

Fulfilling the Law and the Prophets

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“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, **until heaven and earth pass away**, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, **until all is accomplished**” (Mt 5:17-18).

OT is still Applicable

Blomberg, Wilkins, and Hayes (among others) acknowledge that the OT is still normative, relevant, and valid as an expression of God’s will for believers today. But then, Paul himself clearly indicates that this is the case: “All Scripture [OT too] is inspired by God and profitable for teaching for reproof, for correction for training in righteousness [even today]” (2Tim 3:16). Paul’s NT affirmation applies to the entire OT: both its fulfilled and unfulfilled portions. These commentators wisely caution against avoiding two extremes: (1) One should not think that *none* of the OT applies unless explicitly *affirmed* in the NT, (2) nor should one conclude that *all* the OT applies unless *revoked* in the NT. So how does one achieve a balance between these two extremes?

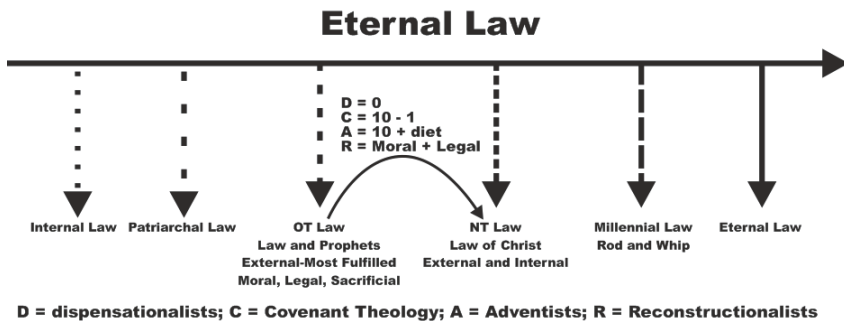
Principles

Expressed another way, how is the OT law applicable today? A solution is available in affirming that the principles of the law are still in effect. Martin states: “The **principle** underlying the moral laws of God is indeed eternal.”¹ Geisler and Rhodes concur that since the moral **principles** reflect the nature of an unchanging God, they are still binding, but we are not under the moral law.² The moral principles are binding; the moral law is not. Wilkins uses the atonement as an example: The OT commandment to offer atoning sacrifices “is no longer legally binding as a practice. Nevertheless, the Old Testament **principle** of penalty and payment for sin remains valid.”³ “**Principles** of the law are valid guidelines.”⁴ The practice has been modified, but the underlying principle still applies. The application of underlying principles is called *principlism*. But how does principlism work in practice?

Unity of the OT Law

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) breaks the law up into three parts (moral, legal, ceremonial) in order to claim that the moral parts are still binding for the NT believer today. Martin and Hayes (along with many others) demonstrate the unity of the law and thereby nullify attempts to make certain parts of the law directly applicable today by means of such artificial distinctions. Surely Jesus fulfilled both the moral and ceremonial

parts of the law. Jesus is not distinguishing between various parts of the law in this passage. Morris concurs that there is “no distinction between the ceremonial and moral law here.”⁵ Of course, dispensationalists are known for insisting that the OT law is a unity and that NT believers are not under any part of the law. Since it is a unity, if believers are not under part of it, they are not under any of it. Schmidtbleicher suggests that the OT and NT laws are dispensational expressions of the *eternal law of God* under which humanity has lived from the beginning of time. In the chart below, I have adapted his chart and approach.



Paul tells us that the law has been written in hearts of those who do not have the written law (Rom 2:14). He also adds, “Where there is no law, neither is there violation” (Rom 4:15). Are we to conclude, then, that when Cain killed Able, Cain was not violating God’s law just because God had not spelled it out for him: “Thou shalt not murder”? No! Cain was violating the moral law that God had already written in his heart. Even before that violation, Abel respected the Lord’s sacrificial law, and the Lord respected him for doing so (Gen 4:4). Both the violation and respect of God’s law was going on long before the Ten Commandments.

As to the continuity between the OT and NT expressions of this eternal law, dispensationalists are criticized for saying that NT believers are not under any of the OT law. Ultra-dispensationalists even go so far as to claim that the four NT Gospels do not apply to church age believers because the church did not come into existence until after the time period covered by the Gospels. These ultra-dispensationalists lump the NT Gospels with the OT. (Some would even lump the non-Pauline NT epistles in this list of non-applicable NT writings.) The Gospels refute such ultra-dispensationalistic handling of their pages, however. John, writing after the NT church has already been established, tells unbelievers that they can find eternal life by reading the words of Jesus contained within his Gospel (Jn

20:30-31). A verse like Jn 3:16 still applies directly today! Matthew, writing to NT believers, tells them that the way to make disciples is by teaching them to obey the words of Jesus contained within his Gospel. NT believers today are to obey all that Jesus commanded His disciples during His earthy ministry as recorded in the Gospels (Mt 28:19-2).

Going in the opposite direction, Covenant theology adopts the Reformed statement, as expressed in WCF, and brings over the Ten Commandments (minus the fourth one regarding Sabbath worship) to the NT period and places Christians under this part of the Mosaic law, despite the NT insistence that NT believers are not under the OT law. Adventists err even more by bringing over all Ten Commandments plus the dietary regulations, despite the fact that Jesus simultaneously nullified both their dietary error and ultra-dispensationalism in Mk 7:19 when “He declared all foods clean.” There is no way an ultra-dispensationalist can make that part of the OT! Neither can the OT dietary regulations be brought over by Adventists from the OT and be made directly applicable today when they have to pole vault over such a statement to do so. In an even greater blunder, Reconstructionists bring over all the moral and legal laws. The Sermon on the Mount stands at the intersection of these colliding approaches. But if by paying attention to how the Lord handles the past, present, and future, collisions may be avoided by following Jesus’ example.

Until heaven and earth pass away

Will Jesus throw away the OT when He returns? Some seem to think so. Admittedly, Jesus does say that *not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law until heaven and earth pass away*. But heaven and earth will not pass away when He returns. So the OT will continue at least until then. Morris understands Jesus’ statement to mean that Scripture will not pass away even though the physical universe will pass away. Similarly, France believes that Scripture will endure because the phrase is idiomatic for enduring forever. Regardless, the proper interpretation is that the Scripture will abide forever (Ps 119:89; Is 40:8; 1Pet 1:25). The best explanation is that the principles of the eternal law as expressed in the Scripture will never pass away.

Until all is accomplished

How did Jesus fulfill the law in such a manner that it is still operative at least until He returns and evidently throughout eternity? There are three primary options:

1. Jesus personally fills *up*, performs, carries out, completes by meeting the OT **demands**. The text may mean more than simple

completion by Jesus' action, but it cannot mean less since even its smallest detail has eternal validity.

