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**Divine Peace from a Reformed Perspective  
Based on the Sermon on the Mount**

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**Introduction**

The Reformed perspective places the Sermon on the Mount within the redemptive historical narrative of the Bible. The redemptive historical narrative helps us to understand the Biblical message correctly.<sup>2</sup> Albert M. Wolters uses Herman Bavinck's definition of the Christian faith to show one of the distinctives of the

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<sup>2</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, H. De Jongste, trans. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988).

reformational worldview: “God the Father has reconciled His created but fallen world through the death of His Son, and renews it into a Kingdom of God by His Spirit.” The reformational worldview has an integral perspective, which does not make “a distinction between sacred and secular ‘realms’ in the cosmos,” and therefore, the terms “reconciled,” “created,” “fallen,” “world,” “renews,” and “Kingdom of God” are cosmic in scope and everything is included within “these foundational realities of the Biblical religion.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bible begins with the view of a personal God, who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). The Fall and the reality of sin is found throughout the Old Testament, in the teachings of Jesus, and all through the New Testament. There is a great gulf between the Creator and creature (Job 9:32, 33). The three fundamental dimensions of the Biblical revelation—“the original good creation, the perversion of that creation through sin, and the restoration of that creation in Christ”—help us to see redemption as restoration.<sup>4</sup> However, this is not to be misunderstood as restoring to the original creation without fulfilling its eschatological purpose.<sup>5</sup> In fact, redemption accomplishes its purpose (which includes peace) in that it takes creation beyond restoration and the eschatological promise is fulfilled in the finished work of Jesus Christ whereby the original good creation is recreated and redeemed.

The eternal law of God progressively revealed finds its fulfillment and significance in the person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, human striving for moral perfection is evidence of the inherent human desire to be recreated from the fallen state. That recreation is possible only through the incarnate Son of God, and not by human effort.

The Bible is the Word of God by its own reliable testimony and the Reformed perspective builds on a unified Biblical foundation. In the following section, we observe that the Sermon on the Mount fits into this Biblical foundation and briefly discuss its structure and purpose. Then we will enter into a discussion of the relation between the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus, which in turn will help us to establish that the sermon is an integral part of Jesus’ teaching.

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<sup>3</sup> Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1948).

### A. The Unity of the Sermon with the Whole Bible

The Sermon on the Mount complements the message of the whole Bible, including the Old and New Testament, and it cannot be seen as in conflict with the message of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Machen recorded in the early part of the twentieth century, in *Christianity and Liberalism*, that it was the fashion of the period to “place the Sermon on the Mount in contrast with the rest of the New Testament.”<sup>7</sup> The eschatological redemptive plan of God runs throughout the Bible, from the very first book of the Old Testament all the way to the last book of the New Testament. That same redemptive plan is operating in the words of the Sermon on the Mount.

The unity of the whole Bible does not come at the expense of its inherent diversity. The diversity is characterized by the “differences in the personalities and purposes of its authors,” diverse genres, and the progressive nature of revelation.<sup>8</sup> Gandhi mischaracterizes the progressive nature of the Biblical revelation as disunity, thereby identifying stark contrasts between the Old Testament and the New Testament as well as disharmony within the New Testament. For example, he fails to understand the context in which the Mosaic Law regulates the behavior of God’s covenant people. The words “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” which Gandhi used to summarize the teaching of the Old Testament, though sounding cruel, in reality regulate the punishment in a just manner. What Gandhi understood as violence was the just regulation of the behavior of God’s covenant people. In Jesus, the One who was sinned against takes on the punishment. The Bible in fact maintains unity and diversity, a relation that is “somewhat parallel to the Trinity.”<sup>9</sup> The Bible by its own reliable testimony is the Word of God, and the Creator God has spoken to created human beings in the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith states: “the Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.” *Westminster Confession of Faith* I. viii.

<sup>7</sup> Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 35.

<sup>8</sup> William Edgar, *Truth in All its Glory* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004), 128.

<sup>9</sup> William Edgar, *Truth in All its Glory*, 128.

