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Chapter 6: The Wisdom and Power of God

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Introduction

The previous chapter began a discussion of the third act of the biblical story: the redemption of humanity by Jesus Christ. It claimed that worship of God takes a definitive turn with the life and death of Jesus Christ. To worship God means to worship Jesus, the divine human being whose life was utterly devoted to God and humanity, the human being who, as God, fulfilled the human vocation to be in God's image. Worshiping the true God begins in the rejection of the worship of self and a reorientation toward self-sacrifice. The worship of things, including wealth, power, fame, and sex, that magnify the self is to commit idolatry; such worship is incompatible with the worship of the true God as definitively revealed in the human life and death of Christ.

But, how do human beings actually come to reorient themselves to the worship of Christ? How can humans overcome their idolatrous hearts? How can they truly love the God who loves them in Christ? Answering these questions is the focus of this chapter. It brings us into the sphere of the fourth act of the biblical story, restoration—the renewal of all creatures, particularly humanity, to the worship of God. Discussion in this chapter will show that the restoration of the worship of God not only entails the external work of Jesus Christ, but also the inner restoration of the human heart. In this discussion, two topics will be encountered:

- Justification by faith, the process by persons become righteous on account of their faith in the work of Jesus Christ, which was done on their behalf, and
- The life of wisdom as explained in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Faith in Christ: The Restoration of the Human Heart to True Worship

In the New Testament, the event around which the human heart is restored is called **justification** by faith. It receives its most sustained treatment in the book of Romans—Paul's letter to the church in Rome. Romans reveals that the issue of justification goes all the way back to the covenant with Abraham. Recall that this covenant was the beginning of God's plan to save humanity; through Abraham's family, all the families of the Earth would be blessed. But, the blessing of humanity in Abraham consisted of the development of a nation—the people of Israel—who were to obey God's laws and, thereby, exemplify to the world the justice of God and God's true intentions for humanity. When the Law was given, being a part of Abraham's family became a bit more complicated than simply being a descendent of Abraham. Now, one had to be obedient to the Law in order to be a true Israelite or child of Abraham. Justification, then, concerns one's status in relation to the covenant God made with Abraham as measured by the Law of Moses. In short, to be a member of Abraham's family, one has to be obedient to the Law of God. If one has been obedient, he or she is regarded as justified or righteous; if one has failed to keep the Law, he or she is unrighteous.

The Inadequacy of the Law to Justify

Importantly, atonement and forgiveness for a lawbreaker were provided in the Law. In other words, if someone broke the Law, the Law itself provided the remedy, whether by way of stipulations for how to make amends or through the sacrificial system. In theory, then, there was no situation in which a faithful Israelite would be found unrighteous. In the presence of disobedience, the unrighteous Israelite only needed to fulfill the Law's requirements for atonement. This raises the question: Why was the cross necessary? The answer leads to the heart of the theme of justification in the New Testament. In the cross of Christ, when God definitively revealed his justice and wisdom, God provided a new way of justification. This new way was necessary because the laws and sacrificial system of the old covenant were inadequate for revealing the fullness of God's justice and, furthermore, guiding humanity into its true calling. The long and short of it is this: Because God's justice is not a justice of rights but a justice of responsibility toward those in need, a purely legalistic approach to justification would fall short.

The inadequacy of the Law was acknowledged in the Old Testament itself. To give just one familiar example, a few centuries before Jesus was born, there arose prophets who sensed the imperfection of the old covenant. After the kingdom of Israel collapsed, prophets, such as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah, did something very curious. On the one hand, they acknowledged that the downfall of Israel was divine judgment upon Israel's failure to uphold God's Law; however, at the same time, these prophets also sensed that the Law itself was insufficient. They wondered if the Law could not adequately correct the

corruption of the human heart. They felt that the old covenant must give way to a new covenant. This new covenant is discussed in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel indicate that this new covenant will consist of God gifting his people with a “new heart” (Ezekiel 36:26-27 English Standard Version) upon which was written the Law (Jeremiah 31:33).

