

# Three Teachings on Compassion

Largely Ignored by Christians, Jesus' Own Words on Key Subjects  
Present an Insightful and Workable Approach  
for Creating a More Compassionate World

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*5667 words, plus notes*

While doing research for a secular book on the human condition – The Paradise Paradigm: On Creating a World of Compassion, Freedom, and Prosperity – I was reminded of the insight that [many religions](#) bring to fundamental issues of life. Although not a believer or member of any religion, I appreciate truth about the human condition wherever I find it.

In particular, I was impressed anew with three important teachings that Jesus is clear about yet which have been largely ignored or misunderstood. Heavy emphasis on an afterlife in the Christian community means that direct, core quotations<sup>1</sup> from Jesus on real-world topics are de-emphasized and even denied by many Christians, at least in a practical sense. In addition, harsher Old Testament advice on child-rearing, predating Jesus by as much as a thousand years or more, seems to carry more weight with many Christians than do the words of Christ himself.

This matters, because these oft-ignored passages comprise both an insightful *diagnosis* of the human condition and an accurate *prescription for the cure* of that condition. Together, they make up an amazing (if mostly unused) gift to mankind. Any person of good will can appreciate, make use of, and benefit from these teachings.

The subjects involved are:

**The nature and importance of children, and how they should be treated.**

**The nature and actual location of the kingdom of God.**

**Jesus' own definition of discipleship** – which also points to the **defining issue of Jesus' ministry: love**. This issue is the least ignored and denied of the three, but still gets too-little attention and seems widely misunderstood.

Lack of understanding on these issues, and lack of fidelity to Jesus' teachings about them, has gravely harmed the Christian movement almost from the

beginning. Misperception of these issues has been fostered by many church organizations, governments, and other centers of Power, to Power's benefit and to the great harm of people who might have otherwise benefited from the teachings of Jesus.

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### **Children: precious examples for adults**

Jesus' comments on children are passionate and eye-opening, and form the **first** of three pillars in his approach to healing the human condition. Here are six well-known verses from *Matthew* on the topic:

*Matthew:*

18:1 *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

18:2 *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,*

18:3 *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

18:4 *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

18:5 *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*

18:6 *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

Clearly, Jesus saw *children as examples for adults, not the other way around*. This approach is counter-intuitive for many people, who have been raised with coercive methods and taught that children must, in essence, be broken like horses. Jesus' own disciples did not understand Jesus' approach to children, as *Mark 10:14* makes clear. Pointing out that children are mistreated (offended) is the first part of the *diagnosis* that Jesus makes about the unhealthy state of the human condition; insisting that followers treat children with compassion and respect (as opposed to offending them) and plainly stating that adults must "be converted, and become as little children" is the first element of the *cure*.

Consider the context for all this: The level of emotional and physical violence in Jesus' day against both children and adults was horrifying, as suggested by incidents in Jesus' parables, by other incidents related in the New Testament, and by the ruling regime's common use of torture (often with a spiked whip called a scourge) and execution, typically by crucifixion. These brutal, drawn-out

murders were committed in public, in full view of both adults and children. Jesus' doctrine of love and compassion was shockingly at odds with this nightmarish reality and was clearly a threat to the power elite.

Regarding *Matthew 18:6* – what does Jesus mean about “little ones which believe in me”? Not a single child knew of Jesus only a few years before; can anyone believe Jesus felt it was unimportant if those children had been mistreated? During Jesus' lifetime and for centuries after the crucifixion, most children on Earth did not know Jesus had ever existed. Again: are we to believe Jesus would not have cared that so many of those children would grow up abused, molested, beaten, neglected, treated with emotional cruelty, or otherwise “offended?”

I find it impossible to see Jesus as so callous. Other comments by Jesus (the verses from *Mark* below, for instance) confirm that Jesus was *on the side of children, period*. *Matthew 18:6* makes sense to me only if I take Jesus' comment to mean “children who have not yet had the life and loving nature crushed out of them” – that is, children who have not yet become as adults typically are; *children, in other words, who are living examples of Jesus' teachings*. Millions of people today would agree that inflicting emotional damage on a child – turning a once-healthy young soul into a repressed and miserable neurotic – is the worst of all possible sins; *the sin from which all others grow*, in fact. Jesus apparently had a similar view, despite modern language and concepts being different from those of two thousand years ago.

