

Perspectives on Social Ethics

Part III: Christ's Teachings on Social Ethics

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The image of Jesus Christ as an ethical Reformer has evoked a variety of responses. Some think this was His primary mission on earth; others suggest that He did not concern Himself at all with social questions. And of course, a whole spectrum of views exists between these two extremes. That He was a great Teacher of social ethics is supported by a distinguished Jewish scholar, J. Klausner, who states, "The main strength of Jesus lay in his ethical teaching. If we omitted the miracles and a few mystical sayings which tend to deify the Son of Man, and preserved only the moral precepts and parables, the Gospels would count as one of the most wonderful collections of ethical teachings in the world."¹

Other scholars give little place to His ethical teaching. The index to Emil Brunner's classic *The Divine Imperative* lists forty-six references to Luther, thirty-five to Calvin, twenty to Paul, and none to Jesus (though by diligent search one is able to find an occasional allusion by Brunner to Jesus' views on ethics). In the popularly held image of dispensationalism, the teachings of Jesus are thought to have no relevance to the church; furthermore, since His emphasis was on personal redemption He is not to be considered a social Reformer at all. T. A. Hegre, for example, in a book entitled *The Cross and Sanctification*,² heads one of the chapters "Have You Lost

1 J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 381, cited by T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), p. 285.

2 T. A. Hegre, *The Cross and Sanctification* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Press, 1960).

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Your Bible?" He devotes two pages to the disastrous effects of liberalism on the Bible, but five pages to what he calls the "damaging" results of dispensationalism. C. Norman Kraus, an evangelical, misrepresents dispensationalism by insisting that in it "Jesus' life and teachings are lost to the Church."³ A typical contemporary statement concerning the importance of the teachings of Jesus as they relate to ethics is expressed by the late Georgia Harkness, of the Pacific School of Religion:

. . . we cannot find our *primary* authority for the demands of Christian decision in the general field of moral philosophy, or in the moral standards of Christendom, past or present, or in the ethical pronouncements of the churches, corporately or through the words of any one of its leaders, though from all of these sources important insights may be gleaned which we cannot afford to overlook or to discard. It was also said that Christian ethics is rooted in the Bible, but not equally in all parts of it, the New Testament being our more definitive point of reference. It was said, furthermore, that within the New Testament no final authority is to be located in particular words or passages but rather in the total picture it gives of the person and work of our Lord, the life, teachings, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God.⁴

However, this ordained Methodist minister believed that the Gospels are the product of the first-century church and that one cannot indiscriminately "take every word recorded as spoken by Jesus to be accurate or authoritative."⁵ Nevertheless, she defined Christian ethics as "the systematic study of the way of life set forth by Jesus Christ, applied to the daily demands and decisions of our personal and social existence."⁶

In the final analysis, all the various appraisals of the ethics of Jesus are mainly of academic interest, since the obvious task at hand is to discover, correlate, interpret, and apply what He said on these subjects. The discovery and correlation is not a difficult task. Anyone can do it with the aid of a concordance. But the interpretation and application are more difficult. Interpretation can be greatly assisted by the many good commentaries available, but application involves one's views on hermeneutics, progress of revelation, and systematic theology.

3 C. Norman Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), p. 133.

4 Georgia Harkness, *Christian Ethics* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 50.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

Passages dealing with the teachings of Christ present probably the most difficult problem of proper and consistent interpretation of any portion of Scripture. The reason is simple: Christ lived and taught in relation to three different stewardship arrangements. He actually lived under the dispensation of the Mosaic law which was still very much in force all during His earthly life. Thus many of His teachings pertained to that economy. Since the New Testament says unequivocally that the law has been done away for the Christian (2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:12; Rom. 10:4), how shall one interpret the sayings of Christ which had to do with that economy?

Christ also delivered teachings about the coming church which would be inaugurated "when the Spirit is come." These are not usually difficult to isolate since they are clearly distinguished from the actual time in which He was ministering. Most of these sayings are found in the Upper Room Discourse in John's Gospel.

