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“They Shall Not Inherit the Kingdom of God”

**Is the Bible’s Language of Judgment and Sin too
Condemnatory to Deal Patiently with Human Sins?**

Rev. Dr. Matthias Grebe

Post-Doctoral Researcher and Lecturer, Evangelisch-Theologische
Fakultät, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn¹

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Introduction

The servant fell on his knees before him. “Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.” The servant’s master

¹ Grebe’s publications include *Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit: Through and Beyond Barth’s Interpretation of Scripture* (foreword by David F. Ford) (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, Princeton Theological Monograph series). Dr. Matthias Grebe studied theology at Tübingen, Cambridge, and Princeton. He completed a doctorate at Cambridge under the supervision of Professor David Ford and is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the Faculty for Protestant Theology at the University of Bonn, working on his second monograph on theodicy. See grebe@uni-bonn.de and www.ev-theol.uni-bonn.de/fakultaet/ST/lehrstuhl-pangritz/dr.-m.-grebe.

took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.
Matthew 18:26

Since the time of the early Church, ethical teaching has ordinarily been positioned in terms of ‘practical precepts for everyday living.’² Particularly in the first five hundred years of Christianity, during the time of creedal formulations, the question of *who* will inherit the Kingdom of God was at the forefront of the minds of preachers and theologians alike. This was to “safeguard” the Gospel and to exercise ecclesial discipline by highlighting those deemed to be “inside” or “outside” the realms of Christian orthodoxy.

The background of the early Church’s ethical teaching lies in Judaism, which ‘adopted the interpretation of history put forward by the prophets of ancient Israel.’³ This interpretation of history was that history itself was propelled towards the eschatological messianic age and the event of the revelation of God’s mercy and justice. This event would therefore simultaneously bring about ‘judgment and salvation, judgment absolute and salvation absolute, and would reveal the Kingdom of God, that is to say, the sovereignty of God over His world.’⁴ The early Church believed that this inauguration of the Kingdom of God, God’s rule over the world, with its dual focus on both judgment and salvation, had occurred not by military force but by the obedient suffering of Jesus Christ, God’s anointed one, in his life, death and resurrection. The early Jewish followers of Christ had found in him a

continuation of Israel’s vocation to imitate God and thus in a decisive way to depict God’s kingdom for the world. Jesus’ life was seen as the recapitulation of the life of Israel and thus presented the very life of God in the world. By learning to imitate Jesus, to follow in his way, the early Christians believed they were learning to imitate God, who would have them be heirs of the kingdom.⁵

² C.H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law: The Relation of Faith and Ethics in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 25.

³ Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, p. 26.

⁴ Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, p. 27.

⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, ‘5. Jesus: The Presence of the Peaceable Kingdom,’ in *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, Second Edition (London: SCM Press, 1984), p. 78.

The Church’s understanding and teaching of the Kingdom of God resulted in an acute tension between the sense of “already” and “not yet” with regard to its fulfillment, which is apparent throughout the New Testament.

The question addressed in this essay is whether the language we encounter in these New Testament writings in relation to judgment is too condemnatory, in such a way that there can be no space to deal patiently with human sin. This question will be attended to through two further questions:

1. Who will and will not inherit the Kingdom of God?
2. What does the Bible mean by sin and judgment?

And these questions will consider God’s patience and suffering and Christ’s call to follow him in the power of the Spirit.

Within this undertaking, the first part of the essay will examine the Beatitudes in the Sermon of the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel, and Paul’s vice list of 1 Corinthians 6, which serve to identify those inside and outside the covenant (in the Beatitudes, Jesus highlights those who will inherit the Kingdom of God and to the Corinthians, Paul highlights those who will not). Furthermore, we will also see that Paul tells us that those people who will inherit the Kingdom of God will do so because of the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit within them, giving evidence of what life lived by the Spirit looks like. The final part of the essay, then, will investigate what Christian ethical living—empowered by the Spirit—looks like according to the Bible.

A. Matthew and Paul on the Kingdom

Before we investigate who *will not* inherit the Kingdom of God, let us first turn to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, one of the most cited and widespread New Testament texts, and in particular the Beatitudes. Here we can consider who—according to Jesus’ preaching—*will* inherit the Kingdom of God.

1. “Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”

The *leitmotif* of Matthew’s Gospel is found right at the beginning of Jesus’ preaching, in Chapter 4 verse 17: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ Jesus’ preaching of the Gospel, the “Good News,” is closely linked to the messianic or eschatological event of the

‘Kingdom of God’,⁶ and Jesus’ mission, characterized in terms of God’s kingdom, is ‘working within a Jewish context [...] united in its vision of God’s comprehensive, peaceable rule.’⁷ Thus the ‘Good News’ (εὐαγγέλιον), which is coupled with τῆς βασιλείας, includes a call to repentance, thereby making a demand of people.

In the Sermon of the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples, just as “Israel was taught by Moses, to be holy.”⁸ Jesus’ revelatory words and commands not only announce God’s Kingdom—God’s saving activity in the world, which is good news—but his words and deeds, or rather his person and his deeds, complete the realization that the Kingdom is near (Mt 4:23). Thus, the sayings of the Sermon of the Mount are the interpretation of Jesus’ life, and we might argue, with Stanley Hauerwas, that ‘that same life is the necessary condition for the interpretation of the sermon.’⁹

In Chapter 5, the Beatitudes are framed with the reward of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is given to those who are ‘poor in spirit’ (v. 3) and those who are ‘persecuted because of righteousness’ (v. 10). Entering the Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God is ‘equivalent to the divine gift of eternal life’,¹⁰ and is positioned as incorporating all the other rewards;¹¹ in other words ‘4b, 5b, 6b, 7b, 8b, and 9b explicate the meaning of “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”.’¹² The word μακάριοι, translated in the LXX with the word

⁶ See also the parallels in the Good News for the oppressed between the Matthean Beatitudes and Isa 61, in W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, Volume I, The International Critical Commentary (ICC) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), pp. 436-439.