It is no surprise that many Christians differ from Jesus in their views of children; as I said earlier, even the disciples, who spent time with Jesus in person, did not understand Jesus' teachings on this topic. This is yet another reason to believe that mistreatment of children was the norm in that place and time – as it has always been and as it remains in most places today.

Here are the passages in *Mark* where Jesus corrects his disciples on their view of children:

*Mark:*

10:13: *And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.*

10:14: *But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

10:15: *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

The brevity of these verses does not diminish their power or importance. Jesus was not easily angered, but he was “much displeased” at the way his own disciples were treating children. The disciples were not hitting or yelling at children, *but were merely treating children as less important than adults; treating children as if they were an intrusion on Jesus’ time*. If even *that* angered Jesus, the shocking comment in *Matthew 18:6* (“. . . *it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*”) becomes more understandable. (Jesus never actually drowned anyone for offending a child, of course, and it seems perfectly clear that he was using a vivid image as a parable to drive a point home – something he did often – not suggesting a literal action to anyone).

The lesson Jesus imparts so passionately here is that children must be treated with love, with compassion, and with *respect*. Adults have no business trying to change children into little adults or trying to otherwise “improve” children; *it is the adults who need improving, not the children*.

I would guess that many readers believe Jesus’ teachings on children are unreasonable or unworkable. In fact, they are neither. As I discuss later in this essay, the approach to children suggested by Jesus’ teachings is far more practical than the less loving and respectful methods typically used both today and in the past, and the *results* of non-coercive, respectful, and compassionate treatment of children are dramatically *better* than what one gets from less healthy methods.

### **Heaven: can’t find it if you don’t know where to look**

This brings us to the **second** pillar of Jesus’ *diagnosis* and *prescription* for the human condition: his teaching on ***the nature and location of the kingdom of God***. (“Heaven” and the “kingdom of God” generally [have the same meaning](#) in the Bible; see also *Matthew 18:3* and *18:4* above). Jesus not only answers this important question directly and clearly, he also tells his followers *not* to look elsewhere for the kingdom. *Luke* quotes Jesus<sup>2</sup> as follows:

*Luke:*

17:21 *Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

It is remarkable how little weight Jesus’ own words on this subject seem to have in the Christian community; neither the [New Advent Online Catholic Encyclopedia](#) nor the [WikiPedia article on Heaven](#), for instance, reference *Luke 17:21* when specifically discussing the location of heaven. Nor did searches for “where is the kingdom of God” at several “Christian questions” websites bring up any mention of *Luke 17:21*.

Interestingly, this verse is in harmony with several other religions; for example, it calls to mind the traditional Indian (Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain) greeting of [namaste](#): "I bow to the divine within you." The greeting goes with a gesture: hands pressed together in front of one's chest, and a subtle bow of the head and shoulders. Namaste makes perfect sense from the Christian viewpoint, if one takes Jesus' own words to heart: "*the kingdom of God is within you.*"

Note that by specifying the location of heaven as "within you", Jesus was also defining heaven (the kingdom of God) as an *inner state*. This inner state can only be one of deep emotional health, characterized by the ability to *love* – precisely what Jesus reveals (in *John* 13:34 – 35) as the central element of his own teachings. Looking for the kingdom of God elsewhere prevents one from looking in the right place: within one's own heart.

Much in the Bible suggests that heaven comes in an *afterlife*, of course. Whether one sees this as symbolic or literal, it is undeniable that Jesus saw heaven (the kingdom of God) as being "within you." Perhaps he meant this in a limited Earthly sense, but in *Luke* 17:21 Jesus does not qualify his statement in any way. Instead, this verse, as well as several others, suggests that Jesus saw heaven literally as a state of being within oneself, with the heaven of an afterlife as perhaps an extension of that. The state of being "as a little child" (*Mark* 10:15) was the critical factor, which made it more difficult for adults to find heaven than for children – *who were already there*.

*Mark* 10:15 is also intriguingly ambiguous. When Jesus says that one must "*receive the kingdom of God as a little child*" was he saying that how one is treated in childhood determines whether one lives in a state of [grace](#)? That would agree with Alice Miller's observations, including this passage from [For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence](#):

We admire people who oppose the regime in a totalitarian country and think they have courage or a "strong moral sense" or have remained "true to their principles" or the like. We may also smile at their naiveté, thinking, "Don't they realize that their words are of no use at all against this oppressive power? That they will have to pay dearly for their protest?"

