

6:25 *Therefore*- Because our hearts can only be in one place, either with God or not, we should especially beware of materialism. For this more than anything else can lead us to hate God and to despise Him- because it takes our hearts away from Him.

Take no thought- The Sermon is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk. 12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life.

This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

Is not the life more than food, and the body than clothing?- This continues the theme outlined above. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

6:26 *Behold*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

The birds of the air... He feeds them- As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns- These words are repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26); , then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at 6:25 and elsewhere that the Sermon is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we

should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

Your Heavenly Father feeds them- God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. "If God so clothe the grass of the field. . . shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Better than- Quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

6:27 Taking thought- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence (see on 6:25).

Add- The same word occurs in 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them rather than our

material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

Stature- The Greek can mean 'age' as well as referring to our body. No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

6:28 Thought for clothing- The allusion is surely to how God provided food, drink and clothing which didn't wear out for the Israelites on their wilderness journey (Dt. 8:4), just as He will for those who have crossed the Red Sea in baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

Clothing- Again, it seems likely that the Lord intended us to refocus from material to spiritual. For later in Matthew we read of Him emphasizing the ultimate importance of having the right 'clothing' [s.w. "wedding garment"] to enter God's Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 22:11,12). On a simply practical level, it's my observation that many believers find spirituality hard because their minds are too taken up with making money- to fund the buying of branded, designer clothing. In our generation as never before, the price range of clothing is as never before. It is rather beyond me why in a brotherhood of need, it seems perfectly acceptable to not buy good second hand clothing and pay ten or more times the price for new clothing with the right brand name on it. But maybe that's just me.

Consider- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. The same idea, although a different word, as the Greek for "Behold" in 6:26. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

How they grow- The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

Toil... spin- As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The later appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

6:29 In... glory... clothed- It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here - plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

Solomon- The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer (Mt. 6:29,30). This reference to Solomon in Matt. 6:29 is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. He goes on to warn against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes (Matt. 6:31) - all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow...sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But", says Jesus, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt.

6:33) - clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was Christ alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

6:30 *If God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you?*- The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. See on 6:26. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? The Lord brought out the point in Mt. 6:30: *If God so clothes the grass... how much more will He clothe us, therefore, don't worry!* "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi*- to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes... although they do not spin them or work for them (Mt. 6:29). Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'... a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's

remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

Cast into the oven- We have noted that the idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

You of little faith- The word is used another three times in Matthew (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In each case it refers specifically to a lack of faith in the saving power of Jesus. The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

6:31 *Eat... drink... clothed* - The three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them.

Clothed- God will provide, but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time

in his long and varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

6:32 Gentiles seek- God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to 1st century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding nature of God's grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. Mt. 6:32 goes on to imply that the difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a 'first principle' this really is.

Seek- Parallel with 'thinking' anxiously in :31. Again it is the overall direction of our hearts, to where our seeking is set, our mental life and thinking, which is the issue. Rather than individual acts of spiritual failure or success.

Knows that you have need- God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

All these things- Hapas, 'all', means strictly 'each and every one of'. God knows every single human need relating to eating, drinking, clothing and existing. And He knows better than we do our greatest need- to eat and drink of that bread and blood which gives eternal life, and to be clothed with His nature.

6:33 *Seek first*- Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :31,32. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

The Kingdom- I noted under 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

His righteousness- The Sermon was intended for those who earnestly wished to be righteous but felt unable to attain it as they wished (see on 5:6). Yet we should continue 'seeking' it. And Paul takes the thought further by declaring that if we really seek to be righteous, then we will become "in Christ" and believe in God's offer of imputed righteousness.

All these things- Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verse 32- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on 6:31.

Shall be added- The only other usage of the word in Matthew is just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height (6:27).

6:34 *For tomorrow*- The only other occurrence of the Greek word in Matthew is a few verses earlier in :30. God provides for the grass which "tomorrow" will be cast into the fire. We observed under 6:30 that this is the language of condemnation. If God even keeps alive and provides for those who shall be condemned, and the things of the animal and plant creation which live for only a day or so, how much more will He care for us. The "tomorrow" which is in view is therefore the ultimate 'tomorrow'- of the coming of Christ. We are to take no anxious thought for the outcome of that day if we know that in our hearts we are seeking the things of the Kingdom above all. In the same spirit, Paul taught that all who wholeheartedly love the Lord's appearing shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). We should not be full of worried thought about our possible rejection on that day, but rather the overall thinking of our mind should be positively full of the things of the Kingdom. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" could be read as meaning 'Yes there will be evil for some on that day, but don't waste your thoughts worrying about that. If your heart is for the Kingdom of God, you are secure. Don't worry about it". Although this is the ultimate sense of 'tomorrow' which the Lord has in mind, His words can be understood on a quite simple literal level too. We are to live one day at a time without worrying about the future, because quite simply- God will provide. Each day has its own problems, and don't worry about them ahead of time. Rather focus your thinking and mental energy upon the things of God's Kingdom. This is exactly in the spirit of the command in the Lord's model prayer to ask for enough food only for today (6:11). Living like this is of course seen by the world as irresponsible. But it is not irresponsible if we do so with a firm faith that God is responsible for our tomorrows.

Notes

(1) Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76.

(2) Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998).

(3) Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96

(4) Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, translated by John Bowden (London: Collins, 1965) p. 214.

(5) See the article "Amen" in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) pp. 35,36.