⁷ J. B. Green, ‘Kingdom of God/Heaven,’ in Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (eds.) *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 472.

⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, ‘5: The Sermon,’ in *Matthew*, SCM Theological Commentary on the Bible (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 58.

⁹ Hauerwas, ‘5: The Sermon,’ in *Matthew*, p. 61.

¹⁰ C. Hartsock, ‘Life, Eternal Life,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 519.

¹¹ Among the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew is unique in his use of the phrase “kingdom of heaven”. For an explanation of this novelty see J.B. Green, ‘Kingdom of God/Heaven,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 473f.

¹² Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC), p. 446.

יְשׁוּעָה, describes the ‘nearly incomprehensible happiness of those who participate in the kingdom announced by Jesus’,¹³ of those who have long awaited the fulfillment of salvation brought by God’s Messiah.

In the Beatitudes, the eschatological blessings of the Kingdom of God, or rather the ‘decisive pronouncements of the blessedness of those who receive the kingdom’,¹⁴ are presented in a ‘proleptic present’.¹⁵ What this means is that the ‘kingdom of heaven will come to those who live thoroughly in *renunciation and want* for Jesus’ sake’ in the here and now.¹⁶ In this way, the Beatitudes do not simply proclaim ethical principles—though they do contain ‘implied ethical exhortations’, which become more explicit in the fifth and seventh Beatitudes—but in fact are a ‘description of the behavior of Jesus himself’.¹⁷ The focal point of the Beatitudes is the announcement of God’s Kingdom;¹⁸ they are in and of themselves the very constitution of a new salvific community *en Christo*, as the proclamation of these words bring the Kingdom of God into the present existence.

Does Matthew’s Sermon of the Mount, particularly the Beatitudes, advocate a legalism that denies an understanding of justification by faith we see in Paul? In Matthew’s Gospel, we also encounter what in Pauline theology is summarized with “justification by faith”—‘that childlike acceptance of God’s gracious gift, undeserved and incapable of being merited’¹⁹ (Mt 18:2-4). Those who inherit the Kingdom of God are not the ones who rely upon their own strength but those who trust in God and accept his promises and commands in an innocent, childlike way; those who have a faith that comes from knowing that it can accomplish nothing; those who

¹³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Volume 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) (Dallas: Texas, Word Book, 1993), p. 91.

¹⁴ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC), p. 88.

¹⁵ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC), p. 446.

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBW), Volume 4, Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D Godsey (eds.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 103. Italics original.

¹⁷ Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC), p. 96.

¹⁸ See Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC), p. 96.

¹⁹ W. F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday&Company, 1971), p. CII.

humbly receive the complete unmerited gift of salvation offered by God in Christ's person and work.

How then are the Beatitudes meant to be understood? Do they exemplify unachievable Christian living, an idealized set of ethical principles? As Hauerwas highlights, 'ecclesial practices that have legitimated questions about whether Jesus's teachings in the sermon are meant to be followed are but reflections of Christologies that separate the person and work of Christ.'²⁰ When the Church assumes it is at home in the world, and exists for her own sake, then the Church loses the 'eschatological character of Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom'.²¹ One result of this is that salvation is coined in individualistic terms and with satisfaction theories of the atonement, which focus on the work of Christ and make it 'possible for the "saved" to avoid the radical character of the discipleship depicted in Jesus's sermon.'²² According to this interpretation, salvation might appear to be all about accepting Jesus as "my personal savior," after which point the individual can then follow the teaching of the Sermon of the Mount.

This is problematic, however, because when salvation is construed in this way, the Sermon becomes 'an ethic that is no longer constitutive of salvation,'²³ and this represents little more than another form of Bonhoeffer's 'cheap grace,'²⁴ discipleship following a set of doctrine or principles, thereby turning grace into a 'general truth'.²⁵ For Bonhoeffer, grace is understood as God's gift of forgiveness to humanity, and this gift has a name—the person of Jesus Christ.²⁶ According to Bonhoeffer, Jesus is the one preaching the Sermon, and thus the proclamation should not be separated from the preacher: 'The Sermon on the Mount is the word of the very one who is the lord and law of reality. The Sermon on the Mount is to be understood and interpreted as the word of God who became human....

²⁰ Hauerwas, '5: The Sermon,' in *Matthew*, p. 60.

²¹ Hauerwas, '5: The Sermon,' in *Matthew*, p. 60.

²² Hauerwas, '5: The Sermon,' in *Matthew*, p. 60.

²³ Hauerwas, '5: The Sermon,' in *Matthew*, p. 60.

²⁴ See Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (DBW 4), pp. 43-56.

²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (DBW 4), p. 43.

²⁶ See Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (DBW 4), p. 45.

Action in accord with Christ does not originate in some ethical principle, but in the very person of Jesus Christ.’²⁷

This means that from the ‘perspective of the entire Gospel the proclamation of the kingdom and the teaching about the behavior that God desires cannot be separated from one another, nor can the two of them be separated from Jesus.’²⁸ Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is the Gospel of the Kingdom and the εὐαγγέλιον is the preaching of the earthly Jesus,²⁹ otherwise the Sermon ‘cannot help but become a law, an ethic, if what is taught is abstracted from the teacher.’³⁰ Ultimately, therefore, preaching and teaching in Matthew are not related as ‘promise of salvation and imperative’, but instead, the ‘imperative is also the goal of the “proclamation,” and the “teaching” also points to the kingdom.’³¹ Jesus’ proclamation is a direct address, with ramifications in the eschaton: it is Christ’s call to the people, which demands a concrete decision that leads either to a response of repentance or to rejection, i.e. finally resulting in preservation or condemnation.³²

Furthermore, since the life of Christ comprises suffering, reconciliation, and cross-bearing, the disciples are called to ensure that their life does likewise. According to Bonhoeffer, Jesus is speaking the Beatitudes to ‘those who are already under the power of his [Jesus’] call,’³³ and it is this call to discipleship, which has made them poor, hungry, and tempted. Finally, whereas in other places, Jesus’ words about the Kingdom of Heaven are linked with judgment and woe (Mt 7:12; 8:12; 13:41; 23:13), here they are phrased in positive terms (excluding the ‘woes’ in the Gospel of Lk 6:24-26). In contrast, in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Church, to which we

²⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBW), Volume 6, Clifford Green (ed.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), p. 231.

