

# The Jesus Manifesto



**How To Live In The Kingdom of God**  
**An exposition of the Sermon On The Mount**  
**by John Edmiston**

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## Introduction



Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) revolutionized my life as a new believer, especially as I read John Stott's wonderful exposition of it entitled, "Christian Counter-Culture". I found out that the Kingdom Of God was at complete odds with the selfish and corrupt way that "the world" operates. Jesus' words called my soul to a higher level of living and to new values based on love instead of on competition.

Since then I have often meditated on the teachings in the Sermon On The Mount and over the last ten years I have written a series of sermon-length articles that tackle the sermon as a verse by verse exposition. My central insight has been that the Sermon on the Mount is not a set of rules or a new law code for Christians to replace that of Moses; rather, it is an invitation to our spiritual side to accept the grace of God. The Sermon On The Mount encourages us to lowliness and humility, to give up our thoughts of rule-keeping, being spiritual experts, and all our attempts at living by our own willpower and instead invites us to let God live in us and through us as children of God.

Jesus indicates that the teaching He gives in Matthew 5-7 is foundational and at the end He compares a person who lives out His words to one who "builds their house upon a rock" thus making it indestructible by the storms of life. The Sermon on the Mount is a "solid stuff" and we can trust it as the basic truth of our Christian life. From the Golden Rule ("do unto others as you would have them do unto you") to instructions on money, anger, prayer and fasting we find the main points of our life covered. The words ring true and cut deep.

Luke's gospel also contains much of the teaching found in Matthew, often with some helpful additions. When this occurs we look at both passages to get the full meaning of what Jesus is saying. There are occasional references to Greek and Hebrew but they are kept to a minimum and the words are spelled out using English letters to avoid confusion. Theologically, this is a mainstream work and draws on insights from people as varied as Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, John Stott, F.F. Bruce, Dallas Willard, Eugene Peterson and numerous others. I hope that I have kept my own theological opinions to a minimum for the idea is to let the Bible do most of the talking!

The Jesus Manifesto of course can be used as bible studies or in your own personal devotions. If you are a pastor you can preach each chapter as a sermon. This is a manifesto – it is meant to be put into action and lead to a new lifestyle completely different to the world around us. If the Communist Manifesto was based on class struggle and the control of capital, the Jesus Manifesto is based on the struggle to be our true selves, free from sin, and to the seeking of eternal rewards that far surpass anything Lenin ever offered! May you grow in grace and live a Kingdom lifestyle to the glory of God!

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## The Sermon on the Mount - Common Threads



The Sermon on the Mount is holy ground, and we would be wise to know what we are doing before we engage in studying it. Spiritual truth is powerful stuff. Rightly interpreted it blesses all who hear and understand. But if treated negligently or with deceit it can do lasting harm. The Sermon on the Mount is beautiful. It pierces us to the core; it cuts away our sham and exposes us to God. Precisely because of this awesome power I am devoting the first of these articles to an overview; from setting the stage to rightly dividing the word of truth.

Why did Jesus utter these words at all? Did He bring in a new law code? Did He try and show us what a perfect world would be like in the Millennium, as some hold? Why did He teach his disciples and the crowds? I believe the answer is quite simple.

The first is to bless the common people who knew they were sinners and to shame into repentance those who trusted in themselves. Jesus was teaching from His heart, to the heart. The Sermon on the Mount is not a new law; it is rather the true nature of the old law explained. It is in many ways a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Those trying to earn God's approval instead of just accepting His love will be bewildered and frustrated by it. You have to turn cartwheels to get away from the obvious fact that no-one, no-one at all except our Lord, can live like this. And yet to the poor in spirit it is a blessing. It starts by promising them the kingdom and then shows them what is in there. Only the humble can read this sermon with joy. In another chapter I will explain why the Sermon on the Mount is the beginning of the end for the law. Suffice to say that it shows us that truly keeping the spirit of God's law is utterly impossible. It makes us cry out, "There must be another way to God - I am condemned already!" For instance the passages on who are deserving of Hell and judgment condemn every one of us. There is not a Christian man alive who, if lust is adultery, and it is, does not deserve a thorough stoning. It ends the Pharisee in us, and that is good. It drives us half-way to salvation.

The Sermon on the Mount has a second function - to reveal to the humble the life of the Spirit. The life in the Spirit is fundamentally a life of god-like-ness, not a life of spectacular miracles. John the Baptist did no miracles yet was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). He turned a nation back to the truth and was attested by all as a great man of God. His calling was ascetic, solitary, powerful and godly. The Sermon on the Mount calls us back to this very basic spirituality. Its only mention of miracles is to associate them with the self-deceived "workers of iniquity". I do not wish to turn you away from the miraculous. It has its place in the spirit-filled life. I just want to point out to you that our basic calling is to be lovers of God, not miracle workers. There are many wonderful, beautiful Christians who feel utter failures because they have never converted someone or healed the sick or raised the dead. One of my dearest and most precious friends in my late twenties was a saint of God called Jenny Brown who was radiantly Christian and full of mercy. Yet she

felt a failure because she had never converted anyone and looked up to me who had been used to convert quite a few. Yet I saw in her character a depth of Christianity that was far beyond me. The Pharisees had done a good job on Jenny's self-esteem. God does not measure us by our converts, our miracles, our lengthy prayers or our experiences but by our love, our character, our quiet and powerful godliness. One ounce of self-sacrificing, loving obedience to the Father is worth 10,000 miracles to God. I suspect that when I get to Heaven I shall meet many there who spent years looking after aged parents with sacrificial love, and their crowns will be beautiful.

It is easier to make the spirit-filled life one of extroversion and action than one of reflection and godliness. I have had to repent of this. I am by nature intelligent, active, and I make a great church member and a splendid Pharisee. It is much easier for me to organize a crusade than love my wife when she is cranky. Jesus tells me that my duty lies in love and forgiveness, meekness and lowliness. The spirit-filled life is not some loud and noisy thing. It is the quiet work of the Spirit within me toward God and those He has given me to love. Jesus calls us to be meek, humble, seekers after righteousness and the Kingdom. Somehow I cannot align this with the bombastic noisy clatter that passes for the spiritual life in some places. Many of those I went to Bible College with would be horrified if I suggested to them that God would have them support their parents in their old age or that they should live among the poor as one of them. They are too busy with "God's work" to be Christ-like! We have lost our way; we have forgotten the basics of Christian love. We need to come back to the purity of heart that Christ calls us to here. We need to see, with Jesus, that the primary work of the Spirit is to make us fit for the Kingdom and eternal life. As we study this magnificent body of teaching together I ask you to let go of your plans for advancement in your church, to put aside your innumerable activities and ask yourself the question - "If this sermon is really true, what sort of a life should I now be living?" Echo that question through your heart and hold it inside you as you meditate on the words of our Savior. "If this sermon is really true, what sort of a life should I be living?" If, like me, you tend to be a bit too active, that question just may change your life.

Jesus shows us that the spirit-filled life is one that is disconnected from the world. The godly person does not strut. The godly person is not clamorous for this world's goods. The godly person is simple, pure, peaceful - and persecuted. The contrasts our Savior draws are so stark that I am continually surprised that Christians reading these chapters do not sell their houses and head for the monastery. What Jesus says in these chapters is alarming. Before I read them seriously my life plan was to be an academic with a wife, car, large house and this world's goods. It all ended when I studied these three chapters. I could no longer call that a godly life plan. I was called to "seek first..." all sorts of things I had hardly even thought of seeking. I was called, no yanked forcibly, out of "this world" and into God's plan for my life. To my worldly heart these chapters were like cannon fire. They blew me apart; they threw me in the air and set me upside down. A little rich boy with big ambitions was walloped by God. Many years later I was preaching in a small church to an evening service of perhaps half a dozen people. For some reason I was preaching on "meekness". I said to the assembled congregation, "I hardly know what meekness is..." and they, who knew me well, all looked straight at me, and nodded. It devastated me that they should see straight through me like that. I was not meek. Cannon fire again.

Jesus pierces us here, we cannot, dare not remain the same after encountering such teaching. It blazes with holiness. The dross of our petty ambitions and grubby, self-centered motives is exposed to our sight and we tremble and plead for the refiner's fire. We cannot

love worldly things and take the Sermon on the Mount seriously. It casts us adrift as pilgrims, as persecuted seekers of righteousness, as fellow travelers with Jesus, bearing our insults, full of forgiveness, joy and the purity of meek and humble hearts. Oh what a calling! How can we resist it all too easily? O Lord, forgive my apathy. Set me aright. Remind us all O God that we are just pilgrims, servants, O God call us onward. May your disturbing mercies cut us adrift from our comforts and niceties and set us seeking Your Kingdom, love and righteousness today, Lord, today.

To me, St. Francis of Assisi is one of the best "human" examples of someone who has lived these teachings out. He took them literally. He spent 20 years of his precious life obeying them. He died at the age of 44, blind and in great pain. There are no "worldly" advantages in obeying these teachings. To my knowledge, no-one has ever become a millionaire by following them. But then how many millionaires still have followers 800 years later? Godliness is truly a great inheritance. Jesus is quite explicit as He calls us to the treasure that is in heaven and away from the treasure that is on earth. Matthew 6:19-21 states, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

This godly and holy life is a life of reactions as much as it is a life of actions. The Sermon on the Mount has a lot to say about the way we react to life. How we react to injury, to injustice, to persecution and to loss of our material possessions are important to Jesus for it reveals what we are really holding dear. Our reactions are instant tests of whether we have truly comprehended what God is on about. In recent years people have begun talking about "reacting in the opposite spirit" and its power for transforming people and situations. I believe that "reacting in the opposite spirit" is a good phrase that neatly summarizes what Jesus is talking about here. It is laying down your right to retaliation or natural justice in order to demonstrate the grace and love of God.

The second part of that definition is very, very important. I am not teaching that "Christians have no rights" for we certainly do have our full Creation rights and more. But Christians have the right to let go of their rights in order to demonstrate God's love and forgiveness. "Turning the other cheek" is the act of a person so passionately in love with God that they do not care about personal injury if somehow they can get this world to believe that God loves ordinary fallen people. It is an act of spiritual obedience that aims to transform the world. It is a revolutionary thing. It upsets the natural order and creates that moment in people's lives when they sense the unusual and they let God break in. Many have been transformed by such acts. I will share just one example out of my own life.

This happened when I was serving as a short-term missionary in Papua New Guinea. Our mission station had a visit from an unbearable snob, a speech therapist who had been educated at Cambridge and was filled both with her own self-importance and the deep conviction that no-one had suffered like her. I was given the task of working alongside her. At first it was deeply humiliating as she would belittle me in front of the students out of her own deep insecurity. I, unfortunately, became sarcastic in response. Every bone in my body wanted to go for the jugular, to rip and tear, and I confess I let loose more than once or twice. In the grace, purposes and good humor of God, I was teaching through 1 Peter and came across the verse about "when He was reviled, He reviled not in return..." (1 Peter 2:23) and, "Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult, but with blessing, because to this

you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

I was deeply convicted about my poor example in this area and decided if I was to teach it, then I must live it for the sake of the students. So I decided to bless her every time she humiliated me. It was sheer obedience at first. It felt like I was dragging my body across broken glass. But in the end it became easy. After two or three weeks her personality changed completely. She felt genuinely loved for who she was as a person, softened, became civil and above all became vulnerable to people and to life. The last I heard of her she had gone back to Australia, fallen in love and had gotten married. Her defiant self-centered singleness was gone and she had been made ready for life and love by a few weeks hard work. Reacting in the opposite spirit transformed a thoroughly obnoxious person to one in whom grace could be truly active.

When Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek, walk the other mile, do not ask for it back, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute you; He has a reason or two, and they are very good reasons. You will save your own soul from bitterness and you will save others from their sins. Your life will be a living rebuke to the self-centered people of this world and, after watching you for a while to see if it is real, some of them will follow. You will save many who otherwise could not be won for God. And you will gain a pure and joyous heart in the end. Just one warning, following these principles is like a refiner's fire. You need to be a Christian first and to have Jesus living in you if you are to succeed. The flesh will not crucify itself so completely. Acting in the opposite spirit is difficult at first and a struggle for as long as we are in this flesh. It is one of those things in life where sheer stubborn; even grudging obedience at first, can lead to everlasting joy later on. Just do it. It's worth it.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is posing an ancient but powerful question, "can it be done?" By the end of the sermon you are utterly convinced that what He has taught is right. But you are (or at least I am) left shaking with bewilderment at how you can ever live that way. For a while I took the approach that "God never commands what we cannot obey..." the Pharisee in me is very clever, and has good theology. With self-deception upon self-deception I really tried to live it. Yet any honest, truly honest inventory of my soul would have shown how fraudulent such a claim was. Yet I feared more than death itself "being a failure as a Christian". If only someone had told me that it is OK to fail - that Jesus knew all along that I would be a failure, and that grace is all about failures like me.

I can no longer hold up my head among the strong. Among those who can preach humility because their humility means leaving their vast achievements "undiscovered" to slip out quietly and proclaim their virtue. I am truly a failure, not a pretend one. I am amongst the millions of men and women who have disasters in their life of which they cannot be proud. I need God and I need Him badly. I sense that many of you, like me, look at the Sermon on the Mount and see a huge burden, an unlivable weight of commandments which we agree are right but ..... (And that "but" is very important). The Sermon on the Mount cannot be done at all in the flesh and can only be imperfectly achieved in the Spirit. No living person can claim righteousness like this. This leads to two spiritual conclusions.

First, that we have no hope of a performance-based righteousness. It is done away with. This leaves us with a vacuum. How else do we achieve righteousness? The way Abraham did. "And Abraham believed God and it was accounted unto him as righteousness" - the righteousness of a man who depends on his God utterly. This is righteousness of relationship. The righteousness that comes from God saying, "Simply because you want to

be My friend and trust Me and know Me - I will call you righteous. I know your faults but I will cover them over because of love."

That's the only way left open to us. The second spiritual conclusion that the Sermon on the Mount leads to is the sheer necessity of having Christ dwelling in us. These chapters do not explicitly mention the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit but they do leave us with the question "Where will I find the spiritual strength to live like this?" That is a wise question.

A quick inventory of our own spiritual stock will leave us wondering why Jesus even said such things. Why did He place such a burden on sinners? Was He worse than the worst of Pharisees who put heavy burdens on people and did not lift a finger to help them? Not at all! He knew he would soon be sending the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to give us a power way beyond ourselves. Now I'm going to be a little bit of a heretic. Even with the Holy Spirit in your life you cannot live out the Sermon on the Mount by your own will-power. Uh? The Sermon on the Mount cannot be achieved. It can only be lived. Well what's the difference? If you are trying to achieve it - its still you trying to prove you can do it (to yourself) and all the glory will go to you. God may, in His grace help you in your folly, (He certainly helped me for many years) but one day it will all come crashing down. God's not very interested in you glorifying yourself.

The other way is to say "God I want to live like that, but now I know that I cannot, it is far away and beyond me, help me..." and you will start to live it out, bear it like fruit, and gradually increase in obedience, as the life of Christ in you does it. Instead of trying to produce the fruit by your own struggles God produces the fruit and you pay attention, close attention, to his precious garden. Let me not mislead you. I am not advocating passivity. I just want you to recognize who is doing what and to get your perspective right. Human willpower has never produced a drop of meekness. Jesus is meek. When He lives out through you and you obey His voice in your conscience - you express His meekness. But it is His quality - not yours. Praise be to God!

A book that helped me greatly in understanding this is "Living with Jesus Today" by Juan Carlos Ortiz. Buy it if you are as puzzled by this as I was - even after I went to the Bible College. In the end, the Sermon on the Mount causes us to surrender our willpower to God's resurrection power. Paul uttered a true mystery when he said, "For through the law I died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Gal 2:19-21). Our law-keeping will power is broken by the impossible task of attaining God's true righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount. These commands are the nails that put to death our self-righteousness and activate faith in Jesus for salvation. We get driven to the point where "I" no longer live - my ego is no longer the driving power in seeking righteousness, but rather "Christ lives in me" and He is the engine of my sanctification and the Person who achieves all that is good.

The third function or reason and the most obvious for Jesus giving us the Sermon on the Mount is that, this claims to be (and is) the true Truth. What do I mean by this? We are given partial truths by the "scribes and Pharisees", some truth, some interpretation, some flattery of our weaknesses, some excusing of sin, some severe legalism? What we hear proclaimed as "truth" and what is truly Truth are two different things. The people noticed the difference between Jesus' true Truth and the opinions of the religious establishment. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because He

taught them as One having authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Matthew 7:28, 29). Jesus had authority - not a presumptuous claim to authority; His authority came from Reality and was perceived by others as genuine. His authority was straight from God in contrast to the authority of the "teachers of the law" which Jesus points out in John's gospel was based on "receiving glory from one another"(John 5:44). Human prestige is no substitute for spiritual reality.

There are many wrong teachings in the church that are regarded as "true". Jesus' true Truth involved correcting current misconceptions about "what the Bible taught". In a series of sayings Jesus starts off with "You have heard it said...." and then goes on to show how false that teaching is. Many commentators start off with something like "Here Jesus is updating the OT law on....." actually he is doing nothing of the kind. He is showing what the Old Testament law meant when properly interpreted. Jesus did not change one jot or title of the law; He did change how people interpreted the law. I will give one well known example - His teaching on divorce. It starts with, "It has been said that 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' but I say to you that.... (Matthew 5:31-32). There were in Jesus time three basic schools of teaching about divorce. The most lax of these rabbis taught that a woman could be divorced for "any and every reason" but that it was necessary to give her certificate of divorce.

Jesus reinstates the Law of Moses with its requirement that there be a REASON for divorce (Deut 24:1-4). The only acceptable reason is related to sexual impropriety of some kind (ervath darbar - unclean/immoral thing). Jesus defines that this "unclean thing" of Deuteronomy is general sexual misconduct (porneia in Gk.). Because the only valid reason for divorce is sexual immorality then capricious divorce puts innocent people in the same basket as adulterers. All who are divorced are "made adulterers" - innocent or guilty they are all lumped together with the imputed title of "adulterer" i.e. given the status of "adulterer" in the eyes of society - whether or not they deserve it. This is plainly unfair to those women divorced so a man could marry a prettier girl (a valid reason for this lax school or rabbis). The gross injustice of treating an innocent party as an "adulteress" would be quite obvious and add to the weighty condemnation of capricious divorce that Jesus is here bringing. Jesus is not rewriting Moses here - He is in fact saying that we need to go back to the full teaching of Moses. We need a reason for divorce - and a good one, as well as a certificate of divorce. He thus takes the prevailing opinions of the day and compares them with "true Truth" and brings them into line with a balanced and total view of Scripture. Jesus demolishes the 'false teachings' that abounded in His day, He hauls into line various Jewish schools of thought and brings us back to what the Bible really teaches.

The Sermon on the Mount is not Jesus re-writing the Law and it was not yet the time for abolishing the Law, (that happened on the cross) rather it was a breaking forth of real authoritative light from the Law. It was true Truth shining forth and calling us to follow it.

Well that is enough of an introduction. Your mind is probably quite boggled by now with all these common threads. I hope that some of them have been a real blessing to you as writing about them has been to me. Now we shall go and consider Jesus and the Bible in a bit more detail.

## Jesus And The Bible



Jesus comes closest to agreeing with the Pharisees when it comes to His view of Holy Writ. To Jesus the Scriptures were absolutely sacred, lasting and eternal, and of paramount authority. Jesus was no textual critic taking a bit from here as merely human and a bit from there as authentically divine. There was no question for Him that the Bible was true from start to finish along with all its evident supernaturalism.

And this was not just Jesus being "a man of his time" with outmoded views imposed upon Him by his culture. For a start Jesus did not let the culture of the day impose their views on him in any other matter, let alone one as important as this; the range of views on Scripture then was as broad then as it is today. The viewpoints abroad in Jesus day included everything that is common today. There was extreme mysticism and allegories, skepticism about miracles and the supernatural, strict literalism, superstitious veneration of prophets tombs, codified morality, people seeking signs and wonders, and others retreating to the deserts to save their souls.

Numerical systems abounded, Messianic triumphalism was common, Platonic idealism occupied the minds of those favorable to Greece and Rome. Philosophies and interpretative schemata from political to allegorical found adherents in first-century Palestine. Jesus could have chosen to champion one or all of them. He certainly refuted many of them. The Sadducean view that there were no angels, demons, or after-life was characterized by Jesus as "sadly mistaken". Messianic triumphalism was refuted by His poverty, His suffering and His death on the cross. Mystical and fanciful interpretations were scuttled by Jesus' straightforward approach. Jesus took Scripture seriously and fairly literally - every word therein was Truth.

Yet Jesus transcended the literalism of the Pharisees by putting the interpretation of Scripture on the basis of spiritual and moral insight not on the scholastic ability to add, subtract and compare texts. Scholarly study has its place but, as is commonly experienced, it can be dry and very unsatisfying spiritually if it is not enlivened by appropriate spiritual insight.

My original theological training was in fundamentalism and there the Bible is held in high esteem and texts are treated with respect - but largely without spiritual or humanitarian insight. No fundamentalist could have come up with the insight that the Sabbath was made for man - not man for the Sabbath. Fundamentalism sees man as being made for the Scriptures and what they command. Fundamentalism often lacks the mercy of Jesus and a true love of people. It lacks the basic spiritual insight that could bring it to life - yet I am very glad of the knowledge of Scripture it has given me and which has enabled me to write this book. Liberalism on the other hand is even more of a catastrophe. It denies the basic building blocks of Christian faith - even the hope of the resurrection. In its effort to communicate with unbelievers it has lost its faith. I believe if Jesus was to "have His say" He would call us back to the simple, experimental faith of St. Francis of Assisi where the call is to live out the gospels as if they were true - and of course they are.

Here we come to two essential statements about Jesus and the Bible. First - Jesus believed every word of the Bible was true. Second - Jesus put the Bible into practice assuming that it

was true. I have signed many statements saying that I believe in the Bible - in fact I signed one last week. But I must honestly ask - do I really and truly believe it? Will I take the risks that come from putting the scary dangerous bits into practice? How many times have I sold a possession to give to the poor? How much do I really believe in God healing people? Can I really be meek and humble when people in bureaucracies treat me like dirt? Can I leave my rights behind some days? To be gladly obedient to God when there is very little earthly advantage in doing so is my challenge. Yet Jesus took hold of the Bible and said "This is worth obeying - right down to the last jot and tittles" and He obeyed it - right down to the last jot and tittles.

But what was the nature of that obedience? It was the obedience of someone who was fully human but not corrupt. He did not cheat. He did not use more of the indwelling power of God than any human being is fairly entitled to. As I explained earlier we were all meant to be God-indwelt images of God. He was human but He was in no way corrupt. He did not bend commandments to get around them or create excuses for sin. He lived in the bare light of God's love and holiness. It was a full obedience - obedience in spirit and truth as well as outwardly in form. It was a natural obedience not a bug-eyed striving of a tormented soul, it was a natural outflow of an obedient inner being not a terrible attempt to conform to expectations. It was a wise obedience that knew obeying the law in one situation may not be the same as obeying it in another. It was an obedience governed by a spectacular level of spiritual insight. The law for Jesus and the Bible for Jesus were absolute governing determinates of His life. He saw Himself in them - and indeed He is there. When we come to living by the Sermon on the Mount our guiding principle should be - how did Jesus live by the light he had and how then should we live in the light of this sermon?

Our obedience must then be obedience without evasion. We must try to actually live out the calling to blessedness set before us. Every jot and tittles of the Sermon on the Mount is important and authoritative to you and I. Underlying our obedience must be mercy, discretion, love of others and a growing spiritual insight. I have said a fair bit about this earlier and so I will leave it here - but it is a lesson worth repeating that the sermon needs a certain cohesive underlying spiritual insight before it can be properly and graciously applied and lived today.

When Jesus approached Scripture there was no question in His mind that it was true. The question seemed to be how it was to be lived and understood and what everlasting principles were revealed. He distinguished between weightier matters - such as justice, and lesser matters such as tithing. But even the lesser matters were not to be neglected. His only agenda seemed to be joyous obedience to God. What do I mean by this? In the encounters Jesus had with other people they all seemed to have a private agenda which distorted the way they viewed Scripture.

The Pharisees seemed to ask "How can I justify myself before God?" then there were others who had nationalistic political agendas and asked about the Messiah "When will he restore the kingdom to Israel?" and those such as the lawyers and Sadducees who had self-centered social ambitions and could not tolerate Jesus' answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?". Then as now people wanted Him to interpret Scripture in a way that would validate their lifestyle of choice. On the other hand when Jesus came to the Scriptures He seems only to have asked "How can I glorify my Father who is in Heaven?" He saw God in Scripture, in nature and in the events of the world around Him. He reveled in what was revealed and Scripture glowed for Him as he sought God's glory in obeying it, living it, being it, and of

course imparting it. Joyous obedience to God out of simple-hearted love of the glorious Father drove Jesus into the Scriptures and opened the book to Him.