<sup>10</sup> See B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing), 1948. E. J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 185-204.

## 1. The Purpose of the Sermon

The purpose of the sermon is to glorify God. Jesus' relationship to the Law and the prophets as its fulfillment demonstrates the Lordship of Christ, and the work of salvation as the kingdom of heaven indicates "the supernatural character, origin and purpose of our salvation."<sup>11</sup> The sermon introduces the gospel of the kingdom, indicating "God's kingship, reign or sovereignty, recognized in the hearts and operative in the lives of his people, and effecting their complete salvation, their constitution as a church, and catastrophically a redeemed universe."<sup>12</sup> The righteousness Jesus preaches is not of limited applicability—it extends to all and all of life, bringing glory to God.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. The Structure of the Sermon

The entire Sermon on the Mount can be divided into beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12) and commands (Matt. 5:13-7:27). The commands that follow the beatitudes give an exposition of the righteousness that is the result of the relationship with God and with the kingdom of heaven.<sup>14</sup> Matthew 5:13-16 provides the transition from the beatitudes to the commands, giving the general necessity of righteousness, which is elaborated under four points of view in Matt. 5:17-7:12. Ridderbos shows that Matt. 7:13-27 forms the epilogue that gives a sharp exhortation to fulfill the preached righteousness with reference to eternal life and judgment. The four points of view are the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 5:17-48), the motive for righteousness (Matt. 6:1-18), the radical commitment demanded by righteousness (Matt. 6:19-34) and the behavioral standard with regard to the neighbor as one fulfills righteousness (Matt. 7:1-12).<sup>15</sup>

There is a unity within the sermon, which appears as the first of the six great discourses of Jesus' in the Gospel according to

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<sup>11</sup> Hendriksen, *Sermon on the Mount*, 31-2.

<sup>12</sup> Hendriksen, *Sermon on the Mount*, 31-2.

<sup>13</sup> Ridderbos develops this idea in his study on the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>14</sup> William Hendriksen, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1934), 33-35. A helpful outline of the Sermon on the Mount is found here.

<sup>15</sup> Ridderbos' doctoral dissertation on the Sermon on the Mount gives the structure of the sermon in detail.

Matthew.<sup>16</sup> The beatitudes preach the salvation of the kingdom of heaven, addressing those in misery, and therefore show “the *redemptive* significance of the kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> The commands include the preaching of righteousness, communicating to “the heirs of the kingdom of heaven what they have been called to.” Hence, the commands have their ground in the beatitudes and the promise of salvation precedes the commandments.<sup>18</sup> It is the whole message of the kingdom of heaven that dominates and not its constituent parts, giving the sermon its unity.

### **B. The Relation between Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount**

Having established the unity of Scripture and the sermon, we can explain the relation between the message and the Messenger from a Reformed perspective. The Biblical revelation is unambiguous about the particularity of its message with its redemptive historical focus. Unlike other religions, Biblical Christianity responds to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christianity teaches the imputation of righteousness to sinful fallen human beings by the atonement<sup>19</sup> of Jesus Christ, who justifies and sanctifies. This brings about Peace and Reconciliation. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ fulfills the Law for all those who are in union with Him. The Messenger fulfills the demands of the message.

The relation between the message and the Messenger is further clarified by a study of the historical background of the sermon. William Hendriksen identified the controversy with the Pharisees concerning Sabbath that preceded the sermon (John 5; Luke 6:1-11), and brings to light the “the underlying contrast between Christ’s deeply spiritual interpretation of the law and the literal interpretation of the Pharisees.” Against the accusations of the Pharisees, Jesus

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<sup>16</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Matthew’s Witness to Jesus Christ: The King and the Kingdom* (New York: Association Press, 1958), 15. The other discourse being the commission to the disciples (Matt. 10), the parables (Matt. 13), relationships within the church (Matt. 18), the denunciation of the Pharisees (Matt. 23) and the discourse about the last things (Matt. 24-25). Also in H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, tr. Ray Togtman (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1987), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 93-4.