²⁸ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 169.

²⁹ See Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 168f. Hauerwas laments that ‘Christian ethics has tended to make “Christology” rather than Jesus its starting point,’ in *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 72.

³⁰ Hauerwas, ‘5: The Sermon,’ in *Matthew*, p. 59.

³¹ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 169.

³² See Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, p. 169, footnote 13.

³³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (DBW 4), p. 101.

will now turn, we encounter a decidedly more negative perspective, namely the list of ‘unrighteous’ people who shall *not* inherit the Kingdom of God.

2. “They shall not inherit the Kingdom of God”

The vice list in 1 Corinthians 6 of Paul’s anathemas, which represents the negative conditions of those who will *not* ‘inherit the Kingdom of God’, contrasts sharply to the virtue list of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, and those who will be partakers and inheritors of God’s Kingdom.³⁴ Because Paul assumes that God’s Kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness, therefore ‘the unrighteous can have no part in it,’ since God’s rule brings with it the ‘moral conditions that require a radical transformation of values and behavior for believers.’³⁵

Consequently, those who exhibit the sins listed in vv.9-11 ‘cut themselves off’ from God’s rule and his Kingdom (the phrase ‘they will not inherit the Kingdom of God’ bracketing either side of the catalogue of sins, or rather the different types of sinner),³⁶ and are therefore offered no ‘hope of divine inheritance.’³⁷

The vice list Paul offers here and elsewhere (see also Gal. 5:19-21 and Eph. 5:3-5) does not simply represent a subsidiary concern with regard to the Gospel he preaches on justification by faith, but is in fact very much at the center. This is apparent in the fact that the attributes contrast to both Christ’s person and preaching of the Kingdom, and also to his work, which includes his death on the cross for humanity, bringing about the sinner’s justification and sanctification through the forgiveness and washing away of sin—i.e. transferring her from one realm to another, from the slavery of darkness into the Kingdom of light (see Col 1:13 and 1 Pet 2:9). Thus, for Paul, living a life according to the vice list represents a life in direct opposition to and rejection of Christ.

³⁴ See the Jewish “Two Ways” tradition, in Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Volume 41, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) (Dallas, Texas: Word Book, 1990), p. 251.

³⁵ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2003), p. 211.

³⁶ See Stephen J. Chester, *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul’s Theology and the Corinthian Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 134.

³⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 211.

Since some in the Corinthian Church were likely to have been married to pagan individuals and others were household slaves, many were understood to be mixing with those of ‘loose morals.’³⁸ Paul therefore warns the Corinthian Church that if they ‘persist in the same evils as “the wrongdoers,” they are in the same danger of not inheriting the kingdom.’³⁹ Is this a hypothetical warning, since children of the Kingdom cannot be disinherited? Fee highlights that the ‘warning is real’ and that those who are persisting with the same behavior as those already destined for judgment—those outside the community of faith—are ‘placing themselves in the very real danger of that same judgment.’⁴⁰ Here, we also observe both Paul’s pastoral concern that the Corinthian Church is allowing herself to be persuaded that ‘God cannot mean his moral demands seriously’,⁴¹ as well as his patient invitation to them to change their behavior, and repeated reminding of them of God’s promise of inheritance⁴² and gift of salvation (*pro nobis*). This gift is that they are holy and thus already belong to God (v.20—bought with a price) through the work of Christ (*extra nos*) and the Spirit (*in nobis*) and should therefore no longer live as the ‘wrongdoers’. We see Paul’s particular understanding of the relationship of ethics and grace when he urges the Corinthians to “Be who they already are by grace” and to “Stop behaving like the wrongdoers,” calling the believers to turn away from behavior that may have matched who some of them *were*, but no

³⁸ James Moffatt, *The First Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), p. 60.

³⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Revised Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), p. 267.

⁴⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 267.

⁴¹ C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), p. 140.

⁴² For the Exodus tradition see J.K. Howard, ‘Christ Our Passover: A Study of the Passover-Exodus Theme in 1 Corinthians,’ in *EvQ* (1969), pp. 97-108. In 2 Corinthians 6 vv.9-11 Paul connects the Kingdom of God and inheritance with a list of ten vices: see Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 238. In the background to this passage are themes such as obedience to the covenant, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.

longer *are*. Here he predicates the implied imperative on the prior work of Christ of justification and sanctification (see also Gal 5:1).⁴³

The echoes of inheriting the Kingdom of God that form the background to vv.9-11—a piece of both paraenesis and encouragement—derive from the Old Testament context of the Exodus and the giving of the Law (see Ex 18 and 19 and Deut 1).⁴⁴ These passages explain that obeying the Law of the Covenant, enshrined in the Ten Commandments, will lead to God’s people inheriting the land.⁴⁵ It is not, however, only the Old Testament background of obedience to the Law which helps unlock the Pauline passage, but also the context of suffering. In the Exodus narrative, the people of Israel have just come out from slavery in Egypt and endured the wanderings through the wilderness, trusting in the promises of God. In this way, the two notions of *obedience* and *suffering* are central to understanding what Paul has in mind when he talks about inheriting the Kingdom. Entering into the Canaan and inheriting this Promised Land in the Old Testament form the paradigm for understanding inheriting the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, and are ‘held out as encouragement to fidelity and obedience in difficult circumstances in the knowledge that the wicked will one day face judgment when God’s people are vindicated.’⁴⁶ The ‘wrongdoers’ however, will not inherit the Kingdom but instead face final judgment.

Judgment, as we will later further expound, must be seen here through the covenantal lens. In the Exodus story it was those who

⁴³ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 273 and Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 225.

⁴⁴ See Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 238.

