The Logic of Matthew 6.19–7.12: Heavenly Priorities in the Kingdom of Earth

CHARLES NATHAN RIDLEHOOVER (iD)
*North Raleigh Christian Academy, 7300 Perry Creek Rd., Raleigh, NC 27614, USA.
Email: cnridlehoover@gmail.com*

In Sermon studies and their discussion of structure, scholars disagree on how to understand the latter half of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6.19–7.12). This section breaks the almost seamless structure of the first half of the Sermon (5.17–6.18). In what follows, I will argue that the latter half of the Sermon displays more structure than is generally acknowledged by Graham Stanton and others and gives us key insights into the overall message of the Sermon. I will argue that the structure of the latter half of the Sermon is marked by internal structuring, thematic consistency and verbal patterning. Matthew's emphasis in this section is on disciples having heavenly priorities while on earth.

Keywords: Matthew's Gospel, Sermon on the Mount, Lord's Prayer, structure, heaven, earth

1. Introduction

In Sermon studies and their discussion of structure, scholars generally agree on two points. First, the Sermon on the Mount is highly structured and carefully put together by Matthew. Second, no one is fully confident about what to do with Matt 6.19–7.12. The latter half of the Sermon (Matt 6.19–7.12) breaks the almost seamless structure of the first half (5.17–6.18). This seeming contradiction in observations has not stopped biblical exegetes from handling the text, but Graham Stanton's comments seem to be representative: 'This part of the Sermon seems to be a "rag-bag" of sayings, only some of which are loosely related to others.'[1] In what follows, I will argue that the latter half of the Sermon displays more structure than is generally acknowledged by Stanton and others and gives us key insights into the overall message of the Sermon. This structure is marked by internal symmetry, thematic consistency and verbal patterning. By acknowledging these elements, one can appreciate a thoroughly

---

1 G. N. Stanton, *Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992) 298.

structured text from beginning to end and see themes consistent throughout the Sermon, even in the midst of the 'rag-bag'.[2] Matthew's emphasis in this section is on disciples having heavenly priorities while on earth.

Before attending to other proposals and my own, I will begin with a brief sketch of my presuppositions and methods. Following James Muilenburg, I will first assume that 'form and content are inextricably related. They form an integral whole.'[3] In other words, Matthew is not only recording the content of Jesus' teaching, but also arranging the material with clues to its meaning. Second, the particular method employed in this paper is a form of rhetorical criticism. Historical inquiries into the text are important but will remain in the background. The literary characteristics of the text will be foregrounded in the following study. Given this backgrounding and foregrounding, I will examine synoptic parallels for comparison instead of the origin of sources. What is certain is that the Sermons in Matthew and Luke's Gospels are similar in content and ordering.[4] Third, I recognise the danger in proposing a structure for this apparently 'chaotic' section of the Sermon. Yet, the clues within the text appear to show a conscientious editor who is careful with his sources and equally creative. It is with these points in mind that I will consider some of the more helpful and adventurous structural proposals before sketching my own ideas and giving a proper name to this last section of the Sermon's body.

2. The Proposals

For the sake of convenience, I have grouped the major structural proposals for Matt 6.19–7.12 under the names of their respective proponents.[5] In giving an overview of the proposals, I have intentionally avoided those scholars who merely follow the numbering of the verses. In the following section, I will examine the

---

2 This article is intended to be similar to William Dumbrell's 'The Logic of the Role of the Law in Matthew 5.1–20', *NovT* 23 (1981) 1–21. Dumbrell shows the inner logic within the first twenty verses of chapter 5. I will argue similarly that there is an inner logic to Matt 6.19–7.12.

3 J. Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', *JBL* 88 (1969) 5.

4 Each Sermon begins with an introduction (Matt 5.1–2//Luke 6.20a), followed by the *macarisms* (Matt 5.3–12//Luke 6.20b–23), 'loving your enemy' (Matt 5.38–48//Luke 6.27–36), judging (Matt 7.1–5//Luke 6.37–42), Golden Rule (Matt 7.12//Luke 6.31), fruits (Matt 7.16–20//Luke 6.43–5), those who say 'Lord, Lord' (Matt 7.21//Luke 6.46), the two builders (Matt 7.24–7//Luke 6.47–9) and Sermon conclusion (Matt 7.28//Luke 7.1). See R. A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 33–5.

5 The following structural proposals have been selected because of their sway on the field. One may be dissatisfied that some of them seem dated, but no new and significantly different proposals have been given which vary from the chosen sample set. Possible exceptions include J. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017) 105–34, especially 128–30. Also, see my recent contribution in *The Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel* (LNTS 616: London: T&T Clark, 2019) 29–64.

work of Walter Grundmann and Günther Bornkamm; Michael Goulder and H. Benedict Green; and Dale Allison and Glen Stassen.

2.1 *Walter Grundmann and Günther Bornkamm*

Walter Grundmann[6] and Günther Bornkamm[7] are two of the strongest proponents for the Lord's Prayer as the centre of the Sermon. Both argue that the Sermon's structure revolves around the ordering of the Prayer's petitions. In his commentary *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, Grundmann argues that the first half of the Sermon (Matt 5.1–48) corresponds to petitions 1–3 (Matt 6.9–10), and and its latter half (Matt 6.19–7.23) to individual petitions of the Prayer (Matt 5.1–2 and 7.7–12 to petition 1; Matt 5.3–16 to petition 2; Matt 5.17–48 to petition 3; Matt 6.19–34 to petition 4; Matt 7.1–6 to petition 5; Matt 7.13–23 to petitions 6 and 7).

