

READING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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The question set forth in Mind & Spirit lectures is: How does my scholarship inform my theology? An August evening in 2004, at Cedar City, Utah, after a performance of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, Scott and Shauna Samuelson and I discussed the play's themes of redemption, forgiveness, and resurrection as we walked back to the hotel. Conversation centered on spiritual sensations, and of a sudden we understood that the promptings were possible in part because of academic preparation in literature and Shakespeare. We knew our hearts were penetrated by the synergy of spirit and mind instructing together. This was the inception of the Mind & Spirit lectures.

Thank you for joining me to read the Sermon on the Mount. I shall undertake a review of the reading process, paragraph by paragraph. My intent here and in the classroom is not an essay or interpretation—but primarily a reading exercise, a study of scholastic methods through which reading leads to meaning. It would feel irreverent to interpret such words as those in the Sermon. Talking of them, though, is vital, as are feasting on them and rejoicing in them.¹

Reading the Sermon on the Mount instructs me in two theological regions: the principle of fulfillment, and paradox in gospel teaching. The two converge in a reading of the Sermon, suggesting that paradoxical logic is a key to understanding the fulfillment Jesus taught.

Reading in the Sermon, I will note the features in sequence as they appear, as if you and I walked an open trail together, glancing here and there to take the scene in. Once it appears that the topic is fulfillment, fulfillment will reflect all around like nature's shades of green. Just as a trail might lead through woodlands and then across fields from which trees are only distantly visible, paradox in the Sermon appears, here as a thicket, there as a background.

"My theology" means my own receipts from what is, and was, and is to come.² Points of theology proclaimed to all are the revelations, by whose light we walk in the community of the Church. At the same time, paradoxically, individuals walk in the light of Christ, each led individually by immortal intimations. Here are four observations about theology:

The universe is illuminated by the light of the Son;
Few know much;
Each believer does know some; and
What each knows partly overlaps and partly differs from what others know.

My theology is my portion of the universal light.

“My scholarship” means my individual collection of scholastic gifts. Our gifts vary, one from another. A gift I have desired is to read, reading as a conduit for learning. A text I have read is the Sermon on the Mount.³

A TEXT TO TEACH

Coming here from a secular college, for a decade I directed the Reading Center. I arrived rejoicing that I could take scriptures to the classroom. My first study was to build a grid with about 35 reading skills down the left column under my 25 or so resources for teaching them. Then I checked boxes how to proceed. The discovery was that more reading skills could be learned through scripture analysis than any other way.

Reading Skills	Teaching Tools						
	Textbook A	Textbook B	Phonics Manual	Scripture Analysis	Mapping Exercises	Close Exercises	Etc.
Vocabulary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Phonics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Find Main Idea	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sentence Patterns	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Scripture study would also help student writers since reading is prerequisite to writing. We needed a daily text small enough to cover quickly but large enough

for study. Analysis is study by taking things apart; synthesis, by bringing things together. Analysis and synthesis are among the most powerful of thinking skills, not of reading and writing only. In my 234 sections of reading or composition, we have read the Sermon on the Mount, one paragraph per class meeting. The 20 paragraphs are marked in your King James Bible.

A concept in the discipline of reading is that it occurs on multiple levels:

- Literal: what it says,
- Interpretive: what it means, and
- Applied: what to do about it.

In reading, the first question is, What is here? A reader’s definition of “comprehension” might be: By looking at the mysterious marks on the page, to know what idea the author is having. This is reading at the literal level. Its premise is that, at the first level of reading, the text states the message, that the message starts with what the text says—regardless of what anyone says it means. The Sermon on the Mount does not ask much interpretation. As for what to do about it, Jesus says in little words: do and teach,⁴ hear and do,⁵ his sayings.

Some readers resist the question, What does it say? Having been told some meaning, they wish to be left alone about the mysterious marks on the page. But a gadfly urges, “What does it say? Don’t tell me what it means until you can answer, ‘What does it say?’”

UP TO THE MOUNTAIN

So to paragraph one, the beatitudes,⁶ eight in number, the eighth with two added sentences of explanation. Each beatitude is a pair of statements connected by the word “for.”⁷ When used as a conjunction, “for” implies “because,” indicating that the two halves are connected by causality. Being merciful, for example, causally evokes mercy. So far, so good.

If the pattern holds, we should also expect mourning to cause comfort. By what logic can mourning cause comfort? Aren't they antithetical to each other?