The story of Jonah is another example. It is a trenchant critique of this prideful use of the Law. Whereas Israel was supposed to share the Law with the surrounding nations and, thereby, be a great nation of great blessing to the other nations, they had used it to justify themselves against other nations. The story of Jonah makes this plain. God commanded Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, but Jonah refused because he despised them. When he finally obeyed, he was furious with God that God saved Israel's enemy. The story illustrates how Israel looked down upon the other nations and used the Law as an excuse to isolate themselves from the unrighteous. The Israelites justified themselves against the other nations, thinking that the Law was not an undeserved gift to be shared but an achievement that made them better than others. The missionary people of God turned inward and isolated themselves. People could obey the Law in order to feel morally superior to others, which created spiritual discord amongst people.

Paul picked up on this Old Testament critique of the Law's failure to address the human heart behind obedience and argued that the Law only exacerbated the prideful condition of the human heart. Looking closer at Paul's argument, in Romans 1-2, he stated that both the Jews and the **Gentiles** stood equally guilty and condemned by God's Law. Gentiles failed to obey the Law of God in their conscience (Romans 1:21), while Jews failed to obey the Law of God revealed to Moses (Romans 2:23-24). The reality is that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). This raises the question: If Gentiles knew the Law without it being revealed to them by Moses, and if the Jews who had the Law of Moses, but, nevertheless, failed to observe it, then why did God reveal the Law to the Jews in the first place? This is the question that begins Romans 3: “Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?” (Romans 3:1).

The Law Exposed the Corruption of the Human Heart

In answer to this question, Paul reversed the reason why the Law was given. The Law was not given to make people good, but rather to show people how evil they are (Romans 3:20). He said the Law only intensified human sin (Romans 5:20). In fact, Israel, in Paul's theology, was no longer a great nation that modeled God's justice to the surrounding world, but was a negative warning in which humans beheld the true depth of their wickedness. In Israel, an example of human morality is not seen, but, shockingly, an intensification of human immorality under the Law. This is because the Jews engaged in self-justification; that is, they thought they were better in the sight of God than were Gentiles. Paul was not alone in this criticism. It was clearly a commonplace problem, for Jesus tells a story of a Pharisee praying in the temple thanking God that he was not like the tax collector next to him (Luke 18:9-14). This is the only time Jesus mentions justification in his teachings, and, in that example, it is not the Law-abiding Pharisee who goes away justified but the penitent sinner.

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Justification by Faith and the New Heart

For both Paul and Jesus, then, something more was needed than simply being a good person. Indeed, Paul spoke of God revealing in Christ's cross a “righteousness of God apart from the Law” (Romans 3:21).

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:21-26).

This might be summarized as follows: God reveals a new form of righteousness through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, a righteousness that is available to humans by faith.

It might be helpful to break down this complex idea. God's justice desires not simply punishment but restoration. To restore humans, God initiated a covenant of salvation with Abraham through whom he would bless all the people of the Earth. To be restored is to be a member of Abraham's family. As this covenant was developed under Moses, being a member of Abraham's family also meant obeying the Law of Moses. Because God established this covenant, he must honor it; however, as Paul said, both Jews and Gentiles were unrighteous before the Law of God—all had sinned. God not only desires to save humans but also to be faithful to the terms of the salvation specified in the covenant. However, there is a problem: to be faithful to the terms of the covenant means punishing rather than saving sinful humans. God cannot simply save humans while ignoring the covenant that he established with them. It would seem really odd for God to complain that humanity has broken the rules of the covenant while also breaking those rules himself. If God is going to restore humans to the covenant, then he must do so in a manner that keeps the covenant rather than undermines it; this, then, is where Jesus' death becomes important. Jesus' death satisfied the punishment that stood against humanity for its failure to keep the covenant. God could now restore humanity to good covenantal standing while not undermining the covenant itself. As Paul said, this process itself was not foreseen by the old covenant, so it actually established a new covenant. It is a covenant founded not on justification by works or obeying the Law, but on justification by faith in Jesus' work. As Paul indicated, God's righteousness through Jesus is available "to all who believe" (Romans 3:22) for God justifies "the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

According to Paul, having the righteousness through faith in Christ rather than through obeying the Law overcomes the shortcoming of the old covenant of Law, namely, the problem of boasting: "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Romans 3:27-28).

If the ultimate index of a person's value is not a matter of moral and spiritual achievements but a matter of Jesus' work on behalf of humanity, then one who has faith in Jesus, no longer has any basis for seeing oneself as better than others in the eyes of God or humanity. To have faith in Christ is to reject the prideful measuring of oneself and others against God's requirement and to accept humbly Christ's work on humanity's behalf. This takes the wind out of boasting. To be justified by faith, then, is to gain the new heart that is necessary for overcoming the spiritual inadequacy of the Law.