Yet it is possible that both those who admire and those who scorn these protesters are missing the real point: individuals who refuse to adapt to a totalitarian regime are not doing so out of a sense of duty or because of naiveté but because they cannot help but be true to themselves. The longer I wrestle with these questions, the more I am inclined to see courage, integrity, and a

capacity for love not as “virtues,” not as moral categories, but as the consequences of a benign fate. (pp. 84 – 85)

The “benign fate” Miller is speaking of is simply a warm, loving infancy and childhood, which allows the child to retain and develop emotional health, compassion, strength of self and character, and a sense of connection to others.

A more common interpretation of *Mark* 10:15, which certainly fits with *Matthew* 18:3, is that an adult could enter the kingdom of God if the adult were able to regain essential child-like qualities, such as openness to love and to feeling generally, and – once again – a vivid and compassionate sense of connection with others.

Perhaps Jesus would have agreed with both interpretations. It is true beyond doubt that how people are treated in the earliest months and years of life determines much of their character and quality of life in adulthood.<sup>3</sup> “Sensitive dependence on early conditions” is a powerful reality in human life, and whatever early trauma we suffer affects us for the rest of our lives. Some adults, however, are balanced at a point where they can go either way; their emotional damage is not so deep as to preclude opening back up to feeling (and thus to love) if given the right help. For them, becoming “as a little child” again is still possible to some degree, and Jesus’ teachings were meant, I believe, *to have exactly that effect*.

Ministry-as-therapy fits perfectly with the assertion that “the kingdom of God is within you.”

### **Discipleship and the central importance of love**

Further supporting this belief is the **third** pillar of Jesus’ diagnosis and prescription: *the need for more love in the world*. Strong emphasis on **the importance of love** is the signature issue of Jesus’ ministry. For example, consider one of the best-known quotations we have from Jesus:

*John:*

13:34 *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*

13:35 *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

You might argue with that definition of “Christian” (plenty of self-described Christians do) but understand *who* it is you are arguing with.

The commandment that we should "love one another" is echoed in other religions; for example, the ancient principle of [ahimsa](#) (again, Hindu, Jain, Buddhist; also spelled [ahinsa](#)) commands non-violence and respect for all life. There is a good reason why love is a central thread in so many religions and philosophies. As Benjamin Disraeli put it:

*We are all born for love. It is the principle of existence, and its only end.*

Love is literally the reason we are here on Earth; love brings us together to create new life and keeps us together to help shelter and nourish our offspring. We would die in infancy if someone did not love us at least enough to keep us alive, which is not a brief or easy task. Love is also the necessary lubricant and anti-corrosive for a free and open society, including for the market. Respect for others (an aspect of love) is necessary for people to reliably deal with each other honestly and without coercion. Indeed, love is the *only* real defense against the growth of evil in any society, no matter what the political framework.

Of course, coercive political frameworks themselves erode and destroy love, which is why coercive government has never worked well in the long term. Love and freedom require each other, and in many ways are [Yin and Yang](#) to each other.

One does not love other people by coercing them.

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It is clear that one need not be a traditional Christian to appreciate and strongly support Jesus' teachings on the importance of love. Likewise, many who are not traditional Christians would surely agree that "heaven" or "the kingdom of God" *is simply a healthy, loving inner state – or (socially) a world filled with healthy, loving people.* Jesus' flat assertion that adults must "become as little children" (as opposed to the *false* need for adults to *discipline* and *indoctrinate* children into becoming repressed and obedient adults), also seems natural and obvious.

**Taken as a whole, these three teachings amount to an open war on neurosis.** They suggest that one way to see the kingdom of heaven is as an emotionally healthy world, *here on Earth.* (See also *note 2* at the end of this essay).

Further support for that belief is peppered throughout the New Testament; for example in *Matthew 5:22*, Jesus says, "*But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.*" Being angry at someone *without cause*<sup>4</sup> is among the most common and visible

symptoms of neurosis, and among the most damaging; it plays a large role in transmitting neurosis down through time, from generation to generation.

Example: Dad has a rough day at the office, cannot express his anger toward the boss (Dad needs the job) and takes his anger out against Mom and the kids after getting home. Or, in more detail: Dad has a rough childhood, and after years of being neglected or spanked or treated coldly or being otherwise abused and offended, finds himself *angry in the present* whenever something sets off his old, unresolved childhood feelings. This makes him inappropriately angry in many situations. Without even thinking about it, Dad finds that people who are weak and cannot fight back make easy targets. Dad is thus able to express his anger, which feels good, but the anger never goes away since it is never connected with its real source. The same repressed anger from childhood powers new episodes of inappropriate anger in the ever-advancing present, right up until Dad's final coronary at age 62. By then, Dad's children have inflicted *their* childhood anger on an entirely new generation, who in turn are now inflicting similar emotional damage on Dad's grandkids.

