

THE UNITY AND STRUCTURE OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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Jesus is often described in the Gospels as a preacher.¹ What has become his most famous sermon is recorded in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6:17-49. The former is usually referred to as the Sermon on the Mount (note 5:1), the latter as the Sermon on the Plain (note 6:17 KJV). The following study will be concerned primarily with the unity and structure of the Matthean sermon, but a necessary preliminary is a consideration of the interrelationship of the two sermons.

The Interrelationship of the Two Sermons

The relationship of parallel passages is best studied in a synopsis of the Gospels where the passages are placed side-by-side to facilitate comparison.² Space limitations prevent doing that here, but a perspective can be obtained from the following list based upon Matthew's order.³

¹ Matt 4:17; 11:1; Mark 1:14, 38, 39; and Luke 3:18; 4:43, 44; 8:1; 9:6; 20:1. Compare Matt 11:5 and Luke 4:18; 7:22; 16:16. Actually only the verb "to preach" is used. John's Gospel never indicates that Jesus preached. It describes him as a teacher, as also the Synoptics do more often than as a preacher. In the Gospels, however, there is not much difference between preaching and teaching, unless it is that preaching is always public and teaching sometimes private.

² Probably the best for most readers of the *Criswell Theological Review* is K. Aland (ed.), *Synopsis of the Four Gospels: Greek-English Edition of the Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 8th ed. (n.p.: United Bible Societies, 1987), which is available through the American Bible Society. A different method of presentation may be found in *Horizontal Line Synopsis of the Gospels* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984).

³ Similar, but less detailed, lists may be found in D. A Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 140; R A Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco,

Matthew's Sermon	Parallels in Luke's Sermon	Other Parallels in Luke	Parallels in Mark
5:3	6:20		
5:4	6:21b		
5:5			
5:6	6:21a		
5:7-10			
5:11-12	6:22-23		
5:13		14:34-35a	9:50
5:14			
5:15		8:16; 11:33	4:21
5:16-17			
5:18 (cf. 24:35)		16:17; 21:33	13:31
5:19-22			
5:23-24			11:25
5:25-26		12:58-59	
5:27-28			
5:29 (cf. 18:9)			9:47
5:30 (cf. 18:8)			9:43
5:31			
5:32		16:18	
5:33-39a			
5:39b-40	6:29		
5:41			
5:42	6:30		
5:43			
5:44	6:27-28, 35		
5:45			
5:46-47	6:32-33		
5:48	6:36		
6:1-8			
6:9-10a, 11-13a		11:2-4	
6:10b			
6:13b			
6:14-15			11:25[-26]
6:16-19			
6:20-21		12:33-34	
6:22-23		11:34-35	

TX: Word, 1982) 34; J. Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Wilmington, DL: Glazier, 1985) 36-37; and R T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 161.

Matthew's Sermon	Parallels in Luke's Sermon	Other Parallels in Luke	Parallels in Mark
6:24		16:13	
6:25-33		12:22-31	
6:34			
7:1	6:37a		
7:2a			
7:2b	6:38c		4:24b
7:3-5	6:41-42		
7:6			
7:7-11		11:19-13	
7:12a	6:31		
7:12b			
7:13-14		13:24	
7:15			
7:16-17	6:43-44		
7:18-20			
7:21	6:46		
7:22-23		13:25-27	
7:24-27	6:47-49		

The most obvious difference in the two accounts is length. Matthew's sermon is about three and a half times as long as Luke's--to be exact 107 verses vs. 30 verses.⁴ A second observation is that 23th of Matthew's verses are paralleled in Luke's sermon mostly in the same order,⁵ 33 are paralleled elsewhere in Luke, and 50 ½ have no parallel in Luke. There is no comparable sermon in Mark--only scattered, secondary parallels.

The following cannot be seen in the above list, but if Luke's sermon is taken as the basis of comparison, 23 of his 30 verses are paralleled in Matthew's sermon, one is paralleled elsewhere in Matthew, and six have no parallel in Matthew. Only one-half of a verse is paralleled in Mark.