Faith: The Key to Wisdom

What does it mean to have faith? It must be acknowledged that living in the modern, scientific world of facts and propositions has distorted the original meaning of faith. Modernity is a product of European society developing skepticism about religious doctrine because of its role in divisions of post-Reformation society that often fueled wars and a growing optimism concerning science. The aftermath of the Reformation was a divided Europe, and these divisions prompted a search for a neutral basis for organizing society. Science displayed the power of human reason, and so reason began to replace religion as the authority of human society. Many have argued that reason is more reliable than religion, and science is more certain than faith. This has led to a scheme in which faith and science are seen as opposites. Consequently, many think faith is accepting information without good reasons or scientific proof.

It must be recognized that questions about the relation between religion and science were not on Paul's radar. Paul's focus in Romans and elsewhere was not on how knowledge is acquired and verified, but on how Christ has brought the history between God and humanity in Israel to completion and radically redefined the spiritual relationship between God and humanity through his cross. For Paul, faith concerns engaging with God in a certain way. Faith, then, has to do with the posture or orientation of the human heart behind human thoughts and actions. Specifically, faith is refusing to be confident in one's own ability to establish or ensure a relationship with God and instead entrusting oneself to Jesus Christ to procure and preserve that relationship. Faith is not looking to oneself and one's good deeds or good intentions but looking to the work of Christ and humbly accepting God's forgiveness. Faith is an act that mirrors in the human being the justification of God; God's justice is not one that boasts against the sinner, but, rather, looks compassionately upon the needs of the sinner. Likewise, human faith is the refusal to boast before God and others of an individual's righteousness. Humans are justified by faith because faith is the acceptance of the justice of God in the cross of Christ. In fact, faith parallels or mimics Christ's sacrifice. Having faith in Christ's sacrifice is a decision to sacrifice oneself. Why? Because faith is self-denial; it denies that one can achieve a relationship with God on one's own power and, instead, trusts that God has done all that can ever be done.

Faith's Effect on Relationships

Living by faith is a beautiful alternative to the way people think of themselves and the way they live in relation to others in their daily lives. The world is driven by merit, achievement, production, and work. Many think they are what they are able to do. People measure themselves in terms of their accomplishments and they measure others in the same way. People tend to associate this behavior to how God views them. In other words, people view a relationship with God in the same way they would with a boss, the only difference being that God has different, more religious or spiritual work for them to perform. But, Paul said that a relationship with God is not like this. It is not a relationship predicated on one's ability to prove his or her worth, to impress, or to work; rather, it is a relationship predicated on God's work in Jesus that humans can freely accept. In faith, individuals undergo a fundamental change in outlook toward themselves. By accepting God's work in Jesus, humans see themselves not in terms of what they do but in terms of God's profound love for them.

It turns out, then, that becoming wise is a matter of having faith in Jesus Christ. Shockingly, wisdom does not mean having perfect knowledge but being transformed from selfishness to selflessness. Faith brings someone to personal terms with God's justice and wisdom because, by faith, he or she internalizes the sacrificial mentality of God in Jesus Christ, and doing so enables him or her to become truly wise. Faith is the mentality that enables a person to stop seeing him or herself and the world in selfish terms and begin seeing both through the Creator's eyes. Such a change of heart moves a person toward a new way of being with God and fellow human beings.

The Activity of Faith

While it is an act of surrender, faith is not passive. In the Bible, faith is associated with regeneration and resurrection. Faith gives birth to new way of life, a life that is oriented by the justice of God in Jesus. Faith, then, is not so much a spontaneous decision, but a lifetime of deciding again and again to put one's confidence in Christ rather than in self. Faith is a discipline of the soul and an orientation of the heart that directs and motivates human action. Martin Luther, for instance, spoke of faith as a "clinging to Christ." His counterpart in Geneva, John Calvin, described faith as a leaning on God's promises of benevolence toward us (Calvin, 1536/1845). In fact, Calvin followed medieval scholastic theologians when he observed that there were three components of faith: knowledge, assent, and trust (Calvin, 1536/1845). He explained that trust was the most important dimension of faith. To trust someone is not merely to accept what he or she says as fact, but, as Calvin said, to live your life in such a way that acts on what the trusted person said. For the reformers then, faith is not so much about naively trusting unverifiable knowledge but about how one values the work of God in one's living and acting. In this way, faith is not antithetical to good works but is the fundamental orientation of the human heart that lies behind a person's actions. "Only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe" (Bonhoeffer, 2001, p. 63). Is this really the case?

