

## ***“You Fool!”*** **Matthew 5:22**

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*This essay advances the case that Matt 5:22 is not a prohibition of generic name calling, using common terms of abuse. It is, rather, a pointed and specific warning that one Christian believer must not consign another believer to perdition by labeling him/her a “fool” (“unbeliever,” “apostate,” “heretic,” etc.), that is, one who is excluded from the eschatological kingdom of God. To do so is to expose oneself to divine wrath in the day of judgment.*

*Key Words: brother, kingdom, love, fool, unbeliever, apostate, heretic, unfaithful, hypocrite, judgment, Gehenna*

The second half of Matt 5:22, the proscription of calling one’s brother (sister) defamatory names, specifically ῥακά and μωρός, tends to be looked on as a kind of sidebar to Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount (SM). The words in question are normally reduced to various common terms of abuse and thereafter given noticeably short shrift. In part, the relative disregard of the passage is due to the fact that ῥακά (Aramaic, ܠܩܝܢܐ) is frequently said to be an obscure term, meaning something like “empty headed.”<sup>1</sup> But the Jesus of the SM is so frighteningly serious about this infraction of the righteousness of the kingdom (Matt 5:20) that nothing less than the “Gehenna of fire” is reserved for those hold their fellow believers in such contempt. For this reason alone, I would propose that Matt 5:22, particularly in its application, is well worth probing in more detail.

### MATTHEW 5:22 IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Because Matt 5:22 occupies a place within the SM as a carefully constructed literary unit, it will be useful to consider its particular niche within the composition. Because I have provided a lengthier treatment of the structure of the SM elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> here I will cut to the chase as regards Matt 5:22

1. Robert A. Guelich (“Mt 5:22: Its Meaning and Integrity,” ZNW 64 [1973]: 39–42) provides a detailed analysis of the main lexical questions pertaining to ῥακά and μωρός.

2. Don Garlington, *Exegetical Essays* (3rd ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 56–58. That analysis and this are based on, but at points modify, Dale C. Allison’s “The Structure of

in context. In brief, the overall schema of the SM is this: nine blessings (5:3–12); core of the sermon (5:13–7:12); three warnings (7:13–27). Our text falls within the “core” of the discourse, which can further be subdivided into the “three pillars” of the discourse: Jesus and the Torah (5:17–48); the Christian cult (6:1–18); social issues (6:19–7:12). Matthew 5:22 thus falls under the domain of the “first pillar.” This “pillar” has an extended introduction, consisting of two parts. One is 5:13–16: the disciples are told that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Thus, 5:13–16 serves as a transition in which Jesus moves from the life of the blessed future (promised in 5:3–12) to the demands of the life of the present (5:21–7:12). The theme, accordingly, switches from the gift to the task and describes the treatment to be received by those who embrace the conception of the kingdom as preached by the Christ and live according to the directions of 5:21–7:12. The other is 5:17–20, which can be compared to Lev 18:1–23 and Eccl 3:1–9, as well as the rabbinic *kēlāl*, a summary or declaration that heads a section consisting of various particular cases or instances.<sup>3</sup>

These verses thus perform both a negative and positive function. Negatively, 5:17–19 anticipates an incorrect interpretation of 5:21–48, namely, that Jesus came to abolish the law before the time and irrespective of fulfillment. Positively, 5:20 announces what 5:21–48 is all about. That is to say, there is a righteousness superior to that of the scribes and Pharisees, a righteousness that breaks the mold of Judaism and articulates a norm of behavior germane to the new, eschatological/Christological state of affairs.<sup>4</sup> The nature of this superior righteousness, requisite to entering the finalized kingdom (5:20), continues to be debated. Yet I would commend Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s seminal thought that the righteousness in question is Christocentric in character.<sup>5</sup> In more recent days, Douglas J. Moo likewise has spoken of the “Christological ἐγώ” that pervades the “antitheses” section of the Sermon, 5:21–48 (“You have heard it said . . . but I say to you”).<sup>6</sup> Both Bonhoeffer and Moo, then, are in accord that the long-disputed question regarding the “better righteousness” of the kingdom is to be resolved in Christological terms.

Here is where Donald A. Hagner’s observation is much to the point. According to Hagner, Jesus expects, as the following antitheses demonstrate, a new and higher kind of righteousness, one that rests on the presence of the eschatological kingdom. This δικαιοσύνη finds its definition and

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the Sermon on the Mount,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 423–45. A reworked and expanded version of Alison’s essay now appears in his *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 173–215.

3. Idem, “Structure,” 432.

4. See Robert A. Guelich, “The Matthean Beatitudes: ‘Entrance Requirements’ or Eschatological Blessings?” *JBL* 95 (1976): 415–34. Guelich’s approach to the Beatitudes is valid for the whole of the SM, which too often has been read as a “book of virtues” devoid of eschatological content.

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 125.

6. Douglas J. Moo, “Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” *JSNT* 20 (1984): 18.

content in his definitive and authoritative exposition of the law.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, *the better righteousness is a Christological righteousness*: it is the king who articulates his will and imposes it on his latter-day subjects. I say this because the antitheses follow directly on 5:20 and furnish Jesus' own commentary on his declaration. Hagner, then, is precisely right: "Jesus' remarkable use of the 'but I say to you' formula is to be explained by his identity as the messianic bringer of the kingdom. . . . It is the Messiah's interpretation of the Torah that is finally authoritative."<sup>8</sup>

The exegetical significance of the positioning of Matt 5:22 in an eschatological setting such as this is, as will be argued below, to this effect: *an important aspect of the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees and eventuates in last-day salvation is one that does not condemn believers*. Given the climate in which Jesus found it necessary to commend to his disciples love of enemy, instead of hatred (5:43–48), and in which they are not to judge, lest they be judged (7:1–5), this imperative stands out as one of the unique emblems of the kingdom of heaven as preached by him. Compliance with his prohibition against the hatred that results in condemnatory name calling is to do his words and thus to survive the floodwaters of eschatological judgment (7:24–27).

#### EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 5:22

The immediate locale of our verse is the pericope of Matt 5:21–26, pertaining to murder and reconciliation with (Christian) adversaries (cf. Luke 12:58–59). The opening verse of this segment introduces the first of the antitheses by drawing on Exod 20:13 and Deut 5:17: "You shall not murder." Originally and literally, the sixth commandment forbade the unlawful taking of human life, as confirmed by the Hebrew and Greek of these parent texts, *לֹא תרצח* and *οὐ φονεύσεις*, both of which denote homicide rather than the generic taking of life. The prohibition "was said to those of early times," meaning, in this antithesis, the original recipients of the Torah.<sup>9</sup> The third clause specifies the penalty for murder: "shall be liable to the judgment." This is not, of course, a part of the commandment per se, but it does state the inevitable consequence of violating it. W. D. Davies and

7. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33a; Dallas: Word, 1993), 109.

8. *Ibid.*, 111. See further Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 230–31. John Kampen ("A Reexamination of the Relationship between Matthew 5:21–48 and the Dead Sea Scrolls," [SBLSP; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 36–44) has forged a link between the antitheses and Qumran. According to his data, the protasis of the Matthean formulations has to do with a prior revelation, and the new understanding either supersedes the old or becomes the authoritative interpretation of it (*ibid.*, 43). That said, there are literary parallels in rabbinic texts (in addition to the DSS). See *ibid.*, 36–44; David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), 55–62.

9. Hans Dieter Betz provides an account of the way in which οὐ αρχαιοι finds parallels in Greco-Roman sources and Philo (*The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–40)* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 215–17). Of the literature cited, Philo comes the closest to the usage here.

Dale C. Allison relate that this clause is a fair summary of the legislation set forth in Exod 21:12 = Lev 24:17; Num 35:12; Deut 17:8–13 (also Gen 9:6).<sup>10</sup> Richard T. France remarks that the use of “judgment,” rather than an exact term for execution, is perhaps intended to emphasize that the death of the murderer was the result of due process of law, not unofficial blood-feud.<sup>11</sup> In the Mosaic setting, this judgment was administered by the judges and elders of Israel (e.g., Deut 16:18–20, 21:19–20; 2 Chr 19:5), and, in later Jewish history, local “sanhedrins” functioned in a judicial capacity by taking responsibility for criminal cases.<sup>12</sup> Verse 21, then, is a taken-for-granted restatement of what everyone already knew.