Think of the Sermon as our only text, newly arrived floating in a bottle to our desert island. No logic internal to the text explains how mourning causes comfort. Something else is happening. The logic of the connection is not causal but paradoxical, the kind of paradox stated in such words as: Even though you mourn, nevertheless you shall be comforted.

If this paradoxical relationship of concession/assertion appears often in scripture, that could signal an important method for teaching gospel principles. Shifting from analysis to synthesis by leaving the desert island, let us check whether other scriptures employ such paradoxical pairs, not connected by causality but consisting of a concession followed by its counter-assertion:

(cause) I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents,
(effect) therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father;

followed immediately by:

(concession) and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days,
(assertion) nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days....⁸

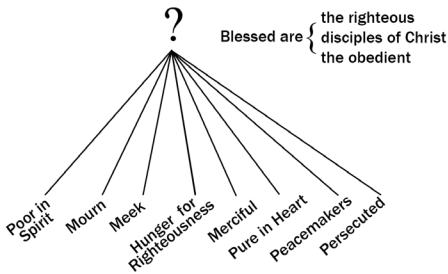
In 1 Nephi the word “nevertheless” appears 17 times, and “notwithstanding” three times. Nephi was no stranger to paradox, in his daily work or in theology. Further along, we will see that for a stranger to paradox the Lord's message is strange.

In the classroom, students list the eight beatitudes and label each by the relationship they see in it, whether cause/effect or concession/assertion. They enjoy explaining to each other their reasoning, though they do not attain unanimity of perception.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Also in the paragraph of the beatitudes, a topic sentence⁹ is conspicuously absent. The beatitudes are eight examples of some unstated thing. In reading theory, a coherent text has a main idea, if not stated then implied. When the main idea is not stated, two contingencies arise: a main idea must be inferred, and multiple main ideas may qualify—so long as each is supported by the text (analysis) and, in scripture study, with revealed knowledge (synthesis).

Eight Examples of Some Unstated Thing



Students quickly recognize that the topic is “blessed,” and the main question answered about “blessed” is, Who are blessed? Then such topic sentences emerge as: Blessed are the righteous, Blessed are disciples of Christ, Blessed are the obedient. Each multiplies potential meaning by alluding to its own set of cross-references. In the Sermon on the Mount, each of the 19 paragraphs after

paragraph one states its main idea. The absence of a topic sentence in the first paragraph marks the paragraph as introductory and invites each hearer to ask questions, to become an active listener.

The second paragraph begins with salt but is not about chemistry. It then mentions light but is not about physics. As a child I was taught that it means to set a good example, and it does. But that is not what it says. A

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

richer meaning awaited my application of analysis, in this case searching for a main idea while reading at the literal level—of asking not what the text means but what it says.

Asked for the topic, students often say “light.” But if the topic is light, the problem becomes what to do with salt, since light does not include salt. If the topic is neither salt nor light, then what remains? “Men...see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” I remember the thrill, in a reading class, of realizing that my good works may augment the glory of God, however indirectly. I have not forgotten the ancient Sunday school lesson on interpretation, but I am glad to have also asked, What does it say?

Of course the salt and light must be accounted for. If a paragraph is an idea explained, then they are explanations. In the first paragraph, Jesus explained by example, each beatitude exemplifying the main idea. In the

An Idea Explained



second paragraph, he explains by analogy, which is figurative likeness, different from direct comparison, which is literal likeness.

<u>COMPARISON (LITERAL LIKENESS)</u>	<u>ANALOGY (FIGURATIVE LIKENESS)</u>
The gray cat is like the black cat.	O, my love's like a red, red rose. ¹⁰

Just as we needed to infer a main idea for the beatitude paragraph, an analogy also requires application of imagination to have meaning, and also just as in the beatitude paragraph, multiple meanings may be correct when they are arrived at imaginatively. How kind is Jesus in his analogies of all kinds: how pregnant with meaning his words, how respectful of us in our individuality and imaginative capacities.

Analogy is like oxygen—so essential to human functioning as to be ever overlooked. Analogy is the essence of literature and art, where what is meant must exceed what is said and making meaning requires imagining. Analogy is the basis of theoretical thinking and science, without which learning consists only of note taking and discovery cannot occur. Analogy is the fount of abstract thinking and language, without which “piety,” “beauty,” and “truth” are only random collections of ciphers and an alphabet could not be. Theology is infused by analogy, with heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity being types for each other, the visible making imaginable the non-visible.

