

Chapter 4.02 Illustrating Points about Jesus

This chapter and the next two chapters use selections, mostly from Mark, Matthew, and Luke, to illustrate points about Jesus' message and life. I illustrate as many points as I can from his message but I do not cover all: some points are self-evident; and some are implied by other points. I note what I do not explicitly cover. To decide if my treatment is fair or not, you have to read the New Testament for yourself.

The goal in using passages from the New Testament is to show that the modern American view of Jesus is compatible with most of the New Testament. This view is as valid as the conservative orthodox Christian view and the atheist view. You do not have to worry that the modern American view of Jesus is not supported.

Proof Texts.

Beforehand, I need to explain why I seem to use a technique that I dislike. A "proof text" is a short passage from the Bible that somebody cites supposedly to prove a point, such as that God hates homosexuals or that we must give all our possessions to the poor now. Usually the text is given incomplete and out of context, sometimes the text is based on mistranslation, and so often it does not support the point. People who use proof texts call themselves Biblical literalists so, to them, every text should be equally a proof text. In fact, they do not treat every passage as equally true and binding. They select and interpret passages to suit their agenda while they overlook passages that go against it. People use proof texts as a weapon to defeat opponents rather than out of respect for God's word. Proof texts get in the way of good understanding rather than show good understanding. Real scholars avoid them. Real scholars cite texts fully enough to show the intent of the text and they explain alternatives even if alternatives do not accord with their argument. I seem to use proof texts but I hope not. I use texts as short illustrations of points and I invite you to go to the whole context to see what I have left out and to decide for yourself.

Jesus' Style.

In many of the passages that can be attributed firmly to Jesus, we see a distinctive style. Jesus was clever, blunt, funny, did not suffer fools, and did not give people much "wobble room" to get out of doing good. For example, when asked how often we should forgive, he said in effect, "Always. No limit." Jesus wanted to shake people out of their normal mindsets and wanted them to see clearly the simple truth at the heart of a matter, so he used verbal and mental tactics. He was like a Zen master. Jesus did not speak like that all the time. He could be patient, kind, and even sweet. Sometimes he just talked ordinarily. He used images from everyday life, especially the lives of farmers, workers, and householders. Jesus was not an ideologue. He did qualify situations. He was not a black-and-white fundamentalist. Most passages that show Jesus' distinctive style are from him; some passages might still be from him that do not show his style but are in line with his intent and do not contradict his style; many passages that do not show his style are from the writers; and passages that do not show his style and do not follow his intent likely are not from Jesus. The lines are not easy to draw.

The Message.

Here again is Jesus' message. Some points are so simple they need no explanation and little support from scriptures. In the explanatory sections below, I do not cite passages for each point, and I combine some points. Some points do not come out in any single passage of their own but emerge from a combination of many passages, so it is not possible to cite all the necessary passages. It is not hard to read the Gospels with these points in mind, and that is the best way to verify them.

- (1) The Golden Rule: actively do for other people as you would have them do for you.
- (2) The Kingdom of God. See below and later in the book.
- (3) God loves us each in particular as individuals. God loves you.
- (4) We should love other people like God loves us, as much as we can.
- (5) Trust God, other people, and ourselves. Usually we can do what we need to do if we let go of fear and if we trust. Usually we get what we need to get if we let go of fear and if we trust.
- (6) Mercy. Show forgiveness with few requirements.
- (7) The importance of intentions and purity of heart.
- (8) Include as many people as possible. Include sinners and other marginalized people.
- (9) Act on the basis of our ability, to the full extent of our ability. Try hard. You cannot do more than that. God expects more from people with greater ability, wealth, and power.
- (10) There is no magic ritual, formula, set of rules, or set of laws to establish and maintain a relation with God. We must respect laws but we have to trust God more.
- (11) Non-violence, with few exceptions.
- (12) Allow other people to hurt us rather than that we should hurt them, even to defend ourselves, our family, what is right, or any property. We should trust God to advance the cause of right if we cannot do it ourselves other than through violence.
- (13) Be willing to sacrifice a little bit so that the common good benefits even more. If you sacrifice a little bit in this way now, you are likely to receive even more in return later as a result of society and life becoming better. But even if you do not, be willing to give up a little for the common good.
- (14) God is bigger than any ideology, program, law, or ideology. God is bigger than evil. God is bigger even than Jesus.

(15) God invites you to join the world and to enjoy it if you can. Enjoy it in your own way but do not hurt other people. Understanding that there is a God and that he cares about you can be a great joy. Even when we are in distress such as when sick or in prison, we can sometimes take comfort from knowing that God cares about us and we can feel joy in the world. If you cannot join and enjoy because your own distress is too much, God still understands and still cares.

(16) Individual people are precious. Your integrity as an individual person is the most precious part about you, more precious to you than all the world. Following the above points helps maintain your integrity. Failing in any of the above points can undermine your integrity. You can call your individual integrity your "soul"; but Jesus probably did not think of individual integrity, and even of the soul, in the same ways that the modern Christian term "soul" conveys.

(17) If you understand all this, especially if you understand God's love and you trust God, then sometimes you can cut through all the silliness, personal problems, ill will, clinging, setbacks, and handicaps to a sudden insight.

The Golden Rule and Loving Your Neighbor.

Although everybody knows the Golden Rule, it is well to cite the passages. In Matthew, it is part of the Sermon on the Mount; in Luke, it is in the parallel Sermon on the Plain. The famous words from the King James Version are: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

Matthew 7:12. * "Act toward other people as you would like them to act toward you; that is the root of the Law and the prophets." *

Luke 6:31. * "Act toward other people as you would like them to act toward you." *

Luke does not say this phrase summarizes the Law and the prophets.