Christian Ethics

If Christ has done all for humans on their behalf, then why should they do good works? If they are not defined by what they do, then why do anything? Or, why not do evil things because they are (supposedly) more fun? Why not go on a crime spree, if one will be forgiven of everything anyway? This is a response Paul anticipated (Romans 6:1), yet he responded immediately, with the strongest form of negation in the Greek language, that true faith cannot be divorced from active obedience. Faith is the orientation toward genuine good works.

This is a key insight for Christian ethics. For any Christian account of **ethics**, a good act is one that is done out of faith, out of selflessness not any form of self-interest. The Protestant reformers recognized this; they noticed that if one does good apart from faith, one does it out of self-interest rather than out of genuine love for others. People try to be good for various reasons, but usually their motivation is selfish—fear of being punished, to look noble or upstanding, or to feel good about themselves. This was the problem with the Law. Under the Law, obedience to God was not so much because people loved God and admired his laws or because they cared about their neighbor, but because they wanted to protect themselves from the consequences of disobedience and because they wanted to appear to be good people. In this sense, obedience is not a way of growing into a relationship with God and neighbor; rather, it is a way of escaping a relationship with God and feeling superior to one's neighbor. The Protestant reformers argued that God had to set aside the Law as the source for human goodness because it only leads to selfishness.

Luther went on to claim that, because humans are deemed good by God on the basis of their acceptance of Jesus' sacrificial obedience on their behalf, people no longer obey the Law for themselves but, instead, are free to obey the Law because it is good, they love God, and they genuinely care about their neighbor. In removing any selfish advantage for being a good person, people are enabled or made free to do good on the basis of love alone, out of genuine delight in God's ways and selfless care for others. This freedom is called "Christian liberty," which is seen as the liberty of humans to love in the same way God loves, not out of self-concern but out of selfless compassion.

The Christian worldview, rooted in the work of Christ on the cross and the human response of faith, gives rise to a distinct form of ethics. Christian ethics cannot be the mere articulation of duties, as though what is most important to human morality is behavior. Christian ethics must be concerned with the human heart, specifically, its freedom for genuine compassion and love. The notion that love is at the heart of morality is something that has been discussed already, but it is important to observe that Jesus himself taught this. When asked about the greatest commandment in the Law, he remarked that the greatest included a second commandment:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37-40; cf. Romans 13:8-10).

Matthew 22:37-40, in which people are to love both God and neighbor, who asked Jesus about the greatest commandment as spoken truthfully, the inquirer reveals that this Jesus' life, Jewish scholars had divided the Ten Commandments into two halves: responsibilities toward God and the second half toward neighbor.

The Logic of Love

For Jesus, love for God does not come at the expense of love for one's fellow human being. This brings us deep into the logic of the Christian worldview. The reason for this, quite simply, is that humans reflect the image of God. If an individual cannot bring oneself to love a fellow human being, created in the image of God, he or she will not be able to love God. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

Paul treated love as the ultimate goal. While the Christian life can be characterized by faith, hope, and love, Paul indicated that faith and hope will pass away but love will remain and, therefore, is greater than faith and hope. Indeed, Paul said that without love, the most profound and accurate understanding of God is nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). A great deed done without love is no more than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). From a Christian perspective, love is crucial for ethics because love builds relationships rather than merely fulfills a duty. As seen in the previous chapter, God's justice does not use human failure as an occasion for self-justification or an excuse to terminate the relationship. Instead, precisely because God relates to the world in love, God uses human failure as an opportunity to justify the sinner and, through reconciliation, move into a deeper, more radical relationship that displays the glory and power of goodness by overcoming human evil with good. Likewise, Paul instructed that Christians should not "be overcome by evil, but [should] overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Christian ethics is not merely interested in distinguishing good from bad behavior, but in turning bad people into good people. Just as God does with sinful humans, Christians are to view the faults of others with love and compassion rather than self-justifying arrogance and pride. Christians should see wrongdoing not merely as a problem to be solved but as a person to be restored and a relationship to be reconciled.