<sup>19</sup> “The reason why the doctrine of the Atonement by blood is not emphasized in this sermon is that in God’s wisdom the facts of redemption precede the doctrines of redemption.” Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (New York: American Tract Society, 1903), 116.

presents Himself as the Fulfiller of the Law (Matt. 5:17), and in the Sermon on the Mount, He “gives us the true, spiritual meaning of the Law.”<sup>20</sup> Jesus has given the Old Testament Law, or the eternal law of God, “its true deeply spiritual interpretation” in the message of the sermon.<sup>21</sup>

### C. The Sermon as an Integral Part of Jesus’ Teaching

There is a central place for the Sermon on the Mount in the Scripture, being the words of Christ and his teaching. However, there are numerous opinions about the purpose and intent of the sermon. Mahatma Gandhi considered the Sermon on the Mount to be the very essence of Christianity and therefore the core of Jesus’ teaching, which Christians should follow entirely and literally. On the other hand, extreme dispensational views suggest that the teachings of the sermon are not for this generation. Gandhi’s view is very close, though not identical, to the liberal views of his period. He, like the liberals, emphasized the ethical element and tried to do away with all doctrines including the atonement. However, both the liberal and the dispensational views in their entirety cannot hold in the light of the Biblical witness (Matt. 5:34; 16:6; 26:63,64; Mark 10:45; John 2:19; 3:3; 4:10,32; 14:1).<sup>22</sup> The message of the sermon is directed against the undiscerning, literal interpretation of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:21-48).

The Sermon on the Mount is as relevant to all those who follow Jesus in our generation as it was for the disciples to whom it was delivered. Its teachings are “fundamental principles of conduct” that are relevant for all generations (Matt. 5:17, 18), including this generation.<sup>23</sup> The sermon is an integral part of Jesus’ teaching. As Bruggen writes, the Sermon on the Mount is “Jesus’ compass on the journey of faith” that “marks the route to God’s kingdom.”<sup>24</sup>

The person of Jesus has the central place in the proper understanding of the message of the sermon. The central focus of the message is in the fulfillment of the Law in Jesus. The message has a

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<sup>20</sup> Hendriksen, *Sermon*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Hendriksen, *Sermon*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Hendriksen, *Sermon*, 20-23.

<sup>23</sup> Hendriksen, *Sermon*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> J. Van Bruggen, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1986), 5.

gospel focus, as is the case of the entire message of the Bible, which is directed towards the person of Jesus Christ.

#### **D. Jesus of the Bible**

The picture of Jesus that emerges from the Sermon on the Mount in no way contradicts the Biblical witness taken in its entirety. Contrary to the claim that the teachings of Jesus do not make any doctrinal claims, the sermon contains statements that amount to doctrine as we will see in this section. Moreover, given the structure and purpose of its message and teaching, the sermon has to be interpreted and understood within the framework of the redemptive history presented in the pages of the Bible. Jesus and His teaching cannot be understood holistically in a worldview that is unbiblical and non-Christian. The Reformed Christian worldview provides an accurate and consistent perspective to interpret the revelation of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus as he is revealed in the Bible is the second person of the triune personal God. At the same time, Jesus of Nazareth, who spoke the Sermon on the Mount, was a real person. Some believe that Jesus is only divine in as much as there is divinity in everyone. According to this view, Jesus differs from other “men only in degree and not in kind.”<sup>25</sup> However, the Reformed view is at odds with this liberal portrayal of Jesus. Rather, Jesus is the son of God, the second person of the Trinity.

#### **1. Progressive Revelation**

The fullness of God’s revelation in the person of Jesus Christ came progressively. As the writer to the Hebrews so eloquently put it, “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son” (Heb. 1:1,2a NLT). The self-revelation of the person of Jesus also came in stages and culminated in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the basis of faith (1 Cor. 15:14). All shadows of doubt in the minds of the disciples, cast by the death of Jesus on the cross, were dispelled by the radiance of the glory of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to them.

