A HARMONY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS — CHAPTER FIVE

Matthew 5, Mark 2, and Luke 5–6 (opening) Woven Into One Continuous Narrative

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Preface: Continuation of the Harmony

This volume continues the harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke through their fifth chapters. Chapter five brings together some of the most theologically significant material in the entire Synoptic tradition: the healing of the paralytic lowered through the roof, the call of Levi, Jesus's controversies with the Pharisees over eating with sinners, fasting, and the sabbath, and — most monumentally — the full text of Matthew 5, the opening chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest single extended discourse in the Gospel record.

Mark chapter 2 and Luke chapter 5 (with the opening verses of Luke 6) run closely parallel through the controversy narratives. Matthew 5 then stands largely alone as the first chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, with no Markan parallel and only scattered Lukan counterparts distributed across Luke's Gospel.

Each section is identified by its source Gospel in brackets:

[Matt] = Matthew

[Mark] = Mark

[Luke] = Luke

[Matt / Mark], **[Matt / Luke]**, **[Mark / Luke]**, or **[Matt / Mark / Luke]** = parallel passages

The translation throughout is the **American Standard Version (ASV, 1901)**, a public domain text of high scholarly accuracy. No words are invented or paraphrased; all text is drawn directly from the ASV.

Chronological ordering follows the scholarly consensus of A.T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels* (1922), Kurt Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, and Orville Daniel's *A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (2nd ed., 1996).

Part Four: Controversies, Call, and the Sermon on the Mount

Section 35 — The Healing of the Paralytic [Mark 2:1–12 / Luke 5:17–26]

And he entered again into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, no, not even about the door: and he spake the word unto them.

And it came to pass on one of those days, that he was teaching; and there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, who were come out of every village of Galilee and Judaea and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

And they come, bringing unto him a man sick of the palsy, borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the crowd, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay. And Jesus seeing their faith saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins are forgiven.

But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak? he blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but one, even God?

And straightway Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, saith unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house.

And he arose, and straightway took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion. And they were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day.

Section 36 — The Call of Levi [Mark 2:13–14 / Luke 5:27–28]

And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the place of toll, and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Section 37 — The Feast at Levi's House; Eating with Sinners [Mark 2:15–17 / Luke 5:29–32]

And it came to pass, that he was sitting at meat in his house, and many publicans and sinners sat down with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with the sinners and publicans, said unto his disciples, He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners.

And when Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Section 38 — The Question About Fasting [Mark 2:18–22 / Luke 5:33–39]

And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting: and they come and say unto him, Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast in that day.

No man seweth a piece of undressed cloth on an old garment: else that which should fill it up taketh from it, the new from the old, and a worse rent is made. And no man putteth new wine into old wine-skins: else the wine will burst the skins, and the wine perisheth, and the skins: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins.

And no man having drunk old wine desireth new; for he saith, The old is good.

Section 39 — Lord of the Sabbath: Plucking Grain [Mark 2:23–28 / Luke 6:1–5]

And it came to pass, that he was going on the sabbath day through the grain fields; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?

And he said unto them, Did ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was hungry, he, and they that were with him? How he entered into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the showbread, which it is not lawful to eat save for the priests, and gave also to them that were with him?

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: so that the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath.

Section 40 — The Great Multitudes; Setting for the Sermon [Matt 4:23–25]

And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people. And the report of him went forth into all Syria: and they brought unto him all that were sick, holden with divers diseases and torments, possessed with demons, and epileptic, and palsied; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judaea and from beyond the Jordan.

Section 41 — The Sermon on the Mount: The Beatitudes [Matt 5:1–12]

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

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 that 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 sons of God.

Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and 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 that were before you.

Section 42 — Salt of the Earth and Light of the World [Matt 5:13–16]

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men.

Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house.

Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

Section 43 — Christ and the Law: Not Abolition but Fulfilment [Matt 5:17–20]

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he 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 wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Section 44 — The First Antithesis: Anger and Reconciliation [Matt 5:21–26]

Ye have heard that it was said to 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 every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire.

If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught 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 with him in the way; lest haply 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 have paid the last farthing.

Section 45 — The Second Antithesis: Lust and Purity [Matt 5:27–30]

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell.

And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell.

Section 46 — The Third Antithesis: Divorce [Matt 5:31–32]

It was said also, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.

Section 47 — The Fourth Antithesis: Oaths [Matt 5:33–37]

Again, ye have heard that it was said to 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 the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.

Section 48 — The Fifth Antithesis: Retaliation [Matt 5:38–42]

Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him two.

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Section 49 — The Sixth Antithesis: Love of Enemies [Matt 5:43–48]

Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same?

Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Appendix: Notes on Chapter Five

On the Structure of Chapter Five

Chapter five in this harmony falls into two distinct movements. The first (Sections 35–39) follows the triple tradition: Mark 2 and Luke 5–6 carry the narrative through the healing of the paralytic, the call of Levi, the feast with sinners, the debate about fasting, and the sabbath controversy. These are closely parallel accounts and harmonize with relative ease.