Surely, this is why Jesus and the early Christian community focused on people sometimes known as the "least of these," that is, the poor, the marginalized, the unprotected, the abused, the discarded, and the oppressed. It is rather comfortable and convenient to focus on marginal behavior modification. Many people would admit they could be a little more patient and giving to their families, friends, coworkers, or other people upon whom their own lives depend. If they love only those who are relatively lovable, then they do not have to tackle the severity of their selfishness; indeed, loving only these people is selfish. However, if one's understanding of love were defined by the practice of being patient and giving to the impoverished, to the criminals, to one's enemies, to the ostracized, then he or she would see just how much selflessness true love requires. Looking upon the poor or despised, reveals the extent to which humans must purge self-interest from their souls to fulfill what the Law demands. It is now time to take a look at what this love requires by looking at the core teachings of Jesus.

The Life of Love, the Obedience of Faith: Living in God's Kingdom

Ultimately, faith is about an inner transformation of the human heart toward love that enables a person to do good selflessly. What does this life of love look like? Jesus' teachings reveal the character of one whose life is lived according to this kind of love. Unfortunately, it is common to overlook the teachings of Jesus. For a great many Christians, what is important is not Jesus' life but his death. How he lived and what he taught during his life are at best an interesting prelude to the cross. This is rather ironic, because it is his teachings that take up most of the four Gospels. Why did the Gospel writers spend so much time relaying his teachings if they really were not essential?

God's Reign in Renewed Human Hearts

Jesus had many things to say about the Kingdom of God, but given the focus of this chapter on the new heart of faith, here, the focus will be on his Sermon on the Mount, which is recounted in Matthew 5-7. The Gospel of Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses, and, as many have suggested, Matthew sees Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as the new covenant equivalent of the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. In this sermon, it seems Jesus himself was aware of this, as he made it clear he was not offering a totally new Law in place of the old Law, but his new Law is actually a perfection of the old Law:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ... For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17, 20).

From Jesus' perspective, then, the problem was not with the Law so much as how the Law was understood by the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus came into conflict with the scribes and Pharisees because his understanding of the essence of the Law was one that made Israel a peaceful, sacrificial people who suffered persecution as they served other nations, including the nation that controlled them during Jesus' life—Rome. Jesus' sermon began with what are often referred to as the *Beatitudes*:

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:2-10).

The ones who are blessed by God, Jesus said, are not the triumphant, successful, comfortable, strategic, or powerful, but the ones who look like they are failing and losing. The irony should be startling, as, today, many equate blessing with happiness or success; but Jesus does not see a blessed life as a life of ease and comfort. In his day, the Israelites believed the Messiah would defeat the presently powerful Roman Empire and set up Israel as a powerful, prosperous nation. In this sermon, Jesus was saying this expectation was wrong. The blessing of Israel, the blessing that goes back to Abraham, does not make life easier; instead, it makes it more difficult. This is in keeping with his claims elsewhere that, in his kingdom, "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16) and that the one who saves his life will lose it and the one who loses his life will gain it (Matthew 16:25).

The remainder of the sermon was an explanation of these Beatitudes. He began with some strong statements that the Law's commands about murder and marriage require purity of heart. Fulfilling the command "Do not murder" turns out to mean not even harboring anger in one's heart for another person. In fact, Jesus said that if a person were about to offer a sacrifice for sin and discovered that he or she had a conflict with another person, before offering the sacrifice, the conflict should be resolved (Matthew 5:21-26). Fulfilling the command concerning adultery requires more than stopping short of sexual affairs, it requires not even thinking about another person with sexual desire or lust (Matthew 5:27-30). In both cases, Jesus said fulfilling the Law was not merely about external conformance but inward integrity. It is about the heart of a human person, for what a person's heart focuses on is who he or she truly is and what he or she truly values (see Matthew 6:19-24).

Nonviolence and Nonretaliation

One of the most often quoted, but least practiced, of Jesus' teachings came as he exhorted a new approach to the Leviticus 24:20 teaching of an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Instead, Jesus commanded that "if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). Jesus also said to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Once again, his teachings would have been deflating to his audience, who hoped for a great military leader who would conquer their enemies. But, if Jesus' work on the cross reveals a God who looks upon his own enemies with love, and, rather than insist on seeing himself vindicated against them through their

punishment, overcomes their evil with an act of profound goodness, then Jesus' followers must do the same. To have faith in a God whose justice is restorative not retributive means not retaliating against those who have been the cause of one's pain and sorrow.