In addition, Christ taught many things about the kingdom. These passages represent undoubtedly the greatest challenge to proper and consistent interpretation. Confusion at this point is not hard to document. For example, a great Scottish preacher and New Testament scholar wrote the following: "Jesus came preaching a kingdom, and the very use of that idea raised profound social issues. . . . Either Jesus must be king everywhere, or he has no place at all."⁷ And again, "If the Kingdom was the rule of God in the world, it followed, *first*, that the kingdom of God was social, not individualistic. . . ."⁸ In order to find one's way through the maze of the Gospels, it is necessary to realize that the Lord came proclaiming the imminency of the Messianic (Davidic) kingdom promised in the Old Testament. He announced the need for repentance and explained in the Sermon on the Mount what that would involve for individuals. But the immediate establishment of the kingdom was dependent on the heart acceptance of His claims by His Jewish kinsmen, a thing they were unwilling to do. So the kingdom was not established at that time; instead, revelation of the coming church was given. However, the kingdom promises were not abrogated but merely postponed until His second coming. Clearly, some of the things Jesus taught *do* relate primarily to the kingdom which is yet to be established. Yet those precepts may (and should) readily be applied to God's people today, which explains why the dispensationalist does not tear out these pages from his Bible!

7 James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), pp. 124-25.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

JESUS ON POVERTY AND WEALTH

More than a dozen references to money can be found in Jesus' teachings.

Now this frequency of allusion might seem surprising until we remember how inextricably the whole question of money gets mixed up with the lives and experience of ordinary men and women in this world, even against their will. It gets mixed up even with fine, spiritual things—like the love of parents for their children, or the compassion of a good Samaritan for the distress of his neighbor, or the thank offering a man makes to God. Now Jesus was no fanciful dreamer, dwelling in the clouds; Jesus was a realist and saw the facts as they were. Here, then, was a whole aspect of life which could not be ignored. Here was a clamant need for all the guidance he could give.⁹

What directions did He give concerning the monetary aspect of societal life?

CONCERNING POVERTY

At Bethany Jesus uttered the well-known statement, "For you have the poor with you always" (Mark 14:7). By this He affirmed the *inevitability of poverty* as a social phenomenon. The occasion was His anointing by Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3), with costly ointment of pure nard. These twelve ounces of highly aromatic perfume were worth the equivalent of a year's wages for the average agricultural worker. When the disciples protested that the money might better have been given to the poor, the Lord made His well-known remark. The statement should never be understood callously, as if Christ were saying one need never concern himself with the alleviation of poverty. In effect, Christ was saying that opportunities always exist to do something for the poor, but not always to do what had just been done to Him since He was about to be put to death. To put it another way, Jesus was saying that on that occasion "an extravagant gift of perfumed ointment was more appropriate than a donation to the poor."¹⁰

Jesus' statement furnishes a second principle: *The mere presence of poverty does not necessarily constitute a call to action to alleviate that poverty.* If poverty alone constituted a call to action, then no Christian could justify having anything but the barest necessities of life since the poor are constantly everywhere. In view

⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰ Larry Christenson, *A Charismatic Approach to Social Action* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Press, 1974), p. 33.

of the fact that ten thousand people die of starvation or malignant malnutrition every day, how could anyone justify steak when he could eat hamburger, or even hamburger when he could eat cereal, and so on? If a person "were to follow the slogan, 'The need constitutes the call,' he would soon be a nervous and starved wreck! It is not the goodness or necessity of a work which determines whether we can enter into it, but whether it is *the specific will of God for us to do it at this time.*"¹¹ Or to be explicit, it may be in the will of God to own and properly use expensive perfume rather than give the equivalent amount of money to the poor. Then again, the converse may be equally true in a given situation.