⁴⁵ See Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 238. We might wonder if there are similarities between the Decalogue and Paul’s vice list. Paul might have reflected upon the Moses material typologically, as Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, point out: ‘In vv.9-11 Paul connects inheritance with a list of *ten* vices. Whereas the Decalogue and Paul’s vice list overlap in content, the similarity is not so marked as to suggest dependence. It is not that Paul is giving a second Decalogue. Nonetheless, that Paul and Moses both gave God’s people ten words to ensure they would receive their inheritance and becomes part of a kingdom is intriguing’, p. 238.

⁴⁶ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 239.

mourned and rebelled against Moses who were not allowed to enter the Promised Land and cut off from the community, either through direct divine judgment (see Num 16:31-32) or when instructed by Moses and Aaron (Ex 32:27-29). The Old Testament covenantal passages about divine judgment can therefore be read typologically, as prophetic signs of judgment, which ‘serve as patterns for what is yet to come, especially the deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of the wicked.’⁴⁷ The purpose of God’s “pruning” the people is to separate and make them holy, so that they can enter into the Promised Land (see also Jn 15, where Jesus talks about the Father pruning his people). This “pruning,” Paul says, has already taken place in the circumcision of Jesus Christ, and through being washed by him in his baptism (Rom 6:3 and Col 2:11). Here it is important to point out that Paul is not stipulating that no individual committing one of the sins could ever inherit the Kingdom, but rather that the ones at risk are those whose lives are characterized by sin—those who are unrepentant and thus in ‘persistent rebellion against God, not the temporary backsliding.’⁴⁸ So with pastoral sensitivity, Paul reminds and affirms the Corinthians of who they are *in Christ*, and patiently encourages those who have lapsed to ‘change their ways so as to distance themselves as far as possible from such behaviors,’ as those who will bear not fruit will eventually be cut off completely and ‘thrown away’ and ‘face rejection in the final judgment’.⁴⁹

To re-emphasize: if the Covenant, and thus the Kingdom of God, is all about union with God—perfect fellowship with God in and through Christ’s achievements—and if being part of this Covenant and Kingdom of God is contingent upon holiness and purity, then in this passage Paul is painting sin as essentially ‘self-living in the body’, counter to the bodily resurrection life of Christ.⁵⁰ Honoring God with one’s body entailing not exhibiting the vices listed, but instead joyfully enduring the suffering of the Beatitudes.

⁴⁷ M.A. Seifrid, ‘Judgment,’ in Martin, Ralph P., and Peter H. Davids (eds.) *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 624.

⁴⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 243.

⁴⁹ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 240.

⁵⁰ Moffatt, *The First Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 69.

The next section will first involve an examination of God’s judgment, before we turn to the Holy Spirit’s application and how the sanctified community—the Church—whose chief cornerstone is Christ, joins in with the messianic mission of the Kingdom of God on earth through word and deed.

B. Judgment, the Holy Spirit, God’s μακροθυμία, and the Church

1. Judgment

From Genesis to Revelation, God is seen as the ‘Judge of All’ (Heb 12:23). But what does this understanding of judgment mean in Christological terms? According to the creedal profession of faith, it is Jesus who is the Judge, who after dying on the cross for humanity’s sins and ascending to the right hand of the Father, will return for judgment. Jesus is not, as Barth famously put it,⁵¹ the Judge judged in our place (in a passive sense), but, as I have argued elsewhere, Jesus is actually the eschatological Judge actively judging humanity (see Jn 5:22).⁵² Overall, his messianic task is to give life back to a world enslaved to sin and death—to be the light of the world. The New Testament can therefore be said to conceptualize judgment as restorative of God’s original order of things. The negative side of Christ’s judgment, as we will examine later, should consequently be understood as a ‘self-imposed fate for those who refuse to believe in his Son (3:16ff).’⁵³

According to Jewish tradition, the eschatological Messiah who brings judgment is a comforter. In line with this tradition, Jesus makes reference to Isaiah 61:2, to a time when God will ‘comfort all who mourn’ in Zion. This emphasizes that God’s ultimate *mercy* will be revealed on the Day of Judgment, when the righteous will be declared

⁵¹ See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956).

⁵² See Matthias Grebe, ‘4. Jesus Christ the Judge: Through and Beyond Barth,’ in *Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit: Through and Beyond Barth’s Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, Princeton Theological Monographs series 214 (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014).

⁵³ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John: Commentary on Chapters 5-12*, Volume Two (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980), p. 105.

children of God (Rom 8:17).⁵⁴ Yet, even though God's saving will always "prevails over his judgment," Jesus' coming also highlights two aspects of the divine: God's κρίμα (see Jn. 3:17; 5:22-27; 8:15; 12:42) and God's saving purpose.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Schnackenburg contends, "[i]f anyone rejects the one sent by God, their unbelief becomes judgment on them through their own guilt (3:18b; 12:48). This judgment leads to a division among people."⁵⁶ This division in the final judgment is clearly depicted in Matthew 25 in the separation of the sheep and the goats, a paradigm already present in the Old Testament cultic Day of Atonement of Leviticus 16, where two goats face two very different kinds of fate—one, union with God, and one, eternal separation.⁵⁷

Paul believes that the community of believers, the Church—in contrast to the pagan temples and shrines—is the temple of God, indwelled by the Spirit of God. He therefore highlights that the body of the believer is for God and not for self-gratification.⁵⁸ The believer is commanded to follow in the footsteps of Christ, to imitate him and commit to his teaching and reject all immorality, greed and idolatrous behavior, which for Paul are marks of pagan life. Furthermore, in light of the fact that the person (both body and soul—there is no dualism here!)⁵⁹ *in Christ*, bought at a price,⁶⁰ does not belong to

⁵⁴ See Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 166.

⁵⁵ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John (II)*, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John (II)*, p. 105.

⁵⁷ See Grebe, *Election, Atonement, and the Holy Spirit*, pp. 68-99.

⁵⁸ See Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 458.