THE FIRST WITNESS

Having read two paragraphs, I begin to see how the Sermon on the Mount is a fast-traveling text. Reading the whole Sermon, I realize that each paragraph demands new analytical methods, paradoxical in a text where structural patterns repeat over and over, as we soon shall see.

Also, reading the whole Sermon, I realize that the topic sentence of paragraph three is the thesis statement of all. A rhetorical reading pays attention to message, purpose, and audience. Paragraph three states the message and the purpose. Matthew identifies the immediate audience as the multitude on the mount, while back in paragraph one the students inferred a broader audience: all who hear Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The three opening paragraphs are introductory, illustrating the principle of the fulfillment. What this principle is must wait till we know the thesis statement, for it is not explicitly asked or answered in the Sermon.

Jesus comes to fulfill the law [Torah] and the prophets [Navi'im].

Think not that I am come to destroy the law [Torah], or the prophets [Navi'im]: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

If his coming to fulfill is the main idea, then the rest of the Sermon is explanation. Analytically speaking, a whole text, no less than a single paragraph, is an idea explained. If the purpose is to proclaim fulfillment, then hearers are obliged to do and teach his commandments. In stating that he fulfills the Torah, he bears witness of his Messianic identity.

The reason for calling attention to the Hebrew word is that our word “law” is looser in meaning than “Torah.” “Law” means any old rule in science or civics or somewhere. “Torah” means the five books of Moses, the religious and civil code of the Jews. When Jesus says he comes to fulfill the Torah, it can mean only two things on Galilee’s shore: some conclude that he is Messiah, the only one who could fulfill the Torah; to others, under the law he is a blasphemer presuming to fulfill the Torah, worthy of death by stoning.¹¹ Some others were watching a bird fly over just then and didn’t hear what he said. When the word is “Torah,” there is no other way to understand. When the word is “law,” the statement has no precise referent.

With fulfillment of the Torah promised, the grand question immediately arises: What is the principle of fulfillment? that is to say, What is the premise of Jesus’ message? We have been drilled in superficially right answers: the New Testament, the restoration of the Melchizedek order, and mysteriously and most popularly, “the higher law”—all of which are true and none of which explains the principle. The principle is not stated in the Sermon. Because it is stated elsewhere, amply in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, it can be learned by synthesis. Because every paragraph in the Sermon exemplifies it, it can be confirmed within the Sermon by inference.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

In fulfillment of the Torah, we might now expect specifications from it followed by their fulfillments: thus to paragraph four. Jesus begins by

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

citing Moses: “Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment,” followed by, “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry. . . shall be in danger of the judgment.”

In contrast with the simplicity of the language, interactions between the statements are complex. The commandment and its fulfillment are connected by “but,”¹² an indicator of difference, but the only logical difference between the two statements comes by synthesis: the knowledge that anger

differs from killing in being less harrowing to repent of. A logical reason for juxtaposing the two statements is, rather, to show their likeness: that not only killing but also anger places one in danger of judgment. Another logical connection between anger and killing is that of cause and effect. Causality seems significant because it is the readiest reason to bring the two propositions together in the first place. Contrast, comparison, and causation: between two statements, so many rhetorical relationships at work are unusual.

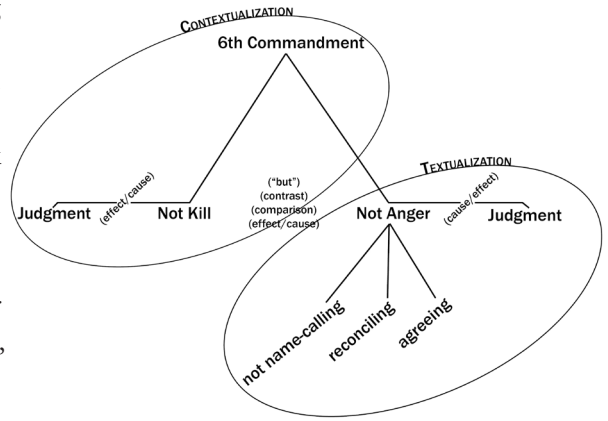
The paragraph structure is a model for writers. A paragraph being an idea explained, the idea that anger is damnable is explained by its result, judgment, and by three examples of how to resolve anger: reconciling, agreeing, and not name-calling. The idea is not only textualized by these explanations but also contextualized next to the Torah, a pattern of textualizing and contextualizing repeated from paragraph four through paragraph thirteen. In analytical reading, meaning emerges from both text and context.