Nonetheless, it is 5:22, to invoke a baseball metaphor, that offers up a “curve” that doubtless caught most of the audience “looking.” That is to say, the anger that eventuates in malicious name calling is tantamount to murder!<sup>13</sup> As Jesus adapts and applies the sixth commandment to his disciples, the community of the “eschatological now,” he radicalizes and internalizes this word of Moses into something it would not have been taken to mean otherwise, as commentators regularly point out. For example, Hagner writes: “Here, as elsewhere in the antitheses, Jesus’ interpretation deepens the commandment, making the demand greater than it was usually understood to be.”<sup>14</sup> This being the case, this pronouncement of Jesus occupies a conspicuous place within its *Sitz im Leben*. In a climate in which the denunciation of one’s enemies was not in the least unusual,

10. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–1997), 1:511.

11. Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 200.

12. As attested in part by Josephus, *Ant.* 4.214–18 (cf. 1QS 6:24–7:9). On the rabbinic materials, see Str-B, 1:257–75; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (ed. Geza Vermes et al.; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–87), 2:225–26. Guelich engages in a rather detailed discussion of συνέδριον (“Mt 5:22:” 42–44) and sees no reason why it could not be taken as the highest Jewish tribunal in Jerusalem (*ibid.*, 44). Robert H. Gundry, however, maintains that the judgment in question does not spring from rabbinic tradition but is Matthew’s own summary of the OT penalty for murder (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* [2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 84).

13. France (*Matthew*, 199), Luz (*Matthew 1–7*, 236–37), and Robert Banks (*Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* [SNTSMS 28; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 187–89) point to various Jewish texts as parallels to this verse, wherein anger is denounced as an offense of some gravity. However, the only clear-cut equation of anger with murder (punishable by death) is CD 9:6–8, and, in any event, it is possible that at least some of the rabbinic sources are derivative from the Gospel tradition. It is of interest that CD 9:6–8 is directed at sectarians who verbally abuse other members of the community. In this regard, the Qumran text is very much like Matt 5:22, which admonishes believers in Christ vis-à-vis their own community. As regards the rabbinic materials, Banks in particular thinks there is no real parallel between them and this word of Jesus. I think he is wrong that Jesus deals with anger of a “much less concrete variety,” but certainly Banks is right that Jesus heightens the transgression of the sixth commandment and that “His teaching is thus something new which speaks on an altogether different level to the OT law” (*Jesus and the Law*, 188–89).

14. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 114.

this interdiction of anger stands out quite prominently.<sup>15</sup> Kingdom life, for the disciples of Messiah Jesus, is not to consist of the hatred of enemies, real or imaginary, but of the love that makes them "perfect," even as their heavenly Father is perfect (5:43–48).

To be angry with one's brother in the sense intended is not inconsistent with Paul's allowance that there is such a thing as a justifiable anger (Eph 4:26), nor is the pronouncement of this verse at variance with Jesus' own anger, directed mainly at the Pharisees (e.g., Mark 3:5, 8:12; Matt 21:12–13 and par.; Matt 23).<sup>16</sup> Rather, the animus in question, if given full vent, would result in the destruction of others. This is not a flare-up of temper that just as quickly subsides but a constant and abiding hatred that, unhindered, would take the life of another, all the while believing itself to be justified as "righteous indignation." I say "constant and abiding" because Jesus' experience furnishes the paradigm. It was precisely the brand of hatred he denounced that he had to endure from his enemies throughout his ministry; this was the rage that sent him to the cross (e.g., Matt 11:19; Mark 15:13 = Luke 23:21; Luke 7:34 [= Deut 21:20]; John 7:23; 1 Pet 2:22–23). The abhorrence/rejection of him is encapsulated by John 1:11: "he came to his own home, and his own people received him not."

But the most telling factor of 5:22 is right on the surface of the text: this is an anger/murder aimed at one's *brother*. France points out that ἀδελφός occurs in Matt 18:15, 21, 35 (cf. 12:46–50) as a designation of Jesus' family of disciples.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, commentators who downplay the specificity of this appellation have missed the point. No doubt, Jesus would not have his followers hate anyone (5:44–47), but the impact of this verse can be appreciated only in view of its point of reference. John Nolland is right to stress that the language of "brother" and "sister" reflects Jewish usage and points to shared membership in the community of the historic people of God. The anger of which Jesus speaks breaches the family solidarity of that community.<sup>18</sup> To anticipate our conclusion, the anger that targets another believer is one that would exclude that brother/sister from the

15. I have sketched this setting in *Exegetical Essays*, 252–57. See further the survey of the Jewish materials by John Piper, "Love Your Enemies": Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and the Early Christian Paraenesis (SNTSMS 38; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 35–49.

16. On Jesus' anger and related issues, the essay of Benjamin B. Warfield is still worth consulting, "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord," in *Biblical and Theological Studies by the Members of the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary* (New York: Scribners, 1912), 37–90. It is accessible online at [http://www.the-highway.com/emotion-Christ\\_Warfield.html](http://www.the-highway.com/emotion-Christ_Warfield.html) (accessed November 24, 2009).

17. France, *Matthew*, 200.

18. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 230. Likewise, Betz, *Sermon*, 219–20. Betz also discusses the variant reading "without cause" (εἰκῆ), which would serve to soften the impact of this verse (*ibid.*, 219). At more length, there is David Alan Black, "Jesus on Anger: The Text of Matthew 5:22a Revisited," *NovT* 30 (1998): 1–8. Whether εἰκῆ is original or not, the meaning of the verse is not materially affected, because the anger in question is unjustifiable in any event. And certainly, if the interpretation proposed herein is correct, it is glaringly obvious that this anger is "without (justifiable) cause."

eschatological kingdom. This, as we will see in short order, is where “fool” enters the picture.

It is Allison’s study “Murder and Anger, Cain and Abel” that has shed an uncommon amount of light on Matt 5:22 and its context.<sup>19</sup> In a nutshell, Matt 5:21–24 is designed to send informed readers back to Gen 4, to the story of Cain and Abel. The strength of Allison’s case resides in the thematic connections of Matt 5:21–24 and Gen 4:1–16. (1) If the former turns anger into the moral equivalent of the Decalogue’s prohibition of murder, then Gen 4:5 springs to mind immediately: “Cain was very angry.”<sup>20</sup> (2) If Matt 5:21–24 addresses the relationship between two brothers, the same is true of Gen 4:1–16. In both places, “brother” is a key word, occurring four times in Matt 5:21–24 and seven times in Gen 4:2–11. Allison notes that, in Jewish and Christian references to the story of Cain and Abel, it is “brother” that adds so much pathos and is always a prominent feature.<sup>21</sup> (3) If the situation in Matt 5:23–24 is that of an individual offering a sacrificial gift on an altar, in Gen 4 the offering of sacrificial gifts is the proximate cause of Cain’s slaying of his brother. The reason Yahweh rejected Cain’s sacrifice is a matter of longstanding dispute. But, for whatever reason it was turned down (I suspect Heb 11:4 is the clue), Matt 5:21–24 has to be taken into account. What is clear is that Cain’s rage was taken out on his *brother*, and there can be little doubt that Cain was driven by his envy of Abel and his implacable anger against him. This is precisely what Jesus does not want his disciples to emulate: they must not be Cain-like in their dispositions and actions. (4) The intertextual link of Matt 5 and Gen 4 is backed up by Matthew’s fairly extensive use of the book of Genesis elsewhere in the Gospel.<sup>22</sup> What is particularly noticeable is Matthew’s employment of Cain and Abel. There is Matt 18:21–22, in which the requirement for forgiving one’s brother “77 times” corresponds to Gen 4:24: “If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” Jesus thus reverses, I would add, Lamech’s demand for vengeance into the limitless provision of forgiveness for those who ask for it. In Matt 23:34–36, Jesus admonishes the scribes and Pharisees by the mention of “the blood of Abel the just.” While no further explanation is provided, Matthew’s Gospel assumes an audience that carries in its memory the story of Cain slaying his brother.<sup>23</sup> The Cain tradition appears in various other parts of the NT, but,

19. Allison, *Studies*, 65–78.

20. Allison discusses the wording of the several Greek translations of Gen 4:5 and the various ancient sources that take up the Cain story (*ibid.*, 69 n. 12). Note, for example, Wis 10:3: “But when an unrighteous man departed from her [wisdom] in his anger, he perished because in rage he slew his brother.”