2. Jesus fills *out* the full **meaning** of the OT by showing forth and bringing out its true meaning. MacArthur acknowledges, "There is a sense in which Jesus did that...But that cannot be the primary meaning of fulfill, because that is not what the word means. It does not mean *fill out* but *fill up*" (bold his).⁶ Regardless, this full meaning had to await His death and resurrection and the sending of the Spirit, so this fulfilling extends beyond Jesus' earthly ministry.
3. Jesus brings the OT to its completion.
 - a. Jesus brings the OT to its intended goal, bringing its complete **meaning** to fruition. With this approach, Blomberg effectively incorporates option two into option three, observing that the need for sacrifices has already been "brought to complete fruition" but "in other instances certain requirements of the law [such as loving God and others] endure until Christ's coming again."⁷ Superficially, Blomberg's statement might be taken to make the present day *application* of the law contingent upon whether or not it has been fulfilled. But this would be a misunderstanding of Blomberg's intent since he states in the preceding paragraph that all the OT remains normative today. As an advocate of *principlism*,⁸ Blomberg should probably be understood as affirming that the unfilled proportions of the OT await direct application but the fulfilled portions may only be made normative through indirect application. After all, unfilled prophecies still await literal fulfillment and therefore have direct application to a future age. Some dispensationalists even believe that OT sacrifices will be reinstated as memorials during the millennium. So I would qualify Blomberg's position by adding that those portions of the OT which still await fulfillment will have direct application in the day and age in which they are fulfilled. Even so, this direct application does not entail placing

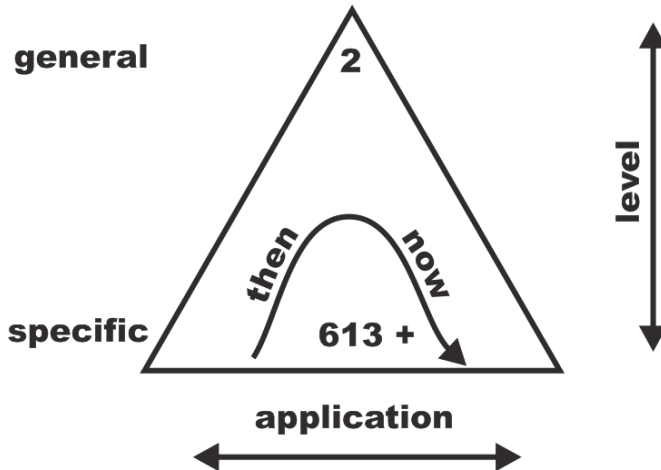
those in the future directly under the OT law. (See *Then-Now-Then*, 8).

- b. Blomberg seems to err, however, when he indicates that the application of the law will only endure until Christ comes again. For one thing, as already indicated, the physical universe does not pass away when the Lord returns at the beginning of the millennium. The application of the law would have to extend at least until the end of the millennium. The fulfilling of the Prophets would certainly include the literal fulfillment of unfilled prophecies during the millennial age. Moreover, Mt 5:22 (which is the first application that Jesus makes of what He is teaching in 5:17-18) finds its culmination in Jesus' millennial administration. Since Scripture affirms its own perpetuity, and since Jesus affirms Scripture, we may affirm the perpetuity of Scripture by Jesus' authority.
- c. Whereas Bloomberg combined the third option with the second one, France combines the third option with the first one (via v. 17): "It is, then, Jesus' 'fulfillment' of the Old Testament which is in view here. The law remains valid until it reaches its intended culmination; this it is now doing in the ministry of Jesus. This verse does not state, therefore, as it is sometimes interpreted, that every regulation in the Old Testament law remains binding after the coming of Jesus. The law is unalterable, but that does not justify its **application** beyond the purpose for which it was intended."⁹ France is correct to stress that Jesus is the one doing the fulfilling; however, in accordance with principlism, direct application of the OT is intended until its fulfillment. Subsequently, indirect application is still intended.
- d. All in all, option three is preferable and should entail options one and two. These options are not mutually exclusive.

Principlism

Principlism is the approach adopted herein to explain the means by which the OT principles are still applicable today. In this approach, one determines if the OT statement still has direct application by means of a consistent hermeneutic which simply asks, “Has the OT proposition been fulfilled?” If not, it still has direct application in the time period it is fulfilled. If it does not have direct application, then indirect application is sought. The application of the moral principles may vary from one dispensation to another, but the underlying principles are still valid. All Scripture, even the fulfilled parts, are still useful for instruction when one discovers and applies the underlying principles (cp. 1Cor 9:9-10; 2Tim 3:16-17).

Kuhatschek suggests a three-step, pyramidal approach.¹⁰ For sake of simplicity, this approach will be adopted as a working model. As the level increases, the level of the application becomes more general so that our love for God and love for others are the two capstone principles. As one proceeds down to the base of the pyramid, the applications become more specific and numerous. But as will be explained subsequently, direct application of a principle as stated in the OT to the NT era does not mean that those in the NT era are under the OT law.



1. **Direct application:** Determine *what* the intended application was in the original situation at the ground level application. Ask yourself: “Is the OT application repeated in the NT as being applicable today?” If so, then you can apply it directly to your

current situation today. If the OT application is not repeated or if it is revoked, then proceed through the pyramid to discover its indirect application for today.¹¹

2. **Underlying principle:** If direct application is not applicable, then move up the pyramid to seek the underlying principle from the ground level (original application) by discerning the broader principles at the higher levels. Asking *why* the original application was made will help you move up the scale to broader principles to discover key elements by considering the reason for the original application.
3. **Derivate application:** After finding the underlying principle, move back down the pyramid to make a specific application for today by asking *how* this principle can be applied to your specific situation. Use the same key elements from the original application as in the indirect application. In comparing key elements, avoid confusing these elements with variables.

Adventists

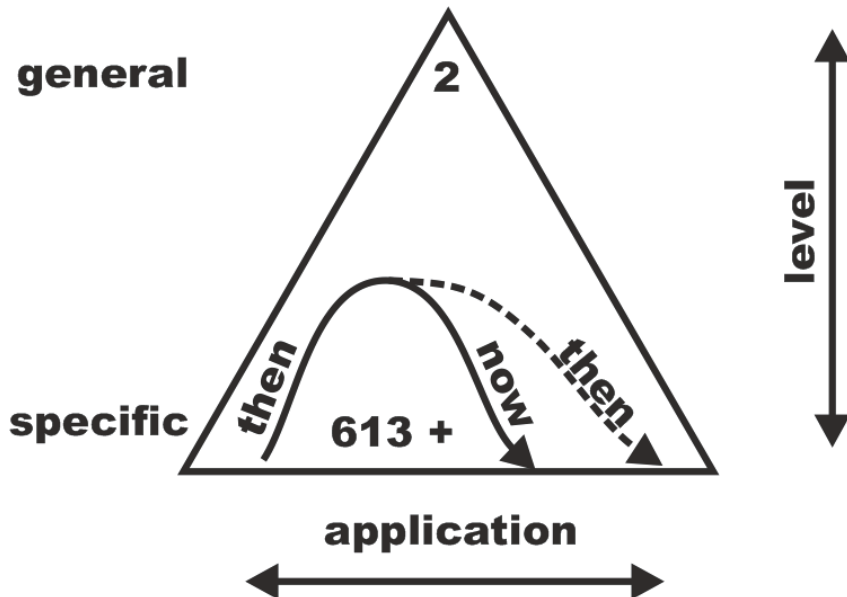
As an example in distinguishing key elements from variables, Kuhatschek notes that Paul objects that the Colossians were wrong in observing special days (Gal 4:10). Yet Paul allows the Christians in Rome to do so (Rom 14:5-6). Why? Because the Galatians were doing so as a means to *retain* justification (Gal 5:4).¹² Consequently, Adventists are wrong in observing the Sabbath because they do so for the wrong reason.¹³ Adventists not only mistakenly believe that only parts of the law have been abolished,¹⁴ far worse, **they believe that obeying the moral law is necessary to retain salvation.** Adventists wrongly believe that they have successfully avoided being charged with trying to merit salvation since (according to Martin) they affirm that salvation *gained* by grace is *retained* by works.¹⁵