A third principle suggested by Jesus' words in Mark 14:7 is this: *The Lord commended sacrificial giving and condemned selfish and showy giving.* The object of commendation was a poverty-stricken widow who gave all she had (Mark 12:41-44). The Lord had just finished teaching in the Court of the Gentiles. Passing through one of the nine gates in the dividing wall around the Temple proper, he walked into the Court of the Women where the treasury was. Throngs of people were casting their offerings into the thirteen trumpetlike receptacles placed there for receiving religious and charitable contributions. A destitute widow cast in two small coins, the least valuable of any denomination then in use but representing her entire means of sustenance. Her gift not only demonstrated the highest kind of sacrifice, but also showed her complete trust in God to sustain her and provide her with a means of earning more. Two observations may be noted here: (a) *all should give, even the poor;* and (b) *people should give proportionately and generously. The test of true giving is not simply what is given but what is retained.*

A fourth principle is this: *While the poor are blessed, it is desirable to work for self-advancement.* Luke's account of the Beatitudes begins, "Blessed are the poor" (Luke 6:20). This is different from Matthew's account where the words "in spirit" are added. Undoubtedly, actual poverty is meant here. However, the Lord is not saying the state of poverty is more desirable, as if men should renounce all their possessions, for elsewhere He clearly commends those who work for self-betterment. It is possible that the beatitude should be applied only to the disciples, indicating that they were blessed in their poverty as it made them more dependent on God. The parable of the pounds commends trading and legitimate

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

gain (Luke 19:11-28). Apparently each man could have gained additional pounds, thus showing that ~~God commends industry and profit.~~

CONCERNING WEALTH

From Jesus' teaching on wealth, four principles can be derived. ~~First,~~ He did *not* say that possessions were necessarily or intrinsically wrong. His circle of friends included well-to-do people like Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57), Nicodemus (John 3:1), the centurion of Capernaum (Luke 7:2), the family at Bethany (Luke 10:38), and the women who "ministered unto him of their substance" (Luke 8:3). When the Lord demanded the rich young ruler to sell everything he owned, He was testing the ruler's claim to have kept the commandments, especially the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The young man's unwillingness to obey belied his claim of obedience from childhood, and showed him to be a sinner in need of salvation (Matt. 19:16-22).

~~Second,~~ Jesus *did* say that riches make it more difficult for a man to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24). The needle referred to in this verse is a sewing needle, which accentuates the solemnity of the warning. Christ did not say that a rich man could not be saved, but only that it is more difficult since such a person seldom senses his personal need as readily as a poorer man does.

~~Third,~~ the Lord warned that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Luke 12:15). Life derives its value from the way one makes use of his possessions; its continuance depends solely on the will of God.

~~Actually, these principles concerning wealth say not one word about social responsibility.~~ They are all couched in a personal context, not a societal one. Thus there is no scriptural support for a statement like this: "For the Christian the 'war on poverty' is not a political option. It is a lifelong battle based on the mandate of Christ, who loved the poor,"¹² Luke 16:20 being cited as scriptural support for the statement.

~~Fourth,~~ in the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13), Jesus instructed believers on how to use money in the service of others. The ingenuity of the dishonest steward in using his present opportunities to prepare for the future is commended by Christ to His followers. They too should be ingenious in using the "mammon

12 Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 136.

of unrighteousness" (v. 9) to assure rewards in heaven. The admonition is clear: Use money wisely in this life, so that when it fails (not "when ye fail"), that is, when you can no longer use money because death occurs, they (those you have helped during life) ~~may receive (i.e., welcome) you into heaven. Who are these who are the objects of charity in this parable? Unquestionably they are also believers,~~ for both donor and donees are seen in the "everlasting habitations." "What the steward did in his sphere in relation to people of his own quality, see that you do in yours toward those who belong like you to the world to come."¹³ Faith alone opens heaven, but good works gain an abundant entrance. ~~Thus the Lord taught that money should be rightly used by His followers to help other followers.~~ No word is found here concerning the believer's responsibility outside the circle of disciples. ~~The elimination of poverty or the equalizing of wealth was not Jesus' goal.~~

JESUS ON DUTIES TO ALL MEN

Are there no universals in Jesus' teachings? Does He not commend social service to all men? ~~Has the believer no obligation to unbelievers other than preaching the gospel to them?~~

BEING SALT AND LIGHT

Christ's two metaphors, salt and light, are often used as evidence of the need for penetration by the church into the world. Wirt explains the metaphors as believers "imparting flavor and wisdom and lasting value to all of life."¹⁴ Usually salt is explained as the preservative power of the followers of Christ in this world, and light is explained as the attraction of the life and witness of believers.