⁵⁹ Here the term 'soma' needs to be understood in a holistic sense, i.e. as indicative of the entire human being. For further detail see John A.T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM, 1966).

⁶⁰ Schrage points out the theology of redemption from the Old Testament and draws attention to the Hebrew term פדה (*padah*) and גאל (*ga'al*) behind ἀγοράζειν, in Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther: 1Kor 6,12-11,16*, *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (EKK)*, VII/2, (Düsseldorf: Benzinger/Neukirchner, 1995), pp. 2:35-36.

oneself, but to God (v. 19f.), “to whom they must give account for everything,” Paul particularly warns against sexual immorality.⁶¹

Through the lens of the Covenant, the body is understood to be the temple of God’s presence (vv.18ff.), the place to ‘bring glory to God and to sanctify his name.’⁶² Since sexual immorality is viewed as a sin against one’s own body, Paul conceptualizes this as a direct sin against God. It is not simply that God is offended because his holy temple is defiled, but from a covenantal point of view, the root of the problem goes deeper to the nature of God’s love. If the core of the Covenant is about union with God, which Christ has won on the cross, then sinning in this way involves returning from the freedom won in Christ (Gal 5:1) to the bondage from which God has ransomed the believer in the first place. This is contrary to God’s will for humanity, and Paul patiently pleads with the Corinthian Church to remember the Covenant promises of the Kingdom.

The judgment Jesus expounds is always an ‘assessment of what one’s life declares about allegiance to Jesus and the God of Israel’.⁶³ For Paul, the focus is on relationship with Christ, which in no way is seen to be in ‘conflict with his affirmation of judgment according to works. For he understands people’s deeds as evidence of their character, showing whether their relation to God is fundamentally one of faith or unbelief.’⁶⁴ Thus, doing the will of the Father—and in so doing, imitating the Son—becomes imperative for those who want to inherit the Kingdom of God and be granted eternal life. Judgment is, as highlighted in John 15’s picture of Christ the vine and the Father the gardener, both a pruning and a cutting off process: all who bear

⁶¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 475.

⁶² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 264.

⁶³ W.G. Olmstead, ‘Judgment,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 460. See also Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), pp. 224-226.

⁶⁴ S. H. Travis, ‘Judgment,’ in Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 517.

good fruit (faith *with* works!) remain part of a strengthened vine and all those who do not, are cut away.⁶⁵

Here we see that judgment is attributed with a positive sense—cleansing through separation—God judging by separating the pure from the impure, the wheat from the chaff (Mt 13: 24-30). According to Jesus (Jn 9:39), judgment is positive for those who are Christ’s disciples, as to ‘receive Jesus is to receive the light of the world; to reject him is to reject the light, to close one’s eyes, and to become blind.’⁶⁶ Jesus Christ, the High Priest is the judge on the judgment seat (2 Cor 5:10) who judges (Jn 5:22). Thus, when Jesus said ‘No one comes to the Father except through me,’ (Jn 14:6) what he means by ‘through me’ is his judgment. In the unity of his person and work as judge, Jesus Christ becomes the ‘means of access to God who is the source of all truth and life’;⁶⁷ Jesus is the only “way” to eternal life, and the entry “door” (Jn 10:9) to this life is his judgment. Since a person has to go *through* Jesus to get to the Father—i.e. through this “judgment of separation” of the High Priest (Mt 13 and 25)—this separation or “pruning” of the believer (see Jn 15) should be seen as salvific. Through Christ’s command to follow him into discipleship, the Church is being cleansed (Jn 15:3).

Key to understanding how Christ’s judgment should be seen as salvific is the fact that judgment is not simply stating an opinion, but brings about an action. Because judgment should be understood not simply as a statement of what is right or wrong, but rather as an act of performative speech, Jesus’ spoken words bring about what he says, and execute his commands to the disciples, just as God’s words did in creation when he spoke the separation of light and darkness into existence. Thus, in his judgment, Jesus brings about the new creation, and the on-going sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit continues this work of “judgment of separation” in a Christian’s life (Jn 16:8). This new life, Paul argues, is the new life of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and it is to this, which we will now turn.

⁶⁵ See also Travis’ argument on the ‘branches’ in, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, p. 272.

⁶⁶ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (London: SPCK, 1960), p. 303.

⁶⁷ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 382.

2. Life in the Holy Spirit and God's μακροθυμία

The interpretation of the Law as it appears in the Gospels has often been seen as contrasting starkly to the interpretation of the Law as set out by Paul in his letters, and particular chasms have been identified between passages such as Matthew 5:17 (Jesus being the fulfillment of the Law) and Romans 10:4 (Jesus being the τέλος of the Law).⁶⁸ Whether or not we regard Jesus as the second Moses, who ascends a second mountain and teaches Israel to be holy,⁶⁹ he nevertheless still explains the Law and a New Covenant to his followers, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-35. That the Law is written neither in stone nor with ink, but with the Πνεύματι Θεοῦ on the hearts of the believers (2 Cor 3:3), is also what 'struck the imagination of Paul.'⁷⁰ In Paul's letter, as well as in John's Gospel, we see an 'ethical dualism that uses the terms σὰρξ and πνεῦμα to express the antithesis of that dualism',⁷¹ originating not in Greek thought but having its background in the Old Testament.

According to Paul, the flesh opposes the life of the Spirit and the Spirit opposes the evil works of the flesh. Paul's understanding of this personal internal struggle (see Rom 7) can thus be encapsulated with the following: if a person chooses evil, the Spirit opposes him; if they choose good, the flesh hinders them.⁷² Thus, in 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul commands his readers 'Be imitators of me as I am of Christ' and elsewhere he calls them to 'fulfill the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2), saying that he himself is 'within Christ's law' (1 Cor 9:21), that is, the "new law" Jesus preached in the Sermon of the Mount.

Most significantly, however, this fulfilling of the Law or imitating Christ should not be understood legalistically, as for Paul, life by the Spirit is a life of freedom, which constitutes 'a third way of life distinct both on the one hand from legalism and on the other from

⁶⁸ See Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 246.