Even so, the Adventists are no worse than many Arminians (such as Guy Duty) who uses a similar argument for *gaining* versus *retaining* salvation. Picirilli, also an Arminian, correctly notes that such an argument does not avoid meritorious legalism: **We cannot keep our salvation by works without conditioning our salvation on works.** Even more surprisingly to some perhaps, if Martin is correct, then Adventists are better than MacArthur, since MacArthur makes works necessary for both gaining and retaining salvation.¹⁶ Blomberg, a Baptist, considers heaven a reward! So my criticism herein of Adventists is not based on a bias against them just because they are cultists. To the contrary, this Adventist gain-by-grace-

retain-by-works soteriology is more in line with NT soteriology than that of many mainline Reformers and is no worse than that of many Arminians. This acknowledgement does not make their error any less serious, however. All these false gospels lead to hell since they condition either the reception or retention of justification on works.

Then-Now-Then

In my adaptation of Kuhatschek's pyramidal model, I have proposed that OT prophecies which have not yet been fulfilled will be fulfilled literally in the future. If this literal fulfillment entails a return to the sacrificial system during the millennial kingdom, does this mean that those in the future will be placed directly under the OT law? No. For one thing, the nature of those sacrifices could be modified in this future dispensation so that they are no longer reconciliatory but only commemorative, in a manner similar to the observance of the Lord's Supper. Even if these sacrifices are necessary for temporal forgiveness in the millennial kingdom (in a manner which is somewhat analogous to 1Jn 1:9), would this mean that those in the future are placed directly under the past moral code? No.



Suppose you were to leave your present country and move to another country and become a citizen of that country, and you were to commit murder in that country after moving there. Would you have violated the law in your original country prohibiting murder? No. You would have

violated the law in your current country prohibiting murder, not in your original country. You would be subject to the laws of the land in the land you now reside, not subject to the law of the land in which you had previously resided. Your current country may impose the death penalty; your former country cannot. You would be subject only to the penalty of the country whose law you broke—your current country. Suppose the laws of both countries prescribe the death penalty. You would only be guilty of breaking the law of your current country and subject to the death penalty under its law and by its administration. You would not be subject to the death penalty under the law of your former country. We might say that the prohibition against murder (as expressed by either country) is *directly applicable* to you, but you are only *under* the law of your current country.

In the same way, the OT prohibition against murder not only applied *then* but applies *now* also. Many have assumed that since it applies in both the OT and NT, the prohibition against murder is part of an OT moral law that transcends dispensational boundaries. They have chopped up the OT law into constituent parts and tried to port what they consider the moral part over into the current dispensation in an attempt to place believers directly under the OT law. Their surgery has been quite messy. NT believers are no longer under the OT law—any of it. Technically, although the same prohibition may *apply* in both dispensations, the people in the new dispensation are *under* a completely new law—the law of Christ (1Cor 9:21). Granted, the law from that old dispensation may apply just as directly to NT believers as before, but it is not because they are still under the law of that old dispensation.

Just as the prohibition against murder may apply to you in your new country also (since it expresses an underlying principle that has identical representation in both countries), the prohibition against murder in the OT would apply to you even though you are a NT believer. Still, this NT application does not place you under OT jurisdiction. The prohibition against murder in the OT applies just as directly to believers in the OT as it does now in the church age because this law expresses an underlying principle that finds identical expression in both dispensations.

Future

“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother *shall be guilty* before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' *shall be guilty* before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' *shall be guilty* enough to go into the fiery hell” (Mt 5:22).

Many commentators (particularly of the non-dispensational persuasion) have failed to pay sufficient attention to the futuristic nature of Mt 5:22. The future setting is not accidental, incidental, or merely logical. It is an eschatological future, not merely a logical future. Jesus is describing a future judicial system in this verse. Nevertheless, Jesus makes a present day application beginning with the next verse (Mt 5:23ff). Principlism applies to both the past and future. When examining a passage of Scripture regarding the past or future, believers are not to place themselves under the jurisdiction of that past or future administration. Rather, they are to take the underlying moral principles in that passage of Scripture and apply it to their current situation. They should follow Jesus' example as exemplified in this context by making proper, present day applications of past and future moral codes.

This principlistic approach, therefore, does not require that the Sermon on the Mount be placed on a pair of dispensational roller skates and shoved off into the future, contrary to the criticism expressed by some non-dispensationalists. As widely noted, James shows that the Sermon on the Mount has direct application for today. But for that matter, so does Jesus. After affirming the lasting validity of the law in Mt 5:17-18, Jesus starts off with a prohibition against murder as His first illustration (5:21) and demonstrates the full intent of the moral principle underlying that OT law by showing how it will be treated during the future millennial kingdom. Those who display a murderous attitude *shall be* guilty (5:22).

Next, Jesus proceeds to deal with adultery. He does not speak in futuristic terms this time, however: “Everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her *has* committed adultery with her *already* in his heart” (Mt 5:28). Jesus does not say that the offender *shall be guilty* of committing adultery (in the millennial kingdom). Instead, the offender *is already* guilty of adultery. Likewise, when He deals with divorce, Jesus states that the one abusing the marriage relationship *commits adultery*—right now in the present dispensation (Mt 5:32). When dealing with the law of retaliation (Mt 5:38), Jesus gives present day application also. When dealing with love (Mt 5:43), the exhortation is that we should love now. Therefore, even though the brilliant writings of Hodges and Wilkin should be consulted for the eschatological dimension of this passage,¹⁷ the application is by no means limited to the future. Jesus is informing His present listeners, among other things, as to how they can enter that future kingdom.