21. For references, see *ibid.*, 69 n. 13. Allison compares the RSV and the NRSV translations of 5:23–24. While not against inclusive renderings where appropriate, he questions the appropriateness of the NRSV’s “your brother or sister” because it obscures the intertextual allusion to Cain and Abel (*ibid.*, 78).

22. *Ibid.*, 71–72.

23. A more detailed analysis of 23:34–36 is provided by *idem*, *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 84–87.

with one noteworthy adjustment to be made below, the most pertinent factor for our purposes is:

In short, Matt. 5:21–24 concerns the affiliation of murder and anger, and it depicts a circumstance in which someone, while offering a gift on the altar, is upset with his brother—all of which is strongly reminiscent of the story in Gen. 4, where Cain offers his gift, becomes angry, and attempts no reconciliation with his brother, whereupon murder ensues.<sup>24</sup>

A bit later, Allison takes up the problem of the "altar." That is to say, in the life setting of the early disciples, only the priests could offer a gift on the altar of the temple, not ordinary worshipers. Taking a clue from Augustine, he proposes:

But recognizing the background in Gen. 4:1–16 permits us to think something else, to judge instead that the text means exactly what it says because it really does want us to envisage an individual offering a gift at an altar, an individual whose brother is nearby. The image, that is, is not of someone in the Jerusalem temple but of Cain, acting as priest for himself and offering his own sacrifice with his sibling to hand.<sup>25</sup>

Assuming this reading, I deduce that Jesus would have us place ourselves in a Cain-like situation, without repeating the sin of the firstborn of Adam and Eve. Effectively, then, our "altar" is any locale of worship, wherever it may be.

Everything said so far has been an extended but necessary introduction to the actual purpose of this essay: one believer must not relegate another believer to the status of "fool." Should that happen, the direst of consequences will surely result. That the operative word is "fool" stands to reason by virtue of its repetition, *ῥακά* followed by *μωρός*. The "majority opinion" among the commentators is that the former (as a transliteration of *רִיקָן*) in the Aramaic speaking world meant something like "empty headed" (cf. Jas 2:20), "airhead," "blockhead," "idiot," and kindred terms of ridicule.<sup>26</sup> The latter, "fool," is easily enough turned into "moron," given its Greek progenitor. Understood along these lines, these synonymous terms would serve to cast aspersions on the intelligence of individuals. However,

24. Idem, *Studies*, 69–70. If it be objected that anger is surely the lesser sin, Allison's response is a perfect comeback: Gen 4:1–16 establishes not only how dangerous anger can be but that it can in fact lead to murder, even the murder of a brother. "So Cain's anger and subsequent sin add both plausibility and solemnity to Jesus' seemingly hyperbolic equation" (ibid., 76).

25. Ibid., 74.

26. For example, France: "The deliberate paradox of Jesus' pronouncement is thus that ordinary insults may betray an attitude of contempt which God takes extremely seriously" (*Matthew*, 201). The Jewish materials are canvassed by Guelich, "Mt 5:22," 39–42; Gustaf Dahlman, *Jesus—Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1929), 75–77; Joachim Jeremias, "*ῥακά*," *TDNT* 6:973–75. Jeremias concedes that *רִיקָן* was regarded as a *harmless* insult (ibid., 974), which makes it even more unlikely that Jesus has in mind "ordinary insults."

I think it entirely improbable that nothing less than the “Gehenna of fire” is the destiny of those who throw out mere insults, however slighting and offensive they may be. Normally, words such as these are the product of momentary outbursts of temper and are just as quickly forgotten.

That apart, the most relevant and incisive exegetical observation is that of Gundry, who maintains that notwithstanding the linguistic environment of “fool,” in Matthew the term always applies to those who do not belong to the kingdom of heaven (7:26; 23:17; 25:2, 3, 8). The Greek word, he writes, “expresses a negative judgment, private and premature, against a brother’s membership in the kingdom.”<sup>27</sup> According to Gundry, the impact of the present verse is to this effect: “*The final warning implies that offenders may find themselves eternally doomed as the very kind of false disciples they had accused others of being.*”<sup>28</sup> Before Gundry, Georg Bertram proposed the possibility that “To call someone a fool in this sense would be to deny him fellowship with God and man and to charge him with a capital offense.”<sup>29</sup> In this light, I propose that “fool” is a shot aimed not at one’s IQ but at one’s salvific condition or state of soul. That is to say, *the fool has no part in the (eschatological) kingdom of God*. Because of their exegetical and practical significance, each of the passages appealed to by Gundry will be considered in turn.

#### *Matthew 7:26*

Occurring in the closing triad of 7:13–27,<sup>30</sup> the final word of the SM is comprised of Jesus’ exhortation for his listeners to do his words and his four “eschatological warnings” concerning the consequences of not doing these words. Historically, it was Lutheran orthodoxy that advanced the notion that the SM is best understood in terms of what Joachim Jeremias labels “the theory of the impossible ideal.” If one asks “What is the intention of Jesus’ teaching?” the answer comes from a comparison with what Paul has to say about the law. As Jeremias explains, on this view, “The Law is ‘*praeparatio evangelica*’ in that it reveals to man his impotence; by driving him to despair it opens his eyes to the wonder of the mercy of God.”<sup>31</sup> Yet Jeremias’s retort is spot-on: “the theory of the impossible ideal” is to be

27. Gundry, *Matthew*, 84–85.

28. *Ibid.*, 85.

29. Georg Bertram, “μωρός, μωραίνω, μωρία, μωρολογία,” *TDNT* 4:831–46. Bertram refers to *m. Sanh.* 8.1–5, a reflection on the rebellious son of Deut 21:18, a very pertinent instance of “fool.”

30. Dale C. Allison makes a convincing case that 7:13–27 is modeled on the closing chapters of Deuteronomy (*The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 190–94). If so, then the SM may legitimately be looked on as the new law of the kingdom, with Jesus as the eschatological lawgiver or new Moses. Ulrich Luz suggests that Jesus’ ascent of and descent from the mountain in Matt 5:1 and 8:1 are meant to recall Exod 19 and 34 (*The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* [New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 48).

31. Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Ethel M. Wood Lecture; London: Athlone, 1961), 11–12.

rejected precisely because of 7:24–27: "When the waves of the last judgment beat upon the rock then the man will stand firm who 'hears these words of mine and does them', and only he."<sup>32</sup> As is becoming more commonly recognized, in Matthew and the other Gospels, *the* gospel is following Jesus.<sup>33</sup>

The similitude of 7:24–27 is rooted in contrast. On the one side there is the "wise" builder (ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ), the doer of Jesus' words; on the other, there is the "foolish" builder (ἀνδρὶ μωροῦ), who refuses to do them.<sup>34</sup> As Gundry observes, "wise" and "foolish" anticipate the parables of the ten virgins: "The wise man corresponds to the five wise virgins, the foolish man to the five foolish virgins."<sup>35</sup> The prudence of the wise builder is evidenced by his digging down to the bedrock to provide a foundation for the house, and the folly of the other builder is likewise apparent in that he does not bother to dig deep but rather is content to situate his house on the surface sand, which cannot hold when the flashflood hits.<sup>36</sup> The point is that the flood of waters—a familiar metaphor of judgment—is coming.<sup>37</sup> The wise builder will be well prepared for the "rush of mighty waters" at a time of distress (Ps 32:6), but the individual who hears and yet will not perform the will of the Lord (Matt 5:21–22) will hear something else:

32. *Ibid.*, 13.

33. See Luz, *Theology of Matthew*, 58–61, 101–16. There is more recently Alan P. Stanley, *Did Jesus Teach Salvation by Works? The Role of Works in the Synoptic Gospels* (Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series 4; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006); Edmund K. Neufeld, "The Gospel in the Gospels: Answering the Question 'What Must I Do to Be Saved?' from the Synoptics," *JETS* 51 (2008): 267–96; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 546–65.