Bornkamm, in his helpful article 'Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt', amended the argument of Grundmann by reducing the Prayer's structuring to the latter portions of the Sermon (Matt 6.19–7.11).[8] If the first half of the Sermon (Matt 5.1–6.18) is intricately structured, Bornkamm reasoned that the latter half (Matt 6.19–7.6) must also be tightly structured. By comparing Matthew's arrangement of his prayer teachings (Matt 6.9–13; 7.7–11) with Luke's arrangement (Luke 11.1–13), Bornkamm argues that Matthew has split the teaching on prayer (Matt 6.9–13 and 7.7–11) to form an *inclusio* around 6.19–7.6. Within this *inclusio*, Matt 6.19–24 (teaching 'treasures not on earth but in heaven') connects to the first three petitions, Matt 6.25–34 (teaching on 'worry') connects to the fourth petition, Matt 7.1–5 (teaching on 'judging') connects to the fifth petition, and Matt 7.6 (teaching on 'dogs, pigs, and holy things') connects with the last two petitions. To establish these connections between the Sermon and Prayer, Grundmann and Bornkamm point out the similar vocabulary and shared thematic elements (Table 1).

Grundmann and Bornkamm both have noted an important point concerning the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer. I agree with the argument for the centrality of the Lord's Prayer, but the Prayer does not structure the latter sections of the Sermon. While this solution is intriguing, it presents two major problems. The first of these is the disproportionate arrangement that occurs when each scholar assigns the Sermon's content to its respective petition. One will notice from the chart that one petition will parallel large sections of verses while multiple petitions will parallel a single verse. For example, both proposals assign the bread petition to a single petition, while the temptation and evil petitions cover the

---

6 W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (THKNT; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1972) 204–6.

7 G. Bornkamm, 'Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt', *NTS* 24 (1978) 419–32.

8 See also J. Lambrecht, *The Sermon on the Mount: Proclamation and Exhortation* (GNS 14; Wilmington: Glazier, 1985) 155–64 and R. Schnackenburg, *All Things Are Possible to Believers: Reflections on the Lord's Prayer and the Sermon on the Mount* (trans. J. S. Currie; Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1995) 27–8. Schnackenburg is more hesitant than Lambrecht.

Table 1. Lord's Prayer as Structuring Agent

Lord's Prayer	Grundmann	Bornkamm
1. Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your Name	5.3–16 and 7.7–12 and other references to 'your Father in heaven'	6.33 Seek first God's reign and justice
2. Your Kingdom come	5.3–16 Beatitudes and salt, light deeds	6.33 Seek first God's reign and justice
1. 3. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven	5.17–48 The better righteousness	6.19–24 Treasures not on earth but in heaven
1. 4. Give us this day our daily bread	6.19–34 Treasures, food and clothes	6.25–34 Do not be anxious; God cares
1. 5. And forgive us our debts	7.1–6 Judge not, but repent	7.1–5 Judge not, but repent
1. 6. And do not bring us to the time of trial	7.13–23 False prophets	7.6 Dogs, pigs and holy things
1. 7. But deliver us from the evil one	7.13–23 False prophets	7.6 Dogs, pigs and holy things

Sermon's conclusion in Grundmann and a single verse in Bornkamm. In Bornkamm's proposal, Matt 6.19–24 parallels the first three petitions, while the rest of the Sermon is split among the remaining petitions. Second, many of the exegetical parallels between the Sermon and the respective petition are tenuous. Examples include: (1) the connection of Matt 7.6 in Grundmann's proposal to the forgiveness petition,[9] and (2) in Bornkamm, connecting Matt 6.19–24 to God's will being accomplished.[10]

2.2 *Michael Goulder and H. Benedict Green*

In *Midrash and Lection*, Goulder argues that Matthew is employing the use of triads and reverse ordering.[11] Goulder reasons, 'The eighth beatitude is plainly

---

9 This point is made by Bornkamm, 'Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt', 427–30.

10 Bornkamm's connection here is problematic in two ways: (1) he splits 6.19–24 and 25–34, but these verses should in fact be seen as one section which addresses material needs and God's provision for even the 'least of these'; (2) the emphasis in the Prayer's petition is on earth, but also clearly in heaven, while the emphasis in 6.19–24 focuses more on the earthly aspect, pointing out that man should not be subservient to wealth while on earth.

11 See also A. Farrer, *St. Matthew and St. Mark* (Westminster: Dacre, 1966) 174, J. C. Fenton, 'Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew', *Studia Evangelica*, vol. I (ed. K. Aland *et al.*; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959) 174–9 and J. Welch, 'Chiasmus in the New Testament', *Chiasmus*

expounded in the first verses of the main body of the Sermon.'[12] If the beginning of the body of the Sermon (Matt 5.11–12) starts to explain the last Beatitude, the Beatitudes must then be a *kelal* for the entire Sermon. In what follows, Matthew has adopted the rabbinic practice of triple illustration throughout the Sermon body to correspond to each of the Beatitudes.[13] As Table 2 illustrates, the Sermon's structure simply follows the ordering of the Beatitudes.