Mark 12:28 – 12:34. * At a break in the discussion, a lawyer who apparently approved of Jesus' answers asked him, "Which commandment is most important?" Jesus answered, "The First is: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God [Yahweh] is the only Lord [God]; love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.' The second commandment is: 'Love your neighbor as if he were you.' There is no other commandment greater than these two." The lawyer said, "Well said, Master. You are right. God is one and there is no other god. To love God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and to love other people as if they were you - that is far more than any burned offerings, sacrifices, [rituals, or dogmas]." When Jesus saw that the lawyer spoke sincerely and understood too, Jesus said to him, "You are at the door of God's Kingdom." *

The saying that begins 'Hear, O Israel...' is called the "Shema" ("Hear") and is perhaps the most common and basic prayer of Judaism. To cite the beginning words is to imply the entire prayer. The message of this passage accords well with rabbinic (Pharisaic) teaching at the time of Jesus. The words of the lawyer refer to Isaiah, and are designed to show the astuteness of Christian understanding. At the same time, the words do not "put down" any other groups.

Matthew 22:34 – 22:40. * The Pharisees heard that Jesus had defeated the Sadducees in discussion, so they conspired to get him. A Pharisee went to Jesus to ask: “Master, what is the greatest commandment of the Law?” Jesus said, “‘Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind’ is the greatest commandment. The second greatest has a similar root: ‘Love your neighbor as if he were you.’ Everything in the Law and from the prophets comes from these two commandments alone.” *

Matthew makes this situation a controversy with the Pharisees rather than a simple productive discussion with a lawyer. Matthew uses Jesus to justify the Christian stance against a contrived stance of the Pharisees. The words of Jesus likely are from Jesus but Jesus probably never had such a dispute with a Pharisee. He did not say the words in that context. The Pharisees did not conspire to get Jesus. Matthew puts Jesus’ words in a context to make them mean more than the original in a way that supported Matthew’s position and the position of the early Church.

Matthew 25:31 – 25:46. * When the Son of Man comes in glory with the angels around him as an army, he will sit in state on his throne, with all the people of the world, from all the peoples of the world, gathered at his feet. He will divide individual people into two groups, on the left and right, much as a shepherd sorts sheep on the right with goats on the left. King Jesus will say to the people on the right, “You have the blessing of God my Father. Come, enter, and possess the Kingdom of God. It has been ready for you since [before] the world was made.” Jesus continued:

“When I was hungry, you fed me. When I was thirsty, you gave me water. When I was a stranger lonely and afraid, you took me into your home. When I had no clothes, you gave me shoes and a coat. When I was sick, you nursed me. When I was in jail, you visited me.” Then the decent people [on the right] will ask, “Master, when did we see you hungry and feed you, when thirsty and gave you water, when a stranger that we took in, when shivering so that we clothed you, when ill so that we nursed you, and when in jail that we visited you?”

And Jesus the King will respond:

“Understand my words: Anything you did for any of my humble brothers and sisters on this Earth, you did as much for me.”

Then Jesus will say to the people on his left hand, “You are cursed. Get out of my sight. Go to the eternal Hell that is waiting for you, the Devil, and his angels.”

“When I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I shivered, you gave me nothing to wear. When I was ill, you gave me no care, [medicine, or insurance]. When I was in jail, you increased my time. [You found rationalizations to deny me, overlook me, and hurt me.]”

The indecent on the left will retort: “Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, unclothed, shivering, a stranger, ill, or in prison, and did not help you?”

Jesus will declare, “Hear me. Whenever you ignored or denied any other person, no matter how small, you ignored and denied me personally.”

And the indecent will go to Hell's punishment eternally. But the decent people will have eternal life. *

This passage shows Matthew's editing, how hard it is to separate what Jesus said from what Matthew had Jesus say, yet how important to think about the problem. The portion in italics (and/or in red) likely belonged to the original event, and it reflects the words of Jesus although the words are not an exact quote. Jesus likely did say that helping any other people, especially the most humble, is like helping him, God, a prophet or teacher, or yourself. This passage also shows that Jesus did not pay much attention to personal situation or social station and that he intended to include many people.

Matthew added the other words to make a situation, put spin on Jesus' words, and make points that Matthew cared about but that Jesus did not obviously care about. The words attributed to Jesus but that are not in italics are not in the style of Jesus but are in the style of a scholarly religious commentator. Matthew makes Jesus a king, and has Jesus publicly accept his status as a king. Matthew condemns to hell people who were not kind enough (Pharisees), and sends to heaven kind people (Christians). It is not likely that Jesus believed in heaven and hell in this manner. Jesus would not send people to hell for this kind of non-action, and Jesus would not have condemned Jews while saving non-Jews. Rather, Jesus wanted all people to see what doing unto others, and loving others as yourself, meant. Jesus would accept truly decent people into the Kingdom of God and would shut the door on the indecent. Jesus wanted people to do good primarily because it was good and because it was what the citizens of the Kingdom of God do; not for rewards such as heaven or hell. Jesus did not speak of "coming in his glory". Common listeners of Jesus would not have known what that image meant but literate readers of Matthew would know if they shared Matthew's ideas about the Book of Daniel, ideas that came only after Jesus (Daniel was before Jesus but Matthew's ideas about Daniel came after Jesus). Matthew created the situation and gave words to Jesus to validate the new Christian position on Jesus as Lord, God, king, and judge; show that Pharisees and Jews were selfish; bolster Matthew's arguments against opponents; and change the Kingdom of God into heaven and hell.

Kingdom of God. I illustrate this topic in the next chapter.

God Loves Us Each Individually. See below under "Trust God" and "Individual Integrity", and see the Gospel of John in Chapter 04.07 on illustrating the Gospels.

Trust God.