Interpretation involves renunciation. Jesus renounced reputation, possessions, political power and even life itself in order to live out Scripture in a hostile world. To see Scripture clearly means letting go of those things that blind us. I remember when I was a new Christian I tried to go out with a girl who was not a Christian. There were certain sections of Scripture I crept around and just plain refused to read. I would not read them because I knew they would tell me I was wrong and I wanted the girl more than I wanted to obey God in that area. I had to sort that out before I could get back on track spiritually.

There are many things we may have to simplify or even renounce totally if we are to see Scripture as Jesus saw it. I doubt we can be materialistic and read the gospels with much comfort. I doubt we can hold grudges and join church factions and then survive the epistles. Or we may have to renounce some of our far too busy schedules and make time to fast and pray. While the concepts of Scripture can be of vast delight the real joy comes from radical obedience and realizing that God is there and with you and loving you as you attempt to put it all together and into practice. That radical obedience costs but it makes things clear. That is what I mean by interpretation involves renunciation - you cannot have armchair Christianity and truly know God. You must get out there and do it.

Here is a simple suggestion for putting into practice the Jesus view of Scripture - start with one commandment that really scares you. For you it may be being merciful - go and be merciful to someone you hate, who annoys you, who you would like to judge all the way to Hades and back again. Or it may be God calling you to come out of your cultural boundaries and love people from other nations and backgrounds - even other denominations! You may be called to help the poor. Take something - just one thing that scares you witless and do it for Jesus just because you love Him and want to obey Him. Then do it again and again. Joy will fill your soul and God's word will come clearer and you will see God's love for those people all through Scripture. Christianity will become an adventure not an obligation - and so it should be.

Jesus never taught His followers how to interpret Scripture - only how to live it out. Jesus did not produce scribes, He produced disciples. I am not suggesting that we abolish all the courses on hermeneutics (the art and science of interpreting Scripture) taught in Bible colleges and Universities rather I am suggesting that we average Christians need to get our focus fixed on living right lives rather than arriving at correct conclusions. Correct conclusions are well and good and incorrect conclusions can be damnably dangerous however we quickly reach a point when we are doing little more than engaging in warfare over how many angels can fit on the head of a pin and disobeying the Pauline injunction not to engage in disputes over words. In the contest for our interpretation we divide the body of Christ, cause factions and set up disputes all "in the name of Christ". When we indulge in that we fail to live out the gospel. We live like scribes not like disciples.

What I am suggesting is not new, there have always been proponents of a practical obedience. What I am asking of you, especially if you are a pastor, is that you stop nit-picking and start living. Take up the challenge of actually doing what the gospels say. Be a disciple and in doing so you will not only save yourself but will inspire others to seek salvation as well. The from and to of this and that interpretation were the stuff of the scribes and Pharisees and consumed their energies and defined their social relationships. For Jesus this was not so. I am sure that He cared that Scripture was interpreted rightly - He takes

great pains to disembowel the wrong interpretations of His day in the Sermon on the Mount, but for all this it was not His preoccupation. Jesus did not define His piety in terms of "for" and "against" this or that interpretation. For Jesus piety was not arrived at through discussion but through action. Jesus and His disciples lived - they were not a committee or a forum, they were not an itinerant band of speculative Jewish philosophers, they were a group of people committed to living for the Creator and to serving the Most High God. So must we be.

Jesus appears to have done us all a great disservice in leaving behind no writings and no teachings that give us a neat and tidy infallible system of biblical interpretation. If correct biblical interpretation is necessary for holiness and if faith cannot proceed except on the basis of right exegesis then He should have told us how to do the job with less confusion than we currently have. These assumptions assume Christianity is an exercise of the intellect first of all, then the will and last of all the emotions. The spirit is relegated to being a source of data for the intellect which is placed in supreme position of guidance for the Christian. Such a position is sadly mistaken.

If we take that position then we go ever backwards trying to find absolutely reliable data - back to original languages, textual and form criticism, redaction criticism and parallels from ancient languages and we end up ultimately asking "How do I know what I know - in fact do I know anything at all? Can I prove that the Bible is true and if I cannot prove it how can I know God exists and if I can't then....." We get lost in a quagmire of doubt and some even lose their faith in the process. It just doesn't work that way. Faith does not depend on confirmation by ancient manuscripts.

Faith lives off life and the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit. When i was converted I came to believe the Bible was true, my spirit found nourishment in its words and my initial doubts were eventually swept aside. Years later new aspersions were cast against Scripture and I began to ask questions again but the "proofs of Scripture" I discovered were appreciated by me because I already deep down believed in the truth of Scripture because of the testimony of the Holy Spirit. First came the Spirit, second came the "proofs". This is how it is with most people. We believe the Bible not because it is demonstrated to be true by some historian but because of its impact on our lives and the testimony of the Holy Spirit convincing us inwardly that it is true. The historical proofs come later. The intellect comes last, the spirit comes first.

Jesus did not teach us how to interpret Scripture because he was to send the Holy Spirit into our hearts to write His laws there and to create a prophetic community which glorified God together. The Holy Spirit imparts to us the few dozen truths we need to know to be fully Christian, in fact He imparts all truth (1 John 2:20,27). We do not need to make Christianity more complicated than the Holy Spirit makes it. You do not need to know Greek in order to be godly. If we simply paid disciplined attention, disciple-like attention, to the basic doctrines of the faith and to loving the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves then we would quickly be on the path to saintliness.

This path to saintliness seems to be the centre of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Of all the Old Testament He could have chosen from in this call to blessedness He selects those things that lead to saintliness most quickly. He does not present a systematic theology of God's dealings with Israel or a lecture on the proper interpretation of prophecy - as important as these things may be. He gets to the common core - about what it really means to be God's person and to live in joyful and holy obedience. Jesus seems to see the Bible as a guide to saintliness, as the light-filled book of the Kingdom. To Him the Bible is not

burdensome and not to be so interpreted as to become a burden.

It is the opposite; it is the razor that cuts us free from the entanglements of life and into the glorious freedom of the humble and the poor in spirit. It cuts away pretension and the crushing burden of having to maintain a facade of righteousness. It demolishes the thousands of regulations imposed by men in order to prop up their own respectability. The Bible of the saint is a book that is loved not feared, it is a book that frees not burdens, it is a book that strengthens the heart in the love of God and promises joy at the end of the pathway of suffering. The Bible for Jesus floated on the Spirit - its author and interpreter.

There is a view abroad today that Scripture is there as a set of proof texts to increase our faith, that "the promises of God" are what we are to hold to and that the proper result of Bible study is a miracle-working faith. This is not Jesus' view of Scripture at all. Jesus aims at producing responsible, godly and love-filled disciples. Miracles are secondary. Love, not faith, is the goal of the teaching of Jesus.

Faith is good and miracles are marvelous but there is a greater good that Jesus calls us to and that is the good of a noble, faithful and loving character. It is who we are in our inner being that is His preoccupation, not the results of our prayers. Paul, echoing these sentiments says that even if we have faith to move mountains but do not have love - then we are nothing. The call to blessedness includes a call to work miracles or to great faith, but that is not the end or goal of the matter. True Truth leads us to Christ and to Christ-likeness as the goal of our Christianity.

If the goal of Bible study is saintliness then what is the Bible and how does it change us? Jesus answers that the Bible is the Word of God and that we are changed to the extent that we prepare ourselves for and train ourselves in godliness. In His parable of the sower He explains that the seed of saintliness is the Word of God - both spoken and written it seems. He then goes on to describe the outcomes of this same seed falling on hearts with differing degrees of softening and differing degrees of attention to the things of God. The Word of God is not magical. It cannot convert the totally hard-hearted. It does bear great fruit though in those who are "good soil" - who are receptive to the Word and who deal with the distractions of this life, in them it has a power of its own to bear fruit, thirty, sixty even a hundred-fold over.

The Bible for Jesus had life and had the power to be life-giving to those who would receive it with a good and faithful heart. In all His kingdom parables the Kingdom is portrayed as having a particularly vigorous energy about it. It is the quickly growing mustard seed, the leaven in the loaf, the salt of the earth, it is light, it overcomes the world. The kingdom of God is full of vitality. It is exploding with life and part of this life is the Word of God which is portrayed as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...". The Bible is not a dead book but a living force-to-be-reckoned-with! For Jesus the Scriptures were not something you studied, dissected and killed but something that lived in you and animated your whole being. Yet he did study Scripture; let me not discourage you from that! Study it as much as you can, but do not kill and dissect it - let it live within you with power and surrender to all the changes it brings.

I see in many a gradual loss of enthusiasm for the Scriptures. At first there is a tremendous zeal and much learning. Then in the midst of all the learning the Holy Spirit prompts them to some difficult personal change and they push it away with a gentle "Not now..." Gradually the years slip by, too many "Not now's" accumulate and the Spirit's voice seems dull and Scripture rather boring. The zest has gone and they do not quite know why. Perhaps you are

in this category. I know about it because I have been there too. There is a way back to refreshing times and that is simply to say "Yes, Lord". Vow to yourself that you will simply do everything that God tells you to. Do it to the best of your ability and if you fail, try again. Turn "Not now" into "Yes Sir". Take the time to bother with obedience. I know that sounds harsh to you. When I say that you must bother with obedience it is because I know that many days it will be an effort and that on many days it will seem an effort that is not worth the making. But you do love Jesus and you will try won't you?

This clear path to saintliness through the enlivening power of specific Scriptures applied and obeyed in the heart of a receptive and diligent believer is what the Scriptures were meant for. The Scriptures were never meant to be the happy hunting ground for historians, linguists or even theologians. The Scriptures are meant for the saints. I hope you understand that ordinary people like you and I can be saints too, that you don't have to dead and buried to radiate the love of God in your corner of the world. Anyway Jesus got it right (are you surprised) and He used the Scriptures the way they were meant to be used. Not as weapons to divide people in ecclesiastical bun fights but as pointers to the Truth and to the saintly life. Not as proof texts for some marvelous system of thought. Not as flag-waving rhetoric to rally people (as one US politician tried to do recently - and failed). Not as a way of feeling better than others. But as the lights that lit the path to Heaven, as the life-giving power behind true godliness, as the razor of truth that sets people free from the greed and materialism and foolish vanity that ensnares them for so long and in such great fear.

This chapter is only an introduction to the ways Jesus used the Scriptures in love. But I think it has begun painting a picture for you that you can think about and take away with you. Remember the Scriptures are for the saints. Remember how Jesus used them to free people. How He used them in all purity of heart and motive. How He obeyed them and rejoiced in them. Remember their living power to change us. Remember how seriously He took them. With them He rebuked the strong who were using their strength unjustly and encouraged the weak who felt crushed by even the most basic duties of life. With them He changed the world and produced disciples - not scribes. I want you to use the Scriptures well. I want you to continue to look at how Jesus used the Scriptures and to follow His very wise and spiritual example. The Scriptures are not cannon fodder for your personal war or ammunition for rebuking your enemy. They are not cudgels for defending the faith. They are there to grow saints for God and to proclaim His truth in your life. You will most help the Scriptures by a life of joyous obedience. No-one wants an argumentative person, but everyone loves a saint

## Jesus And The Law



Jesus believed in a kingdom that was "not of this world" and established a kingdom that would eventually fill the world and bring to an end "the kingdoms of this world". His agenda was distinctly anti-the-system and it was this that brought Him scourging, crucifixion and death. Jesus created no systems and left no bureaucracy. It has been argued by some theologians that man was designed to be a totally free, Spirit-indwelt agent. Certainly Jesus gave a strong hint to this in John's gospel where He says "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John 3:8) It is the thesis of this writer that we were made to be God-indwelt beings of great beauty, wisdom and intelligence, full of a Spirit empowered reality. All people were to be "in the image of God", bits of eternity expressed through human flesh. This original intention for mankind is being fulfilled through the church, the glorious bride of Christ and Holy Spirit indwelt believers. This Spirit-filled state is not one that fits into the ordinary patterns of life. It has an order - but an order

that makes sense only when eternity is taken into account.

For instance if God had intended Spirit indwelt beings to be legalistic, ordered, judicial and to seek redress in this world by legal means then He would never have instructed us to ignore our rights, turn the other cheek, go the extra mile or to love our enemies. When a society falls in love with legal process every slighting, every wrong, every injury, is brought to court and "justice must be done". Instead God has destined His church to be unjustly treated in this world in order that it might participate in the sufferings of Christ and have eternal glory. We are meant to be a persecuted people, a people who suffer wrongs gladly in the name of Christ knowing that the temporary sufferings of this age will be compensated for by our receiving an overwhelming weight of glory.

Jesus calls His people to be people who do not quickly resort to law. He has called us to be people who call upon the Spirit and upon their God. Neither Jesus nor any of the apostles took anyone to court - even though they were most unfairly treated. As Christians we are to turn off the tape in our head that says "I'll take them to court for that...." and replace it with a Christ like ability to suffer well. I must confess this has been one of life's great challenges for me as I have often wanted to take a certain so-and-so to court, or to sue a doctor for malpractice. Yet despite the reasonableness of it, despite the fact that God has not taken away my rights to justice, I know inside myself that there is a better course. I know, clearly,

that seeking legal solutions is as expensive spiritually as it is economically. Somehow it does not cure the bitterness or sooth the soul.

Jesus has called us to leave behind the worlds way of legal thinking "the leaven of the scribes and the Pharisees". His inveighing against "the teachers of the law" was not because the law of Moses was evil but because it was interpreted in a cruel and oppressive way. The law was being interpreted by the flesh not the Spirit. Jesus often quoted the saying "I desire mercy rather than sacrifice", telling the scribes and Pharisees to go and learn what mercy and true spiritual values meant before they constructed laws about tithes, the Sabbath and a thousand other things. Spiritual values underlie legal requirements. Without these undergirding spiritual values of mercy, justice, and charity the superstructure of commandments and regulations collapses and becomes a tool for oppression.

Galatians 5:19 lists the works of the "flesh" or god-less nature of man as being "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like..". It is the central group from hatred to envy that I want to bring your attention to. What happens when this god-less nature, this "flesh", gets hold of a bunch of laws, any laws, from the rules of bridge to the Constitution of England? We quickly see people hating one another in court, using the law as a weapon, we see discord produced, we see jealousy and fits of rage, we see the law twisted to further selfish ambition and interpreted so as to cause dissensions, promote factions and serve the cause of envy. The flesh loves the law, under the rubric of "justice" the flesh aims to achieve its own divisive way.

Law without the Spirit is a dreadful thing. Do not get me wrong, law is not bad; it is just twisted and misused. There is a true Christian love of law that is a deep reverence for the ways and values of God. There is a Spirit-filled law-abiding. We will see more of that later. But be certain of this - true Spirit-filled Christianity is not of the letter. True Spirit-filled Christianity both transcends the letter of the law and penetrates to the spiritual values underneath. A trained and Spirit-filled Christian conscience in living communion with its Savior knows what is right and true without having to consult a thousand law books and myriad regulations. Christians must give up drawing lines to live behind and find Jesus in their conscience instead. Legalism and the love of the letter of the law is not for the Christian.

How did Jesus deal with His incredibly law-loving culture? How does the Sermon on the Mount prove or disprove all I have just said? Surely it, above all, is a collection of laws? As I showed in chapter one, it is not, and cannot be, a new law code. I am sorry that my fellow preachers and commentators have treated it as such. There are those who use the beautiful Sermon on the Mount as a club to beat young people into line and damage many a sensitive conscience on the way. How many young men struggling with new-found surges of lust and unbreakable habits have been utterly condemned by some preacher saying that such lust is adultery and wicked? They crawl out condemned; beaten, discouraged, feel total failures as Christians and sometimes even leave the faith as a result. Of such interpreters it can be truly said that they "lay huge burdens on men's shoulders and do not lift a finger to shift them". We cannot stand by and tolerate the spiritual carnage that results when Christianity is turned into a set of laws to be fulfilled "don't smoke, don't drink, don't dance, and don't associate with those kinds of people."

There are many people who have said to me "I just can't be a Christian any more..." utterly crushed and dejected by the failure they feel at living up to "Christian expectations". Surely

this is not the intended outcome of the Sermon on the Mount. Surely this outpouring of God's grace is there to help and not to hinder?

Jesus does two things with the law in the Sermon on the Mount. Firstly, he sets it right. It had been monstrously twisted by the spirit of legalism and the ease of the flesh. Jesus puts it back on plumb centre showing us the spiritual values underlying the letters of each law He addresses. Secondly, He breaks the "spirit of legalism" forever and teaches a higher ethic than the *lex talionis*. He teaches us to suffer well, to be meek and to love in a radical new way that penetrates to the core of life.

When Jesus says "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you." He spoke as one who would be crucified. He spoke as the one who prayed "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do." He spoke as one who would shortly have to live out His words. How then, can we, who know all this, and who possess the indwelling Holy Spirit, act in high dudgeon and drag our enemies off to court? If that next door neighbor irritates you with their barking dog do you call the Council, full of wrath and demanding "justice" or do you pray for them? Do you do good to them, build a friendship, and find out the dog is not so bad after all? These daily nuisances are when I find people least lovable and where I must find some spiritual resources to change my impatient nature.

Now I must say that I have not been held hostage by terrorists or brutally assaulted. The great criminal injustices of life have escaped me by and large. These are, perhaps, in a somewhat different category. Terrorism cannot just be politely ignored. There is a time and a place for the proper exercise of criminal justice in order to protect society. The Sermon on the Mount does not invalidate the hanging of terrorists or the jailing or rapists - but it does invalidate your and my temper tantrums over our small and even moderately large injustices. How to treat the criminally inclined is a whole different topic. Some people have forgiven completely and never sought the help of the police; others forgive and see the person jailed. I see nothing inconsistent with the second approach. Loving our enemies does not mean taking away from them the consequences of their behavior. God loves His enemies but allows us all to make our mistakes and suffer our consequences. I think the Christian heart should be reluctant to embrace the law. It should be an awful last resort not a first expedient.

Yet Jesus was not law-less. He believed utterly that God had standards that human lives should be ordered by. When Jesus taught that marriage was ordained ideally to last forever and was not a disposable commodity He meant it with every fiber of His being. When He taught us that greed was not good and that Mammon was not God, He could not have been more in earnest. What then are we to make of the standards taught in the Sermon on the Mount if they are not a "law code". The first thing we must note is that they are incomplete. The Sermon on the Mount does not touch on many things - the proper conduct of worship, idolatry, theft, much is left out. As a law code it is terribly inadequate. What it does address is the spirituality underlying Pharisaism; judging others, twisting the law, hypocrisy, the love of money, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, boastfulness and spiritual superiority.

If the Sermon on the Mount is a law code it is a law code for lawyers! It condemns those who used their understanding of the law to justify themselves and to condemn others. All of us are clearly shown to be in need of grace. So then - it is no law code but an unleashing of grace. The standards of the Sermon on the Mount are not laws we must live up to in order to be pronounced good - that has happened when we believed in Christ. Rather they are standards that call us to a life of grace. They are the goal of our walk not the perimeters of

our disobedience.

Can we use the Sermon on the Mount to judge our fellow Christians - or unbelievers for that matter? Certainly not! The whole aim of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount was to end such judging. The Sermon on the Mount is to be used to show each of us where we need God's grace. It is a manual for prayer so that in its light we can approach God and ask Him to change us. It is a call to sanctity and right practice in life. It calls us to live worthy noble and extraordinary lives as saints of the Most High God.

Deep down inside each of us, in "the flesh", there lives what I picture as a little green leprechaun with a shillelagh who is itching to get out and whack someone on the head. One day at some point we let him out - it is an issue of justice or doctrine or morals. The little green man has a grand old time and many people are hurt - some forever. There is no issue worth letting that little green man out for. The Sermon on the Mount is like a dose of cyanide to this law-loving leprechaun. It takes away his right to ever use his shillelagh. It says to him that there is nothing worth brawling over. It says it is better to lose than to brawl and fight and accuse. It is better to suffer injury than to judge one another; it is better to weep than to say that we alone are righteous. Jesus did not come to give fuel to that little green man. He did not come to feed him more laws to stoke his fires of "righteous indignation" and to create a legalistic, defensive monster. He came to put that little green man behind bars forever - in fact to crucify him, to take the commandments that were hostile to us out of the way through the cross (Colossians 2:15) and to create a race of gracious grace-filled people.

The Sermon on the Mount tells us how gracious grace-filled people behave. The Sermon on the Mount gives us a calling worth living up to and a direction to grow in. That young man struggling with his lusts can now be told - we do not judge or condemn you, here is the direction Jesus is calling you to grow in, we want to help you get there and we are here for you every step of the way and we know it will take some time. We can invite him to join the brotherhood of the weak - of those who need grace and understanding for we ourselves are tempted and weak. I believe far more people would stay Christians if they were treated with that sort of gracious understanding. The standards of the Sermon on the Mount cannot be relegated to the Millennium or turned into a law code. They are God's callings for grace-filled souls. They are the end of the little green man, they are the condemnation of the Pharisee, and they are the death sentence for the legalistic mind set. They require a new way of thinking about life - not by the letter of the law but through the lens of the Spirit who wrote the laws and engraves them on the heart of all who believe.

We can no longer hide our inner beings from the gaze of God while outwardly conforming to a law code. The Sermon on the Mount demands our inner beings as well. It claims God's rulership of the heart. Jesus brought heaven's laws to human hearts through the Holy Spirit and here displays heaven's teachings so that those who are of God may rejoice and those who hide from Him may repent.

The Sermon on the Mount shows us the inner laws of the heart - knowing of God in the inner being and the living out of His life through us is paramount. We are not allowed to hide from God - not even miracles, prophecy, exorcism, almsgiving or prayer are allowed as hiding places. We may not hide our being behind our doing. It must come out into the light. We must be known by God for who we are - for being loving, humble, meek, and seeking after God. Jesus does not allow us to use the law as a mask any longer. We cannot say "I am OK with God, in fact he really likes how I live." such pompous prattle is gone. The law

cannot protect our hearts from the gaze of God. Jesus takes away the law as our shelter from God. Jesus finishes legalistic self-righteousness as a comfort zone forever. We are really only left with three choices - to deny or distort the truth of the Sermon on the Mount, to ignore it, or to start out on the life of grace.

## Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit



I can think of nothing less blessed than spiritual poverty. To be spiritually bankrupt is to have lost everything. Yet Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He is obviously not meaning moral bankruptcy here. He is not saying "blessed are those without values", what then does He mean? The original language gives us a clue in that "poor" here is properly rendered "beggarly, destitute without resources". It is the person who has come to the end of their spiritual tether, who has realized how hopeless our paltry attempts to please God are and feels

absolutely destitute and in need of grace. It is a commonplace observation of the Christian life that we receive as much grace as we think we need.

Jesus illustrates this very well in another place - in Luke's gospel with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector.

**Luke 18:9-14 (NRSV)** *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: (10) "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' (13) But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' (14) I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."*

The cry "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" that came from deep within the penitent tax-collector was more pleasing to God than all the spiritual achievements of the Pharisee. I find it far easier to be a Pharisee than a penitent, and so I suspect do you. Yet God is only pleased with us when we are poor in spirit - aware deeply within ourselves that we are the creatures and he is our Creator, aware that we have sinned and we need mercy. "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to thy Fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die" wrote Augustus M. Toplady. His hymn may seem quaint and overstated these days but it captures the very essence of this holy destitution. All our pride is hammered to pieces by this verse in the Sermon on The Mount. The most righteous of us are reduced to naked supplicants. We cannot come before God with our boastful pride, our spiritual knowledge, and the few sins we have left undone. We would be in tatters at the first glimpse of His holiness. We would be utterly undone and flee in terror from the courts of the Lord. The Lord our God is a consuming fire and He will burn up all that His mercy has not touched and His grace restored. There is no-one righteous, no not one. Even those God chooses to bless and appoint to high spiritual offices must acknowledge their poverty before God. This is made

very clear in the following little biblical gem about Joshua the high priest from the book of Zechariah (not the Joshua of Jericho, a much later Joshua....):

**Zechariah 3:1-7 (NRSV)** *Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. (2) And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?" (3) Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. (4) The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." (5) And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the LORD was standing by. (6) Then the angel of the LORD assured Joshua, saying (7) "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here."*

The high priest was the chief spiritual authority in God's chosen nation. And unlike many previous high priests Joshua truly honored God and was chosen by Him. With such qualifications one would assume that he needed little or nothing of God's mercy yet it is abundantly clear that he was desperately in need of it, it is also very clear that God wanted to grant it. God delights in granting mercy to those that know they need it. Joshua needs God's mercy, how much more for you or I? We cannot storm into God on our own merits. Like Joshua we need garments of righteousness to be given to us by God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. To enter into God's realm, to be part of the kingdom that will oust all other kingdoms is a matter of lowliness not of bombastic pride. There are some nations that are very proud of themselves, their culture and their wealth. Their people say to themselves "Blessed are the Such and Such for we belong to the kingdom of Suchness". This sort of self-preening pride is the precise opposite of being poor in spirit. We cannot fill our hearts with the belief that our race or country or creed makes us special or better than others - and still be poor in spirit. It is a contradiction; we cannot feel rich, magnificent and superior and call ourselves humble. What then should the inhabitants of such nations do if they are to enter the kingdom of heaven? They must take on the perspective that their wealth will cry out against them on the Day of Judgment. They must see that the kingdoms of this world will pass away and eventually only the kingdom of heaven will remain. Their nation will one day be subjugated by the returning Lord Jesus Christ. The all pomp and culture and wealth and learning are just temporary blessings from God - for us to bless others with. This salutary perspective will make us realize that our materialism and selfishness have put us in very great danger indeed. We have withheld the blessings of God. When that breaks through then surely they will cry out for mercy and become poor in spirit - thus inheriting the kingdom of God.