A third observation is that the wording of the parallel passages is sometimes very close and sometimes quite different, which of course is true of synoptic relationships in general both in the double or Q tradition (Matthew and Luke as here) and the triple tradition (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). This cannot be seen above but must be observed in a synopsis, preferably a Greek synopsis. First two examples

⁴ The introductions and conclusions are not included in the count or in the above list

⁵ The exceptions are Matt 5:44 // Luke 6:27-28, 35 and Matt 7:12a // Luke 6:31.

of close--but not exact--agreement and then two of loose agreement must suffice.⁶

"And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, and do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye. You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." (Matt 7:3-5)

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall." (Matt 7:24-27)

"And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye." (Luke 6:4-42)

"Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and acts upon them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard, and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:47-49)

⁶ Because of the desirability of employing a very literal translation in order best to represent the Greek text, all Biblical quotations in this study are from the New American Standard Bible.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. . . . Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matt 5: 3-4, 6, 11-12)

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt 7:48)

"Blessed *are* you *who are* poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets." (Luke 6:20b-23)
 "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

What conclusions may be drawn from the above about the relationship of the two sermons? By the nature of the case there are three possibilities: Matthew was dependent upon Luke; Luke was dependent upon Matthew; and Matthew and Luke were dependent upon a common source.⁷ Before one can make a decision about the relationship of the two sermons, however, a decision must be made about synoptic relationships in general, i.e., about the synoptic problem, and a brief survey of the major theories is necessary.

Augustine (d. 430) argued that the Gospels were written in the order in which they are found in modern Bibles.⁸ More particularly, Mark is a condensation of Matthew, and Luke used both Matthew and Mark as his sources.⁹ This theory dominated until the first half of the

⁷ A fourth possibility would be an unmediated inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that the Gospel writers did not need or use sources. One who holds a high view of inspiration would not deny the possibility of this, but it is contrary to the fact that God usually uses human means where available (e.g., to preach the gospel) and to the explicit statement in Luke 1:1-3 that the author collected sources.

⁸ This is probably the strongest argument for the theory. The argument is weakened, however, by the fact that the Gospels are found in nine different orders in the ancient manuscript tradition (B. M Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1987] 296-97). For arguments against the theory, see below.

⁹ *de Consensu Evangelistarum* 1.2-3.

19th century when the full extent of the synoptic problem was first recognized and began to be studied scientifically. During the 19th century a host of solutions were proposed, and late in the century one came to dominate, at least in Protestant circles.¹⁰ It is usually referred to as the two-document hypothesis. It holds that Mark was the first Gospel to be written and that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and a collection of the sayings of Jesus (Q¹¹) as their primary sources.

The priority of Mark is supported, first, by the length and contents of that Gospel. It is only 60% as long as Matthew and 57% as long as Luke. About 92% of Mark is paralleled in Matthew, 48% in Luke, and 95% in Matthew and/or Luke. Mark contains relatively little of the teaching and preaching of Jesus and no resurrection appearances.¹² Nor does it have such things as the birth narratives, the Sermon on the Mount/Plain, and the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. It is very easy to see why Matthew and Luke, if they were later than Mark, would add these items, but it is difficult to see why Mark, if he were later than Matthew and/or Luke, would omit them and at the same time expand their individual accounts which he retained, as is indeed the case. In fact it is difficult to see why Mark would ever have been written if its author knew Matthew alone (the Augustinian hypothesis, above) or Matthew and Luke (the Griesbach hypothesis, below). Second, the priority of Mark is indicated by the inelegant language in which the Gospel is written. It is easy to conceive of Matthew and Luke polishing Mark's rough Greek; it is more difficult to believe that Mark debased the language of his source(s). Third, Mark contains a number of statements which could be misunderstood and cause offense--statements about Jesus' emotions and ignorance and the disciples' dullness. Most of these statements either do not appear at all or are without problems in Matthew and Luke. Again it is understandable that Matthew and Luke would tone down or omit such statements but not that Mark would create them if working from earlier source(s). Fourth, Mark contains seven Aramaic terms as opposed to only one or two in Matthew and none in Luke. Especially in view of the probability that Mark wrote for Gentile Christians and Matthew for Jewish Christians, this fact and many other Aramaisms in his Gospel would seem to indicate that he was

¹⁰ Until they were freed in 1943, Roman Catholic scholars were required to embrace the Augustinian theory, although some modified it considerably.

¹¹ Q is simply the first letter of the German word Quelle which means "source."

