 7:1–11). Rather it brings to a climax the entire central section of the Sermon on the Mount, 5:17–7:11. (The verse should therefore be printed as a separate paragraph, as in the NEB and the Huck-Greeven *Synopse*.) Mention of “the law and the prophets” takes the reader back to 5:17 and creates an inclusion between which Matthew has set forth Jesus’ relationship to the Torah, given rules for the new cult, and offered instruction and encouragement for life in the world. This would seem to indicate that “whatever you wish that men do to you, do so to them” is—in nice rabbinic fashion—a general rule that is not only the quintessence of the law and the prophets but also the quintessence of the Sermon on the Mount and so the quintessence of Jesus’ teaching in

general. As Luther put it: “From it all teaching and preaching go forth and are broadcast, and here they come back together.”³⁵

Such a conclusion is certainly consistent with other passages in Matthew. In 22:34–40, for instance, the evangelist has Jesus declare that the first commandment is to love God and that the second is “like it” (that is, of equal importance; contrast Mark), namely, to love one’s neighbor. (Here too the command to love is that upon which “depend all the law and the prophets.”)³⁶ Similarly, at the end of the list of commandments required for entering into life, Matthew adds this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:16–30; contrast Mark 10:17–31). And in 5:43–48, Matthew chooses to save until the end, as the last of his paragraphs on the Torah, the command to love one’s enemy; it is, therefore, the climactic paragraph, and it issues in the exhortation to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect. There can be no doubt, then, concerning the preeminence given to the demand to love one’s neighbor in the first Gospel; and since the golden rule is really just another way of delivering that demand (cf. Augustine *De serm. mont.* 2.22.75), it scarcely surprises to find it at the conclusion of Matt 5:17–7:12, the epitome of Jesus’ teaching on discipleship.

(8) The discussion of the previous pages leads to this outline of the Sermon on the Mount:

Introduction: the crowds on the mountain, 4:23–5:1

Nine (= 3 x 3) beatitudes for the people of God, 5:3–12

The task of the people of God in the world, 5:13–7:12

1) Summary statement: salt and light, 5:13–16

2) The three pillars, 5:17–7:12

Introductory statement—the law and the prophets, 5:17

A. Jesus and the Torah, 5:17–48

1. General principles, 5:17–20

2. Two triads of specific instruction, 5:21–48

a. The first triad, 5:21–32

i. On murder, 5:21–26

ii. On adultery, 5:27–30

iii. On divorce, 5:31–32

b. The second triad, 5:33–48

i. Do not swear, 5:33–37

³⁵ M. Luther, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat* (ed. J. Pelkian; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956) 235.

³⁶ Within the context of the first Gospel, the golden rule is not a principle from which all of the law’s commands can be deduced, nor is it the hermeneutical key to interpreting the law or for determining the validity of different commandments; it is instead simply the most basic or important demand of the law, a demand that in no way replaces Torah but instead states its true end. See Moo, “Mosaic Law,” 6–11. Note 23:23: there are some commandments which are more weighty than others, but this should not lead to the neglect of the lighter commandments.

- ii. Turn the other cheek, 5:38–42
 - iii. Love your enemy, 5:43–48
 - B. The Christian cult, 6:1–18
 - 1. General principle, 6:1
 - 2. A triad of specific instruction, 6:2–18
 - a. Almsgiving, 6:2–4
 - b. Prayer, 6:5–15
 - i. How to pray: not as the “hypocrites” in the synagogue, 6:5–6
 - ii. How to pray, continued, 6:7–15
 - a) Not as the Gentiles, 6:7–15
 - b) The Lord’s Prayer, 6:9–13
 - i) The address, 6:9b
 - ii) Three “Thou” petitions, 6:9c–10
 - iii) Three “we” petitions, 6:11–13
 - c) On forgiveness, 6:14–15
 - c. Fasting, 6:16–18
 - C. Social issues, 6:19–7:12
 - 1. God and mammon, 6:19–34
 - a. A triad on true treasure, 6:19–24
 - i. Exhortation: store up treasure in heaven, 6:19–21
 - ii. Parable: the good eye, 6:22–23
 - iii. Second parable: the two masters, 6:24
 - b. Encouragement: μή μεριμνᾶτε, 6:25–34
 - 2. On one’s neighbor, 7:1–12
 - a. A triad on attitude toward others, 7:1–6
 - i. Exhortation: do not judge, 7:1–2
 - ii. Parable: the log in the eye, 7:3–5
 - iii. Second parable: pearls and swine, 7:6
 - b. Encouragement: ἀταῖτε, 7:7–11
- Concluding statement—the golden rule, the law and the prophets, 7:12
 Three warnings, the prospect of eschatological judgment, 7:13–27
 The two ways, 7:13–14
 Beware of false prophets, 7:15–23
 The two builders, 7:24–27
 Conclusion: the crowds and the mountain, 7:28–8:1

