

Matthew 25 Articles

August 2023

George Strong: Matthew 25 and Christian Science Nursing

In my mid-20s, I began studying Christian Science. Yes, I had been to Sunday School for many years, and yes, I had been healed through prayer, but up to that time, I had not been an earnest student of Christian Science.

After spending a few years in a rural community, however, I began to realize how much I had been blessed by the prayers of my mom and her friends. I felt strongly that I wanted to do something to repay a debt of gratitude to Christian Science.

Then one Christmas, my Mom and her friend visited me, and during a conversation one of them suddenly said “You should be a Christian Science nurse,” and I thought to myself: “That’s my answer.” Two months later, I was working as a Christian Science nurse at Fern Lodge. Soon after, I began training at a nearby facility. Three years later, I returned to Fern Lodge, was listed in *The Christian Science Journal* as a Christian Science nurse, and have been at Fern Lodge ever since.

What attracted me so strongly to Christian Science nursing? Well, nursing is a vital component of Christianity. For example, in the parable of the Samaritan, Christ Jesus describes the tender care given to a wounded man and the provision made for on-going care at a ‘facility’ for as long as this might be needed. At the end of this parable, Jesus told his followers: “Go, and do thou likewise” (see Luke 10).

Several years ago, I was wondering why Mrs. Eddy asked us, twice a year, to study the topic “Everlasting Punishment.” To my surprise, I realized that the phrase “everlasting punishment” appears only once in the King James Bible. In Matthew 25:46, we read: “And these [the goats] shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous [the sheep] into life eternal.”

Mrs. Eddy was a student of the Bible. Surely, she knew the source of the term “everlasting punishment.” Clearly, she chose the topics for the Bible Lessons carefully. So I asked: “What is it about Matthew 25 that merits our collective attention twice each year?”

The answer is simple. Matthew 25:31-46 presents us with a clear choice: we either help each other and thereby enter into life eternal, or we neglect each other “go away into everlasting punishment.”

In this key parable, Jesus speaks of a king who is separating the sheep from the goats. To the sheep, he says: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in.” The sheep are confused and ask the king when they did these things. He replies: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” To the goats, he then says: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire...: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in

prison, and ye visited me not.” The goats are confused and ask when they failed to do these things. The king answers: “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” The goats are then condemned to “everlasting punishment,” but the righteous are blessed with “life eternal.”

When Mrs. Eddy asked the Bible Lesson Committee to construct lessons on the subject “Everlasting Punishment,” did she know that she was requiring us to ponder twice each year Christ Jesus’ demand to help each other in practical, simple, humane ways? According to our Master, simple acts of kindness — giving food, drink, and clothes, taking in the needy, visiting those who are held captive — are essential to our salvation. Understood spiritually and put into practice, Jesus’ parable provides a simple model of Christian Science nursing. This is our salvation. We invite you to join us in this holy work.

Letter from our Administrator

By Brad Stock

George and I have been discussing Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25 for quite a few years. Recently, we have been asking: What would it mean to be a "Matthew 25 facility"? What would that commitment look like in practice? We have put together a short checklist that may suggest the essence of Matthew 25 in an organizational setting. The list is incomplete, but represents our conviction that the teachings of Matthew 25 should be put into practice here at Fern Lodge comprehensively, intentionally, consciously. Only in this way can we achieve the full potential of Christian Science nursing.

As an ideal, we believe a "Matthew 25 facility" should be:

Unswervingly Christian. We will strive to ensure that our every thought, motive, deed is radiant with divine Love, that we imbibe the spirit of Christ, that we remain grounded in the teachings and demonstrations of Christ Jesus, that we are willing to give our all for Christ.

Committed to Christian Care. We will strive to love each other in practical ways that meet the human need and lift each other Spiritward. Above all, we will strive to witness each other's spiritual identity as a beloved child of God.

Dedicated to fellowship in Christ. We will strive to live increasingly in harmony with God, His Christ, the Holy Spirit, and each other. This sense of Christian comradery, of brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ, is the essence of genuine Christianity. This true fellowship brings healing.

Several years ago, when speaking of Matthew 25, George said: "Feeding, giving drink, clothing, visiting, and comforting, all lead to salvation. This is nursing." And humanly, this is exactly what Christian Science nursing is. However, Christian Science nursing is more than that — it is holy work. Ideally, the Christian Science nurse is filled with a love so clear that it has a healing effect, physically and morally. Our commitment to putting Matthew 25 into practice is a requirement of salvation. Neglecting our duty of Christian care opens the way to perdition. It is that simple — and that important. And that is why we at Fern Lodge are striving to become more fully a "Matthew 25 facility."