34. Arland J. Hultgren cites a rabbinic parable that likewise employs the contrast of those who study the Torah and do good deeds and those who study but do not do good deeds. The former builds first with stones and then with bricks, and the latter builds first with bricks and then with stones. When the floods come, the house of the first-mentioned will survive, but if even a little water comes, the house of the other builder will be destroyed (*The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 132). Additional parallels are catalogued by Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 328–30.

35. Gundry, *Matthew*, 134. He further notes that 25:1–13 is the only other passage containing the future tense of ὁμοίω.

36. Luke 6:48 especially emphasizes the efforts taken by the wise builder, "who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon the rock."

37. In the OT, the famous instances of judgment by water are the flood (Gen 6–8) and the Red Sea (Exod 14). The Psalms are replete with the imagery (18:11, 16; 32:6; 46:3; 69:1–2, 14–15; 77:16–17, 19; 78:13; 88:17; 93:3–4; 106:11; 107:25; 124:4–5; 144:7), and there are a number of noteworthy occurrences in the prophets (Isa 28:2, 17; 29:6; 30:30; Jer 10:13; 46:8–9; 47:2; 51:16, 55; Ezek 13:11–14; 26:19; 38:22; Hos 8:7). A like metaphor is that of the cup (Pss 11:6, 75:8; Isa 51:17–23; Jer 25:15–28, 49:12; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:31–34; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2). The two come together in Mark 10:38–39. On the Jewish materials, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:721–22; Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 59, 62, 146, 198, 200. Dale C. Allison shows that there are also Greco-Roman "parallels of the end" that are cast in similar terms to the Jewish expectation ("Jesus and the Victory of Apocalyptic," in *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999], 137–39).

"I never knew you; depart from me, you evil-doers" (5:23; cf. Matt 25:12, Luke 13:22–30).

This portion of the discourse exhibits parallels, according to which the "foolish person" is the one who enters by the wide gate that leads to destruction (5:13), the tree that bears "evil fruit" and is thrown into the fire (5:17–20), the one who prophesies in the name of the Lord and yet is judged as an "evil-doer." In the words of 5:21b: the foolish builder has not done the will of Jesus' heavenly Father and, for that reason, will not be able to survive the flood waters of final judgment. Each of these parallels exhibits a study in contrast, as rooted in the "two ways" tradition of the wisdom literature, that is, the will of God versus the course of idolatry and evil.<sup>38</sup> Those who take the path of righteousness (seek God) are "wise," while those who pursue the other way are "fools."<sup>39</sup> Luz appropriately links φρόνιμος to biblical wisdom, in which חכם always has a theological dimension: "the one who thinks in terms of God is 'intelligent.'"<sup>40</sup> By contrast, accordingly, the "foolish" are characterized not as lacking in native intelligence but as making the imprudent decision not to seek after God and, consequently, not to endeavor to do his good pleasure.<sup>41</sup> To the same effect is Jer 4:22.

The Lukan parallel to Matt 7:24–27 is 6:46–49. It would be too far afield to enter into the complex relationship of Matthew's SM and Luke's "Sermon on the Plain." Suffice it to say that in Luke's recension Matt 7:21–23 is condensed into the question "Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I tell you?" and made to serve as the heading to 6:46–49. Apart from that, the most obvious feature of Luke is that "wise" and "foolish" do not appear at all. I infer that while the actual terms are absent, doing or not what Jesus tells the disciples is the functional equivalent of wisdom and foolishness. As in Matthew, there is an emphasis on two types of building, one that digs deep and lays a foundation on the rock and one that builds a

38. Pss 1:1, 6; 36:4; 39:1; 44:18; 50:23; 51:13; 67:2; 68:21; 77:13; 81:13; 85:13; 86:11; 91:11; 95:10; 101:2, 6; 103:7; 107:7, 17; 119:1, 3, 5, 9, 14, 15, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 59, 101, 104, 128, 168; 125:5; 128:1; 138:5; 139:3, 24; 142:3; 143:8; 145:17; 146:9; Prov 1:15, 19, 31; 2:8, 12, 13, 15, 20; 3:6, 17, 23, 31; 4:11, 14, 19, 26; 5:6, 8, 21; 6:6, 23; 7:25, 27; 8:13, 20, 32; 9:6; 10:9, 29; 11:5, 20; 12:15, 26, 28; 13:6, 15; 14:2, 8, 12, 14; 15:9, 10, 19; 16:2, 7, 9, 17, 25.

39. "Wise": Pss 2:10; 14:2; 19:7; 36:3; 49:10; 53:2; 94:8; 107:43; 119:98; Prov 1:3, 5, 6; 3:7, 35; 6:6; 8:33; 9:8; 10:1, 8, 14, 23; 12:15, 18; 13:1, 14, 20; 14:16, 24; 15:2, 7, 20, 24, 31; 16:21, 23; 17:28; 18:15; 20:1; 21:11, 20; 22:17; 23:4, 15, 19; 24:5; 28:7; 29:11. "Fools": Pss 14:1; 38:5; 39:8; 40:10; 49:13; 53:1; 94:8; Prov 1:7, 22, 32; 3:35; 9:13, 18; 10:8, 18, 21, 23; 12:15, 16, 23; 13:16, 19, 20; 14:3, 8, 16, 17, 24, 33; 15:2, 5, 7, 14, 20; 16:22; 17:7, 10, 12, 21, 24, 25, 28; 18:2; 19:1, 13; 20:3, 19; 21:20; 23:9; 24:7; 26:7, 9, 11; 28:26; 29:11; 30:32.

40. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 387.

41. A handy compendium of "wise" and "fool" in Proverbs is provided by Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 93–116. The gist of the difference between the two is that a wise heart produces righteous behavior, and a foolish heart produces wicked behavior. Yet it is not merely behavior that is at stake but a way of being. In Proverbs, wisdom is defined practically as the fear of the Lord, while foolishness is a disregard for that fear. In at least one passage (Prov 1:32), the foolish are depicted as apostates, a category to be taken up below.

house without a foundation. These metaphors bespeak an all-out endeavor or lack thereof, not only to "hear" but also to "do" what the Lord requires. Jesus plays on the notion "hear" in the Hebrew Bible (שמע), that is, hearing is with a view to doing, as famously illustrated by Deut 6:4 (cf. Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22–25). Correspondingly, the one who only hears and does not perform has not "heard" in the biblical sense. Betz insightfully comments that the two parables of this text convey a clear message:

They represent not only a final warning against failure of discipleship but also confirmation of its purpose and goals. The threats of failure serve as a firm reminder of the preventive purpose of education, which one must constantly keep in focus. In addition to the warning, one finds strong affirmation for the success of the well-prepared disciple. The idea that education assures success in discipleship underlies the whole of the SP.<sup>42</sup>

Stated in these terms, the "successful" disciple is the "wise" disciple who will take his place in the eschatological kingdom, and the "unsuccessful" disciple is the "foolish" follower who will be excluded from it (à la the parables of Matt 25).<sup>43</sup>

#### *Matthew 23:17*

As a throwback to 5:33–37, Matt 23:16–22 relates Jesus' castigation of the scribes and Pharisees for their casuistic oath-taking practices. Because of their arbitrary distinction between the temple and the gold of the temple as objects by which they swear (v. 16), he "unloads" on them and then poses a scathing question: "You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?" Our interest lies in "fools and blind" (μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί), as paralleled by "blind guides" in vv. 16, 24 (15:14; Luke 6:39), "you blind" in v. 19, "you blind Pharisee" in v. 26, and the oft-repeated "hypocrites" throughout the chapter. It is the place of these vocabulary items in the setting and intention of Matt 23 that serves so effectively to nail down Gundry's contention that "fool" is an appellation for those who are excluded from the (future) kingdom. That is to say, "fools" stands in parallel to "blind" and "hypocrites" and is explicated by them, a fact almost uniformly overlooked by commentators on Matthew.