III. Additional Observations

(1) Triads. The most obvious fact about the Sermon on the Mount is that it is built around triads. There are three major topics—the Torah (5:17–48), the Christian cult (6:1–18), and social issues (6:19–7:12), and each unit treating these topics displays in its turn threefold structures. There are six (= 2 x 3) so-called antitheses. Alms, prayer, and fasting are the three topics

of 6:1–18, the “cult-didache.” In 6:19–7:12, there are two very similar triadic sections (6:19–21 + 22–23 + 24 and 7:1–2 + 3–5 + 6), to which have been appended words of encouragement (6:25–34 and 7:7–11). In addition, the sermon winds up with three warnings, 7:13–14, 15–23, and 24–27. Even the number of beatitudes, nine, seems to fall into place, for 9 = 3 x 3. For a pictorial representation of all of the triads in Matthew 5–7 see the chart on the following page.³⁷

(2) 6:25–34 and 7:7–11 function to ease the burden of the Sermon on the Mount (see II.7). They inform the disciple that the Father in heaven cares about his children and that he will hear their prayers and supply their needs. What will happen to the faithful believer who gives away cloak and coat and turns the other cheek? What will become of those who love their enemies? And what will be the end of the righteous ones who ignore the cry of mammon and cease to store up treasure on earth? Matthew knew that his text raises these issues. Thus, 6:25–34 and 7:7–11 reveal the evangelist’s practical mind-set, his awareness of the problems created by Jesus’ radicalism, and his conviction that the life of discipleship is rooted in heaven’s grace.³⁸

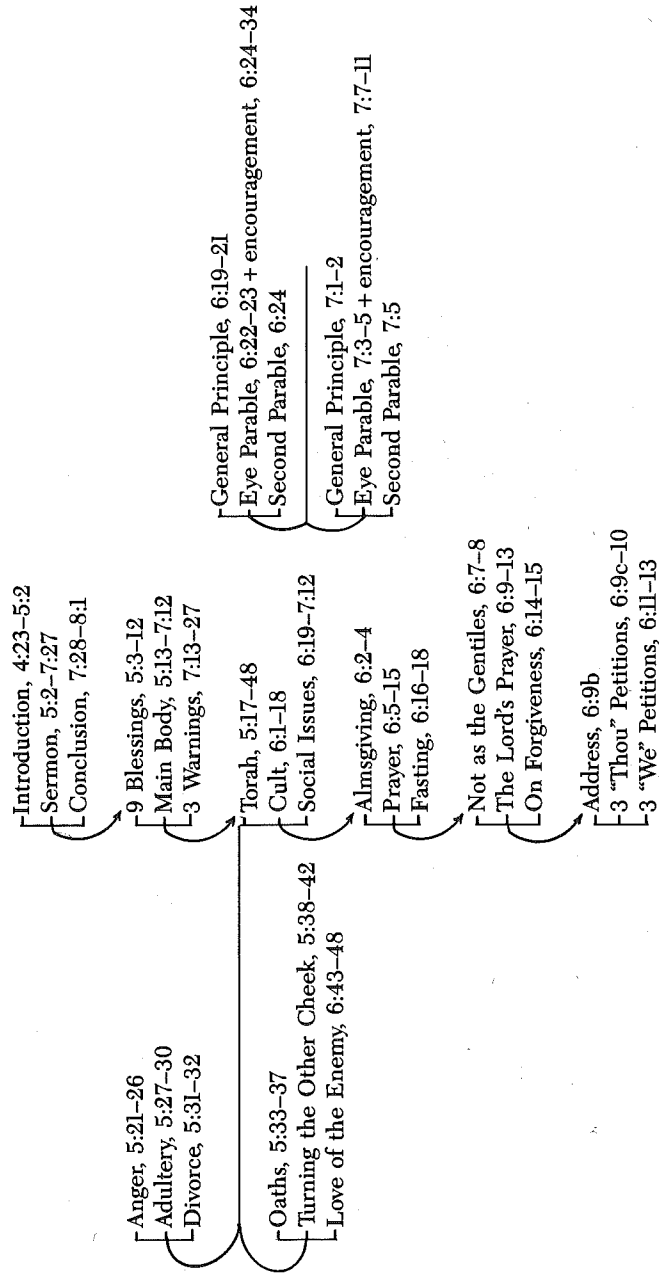
Are there any other paragraphs in the first Gospel whose function is similar to that of 6:25–34 and 7:7–11? In the middle of the missionary discourse in chap. 10 there is this:

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the house-tops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows (10:26–31).

This unit comes after two paragraphs, 10:16–23 and 24–25, which describe the persecution and difficult fate of Christian missionaries. It is obviously intended to offer consolation: the prospect of suffering is tempered by words about the Father’s care of his own. The key is the imperative, μή φοβεῖτε. Like the μή μεριμνᾶτε of 6:25–34, it really means, “There is no need to fear.” And also like the μή μεριμνᾶτε of 6:25–34, it is repeated thrice, at the beginning, middle, and end of the paragraph. Moreover, the argument is again *a minori ad maius*: “You are of more value than many sparrows” (10:31). Perhaps it also bears remarking that the sparrows of 10:26–31 recall the birds of 6:25–34. In any case, 10:26–31 provides another example of the type of argument and arrangement found in 6:25–34 and 7:7–11.

³⁷ Although the other major Matthean discourses are also, I believe, in large measure triadic, the demonstration of this must be left for another time.

³⁸ Matthew’s practical concerns and his awareness of the questions raised by his text have been discussed at length by Davies under the heading, “gemara”; see *Setting*, 387–401.



(3) The structure of the Sermon on the Mount has hermeneutical implications. The most important of these concerns the problem of law and grace. In the judgment of many, Matthew 5-7 is unremitting in its requirements and does nothing more than make demands; no hint is offered as to how one is to accomplish what one is supposed to do. The sermon is advice without help. Such a view fails to understand aright four different portions of the discourse—4:23-5:2; 5:3-12; 6:25-34; and 7:7-11. I have already argued that these last two passages speak the language of grace: the God who demands is at the same time the Father who from day to day is with and for his children; he is a giver of gifts and supplies their every need. I should now like to consider the other two texts.

4:23-5:2 introduces the sermon. It tells us that the disciples were not the only ones to hear Jesus. So did the crowds (cf. 7:28-29). What crowds? *Those who were healed by Jesus.*

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him. . . .”

Before the crowds hear the Messiah's word they are the object of his compassion and healing. Having done nothing, nothing at all, they are benefitted. So grace comes before task, succor before demand, healing before imperative. The first act of the Messiah is not the imposition of his commandments but the giving of himself. Today's command presupposes yesterday's gift.

The same conclusion lies near to hand in the beatitudes, 5:3-12. Jesus opens his discourse with blessings and promises. These hold forth a very bright picture indeed of the disciples' future in the kingdom of heaven. The congregation of the righteous will inherit the earth (5:5), see God (5:8), and receive a grand and glorious reward (5:12). The point to be made is that none of these things could be obtained by purely human effort. If they are to be gained at all it is only because they will have been given. According to the beatitudes, then, God will give human beings what they cannot obtain for themselves on their own. Moreover, although the promises of 5:3-12 are eschatological, they cannot but bring consolation and comfort into the present. In this way, and by the God's grace, the future even now transforms the present.