¹² This statement assumes that Mark 16:9-20 was not a part of the original, as is recognized by most conservative scholars and most conservative translations (ASV, NASB, NIV, Berkeley/Modern Language Bible, and Living Bible).

nearer to the early, Aramaic sources.¹³ Fifth, Matthew and Luke never agree against Mark in the order of their accounts and only rarely and then only in trivial matters in their wording. The best--although certainly not the only--explanation of this phenomenon is that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke independently used it as a source of information.

If for no other reason than it does not now exist, the evidence for the use of Q by Matthew and Luke is not as strong as that for their use of Mark. Nevertheless there are about 250 verses common to these Gospels but not in Mark for which an explanation is needed. These verses contain mostly discourse, i.e., the teaching of Jesus, rather than a narrative of his deeds. The wording is often so close that dependence upon oral tradition appears to be an unsatisfactory explanation. Of course it is possible that Luke was dependent upon Matthew or Matthew upon Luke for this material.¹⁴ If so, why did the one who was dependent leave out so much that was so good in his source? And if Luke were dependent upon Matthew, why has he broken up the orderly discourses in Matthew and scattered the material throughout his Gospel? In the Q tradition Luke places the sayings of Jesus in different contexts from those of Matthew. Is this likely if he were using Matthew? It is most significant that in the triple tradition where Matthew has something not in Mark, Luke does not have the additional material. This consideration is strong evidence that he did not use Matthew. The presence of "doublets" in Matthew and Luke also seems to indicate that they used Mark and another source.¹⁵

Certainly there are difficulties with the Q hypothesis, but there are even greater difficulties with the alternative that Luke was dependent upon Matthew.¹⁶ As a result most students of the synoptic

¹³ Inasmuch as Aramaic was the language of the common people in first-century Palestine, it is probable that Jesus did most of his teaching and preaching in that language. Therefore all of his words in the Greek NT are probably a translation. Just as modern English versions vary considerably from one other, it is probable that the early translations of Aramaic accounts varied greatly. This is one explanation of the different versions of the sayings of Jesus.

¹⁴ The latter has been argued so rarely and unconvincingly that it need not be considered

¹⁵ A doublet consists of two accounts of the same event or saying. According to J. C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909; reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968) 80-107, there are 22 of these in Matthew, eleven in Luke, but only one on Mark. Only four of these appear in Mark and twice each in Matthew and Luke and therefore support the above claim.

¹⁶ It needs to be recognized clearly that there are difficulties with all the theories of synoptic relationships and that therefore one must deal in terms of probabilities, not certainties. Probably synoptic relationships are more complex than any of the theories.

problem have concluded that Matthew and Luke, in addition to using Mark, *independently* used a common source called Q. Whether Q was a single document or several documents is uncertain. It has been objected that it is unlikely that such an amorphous collection of the sayings of Jesus even existed, but in 1945 another collection of disorganized and independent sayings, some of which are paralleled in the canonical Gospels, was discovered in Egypt in the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*.

One theory that was set forth late in the 18th century when the synoptic problem first began to be studied was that of J. J. Griesbach.¹⁷ Soon, however, it fell into disfavor. In recent years, however, it has been revived by W. R. Farmer¹⁸ and others. The Griesbach-Farmer-two-Gospel hypothesis is that Matthew was the first Gospel to have been written, that Luke was dependent upon Matthew, and that Mark condensed and conflated both Matthew and Luke. It does have the advantage of support of part of the ancient tradition,¹⁹ something which the two-document hypothesis cannot claim. It is best able to explain the minor agreements in wording of Matthew and Luke against Mark, although there are other ways to explain these. It can also explain the order of accounts in the Synoptics, but not as well as can the two-document hypothesis. Of course it has the advantage of not having to employ a hypothetical source (Q). But it is not able to explain satisfactorily why Mark was ever written or why Matthew and Luke appear to improve upon Mark at various points (above). Furthermore very little redaction criticism²⁰ has been done on the basis of Matthean priority, whereas much has been done on the basis of Marcan priority. Still further it is questionable whether condensation and conflation are compatible. The latter usually results in a longer, not a shorter account (e.g., *Tatian's Diatessaron*).²¹

recognize. Once they were written there may have been a period of comparison and interchange before their texts began to be stabilized, probably about the middle of the 2nd century when they began to be recognized as Scripture.

