

The Gospel According to Matthew

Views on the So-called Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5-7

1. **The Liberal View – Sometimes called the *Soteriological View*.**

If the liberal deals with the discourse at all, it is with the idea of works salvation. Fulfill the “moral imperatives” and you will be alright. Therefore, the discourse is to be applied to all men in the sense of works righteousness.

2. **The Present Application View – Sometimes called the *Ecclesiastical View*.**

- a. This view is held by those of many theological persuasions, including some who call themselves dispensationalists and some who call themselves covenantalists. They hold that the discourse was addressed to the Church, and therefore is to be applied today.
- b. It is to be obeyed during this age in every area of life. Typical of this view is the statement by Thomas S. Kepler, “It is a religious system of living which portrays how transformed Christians *ought* to live in the world.”
- c. It replaces the ethics of the Old Testament with a higher moral code than that of the Mosaic Law.
- d. The application of Matthew 5-7 brings legalism directly into the Christian life. Once someone recognizes the relationship of this discourse to law, they should begin to wonder how it relates to the clear grace teachings of the New Testament epistles.
- e. This view (and the following one) has infected even so-called dispensational churches, as they also are at a loss to interpret and apply the harsh passages (“if your eye offends you, pluck it out”) and tend to find some kind of figure of speech that is not there.

3. **The Reformed View**

This is an expansion on the Ecclesiastical View, combined with covenant approach of transferring virtually all Old Testament promises to the church. It is sometimes called the *Sociological View*.

- a. Those who hold this view believe that *society* can be saved through the application of the Discourse.
- b. The Discourse is a deeper expression of the moral law of God and presents the kind of righteousness that is acceptable to God. If the moral reforms of the Discourse are applied world wide, it is argued, what a wonderful place the world would be!
- c. Reformed theologians separate the 10 commandments from the law and make them an expression of God’s moral law. They fail to see that the Mosaic Law is always treated as a unit in Scripture and the 10 commandments are included (Deut. 4:8, Mal. 4:4).
- d. Again this view leads the Christian into the depths of legalism. Self-effort must be applied in order to meet the legal requirements. Most reformed theologians take the “blessings” of the discourse literally, but the condemnations they understand figuratively

4. **The Traditional Dispensational View**

- a. The discourse is the standard of life for the Millennial Kingdom.
- b. It was originally given to the Jews and will be in effect when Christ establishes His kingdom on earth. It was sometimes called the “Constitution of the Kingdom.”
- c. According to this view, the discourse could be applied to today in certain areas because we are in what is called “the mystery form of the Kingdom.” (See notes on Matt. 13 for further discussion.)
- d. While those who hold to the “mystery form” of the kingdom are sincere in their dispensational views, they open the door to the application of legal principles to the Christian today. This group is also at a loss to interpret the discourse consistently,

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applying at best parts of it to the Christian life “on principle,” and making figures of speech out of those portions that do not fit their comfort zone.

5. **The “Interim” View**

- a. According to this view, the discourse was given to those of Christ’s time with a view to entering the Kingdom. This approach is called the “interim” approach by Stanley Toussaint (*Behold the King*). He says, “Not only are the crowds and disciples looking forward to the establishment of the kingdom, but the message of the sermon is also anticipatory. This aspect is indicated by the attitude of anticipation which pervades the entire discourse.”
- b. It was applicable to those living during Christ’s day, and will be applicable again to those in the future who will be preparing to enter the Kingdom. Therefore, the discourse will be applicable again during the tribulation period.
- c. Neither the dispensational view nor the Interim holds the discourse to be a means of salvation.
- d. This view is the only consistent view because it relieves the Christian of attempting to find applicable passages or principles within the discourse. The believer is left to find the means of pleasing God today in the New Testament epistles.

6. **The Present Spiritual Kingdom View (Burdick at DCBTS)**

- a. This view says that the discourse refers to Christ’s present spiritual kingdom.
- b. “When we attempt to apply these commands in strong literalness, our obedience begins to border on the ludicrous.” (Burdick)
- c. The fatal weaknesses of this position are:
 - (1) The text must be allegorized (this is true of all non-literal views).
 - (2) It confuses the teaching about the Kingdom of Christ on earth with the teaching concerning the church.
 - (3) It makes all New Testament teaching the standard for living.
 - (4) Like all the other views except number 5 above, this view makes similar things identical.