In paragraph five, “not commit adultery” is fulfilled by “not lust,” just as “not lust” is contextualized by “not commit adultery.” Contrast again appears in the relative strenuousness of repenting of adultery as opposed to repenting of lust. As in paragraph four, rhetorical relationships signified in the phrase “but I say unto you” are contrast, comparison, and causality. Students point out that, as with killing and anger, the one is an act while the other is a thought. Indeed, scripture categorizes acts, thoughts, and words as separate criteria of judgment: King Benjamin warns, “If ye do not watch...your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds..., ye must perish.”¹³

Paragraph five is a lesson on inference, or the unstated message. The reading process begins to appear as a complex of cognitive actions: ideas and explanations, text and context, rhetorical relationships, and now inference—unstated messages in addition to what is stated.

In paragraph five, structural and rhetorical relationships are repeated from the fourth paragraph, but it is not stated,

Paragraph 4: A Model Paragraph



Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time. Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

“Whosoever [commits adultery or lust] shall be in danger of the judgment.” May we infer the judgment? The criterion for validity in inference is to draw a reasonable conclusion from what is given. I have emphasized the necessity of asking what is said before asking what is meant. Said twice in paragraph five is, “Thy whole body should be cast into hell.” From

the text of paragraph five and its contextual setting following paragraph four, it would be unreasonable not to infer judgment. Obvious as this inference is, it instructs readers what inference is and how it works.

Additionally, the omission of “judgment” from paragraph five, after having stated it in only one previous paragraph, alerts a reader

to the text’s rapid development in spite of its highly repetitious structures. At one level, Jesus’ instruction in the Sermon is about what to be on the lookout for, what questions to be asking. The difference between an active reader and a passive reader is that the active reader asks questions, learns the text, and remembers. The Sermon is a short text made shorter by what is not said but left to the listener.

Again we are put in mind of the unstated premise of the message: What may be the principle by which the Torah is fulfilled?

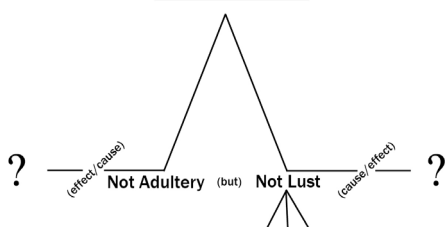
Anyone seeking legal pretext to accuse Jesus (additional, that is, to paragraph three) does not find it in the fourth and fifth paragraphs. Connections between anger and killing, adultery and lust, are too predictable. But something else occurs in the sixth.

By now we know to look for the topic sentence after the phrase, “but I say unto you,” in paragraph six, “Swear not at all.” A puzzle arises, since the contrasting utterance from the Torah has two parts, “Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.” Which of

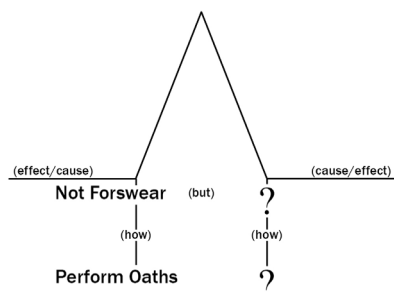
the parts is fulfilled by “Swear not at all”? Students struggle with this question, even when prompted by explanation and example.

To explain, fulfillment of the Torah so far has been by examples from the Ten Commandments. So the preliminary question is, Which of the Ten Commandments is being fulfilled in paragraph six, if any? This question needs understanding of the word “forswear,” not common in our time but common enough in AD 1611, the year of the

7th Commandment



Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.



King James translation. It means to renounce something or commit perjury. Paragraph six fulfills the ninth commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.”

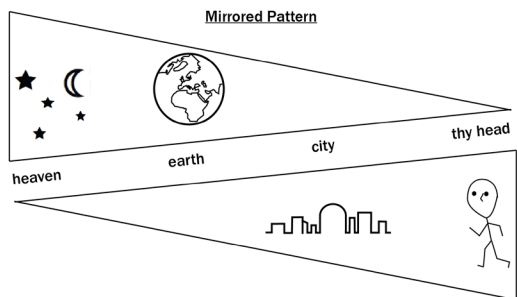
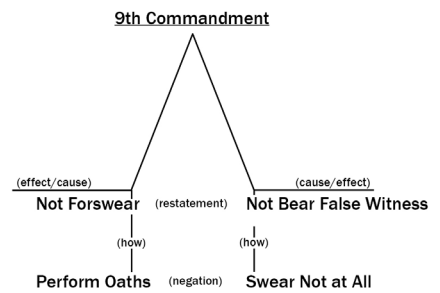
And to exemplify, Moses commanded to avoid forswearing and also to perform an oath—the commandment and also the manner by which to keep it. Nephi avers, “We did observe to keep...the law of Moses.”¹⁴ Accordingly, when outside Jerusalem’s walls Zoram realizes he follows someone other than Laban, and Nephi tackles and grips him, Nephi says, to confirm his invitation to join Lehi’s band, “as the Lord liveth, and as I live,”¹⁵ an oath Nephi often utters. When Zoram accepts the offer with an oath of his own, the young men’s “fears...cease concerning him.”¹⁶