Green, in his work *Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes*, follows very closely the proposal of Goulder, but with some stylistic differences. Green argues that the eight Beatitudes should be split in half and read together as parallel units. The first Beatitude is paired with the fifth, the second Beatitude with the sixth, and so on. After proving the parallel structure of the Beatitudes, Green shows how each pair interacts with the rest of the Sermon.[14]

VIII/IV	5.11–20	+	VII (5.13)
VII/III	5.21–48	+	VI (5.27–37)
VI/II	6.1–18	+	V (6.2–5, 9–15)
V/I	6.19–7.12	+	VI (6.19–24), IV (6.33, 7.7–11)
(IV	7.21, 24)		

The difference in these proposals is that Goulder handles the Beatitudes individually, while Green sees each *pair* of Beatitudes as corresponding to a section of the Sermon. Just as Goulder expressed the connection of 5.11–12 as a *Midrash* on the eighth Beatitude, Green similarly starts his analysis here. The thematic material in verses 11–20 connects with the eighth/fourth Beatitude. This is displayed in the chart above. What is interesting is the linking verse/paragraph that appears in each larger section noted by the parentheses. These linking verse/paragraphs connect to the next section of Beatitudes. For instance, in the larger section of 5.11–20, Green argues that the linking verse is 5.13 (seen in the second column). In 5.13 (teaching on 'salt'), Green argues that Matthew is borrowing from the tradition behind Mark 9.50: 'Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.' As Mark combines 'salt' and 'peacemaking', so Matthew uses the salt metaphor as a major emphasis in the larger section and

---

in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis (ed. J. Welch; Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981) 211–49, at 236.

12 M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974) 252.

13 Goulder, *Midrash and Lection*, 254.

14 H. B. Green, *Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes* (JSNTSupp Series 203; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000) 258.

Table 2. Goulder on Matt 6.19–7.2 (Goulder, Midrash and Lection, 269)

Goulder on Matt 6.19–7.12		
(4) Hunger and thirst for righteousness	(a) No parade in prayer (b) Lord's Prayer (c) No parade in fasting	6.5–8 6.9–15 6.16–18
(3) Meek (Ps 37.11)	(a) Treasure in heaven (b) Generous eye (c) No anxiety	6.19–21 6.22–4 6.25–34
(2) Mourners	(a) No judging (b) No reproving (c) No backbiting	7.1–2 7.3–5 7.6
(1) Poor in spirit	Ask, seek, knock Law and prophets in a *kelal*	7.7–11 7.12

implicitly moves the reader to the next set of Beatitudes (VII/III), which begins with 'peacemaking'.[15] This pattern continues throughout the sets of Beatitudes. There are verbal links in each section that move the reader forward so as to form a circular pattern through the entire Sermon.

Goulder and Green share a flair for creativity and an acknowledgement of the poetic beauty of the Sermon. The main problem lies in the lack of connectivity between some of the passages and their respective Beatitude. In regard to Goulder, Warren Carter has pointed out three passages that are especially troubling: Matt 5.13–16, 7.1–6 and 7.6.[16] I will discuss the last two as they are the most problematic and related to the current section under investigation. First, Matt 7.1–6 speaks of judging others and contains the strange passage concerning dogs and pigs. It is a difficult stretch to connect mourning and an admonition against judging others without any specific verbal links. Goulder attempts to make the connection by appealing to the internal connection between verses 1–5 and verse 6. He argues that both passages concern judging. Therefore, when judging is done improperly, it can be a cause of mourning.[17] As Goulder

---

15 Green, *Poet of the Beatitudes*, 258–9.

16 W. Carter, *What Are They Saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?* (New York: Paulist, 1994) 38–9.

17 Goulder, *Midrash and Lection*, 264.

admits, the passage on dogs and pigs is notoriously difficult to interpret.[18] It does not immediately lend itself to judging and, therefore, may not be linked to mourning. At best, the connection is symbolic, but in the lack of verbal specificity, mourning and dogs/pigs can only be connected tenuously with Goulder's proposed parallels. This difficulty leads to the second issue. Goulder interprets the dogs/pigs passage as one addressing 'backbiting'. While the second half of the verse may be instructing against such behaviour, the first half is a command to withstand putting important things before unworthy recipients. As I will argue, the verse concerns apostasy and is not reducible to 'backbiting'.

In Green's analysis, each verbal clue takes the reader to the first Beatitude in the set of two (5.13 links to Beatitude VII; 5.27–37 links to Beatitude VI, etc.). In the last set, the verbal clue takes the reader to the second Beatitude in the set of two (6.33, 7.7–11 to Beatitude IV). Why in this last case does the patterning change? In previous examples, the verbal clue always links to the first Beatitude and not the second. Green provides an answer to this question, but his tight and narrow methodology does not allow the sort of flexibility he needs to assert this change in parallels.

2.3 *Dale Allison and Glen Stassen*

When it comes to the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, no one is perhaps more published than Dale Allison.[19] Allison has defended a triadic structure for the Sermon. In the passage under discussion, Jesus follows up a section on Jewish piety (Matt 6.1–18) with a section on social issues. Like Matt 5.17–48 (21–6, 27–30, 31–2//33–7, 38–42, 43–7[8]), Matt 6.19–7.11 also contains two triads. Each of the two sections in Matt 6.19–7.11 begins with an exhortation (Matt 6.19–21// 7.1–2), followed by a parable on the eye (Matt 6.22–3//7.3–5), and parabolic conclusion (Matt 6.24//7.6).[20] Matt 6.25–33 and 7.7–11 are labelled as 'encouragements' in regard to the demands of the previous exhortations. Allison presents the structure as is laid out in Table 3.

Following on the heels of Allison's structural proposal is the work of Glen Stassen.[21] Stassen has created an ethics textbook working from the concept of 'Transforming Initiatives', which he finds as the driving force in the body of the Sermon.[22] According to Stassen's presentation of the structure of the

---

18 Goulder, *Midrash and Lection*, 265. Goulder actually says that it is the most difficult passage in the entire Gospel of Matthew.