Prayer

These teachings require a serious amount of inner strength, and, in fact, are impossible to follow using only human willpower. Knowing this, Jesus taught his audience how to pray and draw strength from God through the Lord's Prayer, which, itself, contains some important teachings.

The Coming Kingdom

In the first place, the prayer is not for Christians to be delivered to heaven from Earth. Popular theology and culture hold that Christians expect salvation to be a matter of leaving Earth for heaven. This is contrary to the consistent biblical image, from the event of creation itself onward, in which heaven descends to Earth (see Revelation 21). The only time the Earth ascends to heaven is found in Genesis 11 in the story of the Tower of Babel, and God judges this project. Christians are to anticipate God bringing his reign to Earth rather than hope to leave Earth and enjoy that reign elsewhere. After all, God created humans to live on the Earth. Thus, the Lord's Prayer states, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). It would be hard to call the Christian life a life of love and faith if it were pessimistic and dismissive about life here and now. This prayer calls for Christians to anticipate the coming kingdom life in their daily life; it calls for Christians to live as citizens of the heavenly kingdom, thereby, aliens of their earthly kingdoms.

Trust in God's Providence

The next petition is for God to "give us this day our daily bread." This is a meager request for basic provision. Yet, reliance upon God for food is a major biblical theme. It is part of the teaching of Genesis 1, that God, not the pagan fertility and storm gods, is responsible for the agricultural system. God's provision is seen as Israel received manna in the wilderness, and the first temptation of Jesus centered on hunger (Matthew 4:2-4). In Matthew 6:25, Jesus said to "not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink." What is the connection between relying upon God for one's food and fulfilling the Law? Once again, it is necessary to consider the nature of love that fulfills the Law. Jesus knew that if people live their lives focused on their needs, they either will not see or will minimize the needs of others. The relationship between loving God and loving one's neighbor is quite clear here: If one loves God, he or she will trust him to provide daily necessities. Once one's needs are no longer a concern, the needs of neighbors can become the focus. In this way, the love of God opens up to the possibility of truly loving one's neighbor.

Unconditional Forgiveness

The final request of the Lord's Prayer concerns forgiveness. Here, too, Jesus holds together the connection between God and neighbor by instructing people that as they ask God for forgiveness that they should forgive others. Jesus went so far as to say "if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). The forgiveness Jesus had in mind is not simply a kind of forgetting, shaking off, or downplaying something; this would suggest the offense was not that big of a deal. The forgiveness Jesus spoke of entails the great agony of learning to sacrifice one's rightful claims for personal justice for the restoration of another.

One story, not without a few allusions to the cross, that illustrates the cost of forgiveness is the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the father shames himself by rushing out to meet the prodigal son who wished his father dead in requesting his inheritance early (Luke 15:11-32). The cost of forgiveness also is illustrated in a less popular parable that Jesus told in response to a question from his most eager follower, Peter:

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart (Matthew 18:21-35).

Once again, there is a strong claim that those who do not forgive will not be forgiven; however, in this parable, Jesus illustrated the cost of forgiveness in the context of being released from financial debt. In the case of this parable, it literally cost the person offering forgiveness monetarily. It costs something because one has to commit to the notion that a person who is dragging him or her down, as it were, is more important than any kind of self-preservation.

The Inseparable Relation between the Spiritual and the Social

While on the theme of forgiveness, it should be noted how often it is described using the language of financial debt. People have a tendency to spiritualize forgiveness. Jesus, however, did not think a spiritual relationship to God was something unrelated to our material and social relations with others. The Gospel of Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer makes this plain. When Jesus said to ask the Father for forgiveness for sins, the word in the Greek is *harmartias*, the common word used to describe human offenses against God. Yet, the word for what individuals are to forgive switches in the transition to the common word for financial debt, *opheilonti* (see Luke 11:4). Divine forgiveness cannot be accepted if people are unwilling to forgive at a cost to themselves. As the Lord's Prayer indicates, the Bible does not separate spiritual forgiveness from actual costly forgiveness of others; if one cannot sacrifice him or herself for the sake of restoring another person, especially a person who has wronged him or her, one simply does not have faith in God's forgiveness as it really is.