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<sup>25</sup> Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 112.

Jesus in his post-resurrection appearance to Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, asked him to put to rest his doubts and start believing. In response, Thomas stated, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Jesus affirms his belief and states that “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). The acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of a person’s life is intrinsically connected to the knowledge of Jesus as a living presence in that individual’s life.

Jesus as Lord and God demands obedience and worship from His creation. This is completely different from the understanding of Jesus as a mere human being “who gives without expecting anything in return.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus demonstrated on the Cross his unconditional and unmerited love in order to reconcile fallen humans to Himself. And moreover, Jesus fully accomplished the purpose of His atoning sacrifice, making Him worthy of all praise and honor.

## 2. Jesus of Nazareth

The New Testament clearly establishes the fact that Jesus was an historical figure (Matt. 1:1-17). The gospel narratives were critically analyzed by the liberal scholars in an attempt to reconstruct an ‘accurate’ picture of the Jesus of history. These attempts went to such extremes that there were even those who denied the existence of a historical Jesus.

The Reformed perspective accepts the reliable testimony of the Bible. It affirms that the gospels “recount for us the life of Christ on earth.”<sup>27</sup> The person and work of Jesus has its basis in history. The eternal Son of God broke into history, as the Jesus of Nazareth, born of a virgin (Luke 1:26-38) in very humble surroundings. The gospels give us a reliable testimony of Jesus though its function is not to give a complete biography of Jesus’ life on earth. The intention of the gospels is to make it clear on the basis of historical facts that Jesus is the Son of God (Matt. 12:22-28; John 2:18-22; 5:36). Ridderbos summarizes the purpose of the gospel thus: “to give, in sober and unadorned fashion, such an account of events from the life of Jesus, that Jesus shall become clearly visible as the Christ, in his preaching

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<sup>26</sup> Gandhi, *CWVol081*, 260-2.

<sup>27</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, *Mathew’s Witness to Jesus Christ: The King and the Kingdom* (New York: Association Press, 1958), 9.



and in his miraculous power, in his humiliation and his exaltation.”<sup>28</sup> Based on the Biblical account, we can have a clear narrative of Jesus’ life and ministry on earth.

### 3. Jesus of the Sermon

From a Reformed perspective, the sermon does not obscure the Lordship of Jesus Christ; rather, the Sermon on the Mount gives an accurate portrayal of Jesus as far as his Lordship is concerned and does not contradict the rest of the Bible.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the Jesus of the sermon appears as the fulfillment of the Law in the Old Testament.<sup>30</sup>

Authority was questioned at all levels, including the authority of church, doctrine, Bible or Jesus. Unlike the scribes, Jesus teaches with authority (Mark 1:27). Jesus talks in the Sermon on the Mount as the lawgiver. The words of the sermon make it apparent that “the Creator, the Lord Himself, is standing in front of the disciples, not a man from Nazareth.”<sup>31</sup> The mystery behind the authority of Jesus, who speaks like the lawgiver, “is the mystery behind Jesus’ person.”<sup>32</sup>

The authority of Jesus comes out clearly in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. In the words of the sermon, there is a strange authority “which would be overwrought and pathological in any other person than the Jesus of the Bible.” Machen continues, “Who is this who tells with such extraordinary assurance what sort of persons will be in the kingdom of God? Who is this that announces to men rewards that only God can give?”<sup>33</sup> Jesus’ words that follow the statement that “you have heard that it was said to those of old,” (Matt. 5:21f) elaborate the scope of the Law and warn against the wrong interpretation of the Old Testament law. This He does with the greatest authority, “but I say to you,” demonstrating with clarity His

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<sup>28</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *Witness to Jesus Christ*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of the Synoptic Gospels to Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979) thoroughly defends the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ in the synoptic gospels teaching about the person and work of Christ. Stonehouse gives an analysis of Matthew that sets the Sermon on the Mount in the larger context of the Bible.

<sup>30</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1991) develops the different aspects of the law and its specific penalties to show the fulfillment of the Law in Jesus Christ.