Mark 4:21 – 4:23. * Jesus said to them, "Do you turn on the light switch but unscrew the bulbs? Surely you turn on the light switch to see. Nothing is now hidden that will not be understood. Nothing is now covered up that will not be revealed. If you have ears [and a brain], then use them!" * Matthew 6:19 – 6:21. * "Don't go crazy stuffing your bank account and adding rooms to your tacky mansion. Thieves steal your identity, your counter tops turn radioactive, and you have to buy a hybrid to replace your gas-guzzling SUV. Instead, store up treasures in heaven [God's mind] where there are no thieves, no decay, and things always work. Wherever your focus is, there also will be your heart [and soul]." *

Luke 12:33 – 12:34. * "Don't fear. The many ordinary people among you who follow God should not fear. Your Father has decided to give you the Kingdom. Sell what you have and give to charity. You will

find ATMs without limits and accounts that never empty in heaven, where thieves have no access and nothing wears out. Wherever your focus is, there also will be your heart [and soul].” *

Matthew 7:7 – 7:11. * “Ask, and God will give; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will open. Everyone who asks, gets; everyone who seeks, finds; and to everyone who knocks, the door will open. Would any parent among you give your child a stone if the child asks for bread, or give a snake when the child asks for a fish? If you, bad as you are, know how to give your children good things, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to the people that ask him!” *

The parallel in Luke is 11:9 – 11:13.

Matthew 6:25 – 6:33. * “Stop worrying about food, clothes, [houses, and IRAs]. Life is more than food, clothes, [wealth, and security]. Look at the robins and wrens; they do not write resumes or make monthly contributions yet God your Father feeds them. You are worth more than birds! Can any man by worrying make himself into an athlete or any woman by worrying make herself into a model? Then why worry about clothes? Look at the wildflowers. They do not work, they do not shop outlet malls, and yet the Queen of England in her full regalia never dressed so well. [The wildflowers decorate the otherwise plain hay of the fields]. If that is how God clothes the hay, which is here today and gone tomorrow, will God not clothe you even better? You have so little faith. Do not whine: ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear? [Where will we live? What about old age?] These are for the crude heathen non-believers to chase, not for you. God your Father knows that you need them. Focus on God’s Kingdom and his justice first, and then everything else that you really need will come to you as well. Don’t worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has its own troubles enough.” *

The parallel text is Luke 12:22 – 12:34.

If you are a Biblical literalist, and have not yet given up all you own, then these passages should cause an immediate and total change in your life. Of course, the problem with faith alone is that it is not enough. It does not lead to food and clothes. It is not enough on which to raise a family. It cannot serve as the basis for good government. If we are not fed and clothed, then it is hard to do positive good things. There is no solution to this problem for average people. We can hope that God provides enough even if he does not make us rich and secure.

Mercy and Forgiveness.

Many passages here also show the importance of intentions.

“Casting the First Stone.” The following famous passage is disputed. Some early texts of the New Testament do not have it at all. Some have it at John 7:53 – 8:11. Some place it after John 7:36, John 7:52, or Luke 21:38. In the New English Bible it is on page 193 of the New Testament.

* The crowd went away, and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn, he was in the Temple again, and a crowd gathered around him. He was sitting teaching the people when lawyers and Pharisees dragged in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand in the middle of the crowd. They said to Jesus, “Master, we caught this woman right in the act of adultery. The Law from Moses said to stone her. What do you say?” The legalists and Pharisees wanted him to contradict the Law so that they

could frame him. [If he said to release her, he would contradict the Law. If he said to stone her, he would seem harsh in the eyes of the people.] Jesus bent over and wrote in the dirt with his finger. They kept badgering him. Suddenly he sat up straight and said, "Whoever among you has no fault [has never committed a sin] should throw the first stone." Then he bent over again to write on the ground. With his words in their ears, one at a time they slipped away, beginning with the eldest. In a few minutes, Jesus and the woman were alone there. Jesus looked up again and said to her, "Where have they gone? Has nobody condemned you?" She replied, "Nobody, Master". Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. You may go. But you must not sin again." *

Again, Jesus probably said and did something like this but probably not as a response to a test by "lawyers and Pharisees" but because people dragged a woman in front of him. I can imagine a good-hearted Pharisee coming to the same conclusion that Jesus did, although probably not in this dramatic way. Some commentators cite this passage as evidence that Jesus could read and write.

Matthew 7:1 – 7:5. * "Do not judge other people and they will not judge you. As you judge other people, so will they judge you. Whatever standards you apply to other people, they [and God] will apply those standards to you. You always notice the tiny flake in your neighbor's eye [his-her small difference of opinion with you] but never see the log [of bias] floating in your own. How can you say to your neighbor, 'Hey, I can clean that dirty eye of yours' when all the time your own log makes you blind? First haul the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly enough to dab the flake out of your neighbor's." *

Luke 6:28 – 6:31. * "Love your enemies. Be good even to people that hate you. Bless people that curse. Pray for people that show spite, [bitterness, and vengeance]. When a man hits you on one side of the face, turn your head to let him hit you on the other side as well. When a man begs for your coat or sues you for your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everybody who begs or asks. When somebody takes your tools, money, car, clothes, MP4 player, smart phone, tablet, or laptop, do not ask for it back. Treat other people as you want them to treat you." *

Matthew 18:21 – 18:22. * Then Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often do I have to forgive somebody if he keeps doing the same bad thing? Do I have to forgive him seven times?" Jesus said, "Not just seven times. I say you have to forgive them seventy times seven [that is, always]". *

"Seventy times seven" did not mean exactly 490 times but meant "a gazillion" or "so many as to be without limit" or "every time, always, without exception, no matter how many times". Jesus meant to shake Peter out of any kind of simple rule so that Peter had to use his judgment and his heart.