I want to shift our focus a bit to the second half of this verse, because we will never bother being lowly and poor in spirit if its just a platitude. If the kingdom of heaven is just a state of mind, then let's all join the positive-thinkers with their boundless self-confidence and positive mental attitudes. The kingdom of heaven has got to be something much more than earthly happiness and boundless optimism. We cannot have true faith or holiness or "saintliness" without the resurrection. And it is very much a fact that it requires a death to get a resurrection. The entrance to the kingdom of heaven is a dark grave, carved out of a large rock, in a stony hill. It is the place of utter hopelessness. The sealed tomb, the final burial,

the desolation that comes as we walk away and say "All is lost, I have nothing now, but I still trust God". At that very moment you have become poor in spirit and truly yours will be the kingdom of heaven. Out of that grave will spring a resurrection that you hardly knew of and never believed in. It won't require your faith - God does resurrections, not disciples. In the end you will marvel at what God has done. I hope the following verse from a poem by Dorothy Stevens touches you as it has touched me:

Thank you Lord!  
 When powerful forces wrench a soul;  
 When sore heart's praise comes haltingly,  
 That shattered lives can be made whole  
 If handed to you willingly.  
 Then every stumbling "Thank you, Lord!"  
 Will lift, expand, and proclaim your word.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for "theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This seems to be rather an intangible benefit - open to the criticism of 'pie in the sky when you die'. This is because we have misunderstood and misrepresented the "kingdom of heaven". The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same. The kingdom of heaven is just the Jesus way of saying "the kingdom that is not of the kingdoms of this world and which operates by entirely different principles to the kingdoms of this world, it is the kingdom from above, the kingdom of heaven, not the kingdom from below." In the kingdom of heaven mustard seed sized beginnings produce great results, in the kingdom of heaven people see what is unseen and leaders serve those that follow them. In the kingdom of heaven angels care for the righteous and punish the wicked, it is altogether just. In the kingdom of heaven God rejoices in the presence of the holy angels over one sinner who repents. It is a place of wholeness and peace and joy. It is not "pie in the sky when you die" at all. It is here and now, what every Christian truly wants out of life, in their deepest being, in the hearts and minds of all who truly believe.

The kingdom of heaven is compared to leaven mixed through a large lump of dough in one parable. (Mt 13:33) The kingdom of heaven interpenetrates this present world - it is found in all nations, among people speaking varied languages, and at all levels of society. The kingdom of heaven has no earthly headquarters, no United Nations of the gospel. It is at its most powerful when it is mixed evenly throughout this world. Like leaven in the bread it is equally powerful everywhere - because the power is in its life. It has a "biological power" a transforming power that comes from the power of living things to transform and overcome the environment around them. The kingdom of heaven is full of the life of heaven. It is full of glory and grace. It causes the world to rise and be transformed, it is the true beneficial change agent for the world.

This living, breathing, borderless kingdom is the kingdom of Christ and of Christians. It is the kingdom that comes to all who want God's grace because they need it. The kingdoms of this world, with all their cruelty and injustice are the playgrounds of the less-than-meek. They say in themselves "Blessed am I in my pride for mine are the kingdoms of this world." Throughout the Old Testament there is a condition of heart that brought devastating ruin on all who held it and it is articulated in the phrase "I am, and there is none besides me". They are proud, self-sufficient and puffed up in spirit. It was the phrase God threw back at them, the thought that caused Him to destroy them.

**Isaiah 47:10-11 (NRSV)** *You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, "No one sees me." Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, "I am,*

*and there is no one besides me." 11 But evil shall come upon you, which you cannot charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, which you will not be able to ward off; and ruin shall come on you suddenly, of which you know nothing.*

The summary fact is this, that unless you are poor in spirit - you will have no kingdom at all.

## The Gateway of the Aching Heart

**Matthew 5:4 NKJV** *Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.*

What a blessing these words are to anyone who has known deep suffering and grief, where friends get fed up and wander off tired of your "negativity", when all you have in life is a big lump of pain, and all you want from life is a little comfort, a little kindness and one really faithful friend who doesn't care how badly you feel, who will sit with you at your most despondent and will truly listen and bring you that first shiny, precious glimmer of hope. God is that friend; He is the voice that comes out of the whirlwind, the Friend we discover in darkness. What a blow these words are for the worldly engrossed in the pursuit of happiness. His days will be short and his comforts few and very costly. God's comfort comes to those who will let their hearts be torn by life, whose calluses are not so deep they cannot grieve. Pain hollows us out so God can fill us and mourning is a very important part of the spiritual process.

The flesh does not want to mourn. Sad is bad, happy is good, let's have a party. This is the response of the flesh to pain. (Galatians 5:19,20,21 NKJV) "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." The flesh will commit crime rather than suffer pain. The flesh cannot truly mourn, at best it whines! I have put much thought recently into the problem of alcoholism and one common characteristic of many alcoholics seems to be a deep reluctance to face inner pain and to live with it until it is finished its work. The over-riding need is to anaesthetize the pain, to escape, to feel good at any cost. This unwillingness to mourn, to responsibly handle pain, can cost them their jobs, their families, their self respect and their lives.

I am afraid that certain sections of the church also refuse to mourn responsibly, to wait in silence for God their Savior. In certain places it can be seen as a sin to be unhappy and an unreal optimism develops that is a strain for most people to uphold. The sensitive souls soon leave and the church becomes a habitation of the crass, the vulgar and the annoyingly chirpy. Such people should remember that Jesus wept! He was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Jesus hurt. He hurt over an unbelieving Jerusalem; He hurt over the terrible weight of Calvary, He hurt when His friends hurt. There is a certain medieval over emphasis on the continually mourning Jesus that paints Him in very serious tones indeed. I believe that fundamentally He was a man of deep joy as God is fundamentally a God of joy, but that this joy is not some insensitive triumphalism, an unsanctified reworking of the power of positive thinking, no this joy is a feeling, loving, sensitive joy that is constant amidst the thousand grieves of life.

### Christian Mourning

Mourning is more than just feeling sad. Chemical disturbances in the body can make us feel sad. A romantic movie can make us sad but that is hardly mourning. Mourning involves a

focus. You "mourn over" a lost loved one, a city, or your sin for instance. Jesus had no sin yet He was a man of sorrows. Mourning need not primarily be over sin at all, just over life. Jesus mourned the way an intercessor mourns - from deep identification with the plight of others or the plans of God. Thus we can see that godly, life transforming mourning is a sorrow that comes as a response to God's will in a particular situation. For instance a "Christian" of my acquaintance was found to be committing a series of most foul sins. Sins that shocked both the Christian and non-Christian world. On going to jail he has been filled with sorrow - but it is entirely a sorrow for himself. Never a sorrow for those he has sinned against. I believe that sort of mourning is the mourning of a criminal not a Christian. Christian mourning is grander than wallowing in self-pity; it is one of life's great emotions. Christian mourning is a deep felt sorrow that echoes the sorrows in God's own heart. He weeps over people becoming entangled in sin and so should we, He weeps over the pain of this world - and so should we. I am sure God agonizes over all the lost who are not able to hear the good news proclaimed to them clearly so they can understand. And we should beg God for laborers to be sent out into His harvest. Mourning is a spiritual emotion that centers us on the great things of God and on His agenda for mankind. WE are told to give God no rest until He establishes Jerusalem as praise in the whole earth, we are to mourn until God is glorified and His name hallowed. These are great themes.

When I see pornography I mourn because God is being defied so openly and people are being used so awfully. When I hear blasphemies I mourn because people are using God's precious name as their favorite swear word. If only they knew! When I see people being broken by unfair work practices I mourn for the way people are being exploited by their fellow man. I mourn over the way liars seem to prosper and the cynicism of press and politicians. Most of all I mourn whenever I hear atrocious lies being told about Jesus. That He was just a man, a mere first-century man, that He lusted, that He married Mary of Magdalene, that He was wrong, that he did not rise from the dead. I mourn in anger at the lies people are hearing and believing. And this mourning means we are taking our place in Christ's body, suffering His wounds, being hurt with His hurts. But mourning is not an end in itself.

The end we aim at is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Our aim is to love our God and love our neighbor. Our aim is to mourn, be comforted, then rise up and act. When we mourn we put ourselves in a position where God can show His answers. Look at Scripture, it is when people are in mourning before God, when they are in straits and weeping before Him that God comes and says "This is my answer, such and such will happen..." To the mourning Hannah - Samuel was born, Daniel's contrite mourning over Israel's sins brought an angel to meet Him sent from God, to the mourning disciples came the resurrected Christ. Mourning is like prayer and frequently our deepest prayers are these heart cries to God. It seems that as we mourn in Christ that God begins to act in power and our answer is on its way. "Shall be comforted..." is a promise, it will come to pass. Your godly mourning shall always be answered. It is not ineffective or unheard. Your heart cries will vibrate with the heart strings of the Almighty and He will act on your behalf. You will be comforted and when the comfort comes you will know God better, love Him more and move out to love the world with a more tender and grace-softened heart.

John Hvde was a missionary in India: he earned the nickname "Praving Hvde" because of his

hours of unceasing cries to God for the lost and his deep mourning over sin. But He did not just mourn - he evangelized. At a time when relatively few were being won for God He cried out "give me souls or I die". At first He claimed one soul a day from God and that year 400 were added to the kingdom. The next year He felt able to ask for two souls a day - and they came in. Eventually He was seeing four souls a day won for God through his personal witness alone. He mourned, he was comforted (but never complacent) and he went out and acted to fulfill the cry of his heart - which was the cry of God's heart. This is the godly mourning that brings revival and changes nations.

The baptism of the Spirit is a baptism of mourning for it places us into the body of Christ where we fill up His afflictions, bear His burdens in this world and suffer in His sufferings. We cannot be baptized in the Spirit and have unadulterated "happiness". At the very least we will mourn over the sin around us and in us. At the very least we will cry out for God's work to be more effective. We cannot be baptized with the baptism of Christ without taking on some of Gethsemane in our veins. Praying Hyde died relatively young, after only 20 years of ministry. His heart was shifted out of place in his body from his crying to God and he developed a brain tumor which took him to glory. He poured himself out unto death. He paid a high price - but look at all it purchased! Thousands of people won for God. Mourning can be costly, but it is beautiful and effective and will take you into the courts of the Lord.

## Blessed Are Those Who Mourn...

For me "Blessed are those who mourn....." seemed an insane contradiction, a quite perplexing saying of Jesus that I had no wish to understand or implement. I had had enough of pain and the idea of possibly having to feel some more out of obedience to a bizarre commandment that reeked of monasticism and sackcloth repelled me. "Mourning was for the super-spiritual of which I am not one" was my ever so humble excuse. But I had completely misunderstood the word "blessed". Unfortunately translated "happy" in some versions "blessed" means not happiness but a state of divine favor where God causes things to go better for you than normally would be the case. When God blesses the farmer his barns overflow with wheat even though he planted little, when God curses the farmer -drought and blight and mildew descend and nothing remains though he was expecting a good harvest.

Mourning brings about blessing. Mourning brings about an amplification of our life's fortunes. Praying Hyde's harvest was an increase in the harvest of people and an enduring influence on many lives as a result of his testimony. Hannah's harvest was the great prophet Samuel who set the scene for Israel's history and culture. Daniel's harvest was the release of Israel from captivity. Jesus' harvest is the church. Christian mourning increases your "harvest" in life. Your mourning over sin will increase the release of God's holiness into your life that was blocked until you mourned. Your mourning over a lost world will release you and your church into evangelism.

Your mourning over the state of the nation will release you into social action, mercy ministries and prophecy. And as long as you mourn and weep before the Lord you will be blessed. Lose that and you will lose your heart vision and your blessing.

If I had understood that I would have picked up the sackcloth ages ago - and willingly. Like you I will do anything to increase God's blessing in my life. I want it and I want it now. If that involves some Christian mourning and if that is the path that I must take (and Jesus

says it is) then I must take that path. Perhaps reluctantly at first but soon more willingly we will learn to mourn before our Lord. As we mourn we gain the sense that God is "doing something" inside us, and that He is doing it surprisingly quickly. We feel that we are being rearranged for the better that we are lighter on the inside, purer, seeing things God's way a little bit more, cleansed. Mourning brings about healing as it adjusts our perspectives to those of the Lord. We know we are loved, we feel God's solid approval of us and we sense that he is very present to heal and to save. But can we become addicted to mourning and take things too far?

## Mourning Can Seem Extreme

The way I have been reared is in the way of moderation in all things and extremes in nothing. Yet as I read the biographies of great men and women of God one is forced to conclude that they were seldom moderate suburban folk. They were frequently extreme. They did and felt and saw bizarre things. Yet they knew God so very intimately. Ezekiel would most certainly be locked away today in an asylum. Jesus was so immoderate that many said He was possessed by the Devil. And John the Baptist, that great mourner for Israel clothed in camel's hair and eating locusts and wild honey is so bizarre that he is a Sunday School joke even today. Cardinal Newman came to the conclusion that "Truth often lies at the extremes" and I am inclined to agree with him.

Mourning can seem extreme and the mourning of the great intercessors and prophets can seem not just extreme but downright dangerous. Both Moses and Jesus went for forty days and forty nights without food or water in the presence of God. This would kill most people. Only the sustaining power of God kept them alive. Praying Hyde hardly slept but prayed all night. Rees Howell the great intercessor of the Welsh revival frequently shocked people with his deep, profound and often extreme acts of mourning and fasting for others. To read the life of John Bunyan or many of the great Puritan thinkers and you are struck by the depth of their mourning over sin and the years of despondency some suffered before breaking through to the comfort of God. But they were ALL marvelously comforted. Here I think lies the balance point - if you are mourning because God has placed a great burden on your heart and you are taking it to Him then nothing is too extreme - except sin.

When we mourn before God for a specific reason and seek His comfort then we are on the right track and will not go astray. It needs to be a mourning "in Christ's name" for Christ's cause. However if we mourn merely as an introspective spiritual exercise with no particular point or focus we can become mislead by our own feelings and wander into accusation and despair. I think this is what happened in certain sections of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Mourning was a fashionable spiritual exercise and became a perfect way for the Devil to accuse people of their sin and enhance their terrible sense of guilt. I am struck by how hard it seemed even for the great saints to believe that all their sins were forgiven on the cross and God just loved them as they are.

## Why Mourn? And How

So what is to be the basis of our mourning? If you are not yet a Christian mourn over your distance from God and ask Him to bring you close to Himself. He will quickly answer. If you are a Christian, you are forgiven: there is still a need to mourn over your sin but not over

your guilt. That has been dealt with. You can already take comfort from the cross. No-one can condemn you at all. Your guilt and shame are finished with. You can mourn over your inability to fully master sin, your lack of death to self. Cry out to God that He may help you master sin. Cry out to Him that you may learn to die daily like a germ of wheat in the ground. Pray that your stubborn will may be fully crucified and that Christ may rule within you. Cry "Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive in me, be released into my life in holiness, power and love right now." Cry it over and over again. After we have died to self a little we can cry for the baptism of the Spirit, for effectiveness in service, for souls for God, or for whatever else the Lord lays on your heart in His good time and mercy. The basis for our mourning should not be comparison with others - that we are not as strong or clever or wealthy or even as spiritual as they are. That is the Devil's talk. We are unique and lovely. We cannot be all good things rolled into one. We have each our own beauty and we are to share that with the world in the power of God. Try and mourn selectively. Spiritual confusion is the inevitable result of trying to mourn over all things simultaneously. Take one thing at a time. One special burden and work it through until you are consoled. At most say two or three.

Mourning is a much focused sort of thing. You cannot handle too many issues. Your whole being becomes involved and 'shuts down' other things to focus on the process of mourning. It is very deep and powerful. This "shutting down" can result in people not feeling the need for food or sleep - though taking some is strongly advised. It is good to have friends who can force us to take care of ourselves when we become so preoccupied. Many a saint has been saved from self-destruction by friends who have ordered him or her to eat and be strengthened. I am in no immediate danger of that (Mc Donald's is just around the corner!) and neither I suspect are you. But do take care. My last little caution is not to strive for unrealistic perfection or total sinlessness here and now (though it should be an ultimate goal), sometimes we can mourn for the unachievable and become thoroughly despondent because the consolation will never come. be realistic in what you mourn for. It is realistic to mourn that your family will be saved. That is possible. To mourn that they will all be perfect is to invite awful disappointment. We can mourn that more would hear the gospel and be saved but to be in the throes of agony that not all are saved is to ask of God something He has not promised in His Word. There will always be a Judas, an unbeliever, a worldly. Let's hope the ratio drops - having only one in twelve unsaved would be most wonderful indeed!

With those basics and the guidance of his Word God should be able to lead you in mourning constructively before Him.

I suggest the following prayer to start with "Lord God I accept Your mourning into my heart and life, I accept the burdens that the Lord Jesus Christ within me may place on my heart and conscience, I accept the promptings and groaning of Your Holy Spirit as He prays through me. Lord I accept my role as a mourner, teach me how to pray this way, for my soul, for Your world, and for Christ's Kingdom. Amen." Repeat it slowly a number of times in a gentle rhythm until it sinks within you and you feel it working away in your spirit. God may cause you to praise him and thank Him, or to break down in tears. Each of you will respond differently but open yourself up to being a mourner for God. The following brief meditation may help:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit we come to you to learn how to mourn rightly O God. We know we have been selfish and not considered the plight of others, we have avoided feeling the way You feel O God, we have wanted to be happy at all costs and have only made ourselves hard of heart. We repent of

this O God and ask Your forgiveness. We ask you to make us tender-hearted like the Lord Jesus Christ who wept over Jerusalem. Teach us to weep O God. Lord Jesus teaches us not to cling to happiness when it is not right to do so. Prepare our hearts to feel sad over sin and pain and grief. Release us from our bondage to our feelings. Release us from our inordinate love of the comforts of this world. Release from our need to feel a certain way all the time. Release us O God from the emotional expectations of our culture and our families. Release us from even our theological misunderstandings over how we should feel at certain times and places. Lift up our hearts O God. Lift them up to Your throne Lord Jesus. Lift them up out of self-centeredness and into Your presence. Let our hearts see the world in Your light O God. Show us what is true. Show us how this world really is. Show us what sin and pain and suffering are like to you. Show us how our neighbor is to you. Show us ourselves O God. In this light O God, in the light of Truth lay Your burden upon us. Do not crush us O God but give to each of us the burden we can carry for You. Teach us to mourn for that one particular thing. We reach out now and take it from You. O Lord it seems so heavy. Surely I cannot carry this! Thank You Lord, Christ within me can. Thank you for Your comfort Lord. Thank You for the love of God poured out. Thank you that this cross will lead to a resurrection. Thank you that this mourning will lead to blessing. O Lord open our hearts to You that we may feel with You. Open our hearts Lord that we may mourn with You. Take away our hearts of stone and grant us much grace to sense Your presence and to know Your burdens for this world. Make us Your friends O God and may we sit and mourn with You. Amen"

It is a deep, beautiful and wonderful thing that you are asking when you ask that you may sit with God and mourn with God a little. Christ's body suffers. It suffers from martyrdom, from sin, from divisions - what people could divide over doctrine if they had beforehand felt the sufferings of God! They could not and would not! True Christian mourners are meek and not contentious. As we suffer as part of Christ's body, baptized into His death and His sufferings, His aches for this world, His longings for the redemption of all things. As we are baptized into this we are baptized into mourning. As we are baptized into mourning we become tender and considerate of God's feelings. A church that has learned the heart of God cannot divide, a Christian who has learned to mourn will flee from sin, a musician or worship leader will not exalt themselves if they have felt the touch of God's burden and seek His glory. The great longing of the angels and the prophets was that God would be conspicuously glorified. They mourned over a world that would not recognize its Owner. They cry out "Let the Lord Jesus be exalted above all!" Let us mourn when our church ignores God in all but name. Let us mourn when Christ is not conspicuously glorified among those who should know better. Let us mourn when the church becomes less than it should be in any way and let's seek to restore it gently. Bring your fellowship to God with a broken heart and love it in His presence. Pray and fast for it. Do not open your mouth against it. Seek its welfare with heart-felt cries. And you will be comforted. God will hear your prayers and His blessing will be released upon you.

## My Gethsemane

O Lord of the wounded side and pierced heart, You poured out Your heart and life for me. Teach my selfish stubborn heart to break a little, bear some load To wear some grief in serving Thee. Stop me in my selfish games, amuse me not with idle things Grant my heart to mourn with Thee and give my prayers some angel's wings. Trivial has been my walk so far, I've played a game and been afraid Of taking on the load You bore, I tremble at the thought of arief. Yet blessing lies the other side - assure my cowardly heart of this. That You will

walk with me and give me strength, That I will not be disgraced or fail, and tell me Lord repeatedly That Your blessing, comfort, love will be Waiting surely after this - my Calvary.

## The Winners

**Matthew 5:5 NKJV** Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness is as popular as celibacy. It's all very good for someone else but we can't possibly live up to it. You have probably met some anti-Christian cynic who sneers at you "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the dirt; Christians are a joke...." you walk away desperately trying to be meek and somewhat proud that you did not punch him on the nose. The fact that he was a karate expert had nothing to do with your reaction - it was entirely spiritual. Meekness is hard stuff, and at first glance extremely unwise - after all who wants to be walked on all the time. "Not I!" said the doormat.

Despite all this flippancy, we do like meekness in others. It's nice to work with someone who isn't pushy and domineering. It's great to be married to a partner who gives way a little and who understands your need to be just a little different, who can leave off having their own way so you can grow in God. Meekness in parents is particularly important, confident children have meek parents. Parents who are not meek produce resentment, anger and rebellion in their progeny. So being meek is good, society works better, everyone is happier and more creative - why isn't it more popular? I think it is popular and the current thirst for "non-judgmental attitudes", "non-violence" and "tolerance" is partly a search for meekness after a century of war and an aggressive mind-set. The popularity of non-violent figures such as Ghandi and St. Francis of Assisi and the renewed interest in monasticism is a hearkening to meek people. They are being listened to at last. But we are very scared of meekness for ourselves. We are afraid of exploitation and attack. We are scared that meekness will leave us too vulnerable and that we will lose something. So before I preach the virtues of meekness I think I had better help you with your fears.

I have entitled this chapter "the winners" because that is what Jesus calls meek people - winners. The people who will inherit this earth - the here and now, are meek people. An example of this is Isaac, one of my very favorite Old Testament figures. All we see of him is absolute meekness, a trusting "Yes, Father.." a quiet going along with God. Isaac was the man who would meditate in the fields in the late afternoon. Who lived quietly with his one great love - Rebekah, dug wells and increased greatly in the earth.

**Genesis 26:12-14 NKJV** *Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. (13) The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous; (14) for he had possessions of flocks and possessions of herds and a great number of servants. So the Philistines envied him.* The envy of the Philistines resulted in them blocking up his wells of water, not just once or twice but many times. But Isaac never sent out an army - though he easily could have. The next two verses show Isaac's great strength.

**Genesis 26:15-16 NKJV** *Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. (16) And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."* Isaac had taken the great wealth of Abraham - of which he was the only heir

and multiplied it. He was a mighty prince in the land and could easily have dealt with the Philistines who were depriving him of his rights to a basic necessity of life. If ever there was an excuse for war against those unbelieving Philistines this was it! But what did he do?