I cannot read Jesus' teachings without seeing, in many of them, an insightful and direct attempt to improve the emotional health of those around him and of those who would come after. Jesus' attempt to save the world seems, to me at least, more than anything else an attempt to improve the human condition by *reducing emotional damage*.<sup>5</sup> The approach Jesus used was to focus on *love* as the most important of all commandments, to highlight the *nature and importance* of children, and to point out the obvious: that "the kingdom of God is within you."

*In other words, a more loving and healthy world **here on Earth** was, at the very least, a major part of the cause that Jesus willingly gave his life for.*

### **Love and freedom for children**

I do not see how it is possible to accept Jesus' teachings on love, on children, and on the nature and location of heaven, and still support the use of coercion *of any type* against children, any more than one could use Jesus' teachings to support home-invasion robbery, sexual assault, or other forms of coercion against *adults*. If anything, the quotations we have from Jesus strongly suggest that he would have been even *more* angry at the use of coercion against children – "it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Can you hit or [spank](#) a child "to improve her behavior" non-coercively? No; such action *is* coercion, pure and simple, and yes: it is offensive. Can you force a child to attend school non-coercively? Again, no: force or threats of force are the essence of coercion. Can you non-coercively pressure a child to study subjects

he is not interested in? Once again, no: *offering* a course of study is one thing, but to pressure someone to study (or to do anything else) is to initiate coercion against them, subtly or otherwise.

Using coercion to prevent someone from *actively coercing another* is different – specifically, it is the *protection of the intended victim* – but the prohibition against *initiating* coercion (or substitutes for coercion, such as fraud) is a basic requirement for a healthy society, and was surely a major part of what Jesus was addressing when he spoke of the need to not offend children. (*Neglect* and *emotional cruelty* are two other components of un-love to children; both can easily be seen as “offenses”). Widespread coercion against children leads inevitably to a society characterized by coercion generally. Coercion and love are contradictory; *more of one means less of the other*.

The extremely good news is that *love and freedom for children work just as well as Jesus suggested they did* – a truth more Christians would do well to learn. Love and freedom work so well, in fact, that Jesus’ assertion that “*the kingdom of God is within you*” seems not merely understandable, but forehead-slappingly obvious.

For modern-day examples, visit the [Sudbury Valley School](#) site (and here’s an [article](#) about the school from the June 2006 *Psychology Today*) or read about [Summerhill School](#) in England. The British Government [report](#) on Summerhill from June 1949 (28 years after the school’s founding) is remarkable in its directness about the school’s approach and about the positive effects of that approach upon children. Compare the children as described here with what you find in a typical government school, or even in a typical private or religious school.

Sudbury was founded by Daniel Greenberg in 1968 to apply the same principles of compassionate freedom for children, and there are now several schools run on the Sudbury model around the world. It is worth noting that A. S. Neill, the founder and longtime headmaster of Summerhill School, made a clear distinction between *freedom* and *license*. Freedom cannot include the “right” to harm others or their property, for example. For freedom to work, it must include respect for the rights of others (this, of course, is one reason that freedom requires love). Sudbury Valley School likewise insists that all members of the school – staff and students alike – respect the rights of everyone else.

To give the reader a feel for how well freedom for children actually works, I will quote from the Summerhill report linked above, at some length because of the importance of this material and because the content will go against the expectations and prejudices of many:

"The main principle upon which the School is run is freedom. ... the degree of freedom allowed to the children is very much greater than the inspectors had seen in any other school and the freedom is real. No child, for instance, is obliged to attend any lessons. As will be revealed later, the majority do attend for the most part regularly, but one pupil was actually at this School for 13 years without once attending a lesson and is now an expert toolmaker and precision instrument maker. This extreme case is mentioned to show that the freedom given to children is genuine and is not withdrawn as soon as its results become awkward."

"... the children are full of life and zest. Of boredom and apathy there was no sign. An atmosphere of contentment and tolerance pervades the School."