Given the explanation of Jacobean vocabulary and the example of Nephi and Zoram, students still do not readily detect which part is being fulfilled by “Swear not at all,” whether “Thou shalt not forswear thyself” or “Perform unto the Lord thine oaths.” They are as like to guess the one as the other, even when they know that an oath is sworn but swearing is not the same thing as forswearing oneself.

The discovery of what Jesus is fulfilling answers only the first half of the puzzle, for it leaves a blank space in the paragraph pattern. In paragraphs one and five, we learned to infer, to make a reasonable conclusion from what is given. Since Jesus gives no comment on “Thou shalt not forswear thyself,” would it be reasonable to infer into the blank, “Thou shalt not bear false witness”?

From early on there were unbelievers. Some sought to take away his life, and he knew “who should betray him.”¹⁷ In paragraph six, the main statement flatly contradicts Moses. In analytical reading, this rhetorical relationship is called statement/negation, where the second statement overturns the first. “Swear not at all” might be thought a plausible pretext for hauling Jesus before a judge.¹⁸ How ironic that his first negation of Moses is not of a commandment but of the method for keeping it, as if to measure the Pharisees’ phariseeism.

A paragraph being an idea explained, Jesus’ explanation in paragraph six is notable for its mirrored pattern. To outside observers the four examples of things not to swear by progress from great to small, but to the believer they travel from afar to encompass all.



With paragraph six, Jesus has finished fulfilling the Ten Commandments, thus teaching the technique of exemplification. Unlike classification, which exhausts its category, exemplification shows just one or a few samples, and the reader is left responsible to learn by induction the essential traits of the category. For the moment, the question is whether traits learned from three commandments are intended for application to all the Ten Commandments—or to all commandments in the Torah. The seventh paragraph responds by repeating, outside the Ten Commandments, the familiar paragraph structure.

COMMANDMENTS NOT A FEW

Evidence to infer the principle of fulfillment amasses with each paragraph, and paradox has been awhile on the back burner. If skeptics had a heyday in paragraph six, they are swept clean away in the next two paragraphs. Then again, in the seventh and eighth paragraphs the rightness of fulfillment is self-evident. Today many confess that Jesus is the supreme teacher, on the one hand, and on the other hand disbelieve resurrection and redemption. Among these many, no texts are more wondered at than paragraphs seven and eight. As discovered in Bible study groups, “Christian theology” is nowhere more clearly defined.

In paragraph seven the topic sentence is, “Resist not evil.” This paragraph is a lesson in contextualization. “Resist not evil” does not sound like something Jesus would say. When the bishop drops by the house and spots certain magazines on the coffee table or certain images on the TV screen, none need excuse himself by throwing hands in the air and exclaiming, “Jesus said, ‘Resist not evil.’” Sorry—that is out of context.

Paragraph seven lists six examples, by them limiting the scope of the main statement. What are the six examples of? of receiving evil treatment from somebody. Two from the Torah, “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth,”¹⁹ are set against four of fulfillment: turning the other cheek, giving the cloak when sued for the coat, going the extra mile, and turning not away from the importuner. In each example, somebody brings trouble to someone else; the scope of the paragraph is not so broad as “cosmic evil.”