Entrance into the Kingdom

For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you **shall not** enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20)

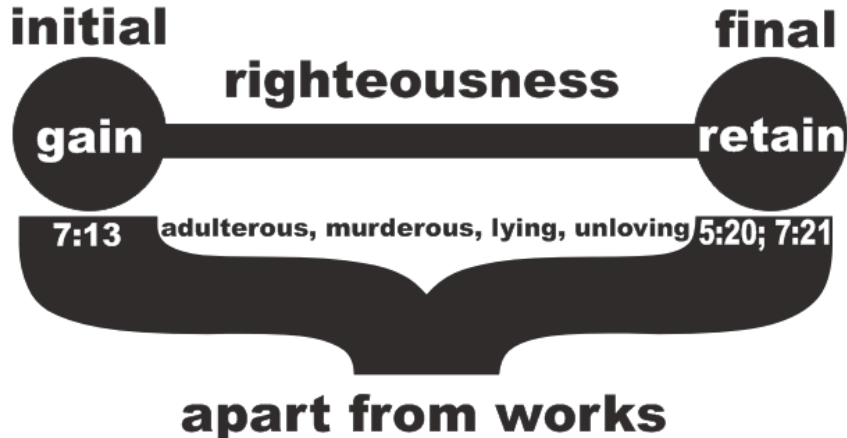
Commentators are quick to point out that Pharisees of Jesus’ day were trusting futilely in their external righteousness as their means for justification (Lk 18:9). Yet many of these same commentators then lead their readers astray into thinking that internal righteousness is practically equivalent to something like a two-coupon ticket in which both faith and works are necessary to enter the kingdom in Mt 5:20. To the contrary, the righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom is exclusively that produced by Jesus in His fulfilling the law. Jesus states that He is the one who fulfills the law in 5:17: “I...fulfill.” Next, He launches an immediate attack against any and all forms of self-righteousness as a means for entrance, whether it is external or internal. If anyone wants to try to enter the kingdom on the basis of his or her internal performance, then this is what that internal performance has to look like. Men have to never look at a woman with the intent to lust. Never, ever. If a man does so, even once, then he is guilty of internal adultery. Adultery was a capital offense in the OT and is punished with the Lake of Fire in the NT. Make no mistake about it, adulterous thoughts defile a person. But for that matter, so do murderous, lying, or unloving thoughts. Men and women alike fail to meet such standards. No one can make it into the kingdom by seeking entrance on the basis of his or her personal performance.

One the basis of OT standards, one would conclude that none of us are righteous (Is 64:6). And Jesus raises those standards, rather than lowering them, by demonstrating the underlying principles of those standards. Gaining absolute righteousness initially as a free gift is necessary because we certainly do not deserve it. By the same principle, none of us can retain such righteousness by our performance. We have to be able to retain it without having our postconversional performance brought into the picture since our performance is flawed. Judged by an absolute standard, we are lying, murdering, adulterers before conversion and after conversion. If we are to be considered righteous by an absolute standard, then this righteousness must come from another source and must not be based on our performance.

Could the righteousness of a transformed life that God produces through believers after their conversion be what is required for kingdom entrance? Hardly! The level of righteousness that God produces within believers

does not rise to sinless perfection on this side of the grave. And even if it did, to base entrance on such postconversional performance-based righteousness would be to make entrance into heaven a reward because it would be based on the righteousness that we produced through God's enablement. Entrance would be gained by works of righteousness which we have done—a deadly fallacy (Tit 3:5).

Jesus has plenty to say about rewards in this Sermon, even rewards that come for being righteous externally (Mt 5:10,12) and secretly (Mt 6:1) and thus internally (Mt 5:6). But entrance into the kingdom is not a reward; therefore, it is not based upon our external or internal righteousness, or upon our initial or subsequent righteousness. Admittedly, our level of internal righteousness can surpass the level of internal righteousness achieved by the scribes and Pharisees. So does this mean that we can follow the example of the Pharisees and trust in ourselves that we are righteous (Lk 18:9)? Not if we want justification (Lk 18:14). Those who experience justification are those who come to God in an attitude of hopelessness, not self-righteousness. By His life of obedience, Jesus fulfilled "all righteousness" (Mt 3:15). He did not do so for Himself, but for us. We must trust in His righteousness, not our own, in order to have His righteousness imputed to us.



In Mt 5:20 and 7:21, Jesus is talking about a future entrance into the kingdom—an eschatological entrance into the kingdom. Naturally, this entrance would require final justification. Such justification would be an eschatological justification. This justification must be granted apart from our performance since our performance would condemn us rather than

justify us. Further, since this justification must be retained to the end by those who receive it in order to enter the kingdom “on that [eschatological] day” (Mt 7:22), it must be concluded that such justification (from start to finish) is not based on our performance. Jesus is not advising us in Lk 18:9-10 to follow the example of the publican in gaining justification and then to turn around and follow the example of the Pharisee in retaining it! From start to finish, this justification cannot be based on our performance.

Jesus implores the unbelievers in this mixed crowd to enter the narrow gate that leads to inclusion in this future kingdom. He wants them to do so without delay (Mt 7:13) so that they may enter on that day. That narrow gate is Jesus, not performance. By entering into Jesus, believers are imputationally clothed with His righteousness and thereby granted entrance into this kingdom. The broad gate that leads to destruction, in contrast, is the broad gate of human performance. Such Pharisaical performance, even if done in the name of Jesus, is a poor substitute for faith in Jesus and is destroyed by the demands of Jesus. Those trying to enter the kingdom by means of their performance (Mt 7:22) are excluded on that basis because their performance fails to meet the requirements of the law (Mt 7:23). Indeed, any attempt to gain entrance by means of performance is doomed to failure (Rom 3:20) so that one must be justified by faith in Christ’s performance (Rom 3:28).

In James’ epistle, which in many ways serves almost as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, James confirms that regeneration is a gift (Jam 1:17-28). Moreover, like Paul, James acknowledges that imputational righteousness is by faith: “Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness” (Jam 2:23). James does not reduce retaining that the gift of regeneration or retaining final imputational righteousness to doing one’s best. James’ demands are absolute: “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (Jam 2:20). Those trying to get into heaven by means of their performance must be able to keep the whole law, which is why Paul is so emphatic about the impossibility of Christians finding final justification by means of their performance (Gal 5:3-4). A stumble at even one point along the way would be deadly.

Least and Great in the Kingdom

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called **least** in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called **great** in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:19).

Porter pairs Mt 5:19 with Jam 2:20 in his list of forty-five statements from James that find corresponding parallels in the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁸ Recognition of this pairing is not unusual, but its misthological significance is normally glossed over. Jesus is dealing with misthological ranking in the kingdom, and James properly applies this statement to believers concerning kingdom rewards. James does so by addressing believers and by warning them that they will need mercy when they stand before the Lord in judgment: “Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy” (Jam 2:13). Paul likewise warns believers: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2Cor 5:10). James and Paul are in complete agreement that believers will be judged by their works, so good works are necessary to do well at this judgment. James stresses that works of mercy are necessary to be shown mercy. Jesus teaches the exact same thing: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Mt 5:7). Positive outcomes on the basis of one’s works at this judgment are identified by Jesus, time and again during the course of the Sermon on the Mount, as rewards and treasures in heaven (Mt 5:12,46; 6:1,2,5,16,19-21).