"... the children's manners are delightful. They may lack, here and there, some of the conventions of manners, but their friendliness, ease and naturalness, and their total lack of shyness and self-consciousness made them very easy, pleasant people to get on with."

"...initiative, responsibility and integrity are all encouraged by the system and that so far as such things can be judged, they are in fact being developed."

"Summerhill education is not necessarily hostile to worldly success."

The report backs up that last point with a list of degrees held and careers followed by former pupils. Clearly, the lack of a "normal," coercive education has not harmed the children of Summerhill. Furthermore, the healthy, friendly character of Summerhill children sounds exactly like what Jesus sought to protect in children everywhere, does it not?

Speaking of both *religion* and *freedom for children*, the British Government Report also notes these children were, in essence, *living* Christian principles but not formally studying them:

"One other highly controversial matter must be mentioned here, the absence of any kind of religious life or instruction. There is no ban on religion, and if the school parliament decided to introduce it, it would presumably be introduced. Similarly, if an individual wanted it, nothing would be done to hinder him. The children all come from families which do not accept orthodox Christian doctrines, and in fact no desire for religion has ever been expressed. Without doing any violence to the

term it may safely be said that many Christian principles are put into practice in this School and that there is much in it of which any Christian can approve."

So, while not Christians in the traditional sense, the children of Summerhill in that June of 1949 were, once again, *living examples of Jesus' teachings*. They were friendly, responsible, natural, easy to be with, and full of life and zest. The children of Summerhill make clear why Jesus insisted that adults could *only* gain heaven by *finding a way back to the essence of childhood*; by becoming, in other words, "as little children."

Summerhill had protected and fostered the emotional health of these children. In particular, the school had provided freedom of thought and action, compassion, and the natural discipline that *only* comes from insisting that each person, adult or child, respect the rights of all others.

Based upon Jesus' own comments,<sup>6</sup> I feel certain that Jesus would have been enthusiastic about the free and compassionate environment that both Summerhill and Sudbury provide for children. *More than that: I believe Jesus would have found the school environment at Summerhill to be a literal example of heaven, in the Earthly, social sense of the term*. Certainly, such an environment would never lead to crucifying a human being for teaching the importance of love.

It is important to note that *forcing* any type of learning on children – including religious instruction – is offensive in the extreme, and honoring this truth is a central element in the success of Summerhill and Sudbury. Not only is there [no need for coercion](#); coercion in general is counterproductive and harmful. Christians, of all people, should understand that *living* the words of Jesus requires *not forcing* those words (or anything else) on others. That will seem a paradox to many, but there is no denying that initiating coercion against someone is the opposite of love. This is not to suggest that religious teaching be abandoned; only, once again, that it not be *forced* on anyone.

For Jesus' vision of a healthier world to become reality, more Christians, including those in the [Christian fundamentalist](#) movement, must adopt a truly Christian attitude, especially towards the young (some members, of course, [already have a similar attitude, including of non-violence towards children](#), but far from all). Non-violence is not enough, however: using even non-violent [coercion](#) against children certainly "offends" them, just as coercion offends adults.

*Love, not force*, was Jesus' message.

## Conclusion

Jesus' own words in the Bible make up only a fraction of even the New Testament<sup>7</sup> (which itself is far smaller than the Old Testament), yet these relatively few reported words of the religion's founder are too-often ignored by even devout Christians. That is a tragedy, because Jesus' teachings – especially about the world of the here-and-now – describe a very different and much healthier approach to life than one often finds among professed Christians.

The actual words of Jesus suggest, at least to this author, that Jesus' main interest may have been to "save the world" in a *secular* fashion, by fostering a widespread improvement in emotional health. Even if one believes this was a secondary interest for Jesus, it is undeniable that Jesus' teachings include much direct commentary about the here-and-now and about the human condition. Two thousand years before the modern (and still fledgling) field of psychology, Jesus understood that the world *needed* more love and compassion. More than that, Jesus understood not only the *problem* but also the *solution*. Jesus' teachings actually describe a *realistic method of creating a more healthy, loving, and peaceful world*.

The rapid growth of Jesus' flock during his brief ministry makes it clear that many other people of the time wanted a healthier, saner, more loving world as well – and many still do, because the desire for a world of love and compassion is built-in at the genetic level. It takes a lot of emotional damage to turn off that desire in a human being.