To be clear: I strongly support Fern Lodge's healing ministry and the contribution it has made over many years to our collective understanding of Christian Science nursing and an expansive sense of home, community, family, and care. My mother was a patient at Fern Lodge for about five years and benefitted greatly. My son worked here for ten years, growing humanly and spiritually. George Strong and I have been friends for over twenty years and collaborated on many projects, enjoying an expansive dialogue. I look forward to witnessing the next phase of Fern Lodge's healing ministry and am grateful that George remains engaged with the work.

November 2023

Demonstration of God's Constant Care

by George Strong

Hello again, dear friends! In our most recent *Fern Lodge Focus*, one article ended with our invitation for you to join us in the holy work that is Christian Science nursing. Of course, we will welcome anyone who is led in prayer to learn and practice Christian Science nursing as their calling and profession. But our invitation was for much more than that.

We have been giving regular, deep consideration of the lessons Christ Jesus shared. It seems apparent that he was giving his followers the clear, thorough, and focused teaching that would enable them, both individually and collectively, to follow his example—to “heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons,” just as he had been doing throughout his life.

Through the years at Fern Lodge, we have thought deeply about the place of Christian Science nursing in The Mother Church, in our branch churches, and in the individual practice of Christian Science healing, helping and healing all mankind. Of course, we have sought and found encouragement and inspiration in the Bible, and especially in the Gospel accounts of the teachings of Christ Jesus. There is much to be gained from the parable of the Good Samaritan, in Luke 10. We have prayed for ourselves to be careful of the thinking of the priest and the Levite—who were the authorities of their day—as they saw the man in need and “passed by on the other side.”

But a Samaritan, a stranger from a different culture, “had compassion on him, and went to him, pouring in oil and wine, and...brought him to an inn, and took care of him.” What’s more, he paid all the costs, and said to the host, “Take care of him, and whatever else you spend, I will repay you when I come back this way.” The final words Jesus shared in this story were, “Go and do the same.”

In Matthew, chapter 25, we learn that Jesus’ counsel was more than just a pretty good idea. Jesus says, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

All people. All of us. What’s the difference between the sheep and the goats? Well, it’s pretty easy. Here’s what Jesus said:

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

Jesus also clearly said that there is a reward when we care for others. “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Feeding hungry people, giving thirsty people drink, taking in those who need a home, giving clothes to those who need them, caring for the sick, and visiting people in prison. Each of these simple activities are aspects of nursing. And these are what earn us the blessing of living in “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” I won’t say much about it here, but also in Matthew 25 we learn that refusing to give people what they need leads to the condemnation, “these shall go away into everlasting punishment.”

Fern Lodge is, and always has been, dedicated to caring for others, in demonstration of God’s constant care for everyone. Recently, we’ve been thinking of Fern Lodge as a Matthew 25 facility—a place where Christian, scientific care is given in support of those who are trusting in Christian Science for healing, right now.

When we invited you to join us in the holy work that is Christian Science nursing, this is what we meant: expressing Christian Science every day with simple acts of helping each other. We love serving our fellow women and men who are helped by Christian care that supports Christian Science healing. And we love everyone who supports us in our work and who cares for others in their own communities and branch churches. Thank you!!!

Letter from our Administrator

Witnessing the Light

By Brad Stock

Recently, a Christian Science nurse asked me to explain the difference between a practitioner and a Christian Science nurse. I once heard a simplistic answer: A Christian Science nurse is a practitioner who does windows. At a certain level, this is true, for a Christian Science nurse is a hands-on worker who meets practical human needs. But we deserve a deeper answer.

The core duty of every Christian Scientist is the same—we are all called to be spiritual witnesses, to be windows through which the light of Christ shines. Such radiant witnessing brings healing.

Mrs. Eddy makes this clear on p. 295 in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*:

The manifestation of God through mortals is as light passing through the window-pane. The light and the glass never mingle, but as matter, the glass is less opaque than the walls. The mortal mind through which Truth appears most vividly is that one which has lost much materiality—much error—in order to become a better transparency for Truth. Then, like a cloud melting into thin vapor, it no longer hides the sun.

Both the practitioner and nurse are spiritual witnesses. Each lovingly strives to see a patient's spiritual identity. In addition, the Christian Science practitioner and nurse are windows through which the light of Christ enters a sickroom. In that sense, the Christian Science nurse and practitioner have overlapping roles. Their offices differ, but both should be spiritual witnesses and radiant transparencies for divine Love.