**Genesis 26:17-21 NKJV** *Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. (18) And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them. (19) Also Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. (20) But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. (21) Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah.*

Then he finally digs a well that is not argued over and rejoices. (Genesis 26:22 NKJV) And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." But all this meekness and moving on - what was the wisdom of it? Why not just fight and win? Well Isaac's lack of contention made a path for peace and prosperity to travel to him along. Let's hear the finish of the story.

**Genesis 26:23-33 NKJV** *Then he went up from there to Beersheba. (24) And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." (25) So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well. (26) Then Abimelech came to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath, one of his friends, and Phichol the commander of his army. (27) And Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, since you hate me and have sent me away from you?" (28) But they said, "We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, (29) 'that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.'" (30) So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. (31) Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. (32) It came to pass the same day that Isaac's servants came and told him about the well which they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water." (33) So he called it Shebah. Therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.*

Isaac's meekness eventually led even the Philistines to fear him, to tremble before him and recognize him as "the blessed of the Lord". Meekness led to victory and prosperity. Read Genesis chapters 22-26 for some fascinating insights into Isaac, the model of meekness. Well and good for Isaac and the Philistines you say, but you don't know the Philistines I am surrounded with.

No, but the Lord does and He has commanded you to be meek. There you are in your family, faced with an unruly willful 14 years old who will run you over as soon as look at you. You think that this child is the perfect model for Atilla the Hun and you are profoundly amazed that you managed to produce such progeny. How will meekness work

there? Well the most effective worker with teenagers I have ever met is also the meekest man I have ever met. Teenagers are so desperately unsure of themselves on the inside that they become absolutely obnoxious on the outside. Meekness says "You are not in danger, I will not bully you in any way, and your inner self is safe with me. I expect you to obey the rules and you know what they are - let's respect one another." It says this "subconsciously", these are the vibes the teenager picks up - and they respond nine times out of ten. Some of the best workers with really tough street kids are really meek friars and monks. They get results. Meekness works. Well I hope you fear meekness a little less by now, so let's move on to see what meekness really is and how to put it into practice.

The definition I like best is "A quiet and expectant bearing of destiny that is grounded in God." (Kittel). Isaac knew he had a destiny, knew for certain that the Almighty was with him and would contend for him. So with that certainty of destiny he could move quietly, confidently and non-assertively through life. God would take care of his rights. And God did take care of his rights. Jesus is our supreme example. As he goes into Jerusalem on a donkey to claim His royal inheritance. Every inch of His path was a movement toward destiny. This is what Scripture says: **Matthew 21:4-5 NKJV** *All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: (5) "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'* The word "lowly" is the same Greek word (praus) as "meek". Jesus also says ... **Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV** *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* Because His mission is a mission of lowliness, not of pomp and grandeur, He can invite all and promise rest to all. His meekness means that God is no bully. We are safe with God.

We have a meek God and it is safe to be with Him. He will not turn on us or bully us. God is every bit a gentleman, but He is not tame. A sinner has everything to fear from God. God has absolute might and strength. He is absolutely fair. He tells you the rules and expects you to obey them. And if you break them you will receive the promised punishment. He is fair like that. God is no push-over. He is very strong and very gentle. The Bible has a curious Hebrew word "*erek aphayim*", it literally means "long-nosed", to the Jew this meant that God did not change his facial expression toward them easily. God wasn't like some people who are kind one minute and nasty the next. With God you can be sure that He won't explode for a very long time. His kindness takes a long time to change into anger - but it can and does happen. This patience of God is called *makrothumia* in the Greek of the New Testament and it is translated "long-suffering love" it is this long-suffering love of God that gives sinners the chance to repent. (Romans 2:4) God has the patience of a gentleman but He has His lines firmly drawn and the person who persists in sin will feel his anger.

God is meek but He is also strong, fair and just. Being meek does not mean we have to abandon our standards. It is no virtue to throw away the truth. We keep our standards but we enforce them with love, patience and understanding.

Do you know who was called "the meekest man on the face of the whole earth?" Well it was Moses - the man of the ten commandments and the law. The man that has so often been misrepresented as hard and uncompromising was in fact very, very, gentle and

lowly. He loved his people dearly and served them and his God totally.

**Numbers 12:2-8 NKJV** *So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. (3) Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth? (4) Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. (5) Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. (6) Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. (7) Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. (8) I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?"*

Moses was so meek and humble (praus) that he did not defend himself when others were grumbling against him. In fact he never ever defended himself - though people often criticized him and his leadership. Each time he waited for the Lord to come to his defense instead. Meekness means a vast reluctance to leap to one's own defense. Meekness is acutely aware of the terrible tearing apart of people that can come from quarrels. Meekness knows that vicious arguments in so called "self-defense" are just not worth it. It is better to be torn apart than to tear apart. In this way meekness is very far-sighted and takes the long view. Meekness looks down the track to when the squabble is over and gone - to all the hurt people and all the battered Christians and all those stumbled in their faith that will result. Meekness then says "No, this is not worth it, I will hold my peace." Meekness looks even further and knows that God understands and knows their suffering and He can repair their life and fix their reputation. And even if He does not, even if they suffer unfairly for many years, that they will still have their dignity, they will still have acted rightly. Ultimately meekness will be rewarded. God remembers the meek with a reward that is eternal and far, far, outweighs any temporary, light affliction they feel here on earth.

Well what about the "imprecatory psalms", you say, the one's where David wants all his enemies obliterated, where he calls down curses on them in pain and anger.

**Psalms 35:4-8 NKJV** *Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor Who seek after my life; Let those be turned back and brought to confusion Who plot my hurt. (5) Let them be like chaff before the wind, And let the angel of the LORD chase them. (6) Let their way be dark and slippery, And let the angel of the LORD pursue them. (7) For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, Which they have dug without cause for my life. (8) Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly, And let his net that he has hidden catch himself; Into that very destruction let him fall.*

Verses like this do not seem meek and safe at all! They are not comfortable verses on the lips of any Christian. But in fact they are very meek indeed. David was constantly surrounded by people wanting to kill him out of envy, jealousy or fear. From Saul to Absalom there was a long list of people seeking David's life "without cause". David could easily have launched a civil war against Saul and won, but he refused to but spent years fleeing him in the wilderness instead until eventually the Lord used the Philistines to dispose of Saul and Jonathan and the kingdom became David's - peacefully. David cried

out to the Lord for deliverance from his mortal enemies - but note this well, he did not take any violent action himself against any of those who sought to kill him, even though he most certainly was a better fighter. He could have easily won, and he was in the absolute right. But David was a man "according to God's own heart" and was meek, not lashing out when threatened but waiting for the deliverance of God.

His psalms reflect his very deep and real distress and his need of a solution. They certainly show that he did not like his treacherous enemies, but he breathed out his dislike of them to God and did not take his defense into his own hands. David did not willingly enter into contention or spoil for a fight. He was meek. When Absalom tried to usurp him he left Jerusalem barefoot, humble, and mourning. The death of his treacherous son in the ensuing battle brought him sorrow. His ability to reconcile with his enemies was legendary. He truly loved people. He was meek.

Meek people can defend their nation and their God. David certainly did. But out of love. If someone threatens your family, your nation or the honor of God you can stand and "fight". But if you are meek you will do so only at the very command of God. Threats to family or nation are easily worked out. But oh, all the innocent Christian blood that has been spilt "for the honor of God". Let us be very careful before we swing into action! That person you see as so very, very wrong may be a brother or sister in Christ. They may be part of the family you are pledged to love and protect when you join the body of Christ. In AIDS and other auto-immune diseases the defense mechanisms of the body turn against it and destroy it laying it wide open to infection and death. Sometimes the church seems to catch an "auto-immune disease" of contentiousness. Some issue sets off an explosion of arguments sometimes lasting for decades. The inevitable result is a severely weakened church. When the battered, bleeding Christians limp back to their churches they are so tired that the body of Christ is soon ravaged by every foul disease in the spiritual world. Some commentators have noted that the "Battle for the Bible" controversy took a powerful, healthy evangelical movement in the US and reduced it to tatters. Let us use our defenses against real enemies, against false gospels and deceptive heresies and gross immorality and the dark occult forces of this world. Let us leave one another alone.

Easier said than done I'm afraid. Let's take an issue that I think is starting to divide churches and Christian more and more - the Creation/Evolution controversy. Every Christian believes that God created the heavens and the earth. Some believe he did it in six literal twenty-four hour days, some believe he used evolution, some - like me believe the earth is old but that evolution is bunk, God created but over a very long time period. Whatever you believe there are people out there wanting to have a gunfight with you. Some of them can get very nasty indeed. Suppose you believe that evolution is the worst idea ever thought up by mankind and is leading our society into moral decay and corruption. Are you duty bound to fight? Yes and no. Yes, you must follow Scriptures, your conscience and the Holy Spirit.

But..... First you should check the Bible to see if you are being biblical in your content. OK, you do that and still believe that evolution is of the Devil. The next thing is to check your methods of argument with Scripture and to understand who your enemies really are. "We do not fight against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers of wickedness in heavenly realms." It's not your brothers and sisters in Christ that are the enemy but the Devil and his lies. So you will be gracious to your brothers and sisters in Christ. you will

present them with the facts without argument or rancor and you will leave it up to them to judge whether or not you are right and convincing. At no point will you launch a personal attack against another Christian. Paul never did. Jesus never did. No apostle ever did. You won't. If they don't buy what you have to say - tough. You will have to live with misunderstanding and you will have to live with not everyone accepting your message. But you will never ever resort to personal attack. And if some ministry does not subscribe to six-day Creation you will not condemn it from your pulpit, rather you will take it to God in prayer. You will leave it to him.

There are godly people on all eighteen sides of this question. And there are some very contentious and aggressive folk on all twenty-two other sides of the question. Its complex and I don't think that the six-day Creationists are worse than anyone else. There are many other people with causes, many of whom are attacking various portions of the body of Christ. Public personal attack against believers is not the Lord's way. Private rebuke, prayer, counsel, Scripture, sweet reason and the power of your godly life may win the day. If these don't - there is nothing in the will of God that will.

We need a Christian commitment to non-violence. I deeply regret my fundamentalist years of bitterly attacking the charismatic movement. I was wrong, not in just what I said but how I said it. I wish I had never persecuted the church of God. I wish very deeply I had listened to their testimonies without bias and genuinely sought some of the blessings that they had to bring. But my mind was made up. One the basis of one verse of Scripture (1 Cor. 12:13), wrongly interpreted by me, I had them boxed as being in error. It was not their reasons but their lives that won me round. I share this because when I look back over my Christian life it is the angry, violent "in defense of the faith" moments that I most deeply regret. I wish someone had explained Christian non-violence and meekness to me 18 years ago. I wish that along with not smoking, not drinking and not going to R-rated movies someone had said - and no religious wars either!

Christian meekness, not bullying, not self-defending, not violent in any way could be a really beautiful healing thing. We could even learn from one another. We might honour one another as brothers and sisters of the living God and lift one another up as precious and lovely. We would trust one another for "they would not hurt or harm on my holy mountain". We would be safe in the church.

Pastors would stand tall in the love of their congregation knowing no Christian sharpshooters were lurking in the pews. They would feel the honor given to them by their congregation. They would serve as lowly servants of God. They would never use the pulpit for attack. The church would be safe to be in. Yet everyone would know God's presence and the firm hand of the Holy Spirit's holy standards. Meekness would exalt the church. I can see a vision of an enthusiasm for meekness spreading through the body of Christ. A practical, Spirit-filled lowliness infecting hearts and minds and transforming churches. And such churches would be so lovely they would have to grow. People would flock to be part of them, to know their healing gentle touch. Like children flock to a kind face the world would flock to the door of such churches. And the meek would inherit the earth.

## Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness

**Matthew 5:6 NKJV** *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

When Jesus said this He was uttering an unimaginably great promise. For those who have really LONGED to be a better Christian and really ached to follow God better, this is good news indeed! The promise is - you will get what you want until you can take no more. The promise is - you will be filled!. In this article we will first of all we examine what righteousness is and clear up the misconceptions that surround it. Then we will see what is involved in our hungering and thirsting for it - and being filled.

Righteousness, true righteousness is not some sort of severe, hard-faced, ill-tempered, killjoy attitude. If you believed a tenth of the caricatures of righteousness that the world produces you would think that righteousness was almost an evil thing, a sort of cantankerous and scolding virtue. But James says in (James 1:20 NKJV) for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. In other words true righteousness is self-controlled, loving and compassionate. It is not an excuse for intemperate wrath. James continues this thought for a few verses finally saying(James 1:26-27 NKJV) If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. {27} Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Righteousness is not an option for the Christian. People who are not concerned about doing right cannot be true believers in God. (1 John 3:10 NKJV) In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. This is not talking about the imputed righteousness we receive through faith but the outworking of our righteous natures in righteous deeds. Unless there are righteous deeds then there is no evidence of a new creation The Christian is to have an appetite for godliness. Specifically we are to have an insatiable appetite for righteousness. What is the righteousness that Jesus speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount? It is not Pharisaical rule-keeping righteousness - it surpasses that! For a few verses later Jesus says: (Matthew 5:20 NKJV) "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Righteousness is firstly obedience to the Law.- as exemplified by Zachariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist.(Luke 1:6 NKJV) And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Yet it goes deeper than mere observance to involve a righteous and God-fearing nature. The righteousness that Jesus wants is internal and compassionate. It is the righteousness of the softened heart. (Matthew 25:37-40 NKJV) "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? {38} 'When did we see you a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? {39} 'or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' {40} "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'.

The righteousness that Jesus wants is the very opposite of the smug complacency so often associated with the term. It is anchored in a sense of need. True righteousness is aware that it can only be fulfilled by God's grace. In Luke 18 Jesus tells a parable of a smug Pharisee who congratulates himself in prayer and a contrite publican who cries out to God from a deep sense of need and unworthiness. Luke 18:9 NKJV) Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. The Pharisee receives no grace, no justification and no righteousness, the sinner who cries out to God receives pardon and grace and is the one considered righteous before God.

Righteousness dwells in the Christian in at least four ways or aspects: as a status, as a new nature, as a governing principle as righteous deeds and actions flowing from a righteous lifestyle.

## Righteousness as a status before God

This has received enormous emphasis in evangelical circles as it was the great rediscovery of the Reformation and is the main doctrine that distinguishes Protestants and Catholics. Scripture is quite clear that right standing before God cannot be earned by any regimen of meritorious works. (Galatians 2:21 NKJV) "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." In fact it is through faith alone (Romans 3:21-22 NKJV) But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, {22} even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe....(Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, {9} not of works, lest anyone should boast. This means that once we believe in Jesus Christ we are made righteous in God's eyes with our sins completely forgiven. For a clear explanation of this see last month's article "Salvation Once you are a Christian there is no use hungering and thirsting after this kind of righteousness - as wonderful as it is - because you have it already! If you are not a Christian it must be pursued at all costs since without it you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 22:11-13)

## Righteousness - a new nature in us.

For a full explanation of this see the article on The Inner Man. When we believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and savior we are made new creations. **2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV** *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* These new creations have a new nature which is righteous. These new natures are described as being "born of God" or "born from above" in us. They are intrinsically perfect and totally unable to sin. **1 John 3:9 NKJV** *Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.* However Christians do sin - despite their righteous new natures - because these righteous new natures dwell in old sin-filled bodies so that Paul could say of himself. **Romans 7:23-24 NKJV** *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

The war between our righteous new natures and the flesh is one of the chief struggles of the Christian life **Galatians 5:16-17 NKJV** *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not*

*fulfill the lust of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.* This leads to a great hungering and thirsting after righteousness - that our new natures may be fully able to express themselves unhindered. See the above article for some encouragement on winning the war with sin. However the Christian should not hunger and thirst for a new righteous nature - despite all that the Devil accuses us of - we have it already. It is our possession - it just needs to be fully brought into play in our lives.

## Righteousness as our governing principle

Paul talks about the Christian being "enslaved to righteousness" which is a consequence of becoming born again. **Romans 6:18 NKJV** *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.* Our new nature is enslaved to a new principle. Just as the old nature was enslaved to the sin principle which was its mainspring and activating energy so the "new man" is enslaved to righteousness as its operating principle. **Ephesians 4:24 NKJV** *and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.* In this sense righteousness is our Master. , The Governor of our actions and our days. It was Christ's governing principle. **Hebrews 1:8-9 NKJV** *But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. (9) You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."*

Jesus is righteous, loves righteousness and operates according to righteous principles - which are what is implied in the phrase. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom- the scepter ("scepter" in American English) is the sign of authority and justice. Thus Christ's government operates righteously - not by favoritism or tyranny but justly and righteously and being fair and yet merciful to all. Since righteousness is loved by Jesus Christ and governs Him therefore it governs all who are "in Him" and has become our operating principle as well. Righteousness should set our priorities. **1 Timothy 6:10-11 NKJV** *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (11) But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.* In these verses we find Paul exhorting Timothy to make his priority the pursuit of righteousness just as others had made theirs the pursuit of money - to their destruction. People talk of "the profit motive", well Christians should talk of the "righteousness motive". Righteousness, godliness, faith etc. should be as important to the Christian as money is to a miser. We should be enslaved to it.

## Righteousness in action - "the righteous deeds of the saints"

The Bible often speaks of the righteous deeds of the saints. They are things of great glory and eternal worth. **Revelation 19:6-8 NKJV** *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thundering, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! (7) "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself*

*ready." (8) And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

Here we run into confusion in Christian circles. Some will say "Surely the Bible says that nothing we do is righteous and acceptable to God, surely all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags and unacceptable, it is impossible for us to do anything good because our evil motives always get in the way. Doesn't the Bible say "there is none righteous, no not one"? Romans speaks of three groups of people - Gentiles without the law who are ruled by their fallen nature in Adam , Jews who are under the law and condemned by it and Christians who fulfill the law of love through the indwelling Christ. In chapters 1 to 5 Paul makes a strong case that groups one and two (Jewish and Gentile non-Christians) are in need of the righteousness that is in Christ by faith. Our "righteous deeds" as unbelievers are fatally flawed by our lack of relationship with God through Jesus Christ and our lack of a new and righteous nature. Both these things change when we become a Christian. We become capable of working righteousness because of the new nature given to us and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is quite plain that Christians can do righteous deeds:

**1 John 2:29 NKJV** *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.*

**Hebrews 11:33 NKJV** *who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,*

**Acts 10:35 NKJV** *But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.*

**2 Corinthians 9:10-11 NKJV** *Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, (11) while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.*

**Ephesians 2:8-10 NKJV** *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Let us be clear about this, your righteous deeds do not earn you status before God or a new nature and they do not destroy the sin nature as your governing principle. Righteous deeds are the appropriate outcome of a faith-filled life. You can perhaps see them as the "outer layer" that depends on the other inner layers for fruitfulness. If the status before God is like the roots of a tree, the new inner nature the sap, the new governing principle the "species" of tree then the righteous deeds are the fruit. But the fruit tell us a lot about the tree. There is no use claiming to be an orange tree when all you produce is sour lemons! A Christian without righteous deeds is like a tree without fruit -as good as dead. **James 2:17 NKJV** *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

## Hungering And Thirsting After Righteousness

**Psalms 63:1-3 NKJV** *O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. (2) So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. (3) Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.*

Hungering and thirsting after righteousness means that we press in to lay hold of God's good things concerning our salvation. It means zeal, fervor and effort stemming from a hungry desire to fill the aching void inside us. Righteousness as a status before God is to be diligently sought by those who lack this standing. The unsaved person is to hunger and thirst after salvation until it becomes theirs, at which point they will be satisfied. It is free if you seek it, yet out of reach of a millionaire who doesn't want to bother!

**Isaiah 55:1 NKJV** *Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come; buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

**John 6:35 NKJV** *And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*

Righteousness as a new nature is to be sought by those who are controlled by the old nature and do not have Christ in them, the hope of glory. Thus unbelievers and many religious but unconverted folk will need to hunger and thirst after a renewed inner nature.

**John 7:37-39 NKJV** *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. (39) But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

Righteousness as an effective governing principle is to be sought by those lacking it. While righteousness is the new master for all Christians we must submit to it before it can govern us. This includes unbelievers and believers alike for many believers are carnal and worldly in their motives and aspirations. They are governed by their own agendas and lusts not God's righteous will for their life. They need to diligently seek the rulership of righteousness.

**Revelation 21:6-7 NKJV** *And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. (7) He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*

Righteous deeds are to be sought out and performed by all believers, not to earn salvation, which is not possible- but to show that we have it and are living according to God's will. We are to plan righteous deeds into our lives and live by them.

**Isaiah 32:8 NRSV** *But those who are noble plan noble things, and by noble things they stand.*

**Genesis 18:19 NKJV** *For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.*

**Proverbs 21:3 NKJV** *To do righteousness and justice Is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*

**Isaiah 56:1-2 NKJV** *Thus says the LORD: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed. (2) Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil.*

## How Shall We Seek After Righteousness?

Many today are apathetic and listless. They are spiritual sluggards of whom the Scripture says:

**Proverbs 26:15 NKJV** *The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.*

Spiritually apathetic people will not feed themselves on spiritual food but find it wearisome to make even a most minimal effort towards their salvation. To hunger and thirst after righteousness means that you make a considerable effort and that this effort is based on knowing that you have a lack, a hunger, a deficiency.

**Proverbs 12:27 NKJV** *The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, But diligence is man's precious possession.*

The lazy Christian does not cook his spiritual food. He does not process the spiritual input he has but neglects it and lets it go putrid. Have you ever seen a spiritual gift gone putrid? An evangelist becomes a gossip, an administrator an autocrat, a teacher a chaser after fads, a prophet a railing critic full of anger and negativity? Spiritual things can go wrong if we do not diligently look after them and think about them at depth "cooking our food". Diligence preserves our gifts and develops our righteousness. Someone hungering and thirsting after righteousness is diligent to search the Scriptures, (2 Timothy 2:15) put things in context and is assiduous to learn and obey. Spiritual diligence is a precious possession.

Love longs for things. Spiritual hunger involves an intense prolonged longing for God and His goodness. It is shameless, persistent and hammers at God until He grants the things ought for. **Psalms 107:9 NKJV** *"For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness".* Very little is accomplished in the Kingdom of God without seeking. Many of us are too impatient, too modern, and too cursory in our attention to spiritual things. We do not press in and seek day after day, year after year for the things of the Lord. Hence many of us are shallow. We feel that if we are not rewarded in 5 minutes or an hour then we will not be rewarded at all. Scripture says all who continue to seek shall find. (Matthew 7:7) That is a promise - but it depends on your continued, persistent and stubborn seeking after God.

## For They Shall Be Filled

**Philippians 1:9-11 NKJV** *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, (10) that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, (11) being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

**Ephesians 3:19 NKJV** *to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

**Ephesians 5:18-21 NKJV** *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, (19) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, (20) giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, (21) submitting to one another in the fear of God.*

**Colossians 1:9-12 NKJV** *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; (10) that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (11) strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long-suffering with joy; (12) giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

When is a jar filled? When no more can be put into it. We each are different in the size of "hole" within us that God has to fill - be we can all be filled with righteousness. Many a person hollowed out by life's trials has afterwards said that the hollowing out was an enlarging so that they later could be filled in greater measure with the things of the Lord. God promises us that our intense longing for righteousness will one day be completely filled. Ultimately this will happen at the resurrection when the power of sin in the members is finally dealt with forever. Before then we can live at increasing levels of filling with the things of God and with righteousness in particular. Prayer seems to play an essential part in this. When Paul wanted people to be "filled with the fruits of righteousness" or "filled with all the fullness of God" or "filled with the knowledge of His will" Paul prayed for it. This is a pretty clear example of what we should do to grasp these things in our own life. We should develop an intense longing for them which moves us to prayer to lay hold of them. A three step process is suggested.

*Step One:* Study the things of God until the Word of God arouses within you an intense desire for the things of God. Study with the aim of desiring God not just accumulating information. Form a clear picture within you of what you want from God. (I'm not talking about visualizing possessions like some do, but clearly wanting Christian virtues such as godliness etc.) There is commonly a cost or price associated with acquiring that virtue - patience comes through tribulation (Romans 5:1-3), love is perfected in love of enemies (Matt 5:46-48). Reach the point where you are prepared to pay the price of acquiring that virtue remembering how priceless it will be for you in eternity.

*Step Two:* When the desire is aroused within you pray, and even fast, using Scriptures to back up your praying. It may even help to set a time period for yourself "I will press into God each day for at least two weeks." etc. We see Daniel doing this mourning for his people and seeking God about them. **Daniel 10:2-3 NKJV** *In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. (3) I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.* God heard Daniel's prayer and sent an angel to answer him! Many people have to press in alone but sometimes you can do so with a prayer partner to encourage and strengthen you. This can be a great help. Remember the following two promises as you do so.