Both the widespread positive response to Jesus' teachings and the *darker*, violent response from the power elite of the day (and from emotionally damaged souls who were excited at seeing a blood spectacle) tell us much about the human condition. Specifically, they point to severe and widespread emotional damage among Jesus' contemporaries, and, once again, to the longing – among those still even slightly in touch with their real selves – for a more loving and compassionate world.

Is the world in better shape in this regard today than it was two thousand years ago? Recent history (including [two hundred and sixty-two million murders by governments in the twentieth century](#) *plus* dozens of [wars](#)) suggests not.

The Christian movement can help change that for the better, if enough of its members want to. Focusing on and *following* the words of Jesus would do the job.

Often persecuted in both [history](#) and the [present day](#) for, among other things, its *healthy* aspects, the Christian religion has nonetheless often failed to live up to

its founder's teachings. The [two-billion-plus](#) worldwide membership of this religion could have, and by rights *should be having*, a major, positive effect on the human condition. Unfortunately, many people focus on the apparent emotional damage of (for example) those [Christians who insist on harsh discipline](#) of children; on [child-abuse scandals](#) within the Catholic and other churches; on Christians who somehow think Jesus would look kindly upon their [supporting the evil of war](#) or [other violence to hasten the Second Coming](#); and on the beliefs and actions of other professed Christians whose personalities are largely opposite those of the children at Summerhill or Sudbury, or of still-healthy children anywhere.

The emotional damage so visible in many Christians is assuredly *not* the result of Jesus' teachings. It is the result of trauma inflicted upon the young, by parents and governments and organized religion and other sources of Power – as well as by (and here is the start of it all) the sheer harshness and cruelty of the natural world over much of this Earth: parched deserts, howling ice storms, multi-millennia-long ice ages, disease, hunger, accidents, predators, and other sources of discomfort, pain, fear, terror, infirmity, and death. In order that life might continue, our sensitive, big-brained ancestors became experts and prodigies at the *repression of feeling*. The uncomfortable twilight state of neurosis became our refuge, our haven, our purgatory, our hell.

Jesus wanted to *end* this hell, and was stunningly insightful about both the problem and the solution. Jesus wanted peace on Earth, and understood how such a thing could be brought about. Jesus knew that the need for a more compassionate world lived within every human heart; the rapid growth of his following is proof that he was right. This success terrified the power elite of Jesus' day, as it would in any place or time. The rich, the priests, the governors and bureaucrats and others who had gained power over others understood that *keeping* their power required *suppressing opposition to the idea of Power itself*. Power – that is, systematic initiated coercion, which by definition is *imposed* upon others by force or cunning – is diametrically opposed to compassion; Power requires not merely *ignoring* the suffering of others but often *inflicting* suffering. In stark contrast, compassion is an element of love, and involves *concern* for the suffering of others and a desire to alleviate that suffering.

The widespread and *expressed* desire for a free and compassionate world, combined with *insightful and peaceful action on behalf of that desire*<sup>8</sup> is, of course, the only true and effective threat to Power. No wonder Jesus was murdered.

My apologies for the bluntness of this paragraph, but painful truths are sometimes important: The weapon used to arrest, torture, and murder Jesus was, naturally, the coercive state – [murder being its most characteristic activity](#),

and *Power* being the essence of coercive government itself. Given that the wealthy and influential outside of government have so often bent government power to their own ends, it is hardly surprising that government's power to kill without legal consequence was sought and granted in this case. It was Roman soldiers, after all – not businessmen, [Pharisees](#), or others – who scourged Jesus, hammered in the nails, and left him to die on the cross – just as Roman soldiers crucified tens of thousands of other Jews over the years, before and after Jesus.

Will Jesus' followers finally understand his message well enough, and widely enough, to overcome coercive Power and actually create a healthier, more compassionate world? That may be the single most important question of our time, for [the coming of twenty-first-century technology](#) means that *overcoming Power with love* may soon be impossible, or at least far less likely. The time, in other words, is now.

Millions of Christians already *do* live in harmony with the words of Jesus, and [the world is a better place because they do](#). But bringing Jesus' vision of a dramatically healthier and more compassionate world to life will require that many more Christians (and, eventually, others as well) take Jesus' words on [love](#), on [children](#), and on the [nature and location of heaven](#) to heart, and act accordingly.

Would that they act soon.