The scope of Jesus’ concern reaches far beyond mere entrance into the kingdom. In bringing the OT teaching to full fruition in the lives of His followers, Jesus touches upon the fact that there will be status ranking within that millennial kingdom. Hodges describes dispensationally what this will look like for those living in that future age. Various commentators, not just dispensationalists, concur that the issue is misthological ranking in the future kingdom, not exclusion from the kingdom.¹⁹

Baxter rightly objects to those scholars who are so infatuated with Jesus’ triple references to entering the kingdom in this Sermon (Mt 5:20; 7:13,21) that they think that “Jesus’ main concern of the Sermon is the front-end of the kingdom, i.e., how to get in; and this ‘entrance’ is based on good works.” Baxter counters: “Much of Jesus’ teaching is not ‘evangelistic’ per se, but presupposes a ‘beyond-entry-level’ discipleship.”²⁰ Jesus is addressing a mixed crowd that includes believers (who have already become light by entering into a relationship with God as their Father) and also addressing unbelievers who have not yet entered the narrow gate.

Jesus’ repeated reference to the *Law* and the *Prophets* (Mt 5:17; 7:13) forms an *inclusio* for the main body of the Sermon. Since the Sermon

includes the instructions for His disciples (the believers within the audience) as to how they should treat others (and their rewards for doing so), Jesus' fulfilling the Law and the Prophets would certainly seem to include His teaching on how His disciples should treat others and the impact that practical righteousness would have on their corresponding rewards. Truly, the Lord moves beyond-entry-level discipleship.

Without making either the present or future entrance a reward, however, Jesus demonstrates the importance of His followers' having their own personal righteousness. A rich entrance into His kingdom will certainly require that His followers meet His postconversional performance requirements to the best of their God-enabled ability. Peter, who was setting in the audience, spells out this conclusion by exhorting believers to develop their Christian character so that they could qualify for a rich entrance into the kingdom: "For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you" (2Pet 1:11; TM). Before, during, and after the antithetical section of His Sermon, Jesus stresses rewards. In His last antithesis, when responding to those who claim that meeting the letter of the law regarding love is good enough, Jesus counters by going to the spirit of the law and demanding much more than trying to do just enough to get by: His followers have to love even their enemies. And Jesus explains in Mt 5:48 that the reason believers (i.e., those who already have God as their heavenly Father) need to meet this higher standard of love is in order to have heavenly rewards: Having God as their Heavenly Father is a gift rather than a reward, but being treated as mature *sons* (Mt 5:45) with full inheritance rights by their Heavenly Father is a *reward* (Mt 5:46). Immediately, upon concluding this antithesis (which is dealing with potential rewards for believers), the Lord commences a full blown discussion of such rewards (Mt 6:1-20). He wants these believers to practice their righteousness privately so that by laying up treasures for themselves in heaven they may have a reward from their Father who is in heaven. They are to lay up treasures *in* heaven, not the treasure *of* heaven. Heaven is not the treasure. Heaven is not the reward. Rewards in heaven are earned by practical righteousness; entrance into heaven is freely granted because of imputed righteousness.

Jacobean Parallels

Porter lists forty-five parallels between the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount. Unfortunately, Porter misaligns and misapplies some of these parallels. No doubt, Jam 2:10 does, in fact, parallel Mt 5:19 in that both passages show that one cannot trifle with the law. (For that matter, Mt 5:22 should have been included in Porter's chart for the same

reason.) However, Jam 2:10 is absolute in its demands, and Mt 5:19 is relative in its rankings (Mt 5:22 is relative in its punishments also.) The correspondence in Jacobean allusions to the Sermon on the Mount is not necessarily one-to-one in that one cannot equate absolute demands with relative results.

This concern aside, however, Porter does not prove to be a good matchmaker when he matches such texts as: Mt 7:21/Jam 2:26 and Mt 7:21-23/Jam 1:26-27&2:14-16. He pairs Matthean soteric texts with Jacobean mistholic texts. In doing so, Porter ends up making entrance into heaven a reward for one's works. Rather than equating soteric and mistholic texts, one should consider the possibility that James' absolute statement has application to both soteric and mistholic texts. The law cannot be trifled with either in terms of what it demands for kingdom entrance or kingdom inheritance. Better matchmaking can be achieved as follows.

Matthew	James	Comment
Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:19)	For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (Jam 2:10)	You cannot trifle with any of the law, not even the least commandment.
But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Mt 5:22)	For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (Jam 2:10)	You cannot trifle with any of the law, not even the spirit of the law or one commandment of the law.
For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:20)	For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (Jam 2:10)	Absolute righteousness is required for entrance.
²¹ Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord,	For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (Jam 2:10)	Absolute righteousness is required for entrance. Those who base their entrance into heaven on their submitting to God's will in terms of their

<p>did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” ²³ And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Mt 7:21-23)</p>		<p>Christian practice will be rejected because of their lawless practice. Regeneration is a gift (Jam 1:17-18(and imputational righteous is by faith rather than by works (Jam 2:23).</p>
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When Jesus deals with those already in the millennial kingdom, He shows that their degree of guilt will be relative (Mt 5:19, 5:22). James likewise shows that for those already justified by faith, there will be a subsequent, relative justification by works (Jam 2:21). They already have absolute imputational righteousness and are thereby qualified for entrance into the kingdom (Jam 2:23). But they will need justification by works in order to do well at the Judgment Seat of Christ and hear the words, “Well done.”

As James surmises, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not only justified by faith” (Jam 2:24; TM). Two types of justification are affirmed. Relative justification by works is the goal for those who already have absolute justification by faith. Justification by faith grants believers entrance into the kingdom and qualifies them to pursue justification by works so that they may obtain rewards within the millennial kingdom. Citizens of the kingdom are encouraged to lay up treasure in the kingdom now that they are citizens of that kingdom. How one will be treated within the kingdom will be dependent, to a certain extent, upon their performance as citizens of that kingdom—how much treasure they lay up in that kingdom for example. But entrance into the kingdom must be granted independent of their performance since James relegates postconversional works to misthological justification by works and affirms that imputational righteousness is based on faith (apart from works since works pertain to a different type of justification).

Conclusion

Entrance into the kingdom is based on Jesus’ imputational righteousness. The demands are too high for it to be anything less than His righteousness. It will not do for Adventists or Arminians to think that they gain entrance by faith but retain it by works or for those in the Reformed camp to argue that they gain initial justification by faith but retain final justification by works. Soteric justification—all of it—is *by faith apart from works* (Rom 3:26). Justification for this Pauline statement in 3:26 not only goes back to the OT (as shown in Rom 4:6) but is also logically deduced straight from the words of Jesus in the Gospels.