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

The principle taught in the Torah is retaliation, or justice. Fulfilled in the Sermon on the Mount, it transforms to mercy—repaying evil treatment with good. Analysis asks what rhetorical relationship is at work between the Torah and its fulfillment. The Torah anticipates causal thinking: because he gouged your eye out, therefore gouge his. The fulfillment thinks

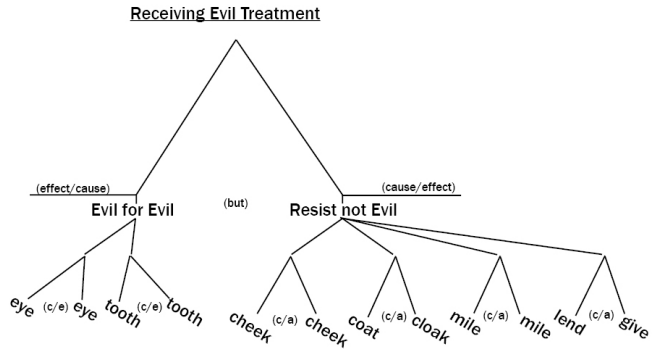
oppositely, by concession/assertion: even though he strikes your cheek, nevertheless turn to him the other also.

Lo, that which is often thought quintessentially Christian is utterly anti-rational. Doers of Jesus' sayings must sometimes set rationality aside. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that is nevertheless true. Reasoning in the concession/assertion pattern is paradoxical. From time to time, the principle of fulfillment must accommodate paradox. Conclusion: the first principle of the gospel is going to be faith.

The example of the extra mile these days is almost always quoted out of context. The context, remember, is when evil is done to someone. The Primary president asking me to teach a lesson does me no evil, so taking cookies to the children is not exactly going the extra mile. I mention this not to decry the baking of cookies, or even the current use of the extra-mile expression, but to identify the example that strikes me hardest.

For one mile, I am the Roman's grudging pack animal, if not in my heart then at least in his mind. When he finally says, "That's a mile; you can put the things down and go back," and I walk on, saying, "It's alright; I will go with you another," something happens deep in me and deep in him. Maybe I am too optimistic about the Roman—those legionaries were hard cases. But only the hardest could continue thinking of me other than as a human with a will of my own. His conclusion is for him to decide, but I have invited him to think well. I like to think I would go with him twain, though the attitude for it is not my nature.

Paragraph eight follows the same paradoxical logic: "Love your enemies." The promised result is, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." Maybe an intermediate purpose of loving enemies is peace in this world, but its final purpose is not worldly at all. Only by revelation can one know how literally to read the sublime promise to become a heavenly child of the Father. Only the principle of fulfillment can explain how is it done.²⁰



Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Matthew’s fifth chapter ends with: “Be ye therefore²¹ perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” As a boy I was regularly terrified by the oft repeated preachment:

Brothers and sisters, my text tonight is Matthew 5 and 48, where Jesus says, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” It is impossible for any of us to attain perfection in this life, but Jesus commands it. Repent, repent all ye ends of the earth. Now is the day of probation and the time to repent: etc., etc., etc.

Nowadays we don’t hear much good old hellfire and brimstone. Our students have been exhorted more sweetly:

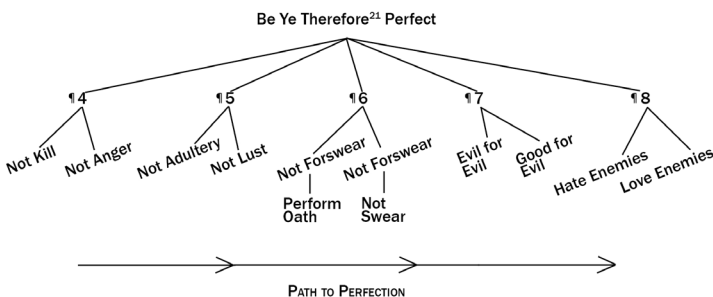
Brothers and sisters, my text this morning is Matthew 5 and 48, where Jesus says, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” It is impossible for any of us to attain perfection in this life, but Jesus commands it. We can become perfect in one thing at a time, such as praying every day: etc., etc., etc.

Both talks are right, but neither speaker seems to have asked, What does the text say? Two implements of reading offer themselves: the mysterious marks on the page and their context.

The word “perfect” is translated from St. Matthew’s Greek *teleioi*, a word that refers to the end of things and means “complete.” In Galilee, Jesus did not claim perfection, but to the Nephites he said, “Those things...in me are all fulfilled.... Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I...[am] perfect.”²² This announces that he has fulfilled the law and risen from the grave: it is finished and he is complete. The Latin etymology of “perfect” is straightforward. The prefix *per-* means “through,” and *fect* (past participle of *facere*: to do) means “done.”