⁶⁹ See Hauerwas, '5: The Sermon,' in *Matthew*, p. 58.

⁷⁰ Dodd, *Gospel and Law*, p. 68.

⁷¹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 245.

⁷² See Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, The International Critical Commentary (ICC) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), p. 302.

that which is characterised by a yielding to the impulses of the flesh.’⁷³

We see that Paul does not contrast the works of the flesh with a list of virtues, but instead with the life in the Spirit, for he is ‘contrasting two realms of existence—life in the Spirit which leads to the kingdom of God, and life in the flesh which leads to exclusion from God’s kingdom.’⁷⁴ For Paul, ‘the way of the Spirit is the way of freedom; the way of the Spirit is the way of love.’⁷⁵ To be under grace is to be led by the Spirit, and to be led by the Spirit is what brings ‘simultaneous deliverance from the desire of the flesh, the bondage of the law, and the power of sin.’⁷⁶ Ultimately, therefore, to be led by the Spirit is to walk by the Spirit—that is, to have the power to ‘rebut the desire of the flesh’ and be increasingly ‘conformed to the likeness of Christ’.⁷⁷

For Paul, the Spirit not only transfers the believer from one realm of existence to another, but ‘also (1) sensitizes the believer to what is contrary to God’s will, (2) gives to the believer an intrinsic standard of values, and (3) enables the believer to do what is good, with expressions of that goodness being for the benefit of others.’⁷⁸ And wherever this new life in Christ through the power of the Spirit is present, the individual’s ‘relationship with God and life lived as a Christian are begun, sustained, directed, and complete entirely by the Spirit.’⁷⁹

This new life in the Spirit is what some in the Corinthian Church had forgotten; Paul therefore had to remind them patiently that through baptism and the proclamation of the word, they were already washed and clean. The gift of the Spirit in the here and now is thus

⁷³ Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 302.

⁷⁴ Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God*, p. 90.

⁷⁵ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 243.

⁷⁶ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 245.

⁷⁷ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 245.

⁷⁸ Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 247.

⁷⁹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 248.

the firstfruit (ἀπαρχήν, Rom 8:23) of the Kingdom of God and the guarantee (ἀρραβών, 2 Cor 1:22) of the future inheritance.⁸⁰

Patience, μακροθυμία, is one of the fruits of the Spirit and thus a quality of God (Ex 34:6; Ps 103:8). In multiple instances, the Bible highlights God showing his patience towards humanity, particularly the impenitent (Rom 2:4, 9:22; 1 Tim 1:16; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 3:15).⁸¹ Indeed, we already read in the Jewish Scriptures about God's patience, or longsuffering, when dealing with his people. The LXX translates אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶא, God's being slow to anger (Ex 34:6), with μακρόθυμος. Here, μακροθυμία is seen as a gift of God, which 'consists in His forgiveness (ἐξιλασμός)',⁸² and spans between God's wrath and his grace. From this Jewish perspective, the term μακρόθυμος does not 'imply renunciation of the grounds of wrath'; rather what it means is that 'alongside wrath there is a divine restraint which postpones its operation'⁸³ until the measure of sins have been filled up for judgment. In Paul's writing, God's longsuffering is also related to his wrath (see Rom 2:4 and 9:22), and yet it is important to acknowledge that divine μακροθυμία stands alongside God's ὀργή, allowing ὀργή to be 'freed from anthropomorphic misunderstanding.'⁸⁴

A quick look at the Gospel of Matthew gives us an example of God's patience with humanity. In the parable of the wicked servant in Chapter 18, Jesus 'both adopts and transcends the Jewish understanding of μακροθυμία.'⁸⁵ We read that when an appeal is made by the debtor to the patience of the Κύριος, he cancels the debt of the servant, which transcends the Pharisees' casuistic theory of

⁸⁰ See Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 251.

⁸¹ See Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 253 and Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 262.

⁸² Johannes Horst, 'μακροθυμία B. The Theological Significance of the Terms in the Old Testament (LXX) and Later Judaism,' in Kittel, Gerhard, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), Volume 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 376.

⁸³ Horst, 'μακροθυμία B,' in TDNT, p. 377.

⁸⁴ Horst, 'μακροθυμία D2,' in TDNT, p. 382.

⁸⁵ Horst, 'μακροθυμία D1,' in TDNT, p. 379.

compensation.⁸⁶ Here God's mercy appears to be unlimited and God's μακροθυμία seems to consist in forgiving grace.

Yet as we continue in the passage, we learn that according to Jesus' teaching, God remains sovereign in his decision and judgment is not ruled out by any prior signs of his μακροθυμία. The picture Jesus gives us is that God's μακροθυμία is linked to a human obligation, namely that of human μακροθυμία towards the neighbor. The idea of neighborly love would not have been new to his listeners, as it was rooted in Judaism. However, when he highlights in the parable that a 'failure of readiness for μακροθυμία on man's part will necessarily call in question again the divine forbearance,'⁸⁷ Jesus augments and goes beyond his listeners' understanding of neighborly love.

Ultimately then, the parable in Matthew 18 provides the model for the Church to imitate Christ, patiently deal with the forgiven sinner and for 'reintegration of the wrongdoer into the community's life.'⁸⁸ It highlights the biblical truth of the two sides of the coin of μακροθυμία in the New Testament: (1) that God in Christ himself is the subject of divine longsuffering (1 Tim 1:16), dealing patiently with human sinners, and (2) that 'love your neighbor' is an obligation in the missionary service of Christ's Church (2 Tim 3:10).

3. The Messianic Mission of the Church

The early Church assumed that by 'imitating the "Way" of Jesus, they were imitating the "Way" of God himself. For the content of the kingdom, the means of citizenship, turns out to be nothing more or less than learning to imitate Jesus' life through taking on the task of being his disciple.'⁸⁹ An individual becomes a disciple not simply by following an ethical principle—this would just amount to 'cheap grace'—but by following the way of Jesus, the way of 'renunciation' as summarized in Mark 8:34 and 10:42-45 and exemplified in the Beatitudes. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jesus is the human for others,

⁸⁶ See, Horst, 'μακροθυμία D1,' in TDNT, p. 380.