Luke 17:3 – 17:4. * "If your brother-or-sister wrongs you, then tell him-her. If he-she repents, then forgive. Even if he-she does the same bad thing seven times in one day but comes back to you seven times saying, 'I am [really] sorry', you still have to forgive him-her." *

The qualification that we forgive only if our brother repents probably comes from Luke rather than from Jesus and probably shows a problem in the early Church with applying the absolute teaching of Jesus to daily life. There is still no solution.

Matthew 18:23 – 18:25. * "Think of the Kingdom of God this way: Once a king decided to settle with his

servants. The first man that the king saw had run up debts of billions. He could not repay, so the master ordered him sold along with his wife, children, and all that he had. The men fell on his face begging: 'Be patient with me and I will pay the debt.' Pity moved the master to release the man and forgive the debt. No sooner was the man out the door than he ran into a fellow civil servant who owed him only a few dollars. The first man grabbed the second man by the throat and said, 'Pay all you can right now'. The second man fell at the first man's feet begging for mercy saying, 'Be patient with me and I will pay the debt'. But the first man refused and had the second man jailed until the second man [his family] could pay the debt. The other civil servants were shocked when they saw, [and feared for themselves too], so they told the master the story. The master sent for the first man. The master said, 'You scoundrel! I forgave your whole debt when you begged me. You were honor bound to show your fellows the same pity that I showed you.' The master condemned the man to torture until the man could pay the whole debt. That is how God my father will treat you unless you forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart." *

God extends to all of us great mercy. We are bound by honor to extend to other people mercy just as God extends mercy to us even if we can never extend as much mercy to others as God extends to us. If we do show mercy to others, we are in the Kingdom of God. If we do not, we are in Hell. In Jesus' time, a king could torture a man for bad debts. It is not clear Jesus really said God would torture us. In traditional high Christian theology, the worst torture consists of separation from God.

Luke 13:6 – 13:9. * Jesus told this parable: "One day a man came looking for figs on one of his fig trees but found none. So he told the gardener, 'Hey. For the last three years, I have come looking for figs on this tree but found none. Cut it down. Why should it go on taking up space and robbing the soil?' But the gardener said, 'Please leave it for one more year. I will trench around it, drain it, and manure it. If it bears, then well and good. If not, I will cut it down.'" * Again Luke allows qualifications on mercy and he tries to establish some reasonable guidelines in practical life. He also shows that we need to invest in our relations with other people to expect anything from them, we all need a little patience sometimes, and people can really change.

The next story contrasts with the story above and it puzzles scholars. Why would Jesus be so unreasonable and spiteful? I do not know. Matthew removed the reference to fig season to make Jesus seem justified. Matthew probably added the part about the tree withering to make Jesus seem magically powerful. In Matthew, the story sounds like a simple lesson about unproductive people. For one-and-the-same-event, Mark and Matthew do not report the same literal words for Jesus, so the New Testament cannot always be the literal words of Jesus. The gist is the same, and sometimes that is all we can hope for.

Mark 11:12 – 11:14. * Next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree in leaf in the distance, so he went looking for fruit. When he got there, he saw no figs because it was not fig season. He cursed the fig tree, saying, "May nobody ever eat any fruit from you again". His disciples heard all this. *

Matthew 21:18 – 21:20. * Next morning on his way to the city, Jesus felt hungry. He saw a fig tree on the side of the road so he went up to it but he found nothing. He said to the tree, "You will never bear any fruit again" and the tree withered immediately. The disciples were amazed at what happened. *

Intentions, Purity of Heart, Consistency, and Not Deceiving Yourself.

See the story above about not casting the first stone. See passages about not judging so that you are not judged. See personal integrity below; you cannot have personal integrity if you deceive yourself.

Mark 7:1 – Mark 7:8, Mark 7:14 – Mark 7:23. * A group of Pharisees and lawyers from Jerusalem met Jesus. They noticed that some of Jesus' disciples were eating food with "dirty" hands – that is without washing their hands first. Jews in general, and Pharisees in particular, never eat without first washing their hands, following an old tradition. When they go to the public square with the market, they never eat without first washing their hands. They follow traditional rules too on many other points such as washing cups, pitchers, and copper bowls. So the Pharisees and lawyers asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples flaunt old tradition but instead eat with dirty hands?" Jesus answered, "Isaiah was right when he said about you hypocrites, 'This people pay me lip service but in their hearts they ignore me. Thus their worship is in vain. They teach as God's doctrine the commandments of men.'" Jesus resumed, "You neglect God's commands so as to keep your own merely human traditions"...

Another time, Jesus called the people to say, "Listen. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him dirty. No, it is what comes out of a man that makes a man dirty."...

When Jesus had left the people to go outdoors, his disciples asked him about what he had just said. He replied, "Are you as stupid as the rest? Can't you see that what goes out of a man does not make him dirty because it does not go into his heart but goes through his stomach, out his butt, and into the gutter?" In so saying, Jesus in effect declared all foods clean. "Yet from inside a man, from his heart, come evil thoughts, acts of lust, stealing, murder, adultery, merciless greed, malice, cheating, envy, slander, arrogance, and stupidity. These evil things come from inside a man. They make him dirty." *

"Dirty" did not mean "contaminated with germs and soil" but ritually impure. Washing did clean as we think of cleaning now in terms of removing germs and chemicals but more importantly it cleaned in another spiritual sense.

Jesus' did stress what is inside. Most of the rest Mark made up. Jesus did not care much about ritual purity but about purity of heart.

