

- c. Earthly-mindedness refers to the self-originating and self-referencing perspective, mindset, and orientation of every human being as he exists in his natural, estranged condition. An earthly mind is the mind of fallen man; it is the way he perceives, conceives, and interacts with all of life; it defines and determines his steps regardless of whether he is moral or immoral, religious or irreligious.

Whatever their spiritual interest and aptitude, whatever their religious zeal and devotion, human beings who haven't been born of the Spirit are earthly-minded. Such individuals may have great and preoccupying concern with spiritual matters, yet their spiritual interests and activities remain "earth-bound" because they are conceived and ordered through the perspective and priorities of a fallen mind.

Corresponding to this dynamic, the sons of Jesus' kingdom – those who share in His life as the Last Adam – are *heavenly-minded*. Earthly-mindedness encompasses the spiritual as well as the natural realms, and so it is with heavenly-mindedness: The sons of the kingdom perceive and so respond to every dimension of human existence with a new mind and understanding. Having been renewed in the likeness of Christ, they live their days possessing His mind by His indwelling Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:16). And this One who has renewed their humanity is also continuously transforming it into the likeness of the True Man, so that their duty of obedience to "walk in the Spirit" is their obligation to "*put on the new self, which in the likeness of God, has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth*" (ref. Ephesians 4:22-24; cf. Colossians 3:9-11; also Romans 8:29).

With respect to the present context, Jesus was continuing to reveal to His Jewish audience their own earthly-mindedness:

- Though genealogical sons of Abraham and "sons of the kingdom" by covenant heritage, the people of Israel had their "hearts and minds set on things on the earth" – not because they were immoral or uncommitted to the Law of Moses, the Scriptures, or God Himself, but because they, like the Gentiles, remained alienated from Him (Ephesians 4:17-18).
- They believed themselves to be heirs of Messiah's kingdom, but that kingdom is the realm and administration of the new creation, and its sons share in that renewal. Those who continue in their estranged, earthly-minded condition have no place in the kingdom and are utterly incapable of fulfilling its ethic. The ethic of the kingdom of heaven is the life of authentic sonship, and that obligation can be met only by those who are sons of the new creation – sons in the Son.

Many within Israel were sincerely and deeply committed to God and His Law, but the truth was that they were no better off than the heathen Gentiles they despised: They were equally enslaved by an earth-bound, self-referential and self-concerned mind; they, too, served the god of mammon and the religion of magic; they, too, needed to embrace the Messiah in faith if they were to enter His kingdom.

And so this context (6:25-34) continues Jesus' treatment of the kingdom's ethic in relation to earthly-mindedness. Various lines of connection have been proposed between this passage and what precedes it, but it is likely Jesus was speaking to an issue He knew His instruction would raise in the minds of His audience. He had called them to renounce treasure on earth and lay up heavenly treasure, but He knew they were hearing His words through "natural ears": They heard a man exhorting them to give no further attention to money or temporal provision, and this was a preposterous demand; *did He actually expect them to ignore (or deny altogether) the very real demands of life in this world?* God had given no such prescription in the Law, and this posture argued against nature itself. At minimum, human beings need food and covering to survive, and these bare essentials cannot be secured without some concern for "earthly treasure." To the earthly-minded man, Jesus' demand is impossible as well as patently absurd.

- 1) Jesus discerned the way the gathered multitude was processing His words, and so introduced this passage with an exhortation that effectively rebuked their wrong thinking. Rightly understood, He was indeed calling them to renounce their concern with earthly provision ("*stop worrying*") (6:25a). They weren't to be preoccupied with even the essentials of food and clothing, and the Lord reinforced this with a two-pronged argument from the greater to the lesser (6:25b):
  - Life itself is greater than the nourishment that sustains it and the physical body is greater than the covering that is essential to its well-being; if God has provided the greater things, won't He provide the lesser?
  - Isn't the Creator of physical life aware of the things necessary to sustain it? How foolish to conclude – even unconsciously – that God would bring forth His creatures only to overlook, neglect, or withhold the things essential to their continued existence.
- 2) The opening verse of the context presents Jesus' fundamental thesis, and He proceeded to illustrate and draw out implications from that thesis in the succeeding verses (6:26-30).
  - Jesus' first illustration involved the *birds of the air* and was directed at worry about food. As the crowd sat on the hillside they would have seen birds flying overhead, going about their business of collecting food for themselves and their young, and Jesus called them to consider how they live (6:26): Unlike men who are preoccupied with obtaining sustenance, birds don't plant and harvest crops. Moreover, they don't store what they gather in order to secure their future provision; *they implicitly trust their Creator to provide for their needs on a daily basis* (cf. Psalm 104:10-28).