19 See D. C. Allison, 'The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount', *JBL* 106 (1987) 423–45; *Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1999) 27–57; and 'The Configuration of the Sermon on the Mount and its Meaning', *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 173–215.

20 Allison, 'Structure of the Sermon', 435.

21 G. H. Stassen, 'The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (5:21–7:12)', *JBL* 122 (2003) 267–308.

22 G. H. Stassen and D. P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003).

Table 3. Allison on the structure of 6.19–7.11

	Instruction	
exhortation 6.19–21	1	7.1–2 exhortation
parable (on the eye) 6.22–3	2	7.3–5 parable (on the eye)
second parable 6.24	3	7.6 second parable
	Encouragement	
6.25–33 the heavenly Father's care		7.7–11 the heavenly Father's care
(argument *a minori ad maius*)		(argument *a minori ad maius*)
	7.12 the Golden Rule	

Sermon, the follower of Christ is relieved from the rigid demands and high idealism of traditional readings of the Sermon, and given the gift of God's grace and deliverance.[23]

Like Allison, Stassen argues for a consistent use of the triad; the difference is in its location and use. Whereas most structural proposals comment on how the various pericopes are grouped together, Stassen argues that each pericope has a triadic nature within itself.[24] The internal triadic structure consists of a teaching on 'traditional righteousness', the 'vicious cycle plus judgment' and the 'Transforming Initiative'.[25] These are classified as follows:[26]

(a) The *Traditional Righteousness* is presented as coming from Jewish tradition. It occurs first in a triad and does not begin with a particle. Its main verb is usually a future indicative or a subjunctive with an imperatival function, as is typical in Matthew for may citations of Old Testament commands; its mood apparently varies with the received tradition.

(b) The *Vicious Cycle plus Judgement* is presented as Jesus' teaching, with authority. It diagnoses a practice and says it leads to judgement. Its main verb is a participle, infinitive, subjunctive or indicative, but not an imperative. It begins with 'but', 'for', 'lest' or 'therefore' (δέ, οὖν, Διὰ τοῦτο, μήποτε), or a negative such as μή or οὐκ; and often includes λέγω ὑμῖν ('I say to you').

---

23 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 268–9.
24 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 267–8.
25 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 275.
26 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 275.

(c) The *Transforming Initiative* is also presented as Jesus' teaching, with authority. Its main verb is a positive imperative – an initiative – not a negative prohibition, calling for a practice of deliverance from the vicious cycle and to participation in the reign of God. It usually begins with δέ and ends with a supporting explanation: that is, 'he may deliver you to the judge'.

Stassen sees fourteen such triads that occupy the main section of the Sermon, 5.21-7.12.[27] They are as follows:[28]

1. On being reconciled (5.21-6: 21, 22, 23-6)
2. On removing the practice that leads to lust (5.27-30: 27, 28, 29-30)
3. On divorce (5.31-2: 31, 32a-b (no Transforming Initiative))
4. On telling the truth (5.33-7: 33, 34-6, 37)
5. Transforming Initiatives of peacemaking (5.38-42: 38, 39a, 39b-42)
6. Love your enemy (5.43-8: 43, 44-5, 46-7, 48 (summary))
       [Introduction to next section: 6.1]
7. Almsgiving (6.52-4: 2a, 2b, 3-4)
8. Prayer (6.5-6: 5a, 5b, 6)
9. Prayer (6.7-15: 7a, 7b-8, 9-15)
10. Fasting (6.16-18: 16a, 16b, 17-18)
11. Storing treasures (6.19-23: 19a, 19b, 20-3)
12. Serve first God's reign and justice (6.24-34: 24ab, 24c-25, 26-34)
13. Judge not, but take the log out of your own eye (7.1-5: 1, 2-4, 5)
14. Place your trust not in gentile dogs, but in our Father God (7.6-12: 6a, 6b, 7-12)

Stassen argues that each of the triads displays roughly the same form and this new understanding of the text makes the most sense of the Sermon's structure.

In regard to these triadic proposals, each has its inherent strengths along with its weaknesses. From the start of the Sermon until Matt 6.19, Allison has pointed out a consistent thread of triads, but in the last sections of the main body, he starts to deviate from his prior consistency. The insertion of the 'encouragement' sections Matt 6.25-33 and 7.7-11 particularly stands out. They follow on the heels of proposed triads but stand alone in their structural connection. Carter notes: 'While there is no dispute that these sections offer encouragement, that function may have more to do with the content and imperatival style than with the absence

---

of a triadic pattern.'[29] Additionally, Stassen has shown that Allison's naming of the particular elements of Matt 6.24–7.11 is tenuous.[30] They do not clearly illustrate what the text says and seem contrived in order to maintain the triadic scheme.

Stassen's proposal is careful and well documented but not without fault. One concern of Stassen's work is his dismissal of dyads. He is quick to point out that the use of dyads is atypical for the Gospel of Matthew.[31] Arguably, one of the major themes in the entirety of the Gospel is the dyad of heaven and earth. Matthew is also very keen to use the literary device of comparisons (a dyadic structure).[32] Before getting to the Sermon, Matthew compares Jesus with John the Baptist and Moses. In the Sermon, the disciples of Jesus are compared to the scribes and Pharisees. After the Sermon, Jesus is compared to his own disciples, Jonah, Solomon and the temple. A complete reading of the Sermon reveals that there are two groups of people hearing Jesus' teachings: the disciples and the crowds. The first major section is filled with dyads: two sets of four Beatitudes and the twin metaphors of salt and light. Also, the Sermon ends with various comparisons: the wide gate vs the narrow gate, good fruit vs bad fruit, and rocky foundations vs sandy foundations. Although these sections fall outside Stassen's exegesis, they are still vital parts of the Sermon's message.