<sup>31</sup> Bruggen, *Sermon*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Bruggen, *Sermon*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “The Sermon on the Mount and the Deity of Christ” in *Historic Christianity: Selections from the Writings of J. Gresham Machen*, ed. Stanley A Mansfield and Carey C. Olson (Philadelphia: Sowers Publication, 1997), 39.

own authority in contrast to the prophets of the Old Testament, who said, “thus says the Lord.” In all these instances, Jesus is not contradicting the Old Testament (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-37, 38-41, 43-48) but “merely setting what He says over against what the Jewish teachers had wrongly held that the Old Testament said.”<sup>34</sup> However, there is freshness to what Jesus says, and His words reveal the same level of authority as the Old Testament Law, which He held “as the very Word of God.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Jesus’ words in the sermon directly express the authority of God.

The divinity of Jesus Christ is upheld in the Sermon on the Mount. In “The Sermon on the Mount and the Deity of Christ,” Machen clearly shows the divinity of Christ within the sermon. For example, Jesus concludes the beatitudes by pronouncing his blessing upon people who are in a certain relationship with Him. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matt. 5:11). Here the phrase “on my account” bears testimony to the tremendous claim Jesus is making. This claim is followed by the words, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:12). Therefore, Jesus proclaims the blessing on those that experience the consequence of a relationship with Him. Machen asks, “Who can claim such an exclusive devotion as that—a devotion upon which a man’s eternal destiny depends? God can, but can any mere man?”<sup>36</sup>

In order to deny the divinity of Jesus, Gandhi quoted Matthew 7:21 and claimed that Jesus is not Lord, and called on Christians to merely follow the ethical teachings of Jesus. However, those same verses testify to the Lordship of Christ and His oneness with God, the Father (Matt. 7:21).<sup>37</sup> The text does not say that even if a person do not accept Jesus as Lord he will enter the kingdom of God, because he did the will of God. What the text does say is that “even among those who do say, ‘Lord, Lord’ to Jesus there are some who will not enter in.”<sup>38</sup> These ones have made oral confessions that are not

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<sup>34</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Machen, *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 295f.

<sup>38</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 41.

demonstrated by their lives, because the confession has not been from their hearts.

Jesus is the righteous judge of humanity. The Sermon on the Mount makes it quite clear that Jesus Himself is the righteous judge. Referring to Matthew 7:22-23, in his characteristic style, Machen says, they “present a stupendous view of Jesus Christ, and like other sayings of Jesus they present a stupendous claim made by Jesus Himself.”<sup>39</sup> Those verses narrate “the scene of the last judgment, the court from which there is no appeal, the final decision that determines the eternal destinies of men.”<sup>40</sup> The narrative clearly states that Jesus gives the judgment on that day, that His decision would be final, “and that life in His presence would be heaven and departure from Him would be hell.”<sup>41</sup>

J. Van Bruggen gives perspective to the events that led up to the scene mentioned above:

Having penetrated into the human world through sin, violence is being pushed back by *right*, which God teaches man, and the law of fair retribution remains in force under Jesus’ reign too. Indeed, the last judgment will employ it as the standard measurement: everyone will be judged according to his works and not arbitrarily punished. God will not destroy the world in rage but He will act as a righteous Judge. The Lord has shown how much this right is worth to Him by placing the priceless blood of His own, beloved Son over and against the unpayable guilt of man. The “eye for eye” rule brought Jesus instead of us to Golgotha, the place which God had forsaken. This manner of righteous retribution truly demonstrates that with God, right does not drive out mercy!<sup>42</sup>

The message of the sermon leads us to the need for a Savior. As Hendriksen notes, “It is surely a very arbitrary procedure *to accept* the Sermon on the Mount but *to reject* those sayings *of the same Jesus* in which he demands faith in himself as present Savior and future Judge (Matt. 16:16-20; 22:42-45; 25:31-46; John 14:1ff. etc.), and clearly