From this illustration Jesus drew out an implication that amounts to an indirect *a fortiori* (“how much more”) argument (6:26b): If God provides for His flying creatures without any sort of strategic planning or strenuous labor on their part, how much more will He provide for the unique creature who alone bears His own image and likeness? And this is all the more the case for those whom He has reconciled and made beloved sons.

- And if God’s evident faithful provision for His creatures doesn’t sufficiently indict worry, human experience does: Every person who has lived any length of time recognizes that anxiousness and worry are profitless and utterly unproductive; worry is incapable of adding “a single cubit” to a person’s stature or life span (6:27). (This metaphorical expression likely refers to the inability of a human being to extend the journey that is his life.)

Worse than ineffective, worry is actually *counter-productive*. The reason is that it is a manifestation of earthly-mindedness, and the earthly mind is at odds with the way things really are. It is darkened to the truth and its sense of perception and judgment are perversely impaired. ***Not only is the earthly-minded man’s preoccupation focused on a future he cannot know or predict, it is directed toward matters he misperceives and outcomes (desired or expected) he misjudges.***

- In similar fashion, Jesus drew His second illustration from the *lilies of the field* (wildflowers) that dotted the hillside where the multitude were gathered. The preceding example concerned preoccupation with food, and this one makes the same point regarding clothing (6:28-29). It makes the same essential point, but it also *amplifies* it: If birds appear insignificant in the scheme of things, how much more the tiny wildflowers and blooming grasses of Galilee? A person walking along would hardly notice them; he could trample them underfoot and not even be aware of it. For the most part, these plants received attention only because of their usefulness for fueling the fire in Israelite ovens (6:30).

In the hierarchy of creation, the tiny, short-lived grasses and wildflowers have far less status than the birds of the air, and yet they carry out their existence in the same way: Like their flying counterparts, they live out their days free of fretfulness and arduous labor. In easy, effortless harmony with their Creator and His creation, they receive their provision from His earth, finding from His hand all that is needful to thrive and array themselves with a spectacle of texture, color and delicate beauty that surpasses even the most exquisite fabric ever manufactured by man.

And whereas the splendor and fineness of human fabrics and garments are undermined by closer inspection, even the scrutiny of a high power microscope only exposes further the intricate beauty and perfection of God's flowers.

- As before, Jesus followed His illustration with an obvious implication arising from it. It, too, is an *a fortiori* argument and it parallels its counterpart in 6:26b: If God is so concerned and careful to adorn His grasses and flowers with such splendid attire – though they spring up and die quickly, often without even being noticed, how much more will He clothe those He loves and cares for as their heavenly Father (6:30; cf. 7:9-11)?

- 3) Jesus' two illustrations and their corresponding implications call for an appropriate response, which is the response of *faith* (6:30b-31). How ironic that, of all God's creatures, the one who bears His own image and likeness is the only one that doubts and mistrusts Him! The creature that ought to have the greatest confidence in Him is the one that lacks it.

But more than the mere fact of this mistrust, Jesus was concerned with the reason for it. This issue stands as the focal point of the passage and corresponds to the thrust of the whole of the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus' gospel of the kingdom: ***Human distrust and disbelief are the result of human estrangement and the autonomy of self-isolation.***

Thus Jesus' exhortation is more profound and graver than simply a call to men to trust God for their food and clothing. Throughout the discourse, He has been highlighting the vast and vital distinction between His kingdom and the "kingdom of God" as envisioned by the earthly-minded, estranged sons of Israel, and the problem of earthly-mindedness continues to permeate His argumentation in the present passage:

- Preoccupation with securing the necessities of life isn't a quirky compulsion in certain people that can be overcome by new insight, a fresh commitment, and self-discipline.
- It is a core expression of the overall mindset and orientation of life that characterizes the human race in its alienation from God.

Those who are estranged from God cannot possibly trust Him (whatever their claims to the contrary), and their self-isolation leaves them no option but to look to themselves and their own strategies and resources to secure their own well-being. Continual, worrisome preoccupation with earthly concerns is nothing but the natural, spontaneous way of fallen man; in Jesus' words, "*all these things the Gentiles [that is, those who are alienated from God] relentlessly pursue*" (6:32a).