**Matthew 5:6 NKJV** *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.*

**Matthew 7:7 NKJV** *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

*Step Three:* Once you have got it -give it! Spiritual food is like the manna that went stale. (Exodus 16:19, 20) We cannot hoard it. Being filled with the Spirit is supposed to result in output - singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, encouragement, thankfulness, submission (see Eph 5:18-21 above). Do so tactfully and wisely without "casting your pearls before swine". **Matthew 7:6 NKJV** *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.* Some people will not be ready for what you have found -so be wise in your sharing Give freely of what God has given you for Jesus instructed His followers to...**Matthew 10:8 NKJV** *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

## Blessed Are The Merciful

**Matthew 5:7 NKJV** *Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.*

Jesus spoke these words into one of the harshest and most legalistic cultures in history. To Pharisees who would stone an adulteress to death. To lawyers who would divorce their wives for burning the dinner. To Roman soldiers who crucified people. To tax collectors who were extortionists. Mercy was in short supply. These words must have sounded like a pious daydream but we can look back and see that they introduced a new era and a new approach to humanity based on kindness and truth. After these words rang out the followers of Jesus would suffer greatly but their mercy would win the day. Hospitals would be built, infant exposure by the Romans would cease, the Coliseum and the "circus" where people fought to the death with each other and wild animals would be closed down, education would prosper and grow, marriage be held in honor and women given a higher status than ever before, and the cross would become a symbol of refuge and hope.

### What Is Mercy?

In human terms mercy is the foregoing of the right to judge, criticize, attack or punish a person who is in one's power. A good illustration of this comes from the days when people fought duels. The fight would be fast and furious but if it came to the point where one of the duelists lost his weapon and was helpless against his opponent he could ask for mercy. The opponent had every right to run him through. But a gentleman would let the loser live. That is mercy. It is releasing our "opponent" from the consequences of their actions. It is forgoing our "right to punish". It is the opposite of a cruel, vengeful or exacting attitude.

The first mention of mercy in the Bible is found during God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and refers to God's rescue of Lot from the destructive consequences of his lifestyle.

**Genesis 19:16 NKJV** *"And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city."*

Mercy takes us by the hand and places us outside of judgment and away from destruction. Mercy is not capricious; God's mercy is chiefly shown to those who are loyal to Him. And obey His commandments.

**Deuteronomy 7:9-10 NKJV** *Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; (10) "and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face."*

Mercy moves along the laneway of covenant relationship. The wicked cannot expect mercy; instead the wrath of God normally abides on them. (Romans 1:18) unless they repent - for

the repentant shall always find mercy with God.

**Isaiah 55:6-8 NKJV** *Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. (7) Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. (8) "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.*

Another meaning of mercy flows from this idea of "people in our power". It is mercy not to exploit the weak but to help and assist them. For instance a rich person is asked for a loan by a poor person. It is mercy to give them a gift or an interest free loan. The poor person is "in the power" of the rich person. The rich person can "make or break" the poor person. Sometimes people can be "in our power" due to circumstances. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the wounded man was in such a grave condition "left for dead" that his life was "in the power" of those who chose to show hospitality or refuse it. (Luke 10:29-37). "Mercy ministries" use the power of the Christian church to help those most in need. The ultimate example is God and His Creation. If He was to decide to withdraw everything He gives us for free then all life would perish. God is merciful to the Creation that is totally in His power. He is the God who sends rain on thirsty ground.

Mercy one of the three attributes often found in the New Testament's greetings. Normally they are in this order - Grace, Mercy and Peace. God sends His Grace through the covenant which then results in Mercy which brings Peace - ("shalom" wholeness") to our hearts, minds and lives. Grace and mercy can be obtained through bold importunate prayer.

**Hebrews 4:16 NKJV** *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* This bold prayer to the throne of God then brings us peace of mind. **Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV** *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Mercy is that gracious attribute of God that sets our needy lives at peace and rest.*

Mercy is an attribute of the truly wise and godly. **James 3:17 NKJV** *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.* And above all of God who shows mercy to all and who has allowed disobedience to spread to all that He might have mercy upon all.

**Romans 11:30-33 NKJV** *For as you (Gentiles) were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their (the Jews) disobedience, (31) even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. (32) For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. (33) Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! The mercy he has shown us in Christ Jesus is truly mercy! It takes disobedient people in danger of judgment and makes them Sons of God with an exalted place in the heavenly realms.*

**Ephesians 2:4-7 NKJV** *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (6) and raised us up together, and made us sit*

*together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,(7) that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

What great and marvelous things mercy can accomplish! This often derided virtue is the very transforming power of God! Merciful people are not wimps they are transformers of this globe. The predators and rapacious will go the way of the dinosaur and the merciful and meek will triumph! Praise the Lord whose ways are past finding out! He is awesome, holy and blessed! Praise His name!

## Blessed Are The Merciful

Being merciful is truly a challenge to our human nature. It challenges the following three fleshly vices - exactness, hypocrisy and vengefulness.

## Exactness versus Mercy

Exactness is that precise spirit that is always worried about things like "fairness" and precise details of ritual. Its the spirit that was outraged at the unwashed hands of Jesus' disciples but which tolerated unwashed hearts.(Mark 7:1-23) It is unable to "make allowances". Jesus told a parable to break this spirit of exactness.

**Matthew 20:1-16 NKJV** *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard.(2) "Now when he had agreed with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. .... "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day?'" (7) "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.'....." (9) "And when those came who were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. (10) "But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. (11) "And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner, (12) "saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.'" (13) "But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' (14) 'Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. (15) 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?' (16) "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen."*

Mercy can violate our sense of what is fair and "exactly right". We can call the goodness of God "bad" because He was good to someone - and it wasn't us! This is, in effect, saying that we are the centre of the Universe and if anyone is to be treated well it must be us. It is making us the Judge and turning God into the accused. Unless we break our spirit of exactness we will end up condemning a merciful God. How can we break out of this? Jesus gives some suggestions that pierce us to the core in this area.

**Luke 6:28-36** *"Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. (29) "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. (30) "Give to everyone who asks*

*of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. (31) "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. (32) "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (33) "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) "And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. (35) "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (36) "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.*

## Hypocrisy versus Mercy

**Matthew 9:11-13 NKJV** *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (12) When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. (13) "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

The desire of Jesus' heart is not that we get all the external details right but that we have merciful hearts - hearts that love sinners and draw them toward God and repentance. The Pharisees saw worship as the "big thing" they got all the details of burnt offerings correct. They tithed even the garden herbs. They attended regularly at the feasts, fasts and hours of prayer. They knew the Scriptures. They knew the rules. But it was all outward. They did not know God. If they did they would have been merciful just as He is merciful. Mercy means that we must break the alabaster vase of our outward pious selves and spill some ointment into the lives of others. Jesus' cure for the judgmental attitudes of the hypocrites is a continuation of the verses we quoted as a cure for the spirit of exactness (36)

*"Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (37) "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

## Vengefulness versus Mercy

"I'll get him back. He deserves it". The spirit of vendetta is the breeze that fans the fires in Hell. As the saying goes if everyone took an eye and eye and a tooth for a tooth soon the whole world would be blind and toothless! Mercy is a close companion of forgiveness and grace. It is the balm that puts out the stinging anger and rage. Once we let go of our rage in forgiveness then mercy extends a helping hand. Life has its very bitter moments. When we feel deeply betrayed mercy seems the farthest things from our hearts. But O! The peace when we extend it. I remember sitting on my verandah, cup of coffee in hand, and more steam was coming out of me than the coffee! I was enraged at a deep betrayal. For six months I had stewed in anger and rage. I seriously wanted to kill the person who had hurt me so deeply. Before God I decided not to. Suddenly deep peace flooded through me. It was so beautiful that even ten years later I remember it with joy. The decision not to take

revenge, to 'extend mercy' was hard for me because it seemed so unjust. It was letting him get away with it. But justice is God's to dispense.

Mercy challenges our flesh and our sense of "natural justice". The Spirit has a different agenda to the flesh, a different wisdom and a different way of calculating profit and loss. That decision to be merciful will be a "star in my crown" in heaven!

**James 3:13-18 NKJV** *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. (15) This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. (16) For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. (17) But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (18) Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

The cure for this spirit of vengefulness is again found in Luke 6.

**Luke 6:27-31 NKJV** *"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28) "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. (29) "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him, who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. (30) "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. (31) "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. Mercy returns good for evil thus breaking the vendetta cycle.*

Mercy overcomes evil with good. This is such a "hard saying" that some theologians have tried to place its fulfillment in the Millennium saying that it is beyond the reach of the average Christian. However countless Christians in ordinary circumstances have put this into practice. It can be done. The Bible sees radical mercy as part of the Christian gospel for all people at all time. It certainly was part of practical Christian living for Paul and for the church in Rome which was soon to be intensely persecuted.

**Romans 12:17-21 NRSV** *Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. (18) If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (19) Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (20) No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

## The Good Samaritan

The Good Samaritan is Jesus' primary example of an actively merciful individual.

**Luke 10:29-37 NKJV** *But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (30) Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. (31) "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (32) "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. (33) "But a*

certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. (34) "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35) "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' (36) "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" (37) And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The Good Samaritan had ten good points that show us how we can have practical mercy on others. He.....

1. Saw the need. (v. 33.)
2. Decided to get involved out of compassion.(v.33)
3. "Went to him." .didn't avoid him or expect the wounded to visit him.(v.34)
4. Acted graciously to meet the immediate obvious physical need. (v.34)
5. Used the best he had at hand (oil and wine).(v.34)
6. Gave the traveler priority over himself . (v 34)
7. Involved others in appropriate ways. (v.35)
8. Did not intrude on the privacy of or make claims on the person helped.(v.35)
9. Made a financial sacrifice. (v.35)
10. Checked back to ensure appropriate service delivery.(v.35)

As Jesus said to the lawyer -"Go and do thou likewise".

## What If We Don't Show Mercy

Jesus tells a number of parables about what will happen to people who fail to show mercy. The unmerciful servant who would not forgive a small debt when he had been forgiven a large one was handed over to the torturers (Matthew 18:21-35) and those that did not have compassion on the "least of my brethren" were cast into everlasting punishment in the lake of fire.

**Matthew 25:41-46 NKJV** "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: (42) 'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; (43) 'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' (44) "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' (45) "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' (46) "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

The showing of practical compassion indicates that the love of God dwells in our hearts and that we are truly believers and followers of the Lord Jesus Christ with His agape love in us. To not have practical compassion indicates that we do not have God's love and that perhaps our actual salvation should be questioned.

**1 John 3:16-18 NKJV** *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

### For They Shall Receive Mercy

We have all sinned against God and against other people. We all need mercy, forgiveness and grace. The best way to get this is to be merciful yourself for as Jesus said in **Matthew 5:7 NKJV** *Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.* He makes us a further promise in **Luke 6:37-38** *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) "Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."* To receive mercy we need to give mercy and when we do we shall receive it back in "good measure" and our life will overflow with the blessings of God.

## Blessed Are The Pure In Heart

**Matthew 5:8 NKJV** *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*

Purity of heart has often seemed to me to be an unattainable goal, lofty, idealistic and out of reach. Almost in the "too hard basket". The questions arise "How can I have a pure heart living in today's world, I don't stand a chance. It's futile to even hope for it" or "I've been too hurt by life, I'm too messed up to ever have a pure heart". Like Solomon we cry: **Proverbs 20:9 NKJV** *Who can say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin"?* Why then did Jesus ever bother uttering these words? These words were uttered to puncture the pride of the hypocrites on one hand and to encourage the humble and godly in their quest on the other. The great surprise of the New Testament and of the Bible in general is that it talks about a pure heart as an attainable reality. (1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:22, Hebrews 10:22, 1 Peter 1:22). We shall look at these references later. First we shall look at what is a pure heart.

### What Is A Pure Heart?

Soren Kierkegaard said that "Purity of heart is to will one thing." While that is fine in a secular sense it is insufficient for the Christian. Hitler could will one thing as could many very evil people. The heart must will the correct "one thing". The Christian must add goodness to this definition. Purity of heart involves holiness. However I don't want to throw Kierkegaard's definition out of the window entirely, purity of heart definitely involves a singleness of purpose. The life is shot like an arrow toward God. Purity of heart, like faith, is singular and fixed. For the godly man or woman it is fixed on God and His glory. A pure heart is that which only wills the good. The pure in heart cries out - **Psalms 40:8 NKJV** *I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.*

By contrast an impure heart unleashes hate, discord and strife. It is ruled by envy and selfish ambition, operates according to demonic wisdom and has the fruit of "disorder and every evil thing".

**James 3:14-16 NRSV** *But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. (15) Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and devilish. (16) For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.*

Jesus and Jeremiah both gave very unflattering descriptions of the human heart apart from the grace of God.

**Jeremiah 17:9 NKJV** *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"*

**Mark 7:21-23 NKJV** *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, (22) "thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness,*

*an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. (23) "All these evil things come from within and defile a man."*

Our hearts are by nature sinful and deceptive. They are full of wicked thoughts including the deceptive lie that we are basically good and that we have no real need to change. That is why Christian fellowship is so important for our growth in God. Without the input of others and the sharp two-edged sword of God's Word wielded by the Holy Spirit we would be easily deceived by our own proud hearts. This is one reason why it is necessary to go to church and hear good Bible teaching from loving pastors.

The Bible also speaks of the divided or double heart. In Psalms 12:1-2 NKJV Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. {2} They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

When you meet a double-hearted person you are aware that there is a lack of integrity and an overriding self-interest. They are "faithless" and do not keep their word. They are not anchored within themselves but adrift.

**James 1:6-8 NKJV** *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

The double-minded person has a heart that cannot stay fixed on God but which alternates between the will of God and the attractions of this world. By contrast people with pure hearts come across as "solid", faithful and dependable. Not men-pleasers but God-pleasers. Psalm 15 describes these faithful, pure-hearted people.

**Psalms 15: 1-5 NKJV** *LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? (2) He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; (3) He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; (4) In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; (5) He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.*

This is an exact parallel to Psalm 24:

**Psalms 24:3-5 NKJV** *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? (4) He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. (5) He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

Psalm 15 can thus be seen as an extended description of what it means to have "clean hands and a pure heart". What then are the chief characteristics of the pure in heart? They are morally upright; their thoughts are "straight". The pure in heart "speak truth in their hearts"(Psalm 15:2). Their inner talk is truthful and honest, full of integrity, God-centered and productive.

**Psalms 19:14 NKJV** *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*

The pure in heart treat their friends well and have control over their tongues and their tempers so that they neither back-bites nor gossips (Psalm 15:3). However they are not naive and use godly discernment evaluating others primarily by their character not their wealth or appearance. The vile are not flattered or courted in any way but rather they are despised - even though they may be influential. Yet even the "insignificant" who fear the Lord and are honored (Psalm 15:4). The pure in heart are safe. When they make a promise they keep it even if it ends up hurting them. (Psalm 15:4). They may be "ripped off" but they do not rip off others in any way (Psalm 15:5) either by charging high interest on loans or taking a bribe against the innocent. Because they are safe and stable friends God grants them safe and stable lives. (Psalm 15:5).

## The Pure Heart and the Blood of Christ

**Hebrews 10:22 NKJV** *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

**1 John 1:7-10 NKJV** *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*

**Psalms 51:7-11 NKJV** *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Make me hear joy and gladness That the bones You have broken may rejoice. (9) Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (11) Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*

Christians have the marvelous advantage of the continuing work of the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin. The blood of Christ is the starting point for personal purity and the only hope of success. Our tendency to become corrupted by the world, tempted by the Devil and led astray by the lusts of our flesh is too strong for any other remedy. The blood of Christ is God's powerful cleansing agent that works day and night against our impurities.

David cries "Cleanse me with hyssop". Hyssop was used to apply the blood of the sacrificial Lamb at Passover and stands for the atonement applied to the life of the Christian believer. The result? "And I shall be clean." This is what Hebrews speaks about when it speaks of "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." The hyssop sprinkled the blood and the blood cleanses the sinner. David again says, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow". This refers to the "washing of baptism" which is not a removal of dirt from the flesh

but an appeal for a good conscience. **(1 Peter 3:21)** *We are washed with water and the blood and made clean inwardly. This cleansing with the blood is ours in Christ; if we ask God for it He is "faithful and just" and will cleanse us. (1 John 1:7-10)* It is one of the ordinary (but nonetheless great) graces of the Christian life. Live in it.

## Other Means of Attaining Purity of Heart

While the basis of a pure heart is the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin there are three other cleansing agents that God uses. They are godly discipline, the word of God received in faith and Christian hope.

**Proverbs 20:30 NKJV** *Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, As do stripes the inner depths of the heart.*

Some of us get purified the hard way. God disciplines us until we wake up and deal with our sin. He calls out...

**Isaiah 55:7 NKJV** *Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.*

If the unrighteous do not forsake their thoughts they are chastised until they repent. When we choose to deal with our thought life we find a God who "abundantly pardons". You will sometimes hear people say "it was a very hard time but after it I got a new perspective on life and started to take God more seriously." that is God's discipline at work. But there is an easier way!

The word of God received in our heart by faith renews our minds and purifies us from sin. That faith is necessary is both common sense and the testimony of Scripture. Obviously not all who hear the word of God have pure hearts. But some are greatly changed by the entering of the word of God into their lives. Such was the case with Jesus' disciples. At the Lord's supper Jesus first of all said:

**John 13:10-11 NKJV** *Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." (11) For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."*

But after Judas left He said:

**John 15:3 NKJV** *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.* Jesus words had sunk into the disciples (soon to be apostles) at such a depth that they were now clean vessels fit for the Spirit to indwell at Pentecost and for years of fruitful ministry.

**1 John 3:2-3 NKJV** *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Hope purifies us. It focuses us on good and godly objectives and is one of the chief means of attaining a pure heart. When a girl is engaged to be married there is often a concentrated flurry of expectant hope and focused activity. She may go to the gym, trim down, get her hair done nicely, and do all the other things needed to look good on the

wedding day. Or the athlete in hope of winning a prize makes each grinding training session count. The hope disciplines the life. So it is with the Christian disciple and the Second Coming. We want to receive our crown, our imperishable victor's wreath. As that hope becomes vivid within us we naturally purify ourselves. We see that the things of this world are passing away and set our sights on eternity. The hope of heaven is absolutely essential if we are to endure the more difficult disciplines of the Christian life. When we realize that we are bound for eternal glory then we want to be fit for it. We want to be blameless, spotless and undefiled. We want to have pure hearts for only those with pure hearts can see God.

## The Benefits of a Pure Heart

Listed below are five benefits of a pure heart.

1. Seeing God – **Matthew 5:8 NKJV** *blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*
2. The Friendship of God the King - **Proverbs 22:11 NKJV** *He who loves purity of heart And has grace on his lips, The king will be his friend.*
3. All Things Become Pure - **Titus 1:15 NKJV** *To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled.*
4. God Is Good to the Pure in Heart - **Psalms 73:1 NKJV** *Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.*
5. God's Presence - **Psalms 15:1-2 NKJV** *LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? (2) He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;*

The pure in heart enjoy a remarkable degree of fellowship with God and man. They can stand in His tabernacle and dwell in His holy hill. They can see Him. He is their friend. He makes earthly kings to be their friend as well. He is good to the pure in heart and gives them the capacity to enjoy all things as pure and good. For the pure in heart even sexual relationships are pure but to the "defiled and unbelieving" they are "dirty". It is as we purify ourselves from sin that we become close to God, useful in His service and able to truly enjoy all that He has created.

## Blessed Are The Peacemakers

**Matthew 5:9 NKJV** *Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.*

The first three beatitudes (poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness) deal with humbling ourselves before God and man and are fundamental to any form of personal piety. The next three (hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being merciful and being pure in heart) concern ones own right actions and attitudes. The last three - (peacemaking, persecution and being vilified) deal with the righteous person in conflict with an unrighteous world. Peacemaking presupposes the other beatitudes. It is futile and self-defeating to try to make peace without virtues such as meekness or righteousness or mercy or purity of heart.

"Blessed are the peacemakers" calls the Christian to take the peacemaker within their hearts and let Him loose on the world. Peacemaking takes good people and asks them to produce a good world. There are too many badly divided churches full of very good people. Good people need to learn to get along, to let Jesus in them make peace among them, if they are to be truly called "sons of God".

### Being A Peacemaker

Peacemaking is the strenuous exercise of wrestling a self-centered and conflict ridden world into the peaceful and blessed paths and patterns of God. The Bible tells us to **Ephesians 4:3** *strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Thus unity comes from the cross and is of the Spirit. We need to maintain it. But maintaining peace is hard work. Verbs like endeavor, strive and pursue are used to describe the effort needed.

**Romans 14:19 NKJV** *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*

Peacemaking seems to be strenuous stuff indeed!

Peacemaking is based on applying godly wisdom to human relationships. It is the opposite of the competitive relationships that divide the world.

**James 3:16-18 NKJV** *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. (17) But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (18) Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*

### Peacemaking Versus Being Holy

It may seem incredibly obvious but in order to be a peacemaker you first have to stop being divisive. Believe it or not divisive people are liked in religious circles because their basic statement is "our group is right and all the other groups are wrong". This is a great struggle for me because as a bible teacher I consider correct doctrine to be very

important. God requires it of me. (James 3:1, 2 Timothy 2:15). I have at times been overly harsh on my brothers and sisters in Christ who do not share my calling or my burden. At times I have been divisive and controversial. Sometimes this has been proper and necessary. Often it has not been. Jesus was both a controversialist and a peacemaker. Let's see what He had to say about this balance.

**Mark 9:50 NKJV** *"Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavour, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."*

We are called to be BOTH salty and peaceful - but saltiness has the priority because without it we are useless. (Matthew 5:13) The same thought is expressed in:

**Hebrews 12:14 NKJV** *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*

We are to pursue peace with all men and we are also to pursue holiness. Our attempts to procure peace must not cause us to compromise core values or become corrupt of heart.

Many Christian groups that seek broad-based appeal have drifted away from sound teaching and its "saltiness" in order to avoid internal conflict. Though this is a common mistake it should not totally dishearten us in our attempts to make peace. What we need to do is study the boundaries that the New Testament sets for who is in and who is out. In Galatians 3:28 and James 2:1-10 we are clearly told to make peace between different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (e.g. Jew and Gentile), between different social backgrounds (rich and poor, slave and free) and across gender (male and female)). In Romans 14 we are not to judge our brother with regard to food or drink or Sabbaths. Jesus made it clear that we are not to judge externals such as giving (Mark 12:42, 43) which is internally regulated (2 Corinthians 9:7). These are our issues of tolerance. However there are some things we are not to tolerate but instead to discipline if we are to have peace. These include immoral lifestyles (1 Corinthians 5:1-13), indolence (Titus 1:12, 13, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12) participation in idolatry or the occult (Revelation 2:20), and blatantly wrong doctrine such as denying the resurrection. (1 Timothy 4:1-8, 2 Timothy 2:15-18)

God's peace comes from God's rule and there is no peace without it.

**Isaiah 48:22 NKJV** *"There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."*

It is ungodly to have a sharp dispute over whether the rapture will occur at the beginning, middle or end of the tribulation - such disputes are fleshly (Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 3:1-5). It is equally ungodly to gladly tolerate adulterous or homosexual lifestyles (1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 6:9-11). Peacemaking must reflect God's rule and God's values. Thus peacemaking is not universal niceness but the ordering of creation into the righteous and peace-filled paths of God. Peace is not just absence of conflict. It is the creation of a community that knows the presence of God and which fixes their hearts on Him.

**Isaiah 26:3 NKJV** *You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

Godly peacemaking is at war with sin. The great peacemakers have a powerful ethical conscience.

**1 Peter 3:11 NKJV** *Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.*

Jesus, Paul, and John the Baptist were all peacemakers of great power and strong ethics. This ethical basis gives a strong platform for winning the war against the angry, disordering and conflict ridden forces of the world. Without such an ethical basis you end up giving too much ground. There is a historical tendency to end up being ruled by that which you tolerate. Israel became tolerant to idolatry under Solomon and was soon ruled by idolatrous kings. Unless the Church's ethical conscience is aroused it will be taken over by the sins it tolerates. The current move in the Uniting Church in Australia to ordain active homosexuals is a case in point. The Christian peacemaker needs to have worked through his or her faith and have a firm grasp of those values which are essential and non-negotiable. This is especially true for those working in cross-cultural situations.

## Pursuing Peace

To swing the pendulum back a bit, now that we have established our ethical boundaries, we will look at our duty as Christians to refrain from division and to pursue and promote peace. Let's start with a few very well known bible verses...