Bands of Pharisees and lawyers did not wander up from Jerusalem into Galilee-of-the-rebel-boondocks, and, if they did, they had more important business than to test Jesus. Mark was writing to non-Jews. Thus Mark also had to explain the rules of ritual purity and of washing. Mark stretches this incident to cover the food laws, and by further extension, all the Law. Mark uses an incident that is really about intention to exempt non-Jewish Christians from Jewish Law. Mark thus accentuated the difference between (non-Jewish) Christians and Jews. Jesus did not declare all foods clean, and he did not do it by emphasizing the importance of right intentions. Simply having a good heart does not automatically release people from food rules and does not release people from the Law in general. The parallel passage in Matthew is 15:1 – 15:20.

The gospels tend to develop the idea of intent in terms of system-versus-intuition: you can either be on

the side of a bad external system of Jewish Law or of good internal Christian intuition; you cannot have both; if you follow intuition then you must be right while if you follow the Law you must be wrong. That simple opposition does not hold up. A person can both follow the Law and have good motives. A lot of people follow their intuition into bad paths. The Law does not usually advise people to do the wrong thing. Sometimes people do use the Law for bad reasons, and Jesus condemned such misuse of the Law; but that is another topic and should not be mixed up with the idea that intent is good and automatically does away with all bad Law.

Matthew 5:27 – 5:30. * “You have been taught that our ancestors were told, ‘Do not commit adultery’. But I declare this: If a man looks at a woman with lust in his eye, he has already wronged her in his heart. If he is married, he has also already committed adultery in his heart. If your right eye leads you to think badly or act badly, then rip it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose a part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into the trash pit. If your right hand is the instrument for you acting badly, then cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to throw into the trash pit.” *

Matthew 5:16 – 5:24. * “In the same way, when you fast, do not look disheveled and depressed like the hypocrites. They make their faces look like zombies so that other people will know that they are fasting. They have their reward already. When you fast, wash your face and hair, and comb your hair, so people can’t tell you are fasting, but only God your Father, who lives in your secret heart, can tell. Your Father, based on what he sees from his secret vantage point, will reward you.

Do not think about worldly goods by adding to your bank account and your toys. Thieves steal your identity and toys wear out. Store up treasure in God’s mind where there are no thieves and nothing ever wears out. Where your treasure is, there your heart and soul will be too.

The eye [understanding] is the light of your body. If your eyes are fine, you will have light for your whole body. If your eyes are bad, your whole body will be dark. If the only light you have is darkness, then you are in a double darkness.

No servant can serve two masters. He will hate one while loving the other, or he will think the world of the first while despising the second. You cannot serve both God and money [power] too. [You must choose.]” *

Probably Matthew put this argument in terms of where you get your reward, and in terms of a treasure, but the gist goes along with Jesus’ emphasis on intent. The eye and heart are metaphors for intent. “Part of the body” does not mean only literal parts of the body such as the eye but means bad thoughts as well. If your desire for power, sex, fame, tobacco, alcohol, wealth, etc. causes you to lose the way, it is better to give those up entirely than to lose your whole soul. The parallel is Luke 16:13.

Matthew 7:21 – 7:23. * “Not everybody who calls me ‘Lord, Lord’ will get into the Kingdom of God. Instead only the people that do the will of my Father God in heaven will get into his Kingdom. When that day comes, many will say to me ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t you see us prophecy in your name, cast out devils in your name, and do many miracles in your name?’ Then I will say to their faces, ‘You were not mine. Get your selves and your conniving wicked ways out of my sight.’” *

Matthew 21:28 – 21:32. * Jesus said to the assembled people, “What about this: A man had two sons. He said to the first son, ‘My son, go work in the vineyard today.’ The boy said, ‘I will, sir’, but never did. The father said the same to the second. The second son said, ‘I refuse’, but then he changed his mind and did go work. Which of these two sons did as the father wanted?” “The second”, said the people. Then Jesus said, “I say this: even tax-men and whores will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. When John came to show you the right way to live, you did not believe him, but tax-men and whores did. Even when you had seen how tax-men and whores changed their lives, you did not change your minds and believe John.” *

These passages have been guides throughout my life. It is better to do as Jesus taught than to worship God and Jesus without doing as he taught. The second passage is one of my favorite stories because I am like both sons. Parents want a son who agrees to work and then actually does it, but we all know that son is not always what we get, and then we have to think about how best to deal with the real son we do get.

Inclusiveness. See directly above about tax-gatherers and whores listening to John the Baptist and doing the will of God.

Luke 14:12 – 14:24. * Once at a dinner party, Jesus said to his host [so that everybody could hear], “When you give a party, do not invite [only] friends, family, rich neighbors, [your boss, or influential people]. They will return your invitation, and then you will be fully repaid. When you give a party, ask people who are poor, crippled, lame, blind, [and losers]. In that way, you will become happy. They cannot repay you [so you cannot look for any reward in the normal terms of this world]. You will be repaid [by God] when good men arise on resurrection day.”

One of the guests heard this and said to Jesus, “The guests who sit at the feast in the Kingdom of God will be truly happy”. Jesus continued with another story. “A man was giving a big dinner party and sent out many invitations. To remind the invitees, at dinner time he sent a servant to their homes to say, ‘Please come, everything is ready’. The invitees all excused themselves. One said, ‘I just bought some land, and I have to go inspect it, so I’m sorry’. Another said, ‘I bought five yoke of oxen [a brand new hybrid car], and I really want to try them out, so I’m sorry’. The next said, ‘I just got married. You can see I have something more important. I’m sorry.’ When the servant returned, he reported all the excuses. The master got angry. He told the servant, ‘Go out right now into the dirty alleys of our town to bring the poor, crippled, lame, blind, [and losers].’ The servant went and returned quickly. ‘Sir, I have called all as you ordered, and still we have more room at the table’. The master added, ‘Then go out to the highways and the county roads. [When you meet a traveler, farmer, or person of foreign land,] make them come in because I need my house to be full. Alas. None of the people I originally had invited will taste my banquet.’” *

Unfortunately, some readers of Luke would have understood “those who were invited” to mean “the Jews”, and the “foreigners” to mean non-Jewish Christians, so that Jews had refused Jesus and were excluded while non-Jews were invited instead. Fortunately, the meaning is wider than that, and we can rest on the better broader meaning. It is about including anybody, Jew or non-Jew. The parallel is Matthew 22:10 – 22:10. Matthew differs dramatically in that the master does not only ignore the guests

that ignore him, the master sends soldiers out to kill the bad guests! Matthew had a grudge.