In terms of finding triads among the commonly viewed dyadic section of 5.21–48, Stassen seems to give way again to his own presuppositions. As mentioned, he is convinced that placing weight on the prohibitions ('You have heard that it was said …') gives the Sermon a negative orientation that prohibits grace. His triadic structure gives a means of deliverance through the 'Transforming Initiative', in which case Jesus' words fulfil the traditional teachings.[33] This is an interpretive decision that maligns the use of the prohibition in 5.21–48. Although one can agree that Jesus' teaching brings an added dimension to this set of six Old Testament commands, this does not mean that the prohibition must take a secondary role. In fact, Jesus has just made clear that he does not intend even an 'iota' or 'dot' to pass from the Law's presence (5.17–20). In this case, the triadic structure is not warranted. It ignores the clear structural markers that dominate 5.21–48: 'You have heard that it was said …' and 'But I say to you.' A close reading of Stassen reveals that in the teaching on divorce, a 'Transforming Initiative' is in fact missing, creating an apparent dyad. Also, Stassen overlooks the grace that is already being elicited in the Beatitudes. This would form a nice introduction to and juxtaposition with Jesus' teaching on the Law, but Stassen begins his evaluation in 5.21.

29 Carter, *What Are They Saying?*, 47.
30 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 298
31 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 268.
32 Cf. Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 77–84.
33 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 270.

The last critique of Stassen's work concerns his refusal to acknowledge particular markers in the text that function as summarising verses. There are at least three passages/verses that seem to function as transitional verses or summations. The first is 5.48: 'Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.' Ulrich Luz comments, 'Verse 48 brings the entire series of antitheses to a close.'[34] Traditionally, this verse would cover all six of the antitheses mentioned in verses 21–47. Although Stassen does acknowledge this function of verse 48, his structural proposal only allows it to apply to the sixth transformative initiative. Second, Stassen takes liberties in arranging 6.1. It is a summary verse that introduces the traditional teachings concerning practices of piety throughout chapter 6. Interestingly, Stassen sets it as an introduction to a section without any formal connection to a specific triad. The third example of breaking from the triadic structure is Stassen's assignment of 7.12. He argues that it fits into the fourteenth triad but serves as the 'climax of the whole central section'.[35] As with the other examples, Stassen does acknowledge the summarising function of these verses, but the question remains of whether his triadic scheme allows that. Either the triadic scheme is binding, or it is not. If it is not binding, then some of the hermeneutical decisions made by Stassen become more questionable.

Stassen clearly lays out his intentions to be exegetically consistent, but upon closer examination, he takes creative liberties. These liberties are less guided by the texts under consideration, and more by Stassen's interpretive presuppositions. Stassen does draw attention to some interesting features of the main body of the Sermon, but his methodology cannot be applied evenly across the entirety of the text and does not fit with the subtle nuances that the author of the Sermon implements. His insistence on emphasising certain verses and de-emphasising others takes away from the fullness of the Sermon as a compositional unit.

3. A Proposal

Having considered these other proposals and their weaknesses, I will begin the following section with some general observations about the Sermon's structure. I will then argue that Matt 6.19–7.12 is less a 'rag-bag' and more a work of Matthew's editorial genius. Last, I will propose an alternative title for the section under examination.

3.1 *General Observations*

The structures surveyed, although ultimately incomplete, are not without merit. Each proposal helps to highlight aspects of the Sermon's literary beauty. As Grundmann and Bornkamm have rightly argued, the Lord's Prayer is at the

---

34 U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 289.
35 Stassen, 'Fourteen Triads', 294.

centre of the Sermon. Luz is more correct in seeing the Prayer as the structural centrepiece of the Sermon without the petitions structuring the Sermon's material. Bornkamm also rightly assumes that the structure of the first half of the Sermon should continue into its second half. Goulder and Green have drawn attention to the Sermon's dependency on the Old Testament and the poetic beauty of the Lord's Prayer. Allison and Stassen highlight the use of triads, an important feature throughout the Sermon.[36] From these proposals, the following comments address the broadest observations concerning the Sermon's structure:

1. Matthew's most common literary devices throughout the Sermon are dyads, triads, *inclusiones*, *kelals* and verbal repetition.
2. The Sermon has a macro-structure and the individual parts exhibit micro-structures.
3. The Sermon's parts form a cohesive message. Although some of the individual parts stand alone, Matthew creates a panoramic view for the reader/listener. In other words, each thematic unit is threaded together by the author.
4. As with other places throughout the Gospel, Matthew consistently uses structuring and literary devices to present two contrasting ways of life. In his verbiage, one is either a child of the Father in heaven or a citizen of the kingdom of man.

3.2 *'Rag-Bag' or Editorial Genius?*

My own proposal closely resembles that of Luz, who offers a concentric scheme for understanding the Sermon's structure, with the Lord's Prayer as the centre. In his proposal, Luz draws attention to the parallel between Matt 5.21–48 and 6.19–7.12.[37] His overarching justification for paralleling 5.21–48 and 6.19–7.12 is that each section occupies fifty-six lines in the Nestle-Aland. In other words, Luz's structural proposal for Matt 6.19–7.12 rests on simple size comparisons with 5.21–48. It is my conviction that more can be posited than mere line equivalence and that reading the parallels between the two blocks of texts gives further insight into understanding 6.19–7.12. In what follows, I will show how the sections are parallel with the intention of demonstrating how these observations reveal an inner logic to Matt 6.19–7.12.