**Galatians 5:19-23 NKJV** *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, (20) idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, (21) envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (22) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

The "works of the flesh" are incredibly divisive.

"Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders,"

and the fruit of the Spirit are incredibly peaceful.

"Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness, self-control".

So the starting point for peacemaking is living a life under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul restates this in his epistle to the Romans

**Romans 8:4-6 NKJV** *that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (5) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (6) For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

The starting point for peacemaking is a renewed mind that is set on the things of God and which is soaked in faith-filled prayer and free from undue anxiety.

**Isaiah 26:3 NKJV** *You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.*

**Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV** *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds*

*through Christ Jesus. Peacemaking is thus, first of all, a spiritual activity that flows from faith.*

There are two sides to this. At the same time that we pursue the things of the Spirit we must also actively put to death the things of the flesh if we to make peace.

**Ephesians 4:31-32 NKJV** *Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. (32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.*

It takes self-control not to gossip, not to vent our frustrations and not to take revenge when we are provoked. It's a good idea not to let the war start in the first place but to absorb the insult with grace.

**Luke 6:27-31 NKJV** *"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28) "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. (29) "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him, who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. (30) "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. (31) "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.*

Peacemaking depends on not retaliating and having the spiritual greatness of heart to be able to temporarily set aside one's legitimate rights in the cause of the cross. Tying this discussion together we can see that peacemaking requires a powerful infilling of the Holy Ghost if we are 1) To manifest the fruits of the Spirit, 2) have our minds full of life and peace, 3) be self-controlled with our gossip etc., and 4) be able to graciously absorb insult and injury. Fortunately God is not stingy in the way He dispenses the Holy Spirit to those who admit they are in desperate need of His power. You and I need to come before God daily and ask God to be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can be peacemakers in His world.

**Luke 11:13 NKJV** *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him*

**Ephesians 5:18 NKJV** *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,*

Today, while I was writing this article a friend rang me to say that he did not need a poster I had spent many hours doing for him. He had done it himself. Last week it was a huge rush to be done ASAP. This week it didn't matter. I fumed. I wanted to tell him how insulting and thoughtless he was. God always convicts me at such times and I could hardly write an article on peacemaking and bite someone's head off!

"Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" came to mind so I prayed that the event the poster was for would be successful and that Mike would have a good day. I also prayed that God would teach him to be a bit more considerate! That's allowed I think. For once I reacted rightly. Something that could have become a contention was made peaceful and I even feel peaceful about it now. As Proverbs says it is best to

stop these contentions before they creep into the relationship and spoil it forever.

**Proverbs 18:19 NKJV** *A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a castle.*

## Sons of God

Peacemakers will be called "sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). In other words their godliness will be so evident that people will characterize them as being "just like God" in character, sons of God. There is an interesting association between peacemaking and being called sons of God which happened just after Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water. Matthew records:

**Matthew 14:32-33 NKJV** *And when they (Jesus and Peter) got into the boat, the wind ceased. (33) Then those who were in the boat came and worshipped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."*

Jesus ability to master the unruly elements and bring peace marked Him as a "son of God". Something similar may have happened in the multi-cultural church in Antioch which was a united and vibrant congregation.

**Acts 11:24-26 NKJV** *For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. (25) Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. (26) And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

It seems that the harmony in the church resulted in them being called Christians that is "little Christ".

**Galatians 3:26 NKJV** *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. All Christians are sons of God but not all Christians are "called" sons of God by those who know them. Our nature as sons of God is hidden and awaits to be revealed.*

**Romans 8:14-19 NKJV** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (15) For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." (16) The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (19) For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.*

As we engage in peacemaking we bring creation out of its bondage into decay and into the peace of God. (This will happen in all its fullness at the resurrection but we can have a foretaste now) As we do so our nature as sons of God is fully revealed. For instance when Jesus healed the sick and restored peace to broken bodies and reversed the bondage to decay it was evident that He was a son of God. Jesus yearned to reveal who He truly was. When the Devil tempted him it was with inappropriate answers to the challenge "if you

are the Son of God....” As sons of God, led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14 above), we declare who we really are when we avoid quarrels, mend our relationships, care for the sick, free the captives and reconcile people to each other. It is our ability to bless others and to love our enemies that set us apart from the world and all who live according to the flesh.

## Practical Pointers For Peacemaking

(See my article on [Christian Conflict Resolution](#) for 20 tips on this.)

- Pursue peace as a worthwhile and high priority goal. (Romans 12:18)
- Develop the proper spiritual foundations for peace. Confess your sins to God. (1 John 1:7-10) Then ask to be filled with the Spirit. (Eph 5:18)
- Develop godly boundaries based on Scripture so that you know what is negotiable and what isn't. (Romans 14)
- Put away the flesh and things such as envy and selfish ambition which only create disorder and "every evil thing". (James 3:16-8)
- Ask God for discernment about which issues/relationships to make peace on. Don't rush in to situations that are too hard for you. (Philippians 1:9)
- Practice blessing people and wishing them peace. (John 14:7, 1 Thessalonians 5:23)
- Be quick to listen to others. (James 1:19,20)
- Don't broadcast your opinions all the time for that is the mark of fools. (Proverbs 18:2, Ecclesiastes 5:3, 10:12-14). Instead show restraint. (James 1: 19, 20).
- React slowly especially when you have been offended. (James 1:19,20)
- Fix things fast before they get "set in concrete". (Proverbs 18:19, Matthew 5:23-26)
- Be willing to yield on unimportant matters (James 3:18)
- Do to others what you would want them to do to you. (Luke 6:31)

## Blessed Are The Persecuted

**Matthew 5:10-12 NKJV** *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (12) "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Some degree of persecution is the normal way of life for the average Christian today. Indeed this is the biblical expectation (2 Timothy 3:12 NKJV). Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. According to David Barrett's "World Christian Encyclopedia," around 150,000 to 300,000 Christians die for their faith each year. In only 24 countries is Christianity completely free of restriction and this number is shrinking every year. Thirty six countries at least actively persecute Christians and this number includes well-known nations such as China, Vietnam and North Korea. No sane Christian wants persecution, even Paul desired that the Christian community live in peace (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Yet we are to rejoice in it when it comes and not to be surprised at it because we live in a world where the forces of wickedness are actively at work (read your newspaper or Eph 6:10-18).

**1 Peter 4:12-14 NIV** *Dear friends do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. (13) But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (14) If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

Christians are obviously different from those around them and this difference results in persecution. Our values are different, our vision is different, we are not 'one of them' any more like we used to be. In His high-priestly prayer Jesus acknowledges how the word of God has changed His disciples' lives and left them adrift in a hostile world. (John 17:14 NIV) I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. Jesus does not ask the Father to pick these poor lost disciples up and transport them safe to heaven or to hide them away in the desert. He has a more robust plan for them than that. He plans for us to become over-comers.

**John 17:15-21 NIV** *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. (17) Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (18) As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. (19) For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. (20) "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, (21) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

Thus God's agenda for us is to be a holy, "sanctified", set apart people, immersed in the word of God, protected from the evil one, sent into the midst of a hostile world in order that

the gospel may be clearly proclaimed and "the world may believe that you have sent me". That's what I want my life to be like! I think most Christians want that too.

## Protection

We will endure persecution as long as we are sure that God is with us and will protect us and not allow us to be tested beyond our limits. The Bible assures us in many places that we can pray for protection and that it will be granted. Even the Lord's prayer includes the phrases "lead us not into temptation (hard testing) and deliver us from evil". It is a legitimate request that Jesus has taught us to pray - presumably so that He can answer it. Three further verses that are worth keeping in mind with regard to spiritual protection are:

**1 Corinthians 10:13 NIV** *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

**1 John 4:4 NKJV** *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*

**1 John 5:18-19 NIV** *We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. (19) We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

This last verse seems to end on a negative note but in fact acknowledges God's protecting power is a greater reality than Satan's dominion over the whole world.

## Parameters

If we want to survive persecution in a way that glorifies God there are certain broad parameters that we must observe. Persecution must be "for righteousness sake" "for my name's sake", slandering and accusation must be "false" accusations. If we are persecuted it must be because we are good people not annoying busybodies.

**1 Peter 4:15-16 NKJV** *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. (16) Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*

Some Christians suffer needlessly because their style is abrupt, rude, or culturally inappropriate. Some of the Christians who get "flamed" on the Internet are in this category. It should not be our personal idiosyncrasies or ability to press other people's buttons that get us persecuted but rather the Christian qualities that we display or the truth of our message. It pays to learn what is appropriate. Missionary societies tell people what is appropriate and what is not. In Australia many people are offended by "American hype" and will criticize some preachers on the basis of style not content. We need to be well mannered and culturally appropriate if we are to only attract "the right sort of criticism".

## Blessings

Jesus mentioned two blessings that flow from persecution a) great reward in heaven b) being treated as the prophets of old were treated i.e. "prophetic status". While persecution may put us down in this world it lifts us up in the Kingdom of God. The apostle Paul - one of the most slandered and persecuted Christians of all time had this to say about his sufferings.

**2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1 NKJV** *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (5:1) For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

Paul looked on the eternal glory and regarded his sufferings as "light affliction" though it included stoning, shipwreck and being beaten with rods. He was not a masochist but a realist who knew that "pain passes".

The apostle Peter wrote to the persecuted churches of Asia saying that their persecution resulted in special approval from God:

**1 Peter 4:14 NKJV** *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*

Not only are we approved by God but the enduring of persecution produces in us a stronger faith and a deeper character.

**1 Peter 1:6-7 NKJV** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, (7) that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

In those countries where the church is most fiercely persecuted there is also often a deeper faith and a greater number of miraculous workings by God.

Persecution drives the church to pray. We see this in Acts 4 when the apostles were threatened by the Jewish authorities and told not to testify about Jesus.

**Acts 4:18-31 NKJV** *And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. (19) But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. (20) "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."..... (24) So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, (25) "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? (26) The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.' (27) "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together (28) "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. (29) "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, (30) "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." (31) And when they had prayed, the*

*place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*

The answer to prayer was evident both in the shaking of the place where they were gathered and in the ministry of miracles which followed - see chapters 5 through 8 of Acts. It was a case of persecution acting as a trigger for what God wanted to do.

Persecution seems to affect the heart of God so that we are "precious in His sight". That is the only way I can put it. I acknowledge that all Christians are precious in His sight but there is something very special about the martyrs and the persecuted. We see this in the honoring of the martyrs in the book of Revelation and in the well known statement that: **Psalms 116:15 NKJV** *Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints.*

Persecution leads to great deliverances. Think of the Exodus when God heard the cry of His persecuted people or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, or Peter delivered from prison under the guard of 16 Roman soldiers or Jesus risen from the dead. The firing line is the miracle line. You have to be there to find out!

Persecution is a sure sign of judgment for our enemies. Those who keep on afflicting God's people will face a very harsh judgment indeed.

**2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 NKJV** *so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, (5) which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; (6) since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, (7) and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, (8) in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (10) when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.*

Lastly and perhaps most importantly, suffering persecution means that we are following Christ's example and suffering both for Him and with Him. He suffers when His body suffers. The risen Christ is not distant from the sufferings of His church. The afflictions of Christians are also his afflictions. This was revealed to Saul - later Paul, on the road to Damascus.

**Acts 9:4-5 NKJV** *Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (5) And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."* Later Paul was to make a connection between His own sufferings and the sufferings of Christ Jesus so that he would describe his own sufferings as part of his fellowship with Jesus.

**Philippians 3:10-11 NKJV** *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, (11) if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

The apostle Peter even took the very radical step of extending the sufferings of Christ to include not only religious persecution but the unjust punishment of Christian slaves.

**1 Peter 2:18-23 NKJV** *Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. (19) For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. (20) For what credit is it if,*

*when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (21) For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: (22) "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; (23) who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*

## Handling Persecution

How then should we handle persecution? Our responses must fit the biblical criteria being lawful and Christ-like responses to injustice. We should not behave badly, lose our temper, revile others or threaten. Threats of lawsuits or defamation cases are never fitting for Christians. Christians can use their rights such as citizenship to ensure fair treatment and a proper hearing. Paul did this in both Phillipi and Jerusalem. The proper response to persecution is that of Jesus and the church in Acts who prayerfully committed themselves to Him who judges justly. They were not disappointed! Jesus was resurrected. The early church saw miracles and incredible growth.

Persecution seems to come in four main forms for me: Unjust treatment, rudeness, physical attack, witchcraft and curses. Physical attack is quite rare here in Australia but the other three are quite common especially in Internet ministry. I have found that unjust treatment and rudeness tend to make me feel violated and angry and tempt me to react in very on-Christian ways. Having a few level headed friends is a big help. I have learned to give it 24-48 hours before reacting. Also to make sure I do not react when I know I am tired. Pagan, cult and Satanic forces are common on the Internet and from time to time take exception to my ministry. Sometimes they use witchcraft to attack my ministry. The important thing is not to give in to fear or superstition. I am often unaware of the attack until much later but once I am aware of it I call friends to prayer and break the attack. Such attacks on me are disturbing but Christ is the very adequate answer for them.

## Summary

Being persecuted for Jesus' sake is a great blessing and reaps rich rewards in heaven so that we should rejoice and count it a privilege to suffer for Christ. Persecution should not be sought out - - for that is the attitude of the paranoid. Neither is it to be dodged at any cost - for in that lies the way of defeat. It is to be endured in a Christ like manner with great glory going to God.

## You Are The Salt Of The Earth

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**Matthew 5:13 NKJV** *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."*

One of the greatest standards for Christian living was presented to us by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. The principles presented are of timeless value and contain the foundation for a dynamic way of life. Many pages have been written and many sermons preached concerning the Sermon on the Mount. Ten times in this teaching, Jesus uses the words blessed or bless. Jewish tradition teaches that there are ten ways in which God revealed himself to man.

These are called the ten sefirot. These ten sefirot are called by a variety of names such as the ten countings, the ten spheres, or the ten emanations. It was believed that the sefirot bridged the gap between God and man. The ten sefirot are: Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Mercy or Gevurah (Judgment or Power), Beauty, Eternity, Majesty, Foundation, Kingdom. The ten sefirot are revealed in the Sermon on the Mount. It is through these ten sefirot that the Jews believed that the world as they knew it was both created and upheld. Sefirot is from the root saphar and according to the Gesenius Hebrew/Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament means: "to write, scribe, bring into order, to number, to count, and to measure. It also means to polish." Is Jesus showing us how to polish our lives? Is he showing us how to bring our lives into order? Some may even say, divine order.

The word "blessed" is from the Hebrew root barak and it means, "To kneel down, to bend the knees, to invoke God, to ask for blessings and to bless." This idea of blessing can be clearly illustrated by picturing a camel being forced to kneel by his master. The camel is made to kneel for rest and then to have his back loaded with goods. Once the goods have been placed upon the camel's back, he can be led out and distribution can take place at the point of need. Christians are like the camel. Sometimes, we need rest and at other times we are prospered and have our back "loaded with goods." We are not to hoard them but distribute them at the point of need.

To be blessed of God also means to be the recipient of Divine favor. In other words, the blessing of God is to receive His favor and affirmations. The by-product of this Divine affirmation is peace, joy, and goodness demonstrated or worked out in the life of the believer. Oral tradition says that Shalom is one of the names of God, blessed be He. According to Matityahu Glazerson, "this name is connected with the holy quality of yesod (foundation). Another characteristic connected with yesod is goodness (tov bof) and this, too, is one of the names of the Holy One, blessed be He. Through marriage, a man can achieve these two blessings: peace and goodness."

## Peace And Goodness In Marriage

This idea of peace and goodness in marriage is implied in and pertinent to the Sermon on the Mount. It is such an integral part, that the principles can never be worked out in community until they are first worked out in the family. In fact, to the Hebraic mind, the five great blessings are peace, goodness, Torah, marriage, and life. It was a commonly held opinion that until a man is married and was inspired by his wife that he would never really understand the deeper teachings of Torah.

According to tradition, there are six benefits that belong to those who are married. These six benefits are: simcha - joy, berachah - blessing, tovah - felicity, Torah - law, chomah - security, shalom – peace. Let us take a closer look at these benefits of the marriage relationship:

Joy - simcha- Marriage should be filled with gladness. A joyful and cheerful countenance should be evidenced. This root also means to have a merry voice and describes those who have become merry with wine.

Blessing – berachah means to prosper and to receive affirmation.

Felicity – tovah means to be pleasant and agreeable. It means to be beautiful.

Law - torah means Divine instruction, to lay foundations and to cast a foundation.

Security - chomah means to surround, to protect, and to guard.

Peace – shalom means to be whole, complete, entire, secure and tranquil. It also means to abide in safety. It also has the idea of being completed or finished. These benefits unite to form quality of life.

Therefore, marriage and family should provide for all of its members joy, the receiving of affirmation, pleasant and agreeable attitudes, and character, as well as providing the opportunity for instruction and protection. The husband and wife, as well as all family members, should be working together to achieve wholeness and completeness as a family unit.

It is not the purpose here to tell every adult person that they should be married and if they are not to go out and get married. We are all products of family. Can you imagine what our lives and the lives of our children would be like if we were consistently living in this type of atmosphere and environment? To the Hebraic mind, peace among the family was not just a private matter, but rather had the potential to affect the community as a whole. Those who were at peace with one another and secure in their home environment could affect community in a more positive way than those who were not. Before the be-attitudes of the Sermon on the Mount can be worked out in community, they must first be worked out in the marriage relationship and in the family.

## The Salt Of The Earth

Jesus made a vital statement in the Sermon on the Mount that requires careful examination in respect to the community in general and the family in particular. In Matthew 5:13 we read, "ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the

foot of men." What was Jesus saying? Is he only talking about purity? Does this message of "salt" have relevance in the family as well as in community? Was he simply speaking of our effectiveness as Christians in the world? Was he saying something about salt that we have either missed or do not understand? If we could understand the concept of salt as outlined in the entire Bible and if we could evaluate that concept from a Hebraic mindset, we would see that Jesus was making a statement that had the potential to completely change our lives. Consider not only the conceptual idea of salt as it is developed throughout the Bible, but a few Jewish traditions concerning salt.

## Salt As A Staple On The Jewish Table

Salt, along with bread and wine, was and is one of the staples on a Jewish table. It is a reminder of the sin of Adam. In Genesis 3:17-19 we read, "and unto Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee: and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the seat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Sweat is salty and a reminder of not only the sin of Adam but also the consequences of all rebellion toward God.

## Salt As Representative Of Covenant

We also see salt as representative of covenant. When the land was to be divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi was given no land. It was God's plan to take care of the priests by the tithes and offerings of the children of Israel. In Numbers 18: 1-7 we read, "And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of the entire tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar that neither they, nor ye also, die. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you. And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there is no wrath any more upon the children of Israel. And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the Lord, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation."

It is important to remember that the Levites were given as a gift to do the work of service. In this passage we can also see how God took care of the financial needs of the Levites. Remember that they were given no land. This is outlined in verse 20-21 of the same chapter. "And the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. And behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." In verse 19 we read, "all the heave-offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee." The priests received no land but their part and their inheritance was the Lord.

Salt is preservative. Salt is a symbol of the everlasting nature of the covenant that God made with the Levites. A covenant of salt between God and man can never be broken. It endures forever. This covenant is still in force. Kings and priests he has made us to be. We are joint heirs with Christ. Truly, the Lord is our part and our inheritance. God is still taking care of His priests.

## Salt Mixed With The Sacrifices

There is a Jewish tradition today of beginning a meal by sprinkling salt on a piece of bread and eating it. This custom is believed to be derived from God's command to mix salt with the meat (meal) offering. Remember that it is the role of the Levites to minister to the Lord before the tabernacle and the Temple. In Leviticus 2:13 we read, "and every oblation of them meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt. By the time of the second temple period, salt was added to all sacrifices that were brought to the sacrificial altar. Salt is a reminder of covenant. The term covenant can be defined here as, "I will be to you a God and you shall be to me a people." Without the salt, the sacrifice was not complete. Salt was the reminder that Israel had a God and they were His people. It took both the offering and the salt to make the sacrifice complete. The salt was added to demonstrate the eternal nature of the covenant. It was symbolic that God would never break the pledge or bond of the covenant.

## Priests Add Salt

It was the responsibility of the priests to add the salt to the offerings. The people did not actually witness the act of adding the salt. Over the course of many years, the priests themselves became the representation of the salt that was added to the offerings. In other words, the people did not see the priests add the salt, but they knew that they had because God commanded it. The priests became the symbol of the salt. Every time they saw the priests, the people knew that the covenant with God was still in force. The priests were the living testimony that God was mindful of the covenant that He established with them. The priests actually became a source of security for the people.

## Jesus Is The Sacrifice, We Are The Salt

Is this then not part of what Jesus meant when He called us the salt of the earth? Jesus is the sacrifice and we are the salt. We become the living representations that the covenant God established through the shed blood of Jesus is still in force. We are the symbols of the New Covenant. It is a covenant of salt that will endure forever. This is what the writer of Hebrews meant when he wrote in chapter 9: 11-15, "But Christ being an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the Holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the New Covenant that by means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." If you are born again, then you become part of the sacrifice of Jesus. You not only accept it; you become a

representative of it. You are a king and a priest. You become a symbol that the covenant that God established with us through the person of Jesus Christ is still in force.

## Salt Is Healing And Soothing

The Hebrew word salt not only means to be soft, smooth and soothing, it was believed to possess healing properties. Salt was rubbed over newborn babies as a sign of cleansing and healing. Salt was also worn in the pockets and sprinkled in the corner of rooms to ward off evil spirits and protect the people in the home from evil and danger. Is it not the role of believers to be used of God to bring healing to a lost and dying world by proclaiming the sacrifice of Jesus? Are we not called by Jesus to be peacemakers? Salt is a symbol of peace. We are not only called to bring peace but to bring soothing and comfort to those who are in pain. Many scientists believe that salt cannot really lose its saltiness but that it can be diluted. It can indeed lose its effectiveness. Salt that was collected from the area around the Dead Sea was taken to Jerusalem and stored in the Temple. Salt that was not pure enough to be mixed with the offerings was stored separately and used to coat the marble courtyards when it rained in order to reduce the slipperiness of the pavement. It was trodden under the foot of men. Jesus is the sacrifice and we are the salt added to that sacrifice. Before we can be salt to the world and to the community, we must first be salt to our own families. Before we can be priests to the world, we must first be effective priests in our own homes.

## What Kind Of Salt Are You?

How do you measure up as salt? Evaluate it from a place of family before you evaluate it from community. The answer is not difficult to determine. Ask yourself a few simple questions. Is your marriage and family life filled with gladness and joy? Are you giving to or receiving affirmation from the members of your family? Are you a blessing to them? Are you pleasant and agreeable to be around? Do you provide instruction in spiritual things in your home? Is the Lord using you to bring wholeness and emotional wellness to your family? Do you make your family feel safe and secure in God's love and in your love? If not, maybe the salt has become a little bit diluted. How do we line up? How effective are we as salt?

How can you be pure salt? Let Jesus bring you to completeness and perfection. God, through Jesus has revealed the sefirot. He is our crown, our head and our Lord. We must walk in His wisdom, understanding, and mercy. That is what the Sermon on the Mount was all about. Our lives need to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to stand in awe of His majesty, eternity and beauty. He is our foundation. He is the one who teaches us to live the kingdom life. We should study and learn the Word of God, the ways of the Lord and not only walk in them but also teach and minister them to our families. We must continually experience the presence of Jesus in our physical reality. If you will do these things, you will never lose our savor.

## You Are The Light Of The World

**Matthew 5:14-16 NKJV** *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. (15) 'Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand and it gives light to all who are in the house. (16) 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

The Christian believer is the light of the world. OK sounds nice but I don't much feel like "the light of the world"! This is the problem - we do not understand or feel up to our role as being the light of the world. We are in fact the light of the world and not in any pompous way at all. A light is not that important, it just sits on a table or a lamp stand. It just illumines the area and helps people see what they are doing and where they are going and leaves the activity up to them. Light controls nothing. It illumines everything. If we see our role as controlling the world's activities then we will despair and feel helpless. If we see our role as illumining them and putting them in a godly perspective then the role is much easier to grasp. The prophets were not kings. They did not control the nation, they just brought God's word of repentance and the nation would either accept or reject it. That is very similar to our role as Christian believers in a largely secular world.