~~What is Christ's intention in likening believers to salt?~~ The idea of preservative power of Christians in the world is certainly inherent in Jesus' words. Plummer makes this comment:

Perhaps the connecting thought is, that Christians, like the Prophets who saved Israel from corruption, must be ready to suffer persecution. . . . But they must beware lest, instead of preserving others they themselves become tainted with rottenness. The salt *must* be in close contact with that which it preserves; and too often, while Christians raise the morality of the world, they allow their own morality to be lowered by the world.¹⁵

13 F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), 2:165.

14 Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical*, p. 25.

15 Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott, 1911), p. 72.

Salt preserves; salt gives flavor; salt cleanses; salt de-ices; salt creates thirst; and salt, when poured into a wound, stings. But how do followers of Christ, like salt, do these things? That question is answered by understanding the Old Testament significance of salt. Salt, in the Old Testament expression "covenant of salt" (Num. 18:19; 2 Chron. 13:5), was a symbol of that which gave life. Salt symbolized a permanent covenant, since the eating of salt with another person signified that the two were bound together in loyalty (Ezra 4:14). Elisha purified the spring at Jericho with salt in order that "neither death nor miscarriage [should] come from it" (2 Kings 2:19-22). Thus Christians are the salt of the earth as they give life and preservation to the world.

Light, the second metaphor, serves as a safeguard. Lest believers think they have light in themselves with which to enlighten the world, they should remember that they are only reflections of Him who is the ultimate light of the world (John 8:12). Light both attracts and repels. The believers' testimony concerning the One who is the light of the world attracts some and repels others (2 Cor. 2:16). But their light must be set on a hill, far above and uncontaminated by the moral decay of the world, illuminating far and wide for all to see. The light shines because of good works; it affects unbelieving men; it glorifies God.

These two metaphors illustrate the believer's responsibility to the whole world. Their character and works preserve, give life, affect men, and glorify the Father.

LOVING ONE'S NEIGHBOR

No discussion of ethics would be complete without including the parable of the Good Samaritan. Scribes were interpreters, teachers, and judges of the law. The one who evoked the story of the Good Samaritan came to Jesus to tempt Him. His question was simple, basic, and to the point: What must I do to inherit eternal life? Because the dispensation of grace had not yet been introduced, and men were still living under the law, the Lord asked him what the law demanded. The man's answer was again simple, basic, and to the point, for he quoted the two greatest commandments. The Lord responded that if the man would continue to do this he would live. But of course, neither this man nor any other man could love the Lord with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself. In

order to justify his inability to keep these basic commandments, the scribe seized on the one word in the commandments that was ambiguous, on which an argument could be raised. Playing to the grandstand, he asked for a definition of the word *neighbor*.

According to this story, who is one's neighbor? He is the person in need who crosses one's path. The man who was robbed was the Samaritan's neighbor, and the Samaritan by his actions loved him as himself. But the Samaritan was also in need of concern, and he in turn was the neighbor of the Jewish scribe. Of course, the scribe refused to accept the fact. Since the scribe would not recognize the Samaritan as his neighbor (Samaritans were considered scum), he could not claim to have fulfilled the law. Rather, he needed to acknowledge his sin and cast himself on the mercy of God.