Luke 15:1 – 15:4. * Another time, the tax-men and other thieves were jammed around Jesus listening to him when the Pharisees and lawyers began whining, “This man opens his arm to sinners and actually eats with them”. *

Matthew 9:10 – 9:13. * One day when Jesus was eating at somebody's house, many tax-men and other yahoos were seated with him and his disciples. The Pharisees said to his disciples, “Why does your master eat with tax-men and sinners?” Jesus heard and said, “Healthy people don't need a doctor. Sick people do. Go and learn what this text means, ‘I require mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to invite spotless people but sinners.” *

Matthew 11:18 – 11:19. * “John [the Baptist] came, with fasting, neither over eating nor drinking liquor, and they say, ‘He is possessed [by a demon]’. The Son of Man [me, Jesus] comes eating and drinking [normally], and they say, ‘Look at him. He is a glutton, a boozier, and a friend of tax-men and sinners’. In the end, God's wisdom is proven right by its outcome.” * Below, a centurion is a Roman soldier, head of 100 soldiers. He is not Jewish (Israelite) and so should not have faith and should be excluded. Ideally, a Roman should never need help from a Jew.

Matthew 8:5 – 8:10. * When Jesus entered the town of Capernaum, a centurion came to him to ask for help. He said, “Sir, my son is at home in bed paralyzed and in agony”. Jesus said, “I will go cure him”. But the centurion replied, “Sir, who am I to have a man like you in my house? You need only speak and he will be cured. I know because I have been trained to follow commands and I have soldiers under me who follow my commands. To one soldier, I say ‘go’ and he goes. To another soldier, I say ‘come’ and he comes. To a servant, I say ‘do this’ and he does it.” Jesus listed with amazement. Jesus said to the crowd, “I tell you this, nowhere, not even in Israel, have I found faith like this.” *

The Church likely did not create the next story just as a way to ratify appealing to non-Jews because the story shows Jesus in a harsh light, as the Church would not want him to be seen: he calls non-Israelites “dogs” and he means it. Even so, the story shows that Jesus could learn from sinners and non-Jews, and could “open up”. “The children” means Israelites. The parallel text from Matthew is 15:21 – 15:28.

Mark 7: 24 – 7:30. * Then he went to the area around Tyre [in Lebanon]. He found a house and would have liked to stay for a while in peace but this was impossible. Right away a woman heard about him, came to him, and fell at his feet because her young daughter was possessed by a dirty spirit. She was a Gentile, a Phoenician [Lebanese] of Syria by her birth. She begged him to drive the spirit out of her daughter. Jesus at first said, “Let the children eat their fill first. It is unfair to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.” She replied, “Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.” He said back, “For saying that, go home happy. The dirty spirit has gone out of your daughter.” Indeed, when she returned home, she found the child calm in bed because they dirty spirit had left her. *

The people that we include we call “neighbors”. So we need to know who our neighbors are. The next story of the Good Samaritan is well known. The amount of money cited is considerable, probably the equivalent of several month's wages. Recall that a Levite is a member of the Jewish priestly clan. Luke specifically cites them as a way to look down on Jews and on various strata of Jewish society. Jews

looked down on Samaritans and usually had nothing to do with them, so this story is another reversal in which despised outsiders (Christians) are better than Jews. Some scholars think Luke originated this story. I hope the original came from Jesus even if Luke edited the original. Even if it all came from Luke, it is worth repeating here anyway because it is certainly in the spirit of following Jesus.

Luke 10:29 – 10:37. * A man who had overlooked his duty wanted to excuse himself so he said to Jesus, “Well then, who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered, “A man was on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, beat him, and left him half dead. A priest was going along the road. When the priest saw the man, he went past him on the other side of the road. A Levite did the same. But a Samaritan traveler saw the man and had pity. He cleaned the man’s wounds in oil and wine, and bandaged them as best he could. The Samaritan put the man on his own horse, took the man to an inn, gave the inn-keeper two silver pieces, and told the inn-keeper, ‘Look after the man until he recovers. If you spend more than this, I will pay you on my next trip by here.’ Which of these three men was the neighbor of the victim?” The man who had been making excuses to Jesus answered, “The one who showed kindness”. Jesus said, “Go and do the same thing”. *

Work Hard to Get Results.

The passages also support trusting God.

Mark 8:34 – 8:38. * Jesus called his disciples and the people. He said, “Anybody who wishes to follow me must leave behind his ego. He must take up his cross and come along with me. Whoever cares for himself and his security will lose his self. But if a man lets himself be lost for me and my message, that man will be safe. What does a man gain by winning the entire world at the cost of his true self? What price can he pay to buy back his true self? If anybody is ashamed of me, my message, and my followers in this world (where people deny God and act wickedly), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when the Son of Man takes his rightful place with God and the angels.” *

Most of this passage is from Mark rather than Jesus but I think there is a core message that needs stressing: the value of the soul is greater than the value of the whole world. This was the meaning of the James Bond movie, “The World is Not Enough”. If you believe in Jesus’ message, then be willing to say so. If you deny it, then you undermine your self-integrity. You have to be willing to let go at least somewhat to get something that is more important than security.