First, both sets of texts share the same rhetorical vein. Jesus' teaching on the Law employs the wording 'You have heard it said … but I say to you' to emphasise

---

36 This comment may seem contradictory to my earlier critiques, but the only digression to the Sermon's triadic structure is 6.25–33 and 7.7–11.

37 Within these individual sections, Luz splits the first (Matt 5.21–48) into two sets of three (Matt 5.21–26, 27–30, 31–2//5.33–7, 38–42, 43–7). He states (*Matthew 1–7*, 226) that each of the two sets has almost the same number of letters and only slightly differentiates in word total (1,131/ 1,130 letters; 258/244 words). There is also a similar introduction to each triad (verses 21, 33: 'you have heard that it was said to the ancients').

that his own teaching goes beyond simple obedience. The Law is sufficient and good, but following Jesus compels one to deeper understandings of the Law's demands. In 6.19–7.12, there is a similar flow of thought. In the individual teachings, Jesus drives to the depths of each issue. Beginning with treasure (6.19–21), Jesus insists that earthly treasure is not sufficient, but that one must strive for heavenly rewards. This pattern continues through 7.12.[38]

Second, the two sections display the same basic structural integrity. Both begin with a *kelal* and end with a summary clause.[39] In the case of 5.17–48, Jesus begins with remarks on his fulfilment of the Law (5.17–20) and concludes with a summary clause on perfection (5.48). Matt 6.19–7.12 starts with a *kelal* to seek heavenly treasure (6.19–21) and ends with the summary clause in 7.12. Being in the last section in the Sermon's body, the Golden Rule summarises not only 6.19–7.11 but also the Sermon's entire message.

In addition to the parallels between headings and summation verses, both sections display parallel micro-structures. Matt 5.21–48 splits nicely into two sections of three (5.21–6, 27–30, 31–2//33–7, 38–42, 43–7[8]). Although 6.19–7.12 does not retain the internal consistency of 5.21–48, it does exhibit the same basic split into two sections. The first section consists of 6.19–34, while the second comprises 7.1–12. The first block of texts begins with some general statements about possessions (verses 19–24) that become more precise in the succeeding verses (25–34).[40] Interestingly, the initial verses here, 6.19–21, give this section an eschatological perspective that becomes more grounded in earthly realities in verses 25–34. The beginning of this first major section speaks of the duality of heaven and earth and uses abstract references to the eye, light and the body. The next section (verses 25–34) uses natural examples to explain the cure for anxiety while also emphasising the themes of heaven and earth.

---

38 Other examples include Jesus' insistence on being full of light (6.22–3) and loving God more than comforts (6.24). The teaching in Matt 6.25–34 concerning worry/anxiety speaks *prima facie* to food, drink and clothing, but at the heart of this teaching is Jesus' instruction to 'seek first the kingdom and righteousness' (verse 34). Matt 7.1–5 gives instruction on avoiding judgements without considering one's own faults. Matt 7.6 encourages care with the gospel and 7.7–11 speaks to trusting in the Father's good provisions.

39 *Kelal* statements function as headings for sections by establishing the thesis and summarising the teaching which proceeds. This patterning is consistent throughout the body of the Sermon. Although not in view in the present section, the three marks of piety in chapter 6 begin with the commendation to guard one's displays of righteousness (6.1) and conclude with 6.19–21. Recent work on the *kelal* patterning in the Sermon's structure can be found in Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 105–34; see especially 128–30. Pennington, interestingly, splits 6.19–34 and 7.1–12, but with the caveat that the two sections are still one unit. The *kelals* for these respective sections are 6.19–21 and 7.1–2.

40 Hagner notes that the first section of 6.19–24 consists of three logia (verses 19–21; 22–3; 24). Verses 22–3 and verse 24 should be read together. D. Hagner, *Matthew 1–3* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 156. See also Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 330.

The next major block is 7.1–12. There are essentially three parts to this section. The first of these, 7.1–5, is clear: be careful how you judge others. The next verse in the section, 7.6, is one of the more difficult verses to interpret in Matthew's Gospel. It does not immediately fit with what precedes and with what follows, thereby providing no contextual clues. Matthew brings the body of the Sermon to a suitable close in 7.7–11. Picking up on the theme of prayer, he explains the importance of persevering in seeking God. As 6.19–34 has the themes of heaven and earth, so the closing to this section of the body contrasts the gifts of earthly fathers with the heavenly Father.

It is also worth noting that these parallel sections (5.21–48//6.19–7.12) have a relatively similar word length. In terms of word count, 5.21–48 has 508 words with the inclusion of one variant word that is disputed in verse 39. On the other hand, 6.19–7.12 has 513 words with two minor variants.[41] As noted above, Matt 5.21–32 and 5.33–48 are parallel sections and a closer look reveals the first three paragraphs have 258 words (1,131 letters), while the second three paragraphs have 244 words (1,130 letters).[42] The importance of this word count could be seen as analogous to the proposed word count in the parallel in 5.21–48 and 6.19–7.12.