42. Betz, *Sermon*, 637.

43. That "foolish" is a description of people outside the kingdom is backed up by certain Second Temple texts. Sirach 50:26 denounces Shechem (Samaria) as "a foolish people." The Samaritans, for Ben Sira, are no better than Israel's ancient enemies, the Philistines and the Edomites. In its scolding of idolaters, Wis 13:1 asserts: "For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature." Philo, in his disdain for the Egyptians, writes: "These indeed, since they infect not only their own compatriots but the peoples in their neighborhood with their folly, must remain incurable, for they have lost the use of the most vital of the senses, sight. And by this I do not mean the sight of the body but of the soul, the sight which alone gives a knowledge of truth and falsehood" (*Contempl.* 2.10). Note that Philo combines "folly" with "blindness."

As to the blind, this metaphorical usage of τυφλός pertains to those who are “in the dark” as far as their understanding and spiritual discernment are concerned.<sup>44</sup> Given the association of darkness with the ideas of chaos and the ignorance of God in the Jewish milieu,<sup>45</sup> this is one of the most inflammatory things one Jew could call another: to be blind is to be a member of the old, fallen world, not a participant in God’s redemptive kingdom or new creation. “Blind guides” is an intentional oxymoron meant to underscore the ironic condition of those who would instruct others but who need enlightenment themselves.<sup>46</sup> In the humorous touch of Matt 15:14, both the guide and the guided will fall into a pit! Even more ironic is the fact that light was associated with the possession of the law (Ps 119:105; Sir 24:27, 45:17; Wis 18:4; Bar 3:14, 4:2–4; *T. Levi* 14:4; 1QSb 4:27), and conversion to Judaism was pictured as a movement from darkness into light (*Jos. Asen.* 8:10). But here the guardians and teachers of the law are addressed as though they are outsiders to the covenant, engulfed in darkness (cf. John 9:39–41).

The other term corresponding to “fools” is “hypocrites.” Popularly, the word is taken in its modern sense of a play-actor or a deceiver, one who represents himself to be something other than he actually is. Yet in the ancient Jewish environment, “hypocrite” carried a significantly different connotation. It is David E. Garland who points to the Dead Sea Scrolls as the most appropriate parallel to ὑποκριτής in this portion of the Gospel.<sup>47</sup> The mainstay of Garland’s argument is the relationship of “hypocrite” to the reproach found frequently in the Scrolls, דורשי הלקות, normally translated “seekers of smooth things.” He notes that this phrase of rebuke seems to possess something of the same ambiguity as the Greek “hypocrite.” In other words, the charge in the Scrolls may express both ethical corruption and doctrinal deviation, but, writes Garland, “a careful analysis of the context where the reproach occurs indicates that it is always employed in the context of disputes relating to the interpretation of the Law and doctrine.”<sup>48</sup>

In CD, the phrase occurs in connection with those who have been led astray by “the man of mockery” (1:14), who will incur the curses of the covenant (1:17, 2:1). In 1QH, the psalmist, as the “interpreter of knowledge”

44. On the biblical/Jewish use of τυφλός in this transferred sense, see Wolfgang Schrage, “τυφλός, τυφλόσ,” *TDNT* 8:269–93, esp. pp. 281–82.

45. Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 141–73.

46. Cf. Rom 2:20: “If you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an educator of fools (ἄφρόνων).” The ensuing verses make it clear enough that Paul considers his interlocutor to be a “blind guide.” The presence of “fools” is of more than passing interest. Effectively, “fools” are “Gentiles,” those excluded from membership of the covenant nation. It is likewise eye-catching that *1 En.* 89:74 and 90:7 bemoan the condition of the sheep of Israel, who were blinded and could not see.

47. David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (NovTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 104–12.

48. *Ibid.*, 107.

(2:13), opposed the "interpreters of straying" (2:14), who sought "smooth things" (2:15). They are the "men of deceit" who condemned the psalmist (2:16), the one through whom God established the teaching, understanding, and knowledge, which they bartered for "uncircumcision of lips" (2:18). In Hymn D, the charge appears again with the accused identified as "interpreters of falsehood" and "seekers of deceit" (2:31). Garland's findings are too detailed to relate in full, but one of his references is very much to the point: the people so excoriated by the psalmist are called "hypocrites" (עלמים). They seek God with a double heart, one that bears poisoned and bitter fruit (4:13–14; cf. Matt 12:33–35); they seek God according to the preaching of "the prophets of falsehood" (4:16).<sup>49</sup> Garland concludes: "Clearly, the bitter antagonism between the psalmist and these opponents has been created by doctrinal disputes and diverging interpretations of the Law which issued in persecution."<sup>50</sup> All in all, according to these data, "seekers of smooth things" really should be "those giving false interpretations" (of the law).<sup>51</sup> Assuming the setting in which the phrase occurs, presumably the "smooth things," according to the literal translation, are those interpretations that best suit the predisposition of the "seekers," the ones with which they are comfortable.

As all this provides context for Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees, one may well ask "What is their false teaching?" Garland's answer is that it is "a pointed disparagement of the oral tradition of the Pharisees." In so assessing the situation, he cites 4QpNah 2:7, translated "those who by their false talmud" (בתלמוד שקרים).<sup>52</sup> He then seconds the outlook of Ben Zion Wacholder that this pesher has to do with false oral teaching or interpretation. As applied to the Pharisees, Jesus is seen to launch "an attack on the Pharisaic claims to be authoritative interpreters of the Law with their oral tradition."<sup>53</sup> Schrage makes the same point: the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees consists not in the contrast of reality and appearance but in their false exposition of the law.<sup>54</sup> This conclusion is borne out by the

49. The "double heart" is matched by Sir 1:28 (καρδία δισστή) and Jas 1:8 (ἀνὴρ δίψυχος).

50. Garland, *Intention*, 107–8 (quotation from p. 108). In this light, it follows that even where the element of deceit is at the fore, it is a matter not of personal pretense but of giving out false readings of Scripture. Luz objects that "hypocrites" in Matthew are "always persons who live in contradiction between what they appear to be and what they are or between what they say and what they do" (*Matthew 21–28* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 115), citing the various occurrences throughout the Gospel. It is true that in most cases there is a glaring inconsistency between the image the Pharisees project and the inner reality of what they are. Nevertheless, even a discrepancy of this sort is not deliberate deceit or play-acting. In 6:2–18, the point is not deception but that the "hypocrites" love to call attention to themselves. Showing off is one thing, but trickery is another.

51. Garland, *Intention*, 109–10. The converse of דורשי התרה is דורשי הלכות (CD 6:7; 7:18), predicated of the Teacher of Righteousness.

52. This is better rendered as "deceptive teaching" by Michael Wise, Martin Abegg Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 219.

53. Garland, *Intention*, 110.

54. Schrage, *TDNT* 8:293. Banks offers the pertinent remark that the Pharisees had a capacity for self-deception and that "hypocrites" expresses their sincere yet misplaced direction

very passage with which we are dealing. Jesus pronounces a woe on the “blind guides” because of their tradition of oath-taking. And certainly it squares with Matt 5:33–37, 15:1–20, 23:1–7; Mark 7:1–23; Luke 11:37–41. In the words of Matt 23:4: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.”

Another element of the equation is relegated to a footnote by Garland and needs to be given more play. In the LXX, ὑποκριτής occasionally serves as the Greek dress for הַנִּזְרֵי, “godless” or “wicked” (e.g., Job 34:30, 36:13), as confirmed by various texts throughout the Hexapla. But more often, הַנִּזְרֵי is rendered by ἄσεβῆς, ἄνομος, παράνομος, and cognates.<sup>55</sup> I would submit that the association of “hypocrite” with these other Greek words has a significance of its own. In my study of the Jewish context of Paul’s phrase “the obedience of faith,” there is a discussion of “lawless” (ἄνομος and παράνομος), with “godless” (ἄσεβῆς) thrown into the mix.<sup>56</sup> The upshot of those data is that sometimes “lawless” is applied to Gentiles, but mostly it serves as a label for apostate Jews. Paradigmatic is the way Deut 13:12–18 is placed in service by 1 Macc 1:11: “In those days lawless men came forth from Israel.” Characteristically, in Second Temple literature, “lawless” and related terms denote these apostate Jews, and in the Hasmonean period apostasy from the “holy covenant” (1 Macc 1:15) became the most pressing issue for Jewish writers.