In Jesus’ time, there was no Gospel yet; ‘take up a cross’ was not a common saying, and nobody would have known what Jesus was talking about if he did mention a cross before his death; all this must have been added later. Jesus did not talk of coming into the glory of his Father and the holy angels because nobody would have understood that either while he was alive, so it must have been added later too. The parallel in Luke is 9:23 – 9:27.

The parallel passage in Matthew 16:24 – 16:27 adds 16:25: “but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, then he will find his true self.”

Matthew 25:14 – 25:30. * “Once a rich man traveled overseas and did not know when he would return, so he gave portions of his capital to his servants according to the ability of the servant: to one, five bags

of gold; to another, two bags; to another, one bag; and so on. The man who had five bags right away invested them in business and made a profit of five bags on top of the original five. The man with two did the same. But the man with only one bag buried it in his backyard. Years later, the master returned, and quickly settled accounts. The man who got five bags said, 'Master, see, you left me five bags and I made five more on top of that'. The master said, 'Well done. You are a good and trustworthy worker. Because you did so well with this modest task, I will put you in charge of a big project. Be happy along with me.' The man with two bags said, 'Master you left two bags with me, and I made two more.' The master told him the same, and gave him another project in accord with his talent. Then the one-bag man said, 'Master, I know you are strict and hard. You reap where you have not sown, and you gather where you have not scattered [you find goodness even where people do not expect and where you have not obviously laid the ground work]. I am afraid. So I buried your one bag in my backyard. Here it is back, exactly what you gave me in trust.' The master fumed, 'You are lazy, not careful. You know that I reap where I have not sown so at least you should have put my money in a bank where I could have earned some interest. Take the bag of gold from him and give it to the man with five bags. To any man who already has wealth, I will give even more until he has enough and beyond. From the man who has little, I will take it all. Throw the useless servant into the dark alley where the poor wail and grind their teeth.'" * The parallel is Luke 19:12 – 19:24.

Matthew 7:21 – 7:23. * "Not everybody who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will get into the Kingdom of God. Instead only the people that do the will of my Father God in heaven will get into his Kingdom. When that day comes, many will say to me 'Lord, Lord, didn't you see us prophecy in your name, cast out devils in your name, and do many miracles in your name?' Then I will say to their faces, 'You were not mine. Get your selves and your conniving wicked ways out of my sight.'" *

It is not enough to do nothing or to be safe. We have to actively work to make the world a better place. We have to work to the best of our ability. We have to yield results to the best of our ability. We have to use our energy to best account so that it yields the best result. We cannot only seek our own satisfaction. That is part of the Golden Rule too.

We have to be careful with this passage. God does not demand results; he demands that we really try. Only evil people demand results "or else", such as movie villains that are out to take over the world, cruel business people, and the Russians in old Cold War dramas. God is not like that.

No Magic Formula. This message is implicit in what has gone before.

Non-Violence. See loving your neighbor as yourself in the section above on mercy.

Matthew 5:5. * "People of a gentle spirit are already blessed. In the end, they will take control of the earth." *

Matthew 5:7. * "People who show mercy are already blessed because other people will show mercy to them."

Matthew 5:9. 5:11. * "People who know how to spread peace are already blessed. God adopts them as his sons. People who suffer persecution for a good cause are already blessed because they already live

in the Kingdom of God. You are already blessed when you suffer insults, persecution, and disaster for my sake. Accept it. Be glad about it. You have a rich reward in the Kingdom of God. Remember that they ignorant treated the prophets in the same way before you.” * Some parallels can be found in Luke 6:12 – 6:22.

Jesus also said that he came not to bring peace but a sword, and that he would cause dissension even among close kin. These two sayings about swords and dissension seem to contradict his stress of non-violence. I do not think they do but an argument over the issue is out of place here. Jesus was realistic about what would happen; it was not something he hoped for or approved of.

Willing to Die Rather than to Do Bad.

I do not cite specific texts. The message comes from Jesus’ crucifixion and from the texts on non-violence. The stories in the gospels are not fully accurate, but assume they are approximately true. If so, then Jesus knew he was in for trouble. Rather than run away, or resist, he accepted that he had to face the situation, and that he might even die. Sometimes it is better to allow harm to come to yourself than to do harm to others. For Jesus, the stakes were higher than himself. If Jesus was human, he could not have known that his mission, and the Kingdom of God, would go ahead anyway after he died. He had to take the chance that his mission and the Kingdom of God might die with him. Jesus did not only risk himself rather than not do harm, he risked what must have been the most important things in the world. Jesus trusted God to advance the cause of right even though Jesus might not be there to see it through and even though Jesus did not fight for right. Maybe it is better to risk not only yourself but also what you love rather than to do wrong by harming other people, resisting, or running away.

This issue is important for modern people who will do harm to make sure their own ethnic group, religious group, or nation, survives. It is easy to argue against crazies such as suicide bombers and the IRA. It is not right to do that kind of evil even to make sure your group survives. The real question comes when standard Christians have to fight to preserve their group. If Jesus was willing to die, then how can Christians fight against Nazis, Communists, or terrorists? If Jesus was willing to die, then why should anybody fight for his-her family? Why should the French fight the Germans to preserve France, Americans fight terrorists to preserve America, and Roman Catholics fight to preserve the Church against Protestants? Why should the Politically Correct oppose the Religious Right or vice versa? We should trust God to preserve good and preserve our family, or to cause goodness and our kin to rise again if they fall. We should trust God rather than do harm. Yet, along with standard Christians, I believe it is right to fight to preserve some things. It is very hard for a normal human being to trust God to preserve family and group, or to bring them back again. I have a hard time justifying my thoughts in light of what Jesus did and must have believed.

Personal Integrity. See also “Trust God” and “Work Hard” from above.