⁸⁷ Horst, 'μακροθυμία D1,' in TDNT, p. 380.

⁸⁸ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper One, 1996), p. 102.

⁸⁹ Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 80.

servicing his Church, and the Church is the community for others, servicing those in need around her. Thus the community of disciples inheriting the Kingdom of God follow the way of service for others, as opposed to the self-centered self-service exemplified in the list of vices.

And yet, as Bonhoeffer stresses, following Christ always entails a decision,⁹⁰ since ‘God’s authority commands obedience. God’s word comes to us with this command.’⁹¹ Since God’s command to follow Christ always propels the disciple to be patient with one’s neighbor (imitating God’s patience with humanity’s sin), the obedient disciple must also show a new readiness to offer ‘mercy to others’, in response to Jesus’ preaching that the ‘reception of forgiveness from God and granting of forgiveness to one’s brother are inseparably connected. Without the latter God’s judgment reassumes its full validity.’⁹² Jesus exhorts his followers not to restrict their benevolence to those who love them, instead urging a ‘generosity beyond the closed circle of relationships’.⁹³

Jesus’ ministry to sinners was therefore one of ‘restoration, rather than the condemnation and exclusion, of sinners through repentance ... he regarded table fellowship with sinners, especially the bitterly despised tax collectors, as an enacted parable demonstrating the open invitation to enter the kingdom to anyone who would receive his message.’⁹⁴ The disciples are called to show the same love and generosity shown by the ‘creator god, who gives sunshine and rain to both Israel and the Gentiles,’⁹⁵ to those regarded as outside the covenant community, as Jesus regarded his followers as the

⁹⁰ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Young Bonhoeffer 1918-1927*, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBW), Volume 9, Clifford J. Green and Marshall D. Johnson (eds.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 451.

⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Young Bonhoeffer 1918-1927* (DBW 9), p. 496.

⁹² Friedrich Büchsel, ‘κρίνω E. The Concept of Judgment in the New Testament,’ in Kittel, Gerhard, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 937.

⁹³ M. F. Bird, ‘Sin, Sinner,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 866.

⁹⁴ Bird, ‘Sin, Sinner,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 867.

⁹⁵ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume 2 (London: SPCK, 1996), p. 444.

‘eschatological people promised in scriptures, through whom, in a manner yet to be explicated, the glory of YHWH would be revealed to the world.’⁹⁶

In fact, we see Jesus’ patient concern for sinners in that he was ‘more critical of those who dismissed the sinners than of the sinner themselves because he saw in the efforts to marginalize persons a way of life that competed with his own message of the kingdom of God.’⁹⁷ The apostolic message with the commission to make disciples of all nations points towards the fact that all of humanity are called to be Christ’s disciples and to participate through the Spirit in his life, death and resurrection, thereby inheriting the Kingdom of God. In Matthew’s narrative, entering into the Kingdom is ‘predicated on one’s conformity to the covenant with God, particularly on doing the Father’s will’.⁹⁸

Here we are reminded of the importance of the twofold pastoral sacramental view of what the Church has practised over thousands of years: (1) The Christian initiation into the community of the Church is through the ‘small gate’ of baptism (Mt 7:13), when the old self dies with Christ, is buried in his death, and then resurrected to new life, becoming a *κατὴν κτίσις*, and (2) The disciple’s entrance through the ‘gate’ and onto the ‘narrow road,’ with the task to *μείνατε* in Christ daily, on this on-going Eucharistic road of fellowship to salvation by faith with thanksgiving. Being in this ‘unique union with Christ in faith’⁹⁹ means that the disciple is called to imitate the master in her behaviour and follow in his footsteps daily, even if this means suffering. Being in union with Christ involves bearing one’s own cross.

Equally, imitating the judge Jesus—who condemned sin in the flesh through his crucifixion and resurrection (Rom 8:3)—also means living a new life by the power of the Spirit, putting sinful flesh to death and conquering the sinful desires. Finally, for co-workers with

⁹⁶ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, p. 444.

⁹⁷ Bird, ‘Sin, Sinner,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 865.

⁹⁸ Green, ‘Kingdom of God/Heaven,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 475.

⁹⁹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John: Commentary on Chapters 13-21*, Volume Three (New York: Crossroad/Herder, 1983), p. 99.

Christ in God's vineyard, it also means preaching the Gospel of Christ's victory on the cross over sin and death, proclaiming his salvation as Good News to the suffering world, and thereby bearing fruit for the Kingdom. The person gains access to the Father through Christ, both, by what he has achieved on the cross—judgment of sin—as well as through his final spoken judgment on the Last Day (Mt 25). The Church lives in this proleptic age between cross and final judgment, witnessing to the fact that Christ is King and Judge of the world.

Conclusion

The biblical texts examined above have shown the tension—already encountered by the early Church—of the “already” and “not yet” of God's Kingdom in the life of the believer; between (1) the theological indicative and ethical imperative of the Gospel as well as (2) the flesh opposing the Spirit. We saw that the indicative and imperative of the Gospel are both predicated on the prior work of Christ and the ethical application of that work to the lives of the believer by the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ Thus one's experience of God's grace and one's ethical behavior that evidences that grace are closely linked.¹⁰¹

We saw that the overall thrust of 1 Corinthians is Paul's opposition to ‘Roman influence in the church belonging to God in Corinth, particularly the archetypal Gentile sins of sexual immorality and idolatry.’¹⁰² Nevertheless, Paul's vice list enumerates not only the typical sins of the contemporary pagans,¹⁰³ but also parallel Hellenistic-Jewish lists of vices.¹⁰⁴ These vices represent a number of

¹⁰⁰ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 273.

¹⁰¹ See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 273.

¹⁰² Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 246.

¹⁰³ See F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 140.