To sum up: The Sermon on the Mount sets forth God's grace in the past (4:23-5:2), in the present (6:25-34; 7:7-11), and in the future (5:3-12); and this is the context in which 5:13-7:12 is to be heard. Amos Wilder was right on target when he wrote that Matthew 5-7 offers “not so much ethics of obedience as ethics of grace.”³⁹

³⁹ A. N. Wilder, *Eschatology and Ethics in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: Harper & Brothers,

IV. The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount

I should now like to consider one final issue. What is the background or general historical context for understanding Matthew's scheme? Is there any precedent for it? In short, what, if anything, does the structure of Matthew 5-7 tell us about the *Sitz im Leben* or setting of the first Gospel?

The answers to these questions are, I believe, to be found in *m. ʿAbot* 1. In this chapter of the Mishna, which hands down a number of pithy, general maxims from the great rabbis of days gone by, the number three shows up time and time again.⁴⁰

Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things:

Be deliberate in judgement,
raise up many disciples,
and make a fence around the Law (1.1).

Jose b. Joezer of Zeredah said:
Let thy house be a meeting-house for the Sages
and sit amid the dust of their feet
and drink in their words with thirst (1.4)

Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem said:
let thy house be opened wide
and let the needy be members of thy household;
and talk not much with womankind (1.5a).

Joshua b. Perahyah said:
Provide thyself with a teacher
and get thee a fellow [-disciple];
and when thou judgest any man incline the balance in his favour
(1.6).

Nittai the Arbelite said:
Keep thee far from an evil neighbour
and consort not with the wicked
and lose not belief in retribution (1.7).

Shemaiah said:
Love labour
and hate mastery
and seek not acquaintance with the ruling power (1.9).

1939) 120. Cf. W. Manson, *Jesus the Messiah: The Synoptic Tradition of the Revelation of God in Christ: With Special Reference to Form Criticism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1943) 79-82.

⁴⁰ For the triadic form of so much of *ʿAbot*, see the translation of J. Neusner, *Torah from the Sages: Pirke Abot: A New American Translation and Explanation* (Chappaqua, NY: Rossel Books, 1984) 23-24, 28-32, 39-44, 71-79, 99, 112-14, 136-41.

Shammai said:
Make thy [study of the] Law a fixed habit;
say little and do much,
and receive all men with a cheerful countenance (1.15).

Rabban Gamaliel said:
Provide thyself with a teacher
and remove thyself from doubt,
and tithe not overmuch by guesswork (1.16).

Simeon . . . said: All my days have I grown up among the Sages and
I have found naught better for a man than silence;
and not the expounding [of the Law] is the chief thing but the doing
[of it];
and he that multiplies words occasions sin (1:17).

Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel said: By three things is the world sustained:
by truth,
by judgement,
and by peace,
as it is written, Execute the judgement of truth and peace (1.18)

To judge from these quotations, many of the olden masters were, at least by the time of the composition of the Mishna, remembered for having uttered three words or three phrases or three short sentences. That is, the wisdom of each rabbi was passed on in a summarizing triad.

Of all of the general maxims preserved in *m. ʿAbot* 1, perhaps the most famous is that attributed to Simeon the Just, a rabbi of the Maccabean period. He is purported to have declared: "Upon three things the world standeth: upon Torah, upon Temple service and upon *gēmūlūt ḥāsādīm* (*m. ʿAbot* 1.2). The two words left untranslated are usually rendered, "deeds of loving-kindness." Judah Goldin, however, has persuasively argued that the phrase refers more precisely to any pious act of a social or religious character. On Goldin's reading, Simeon declared that three things matter most: the law, the cult, and social or religious acts of benevolence.⁴¹ Now, as has been observed by W. D. Davies, the parallel with the Sermon on the Mount is remarkable.⁴² Matthew 5-7 addresses three fundamental issues, the law, the cult, and social behavior; that is, it addresses the three things upon which, according to Simeon the Just, the world stands, and it addresses them in precisely the same order. The first evangelist, one is tempted to conclude, arranged his discourse so as to create a Christian interpretation of the three classical pillars.