Mark 8:34 – 8:38. * Jesus called his disciples and the people. He said, “Anybody who wishes to follow me must leave behind his ego. He must take up his cross and come along with me. Whoever cares for himself and his security will lose his self. But if a man lets himself be lost for me and for my message, that man will be safe. What does a man gain by winning the entire world at the cost of his true self?

What price can he pay to buy back his true self? If anybody is ashamed of me, my message, and my followers in this world (where people deny God and act wickedly), the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when the Son of Man takes his rightful place with God and the angels.” *

Matthew 16:24 – 16:28. * Jesus said to his disciples, “If anybody wishes to follow me, he must let go of his self. He has to pick up his own cross and walk with me. Whoever cares more about his own safety is already lost. If a man will let himself be lost to the normal world for my sake, then he will find his true self. What does a man really have if he owns the whole world at the cost of his true self? Out of the whole world, what could he give to buy back his true self? Someday the Son of Man [I] will come in the glory of his Father, with a retinue of angels, and then he will give to each man the reward for what that man has done. I say this: some of you standing here will not die before you have seen the Son of Man bring his Kingdom.” *

Matthew 4:1 and Matthew 4:8 – 4:11. * The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so that Satan could tempt Jesus...For a final temptation, Satan took Jesus to a high mountain from which they could see all the kingdoms of the world in their glory. Satan said, “I will give you all these if you will only fall down and honor me [according to the power that I truly have.]” But Jesus said, “Get lost, Satan, you enemy! Scripture says, ‘You will worship the Lord God and only him.’” *

Matthew 6:1 – 6:7. * “Be sure not to parade your religion. If you do that, then God will not recognize you in heaven [because you have received enough reward here on earth already]. When you help somebody or give to charity, do not make a big deal about it like the politicians, celebrities, and televangelists do on TV, and the hypocrites do in the churches, so people will admire them. They already have their reward. Instead, when you do something good, don’t even let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Keep your good deed secret. Your Father who knows everything, even secrets, will reward you. When you pray, do not be a hypocrite. Do not stick out your hands in the middle of the office, in the break room, or on the street corner, so that other people admire your piety. People like that already have all the reward they are going to get. When you pray, go into your room all by yourself, shut the door, and talk to your Father who is in every secret physical place and secret personal place. He sees you and will reward you. When you pray, you can be short and to the point. You don’t need to use a lot of words like people who chant and babble and who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard.” *

Matthew 13:44 – 13:46. * “The Kingdom of God is like a buried treasure in a field. One day, a man accidentally finds it. With joy in his heart, he sold everything he had so he could buy that field to get the unforeseen treasure. Here is another way to think about the Kingdom of God. A pearl merchant was always on the lookout for good ones. One day he found the best pearl he had ever seen. So he sold everything he had, including all his other pearls, so he could buy that one perfect pearl.” *

The original ideas are in Mark. Matthew repeats the ideas but adds a bit about the role of the young Church. The part in Matthew 16:24 – 16:28 that begins “For the Son of Man” is Matthew’s addition to promote allegiance to the cause. The passages about being tempted by Satan show the emerging theology and cosmology of the early Church. Still, Satan can stand for any seduction of integrity and so the passages are true even if there is no literal devil and Jesus really was not tempted in the wilderness; that is the point of the James Bond movie. The passages about Jesus coming back soon caused enormous problems in the early Church, and still cause problems today. Matthew mars some of the

passages with snide comments about Jews, and seems to show some ignorance. Matthew takes Jews as (false) examples of what to do wrong, and so started a trend that continues to this day. Praying in public and giving alms in public was also seen as an act of asserting Jewish identity and of defiance toward Rome, although, of course, people did use it as self-advertisement. It was not always bad, it depended on who did it and why. It would be like reciting rap (hip-hop) on a street corner now.

The Christian idea of the self did not emerge in a vacuum; there were many Hebrew precedents in, for example, Abraham's dialogues with God, Moses' dialogues with God, the Book of Job, and the Book of Ezekiel where the foundation for modern individualist justice was laid. An idea of the self similar to the Christian idea of the self is also in other religions, as for example in the Upanishads (Hinduism), non-reductionist Buddhism, and the upbeat Taoism of Chuang Tzu. Still, the Christian idea supported individualistic justice and ideas of the individual that are not as well-developed in other religions and cultures.

Jesus' idea of the preciousness and integrity of individual people does not necessarily mean the standard dogma that is taught in standard Christianity. God made us and God can do with ourselves as he sees fit. As far as I can tell, Jesus just did not think in the terms of standard Christianity where people have an immortal soul, people face eternal damnation or salvation as the only options, and their primary (rather selfish) concern is to save their soul. God decides all that when you die. Standard Christianity substitutes salvation of the eternal isolated soul in place of Jesus' teaching about being a citizen in the Kingdom of God. Heaven usurps the Kingdom of God. The metaphysical immortal isolated soul usurps the integral self. Jesus did not teach any of this standard dogma. He would have seen it as a distortion of his teaching, a distortion that diverts people away from the true message of participation in the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not think of the integral self in the same way that Christian theologians developed the idea of the soul or as modern people think of the soul. Immortality of the soul was not important for him, and he does not raise it. I do not know if Jesus thought the soul is immortal. Eternal salvation in heaven likewise was not an issue. I doubt Jesus thought heaven could take the place of being a member of the Kingdom of God. Jesus thought people could suffer greatly due to separation from God and the Kingdom, and degradation of the integral self; but he did not think of that in the same way modern people think of being damned in hell. Rather than worry about your immortal soul, heaven, or hell, think instead about being a useful citizen of the Kingdom of God, which includes your integral self, and the rest will take care of itself.

Sacrifice for the Common Good. This point is derived from everything above.

Sudden Insight. This point is derived from everything above.