Given these additional facts, “hypocrite,” at least in certain settings, assumes the hue of “godless” and “lawless,” and is tantamount to “unfaithful” or “apostate.” The question is whether in Matt 23 ὑποκριτής bears this connotation. I would say yes, because there is in the Gospels an idolatry motif. To be sure, it is more subtle than overt, but still there are intimations of its presence that become tolerably clear once the dots are connected. For one thing, John the Baptist is a preacher of repentance (Matt 3:2 and par., Luke 1:16), and later Jesus takes up the same cause (Mark 1:15, Matt 4:17, etc.). The verb μετανοέω and the noun μετάνοια are colored by the Hebrew “turn” (שׁוּב), which typically in the prophets functions as a summons to forsake idolatry and to return to the God of the covenant. For another, there is “this generation” in its various forms (Matt 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34; Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19; 13:30; Luke 7:31; 11:29–32, 50, 51; 17:25; 21:23). In fact, “this generation” is an echo of Deut 32:5–6; Pss 78:8, 95:10, all of which bespeak Israel’s idolatry and forsaking of Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> Bryant writes that “this generation” relates to the nation at a particular time in salvation history. The phrase is thus “a salvation-historical designation, the temporal element of which has a length determined not by a standard

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of their religious zeal (*Jesus*, 180–81).

55. Garland, *Intention*, 96–97 n. 20.

56. Don Garlington, “The Obedience of Faith”: A Pauline Phrase in Historical Context (WUNT 2/38; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 91–102.

57. Steven M. Bryant, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81–87.

conceptualization of a number of years but by the moral congruity of those who belong to it in relation to the judgement of God."<sup>58</sup> The nexus of "this generation" with idolatry/infidelity is especially evident in the following examples.

Matt 12:30, 16:4: "An *evil and adulterous generation* seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

Matt 17:17: "O *unfaithful* [ἄπιστος] *and perverse generation*, how long am I to be with you?"

Mark 8:38: "For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in *this adulterous and sinful generation*, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Mark 9:19: "O *unfaithful* [ἄπιστος] *generation*, how long am I to be with you?"

Luke 9:41: "O *unfaithful* [ἄπιστος] *and perverse generation*, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?"

Luke 11:29: "*This generation is an evil generation*; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah."

The outstanding words *perverse*, *evil*, *sinful*, *adulterous*, and particularly *unfaithful* are all familiar from Tanakh as predicates for idolatry and its consequences. The last two are tantamount to one another, as emblemized by Hosea's prophecy in particular.<sup>59</sup> As in the case of the "false interpretations of Scripture" above, the question arises how this charge of idolatry can be made to stick: what was this idolatry? In suggesting an answer, it is N. T. Wright who has spoken of "Israel's idolatrous nationalism."<sup>60</sup> According to Wright, Jesus was fighting Israel's real battle by challenging her idolatrous nationalism, "which was passing off its satan-induced worldview as true allegiance to the reign of YHWH." His opponents, especially the Pharisees, resisted his attempts and so challenged the validity of his mission, vocation, and blueprint for Israel. "They rejected his message, his urgent summons to the way of peace, because they rightly perceived that it would mean softening their grip on some cherished, and indeed god-given, national and cultural symbols."<sup>61</sup> As a variation on the theme, the idolatry of "this generation," I would say, consisted in its tenacious clinging to the Torah as the eternal and unchangeable will of God (e.g., Sir 24:9, 33; Bar

58. Ibid., 85.

59. On the concepts, see Raymond C. Ortlund, *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

60. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 462.

61. Ibid., 462; see the entire discussion of pp. 459–72.

4:1; Wis 18:4; *T. Naph.* 3:1–2), along with the traditions and national life (cf. Gal 1:13–14), a conviction that would not allow it to recognize the Christ when he appeared on the scene. This conclusion, I think, is supported by the presence of the same motif in Paul.<sup>62</sup>

That “hypocrite” in Matt 23 is tantamount to “faithless” or “apostate” receives another confirmation from vv. 23–24: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness [πίστις]; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!” The problem with these “hypocrites” is a fundamental inconsistency on their part. It is fine, even obligatory, to tithe herbs, but the inconsistency resides in a practical disregard of what really mattered in the Torah’s regulation of the covenant community: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.<sup>63</sup> “And,” adds Moo, “far from representing a radical new principle for the evaluation of the law, such an emphasis is entirely in keeping with large segments of the prophetic tradition.”<sup>64</sup>

“Justice” (κρίσις) is a fair and equitable administration of the law, especially where the poor are concerned. Among the prophets, such concern for social justice is the particular burden of Amos. The heart of his prophecy is 5:24: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Amos, as is well known, has a special concern for the poor and oppressed of Israel. Psalm 72:2 celebrates the coming king in just these terms: “May he judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with justice!” This procurement of justice for the poor is a dominating theme of the Psalm (vv. 12–14). Moreover, as Matt 12:18–21 quotes Isa 42:1–4, “justice” (vv. 18, 20) is what the Servant of Yahweh will effect when God’s Spirit is placed on him.<sup>65</sup> When these dots are connected, the charge that the Pharisees should have had more consideration for justice is an accusation that they are out of kilter with the program of the Lord’s anointed.

“Mercy” reflects the character of God as the one who is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression

62. See my *Faith, Obedience, and Perseverance: Aspects of Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (WUNT 79; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 32–43; *An Exposition of Galatians: A Reading from the New Perspective* (3rd ed.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 245–52.

63. “This is not a hierarchical ethic but an incisive teaching that prioritizes the central values supporting the specific legal obligation” (David L. Turner, *Matthew* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 556).

64. Moo, “Jesus,” 11.

65. The passage is analyzed in detail in the study of Richard Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel* (SNTSMS 123; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 122–73. Κρίσις is interpreted as “the justice of God evidenced in the liberation of the oppressed and the renewal of the burdened” (ibid., 157). See further the insightful discussion of ibid., 157–72, including the failure of the Pharisaic leadership. Beaton takes up the important correlation of κρίσις/משפט and δικαιοσύνη/צדק (ibid., 158–61). Effectively, justice is the implementation of God’s righteous rule, in the person of the Servant. This is so both in Isaiah and Matthew.

and sin" (Exod 34:6b–34a), the God who desires mercy and not sacrifice (Hos 6:6; Matt 9:13, 12:7). The implication is that the "hypocrites" have not followed the divine example of Exod 33:19: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." In its context of the golden calf incident (Exod 32), this declaration is all the more significant. The accusation that the Pharisees lack "faithfulness" is the most astounding indictment of all. If anything, the Pharisees prided themselves precisely on their fidelity, both to the Torah and their distinctive halakah (e.g., Matt 6:16–18; Mark 2:18, 7:1–5; Luke 18:12a; cf. Acts 22:3, 26:5). It is possible that πίστις is "faith" as "belief." France and others note that elsewhere in Matthew it means just this. However, given that Jesus speaks of things to be "done," that meaning seems less likely here than the ethical sense of "faithfulness," which "fits more appropriately with justice and mercy as outlining the lifestyle God's law requires."<sup>66</sup> I would add that πίστις, one way or the other, normally reflects its correspondent, אמונה, which is always two-sided and indivisible: faith and faithfulness.

In their failure to perform the "weightier matters of the law," the Pharisees have proven themselves to be so fundamentally inconsistent that they incur the incrimination of "hypocrites," which, in this setting, entails nothing less than a condemnation of them as persons disloyal to God's covenant, especially when that covenant is interpreted in eschatological/Christological terms. Wright's take on Jesus in relation to his contemporaries is again apropos: "He retold the story of Israel as his own story." As a result, there was a strange and doubly subversive announcement that Israel's God was now at last becoming king through Jesus' own work, life, and death.<sup>67</sup> Wright's further remark that Jesus inevitably would have been regarded as a traitor, leading Israel astray, turns out to be ironic vis-à-vis this portion of Matthew: such is Jesus' view of his detractors! If any further proof were needed, there is the parable of the "wicked tenants" and its application to the Pharisees (Matt 21:33–46, Mark 12:1–12).<sup>68</sup> In this powerful story, Jesus identifies the leaders of the people with the killers of the son of the owner of the vineyard—and the Pharisees were not slow to take the point: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them" (v. 45)!