Without a doubt, there is more to what Jesus is teaching in Mt 5:17-20 than mere imputational righteousness, but there is not less. By necessity, option one (and thus imputation by implication) is included in the third hermeneutical option for this passage. Jesus shows what it means to meet the OT demands, and His corresponding illustrations require that His listeners conclude that He is the only one who can fully meet such demands. His righteousness is the fruit demanded by OT law and provided by Him, in compliance with OT demands, to those who believe in Him. To believers who are already qualified for entrance into heaven because of His imputed righteousness, Jesus promises treasure in the kingdom if they will practice kingdom righteousness.

In the process, the Lord demonstrates hermeneutical genius, showing His mixed group of listeners how to apply principlism—in deriving present day application from past and future dispensations—so that they may be qualified not only for entrance into heaven but for rewards in heaven. His words are too full of past, present, and future dispensational truth to be archived away on a dispensational bookshelf as being only applicable to another age.

Surprisingly, Porter omits Jam 2:23 from his chart. But the parallel appears to be rather obvious. In Mt 5:17, Jesus says that He came to *fulfill* (*pleroo*) the Scripture. James says: “The Scripture was *fulfilled* [*pleroo*] which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God.” In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is fulfilling the Scripture and its demands for righteousness. He makes the righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom so high that He is absolutely the only one who can fulfill the scriptural demands. At the same time, He demonstrates the rewards for relative righteousness in the lives of His followers. Wiersbe compares this fulfilling in Mt 5:17 to an acorn seed that grows up into an oak tree.²¹ Righteousness is imputed, implanted, and imparted to the believer. James urges believers to give this implanted word a humble reception so that it can save their souls from misthological loss (Jam 1:21). By implanting His word of righteousness in our heart, Jesus makes the full fruition of righteousness possible in our lives and urges us to build upon those words in order to save our lives from ruinous results (Mt 7:24-27). The Lord wants to bring out the full fruition of the OT demands for righteousness in the NT believer’s life as well so that the NT believer may be called a *friend of God* in the kingdom of heaven. Can being called *great* in the kingdom mean anything less? Is there any greater title for which the believer could hope to aspire?

¹ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 484.

² Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Asks: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Ministries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 98.

³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary: From biblical text . . . to contemporary life, gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 229.

⁴ Wilkins, 236. But Wilkins (not to be confused with Bob Wilkin) blows Mt 5:20 royally by insisting that the righteous necessary to enter heaven is “justification (imputed righteousness) and sanctification (imparted righteousness)”—the latter being described as inner transformation (pp. 234-235). And he is by no means alone in this error. Contrary to Wilkins, and those like him, our entrance into heaven is conditioned on imputational righteousness alone.

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 108.

⁶ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1985), 256.

⁷ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, gen. ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 104.

⁸ See Wilkins, 236, n. 21.

⁹ R. T. France, *Matthew*, vol. 1, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed., R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985).

¹⁰ Jack Kuhatschek, *Taking the Guesswork out of Applying the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 54. This simplified version of the principlizing approach is described more in-depth by Hayes with additional steps. See J. Daniel Hays, “Applying the Old Testament Law Today,” *BibSac* 158 (January-March, 2001): 21-35.

¹¹ I would also add, “Is it prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled?” If so, then, although the direct application awaits the future, proceed through the pyramid to discover its indirect application for today. For example, although Mk 13:13 is referring to being saved as a result of enduring the future tribulation, it certainly has application for today.

¹² Compare Kuhatschek, 75.

¹³ Although Martin demonstrates that the NT practice is to worship on Sunday, he nevertheless makes allowances for Sabbatarians (such as

Adventists) to worship on Saturday on the basis of Rom 14:5-6 (p. 470). Accepting the council of Kuhatschek and Martin in regarding the day as a variable would appear reasonable as long as the proper motive is maintained and the Galatian error is avoided. However, since Adventists seek to retain the justification through such observance, they fail to avoid falling from grace into legalism with their sabbatical observance.

¹⁴ Geisler and Rhodes provide a very helpful illustration to explain how “the moral principles embodied in the Commands” are “still binding on believers today” without placing believers under the law: “The fact that we are bound by similar moral laws against adultery, lying, stealing, and murder no more proves we are still under the Ten Commandments than the fact that there are similar traffic laws in North Carolina and Texas proves that a Texan is under the laws of North Carolina” (p. 98). So how do we reconcile this perspective with Paul who said that all the OT law has been abolished (Eph 2:15) and Jesus who said that He did not come to abolish the Law. Morris is correct: “Jesus firmly disclaims any intention of doing away with any part of the Bible” (*Matthew*, 107-108). By fulfilling the requirements of the law for us, Jesus not only delivered us from the direct application of the law but also from the price of obedience soteriologically demanded by the law. That price is no longer demanded from us—either directly or indirectly. The law’s demand for soteric righteousness from us has ended because it has been fulfilled for us by Christ (Rom 10:4).

Adventists are by no means alone in thinking that the moral law remains intact. Mainline interpreters such as MacArthur and Hendriksen share this error with them. Hendriksen “insists that *every* commandment of that [the greatest commandments] which is truly God’s moral law...must be kept.” (italics his). William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According Matthew*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 292. MacArthur acknowledges that Jesus has fulfilled the moral, judicial, and ceremonial law for us. By His life, Christ fulfilled the moral demands of the law. And by His death, He fulfilled the judicial and sacrificial demands of the law. Yet MacArthur strangely concludes that although the latter two ended and were set aside because they were fulfilled, the moral law is still being fulfilled by Jesus’ disciples (pp. 257-259). Besides being inconsistent, his distinction is artificial and superficial. His inconsistency grows even worse, even if he is just following WCF, when he regards keeping the Sabbath part of the moral law as part of the law that was completed along with the judicial and ceremonial law (p. 262). How he can pick and choose what parts of the so-called moral law is to be set aside is left a mystery. As to the part of the moral law that MacArthur deems to still place believers under, he says it is “just as valid”

and yet “no longer binding” and calls this a “paradox” (p. 272). What happened to Jam 2:10? MacArthur says that Christians “are no longer under the ultimate penalty of the law.” Yet elsewhere he will conclude that God does not keep us apart from our perseverance. (For documentation, see my book *Mere Christianity and Moral Christianity*.) Such a perspective certainly makes it sound like MacArthur regards the moral law as soteriologically binding!

To his credit, however, MacArthur does address Mt 5:20 very well in his commentary by describing it exclusively as imputed righteousness. Splendid! In defense of his treatment of this verse, I will point out although the moral principles (rather than laws themselves) of the OT are still applicable to us (albeit not soterically) and need to be fulfilled by us, this pericope in Mt 5:17-20 conditions our entrance into the kingdom on *our* righteousness (v. 20) as produced by *Jesus’* fulfillment of the law. Entrance is not based on *our* righteousness as produced by *our* obedience of the law. The righteousness in view in this immediate context is produced *for* us rather than *by* us or *through* us. Nor is it righteousness *displayed by* us. Righteous produced by us or through us or displayed by us results in rewards for us. Entrance is free; rewards are not. Imputed righteousness is exclusively in view in 5:20, not imparted righteousness or manifestative righteousness.