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<sup>39</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 43. “In other words, it is the judgment-seat of God. Well, who is it that is represented here as sitting on the judgment-seat of God; who is it that is represented here in this supposedly pleasant, purely ethical, practical, ultra-modern, non-theological Sermon on the Mount, and by this supposedly simple teacher of righteousness who kept His own person out of His message and was careful not to advance any lofty claims—who is it that is represented here in this supposedly purely ethical discourse and by this humble Jesus as sitting one day upon the judgment-seat of God and as determining the eternal destinies of all the world? There can be no doubt whatever about the answer to that question. The one represented here as sitting on the judgment-seat of God is Jesus Himself.”

<sup>41</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> Bruggen, *Sermon on the Mount*, 47.

teaches the doctrine of atonement by blood (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 6:53, 55; etc.). Besides, does not even the sermon itself declare the majesty of Christ?” (Matt. 5:17; 7:21-23, 28, 29).<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to approach the throne of grace with faith in Jesus, who is the Savior of the world.

#### 4. Jesus Outside the Sermon

There is clear harmony between the Jesus found in the sermon and outside the sermon. Jesus is present throughout the Bible in that the Old Testament looks forward to Christ, and the New Testament proclaims Christ the Lord. The four gospels tell us about the person of Jesus, and the epistles tell us how we can have communion with Jesus. The redemptive historical reading of the Bible makes it clear that the picture of Jesus that emerges from the whole Bible is unified and maintains clear harmony. The Bible reveals Jesus who has authority over all creation and is the visible image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).

Christ being the Creator God, is wholly different from us, yet identified with us willfully as a human being. Jesus broke the power of devil and death through His own death as a human being (Heb. 2:14 and 17) and proved to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:3,4). The Biblical witness bear testimony to Jesus humanity and divinity (Rom. 9:5, Gal. 4:4). Bavinck maintains the uniqueness of Jesus when he states that “the Christ who appears on earth in the fullness of time is therefore, according to the account which Holy Scripture gives of Him, not a man as other men are, not a founder of a religion and a preacher of a new moral law. His position is unique. He was from eternity as the only begotten of the Father.”<sup>44</sup>

#### Conclusion

The Reformed perspective addresses the challenges posed by the misreading of the Sermon on the Mount. The ethical teaching of the Bible derives from the God of the Bible and reflects His character. This teaching does not exist in vacuum. The doctrine of God takes

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<sup>43</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 262.

<sup>44</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A survey of Christian Doctrine* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 280-282, 283.

priority as far as a proper understanding of the ethical demands are concerned (Lev. 19:2,3; 1 Cor. 3:17; 1 Pet. 1:15,16; Matt. 5:48).<sup>45</sup> Therefore, we seek to obey God’s authoritative word by keeping the ethical law.

Idealism starts with preconceived notions that the principles, such as truth can lead to God.<sup>46</sup> Even as truth derives from the aseity of God because it is created, does not have self-existence and stands in relationship to the eternal Triune God, testifying to a personal Creator God. Human attempts lead to merely fabricating a god based on a principle.<sup>47</sup>

The Bible testifies to the total depravity of human nature. As far as completely fulfilling the demands of the Biblical ethic is concerned, every human being falls short (Rom. 3:10,12). In Hinduism, ethical living is the working out of self-realization to its highest degree in order to escape from the cycle of life. This is self-liberation. “But no matter how many good deeds we may accomplish, we can never erase our guilt and moral liability against God.”<sup>48</sup>

Ethical law is important in the life of the believer. However, Biblical Law is connected to the redemptive history of the Bible and “subordinate” to it. Ethical living is not a means to establishing relationship with God but a result of God’s relationship with us (Gal. 3-4). The righteous requirements of the ethical law find fulfillment in the lives of the believers in Christ. The place of the ethical/moral law in terms of directing the lives of believers is superseded by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the Law is written on the hearts of the covenant people (Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:6). The demand of the moral law in the life of the believer is fulfilled by the imputed righteousness

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<sup>45</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), 202.