¹⁷ For a list of Griesbach's works in which he developed the theory, see W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) 7, n. 8.

¹⁸ *Synoptic Problem*.

¹⁹ Clement of Alexandria, *Hypotyposes*, as cited by Eusebius, Church History 6.14.5. Clement claimed that the Gospels with genealogies (Matthew and Luke) were written before those without (Mark and John). Of course the other part of the ancient tradition is that of Augustine (above), and, although it does support the priority of Matthew, it does not support the order Matthew, Luke, Mark.

²⁰ Redaction criticism attempts to distinguish a writer's sources from his own composition in order to determine his theological motivations.

²¹ It should be noted that many of the arguments against the Griesbach hypothesis apply equally against the Augustinian.

Therefore the most likely view of synoptic relationships in general is the traditional, two-document hypothesis that Mark was the first Gospel and that Matthew and Luke used it and Q as their primary sources. A study of the relationships of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain confirms part of this theory. Inasmuch as there are no significant parallels with Mark, nothing can be determined about the relationship of Matthew and/or Luke to Mark. Something can be determined about the relationship of Matthew and Luke. Because most of Luke's sermon is paralleled in Matthew--most of it in the same order and in similar wording--it is reasonably certain that one or the other was dependent upon a written source and that the two did not independently compose their entire sermons. If Luke were dependent upon Matthew, it appears most unlikely that he would have reduced Matthew's sermon to less than a third of its size to produce his own sermon and then to have scattered about 40% of the remainder throughout much of his Gospel. It is much more likely that Matthew and Luke *independently* used a sermon in Q, that Luke altered the Q sermon comparatively little, and that Matthew greatly expanded it with material found elsewhere in Q and material from other sources.

The preceding is in keeping with what Matthew appears to have done elsewhere in his Gospel. The most distinctive feature of Matthew is five large discourse sections, of which the Sermon on the Mount is the first. None of these appears to be one sermon delivered on a single occasion but a collection of Jesus' sayings on a subject. The mere length of the discourses is not a problem. Even the longest, the Sermon on the Mount, can be read aloud in the average time of a modern sermon, and ancient sermons were probably much longer. The problem with the idea that the discourses were originally one sermon or one teaching session is the variety of the material in all of them. Such variety is tolerable in a written compilation but not in an oral account. There is nothing improbable or immoral about such topical, as opposed to chronological, arrangement. It in no way questions the authenticity of any of the teaching attributed to Jesus.²²

It is likely therefore that Q contained an account of a famous sermon of Jesus about the blessedness of the godly person and about

²² Carson (*Sermon on the Mount*, 143-45) argues that Jesus preached the same sermon on different occasions, lengthening or shortening it and adapting it in other ways depending upon the hearers and situation. Matthew reports one version of a sermon; Luke another. Carson explains the diversity of material in Matthew's sermon on the basis of representing "a full-fledged teach-in" which "undoubtedly. . . went on for hours, with Jesus preaching the equivalent of many of our sermons" (143). He repeats this explanation in his commentary *Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (ed.

virtues to be pursued and vices to be avoided in order to enjoy such blessedness. Luke reproduced this sermon with comparatively few alterations. The most likely Lukan addition is the woes of 6:24-26. It is possible that he may have omitted a little of what is in Matthew and that both Matthew and Luke may have omitted a little of the Q sermon, but there is no way to determine this. Matthew, however, greatly expanded the sermon by adding material found elsewhere in Q and perhaps also in other sources.

The Unity of Matthew's Sermon

If most of the previous conclusions are correct, the matter of the unity of Matthew's sermon may be treated briefly. Everything depends upon what one means by "unity." If "unity" means a single sermon preached on one occasion by Jesus, Matthew 5-7 is not a unity. If, however, the word "unity" may be applied to a carefully arranged and edited compilation of Jesus' teaching on a particular subject, the Sermon on the Mount is a unity. There is no indication of interpolations by later editors. The only problem is to determine a dominating theme and a clear structure which constitute unity. The former will be done in the remainder of this section, the latter in the final section. Theme is tied up with purpose. What purpose did Matthew have in bringing together various sayings of Jesus in his first discourse section? There has been no shortage of theories. The most important are conveniently summarized by Carson.²³ Lutheran interpreters have tended to understand the sermon as an exposition of the law to show people their need of grace. Neither grace nor law, however, dominate the sermon. Classical liberalism saw in the sermon an ethic for all people of all ages. Nevertheless much of the discourse is irrelevant to those who are not already disciples of Jesus. Many contemporary liberals see in the sermon nothing more than the ethical standards of Matthew's own church. This view denies that most of the teaching goes back to Jesus and that Jesus intended his teaching to have continuing validity.