In recent years, it is increasingly clear that a Christian Science nurse's "primary role" is to witness a patient's spiritual individuality, as Eva Hussey noted in 2008: "Christian Science nurses . . . have every expectation of seeing the patient from a spiritual basis, the man of God's creating. . . . [T]he primary role of the Christian Science nurse . . . is to witness to each patient's innate spiritual identity." ("A Quiet, Mighty Band of Healers," *Christian Science Journal*, May 2008).

Thus, a Christian Science nurse's primary duty is to witness a patient's spiritual identity while taking proper care of their own thought, thereby becoming a transparency for divine Love—and this form of Christian care must have a practical, healing effect. Likewise, the heart of a practitioner's work is to witness the patient spiritually while reflecting the irradiance of divine

Love—and such loving witnessing can heal instantly. There remains, however, a significant distinction in the roles of the Christian Science practitioner and nurse. The practitioner gives direct metaphysical treatment to patients through Christian Science, while the Christian Science nurse provides excellent physical care and supports a patient’s spiritual growth.

Mrs. Eddy also makes it clear that spiritual witnessing must always have a direct healing effect. In one of the most fundamental passages in *Science and Health*, she says:

Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man [spiritual witnessing], who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals. In this perfect man the Saviour saw God’s own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick. Thus Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is intact, universal, and that man is pure and holy. (p. 476)

In the words that Christ Jesus spoke to each one of us: “Go and do thou likewise. . . .”

February 2024

Yoke of Christ

By Brad Stock

As we continue to consider the meaning of Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25, we may well ask what it means to be a sheep in Christ's flock. In Matthew 11, Jesus tells us:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (v. 29, 30)

What is Christ's yoke? And why should we want to wear it?

According to the 1913 Webster's dictionary, a yoke is "a frame of wood fitted to a person's shoulders for carrying pails, etc., suspended on each side; as, a milkmaid's yoke." At first glance, a yoke seems like a heavy thing, something that will burden us or weigh us down. But that can't be Jesus' meaning, for he says that his "yoke is easy," his "burden is light." He promises that if we wear his yoke, we will "find rest." We will find peace and harmony for our souls [spiritual sense].

What might this mean? A yoke has two ends and helps us bear twin burdens. In this passage, Jesus tells us that we will learn two things when we wear his yoke: what it means to be meek and what it means to be "lowly in heart" [humble].

Jesus was extraordinarily meek and humble. Mrs. Eddy says he "was the meekest man on earth" (MW 163). She also says that his "humble prayers were deep and conscientious protests of Truth" (SH 12), and she quotes his statement: "Whosoever... shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mis. 337).

Jesus' beatitudes clarify the relationship between meekness and humility. The third beatitude reads: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." This beatitude clearly pairs with the first, which reads: "Blessed are the poor in spirit [humble]: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Taken together, these beatitudes point the way to the kingdom of heaven on earth.

But if this is true, why would Jesus imply that meekness and humility are a yoke? To mortal thought, meekness and humility are heavy burdens, for they require a denial of mortal self.

What might meekness and humility mean in the example of Jesus' life? Meekness includes a quality of submission, as can be seen in Jesus' statement, "Not my will, but Thine be done." Humility includes a modest assessment of one's own ability, as can be seen another of Jesus' statements: "I can of mine own self do nothing." To this, he later adds: "But with God all things are possible." These statements suggest a Christlike standard of meekness and humility. In this sense, these qualities are in fact the lightest burden, for they allow us to lay down the heavy burdens of a mortal sense of material ego and self. Christ's two-sided yoke aligns us fully with God. We then find peace, a lighter sense of being, find rest for our souls.

How does this insight relate to Christian Science nursing? A genuine Christian Science nurse should be, above all things, genuinely meek and humble, willing to walk fully in the Way of Christ, wholly submissive to God's will. The genuine Christian Science nurse knows she can do nothing without God. In this humility and meekness, the true Christian Science nurse finds peace and brings peace to her patient. The Christian Science nurse finds true rest in active obedience to Christ, and the work then approximates the restful action of God on the seventh day of creation, when He saw everything He had made and knew that it was "very good" — truly good, irrevocably good. A Christian Science nurse who bears witness to God's creation in this way will have a healing effect on all those around her. The Christian Science nurse who bears Christ's yoke is blessed and will be a blessing.

This then is Christ's work. This is Christ's yoke. This is what it means to be a sheep in Christ's flock. We thereby receive the blessing Christ bestows on his sheep in Matthew 25, on the sheep who willingly serve Christ's flock. Meekness and humility signify the complete dominion of heaven here on earth. Meekness and humility set us free.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:29, 30)



— Matthew 25 —