A second emphasis in the story is the extolling of good works done to those in need who cross one's path. This may involve someone of different economic status, different race, different religion, or different political persuasion. Salt, light, and neighborliness are all part of the social ethic for Christians. The believer who shows these good works will be imitating his Lord "who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

THE QUESTION OF MATTHEW 25:31-46

Undoubtedly, the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31-46 is one of the most often-used passages in support of the idea that Christians are primarily responsible to feed and clothe the world. Liberals interpret the "brethren" (v. 40) to mean all men. Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote that Jesus "even said that at the judgment seat . . . human service to hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned would prove the one passport to the favor of the Eternal."¹⁶ Many evangelicals use the passage to promote general social concern on the part of believers. Wirt, for example, says that Christians should seek new ways for the earth to supply the necessities of man's existence, and that such "opportunities are limited only by the stretch of human imagination and the time of the return of him who said, 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.'"¹⁷ Moberg clearly states, "The 'brethren' referred to here include all members of the human race, not solely

16 Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Adventurous Religion and Other Essays* (New York: Association Press, 1926), p. 37.

17 Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical*, p. 136.

those who are brothers in the added sense of being born again. Jesus identified Himself with the whole of humanity by carrying the burden of sin of all mankind."¹⁸

The brethren in this passage cannot be all mankind. After all, it is the Gentiles who are being judged for treatment of the "brethren," obviously indicating some group other than those standing before the King. They must be the natural brethren of the King, the Jews (as in Rom. 9:3). In the tribulation days, to render service to a persecuted Jew will be the most conclusive evidence of one's own spiritual relationship to the Lord, for to do so will only be at the risk of one's own life. While the passage does not teach that all men are a Christian's social responsibility, it does teach that redeemed people of that future time will show to the world the grace of God by their good works to the "brethren."

The common theme underlying these four ideas — salt, light, neighborliness, and treatment of the brethren — is that good works, the fruit of the redeemed life, will attract men to the One who is the Light of the world and who alone can save. The emphasis is on one-to-one activity. The passages, for example, say nothing about how to implement the principles if a believer should find one thousand victims of robbers lying along the Jericho Road!

JESUS ON PRIORITIES

No man can help every other person in the world. Even Christ did not help everyone He contacted, nor did He command His followers to do so. It is perfectly obvious that He did not heal everyone who needed it. In the recorded miracles of Christ performed on specific individuals or groups, one reads of thirty-nine instances of healing. Of these, only two (Malchus and the Syro-phoenician's daughter) involved individuals outside the commonwealth of Israel. It goes without saying that thousands more whom the Lord contacted during His earthly life needed physical healing. For example, "a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered" lay at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:3), yet Christ threaded His way through the crowd to find a single individual to heal — a man, oddly enough, who exhibited no faith that he would be healed.

18 David O. Moberg, *Inasmuch: Christian Social Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 39.

Neither did the Lord feed all those who were hungry. On two occasions He fed more than ten thousand people, but only for a single meal. He did not continue to supply them with food. Furthermore, the healings and feedings were not done primarily to benefit those who were healed and fed, but to glorify God or to teach the disciples or to confirm His claims of deity. It is as if the actual physical benefit was secondary to the spiritual lessons intended, for indeed His priorities were spiritual.

Neither did Jesus attempt to reform the Roman government under which He lived. He acknowledged the rule of Rome (Matt. 22:21). When faced with the question of the poll tax which was annually paid to Caesar, the Lord did not address Himself to the basic question of whether or not Rome had the right to occupy Palestine (and if not, whether the Jews should try to gain independence from Rome). He simply said that if one accepts the benefits of government (in this case by using the money they coined), then one is obligated to pay taxes. The particular denarius with which the poll tax was paid bore the emperor's image and acclaimed him to be God. The inscription on the coin read "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the Divine Augustus." Nor did Jesus address Himself to the question of idolatry which the people felt was involved in using these coins. He simply said, "Pay." But He also said something else which indicates His priorities. He reminded His hearers that they had an obligation to God. The Lord was making a connection between the image of Caesar on the coin and the image of God which is stamped on every man. The point is clear: the Jews were subjects of Caesar. His image was stamped on the coin. What then did they owe Caesar? The tax. Members of the human race bear the stamp of the image of God. What then do they owe God? Themselves. The most important thing is not one's relation to the government under which he lives, but his relation and obligation to God. Once again, His priorities were spiritual. Jesus Christ was not a political revolutionary; but He certainly was a very radical religious one.