Flashy Faith is False

Jesus' sermon also addressed the way in which Law without love could be engaged in pride. He warned about "practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them" (Matthew 6:1). At the close of the sermon, he admonished his audience not to judge others, assuming that if one judges another person, he or she was in denial about his or her own sin:

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye (Matthew 7:3-6).

If love is the heart of the Law, then love does not justify itself against lawbreakers by judging and condemning them; instead, it concentrates on one's own responsibilities. In this case, Jesus said when a fault is seen in another, individuals should examine themselves for the same error, for they will find that their wickedness is much more significant than what they make of the other person's.

song entitled "Holy" (Hutchison, 2013) on their Spare me the brimstone /Acting all holy / When you hypocritical, holier-than-thou mentality of some plence in which a religious person acts like he or she age of salvation when, in reality, the evangelism is e religious person really just wants to feel good by eliever, or feel powerful by being in a position to

resents itself in so-called *humblebragging*, or bragging disguised as modesty. People may say, "God is so good," or "God is blessing me," or "God is so good" as a preface to something they want to say. This is a form of self-promotion.

Final Judgment upon False Faith

A final teaching to reflect upon is Jesus' discussion of the "narrow gate." He is speaking of the final judgment, the moment when all humanity will be judged by God. In conjunction with teachings about treating others how you would want to be treated (Matthew 7:12-14) and how a good tree bears good fruit (Matthew 7:15-20), Jesus said not everyone who thinks they know him will be admitted to the heavenly kingdom:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matthew 7:21-23).

As shocking was Paul's recasting of the negative role of the Law and Israel, so too is the conclusion about what faith really looks like. How could it be that people who did so many great works, miracles even, in Jesus' name were not true Christians? In Matthew 25, Jesus, in discussing the final judgment, said that as he was separating the righteous from the wicked, he will distinguish them on the basis of whoever provided food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked, welcome to the stranger, and visitation to the sick and imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-45). Interestingly, both parties are surprised by the results. The ones who are accepted into eternal life are baffled, asking:

'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me' (Matthew 25:37-40).

Those who "go away into eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46) are similarly dumbfounded, wondering when they declined the opportunity to feed, clothe, or visit Jesus. But, Jesus said that since they did not do this to the least amongst them, they did not do it to him.

Two aspects of this teaching need to be observed: The first is that one must be discerning about faith. If faith does not bear forth a life of loving service to the least of these, then one must question its integrity. Jesus is aware that there are many who are excited about him and his message, many who even do great things in his name, but, ultimately, lack true faith. There can be false faith in Jesus. True faith leads to a life that is attentive to the needs of those that the rest of the world find it easy to overlook. True faith will not lead to a kind of self-satisfaction that encourages the pursuit of success and security but, instead, constitutes a radical reordering of one's life toward seemingly reckless selflessness. There is an unfortunate phenomenon in Christianity today that too easily incorporates faith in Jesus with the pursuit of a smart or orderly life. It is very easy to grow up in the world with the impression that people are to serve themselves and look out for their own interests. Much is heard about basic rights and freedoms, but too little regarding responsibilities. People are told through advertisements and economic policy that they should consume those things that they desire. Movies and TV shows tell people that they should choose a spouse who makes them happy and is the best fit for them. Christian faith can be conformed easily into this life of self-interest; just as when making decisions in this world one looks out for his or her interests, so one looks out for his or her interests in the afterlife by believing in Jesus. Faith in Christ becomes a spiritual form of self-interest. At the very least, this parable about the final judgment informs us that the faith of those who fail to recognize the needs of the least of these is questionable. Faith in Jesus Christ should never seem like the wise choice for a life of self-enhancement, but must remain an act of foolish selflessness.

The second aspect of this teaching is that there is a final judgment. There are consequences for those who do not have faith in Jesus. Many find a message of final judgment difficult to square with Jesus' message of love, but the nature of the relationship God establishes with humanity in Jesus Christ must be kept in mind. Jesus is not humanity's equal; he is, as seen in the last chapter, the Creator. Through his death and resurrection, he has created a new future, new heavens, and a new Earth (see Revelation 21). One cannot expect to be a part of that future if he or she consistently denies it and actively lives a life contrary to it. Jesus warns about coming judgment against those whose faith is hollow.