Support for this understanding of Matthew 5-7 is to be found in the

⁴¹ J. Goldin, "The Three Pillars of Simeon the Righteous," *PAAJR* 27 (1958) 43-56.

⁴² Davies, *Setting*, 305-7; see also P. F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1974) 37.

telling circumstance that, during the period in which Matthew was written, namely, the last quarter of the first century A.D., Rabbi Simeon's three famous pillars were, one may fairly judge, being discussed and reinterpreted in rabbinic circles. The cause of this was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It made the middle member of Simeon's triad problematic. How could the world rest upon the law, the Temple cult, and *gēmīlūt ḥāsādīm* if, in fact, the Temple stood no longer? It could not, of course, and the rabbis knew it. So they therewith set themselves the task of reinterpreting Simeon's saying. In *ʿAbot R. Nat.* 4, as part of a commentary on Simeon's pillars, this story is told: upon hearing Rabbi Joshua cry out, "Woe unto us, that this, [the Temple,] the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid wastel!" Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai announced, "My son be not grieved: we have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is *gēmīlūt ḥāsādīm*, as it is said, 'For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'" In this passage the third of Simeon's pillars has replaced the second. The Temple cult, being no more, has been surpassed by acts of mercy.

ʿAbot R. Nat. 4 also contains, in the following, probably fictitious dialogue between Vespasian, the Roman conquerer of Jerusalem, and Johanan ben Zakkai, another interpretation of Simeon's maxim. "Art thou Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai?" Vespasian inquired. "Tell me, what may I give thee?" "I ask naught of thee," Rabban Johanan replied, "save Jamnia, where I might go and teach my disciples and there establish a prayer [house] and perform all the commandments." Here Johanan asks for three things. He seeks a place in which it is possible (1) to study Torah, (2) to offer prayer, and (3) to perform all the commandments. Once more the influence of the three great pillars is to be seen, although they have been revised. Torah has become the study of Torah, the Temple cult has become prayer, and *gēmīlūt ḥāsādīm* has become obedience to all of the commandments.

Returning finally to the first Gospel: it was composed at a time when the problem of what to make of Simeon's traditional pillars was, it would seem, very much in the air.⁴³ It is therefore difficult to regard the correlation between the structure of the Sermon on the Mount and *m. ʿAbot* 1:2 as without meaning. On the contrary, the evangelist must have been familiar with the scholastic discussions of his day.⁴⁴ Indeed, he appears to have joined

⁴³ In the judgment of J. Neusner, the dialogue in *ʿAbot R. Nat.* 4 between R. Joshua and R. Johanan is to be tentatively dated to ca. A.D. 130 (*The Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai* [Leiden: Brill, 1970] 114, 130). Contrast Davies (*Setting*, 306–7) who dates the story to shortly after A.D. 70. Despite his evaluation of the story in *ʿAbot R. Nat.* 4, Neusner does affirm that Johanan, after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, did occupy himself with reinterpreting Simeon's pillars; see Neusner's *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 95–96.

⁴⁴ This cannot but offer support for the claim, often made, that Matthew was a "converted rabbi." See especially the seminal essay on this by E. von Dobschütz, "Matthew as Rabbi and

in the attempt to reinterpret Simeon's fundamental declaration. He appears, that is, to have molded the Jesus tradition in such a way as to establish the Christian version of what matters most. The Messiah's teaching on Torah, his words about almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, and his commands concerning mammon and right attitude toward neighbor—these constitute the Matthean version of the three rabbinic pillars by which the world is sustained.

Catechist," now translated into English in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. G. Stanton; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 19–29. Our conclusions are also more than consistent with Davies's conjectures about the connections between Matthew and what is called Jamnia.