Years ago, we young elders tracted long hours in the rains of northern France. On the rare occasion of an evening meeting for a first discussion with the family, when we politely recited (in impeccable *français*), “Jesus said, ‘Be you then perfect, same that your Father heavenly be perfect,’” the consternation was real, sometimes accompanied by speechlessness, sometimes by the exclamation, “He said *that*?” Hospitably as they heard us, we were almost never invited back.

I wish I had seen then the context of Matthew 5:48. It summarizes fulfillment of the Torah as taught in paragraphs four through eight. It can be used to scare boys or cool off



investigators, but maybe Jesus uses it to suggest the end of things and also to suggest that the preceding five paragraphs show a way to set out toward the end of things. Perhaps he implies that anger and lust need to be overcome before expecting exalted abilities like returning good for evil and loving enemies. Now, how gentle his command: “Come, cast your burdens on the Lord.... And bear a song away.”²³

THE PROMISED END

The time is far spent, and we have read one chapter of three in the Sermon. Reading in the Sermon on the Mount instructs me on two points of theology: paradox in gospel teaching and what the principle of fulfillment is. The principle of fulfillment is exemplified by each beatitude and in every paragraph. It is especially near the surface in the profound paradoxes of the seventh and eighth paragraphs.

Not stated in the Sermon, the principle of fulfillment is a mystery of God.²⁴ It is given clear utterance by the elder Alma, baptizing Helam: “May the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ.”²⁵ Jesus fulfilled this principle by making efficacious what had been theretofore only conceptual. In the Church’s internet scripture search, 30 references connect “spirit” and “life.” Joy comes to those who search out the principle with pure intent. It is everywhere in the scriptures, sometimes cryptic, sometimes open (as you well know):

- To remember that he cometh to redeem the world,²⁶
- To confess that all things unto him are spiritual,²⁷
- To remember that to be spiritually-minded is life eternal,²⁸
- To know that all men shall repent, for all are under sin,²⁹
- To see that we have faith, hope, and charity,³⁰
- To pray that he will consecrate our performance unto us,³¹
- To take upon us the name of the Son,³²
- To retain the name written always in our hearts,³³
- To receive his image in our countenances,³⁴
- To be sealed in our foreheads.³⁵

All things as they were in the beginning; all mysteries stumbled over by children of Israel. Under the principle of fulfillment, each beatitude evokes the entire Sermon. Under the same principle, the Sermon evokes all the Torah and all the Navi’im.

One application of reading the Sermon on the Mount might be to reassure young people that detractors only spin their wheels, challenging faith by shaking fingers at paradox in the gospel message. Gospel logic, in the Lord’s own words, alternates between cause/effect and concession/assertion. We call the concession/assertion relationship paradoxical; the

unbelieving and rebellious³⁶ call it irrational and set it at naught. The inclination to delimit God's thought is insolence, not the scholar reading the text but the scholar being read by the text. The faith of our students is not only sacred but also powerful: that which is weak in the world breaks down the mighty and strong of the world³⁷—paradoxically.

Here is a quiz on faith: a list of paradoxes requiring the logic that Elder Oaks calls “extra-rational.”³⁸ The quiz consists of pairs of true propositions that cannot both be true. To the wrinkled rationalist, each presents an either/or dilemma; Latter-day Saints embrace each proposition in each pair. If they are cunningly devised fables,³⁹ then we are of all men most miserable.⁴⁰

1. Ye believe in God; believe also in me.⁴¹
2. The last shall be first, and the first shall be last.⁴²
3. God is just; God is merciful.⁴³
4. He who loses his life shall find it.⁴⁴
5. It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things.⁴⁵
6. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.⁴⁶
7. In me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation.⁴⁷
8. Fear not, little flock...let earth and hell combine against you.⁴⁸
9. Not as I will, but as thou wilt.⁴⁹
10. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth,⁵⁰ having given unto man his agency.⁵¹

The paradox in item 10 splits the theological world in half because inclining toward the one or the other is a rational imperative, and natural man is nothing if not rational. A moment's reflection will drop each creed down on the one side or on the other. Latter-day Saint theology bestrides both, which is not possible by rational standards. Abraham (in sacrificing Isaac) and Nephi (in building a ship) are two witnesses, sensing the situation in the world and at the same time invoking an unseen world. This embracing of paradox is a key to intellectual safety: not answer for answer, but walking a second mile—in faith, not knowing beforehand,⁵² one step enough.⁵³

In language, the phrase “Anointed One” is at once the penultimate expression of paradox and also of the principle of fulfillment. The ultimate expression, where all combines in one, is “Messiah,” or “Christ.” To contemplate this fact is to cry out, with Enos, “Lord, how is it done?” One thing has meaning: Christ is the Lord; two things are true: he is there and we are here. This is my theology. I pray for faith.