¹⁵ Martin, 485-486, 490. One cannot simply chop those 10 commandments out of the 613 commandments (from the first five books of the Bible) and claim to have discovered applications for moral principles that are still operable today.

¹⁶ For documentation, see my book *Mere Christianity and Moral Christianity*.

¹⁷ See Zane Hodges, “Law and Grace in the Millennial Kingdom.” Available at http://www.faithalone.org/journal/2007i/3_Hodges%20LAW%20AND%20GRACE.pdf. Bob Wilkin, “Whoever Says ‘You Fool!’ Shall Be in Danger of Hell Fire: Matthew 5:22.” Available at <http://www.faithalone.org/news/y1997/97sept2.html>. The only modification to Hodges’ article that I would suggest is to clarify that those in the millennial kingdom (the future *then*) are not placed directly under the OT law (back *then*). After all, the millennial prohibition against murder will modify the OT Law so that it will have application to anger. This super-strict enforcement of the in-depth implications of the OT Law would be better considered the Millennial Law than a return to the OT Law.

¹⁸ Virgil V. Porter Jr., “The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 1,” *BibSac* 162:647 (July 2005), 344-360. Unfortunately, in his second article, when discussing the mutual soteriology of the Sermon on

the Mount (pp. 479-481), Porter appeals to adopt the popular view point that one must have good works as the necessary and natural expression of one's faith in order for such faith to be saving faith. Virgil V. Porter Jr., "The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James, Part 2," *BibSac* 162:648 (October 2005), 470-482. Such an approach logically and tragically results in making final soteric justification conditioned on faith and works. Porter overlooks the mistholic nature of such salvation. Both Jesus and James are talking about rewards as the outcome for the believers' works! Exclusion from the kingdom and rulership of the kingdom is based on performance. Entrance into the kingdom is not based on works. To those (unbelievers) who are seeking kingdom entrance by means of their performance, Jesus says, "Depart from Me" (Mt 7:23). To those (believers) who are seeking rewards in the kingdom by means of their performance, Jesus says, "Blessed" (Mt 5:3-12).

¹⁹ For commentators affirming that the issue is kingdom ranking rather than kingdom exclusion in Mt 5:19 see Carson, Greene, MacArthur, Morris, Mounce, Nolland, Wilkins. Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 1, chapters 1-5 (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, 1971). Some commentators, in contrast, believe that Mt 5:19 refers to ranking in the present kingdom. France, for example, believes that it is a ranking of last in terms of the quality of discipleship rather than in terms of future rewards. Blomberg also believes that it is ranking in the present kingdom, and on the basis of Mt 20:1-16, he is doubtful that there will be ranking in the future kingdom. See *The Outer Darkness* for my rebuttal to Blomberg regarding this passage and his approach in general.

For sake of interaction with his principle arguments against misthological ranking in Mt 5:19 that may be gleaned from its closest parallels, however, let it be granted for sake of argument that Jesus is describing someone in Mt 11:11 who is presently least in the inaugurated kingdom as having a greater privilege, rather than a greater reward than John the Baptist: "He who *is* least in the kingdom of heaven *is* greater than he." Because John did not live to see the actual inauguration, whereas a believer living during the inauguration would see things that John did not see, being lesser or greater in the kingdom in Mt 11:11 would not refer to a misthological ranking within the kingdom but to the privilege of seeing certain events unfold. Thus, Blomberg's interpretation of Mt 11:11 is reasonable regarding present privilege.

Likewise, let it be assumed that the present tense in 18:1,4 is addressing present greatness in the kingdom, that Jesus' mention of greater versus lesser in regard to the kingdom is lurking in the back of the disciples' minds from Jesus' earlier references in 5:19 and 11:11, and that

Jesus is addressing present greatness: “Who then *is* greatest in the kingdom of heaven?...Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he *is* the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Even so, if one is not to play favorites with the tense, then it should be acknowledged by the same token that Jesus’ use of the future tense in 5:19 is referring to a future greatness: “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, *shall be* called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he *shall be* called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The most natural correlation would be to associate that future greatness with millennial status during the millennial administration described in Mt 5:22: “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother *shall be* guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ *shall be* guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ *shall be* guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

Accordingly, the future tense of Mt 5:20 would be regarded as dealing with entrance into this future kingdom (to be consistent with the tense argument Blomberg is using): “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Consequently, that future tense would correspond with the misthological ranking in 5:19. The matching entrance in Mt 18:3 would also pertain to the eschatological future: “Unless you are converted and become like children, you *shall not* enter the kingdom of heaven.”

To correlate the present and future tenses, I propose that while the disciples were so concerned over which of them was *currently* the greatest in the kingdom and would therefore be qualified for sitting on His left and right in the *future* expression of that kingdom (cp. Mt 20:21), Jesus was concerned with the fact that some of them (e.g., Judas) had not yet even entered the kingdom presently and therefore were disqualified for entrance into that kingdom eschatologically. A sharp dichotomy between initial and final entrance into the kingdom is unwarranted. Likewise, denying a correlation between present and future ranking would be unwise. Their concern over present status would not be mutually exclusive with their concern over future status. Therefore, their inquiry regarding present ranking was in anticipation of their misthological ranking. Their present ranking would determine their future ranking and positions of rulership. Present ranking and its corresponding future rulership is what they were concerned about—it is what **they** had in mind (Lk 22:22). Even if current ranking was not foremost on Jesus’ mind, it was foremost in their minds. Blomberg’s theory that Mt 5:19 refers to present ranking is rendered implausible even by his own tense argument since the most reasonable

hypothesis is that these future tenses are allusions to the future kingdom and that the preoccupation with current status on the part of His disciples was in anticipation of future ranking. Jesus stresses that present greatness, via childlike humility, is the present means (Mt 18:4) to gain this future status they had lurking in their minds from His previous confirmation of future kingdom ranking (Mt 5:19).

Undoubtedly, Blomberg would reply that his argument is not only based on the tense but the sense of the passage to which he is appealing for confirmation in Mt 18:1-4, where he observes: “The criterion for greatness is precisely the criterion for entrance.” Craig L. Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” JETS 35:2 (June 1992), 166. Indeed, one may strengthen his argument by augmenting it with the parallel from Lk 18:9-14 in which Jesus again uses children to illustrate the necessity of humility for soteric justification and entrance into the kingdom. So let us be charitable to Blomberg and allow that the humility of childlike dependency is necessary for both an entrance into the kingdom and for greatness in the kingdom. Does doing so necessarily require that we follow Blomberg’s example in equating entrance with greatness and construing heaven to be a reward? Not logically. Not biblically.