The role of a lamp is to be seen. There is a balance here and the Devil takes advantage of it. A bit later in the Sermon On The Mount Jesus says we are not to do good works merely to be seen by men for that is hypocrisy. **Matthew 6:1-2 NIV** *"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. {2} 'So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. These are often interpreted to mean that we should be very "low profile" and modest about our deeds and our faith. This is not quite what it means. It is not a question of high profile or low profile but a question of motive. Good works done merely for human praise "to be honored by men" get their own reward in that praise.*

However I think that, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK, the culture of understatement has meant that we have gone to the opposite extreme and rarely let people know that we are doing well. The result is that the Christian witness goes unnoticed or worse yet secularists, humanists and unbelievers get the credit for the good that Christians are actually doing.

For instance very few people know that World Vision is a predominantly Christian organization. Again, most of the organizations I know of that work with the disabled are either Christian or heavily staffed by Christians but the humanists get all the publicity, the glory and the front running in this area. The public know little or nothing of the disproportionately heavy commitment of the Christian church to the disabled (compared to their percentage in the community). If we extracted the committed Christians from aged care, the disabled, foster homes, overseas aid, famine relief, prison visiting and child support schemes they would be severely affected indeed. That is not to say that many non-Christians

do not make useful contributions in these areas. Secular governments and relief agencies are getting all the publicity and the Christian contribution is downplayed by the media and even by the Church which 'does not wish to be seen to be grandstanding'. The result is that it appears that secular values are adequate for running our societies. Their bankruptcy is masked by the huge silent Christian contribution and God is getting no glory. We need to be more "up front" and explicitly Christian when we do good.

Recently there has also been a reverse tendency with some Christian organizations being so crass in their publicity over the tiniest good work that many thinking people are turned away from the faith. The light should come from the good work, not from the "trumpets of praise". The devil uses both the overly humble and the crassly egotistical to achieve credit for the world and discredit for the church.

## Where Then Is The Balance?

The light should come naturally from a well positioned good work and be allowed to shine forth without hindrance. It does not need help or amplification. Neither should it be hidden under a bushel.

We once had an incredibly talented Bible teacher in a Christian organization that I was one of the directors of. However he was afflicted with the culture of understatement to an extraordinary degree. When one of our children's workers in the North asked, "What can you do to help us on your visit?" He said, "Nothing". When she probed, "What are you good at?" he said, "Nothing." She knew better than that but arranging his visit was made doubly difficult because he would not say, "I am good at x, y and z but don't ask me to do a, b and c." There is a difference between boastfulness and letting people know what you are good at so they can put you to some decent earthly use.

From time to time I feel the need to ask God to make me more obviously godly and give me a nice shiny face so that people can just look at me and know that there is someone who walks with God and loves Jesus without me saying a word. I would love to have a sweet and godly aura to my life and a saintly disposition. Those who know me well are probably bursting into laughter as they read this as I am far from "saintly". But I'd like to be! This is the sort of "light" that should shine forth from us and I think is the sort of light Jesus was talking of.

I was converted from rampant atheist to Christianity during a visit to a Franciscan friary where the "sweet light of holiness" was very obvious indeed and very attractive. Brother William who led the friars there was the most saintly person I had ever met: Simple godly man in his fifties with a nylon stringed guitar and a gentle voice. I knew I was in the presence of something different that could not be explained in my world and that was very, very good. It won me.

When holiness becomes visible it is a powerful challenge to the selfish secular mind. It is the quality, not so much the sheer quantity, of the light that is important. A quietly spoken Mother Teresa outshines many a televangelist.

If we can put it in a nutshell Jesus is asking His followers to display to the world a clear and unobstructed testimony of a holy life dedicated to good deeds.

Are you talking about "good works"?

Yes. The very purpose of our salvation is that we might do good works, they don't save us but they are the reason why we are saved in the first place. The Christian life is not a vacuum between the sinners prayer of salvation and the saints throne in heaven. God has a pre-planned and good purpose for us after our salvation and before our physical death.

**Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (9) not by works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

This has received remarkably little emphasis in the evangelical churches I have attended because of the fear that it could lead to people thinking that they are "saved by works". We are not saved by our good deeds; we are saved by grace, through faith. However we are saved for good works. We are to be doers of good deeds. We know that I think, but we do not consciously realize that those good deeds are not just extras but are the very reason that God created us in Christ Jesus.

## How Should I Shine?

The way we shine is through our attitudes and through our actions. Without love we are nothing and even the best humanitarian efforts are in vain. **1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV** *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (3) If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

With love as our basis we should take practical efforts to help our neighbor or it can be said that our love is worthless. **1 John 3:16-18 NIV** *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (17) If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (18) Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

There are certain attitudes such as thankfulness that make us stand out from the world as a whole. **Philippians 2:14-16 NKJV** *Do all things without complaining and disputing, (15) that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (16) holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.*

Righteousness, holiness and wisdom are character traits associated with "light". **Matthew 13:43 NKJV** *"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

**Daniel 12:3 NKJV** *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.*

When the glory of God comes on a person, church or nation they become a light to those around them. This is the theme of Isaiah 60-66 and is worth reading. Here are just a few verses...

**Isaiah 60:1-3 NKJV** *Arise; shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. {2} For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, And deep darkness the people; But the LORD will arise over you, And His glory will be seen upon you. {3} The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising. Revivals produce great light in their community and one of the functions of the Messiah Jesus was to be "a great light".*

**Isaiah 9:1-2 NKJV** *Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. (2) The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.*

We are the light of the world whether we want to be or not. Jesus does not give us a choice. It is a role we should take very seriously indeed to ensure that the light of God in us is not obscured and blocked out, unable to do its saving work. Our light will shine at its brightest if we show ourselves to be people with biblical values and godly attitudes engaged in good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do.

## Every Jot and Tittle Of The Law....

**Matthew 5:17-20 MKJV** *Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill. (18) For truly I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. (19) Therefore whoever shall relax one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven. But whoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of Heaven. (20) For I say to you that unless your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*

There is incredible confusion about the Ten Commandments and the Jewish Law and about what Christians can and cannot eat and drink etc. Often we find OT and Nt mixed together in a sort of theological blender. Some groups such as the Seventh-day Adventists and the World-Wide Church of God are noted for this.

It is very important to get this right, but it is a little bit complicated. We are going to learn three things today:

The O.T. Law is for the wicked - and is in force for unbelievers.

Christians are NOT under the OT law at all in any shape or form, we have died to it and are free from it.

Christians however are not lawless, but are freed from the Law, to serve in the Spirit and to love God and to love their neighbor.

There are four main positions about Jesus and the Law (and a host of minor ones).

1. **The Law Is Not in Force in Any Way** Jesus completely abolished the whole Law on the cross. No-one is under the Law since the cross even Jews. People may act as if they are under the Law but God will not judge them that way. People are judged solely on whether they have accepted Christ or not. The Law is done away with. The commandments are kept out of love for God and desire for holiness not as meritorious works. The Law is holy and righteous and good and a guide to the Christian life but obedience to it is not necessary for salvation. The Law has been completely replaced by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and is no longer the ruling principle of the Christian life.

2. **The Law Is Still In Force But Only For Unbelievers.** The essence of position 2 is the law abides but is restricted in its application and is not in force for Christians. Christians have moved "out of judgment" into life. Non-Christians have not moved out from under judgment. The wrath of God abides on them and is directed by the Law which is the encoding of the holy, righteous, just and spiritual standards of God. The Law will thus continue until Heaven and earth pass away and will be the chief instrument for judging those who have not accepted Christ. Having moved out of judgment Christians do not "have to" keep any of the laws, including the Ten Commandments and observing Sabbaths for salvation. (Much the same as No.1 on this point). On the other hand non-Christians and those who put their trust in the Law for salvation will be judged by the Law. According to Romans 1 all unbelievers are under judgment. In Romans 2 this is further explained. The Jewish unbelievers are judged by the Law while the Gentile unbelievers are judged by their own consciences which will excuse or condemn them on the Day of Judgment. The conscience of the Gentile is however "tuned into the Law" so that a Gentile can intuitively obey God's commandments even though they are not circumcised. Christians are not judged either by the Law or their own consciences but only by Christ, and their judgment is not for salvation but for a reward.
  
3. **The Law Is Partly In Force For Christians.** The Law is still in force in its moral provisions but not its ceremonial provisions. Some law-keeping is essential for salvation. You cannot commit mortal sin such as adultery or murder as a Christian and enter Heaven when you die. Keeping the Sabbath is necessary. The "moral law" is still authoritative in the life of the Christian. The Holy Spirit provides power and guidance but moral direction is mainly from the Law.
  
4. **Christians Are To Obey The Old Testament Laws In Their Entirety.** The Law is authoritative in both its moral and ceremonial provisions. Society should be built around its principles and its guidelines for diet and health observed. Sabbaths must be kept and pork and unclean foods avoided. Circumcision is recommended. Jesus saves us so we can keep the Law.

I find the second position makes the most sense of the various teachings in the New Testament regarding the Law. Let's look at some of the clear NT teachings regarding the Law and how it applies to us.

1. The Law will never pass away until this Creation does. (Matthew 5:17)
2. The Law is holy, righteous and good and is spiritual. (Romans 7:12-14)
3. The Law is part of Scripture, inspired by God and is of continuing application and wisdom. (2 Timothy 3:16, Matthew 5:17-19)
4. There is no condemnation for born-again Christians who are led by the Spirit. They have passed out of judgment. (Romans 8:1-3, John 5:24)

5. Christians do not have to observe the Law for salvation; in fact no-one can be justified by works of the Law. Salvation is by grace alone. (Galatians 2:16-22, Eph 2:8-10, Romans 3:19-28)
6. The Christian is not judged by the Law. The Christian is dead to the law and not under the Law. (Romans 6:14-15, 7:4-6, 10:4, Galatians 2:16-22, 5:16-18, John 5:24, Romans 8:1,2)
7. The Law is a tutor to lead us to Christ. The Law has a role in convicting us of sin. Once it has done its job its role is over. (Romans 7:7-14, Galatians 3:19-26)
8. The change of priesthood from the Levitical priesthood to Jesus as the High Priest has meant a change of law and a better covenant has been introduced and the Old Covenant cancelled. (Hebrews 7:11-28)
9. The Law made nothing perfect (Hebrews 7:18,19) it was weakened by sinful human flesh (Romans 8:3) so we cannot be perfected by the Law but only by life in the Spirit. (Romans 8:4-6, Galatians 3:1-3, 5:16-24)
10. In the New Covenant there is not lawlessness, instead the law is written on the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit.(Hebrews 10:8-13) The ethical requirements of the Law are now condensed into the single command to love your neighbor as yourself. (Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8 )
11. Despite being one of the Ten Commandments we do not have to keep the Sabbath for salvation. It is a matter of choice not legislation. (Romans 14:4-14, Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:27-28, Colossians 2:16,17)
12. We are free to eat any foods, even unclean foods such as pork. Regulations about foods are not part of the Christian life. (Mark 7:15-23, Romans 14:14-23, Colossians 2:16, 1 Timothy 4:1-6)
13. Christians are not to rebuild the law or seek to be justified by it. To do so is sin. (Galatians 2:16-22, Galatians 5:1-11, Colossians 2:15-23, 1 Timothy 1:7-11)
14. The Law was 'added because of transgressions' and is for the wicked, not for the righteous. (Galatians 3:19-26, 1 Timothy 1:7-11)
15. Those who are under the Law will be judged by the Law. (Romans 2:12, Galatians 5:1-11)
16. Even after Christ's death those who sought to be justified by the Law had to keep it all. Thus it seems that some people (unbelievers) are still judged by the law. (Galatians 5:1-11)

Points 1-3 above show clearly that the law has some continuing application. Points 14-16 show that the Law is still in force for the wicked and the unbelieving. This eliminates the viewpoint that the Law has been completely abolished for all people (View 1 above). Points 4-6 make clear that the continuing application of the law does not involve Christians. Christians are dead to the law and not under the law. That eliminates the viewpoint that Christians are saved in order to keep the Law and must live by it (View No. 4 above). That leaves us to decide between options 2 & 3. Points 7 to 13 have bearing on this complex issue. The Sabbath was clearly part of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8) and thus part of the moral law. The Jews certainly perceived Sabbath observance as a major moral issue. Yet it is clear that Christians do not have to observe the Sabbath. (Point 11) Neither is there any statement in the N.T. that there is a bit of the law "left over" that we should still observe or any guidance on discerning it if there is. In fact the term moral law is not used in the New Testament. It is a "theological construct" which means it is a generally useful theological term not used in Scripture. However it is, to my mind, an unsupportable one. Given the

contentiousness of the issue for the early church if observance of a moral law was required it would have been stated in unequivocal terms. Quite the apposite is the case. Scripture clearly implies that when we died to the law we died to all the law. Christians do not have to keep any part of the law's legal requirements in order to be saved. No. 3 thus is eliminated also.

Who does the Law now apply to? It applies to the wicked (1 Timothy 1:7-11) Gentiles trying to be made right with God through Jewish rituals such as circumcision (Galatians 5:1-11) and to the unbelieving Jews (Romans 2:12, 13). The law does not apply to the righteous (1 Timothy 1:9).

Does this mean we can be law-less in our behavior? Not at all! We are to be holy as God is holy and in loving our neighbor as ourselves we keep the law. We are no longer under a legal code for approval but we are called on to be holy. A possible key to this is our new natures in Christ Jesus. The "new man" is holy and wants to be holy. Our true eternal selves desire righteousness. For a more full explanation of this see the two articles on the "Inner." When we are holy and righteous and good we are not living up to a code but out from a new nature. We are already approved by God because we are in Christ and a new creation. We are not observing the law because we "have to" but because our new nature is created to be a law-abiding creature in the image of Jesus Christ. A somewhat trivial illustration may help. A small child may eat his or her vegetables because they have to in order to get dessert. An adult eats them without the compulsion of law because they have a responsible adult nature. The adult is "free from the law" (with regard to vegetables) and yet eats them. Thus a Christian will be free from the law regarding adultery but desire to be pure in heart and free from sexual sin simply because that is them. They want to be pure, they want to be holy, so they are. Not out of compulsion but because of the desires of the Spirit in their hearts.

**Galatians 5:16-18 NKJV** *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. {17} For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. {18} But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

When Jesus said "until all is fulfilled" it seems He had two levels of meaning in mind. Firstly all is fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. This fulfillment is "all" but for a certain group - believers, born again Christians. It is not the fulfillment for the whole of Creation. That comes when the new heaven and the new earth come into being. For the wicked and the unbelieving the Law abides until this heaven and earth are done away with and a new heaven and earth are created "where righteousness dwells".

**2 Peter 3:13 NKJV** *Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

In that new creation "all is fulfilled" and there will be no more need for the Law because righteousness will be established there. We only need the law in "this present evil age". (Galatians 1:4)

Until then the Law is holy and righteous and good and a part of Scripture and very useful for ministry. (2 Timothy 3:16) Jesus went on to say that those who taught the commandments of the Law and obeyed them would be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. That at first seems to contradict the well-established conclusion that the Law does not apply to

Christians. The Law does not apply to Christians as a means of salvation but it does apply as a source of wisdom and an example of the will of God. Nine out of the Ten Commandments are restated in the New Testament as God's will for believers. The exception is the Sabbath. The Law provides us with insight into God's standards on many issues from homosexuality through to theft. By upholding the Law and fulfilling the Law Jesus agrees that the standards of the Law are good. Thus while Jesus did not say anything directly about homosexuality by upholding the Law He agreed with what the Scriptures say about homosexuality i.e. that it is sin. However this can be taken too far by some enthusiasts and Christians can get bogged down in "disputes about the Law" (1 Timothy 1:7-9). The primary revelation for Christians is Christ who is revealed to us through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-16). The law is good but is of secondary importance.

*(For further reference see the articles on Jesus and The Law, and Jesus and the Bible)*

## Anger, Rage And Reconciliation

**Matthew 5:21-26 NKJV** *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' (22) 'But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. (23) 'Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) 'leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (25) 'Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. (26) 'Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.*

People with angry dispositions destroy their careers, marriages and relationships. They end up in one of three places - the morgue, the jail or the hospital.

Yet anger is a common part of life and even an emotion that God experiences (Psalms 7:11 NIV) God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. Jesus displayed anger at the scribes and Pharisees and their merciless attitude to life. (Mark 3:5 NIV) He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Later on Paul says in **Ephesians 4:26 NKJV** *"Be angry, and do not sin"* do not let the sun go down on your wrath, thus indicating that sometimes anger may be acceptable for the Christian. There are two things about acceptable anger. Firstly, it is slow to be aroused. Secondly, it is short-lived and always willing to be reconciled. On the first of these God is "slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6, 7) and James says in **James 1:19-20 NKJV** *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; (20) for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* On the second it is clear throughout the New Testament that we are "not to let the sun go down on our anger" and to reconcile speedily any disputes that arise.

### The Context

These verses, when taken out of context, seem to flatly contradict the rest of the Bible's teaching on anger. It seems that here anger has moved from being an emotion that needs to be controlled to a perilous sin that brings us under stern and final judgment. Therefore we need to look at these verses very closely and in their context to see what Jesus was saying and what Jesus was not saying.

The context is Jesus affirming the Law and His upholding of it. His gospel of grace and acceptance of sinners was in danger of being interpreted wrongly so He first of all shows that Kingdom standards are not lower than those in the Law. In fact they are stricter! Jesus is saying that unjustified anger "in the Kingdom" is equivalent to the sin of murder "under the Law". We are dealing with two parallel but different standards of holiness. In one code unjustified anger and name calling were not even offences; in the other it places you in danger of jail or of Hell. Thus Jesus is not adding to the Law but rather using the Law as a "launching pad" for discussing the Kingdom. It is an argument from the lesser (the Law) to the greater (the Kingdom). If x is the standard of holiness under the Mosaic code which is for an national kingdom then y will be the standard of holiness in the Kingdom which is "of Heaven".

Jesus is not saying that the Law should be changed to have severe penalties for unjustified anger or name calling. He is not putting another chapter or verse on the Mosaic code. Neither is He saying that "this is what the Law really means". No-one could get that interpretation from the Law. No-one would buy that explanation. What He is saying is that the standards of holiness under the Law are less than the standards for holiness in the Kingdom but along the same lines. This is the thrust of the preceding verse. **(Matthew 5:20 NIV)** *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

## What Is Jesus Saying About Anger?

With this perspective in mind let's look at what Jesus is telling us about anger:

1. Unjustified anger brings us into judgment. In the Kingdom unjustified anger is something that removes us from a state of blessedness and places us under scrutiny and possibly under penalty.
2. Jesus strongly implies that we will have to justify our anger to God. This is shown in two ways. Firstly in the concept of a court trying someone for their anger - in such a court a defense could be offered. The court implies accountability. Secondly in the direct use of the term "without a cause" which is found in most manuscripts but not in some others. However John Stott says that the phrase "correctly interprets what Jesus must have meant". Jesus himself became angry and even once used the term "You fool" (Matt 23:17) which He says puts someone in danger of Hell. Yet He did so without sin. Therefore there is justifiable and unjustifiable anger. Caution: We do not justify our anger to ourselves however - every hot-headed person does that! We have to justify it to an impartial higher authority.
3. As a logical corollary from the above: If your life seems not to be functioning as well as it ought to then look at your level of hostility towards others and the anger you are expressing in your relationships. You may be constantly bringing yourself into judgment before God!
4. Those even minor expressions of contempt for others can have serious spiritual consequences. The terms "Raca" and "fool" are the sort of things ordinary people would say in traffic jams today. They are terms of annoyance and impatience. "Raca" means "empty-head" probably "blockhead" would be today's equivalent and "fool" is

literally "moron". Some insults never change. These are words Jesus could use as illustrations in his sermon without offending anyone or committing impropriety. Yet in the Kingdom they are so inappropriate that calling someone a blockhead would be a capital offence and calling someone a moron could put you in danger of the fires of Hell.

5. People in heaven will not go around calling each other names. That is not Kingdom behavior. That is not appropriate behavior for a citizen of heaven and we are citizens of heaven! The author of the letter to the Hebrews understood the holiness that is required of Christians because of our heavenly citizenship. **Hebrews 12:22-25 NIV**  
*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, (23) to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, (24) to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (25) See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?*
6. Abusiveness belongs in Hell. There are unfortunately some Christians who rationalize their verbal abusiveness as "speaking the truth" forthrightly. Jesus says that abusiveness belongs in Hell. Stern words may need to be spoken from time to time but abusive intimidating language never needs to come from the lips of a Christian. What is the difference? Stern words have a clean, straight, honest tone to them. They are chosen carefully for that particular occasion. They rebuke particular behaviors as opposed to blanket condemnation of whole individuals, races or denominations. They aim at healing and repentance. Abusive words stream forth with no accuracy or real forethought they are full of blanket judgments and pure destruction.
7. Reconciliation outranks religion but does not replace it. (23) *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.* First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. There are a few things here. Firstly, relationship comes first. Even over offering a sacrifice to God. Pleasing sacrifices flow from rightly ordered and properly reconciled human relationships. Secondly, the sacrifice still has to be made. "Love of man is my religion" is not a biblical concept. Religion and the love of God and devotion to Him are still required.
8. The initiative for reconciliation rests with the person who knows there is something wrong. I can be totally unaware that people are extremely angry with me, I can be completely surprised to find out that such and such a person has a strong dislike of me. They actually have to explode in anger at me before I realize that anything is wrong. I cannot put right a relationship that I have no idea is wrong. Once I am aware that a brother has a grudge against me I hurry to fix it up as soon as possible. Whether you are in the right or in the wrong as soon as you are aware that the relationship is strained and that the other person has something against you then it is up to you to fix it. If you are the only one who is stewing then perhaps you have to sort yourself out first then approach your brother.

9. Prompt patching up prevents punishment. (25) *"Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.* This seems to be referring to a financial disagreement and an "out of court settlement" is the vastly wiser option. "Sticking to your guns" can land you in jail. Stubborn pride has led many people and firms to go all the way to court where they then lose spectacularly. The adversary here is not Satan though that term is used of him. We are never to strike bargains with the Devil! The adversary is a human disputant. There is the application that God is, in some sense, the adversary of the sinner and that unless the sinner decides to agree/come to terms with God during this life when he arrives at judgment it will be too late.
  
10. Remaining angry can lead us into situations of exact and merciless retribution. (26) *"Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.* If we are angry, exacting and merciless with others than God will be angry, exacting and merciless with us. Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount we saw Jesus teaching that "blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy". That has a corollary in that the unmerciful are treated unmercifully. This is very clearly shown in the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35 who was punished for his heartlessness by being handed to the torturers. Jesus ends that solemn parable with **Matthew 18:35 NKJV** *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* Some see in the phrase "will no means get out of there" a reference to Purgatory. Jesus did not mean this at all. He never taught of a state such as Purgatory or Limbo. For Him there was simply Heaven and Hell and a vast fixed unbridgeable gulf between (see Luke 16). This verse emphasizes the exacting and merciless nature of the judgment not the possibility of escaping it!

## Conclusion

We see then that Jesus saw anger as a very serious thing and not as a casual emotion. I cannot see Jesus saying that we need to "let it all hang out". He is no advocate of emotional catharsis. He was fully aware that catharsis of our anger only breeds immaturity in the long term. We cannot live a blessed life if we are constantly getting angry over nothing. That will only bring us into judgment and destroy the works of our hands. We can see this judgment in action in the lives of the habitually angry. They are riddled with psychosomatic as orders such as ulcers, depression and stress reactions. They get angry so they speed, they get booked speeding so they yell at the policeman and get twice the fine. They get indignant about the fine and refuse to pay it and end up in jail. Anger gets people into legal trouble and into fights. Sometimes angry people pick up a gun and kill or are killed. Others are arrested and spend a life in jail. Letting anger grow inside us is a recipe for disaster in life and only leads to the morgue, the jail or the hospital.

## Adultery Of The Heart

**Mat 5:27-32 NKJV**    *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' (28) 'But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (29) 'If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (30) 'And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (31) 'Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' (32) 'But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.*

### The Background Scenario

Under the Law a cunning legalist could steal someone's wife and marry her without actually committing adultery. You just wooed her, reduced her affections for her husband until her husband got fed up and divorced her and then you could marry her. Jesus called this adultery of the heart. There seem to be a number of stages involved.

- Verse 27 - the injunction concerning adultery.
- Verse 28 - the attraction of a man to a married woman
- Verses 29, 30 - the command to sever the inappropriate relationship.
- Verse 31 - the lax divorce customs of the day.
- Verse 32 - the divorce which drives the woman into her lover's arms so that she becomes an adulteress.
- Verse 32 - the inappropriate remarriage.