¹⁰⁴ See Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 140. See also E. A. Martens, ‘Sin, Guilt,’ in Alexander, T. Desmond, and David W. Baker (eds.) *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), who contends that in the Pentateuch, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy, Israel is warned against certain actions, which were prevalent in Canaanite and surrounding cultures. These actions can be grouped in five categories: (1) idolatries (Deut 27:15); (2) human sacrifice (Deut 12:31); (3) [Footnote continued on next page ...]

attributes that do not enhance life or advance ethical living and love for the others, since they foster self-love and a selfish devotion—pure self-gratification that stamps out the sanctity and ‘vital spirit of love within the community.’¹⁰⁵ The list thus reflects the behavior of those ‘outside the church’ who are ‘guilty of open rebellion against God and destined for judgment.’¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, in light of the doctrine of union with Christ and the question of what a person can do with their body,¹⁰⁷ we saw that Paul ‘corrects the Corinthians’ misapplication of Christian freedom and asserts that believers’ bodies come under the lordship of the risen Christ.’¹⁰⁸ This notion of union with Christ also highlighted the ‘inseparability of Christian identity and Christian lifestyle, or of theology and ethics.’¹⁰⁹ For Paul, being *in Christ* means neither nomism nor libertinism, but instead must be seen a ‘highway above

sexual perversions such as homosexuality (Lev 20:13); (4) illicit business practices involving deception (Deut 25:13-16); and (5) dietary and clothing taboos (Deut 14:3; 22:5), p. 769. In Antioch (Acts 15:19-20) Paul pleads with the leaders of the church not to enforce Levitical law onto the Gentile believers. In Antioch, the church leaders agree that the Gentile Christian are freed from any Torah adherence with regard to cultic sacrificial rituals (such as circumcision), since the cultic demands of the Torah have been fulfilled once and for all in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 5:7; 2 Cor 5:21). However, according to these leaders, Levitical laws that attend to ethical living, and specifically here sexual immorality, are not abolished but remain to be followed. See also Thomas Aquinas, who suggests we need to distinguish between moral, juridical, and ceremonial law in the Old Testament, and maintains that only the moral law is to be observed in Christians, as through his life and death, Christ fulfilled the juridical and ceremonial law. (*Summa Theologiae*, part I-II Q.94).

¹⁰⁵ Moffatt, *The First Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 61. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 250.

¹⁰⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, p. 211.

¹⁰⁷ See here Calvin, who argues from lesser to greater: ‘The union of Christ with us is closer than that of husband and wife...For if a man who is joined to a wife in marriage ought not to have union with a prostitute, it is far more serious in the case of believers, who are not...one flesh with Christ, but one Spirit,’ in Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 260.

¹⁰⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 251.

¹⁰⁹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 458.

them both,'¹¹⁰ as a 'new quality of life based in and directed by the Spirit.'¹¹¹

An examination of the Beatitudes highlighted that it is not only those who do no wrong, but also those who are willing to suffer righteously for the Gospel in the present, who are called children of God, and become inheritors of the future promise of the Kingdom (see Rom 8:17 or 2 Cor 4:17). The proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God is a 'claim about *how* God rules and the establishment of that rule through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.'¹¹² It is a way of life that God has made possible *in Christ* for the here and now.¹¹³ We saw that through Jesus' preaching, the Kingdom of God on earth is spoken into existence by the one who personifies the Kingdom of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

We also saw that patience in the Bible is not simply a virtue among others virtues, but part of the very nature of God. God as revealed in the Bible deals patiently with humanity just as a father deals patiently with his child. Since the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) is patience, one might even go so far as to say that the Spirit is God's patience for the Church. For this reason, Bulgakov has argued that it is through 'the patience of the Spirit'¹¹⁴ that the Church is sustained and marked.

However, a life lived in the Spirit is not only one empowered by the Spirit but one lived in direct command to bear fruit, manifested in patience towards one's neighbor. Therefore, the parable of the wicked servant in Matthew 18 highlights (1) that God deals patiently with human sin, (2) that Jesus places real significance on responding to God's patience in a loving way towards our neighbor, and (3) that in God's patience, the possibility of judgment is not ruled out.

We can therefore conclude with Fee that the Spirit's 'genuinely transforming and empowering work is often left until the Eschaton,

¹¹⁰ Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 302.

¹¹¹ Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 246.

¹¹² Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 83.

¹¹³ See Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, p. 83.

¹¹⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, translated by Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 341.

rather than experienced in the process of arriving there.’¹¹⁵ Paul warns his readers that although Christ offers security, to rely on grace in a way that appears to justify continued sinning is false, if not fatal. The Spirit’s coming into the world is a turning point, transforming the present into the shape of the future realities and forcibly drawing all of world history towards the eschatological promise of God’s peaceful reign. Paul also has the calling of holy covenant people in mind and is ‘*comparing habituated actions, which by definition can find no place in God’s reign for the welfare of all, with those qualities in accordance with which Christian believers need to be transformed if they belong authentically to God’s new creation in Christ.*’¹¹⁶ We saw that he distinguishes between two groups of people—those who do evil and those who do good—with two possible destinies. When writing about people ‘not inheriting the kingdom of God’ he implies that if ‘professing Christian persistently did evil rather than good they would show themselves not to be Christians and to be in danger of condemnation at the final judgment’, as Christians are not exempt from this judgment, ‘precisely because its function is to show, by the evidence of people’s deeds, whether they are in relationship to Christ or not (2 Cor 5:10).’¹¹⁷ For Matthew, however, the issue of salvation is not ‘whether one is a sinner, but whether one has repented.’¹¹⁸ Ultimately therefore, Christ’s final judgment of human sin is something that the disciple who turned to Christ in penitence and faith now eagerly awaits—the salvation of God’s Kingdom, eternally fulfilled.



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¹¹⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 274.

¹¹⁶ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 439.

¹¹⁷ Travis, Travis, ‘Judgment,’ in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, p.517.

¹¹⁸ Bird, ‘Sin, Sinner,’ in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 866.