The Lukan parallel incorporates both soteric and mistholic themes, but it does not necessarily equate them. To be sure, humility is necessary not only for soteric justification but for mistholic exaltation: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified [soteriologically] rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted [misthologically]” (Lk 18:14). Humility is necessary for soteric kingdom entrance: “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not *enter* it at all” (Lk 18:17). It is also required for mistholic kingdom possession: “Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God *belongs* to such as these” (Lk 18:16). Nevertheless, the shared necessity for humility both to enter the kingdom and inherit the kingdom does not mean that humility is the condition *per se* for entrance. Instead, humility may be a necessary precondition for faith, and faith itself the necessary condition for kingdom entrance (Mt 21:31-32). This distinction between precondition and condition accords quite well with the Matthean context, which otherwise would have one earning entrance into heaven by chopping off one’s hand (Mt 18:8). This demarcation also accords quite well with the Lukan context in which the rich young ruler had to sell his possessions as a precondition for saving faith and as a condition for rewards in heaven (Lk 18:22). This distinction allows us to affirm, in contrast to Blomberg, that we do not buy heaven.

The mistholic nature of humility is confirmed by Jesus: "He who humbles himself shall be exalted" (Lk 18:14). Jesus had already associated this exaltation with table ranking and thus with kingdom status at the wedding feast (Lk 14:8-11). Therefore, when Peter applies this principle to believers, years later, he is not telling them how to earn kingdom entrance but how to obtain exalted kingdom ranking: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1Pet 5:6). Humility is a virtue. We are not saved from hell by virtue of our virtue. Therefore, we are not saved from hell by our humility. Rather, faith is the sole condition for our salvation from hell. Granted, even faith can be a virtue. But saving faith cannot be a virtue. See my book, *Mere Christianity and Moral Christianity*. The reason saving faith is not a virtue is because it is a passive, punctiliar persuasion and therefore not rewardable as a work. Virtuous faith, on the other hand, is emboldened and enlivened by works and is itself considered a work since it is rewarded as a work. The virtue of humility is required for one to come to saving faith, but this virtue is distinguishable from saving faith just as a precondition is differentiable from a condition. Those, like Blomberg, who cannot tell the difference between a precondition and a condition, end up inadvertently teaching salvation by works. Blomberg's attempt to make heaven a reward that he receives because of his humility turns out to be a claim that he will be exalted to heaven because of the virtue of his humility. Humility has been lost when those who profess it think that they have enough of it to justify their reaching heaven. The publican's humility should not be turned into Pharisaical humility. The publican humbled himself by giving up all attempts to justify himself. He did not seek to justify himself by virtue of his humility. Let us follow his example. If we will do so, then not only will we qualify for kingdom entrance, but we will also be useful for humble kingdom service that can qualify us for a high kingdom ranking. Jesus is demonstrating that we need to be humble presently as His disciples if we wish to obtain a high ranking in the future kingdom.

Like Blomberg, Lenski believes that Mt 5:19 is referring to ranking in the present kingdom; however, in contrast to Blomberg, Lenski at least acknowledges that there will also be similar ranking in the future kingdom. Lenski does, nonetheless, pose an interesting dilemma. If being least is the most that can happen to those disciples who trifle with the least commandments, then what would happen to those disciples who set aside the greatest commandments. In other words, if a person can be sent to hell for just calling someone a fool in Mt 5:22, then what will be the outcome for those believers who actually commit murder. As an advocate of

NOSAS, Lenski believes that any disciple who did so would “cease to be a disciple and would forfeit the kingdom” (p. 211). MacArthur responds to such type of thinking by saying, “Jesus does not refer to loss of salvation” (p. 271). MacArthur’s statement is true but inadequate since Lenski concurs that the present passage does not refer to the loss of salvation. The real question is, “What would happen if a believer were to violate the greater commandments?” Something worse than being least in the kingdom would be required since the worse violators would have to be punished with greater punishment than the least violators. So how could the worse violators be made lower than the least? As advocates of OSAS, misthologists would contend that entrance into the eternal kingdom cannot be lost. At least two options are possible. Ultra misthologists would argue that such believers would forfeit the millennial kingdom. On the other hand, Bob Wilkin’s article may be consulted for a more conservative misthological approach. I adopt and adapt Wilkin’s approach in *The Outer Darkness*.

My dispensational interpretation of Mt 5:19 leads me to suspect that breaking the least commandments and so teaching others will be among the greatest types of offenses that will be committed during the course of the millennial kingdom. (The rebellion at the end of the millennial kingdom is thus not included in this consideration.) Since the lion is to lay down with the lamb, this kingdom is to be characterized by peace. Proposing that its inhabitants will actually commit murder seems rather ludicrous. Those deemed murderers during the span of this kingdom will be those who simply express murderous emotions. They will be subject to removal from the kingdom via capital punishment (Mt 5:22). Alternatively, one might suggest that even if it were possible for someone to actually commit murder during the course of this kingdom administration, such a person would be subjected to capital punishment and thus removed from the kingdom. (It must be remembered that those who enter the millennial kingdom in flesh and blood bodies will still be subject to death.) Therefore, the greatest infringement that one could commit and still be allowed to live in the millennial kingdom would be of the type described by Jesus in Mt 5:19 and would result in one being least in the kingdom. Those committing greater offenses will not be allowed to remain in the kingdom (so Mt 5:22).

Under these circumstances, I am willing to concede to my ultraistic friends that temporary kingdom exclusion for believers who commit greater crimes during the course of the millennial kingdom is at least a theoretical possibility. Even so, even Mt 5:22 indicates that such believers would not be subject to Gehenna. As for my dispensational application to

the present church age, I would equate being least in the kingdom with being cast into the outer darkness. Therefore, spatial exclusion from the millennial kingdom is not even a remote possibility for church age believers since they would at least still be in the kingdom. The greatest offense that a present day believer could commit would be dealt with in terms of kingdom status, not in terms of kingdom exclusion.

²⁰ Wayne Baxter, “The Narrative Setting Of The Sermon On The Mount” *TrinJ* 25:1 (Spring 04), 35. Nevertheless, Baxter’s presentation is less than stellar. He makes final (i.e., eschatological) entrance into the kingdom (Mt 7:21-23) conditioned on one’s postconversional performance and thus relates Mt 5:20 more so to sanctification rather than to justification (p. 36). By basing eschatological entrance into the kingdom on one’s allegiance in following Jesus, Baxter is basing entrance on good works. Yet he denies that the entrance is based on good works. Evidently, he does not know what good works are—mistakenly thinking that they are only works done “apart from Jesus” (pp. 36-37). Baxter fails to grasp the significance of Jesus’ sermonic stress on rewards and even fails to list this mistholic evidence in his list of reasons (on pp. 36-37) as to why it must be concluded that Jesus is concerned with more than just entrance into the eschatological kingdom. To set the record straight, a good work is an action or attitude that results in a positive reward or lessens a negative reward. Jesus is not only demonstrating that entrance into the kingdom (and thus that final soteric justification) cannot be a reward for our behavior; rather, He is also demonstrating that rewards in heaven are based on our performance. The paradox as to why we cannot merit entrance into heaven but can merit rewards in heaven is easily explained: The righteousness which enables us to enter heaven is imputed; the righteousness which entitles us to rewards in heaven is imparted.

²¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Matthew*, Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992), 22.