F. E. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 1984) 8:123-25. Certainly Jesus did repeat himself from time to time as every preacher and teacher does, and therefore the explanation is possible. It is not probable, however, as it ignores the likelihood that both reports of the sermon are highly condensed. It is not likely that two versions of the same sermon would have been remembered and kept distinct in the tradition. One may occasionally explain the different accounts of Jesus' teaching by conjecturing that he said similar but not identical things on different occasions, but if one does this very often the explanations become absurd.

²³ *Sermon on the Mount*, 151-57; and *Matthew*, 126-27.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition applies every element of the sermon to all Christians of all ages in such a way as to justify pacifism and withdrawal from secular society and to depreciate public prayer. No portion of Scripture should be made absolute in such a way as to eliminate interpretation and individual application. Existentialism finds in the sermon as well as the Bible generally merely a summons to "authentic" existence. There is some truth in the view as far as it goes, but it fails to reckon with the specific ethical requirements of the discourse. Albert Schweitzer described the sermon as an interim ethic for the brief period between its proclamation and the expected end of the world. Of course the world did not end as Jesus supposedly expected, and therefore the sermon has little continuing validity. Nineteen centuries of history have proved, however, that the sermon does have lasting validity. Some evangelicals describe the sermon as an intensification of the law, but this makes too much of 5:17-20 and ignores other passages. Classical dispensationalism conceives of the sermon as an ethic for the millennial kingdom and therefore of minimal relevance for the church age. Why, however, would a code of law be needed during the millennium when at least most of the participants are perfected saints?

If none of the above adequately describes the purpose and/or theme of the Sermon on the Mount, what is it? One should note that it follows closely after the programmatic statements that Jesus went about proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of heaven (4:17, 23). The term "kingdom of heaven" appears six times and the word "kingdom" alone three times at strategic places in the sermon. The sermon is therefore a description of the virtues which should characterize those who belong to the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom is the reign of God in the lives of people in Jesus' day, during the apostolic era, and in every age since those times. The sermon deals with the personal life of those who belong to the kingdom. Other aspects of their life are dealt with in other discourses, e.g., mission in chapter 10. Those who belong to the kingdom could be described simply as disciples—a term which appears at the beginning of the sermon (5:1). Therefore the sermon has a consistent theme, and this theme constitutes part of its unity. Another part is supplied by its structure.

The Structure of Matthew's Sermon

There are almost as many outlines of the Sermon on the Mount as there are commentaries on it. This essay, however, must be limited to scholarly studies which seek to determine the structure intended by the author himself. Still further it will be limited to what its writer

considers to be the most important study on the subject: Dale C. Allison, Jr., "The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount."²⁴

Allison begins by surveying and criticizing previous studies of structure: that of Farrer who views the remainder of the sermon as a commentary on the Beatitudes; that of Davies who thinks that the sermon is based upon the three pillars of Simeon the Just; those of Grundmann, Schweizer, Bornkamm, Gundry, and perhaps Lambrecht who find the organizing principle in the Lord's Prayer; and those of a number of other scholars which cannot be summarized here simply and briefly.²⁵ Allison then proceeds to set forth his own proposal.²⁶ The most important element in Allison's analysis of the structure is the presence of numerous triads, something he finds in the other Matthean discourses as well.²⁷ Many of these can be seen in the following abbreviated description of Allison's structure.

There is clearly an introduction and conclusion which consist of 4:23-5:2 and 7:28-8:1 respectively and which correspond to each other. Note the correspondences: "great crowds followed him" (4:25 and 8:1); the crowds (5:1 and 7:28); the mountain (5:1 and 8:1); "going up" (5:1) and "going down" (8:1); "teaching" (5:2 and 7:28); and, "opening his mouth" (5:2) and "when Jesus finished these words" (7:28).