On another occasion the Lord was asked to settle a dispute between two brothers (Luke 12:13-21). He refused to do so because He would not invade the sphere of constituted authority. The manner in which He addressed the questioner is severe and shows Jesus' indignation at being asked to step out of His sphere of ministry (see v. 14). However, the Lord did not leave the matter there. He used the request as an occasion for a sermon on covetousness

and, more importantly, on the priority of soul over substance (v. 20). Once again priority is given to the spiritual rather than to the material.

The incident concerning payment of the Temple tax (Matt. 17:24-17) points to Jesus' priorities as a Reformer. The tax was based on the regulation recorded in Exodus 30:11-16 which required every Israelite who was to be enrolled in the census of the people to pay half a shekel as a ransom for his soul. Originally the silver collected was used for making the sockets which supported the boards of the tabernacle (Exod. 36:19-25; 38:25-31), the sockets of the pillars of the veil, the hooks for the pillars of the court, the capitals, and the connecting rods. Thus the ransom money was always in sight so long as the tabernacle stood. This tax, different from the Roman poll tax referred to in Matthew 22:17, was collected from every male Jew twenty years of age and older, including Jews living in foreign countries. In the time of Nehemiah a voluntary tax of one-third shekel was adopted (Neh. 10:32-33), but by Jesus' time it was half a shekel. After the destruction of Jerusalem the tax still had to be paid to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome as a punishment for the rebellion. It could be paid at any of the three great festivals. Apparently here in Matthew 17 the collectors were calling in the taxes at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that had not previously been paid at Passover or Pentecost.

Seeking out Peter, either because he was the recognized leader of the Twelve or perhaps because he was the only one over twenty years of age, the collectors asked him if Jesus would pay. Peter gave a quick affirmative answer, but then had second thoughts by the time he got inside the house. The Lord, anticipating those misgivings, sought to instruct Peter further in the uniqueness of His person. Then follows the dialogue which results in the conclusion that the children are free. This cannot refer to the Jewish nation (for the Lord would then be teaching that the tax should not be imposed on any Jew) nor to Jesus and His disciples (for the account assumes that the disciples would pay; only Jesus' payment is in question). Rather, this refers to Jesus alone as the unique Son of God. Jesus claimed exemption because of His deity. The money, a stater or four-drachma piece, was produced by a miracle and used to pay Peter's and Jesus' taxes. The miraculous demonstration of omniscience and omnipotence served to dispel any doubt Peter might have had that Jesus was the Son of God.

However, it is the reason why Christ paid that is so instructive. — "lest we should offend them" (Matt. 17:27). The same verb is

used in Romans 14:21 and 1 Corinthians 8:13 to show that Christians should sometimes surrender their freedom for the sake of others. In this incident at Capernaum the Lord practiced a good principle for all reformers to follow, as stated by Plummer:

[This principle is] the avoidance of actions which are not absolutely essential for the success of the reform, and which, because easily misunderstood, and so arousing prejudice, would make it more difficult for others to join in the good movement. . . . Some who might otherwise have listened to Him would have turned away had He seemed by His example to teach that the Temple-services were not worth maintaining.¹⁹

On other occasions the Lord cleansed the Temple of the money-changers and predicted the destruction of the Temple, but here He conformed to a Temple law which in actuality was not commanded in the Torah. Not offending took priority over insisting on His rights.

Reformers must be wise, and reformers must be humble. The example of humility demonstrated by Christ in paying the Temple tax is followed by a striking object lesson on the subject. Childlike character is Christlike character, and is a requirement for all of Christ's followers in all their activities.

These examples clearly demonstrate that Jesus gave top priority to the spiritual needs of those around Him. Though not insensitive to physical needs, He ministered to relatively few of them. Though always obedient to government He led no attempt to reform the system. Though capable of correcting all injustices in the social order, His message was a call to personal repentance. These were His perspectives on social ethics.

19 Plummer, *A Critical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew*, p. 246.