In this context, food and clothing (“all these things”) are a *synecdoche*; that is, they represent the totality of life’s necessities – the things that every human being understands to be vital to his existence. People recognize that they cannot live without certain provisions, and so find their days preoccupied with obtaining them.

- This is readily evident in more primitive cultures, but it is equally true in affluent, industrialized cultures. Americans may not spend their days hunting and foraging for food, but their daily activities still have their primary goal in securing the necessities of life.
- All people are united in this quest, but, in their alienation from God, they fail to consider that the One who created them also designed their biological and physical needs. God isn’t simply *aware* that they have need of food and covering; He *determined* that it would be so.

As with all of His creatures, God knows and supplies the needs of His image-bearers: He causes the sustaining, nourishing rains to fall on the righteous and unrighteous and “*satisfies the hearts of men with food and gladness*” (Matthew 5:45; Acts 13:14-17; cf. also Psalm 104:14-15). But, for the sons of the kingdom, the Creator has become their spiritual Father (6:32); if He provides for all men, how much more will He meet the needs of those whom He has reconciled to Himself and made sons?

If it is culpable unbelief for men to fret over their temporal necessities and give their days and energies to anxiously pursuing them, it is much more so for the sons of the kingdom who know their heavenly Father and have experienced His power and kind intention in His making them partakers in His new creation. Their own status as renewed and restored *sons* of the living God bears witness to His understanding of and provision for their need: He has met their greatest need by redeeming them from their bondage in the kingdom of darkness and bringing them into His everlasting kingdom; surely these sons of the kingdom can trust their Father to provide for their physical, temporal needs.

- 4) Because of who they are and what they know, Christians’ failure to trust their Father makes them more guilty than those who continue in their alienation and unbelief. Nevertheless, *all* people are obligated to abandon their distracting and profitless preoccupation with their lives in this world and look to their Creator-God to give them what is needful.
  - Christians do so as a normative part of their relationship with their heavenly Father. Living in the present already-but-not-yet state of God’s kingdom, they “seek His kingdom” by living as its sons *now* in view of the day of its consummation at the end of the age.

- All other men – including the self-confident Jewish multitude gathered around Jesus – do so by seeking the *true* kingdom which God promised in the Scriptures and entering it by virtue of the *authentic* righteousness that comes only through personal union with His Son (6:33; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21).

5) Jesus introduced this context by calling His hearers to renounce their obsession with providing for their life’s necessities (“*Stop being anxious for your life...*”). He then went on to show them by means of two illustrations that this anxiousness is as useless as it is unnecessary. But more than that, it was a spectacular testimony to their unbelief. What appears laudable to men as conscientiousness and good discipline is actually tangible evidence of mankind’s alienation from God and the darkness of the human heart. Having shown the multitude what earthly preoccupation really represents, Jesus forbade them to return again to it (“*Do not henceforth be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’*”).

For human beings, relentless concern with securing the well-being of their “tomorrow” is as natural and common as breathing.

- Being created in the divine image and likeness, people are conscious of a future beyond the present moment.
- But being creatures, they cannot secure future outcomes.

People can’t predetermine the future, but their consciousness of tomorrow and its needs nags at them and provokes their worry. Whatever their attitudes and actions, all human beings understand that “worry is a payment on a debt not yet incurred.” But, having no resource outside of themselves, their only option is to try to anticipate tomorrow and then labor under the delusion that they can secure its provision ahead of time. Though multitudes from the beginning of time have witnessed the truth that material riches can’t be trusted because they “make themselves wings” and fly away (Proverbs 23:4-5), it remains that people’s natural instinct is to strive to accumulate and “build bigger barns” to insure the happiness and well-being of their tomorrow (Luke 12:16-19).

The sons of the kingdom, however, are to live according to a different principle and perspective. Having been liberated from the darkness of a futile mind, they are to order their affections and labors in the awareness that their Father is the Lord of tomorrow as well as today. Their prayer is to be, “*Give us **this day** our **daily** bread,*” fully confident that, in His hands, tomorrow will care for itself (6:34). Like the birds of the air, they diligently apply themselves to the needs of the day, but they do so in faith, knowing that their Father opens His hand and satisfies them with good.