The sermon proper therefore just as clearly consists of 5:3-7:27. It also has opening and concluding sections which correspond: the nine (3 x 3) Beatitudes in 5:3-12 and the three warnings in 7:13-27.

The core of the sermon therefore consists of 5:13-7:12 and deals with the task of the people of God in the world. It has a heading or introductory summary (5:13-16) which provides a transition from the blessedness of the future (5:12-13) to the demands of the present (5:17-7:12). Then 5:17-7:12 clearly divides into Jesus and the Torah (5:17-48), the Christian cult (6:1-18), and social issues (6:19-7:12). Matt 5:17, however, is more than an introduction to the section on the Torah; it is also an introduction to 5:17-7:12 and corresponds to the concluding summary in 7:12.

The section on Jesus and the Torah (5:17-48) begins with a statement of general principles (5:17-20) and then contains two triads of antitheses: 5:21-32 on murder (5:21-26), adultery (5:27-30), and divorce

²⁴ *JBL* 100 (1987) 423-45. A much briefer account of the structure may be found in W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 projected vols.. The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-) 1:61-64.

²⁵ Allison, "Structure," 424-29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 429-45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 438-40.

(5:31-32); and 5:33-48 on swearing (5:33-37), turning the other cheek (5:38-42), and loving enemies (5:43-48).²⁸

The section on the Christian cult (6:1-18) consists of a statement of general principle (6:1) and three areas of specific instruction on almsgiving (6:2-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). The second can be further subdivided using additional triads.

Unlike some other scholars, Allison does not find the section on social issues (6:19-7:12) to be without discernible structure. It consists of sections on God and mammon (6:19-34), and one's neighbor (7:1-12), each of which contains first a triad consisting of exhortation and two parables and then a concluding encouragement.

As indicated above, the golden rule in 7:12 does more than close the section on one's neighbor (7:1-12) and/or the larger section on social issues (6:19-7:12); it also closes the entire central section (5:17-7:12). It summarizes the law and the prophets and therefore corresponds to the introductory statement in 5:17 about the continuing validity of the law and the prophets.

How should one evaluate Allison's analysis of structure? It is certainly a careful and thorough study of the subject, perhaps the best that has ever been made. It is certainly correct to recognize the prominence of triads. There is no doubt that Matthew had a fondness for grouping things by threes. This would naturally aid the memory in learning the material. It is one thing, however, to recognize the prominence of triads; it is another to claim that their use determines the structure. Some of them are forced, e.g., exhortation, parable, and second parable in both 6:19-24 and 7:1-12 (exhortation and parables are not parallel). There are too many instances in Allison's analysis where there are two divisions rather than three. It is doubtful therefore whether the recognition of triads is the key which unlocks the structure of the sermon.

In view of the widespread disagreement about the structure and the problems with all analyses, one cannot help but wonder if Matthew himself employed a rigid structure. If he did, it still has not been discovered even after 19 centuries of searching. On the other hand, the sermon certainly is not a miscellaneous collection of the sayings of Jesus without any structure at all. There is some topical

²⁸ Allison's justifications for two triads of antitheses rather than merely six antitheses are the word "against" in v 33, the presence in the first three but absence in the last three of the word "that" following "but I say unto you," the presence of "you have heard that it was said to the men of old" at the beginning of the first and fourth, and the description of legal ordinances in the first three but the use of imperative verbs in the last three ("Structure," 432-33).

arrangement and some arrangement in groups of threes, resulting in a coherent discourse which is easy to read and follow and a unity which commends itself to most readers.

Because the author himself did not impose a fixed structure upon the sermon, modern readers therefore may adopt any outline which is helpful, as long as it is realized that it is not the only possible one. The present writer submits the following for consideration. Of course many of the items could be further subdivided.

Introduction: the setting of the sermon (5:1-2)

1. The blessedness of disciples (5:3-12)
2. The character of disciples (5:13-16)
3. The new law for disciples (5:17-48)

Introduction: Jesus' attitude toward the law (5:17-20)

- (1) About murder (5:21-26)
- (2) About adultery (5:27-30)
- (3) About divorce (5:31-32)
- (4) About oaths (5:33-37)
- (5) About retaliation (5:38-42)
- (6) About love of enemies (5:43-48)

4. The practice of piety by disciples (6:1-18)

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