One Who Teaches with Authority

All of Jesus' teachings are so pure that they prompted his audience to discern that "he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29). When people listened to Jesus, they were struck by his character and person. His life matched his message, and this authority was another contributing factor to the Christian recognition of his divinity. Today, people have developed all sorts of strategies for detraumatizing Jesus' instructions; however, doing so denies that Jesus is God. Many who acknowledge Jesus' divinity still dilute his teachings in some way. One common Christian way of softening the radicality of Jesus' words is to say that Jesus did what Paul described the Law did: set the bar so high that humans could only conclude they are incapable sinners and, thereby, have no other option but to turn to Jesus for salvation. This has the rather odd conclusion that Jesus himself only taught Law and not Gospel. How can this be, when Jesus' teachings overwhelmingly concern the Kingdom of God, and it is the Kingdom of God that Jesus announces as the good news? Others have said that Jesus' teachings refer to a coming kingdom that is wholly future; therefore, his words do not apply now. Yet, Jesus gives us no indication that he thought of his teachings in this way. His words consistently portray the belief that he expected his disciples to act as he directed right then.

Many will often rest in appeals to life in the "real world," remarking how impractical nonretaliation, unconditional forgiveness, and selfless love are. This is an interesting response for two reasons. First, those same Christians are quite eager to accept God's nonretaliation, forgiveness, and grace when it comes to their sins and eternal destination. How can one accept the spiritual relationship with God while denying its social form? There seems to be a disconnect between spiritual relationship with God and social relationship with others. Those working with this disconnect will find themselves on the wrong side of history, indeed, the wrong side of eternity. When someone is happy about the way God treats him or her but is unwilling to treat others likewise, one has to wonder whether in fact his or her faith is that aforementioned self-preservation. A necessary question, then, becomes whether accepting the rewards Jesus offers but shirking on the responsibilities is not humble faith but disbelief. Second, one should balk at the appeal to the "real world." After all, for Christians, Jesus is not just a good teacher, but the Creator of the world; no one knows the "real world" better than him.

Conclusion

Wisdom for Christians is not merely a matter of possessing sound, defensible, or accurate information about the world. Being wise involves something much more profoundly personal. Being wise is about being a certain kind of person. Wisdom is a matter of one's identity, understanding, and way of living with God and others. For Christians, being wise requires faith. Faith is the reorientation of the human heart away from selfishness to selflessness. Faith is a fundamental reconstitution of the human soul. The path to wisdom turns upon a profound humility, for, in faith, one turns away from oneself toward the grace of God to behold the depth of one's selfishness. Wisdom involves living a life in which one's needs are entrusted to God's loving care so that he or she can be open to the needs of others in self-sacrificing love. The remaining chapters of this text will begin to explore how this spiritual posture of faith leads to specific **epistemological** and ethical claims.

Chapter Review

Main Ideas

- Jesus' death satisfied the punishment that stood against humanity for its failure to keep the covenant. God could now restore humanity to good covenantal standing while not undermining the covenant itself. In Christ's death, a kind of new covenant was founded, not on justification by works or obeying the Law but justification by faith in Jesus' work. As Paul indicated, God's righteousness through Jesus is available "to all who believe" (Romans 3:22), for God justifies "the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).
- Much of Jesus' teachings focused on the Kingdom of God, in which God reigns in the hearts of humanity. In the New Testament, while the Kingdom has concrete social and political dimensions, it chiefly refers to God's governance of the human heart.

Key Terms

- **Epistemological:** Having to do with the right and reliable sources and methods for attaining knowledge.
- **Justification:** The event in which God regards a sinful human being as righteous on account of their faith in the work of Jesus Christ, which was done on their behalf.

Application of Knowledge

- This chapter helps readers to reassess the divide between science and religion by showing that what Christians mean by faith has less to do with the kind of information or knowledge one has and more to do with the kind of person one is.
- This chapter will show why authentic Christian faith is at odds with the mentality of fake benevolence.
- In this chapter, readers learn that the Christian gospel takes them to the heart of the problem of self-justification by addressing not just the understanding but the heart of the human being. The gospel of God's justification of humans by faith pushes against any form of self-justifying and allows people to see others in charity.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does the Christian worldview understand ethics?
2. Why was the Law of the Old Testament inadequate according to Jesus and Paul?
3. True or False: For one to have faith in God's forgiveness, one must forgive their fellow humans, including releasing them from inequitable social arrangements.

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