The murderous comportment of the Pharisees is further elaborated by Matt 23:29–36. It is certainly noteworthy that among the "murder victims"

66. France, *Matthew*, 873–74.

67. Wright, *Jesus*, 466.

68. Craig A. Evans shows that the Aramaic tradition underlying the parable points to the leaders of Israel as culpable in the death of the Son ("God's Vineyard and Its Caretakers," in *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* [Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 25; Leiden: Brill, 1995], 381–406; idem, "Are the Wicked Tenants Farmers 'Peasants'? Jesus' Parable and Lease Agreements in Antiquity," in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration* [by Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 34; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 231–50). That Jesus' opponents in Matthew are the leaders of the people is demonstrated by Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 44–67.

are the "wise" and the "righteous." In other words, the true servants of God are put to death by these "blind fools." In terms of 5:22, brothers are killed by "brothers"; those who belong to the kingdom are treated like those who do not. Also, in keeping with 5:22, it is striking that in Proverbs it is the longsuffering person who is lauded (Prov 14:29, 15:18, 16:32), while the hot tempered one, given to violence, is denounced as a fool (Prov 14:17, 29).

*Matthew 25:2, 3, 8*

The parable of the "wise" and "foolish" virgins provides a final example of Matthew's employment of "fool(ish)." As the first of a collection of "second coming" parables, this one sets the stage for the entirety of Matt 25. To come to the point, according to Gundry's analysis, the contrast of the five wise and five foolish girls exhibits a parallelism typical of Matthew. The division into the contrastive groups follows the pattern in surrounding context: taking one versus leaving one (24:40–41); the faithful and wise slave versus the bad slave (24:45–51); the good and faithful slaves versus the evil and slothful slave (25:14–30).<sup>69</sup> In the present case, wisdom and foolishness pertain to preparedness: one group took enough oil, and the other did not. The foolish girls assumed that the groom would arrive right away, but the wise were prepared for a possible delay. The consequence is that, while the foolish were away buying more oil, the bridegroom arrived, and those who were unprepared were shut out of the wedding, even in the face of their cries. Because "wise" and "foolish" likewise find a parallel with Matt 7:24, 26, it stands to reason that the foolish bridesmaids represent those hearers of Jesus who refuse to do his will. In terms of this general correspondence, Gundry is right.<sup>70</sup>

Yet a finer point can be placed on this parable: the comportment of the foolish maidens stems from their practical indifference to the consequences of the groom's arrival. It is as though they reasoned, "even if our lamps are not burning, he will let us participate in the ceremonies anyway."<sup>71</sup> But they were wrong, and in this regard the foolish girls are like the wicked servant of Matt 24:48–51, who rationalizes that the master is delayed (and perhaps not even coming), and then proceeds to beat his fellow servants and get drunk. This one, who is caught off-guard by the master's homecoming, will be put with the "hypocrites," where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth (cf. Luke 7:32, 8:52). See further Luke 12:45–46, 19:19–27. The occurrence of "hypocrites" is surely telling. As in Matt 23, the term here points to unbelievers. Confirmation is provided by the following parable of the talents, according to which the "wicked and slothful servant" is consigned

69. Gundry, *Matthew*, 498–99.

70. *Ibid.*, 499. "The failure to take enough oil represents disobedience to Jesus' teaching, i.e., lawlessness."

71. "The foolish virgins take their participation for granted. They make no preparations, and thus their hope does not influence their conduct" (Bertram, *TDNT* 4:843).

to "outer darkness" (25:30). And in terms of the parable of Luke 12:41–48, there is the "faithful and wise steward" who will be set over the master's household, but the other servant, who takes advantage of the householder's delay, will be put with the *unfaithful* (τῶν ἀπίστων, v. 46).

On the other side, the "wise girls" correspond to the "wise and faithful servant" who anticipates his master's return, however belated, and acts responsibly (24:45–47). Richard T. France says it well: readiness does not consist in living in a state of "red alert." "Life must go on in the interim; and provision for the *parousia* of Jesus depends rather on having made preparation beforehand so that one can safely go to sleep, secure in the knowledge that when the time comes everything will be in place."<sup>72</sup>

To reiterate, in the parable of the virgins, "foolish" is a depiction of those who profess to belong to the kingdom but devalue the significance of the Lord's return. Perhaps even lurking in their minds is the presumption that he is not coming at all. In any event, because of the condition of their lives, they are unprepared for his advent, and, on top of that, they assume that nothing very grave is going to happen in any event, notwithstanding their lack of vigilance and self-discipline. But these foolish ones will be very unpleasantly surprised when the Lord appears as a thief in the night at an hour they know not (Matt 24:43–44, Luke 12:39–40, 1 Thess 5:1–7), and then be barred from the eschatological wedding feast. Like the pseudo-disciples of 7:21–23, they will hear the words, "I do not know you" (v. 12; cf. Luke 13:22–30). These are the "goats" of 25:31–46, who are told to depart. France is right that in real life the pathetic pleas of the foolish girls would have met with a more sympathetic response. "But," he writes, "the story is increasingly losing the contours of everyday life and taking on the dimensions of final judgment."<sup>73</sup>

From this examination of the texts forwarded by Gundry, to the basic effect that "fool" and "foolish" are tantamount to "excluded from the (future) kingdom," we return to Matt 5:22 itself and the consequences of calling one's brother/sister in the faith by these names. The purpose is not to propound a particular view of "hell"<sup>74</sup> but simply to underscore the seriousness of not heeding Jesus' word against anger = murder. I defer to the commentators for the explanation of "the judgment," "the council," and "the Gehenna of fire." My only point is that whatever form it will

72. Richard T. France, "On Being Ready (Matthew 25:1–46)," in *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 181.

73. *Ibid.*, 182.

74. Whatever else may be said about divine punishment, the teaching of Jesus ties into the apocalyptic tradition. See Reiser, *Jesus*, passim; Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpreters* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 56–110; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (SNTSMS 88; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 75–147; S. E. Robinson, "Apocalypticism in the Time of Hillel and Jesus," in *Hillel and Jesus: Comparisons of Two Major Religious Leaders* (ed. James H. Charlesworth and Loren L. Johns; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 121–36.

actually take, the eschatological judgment of God is the lot of those who, by means of the slur "fool," expose believers to his wrath as though they were unbelievers, those who have no part in the kingdom of heaven in its consummated phase.

A question worth addressing is whether Matthew's triadic formula represents ascending degrees of punishment or is an instance of synonymous parallelism.<sup>75</sup> My tendency is to think that the terms are synonymous and would have been quite familiar to Jesus' hearers. But because v. 22 is the "latter-day version" of the sixth commandment, there is a transposition into a "higher octave," whereby "the judgment," "the counsel," and "the Gehenna of fire" are elevated above the literal or human level and have God as their referent: he assumes the role of all three forms of judgment. France's initial comment is very much to the point: "The effect of the saying . . . is to be found not in a careful correlation between each offense individually and the respective punishment assigned to it, but in the cumulative rhetorical force of a series of everyday scenes and the remarkable range of expressions used for the results." However, the sequence of this statement fails to appreciate the impact of "fool": "the totally unexpected conclusion in 'hellfire' comes as a shocking jolt to the complacency of the hearer, who might well have chuckled over the incongruous image of a person being tried for anger or for conventional insult, only to be pulled up short by the saying's conclusion."<sup>76</sup> There is insult, no doubt, but it is far from conventional: "fool" is a pronouncement of condemnation, and for that reason the "trial" is for "murder" or the unjustifiable taking of life, the consignment of another Christian to "the second death" (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8), "the lake of fire" (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8).

The ensuing verses, 5:23–26, serve to reinforce the seriousness of Jesus' admonition by stressing the importance of reconciliation. This is the positive counterpart to the anger and abuse condemned by v. 22. In particular, the directive to be reconciled to one's brother takes priority even over acts of worship. Verse 23 takes into account the feelings of the one wronged, and the connection of vv. 22–23 would appear to be this: the person who is about to place a gift on the altar is the one who has called his brother a fool, with all that is implied by that term. But then realizing the gravity of the offense, he goes and seeks forgiveness and reconciliation, thereby avoiding "the judgment," "the council," "the Gehenna of fire," and "prison" (v. 25). It is in this regard that Allison's parallel between Cain and Abel and the two Christian brothers requires adjustment.<sup>77</sup> Rather than the offerer being upset with his brother, the truth is the other way around: the brother is upset with the offerer because of the reproach of being called a "fool." The

75. See Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 74–75. I take the various terms to be parallel, but only as "earthly" symbols of a "heavenly court." On the notion of the heavenly court, see Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 182–84.