The second movement (Sections 40–49) is dominated entirely by Matthew 5 — the opening chapter of the Sermon on the Mount. Mark has no parallel to the Sermon whatsoever. Luke contains a shorter version often called the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17–49), which shares the Beatitudes and some antithesis material but differs significantly in setting, structure, and content. The scholarly consensus is that Luke's Sermon on the Plain is either a separate occasion or a condensed and relocated version of the same discourse. This harmony presents Matthew's full account as the base text for the Sermon, which is by far the longer and more structurally complete version.

On the Paralytic: "Thy Sins Are Forgiven"

The healing of the paralytic (Section 35) is one of the most theologically loaded miracle narratives in the Synoptic tradition. The crowd expects physical healing; Jesus grants forgiveness of sins first, triggering an immediate theological crisis among the scribes — for in Jewish theology, only God can forgive sins. Jesus's response is to perform the physical healing as public demonstration that the Son of Man possesses the divine authority he has claimed: "that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins." The miracle is thus simultaneously an act of compassion and a claim of divine identity.

The detail that the four friends broke open the roof to lower their paralyzed companion appears in both Mark and Luke and is one of the most vivid eyewitness-quality details in the Synoptic tradition. Mark says they "uncovered the roof" and "broke it up" — describing a flat Palestinian mud-and-thatch construction that could be dismantled from above. Luke, writing for a Greco-Roman audience familiar with tiled roofs, says they "let him down through the tiles." Both are describing the same act; the difference in detail reflects each author's awareness of his intended reader's cultural context.

On the Call of Levi

Matthew is called "Levi" in Mark and Luke but "Matthew" in Matthew's own Gospel (Matt 9:9) and in all four apostolic lists (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). The most natural explanation is that Levi was his given name and Matthew ("gift of God") a name given by Jesus, as Simon received the name Peter. The call narrative is among the briefest in the Gospels: Jesus passes, speaks one command, and Levi abandons his tax booth without recorded hesitation. The feast that follows — at which "many publicans and sinners" recline with Jesus — provokes the Pharisees' complaint and Jesus's celebrated reply: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

On the Fasting Controversy and the New/Old Metaphors

The two metaphors Jesus uses in Section 38 — the unshrunk cloth on an old garment, and new wine in old wineskins — are among the most discussed in the Synoptic tradition. Both make the same structural point: the new reality Jesus brings cannot be contained within the old structures of religious practice without causing damage to both. The old garment tears worse; the old wineskin bursts. Luke alone adds a third word: "no man having drunk old wine desireth new; for he saith, The old is good" — a wry acknowledgment that those settled in old forms will resist the new, not because the new is worse but because the old is familiar and comfortable.

On the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5 opens the greatest single discourse in the Gospel tradition and one of the most influential ethical documents in human history. Its structure is precise and deliberate. It opens with the eight Beatitudes — each beginning "Blessed are" (*makarioi*, μακάριοι in the Greek) — which function not as commands but as declarations of the paradoxical reversals that characterize the kingdom of heaven: the poor in spirit possess the kingdom; the mourners are comforted; the meek inherit the earth; the persecuted rejoice.

The Beatitudes are followed by two metaphors of vocation (salt of the earth, light of the world) and then by the most structurally distinctive section of the chapter: the six Antitheses. Each

follows the same formal pattern: “Ye have heard that it was said… but I say unto you.” The formula is without parallel in Jewish literature. A rabbi might say “it is written” or “the tradition teaches”; no rabbi said “but I say unto you” as a contrast to the Torah itself. The authority implied is either the authority of God himself or an unprecedented prophetic claim. The crowds at the end of the Sermon (Matthew 7:28–29) react to exactly this quality: “he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.”

The six antitheses address: anger as equivalent to murder; lust as equivalent to adultery; divorce and its moral consequences; the prohibition of oaths in favor of simple truthful speech; the replacement of retaliatory justice (“an eye for an eye”) with non-resistance and generosity; and the extension of love from neighbors to enemies. Each antithesis deepens the Mosaic commandment from external behavior to interior disposition. The Sermon does not abrogate the law — Jesus has explicitly stated “I came not to destroy, but to fulfil” — but it radicalizes it: the righteousness required for the kingdom of heaven must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, reaching the interior of the person rather than resting in outward compliance.

The final antithesis — “Love your enemies” — is the most demanding and the most distinctive command in the Sermon. It has no parallel in any ancient ethical tradition prior to Jesus. The Stoics counseled indifference to enemies; the Mosaic tradition commanded love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) but was silent on enemies. Jesus commands active love — prayer, goodwill, the extension of the same generosity God shows in sending rain on the just and the unjust alike — and grounds this command in the nature of God himself: “Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The Greek word translated “perfect” is *teleios* (τέλειος) — meaning complete, whole, fully formed, reaching one’s intended end — not “perfect” in the sense of moral flawlessness.

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