Third, the parallel sections address one broad topic. As 5.21–48 addresses Jesus' teaching on the Mosaic law, so 6.19–7.12 considers issues of daily life. As Betz comments, '[t]he third and last section of the body of the SM (6.19–7.12) concern ... the human response to God's generosity in the affairs of daily life'.[43] For Betz, those areas are 'On gathering treasures' (6.19–21), 6.22–3 ('On vision'), 'On serving two masters' (6.24), 'On worrying' (6.25–34), 'On judging' (7.1–5), 'On profaning the holy: a cryptic *sentential*' (7.6) and 'On giving and receiving' (7.7–11).[44] Although slightly disagreeing as to the arrangement of the units, Davies and Allison see various sections in 6.19–7.12 dealing with 'how to behave in the world at large'.[45]

Jonathan Pennington has argued persuasively that 'heaven' and 'earth' are important theological terms throughout Matthew's Gospel.[46] As I will argue

---

41 The first variant is in verse 25: ἢ τί πίητε. Although these small words have significant attestation in the manuscript evidence, they were most likely added as a secondary emendation to balance the immediately preceding phrase, τί φάγητε (cf. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1–7* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 646). This would create continuity with verse 31, in which the two phrases are paired. The other variant is in verse 33, where τοῦ θεοῦ is used to describe the accusative τὴν βασιλείαν.

42 See Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 226

43 H. D. Betz, *Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plan. Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995) 65.

44 Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, 54–7.

45 Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 625–7.

46 J. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

below, Matthew's emphasis on heaven and earth should inform what we call the final section of the Sermon. In this section, the theme is particularly focused. The internal logic of Matt 6.19–7.12 examines the duality of heaven and earth. The section begins with the contrasting rewards of treasures on heaven and on earth (6.19–21). The next contrast is found in the healthy eye versus the evil eye (6.22–3), followed by the contrast between God and mammon (6.24). The section on worry and anxiety presents those who display earthly worries versus trust in the Father in heaven (6.25–34). Matt 7.1–5 is a bit more of a stretch but refers to the way we judge on earth and its relationship to injustice resulting in divine retribution. In verse 6, the 'sacred' and 'pearls' appear to be the message of the kingdom of heaven. The verses depict these words as being given to earthly apostates who will reject the message ('dogs'/'pigs'). Finally, verses 7–11 explain the relationship of the Father in heaven to those on earth who 'seek' him.

Given the above parallels and the inner logic of heaven and earth, the question remains, why is this section of the Sermon so disjointed in comparison with the other sections of the Sermon's body (5.21–6.18)? Although the origin and explanation of source material is beyond the scope of this article, the difficulty of structuring Matt 6.19–7.12 may be due to Matthew's source material. Matthew may have structured the section as 'tightly' as possible without betraying the integrity of the material. Table 4 shows how Matthew and Luke handled their sources. Luke retains the same ordering as Matthew in regard to the Sermon's conclusion (Matt 7.13–8.1//Luke 6.43–7.1).[47] The teachings on judging and the Golden Rule are juxtaposed in both Sermons but inverted in their order. As the table illustrates, the majority of Matt 6.19–7.11 is distributed throughout Luke in other chapters. Notwithstanding the source-critical question, it appears from that evidence that Matthew is aiming to keep the material together (even among the perceived 'rag-bag') in his latter section whereas Luke distributes his to be included as thematic parallels with other sections throughout his Gospel.[48] We can infer from this ordering that Matthew recognised, recorded and enhanced the traditions at his disposal.

---

47 Although the first half of the Sermon's ordering is not displayed, the beginning halves of each Sermon show significantly more overlap/ordering.

48 The source-critical discussion is difficult at this point. My own inclination would be to see Luke as drawing from Matthew's overall Sermon or a source similar to Matthew's ordering. Of course, the opposite could be argued: that Matthew redacted Luke's material for his own thematic purposes. In this latter case, the point would strengthen my overall case concerning Matthew's intentions to 'bring together' this section of the Sermon, but absolute certainty is difficult to substantiate. For more on this issue, see D. Wenham, 'The Rock on Which to Build: Some Mainly Pauline Observations about the Sermon on the Mount', *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. D. M. Gurtner and J. Nolland; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 187–206.

Table 4. The Sermon's Order in Matthew and Luke

Matthew's SM	Luke's SP	Broad outline
6.19–7.12		
6.19–21	12.33–4	
6.22–3	11.34–6	
6.24	16.13	
6.25–34	12.22–32	
7.1–5 (13.12)	6.37–42 (8.18)	On judging
7.6		
7.7–11	11.9–13	
7.12	6.31	Golden Rule
7.13–27		
7.13–14	13.23–4	
7.15		
7.16–20 (12.33–5)	6.43–5	Fruits
7.21	6.46	'Lord, Lord'
7.22–3	13.25–7	
7.24–7	6.47–9	Two builders
7.28–8.1		
7.28a	7.1	Conclusion
7.28b–29	4.32	
8.1		

3.3   *Heavenly Priorities in the Kingdom of Earth*

On having surveyed the flow of Matt 6.19–7.12 and drawn conclusions from the parallels with 5.21–48, one additional matter remains. Not only has the structure of Matt 6.19–7.12 caused problems for the Sermon interpreter, but also the perceived randomness has caused division over nomenclature. Following the lead of Allison, many interpreters simply call Matt 6.19–7.12 'Social Issues'. Allison finds a historical parallel in the writings of Simeon the Just after the events of Jamnia: 'Upon three things the world standeth: upon Torah, upon Temple service and upon deeds of loving-kindness (*m. 'Abot*

1.2)'.[49] Allison states: 'The first evangelist, one is tempted to conclude, arranged his discourse so as to create a Christian interpretation of the three classical pillars'.[50] In other words, Matthew's account of Jesus' teaching is a counter-Jamnia in an effort to understand their new life moving away from Judaism.

This interpretation has some appealing elements but is difficult to establish with certainty. The subject matter in the relevant sections consists of issues common among first-century Jews, making the parallels difficult to substantiate. The parallels with Simeon the Just and Jamnia are equally difficult without any direct references.[51] Luz has pointed out that Allison's parallel of Matt 6.1–18 to the Temple is also unclear.[52] This critique would cause further harm to Allison's historical parallels. As I have shown, Matt 6.19–7.12 has a strong financial theme, an emphasis on rightly placed priorities and an emphasis on heaven and earth.