### ***Notes, including further commentary***

**1.** We can only know Jesus' words as reported by others, of course. Then (centuries later), these reports were translated into English and other modern languages – a process with more difficulty and less precision than one might wish, as some of the Notes below suggest. For the purposes of this essay, I am assuming that the verses quoted here are authentic and accurately reflect Jesus' views. Certainly, these verses fit well and coherently with much else that Jesus is reported to have said – although not with everything, which suggests (among other possibilities) that some of the material was meant symbolically or that not all of it is authentic. In any case, we cannot “replay the videotape” or otherwise directly verify anything Jesus might have said or done.

**2.** Some translations use “among you” instead of, or in addition to, “within you.” This suggests that heaven may be seen as both the interior world of a healthy person **and** as a healthy society consisting primarily of healthy individuals. For example, here is [Luke 17:21 as it appears in the Amplified Bible at the Bible Gateway website](#):

*"Nor will people say, Look! Here [it is]! or, See, [it is] there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you [in your hearts] and among you [surrounding you]."*

The [Bible Gateway website](#), with **twenty** English translations (and many translations in other languages), provides an easy way to get a sense of how different the various translations of the Bible can be.

**3.** There is massive support for the assertion that early experience powerfully affects people for the rest of their lives. Physical health (including risks for cancer, heart disease, and other serious conditions) as well as emotional and behavioral problems are affected by early abuse or other distress. [Violence to children is still common worldwide](#), to name only a single category of such distress. A collection of related data from news and other sources may be found [here](#), and an article on the large Adverse Childhood Experiences study by Vincent J. Felitti, M.D. (including graphs for the stunning data) may be downloaded as a PDF file [here](#) (the title, for those reading this off-line, is "The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Health: Turning gold into lead").

**4.** Most versions I have seen of *Matthew* 5:22 omit the words "without a cause" – which, of course, completely changes the meaning. On the other hand, some translations mention "without cause" in a note. [The New American Standard](#) translation of the Bible includes a note at this point in the text that "Some mss. insert here: without cause." [The New International Version](#) adds a similar note. The [Amplified](#) translation adds a note stating: "Many ancient authorities insert 'without cause.'" These three translations, along with the King James version used in the body of this essay, are as published in [The Parallel Four Translation New Testament](#), *The Iversen-Norman Associates*, 1975. See also the Bible Gateway site in Note #2 above.

**5.** It may be that the **entire** essence of Jesus' message was aimed at creating a more emotionally healthy world, but we simply do not have enough material from Jesus (and none of it direct) to say, nor enough faith in the accuracy and completeness of what we do have. Certainly, there are reasons for believing that even the disciples sometimes lacked understanding of Jesus' teachings (for one thing, Jesus told them so; for example, see [Mark 7:17 – 7:18](#)). Various ways of interpreting what was written so many centuries ago also make it difficult to know Jesus' meaning with certainty in many parts of the New Testament, and of course there are other factors as well, including the possibility of outright fraud by those who may have changed or added to the texts to support their own agendas. Such real-life concerns underpin, for example, the fictional story of [The DaVinci Code](#).

**6.** See also this quotation from Jesus in *Matthew 7:18* – “*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*” The healthy, positive results of growing up at Summerhill School clearly show it to be a healthy, positive environment for children. I find it unthinkable that Jesus would wish to deny such an environment to any child.

**7.** For those interested in focusing on what Jesus is reported to have said – most of the Bible, of course, consists of other material – there are Bibles with Jesus’ words highlighted in red, including [some even for use with PDAs](#). In addition, there are (possible or probable) quotations by Jesus from other sources; for example, see [The Unknown Sayings of Jesus](#) by Marvin Meyer, which contains many quotations thought to be from Jesus collected from sources outside the Bible as we know it today. Meyer provides the source for each, extensive endnotes, and a discussion of the criteria used by various authorities in ascribing a quotation to Jesus. While none of the material can be proven authentic (as is also true of the quotations from Jesus in the Bible itself), Meyer points out in his Introduction that “Doubtless some of these unknown sayings reflect what the historical Jesus actually said, and this prospect is exciting indeed.”

**8.** The almost entirely non-violent 1986 overthrow of [Marcos](#) in the Philippines is a heart-lifting example of what can be done; see <http://www.stuartxchange.org/BeforeEdsa.html> for one particularly detailed account; see also <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0331-31.htm>. Tragically, but not surprisingly, the Philippine people merely installed another government rather than renouncing the use of coercive Power, and have been [suffering for that mistake](#) ever since, [in a variety of ways](#).

### Three Teachings on Compassion

September 11 -- October 30, 2006

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