76. France, *Matthew*, 201.

77. Allison, *Studies*, 69–70.

allusions to the altar, the gift, and anger remain intact, but as is normally the case in a typological reading of the OT, there is rarely a one-for-one correspondence. In the scenario constructed by Jesus, Cain-like deportment is exhibited by the offerer who will not be reconciled with his offended brother. Effectively, in this instance of role reversal, here is a brother who would have the other brother lose his life.

Verses 25–26 provide a further illustration by way of an earthly court; that is to say, settling "out of court" is greatly preferable to being handed over to the court by an accuser and then put in prison.<sup>78</sup> The illustrative point is explained by Gundry: "Like anger, then, failure to make things right with a brother in the church falsifies profession of discipleship and lands a person in hell, the prison of eternally hopeless debtors, i.e., of sinners."<sup>79</sup> Jesus, then, exhorts his followers to take advantage of the opportunities for reconciliation before it is too late, before the great assize of the last day.

#### SUMMARY AND APPLICATION

Our study began by placing Matt 5:22 in the cadre of Matthew's SM. Specifically, the verse belongs to the antitheses of 5:17–48, a segment of the discourse that is distinctively eschatological in that Jesus' teaching is represented as God's final word. In the recurring formula "You have heard it said . . . but I say to you . . ." it is Jesus the Messiah who displaces all revelation and tradition that have gone before. The practical significance of the occurrence of Matt 5:22 in an eschatological setting of this sort is to this effect: an important aspect of the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees and eventuates in last-day salvation is one that does not condemn fellow believers.

The exegesis of 5:22 consisted of three parts. *First*, we observed that Jesus radicalizes and internalizes the sixth commandment for his community by placing anger on a par with murder. But the most telling factor of 5:22 is that this is an anger = murder aimed at one's *brother*. It is just the presence of "brother" that signals an intertextual echo of the story of Cain and Abel in Gen 4: for one brother to hate another is to imitate the first homicide.

*Second*, drawing on observations of Gundry, we postulated that "fool" and "foolish" in Matthew always pertain to persons who will be excluded from the kingdom in its final manifestation, as per 7:26; 23:17; 25:2, 3, 8. These passages were examined in turn, with the following results.

1. In 7:26, the "foolish" builder is the one who disregards the demands of Jesus' words, and thus his dwelling, grounded only on the sand,

78. Scholars point out that the debtor's prison of v. 26 is of Greco-Roman, not Jewish, origin. According to Luz, "we are dealing here with the terror of Gentile trial where the poor is imprisoned until the last penny was paid" (*Matthew 1–7*, 241). Additionally, see Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 134–36. Such a prison could entail physical coercion to "encourage" debtors to pay up (cf. Matt 18:28, 34).

79. Gundry, *Matthew*, 87.

is inundated when the flood waters of judgment are unleashed. In tying into the "two ways" tradition of wisdom literature, Jesus contrasts this "foolish man" with the "wise" builder who founded his house on the bed-rock and, consequently, will survive the coming deluge.

2. According to 23:17, the "blind fools" are "in the dark" as far as their understanding and spiritual discernment are concerned. The criticism is frequently made that 23:17 appears to contradict 5:22. In other words, Jesus does what he tells the disciples not to do. But the two are easily reconciled: "Obviously the Pharisees do not count as 'brothers.'"<sup>80</sup> They are no less than "blind guides" (23:16, 24; see also 15:14; Luke 6:39), "you blind" (23:19), and "you blind Pharisee" (23:26). Given the association of darkness with the ideas of chaos and the ignorance of God in the Jewish milieu, this is a devastating critique. "Fool" is further illumined by the parallel and synonymous term "hypocrite." Against the backdrop of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the latter word is best understood as one who gives false interpretations of Scripture. By way of application to the Pharisees, Jesus probably has in view their oral tradition, as illustrated by their oath-taking practices.

Another element of the equation is that "hypocrite" is associated with "lawless" in certain Second Temple texts. Given this added coloring, "hypocrite" is practically equivalent to "apostate" and "godless." A parallel concept resides in Jesus' denunciation of "this generation," especially as an "unfaithful" and "adulterous" generation, buttressed by his charge that the "hypocrites" are guilty of a fundamental inconsistency: whereas they tithe minutiae such as herbs, they have disregarded the "weightier matters" of justice, mercy, and especially faithfulness.

Given that Matt 5:22 equates unjustified anger with murder, it is of more than passing interest that 23:29–36, with its backdrop of 21:33–46 (Mark 12:1–12), portrays the Pharisees as killers of prophets, wise men, and scribes, so that "upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation" (vv. 35–36).

3. The parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids (25:1–13) presents the same study in contrast as 7:24–27. The wise maidens correspond to the good and faithful servants, while the foolish girls are like the evil and slothful servant (25:14–30). Because of the latter's unpreparedness for the bridegroom's arrival, they will be excluded from the wedding festivities, in spite of their piteous pleas. Their quintessential failure is their devaluation of the Lord's return and its consequences.

In the *third* place, nothing less than "the judgment," "the counsel," and the "Gehenna of fire" are in store those who disqualify fellow Christians from the eschatological kingdom. They will incur this verdict if unrepentantly they label and renounce the others as "fools."

80. Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 120 n. 63.

The cumulative effect of these data is very compelling. "Fool(ish)" is not a surrogate for common terms of insult, as demeaning as they may be in their intent. Rather, to call one a "fool" is to place one in the company of "unbelievers," "blind guides," "godless," "apostate," and the like. In short, the "fool" is regarded and treated as the enemy of God, one opposed to and excluded from his kingdom. Therefore, the actual semantic equivalent of "fool" is not "stupid," "idiot," "airhead," "blockhead," "dope," and so on, or even "worthless" or "good for nothing." Instead, it is *damning speech* such as "unbeliever," "heretic," "false teacher," "apostate," "reprobate," or even "Pharisee," "Judaizer," and "Catholic" in a pejorative/polemical sense. In point of fact, this is the only reading of Matt 5:22 that makes any real sense. Simply throwing out common labels of insult or derision, however heated or contemptuous the tone, hardly deserves the sort of judgment Jesus envisions, especially if Jeremiah is right that נָקִי was regarded as a *harmless* insult.<sup>81</sup> But for humans to arrogate to themselves the prerogative of the divine judge by dispatching other believers to destruction not only makes sense of the text but it vastly increases its relevance for Christian deportment.

If I may make a final application of these findings, theological debate is often "hot and heavy," especially where orthodoxy is perceived to be under attack. To be sure, concern for "sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1) is not only understandable; it is entirely desirable and commendable. But in our passion for the truth, it is always necessary to exhibit the Berean spirit of searching the Scriptures to see "if these things are so" (Acts 17:11). To rush to judgment respecting the souls of individuals and, consequently, to condemn them as "fools" is to violate Jesus' words and to situate oneself before the bar of divine justice. It is those who "play God," who, as exemplified by the Pharisees, will "see God" (Matt 5:8) in other than a beatific vision. Matthew 7:1–2 is directly parallel: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." This imperative is often misunderstood as forbidding any criticism of others, even where it may be legitimate. But "judge" means to assume the role of God by consigning others to ruin. If we do that, we will receive the very measure we have meted out. Matthew 12:37 likewise speaks to the issue: "for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." The "words" in question are the product of "good" and "evil" hearts respectively (12:33–35). As applicable to Matt 5:22, the words that will condemn are the ill-conceived "you fool!" Yet there is the encouragement of 5:23–24 that, this side of the Last Day, it is not too late to "settle out of court" and be reconciled to brothers and sisters.

81. Jeremiah, *TDNT* 6:974. C. F. D. Moule discerningly observes that anger is the real problem, with murder as the result. And then, by stressing the eschatological factor, Moule writes: "This [recognition] saves the saying from the banality of saying no more than that anger should be indictable by the Jewish court" ("Uncomfortable Words: 1. The Angry Word: Mt 5.21f.," *ExpT* 81 [1969–70]: 13).