<sup>46</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: The P & R Publishing Co, 1962), 286. “Any interpretation of Jesus’ commandments starting from an idealistic conception of the kingdom of God either in an individual sense, or as a whole must be rejected immediately.”

<sup>47</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Idealism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955). Van Til’s *Christianity and Idealism* gives an analysis of how the viewpoints of various philosophers and philosophical systems, particularly Idealism, are inadequate. They begin with empirical evidence or notions which are believed to be a path to the knowledge of God. However, Van Til makes it clear that such an approach will lead to creating a self-styled god in man’s image.

<sup>48</sup> William Edgar, *Reasons of the Heart* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2003), 89,90.

through the work of Christ, thereby guarding us to follow the Spirit instead of the sinful nature (Gal. 3:24; Rom. 8:3,4).<sup>49</sup>

The reality of sin in the fallen world demands justice. God's eschatological purpose unfolds in history and makes its decisive entry in the person of Christ, who bore violence on the cross so that the believer will enjoy peace. It is by making peace with the Creator that we can take the first step towards reconciliation with the rest of the creation. J. Van Bruggen puts it well:

At the same time the Bible also demonstrates that this goal can only be reached through the coming of God's king and through submission to His Anointed Son. Men will not make any peace with one another if they have no peace with God; and nations will not be reconciled to one another before they are reconciled to their Creator. For that reason Jesus became man in order to suffer and to die for our sins. The disarmament of the nations demanded the death of the Savior. There is no other way to the kingdom of peace than via Jesus Christ. By faith we will receive world peace from Him when He returns in glory. Plucking texts out of the Sermon on the Mount without bowing before Jesus is unthinkable. ... God has his own peace movement on this earth. Marching in it by faith we learn something underway about non-violence from Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

Jesus' call to non-violence proves that the battle, which belongs to the Lord, has already been won. Jesus has overcome the evil one and the gates of hell cannot prevail against His church. Now the calling of the church is to "demonstrate through non-violent life *how rock-solid* faith in Christ's triumph may be."<sup>51</sup>

Christianity is not teaching to just follow a great moral teacher like following the *guru* in the Hindu religious thinking. It is a call to be under the Lordship of Christ, who is the Creator of everything that is. This leads to the union with Christ that empowers the one who "abides in him to bear fruit." The bearing of the fruit and the fellowship are intrinsically connected. One can not meaningfully exist without the other.

The thinking that the sermon taught that there was no need to accept any creed or doctrine but to follow the patterns of morality has no basis in the sermon itself. The sermon does not say that orthodoxy was unimportant then or now. But it does say that nothing else matters

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<sup>49</sup> Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2002), 227-9.

<sup>50</sup> Bruggen, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 45, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Bruggen, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 49

unless the person is transformed (change of heart) with the evidence of “good fruits.” In his commentary on the sermon, Matthew Henry notes, “There is not much of the credenda of Christianity in it—the things to be believed, but it is wholly taken up with the agenda—the things to be done; these Christ began with in his preaching; for if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.”<sup>52</sup> Machen puts it well, “orthodoxy without right living is a sham, and that real orthodoxy results in obedience to the commands of God.”<sup>53</sup> It is to obedience in Christ that the sermon exhorts us.

Jesus died in our place on the Cross paying the price for our sins. There is a great mystery, but it is not something that needs to be mystified that it loses its power in the life of individuals. The ultimate demonstration of the value of *ahimsa* is in the power of the Cross. Reformed worldview begins with the Triune God, the wholly other Creator—incarnated in Christ and reaches human beings through the work of the Holy Spirit regenerating people to receive the gospel of Christ’s salvific work.<sup>54</sup> The use of the revealed Word of God in the Bible helps us to be challenged and humbled by the reality of Jesus love demonstrated on the Cross so as to be continually transformed by the renewing power of the gospel demonstrating the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in us.

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<sup>52</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on Matthew Chapter 5*, CD-ROM (BibleWorks, 2006).

<sup>53</sup> Machen, *Historic Christianity*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 159-60