Anyone anywhere can know that Jesus of Nazareth is the Anointed One. As faith is not a function of scholarly reading, pilgrimage to Palestine is not needed by the deep-rooted tree, roots reaching into me. That I perched on a shred of wall near Bethlehem watching a shepherd boy whose dozen draggletailed innocents fed where there appeared only

stone, though, and that I crisscrossed the stony slope above Capernaum until sure to have crossed tracks with the King of Kings, even his path to the Mount: that I dusted my feet with that dust does not strengthen my faith in Jesus but does add facts to faith already bestowed.

Analogous with walking in the Holy Land—superfluous to faith while expansive of fact—is my teacherly reading of the Sermon on the Mount, unessential to assurance but suffused with faith. I can no longer think about the Sermon without the analytic plunges and synthetic back flips hinted in this review. Unlike the sorrowing student who dropped my class the first day, saying, “The scriptures are not for analysis,” I revel in the kaleidoscopic character of the Sermon opened by study. As to its great composer, not words will say what it would be to meet him and weep upon his feet. ☹

NOTES

- 1 Nephi 25:26, 31:20.
- 2 Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.
- 3 St. Matthew, chapters 5-7.
- 4 Sermon on the Mount, paragraph 3.
- 5 Sermon on the Mount, paragraph 20.
- 6 Latin *beati*, “blessed,” from the Vulgate, a Latin translation of the Bible consulted by King James translators.
- 7 Greek *hōti*: that, because; Latin *quoniam*: now that, since, seeing that; German *denn*: for; Russian *ibo*: because, since, as; French *car*: for, because.
- 8 1 Nephi 1:1.
- 9 A topic sentence is the main idea statement of a paragraph. The main idea statement of a whole composition is called a thesis statement. Either should be one short, complete sentence.
- 10 Robert Burns, Scottish poet.
- 11 Leviticus 24:16; I Kings 21:10; Matthew 26:63-66; John 8:58-59, 10:30-31.
- 12 Greek *de*: but, thus, further; Latin *autem*: but, moreover, on the other hand, further.
- 13 King Benjamin in Mosiah 4:30.
- 14 2 Nephi 5:10.
- 15 1 Nephi 4:32.
- 16 1 Nephi 4:37.
- 17 John 5:16, 6:64.
- 18 As among the Ammonihahites, where “the more part of them were desirous that they might destroy Alma and Amulek, [saying that they] had reviled against their law,” Alma 14:2.
- 19 Leviticus 24:20.
- 20 Enos 7.
- 21 “Therefore”: Greek *oun*: indeed, really, therefore, accordingly; Latin *ergo*: consequently, therefore, accordingly; German *darum*: therefore; Russian *itak*: thus, so, then, now; French

donec: therefore, so, thus, then.

- 22 3 Nephi 12:46-48.
- 23 Hymn 125, "How Gentle God's Commands."
- 24 King Benjamin in Mosiah 2:9.
- 25 The elder Alma in Mosiah 18:13.
- 26 Helaman 5:9.
- 27 Doctrine and Covenants 29:34.
- 28 2 Nephi 9:39.
- 29 Doctrine and Covenants 49:8.
- 30 Alma 7:24.
- 31 2 Nephi 32:9.
- 32 Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
- 33 King Benjamin in Mosiah 5:12.
- 34 Alma 5:14.
- 35 Doctrine and Covenants 77:9.
- 36 Doctrine and Covenants 1:8.
- 37 Doctrine and Covenants 1:19.
- 38 Dallin H. Oaks, "Reason and Revelation," in *Thinking about Thinking*, 3rd ed., ed. M. Kip Hartvigsen (Ft. Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 2000), 123-40.
- 39 2 Peter 1:16.
- 40 1 Corinthians 15:19.
- 41 John 14:1.
- 42 Matthew 19:30, 20:16, 27.
- 43 Alma 42:15.
- 44 Matthew 10:39, 16:25.
- 45 Lehi in 2 Nephi 2:11.
- 46 Psalms 30:5.
- 47 John 16:33.
- 48 Doctrine and Covenants 6:34.
- 49 Matthew 26:39.
- 50 Revelation 19:6.
- 51 Moses 7:32.
- 52 1 Nephi 4:6.
- 53 Hymn 97, "Lead, Kindly Light."