Pennington has recently argued that a better title for 6.19–7.12 is 'Greater Righteousness in Relation to the World'.[53] Matt 6.19–21 functions as the introduction. Matt 6.22–34 describes relations to the goods of this world, while 7.1–6 describes relations to the people of this world. Matt 7.7–12 serves as the conclusion. Pennington uses the major theme introduced in 5.17–20 and reiterated in 6.1 to emphasise 'greater righteousness' and uses the two major themes in 6.19–7.6 to split this section into two. I mention this suggestion because Pennington's methodology and, further, nomenclature are similar to mine yet with some revision.

A possible explanation for the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount may be found in the Lord's Prayer. The justification for this connection lies in the centrality of the Lord's Prayer to the Sermon. The third petition reads, 'your will be done on earth as in heaven'. The emphasis of this petition is an ethical exhortation to live in a heavenly way while on earth. The one engaged in prayer petitions God for the power to do so. In many ways, Matt 6.19–7.12 is an answer to the petition's request. How can we make God's will known on earth? By following the prescriptions of this last section, the eschatological future meets the eschatological now and vice versa. Matt 6.19–21 functions as an eschatological *kelal* which

---

49 The reference to 'deeds of loving-kindness' is a translation decision by Allison based on the work of J. Goldin. Cf. J. Goldin, 'The Three Pillars of Simeon the Righteous', *PAAJR* 27 (1958) 43–56. Goldin summarises that the three areas that matter most are the law, the cult and the social acts of benevolence.

50 Allison, 'Structure of the Sermon on the Mount', 443.

51 C. Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985) 299–301 comments: 'The disentanglement of the relationship between the Christians and the rabbis of Jamnia is a task which still awaits completion, though, of course, the paucity of information at our disposal makes the completion of it a very difficult enterprise.'

52 Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 172–3.

53 Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 132.

becomes more grounded in what follows (6.22–7.12). Jesus gives instruction on accumulating heavenly treasure while on earth. This accumulation of treasure means an earthly life which avoids duplicity (6.22–3), resists the enslavement of money (6.24) and relies on the Father for the earthly needs of food, drink and clothing (6.25–34). Additionally, disciples reflect the Father when they judge but do not condemn (7.1–5), guard the Gospel against apostasy (7.6), seek the Father persistently and trust in his provision, and treat others with the Father's love (7.12). Thus, this final section details 'Heavenly Priorities in the Earthly Kingdom'.[54]

 This title draws attention to the dialogical and spatial aspects of Matt 6.19–7.12.[55] The proposed title intends to reflect the relationship between the Father and the supplicant. First, by using the language of the Lord's Prayer, the Sermon's sections are read in light of the Prayer's centrality and according to the nature of the Prayer.[56] It also appears significant that this section of the Sermon ends with prayer (Matt 7.7–11). Second, the doing of God's will and the coming of God's kingdom (i.e. prayer language) are executed in the realm which will be the new heaven and the new earth. God's will has been accomplished in heaven and the disciples' interim lifestyle on earth reflects that accomplished reality. Obedience to the Father in heaven is a reflection of being part of the family of God while on earth. Third, the suggested title takes into account the structure proposed here with Matt 6.19–21 ('treasures on earth/heaven') as a *kelal* dictating the theme for what proceeds.

54 One may object that this proposed title is too general and could just as easily apply to the entire Sermon. First, this critique could be used to undermine common titles used to describe Matt 5.17–48 ('Jesus' Teaching on the Law') and Matt 6.1–18 ('Practice of Proper Piety'). Generally speaking, the entire Sermon is about Jesus interpreting the Law and proper piety, yet there are specific *kelals* in these respective sections (5.17–49//6.1) which require the section's theme. Second, the concentration of heaven/earth references is more present in Matt 6.19–7.12 than in other sections.

55 For an alternative explanation, consider W. C. Mattison III, *The Sermon on the Mount and Moral Theology: A Virtue Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2017) 161–203. Mattison makes a similar argument to the one suggested here but builds his structure around the theme of single-mindedness. Because of his concerns with Thomistic moral theology, the aforementioned virtue becomes the guiding factor for his structural proposal. Further, Mattison (op. cit., 163) states: 'The verses examined in this chapter are unified by the theme of seeking first the kingdom and its righteousness, with the ensuing impact of such prioritization on all other activities of the disciple.' His suggestion is not opposed to my own, but rather highlights different aspects of this section. Mattison argues for an ordering of priorities and single-minded devotion to those priorities. I am assuming these insights and seeking to add a dialogical and spatial element with recourse to clues offered by the Lord's Prayer.

56 The Prayer's centrality is conceded by Pennington, but he only mentions this significance without expounding upon the insight (*Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 131–2).

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has set about the task of analysing the structure of Matt 6.19–7.12. In so doing, I have argued that, where most have seen disorder and randomness, Matthew has intended structure. I have attended to some of the more helpful structural proposals before drawing my own conclusions. My own proposal is marked by internal structuring, thematic consistency and verbal patterning. Chief among these markers is Matthew's effort to use his source material faithfully by applying the same editorial genius found in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Although the subjects which Matthew brings together in this final section of the Sermon's body are varied, I have suggested that the Sermon is giving the disciples instruction on how to have heavenly priorities while on earth. The petitioner who prays 'Father, your will be done on earth as in heaven' then is given direction and answers to his prayers by following the imperatives of Matt 6.19–7.12.