Jesus may have had an incident like the following in His mind when He spoke. In verse 29 a man sees the woman and lusts after her, she is a married woman (gunaika) not a virgin (parthenos) he thus commits adultery with her in his heart. In verses 29 and 30 He is told to sever this relationship even though it seems like it is "cutting himself in pieces". The man is warned that it is better to sever an inappropriate relationship than wind up in Hell. However he continues the illicit liaison. He woos her with the intention of getting her to leave her husband for him. He reduces her affections for her husband. Since women generally did not divorce men in those days he has to wait until the husband divorces her. In verse 31 the husband notices the attraction and using the lax divorce laws of those days angrily divorces

her -even though actual adultery had not yet occurred. Jesus does not see this divorce as legitimate because she has not actually yet had sex with the person who is courting her. It is also unwise because the divorce causes the woman to run into her lover's arms and become an adulteress. The two lovers quickly remarry and consummate their union but their consummation is in fact adultery. The context of both the "divorce" verses and the "lusting with one's heart" verses is fleshly enticement to go beyond the boundaries of emotional faithfulness to one's partner. What is being breached in all three cases - lust, divorce and remarriage are the emotional bonds of the marriage.

## The Reasoning

Now to explain some of my reasoning behind this conclusion....

I believe that verse 32 has been mistranslated in most (if not all) English translations. The Greek is difficult to translate because it ends the sentence with a participle and two verbs in a row. The construction is extremely unusual. Its a bit like saying "The dog jumping bites runs" then stopping right there! Here is the Greek sentence. "kai os eav apolelumenen gamese moichatai" its literal translation is "and whoever a being divorced marries commits adultery" (commits adultery is one word in Greek). This is NOTHING like the current English translations. The long translation is probably "he who ensures that a marriage breaks down so that he can marry the woman as soon as she is divorced commits adultery." Now I will explain how I arrive at that conclusion.

The word "gamese" for marriage is used for a man marrying. So it is the man at fault here. Therefore the person he is marrying is a woman (same sex marriages were not recognized in Jesus day), it is the woman who is "being divorced". So the prohibition is against serial monogamy -jumping out of one marriage into the next. Notice it is the man, not the woman who commits adultery...but he is not the one jumping out of one marriage into the next - the woman is doing that! So how is he at fault? Her husband could have divorced her for all sorts of reasons! He could be dumping her in order to take up with a younger woman! So how is husband number 2 an adulterer? What has he done wrong if he just loves what someone else has rejected? He can only be an adulterer if he has acted in some way contrary to the original marriage bond.

Husband No.2 wants the woman but does not want to risk getting caught in adultery. He doesn't have an actual sexual affair but he woos her off her husband by reducing her "marital affections" until the marriage bond snaps and he takes her for his own. Though not "legally adultery" it is adultery in every other sense. It is adultery of the heart. Jesus quite rightly prohibits this. This is consistent with his prohibitions on "serial monogamy" - hopping from partner to partner with very little gap in between. This fits in with the context of lusting after a woman in your heart.

## Jesus Teaching On Divorce

Theses verses help complete the picture of Jesus teaching on divorce. Let's summarize it quickly:

1. You cannot divorce your partner except for sexual unfaithfulness. (Matthew 5:31, 32, Matthew 19:9)

2. You may not divorce your wife in order to marry a newer model. (Matthew 19:9)
3. Conversely if you were unfaithful and thus were kicked out of the original marriage then remarriage to your lover is just a continuation of the adultery. (Matthew 19:9)
4. If you entice a woman off her husband then marry her it is adultery even if you waited until marriage before you have sex with her. (Matthew 5:32)

In my view Jesus' teaching on divorce says NOTHING about people who are divorced then, sometime later -say at least two to three years, meet someone and marry them. By that time the marriage is irretrievably finished and the person has not left their marriage simply in order to have a sexual relationship with someone else. They have not diminished the affections of the original marriage bond by physical or emotional association with another person therefore they have not committed adultery. I see them as in the much the same position as the "young widows" that Paul strongly advises to marry again. (1 Tim 5:14 NIV) So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

It is my observation that divorced but not remarried Christians occasionally fall into sexual sin and some lead disgraceful lives, unable to marry because of their churches teaching on one hand and yet unable to resist their own sinful weakness on the other. It is indeed better to marry than to burn and I think some churches need to rework their teaching on divorce so that remarriage is permitted but after a suitable period of time (say 3 years) so that people do not just hop from one partner to the next. I suggest three years because statistics indicate that the failure rate of marriages contracted in the first two years after death or divorce is very high. It also ensures that the second marriage is not an adulterous liaison i.e., that they are not marrying the lover that broke up the first marriage, etc.

The reason for the remarriage of widows (and if I am right - divorcees) has nothing to do with them being happy. Paul's language actually carries a moderate degree of force "I will that they should marry" or "I desire that they should marry". It is not an imperative command but rather a firm request. The concern that younger widows remarry is twofold:

(1) They avoid the shame and accusation of sexual sin. (2) They avoid the welfare mentality and an idle lifestyle where they went house to house gossiping. Paul, Jewish tradition and the OT concur in that productivity from both men and women was held as a high virtue. Idleness and promiscuity give huge amounts of ground for the Devil to accuse God's people - and none more so than today. The Devil will have far less grounds for accusation if "younger widows" remarry, get off welfare, and live productive lives.

## Pastoral Application

Churches need to be able to say to people "This is an inappropriate friendship we know you have not slept with each other but you are too close, back off, this is adultery of the heart." Many marriages would be saved if we gave stern straight teaching on inappropriate relationships. If a friendship is reducing your affections for your partner or coming into the emotional space you normally reserve for your partner then it is an inappropriate friendship - even if it is with your pastor, Sunday school teacher or counselor. If you start to get a "zing" when you are near that person, or you look forward to meeting them more than you do your

own spouse, or you have sexual fantasies about them - then run. It is better to break off a wrong relationship than to wind up in Hell.

Churches should not sanction those remarriages that have resulted from affairs or from "adultery of the heart". Churches must protect the sanctity of marriage. Let the State marry those people.

Churches should remarry, with a clear conscience, people who after a suitable period of time on their own (and chaste while single) have found a partner.

The first two recommendations may seem overly harsh while the last may be contentious for some. I think I have the interpretation right - so that it makes moral, pastoral and exegetical sense, but I leave it with you for consideration, well aware that differences of opinion will exist.

## Oaths, Vows and Pledges



**Matthew 5:33-37** *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' (34) But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; (35) nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. (36) Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. (37) But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."*

The easy answer is that the bible strictly and totally forbids oaths, vows and pledges, but the reasons for this are complex and the applications to daily life are numerous. We will look at formal vows made to God, and vows made to the church and inner vows we make to ourselves, lastly we shall look at pacts made with the Devil which, though rare, can have a devastating impact on one's life. Just to be clear when I talk of "oaths" or "swearing" I am not talking about abuse but about a sacred promise such as "swearing on the Bible".

Apart from our main passage there are three key bible passages that outline the principles behind not taking oaths, vows and pledges. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tell us quite bluntly "But I say to you, do not swear at all:" and later He rebukes the Pharisees telling them how solemn oaths were and how dangerous it was to make them flippantly:

**Matthew 23:16-22** *Woe to you, blind guides, saying, Whoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. (17) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? (18) And, Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is a debtor! (19) Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? (20) Therefore whoever shall swear by the altar swears by it, and by all things on it. (21) And whoever shall swear by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. (22) And he who shall swear by Heaven swears by the throne of God, and by Him who sits on it."*

Jesus' brother James writes in his epistle "above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath."

**James 5:12** *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.*

And Ecclesiastes tells us that God has no patience with fools who make promises they cannot keep and that God will destroy the works of their hands.

**Ecclesiastes 5: 1-7** *Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. (2) Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few. (3) For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words.(4) When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed. (5) Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. (6) Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? (7) For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.*

From the above verses we can see that vows lay a trap for us in creating a burden that we, in our weakness and finiteness cannot keep. There are a number of reasons for this:

1. Vows are about actions in the future, and the future is something over which we have little or no control.
2. Vows are solemn and sacred and involve powerful heavenly realities that we should not mess with.
3. Some people e.g. the Pharisees uses vows to make people trust them so they can trick and cheat others.
4. Breaking a vow can result in judgment (James) and the destruction of the work of our hands (Ecclesiastes).
5. We may make a vow that depends on the actions of another person, and that person may act in such a way to make fulfilling the vow impossible - such as a vow to be responsible for another person's debts.
6. Our circumstances may change so that we cannot keep the vow or pledge e.g. we may lose our job and be unable to pay the pledge to the church.
7. We may construct the vow in absolute terms using words such as 'always' or 'never' and in reality life is too complex to say we will "always" do X or "never" do Y.
8. We may make an open-ended vow that traps us with its consequences using terms such as "whatever".

Let's look at three very foolish vows made by Herod, the Jewish Assassins and Jephthah's daughter that are recorded in Scripture:

## Foolish Vows

Herod in **Matthew 14: 6-12** *But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. (7) Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. (8) So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter." (9) And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her. (10) So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. (11) And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. (12) Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.*

Here Herod makes an open-ended vow "whatever she might ask" and when Herodias' daughter asks for the head of John the Baptist on a silver platter Herod has to reluctantly comply.

The Jewish Assassins in **Acts 23:20-24** *And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. (21) But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." (22) So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." (23) And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; (24) and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor."*

These fanatical Jewish assassins bound themselves with an absolute oath "that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him;" and if they kept their oath they would have starved to death since Paul was rescued. This oath depended on the actions of others and on circumstances remaining constant -which they did not.

Jephthah's Daughter in **Judges 21:29-40** *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. (30) And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, (31) then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." (32) So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. (33) And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith-twenty cities-and to Abel Keramim,[a] with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.*

*(34) When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. (35) And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it."*

*(36) So she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your*

*enemies, the people of Ammon." (37) ....And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man.*

*And it became a custom in Israel (40) that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.*

This tragic oath came about because it was open-ended "whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace". Unfortunately it was his daughter. There is some debate as to whether Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering or simply kept her single like a nun all her days.

So we see that rash oaths, vows and pledges can bring us into tragedy and judgment and are so all oaths are forbidden by Jesus and the apostles.

The biblical principle is that promises to God must be fulfilled - even at great cost and because we are fallen and finite it is better not to make such promises at all.

## Dangerous Promises

Proverbs tells us what to do when we have made a promise that we cannot keep:

**Proverbs 6:1-5** *My son, if you become surety for your friend, If you have shaken hands in pledge for a stranger, (2) You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth. (3) So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; For you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself; Plead with your friend. (4) Give no sleep to your eyes, Nor slumber to your eyelids. (5) Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, And like a bird from the hand of the fowler.*

The principle is: "Go and humble yourself; Plead with your friend." and do it as soon as possible. Do not remain under a foolish vow, for pride's sake, any longer than necessary. Go to the friend, the church, the relative or whoever and humble yourself and ask to be released from your vow.

Christians, when asking to be released from a vow they have made to God can also use this principle. God, through the cross, and has become our Friend and we can plead with Him on such matters, and so when we have made a wrong vow to God, we need to quickly humble ourselves before Him and ask forgiveness and release from the vow.

There are some common categories of oaths, vows and pledges that Christians get ensnared in:

## Tithing, Promises And Pledges

Unfortunately many churches encourage folk to make solemn vows to about financial matters such as tithes, pledges and very large sacrificial offerings they cannot fulfill. This violates New Testament (NT) teaching and can bring the church members into judgment. As a missionary I do not ever ask for pledges of support from people because some of the nicest people, with the least resources, make the largest and most impractical pledges. I simply ask people to give as God directs, whenever God directs, without any sense of obligation. Nor as a pastor do I insist that people tithe or that they pledge to tithe. The

reason for this is that some people are in such dire financial straits that tithing is impossible, particularly people paying child support, which in Australia can be 80% or more of a person's income.

I am certainly happy when people give regularly and in a disciplined fashion, that is a good and noble thing to do. But I will not hang it over their heads as a spiritual obligation. The clear principle of NT giving is that it should be voluntary and not under compulsion.

**2 Corinthians 8:12** *For if the eagerness is present, it is acceptable according to what one has, and not according to what one does not have.*

**2 Corinthians 9:7** *Each one, as he purposes in his heart, let him give; not of grief, or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

I am not going into the whole issue of tithing today, because it is complex. The aspect I want to clarify is that you should not solemnly promise God to give a certain amount of money because that can become a trap for you if your circumstances change. Give and give generously, but give freely and without compulsion and not as one is being compelled by an oath, vow or pledge.

## Rash Romantic Vows

Some Christians make promises of marriage to totally unsuitable people and need to swiftly apply Proverbs 6, before the wedding takes place. No amount of pride, honor or expense is worth a failed marriage.

## Idealistic Vows

Idealistic vows are vows made to God in a moment of spiritual light-headedness such as vowing to go to Uzbekistan as a missionary. Now there is nothing wrong with wanting to be a missionary but vowing to be a missionary, when you are not really suited or called is sheer rashness and folly and does not please God. I do not serve God out of a vow. I serve God because I am called and because I find it very fulfilling. I am not under any onerous obligation. I am free to serve Christ any way the Holy Spirit directs. Churches should not ask people to stand and pledge themselves for the ministry; instead they should ask them to be enquirers, to start on the journey and to take the time to discern their path.

## Inner Vows

Now we turn to the complex topic of inner vows. Inner vows are the deepest promises we make in our own heart. They mainly fall into four categories:

I shall never..... be poor, marry a man like my father, trust a \_\_\_\_\_, be a missionary, have children, depend on others, give in, be taken advantage of...

I shall always.... Be strong, be in charge, be on my guard, be wealthy, be nice, be submissive, be safe, be an expert on everything....

I must \_\_\_\_\_ or else \_\_\_\_\_ get 100% or I am a total failure..

If I ever \_\_\_\_\_ then I'll \_\_\_\_\_ make a mistake in public - I will die..., If I get married - I will go crazy,

The problem with such vows is that they remain a permanent part of our psyche and affect our future actions. When we try and act in a way that opposes our ancient inner vow we find ourselves having a huge inner conflict that we do not understand. Say someone made a solemn inner vow that they would never marry when they were a young girl and their parents divorced. Later on when she is 28 she may have such strong wedding jitters that she may break off the engagement.

When you find yourself very reluctant to do something ask yourself if you ever made a promise to yourself that stands in the way of what you are trying to do. Then write on a piece of paper "I hereby release myself from my sacred vow that I would never get married..." or whatever the vow was. You made the vow and you can release yourself from it. Say it three times then burn the piece of paper in a little ceremony. You will find a sense of inner release and normality inside yourself.

### Dealing with Blood Pacts, Satanic Vows and Rituals.

This is a very sinister kind of vow people make and that is making a pact with the Devil.

The Devil makes offers to people and even made a Satanic offer to Jesus:

**Matthew 4: 8-10** *Again, the Devil took Him up into a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. (9) And he said to Him, All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me. (10) Then Jesus said to him, Go, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve."*

The Devil can make people very prosperous, famous, wealthy and powerful - but always at the cost of their souls which is why Jesus said:

**Matthew 16:26** *For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

People with strong desires may make a bargain with the Devil in order to get what they want. They may well get what they want but the long-term price will be awful. Sometimes the deal will be written in a drop of blood on a piece of paper.

When such a person becomes a Christian the deal may be forgotten but strange things will happen in their life as the Devil exacts revenge for the broken promise. The person may even need deliverance and much prayer. The key to deliverance is a seven step process:

1. Renounce the Devil and all his works.
2. Claim the blood of Jesus Christ and God's cleansing.
3. Tell the Devil he no longer has any power or right over you because you are no longer in his kingdom of darkness and rebuke him.
4. Assert that you now belong to God alone.
5. Claim the protecting power of God. Put on the armor of God.
6. Be filled with the Spirit and spend much time in prayer.
7. Destroy all artifacts associated with the pact or with the devil.

### Marriage Vows and Vows in Court.

Socially, we are asked to make vows in three areas: pledging the flag, marriage vows and vows in court.

The Pledge of Allegiance is not made to God, and does not require specific actions: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

It thus has minimal spiritual impact and is relatively safe for Christians.

Marriage Vows: are made to God, and do prescribe specific actions, which we may not be able to fulfill due to our partner's actions. There should be solemnity and responsibility in marriage and there should be a covenant between the marriage partners and a sense of deep commitment. However the wording of such vows should be done with utmost care. Technically it would be better not to have such vows before God but simply replace them with solemn promises to each other.

Vows in court: Personally I would not swear on a bible or under an oath to God but would use the alternative vow "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth".

## Making Your Yes, Yes and Your No, No

Both Jesus and James tell us to simply make our Yes, Yes and our No, No.

We should be reliable people whose word is as good as our bond. People should get used to us being people who can deliver on our promises.

We should be people who are honest in every single word, and who do not need oaths, vows or pledges to keep us on track.

For Whatever Is More Than These Is From The Evil One.

How are oaths "from the evil one"? In two ways:

- a) False oaths can be a cover for dishonesty.
- b) Genuine oaths can bring us into judgment if we fail to keep them.

False oaths: In Jesus' day people used oaths to avoid keeping their word. In Matthew 23 Jesus chides the Pharisees for teaching that if you swore by the "the Temple" that was not binding but if you swore by the "gold of the Temple" it was binding. This is like making a promise then saying "but I had my fingers crossed when I said it". Oaths thus became a way of cheating another person!

Satan uses such false oaths to trick people as part of his campaign of lying, cheating, stealing, killing and destroying.

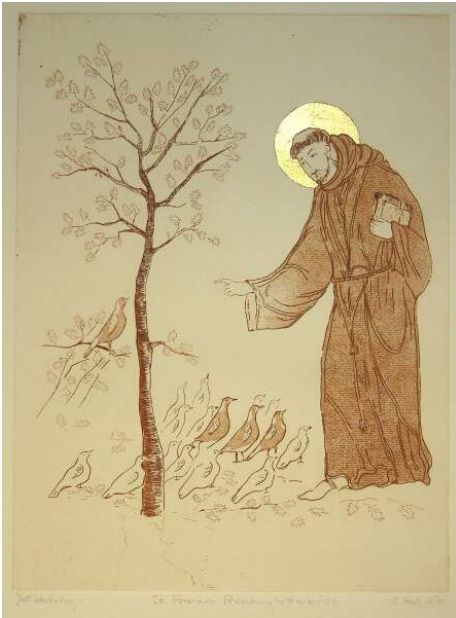
Genuine oaths: James warns us against vows and oaths saying: "lest you fall into judgment." A broken oath brings us into judgment and as Ecclesiastes says results in god destroying the work of our hands.

Thus Satan, who wishes to snare well-intentioned Christians and bring them into condemnation, gets them to swear binding oaths. Sacred oaths may feel right and seem solemn and deep and spiritual but they are a spiritual snare.

This is why Jesus always attacks the making of oaths, vows and pledges, and did not require his disciples to make oaths vows or pledges.

Lets' finish with the words of Jesus: **Matthew 5:33-37** *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' (34) But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; (35) nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. (36) Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. (37) But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one*

## Turning The Other Cheek: The Law Of Non-Resistance



**Matthew 5: 38-42** *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. (39) But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (40) If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. (41) And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (42) Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."*

### Introduction – Surfing the Big Waves

On Thursday evening Minda and I watched a PBS program about surfing the largest waves ever surfed. These giant waves were produced when a storm brewed up 40ft plus waves on north Oahu beaches on December 28<sup>th</sup> 1998. The height of a wave is measured from sea level so a 40ft wave has an 80ft "face" from trough to peak – as high as an eight to ten story building. On Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> December 1998 12 surfers ventured out into the giant waves while everyone else stood on shore and watched, sure that they would be killed. An IMAX film crew, which happened to be there got a helicopter and went out and filmed the surfing for their movie Extreme – about extreme sports. The surfers were tiny little dots against the huge green rollers. They zigzagged across the front of the waves, zipping in and out of the tube formed by the breaking waves. There were several amazing tales of survival but amazingly no one was injured or killed.

What those surfers illustrate is the Law of Non-Resistance at work. If those surfers had gone out there trying to fight the giant waves, they would have been killed. Instead they surfed the waves and enjoyed them and set world records for the biggest waves a human being has ever, ever surfed.

The surfers could have chosen three alternatives:

Flight: Run away, be sensible, and stay on the beach. Don't go in the water.

Fight: Go out there and take the waves on. Stand at the break and hit them with their fists.

Mastery: Use all their professional skill as surfers, and ride the waves!

Jesus does not want us to be caught up in fight or flight reactions but to move to spiritual mastery. Jesus wants us to move beyond our instinct for revenge and out of the raw, red-necked response to life and into the ability to “surf” life and master the biggest waves of all. We are to be spiritual people, not instinctual people.

## Vendetta – An Eye for an Eye

Jesus starts off with: (38) *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’”*

This was the old system of justice that involved exact retribution and the law was:

**Exodus 21:23-25** *If there is an injury, then you must give life for life, (24) eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, (25) burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound.*

This is often called the “lex talionis” or “law of retaliation”. It is what we instinctively want as justice and I have even seen animals seem to want this kind of retaliation when injured. It is basic and brutal. However as someone once said, “If it is always an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, pretty soon the whole world is blind and toothless.”

Vendetta destroys societies such as Papua New Guinea, Sicily and the Middle East.

## Non-Resistance

Jesus continues with verse (39) *“But I tell you not to resist an evil person.”*

Now what does this mean? Does it mean that policemen should not arrest drug dealers? Should we hand the keys to Fort Knox to burglars? Should we let terrorists run loose?

Not at all! This verse is not meant to be interpreted in such a literal fashion! Jesus is talking about inner resistance or spiritual resistance or reactivity.

Jesus is saying: “Do not let evil press your buttons. Do not fly into a rage. Do not get into a lather and desire to sue people or to take revenge, don’t let evil make you ugly and hateful and bitter and vengeful.”

The natural man is ensnared in the instinctive, adrenaline packed, fight-or-flight reaction. This reaction was very useful when we had to figure out what to do with a saber-toothed tiger – do we get our club and spear and fight it, or do we run and hide? At a sign of threat we produce lots of adrenalin, the blood goes to our extremities to help us run and fight and we react swiftly and instinctively to surrounding events.

This is fine if the house is on fire or we are in a war. But it is useless in normal everyday life where the threats are of a vastly different nature. If you go into a difficult committee meeting with your muscles tensed and your face red and with your teeth bared, you will not negotiate anything worthwhile.

When we go into the fight-or-flight reaction the blood goes away from the brain to the extremities and our thinking becomes unclear and we can make poor choices. There was a case of a man who killed his daughter when he thought a burglar was in the house and shot

without thinking. Anger, rage and defensiveness cause dumb decisions and inflict much of our social harm.

The Christian alternative to the fight-or-flight reaction is personal mastery through non-resistance.

Mastery is the ability to use professional skill and wisdom to solve problems in creative and non-reactive ways. It involves taking the focus off the problem and onto the solution and then achieving that solution.

Say two people get a flat tire we will call one Problem-Focused Pete and the other Solution-Focused Sam:

Problem-Focused Pete – sees the problem, says “why did the nail get in my tire, what was the nail doing in the road, I am going to sue whoever left that nail here, now I am going to be late, I am calling my lawyer, soon Problem-focused Pete is yelling at the top of his lungs and abusing the car and the tire and the road and the nail manufacturer and is photographing the tire and the nail and videoing everything for the court case and is still there six hours later collecting evidence and complaining loudly.

Solution-Focused Sam: Gets out the jack and the spanners and the spare tire and uses his mechanical skill to change the tire in under a minute and is back on the road in no time. He goes home and watches Problem-Focused Pete being arrested on TV for abusive behavior.

Jesus wants us to be like Solution-Focused Sam. He wants us to be calm, to be wise, to be professional and to be constructive solvers of life’s problems.

Another illustration- playing golf - two golfers, me and Tiger Woods, and we both hit our balls off the fairway into exactly the same patch of rough ground. There are three alternatives – fight, flight or mastery. Fight – I get a club and bash the ball as hard as I can to get it out of there. Flight – I take the penalty and drop the ball. Mastery – Tiger Woods waltzes up, sees exactly what needs to be done, visualizes the ball landing on the green, selects the right club and makes a perfect shot. I am looking at the problem – being stuck in the rough. Tiger Woods looks at the solution – how to get the ball onto the green.

Mastery comes from overcoming our instinctive fight-or-flight reaction and from being able to visualize and then implement a constructive solution in each of life’s trying circumstances. The Law of Non-Resistance involves not fleeing from the big wave, or fighting the big wave, but surfing the big wave in a masterful fashion.

## Turning the Other Cheek

Jesus goes on to say: But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Someone always says something like: “Does this mean that I cannot protect my wife from a rapist?”

Not at all! In fact you are duty bound by love to protect your wife in such a circumstance and you would be a coward not to do so. Turning the other cheek is not about war or self-defense. It is about minor personal provocation. It is about not letting an insult press all your buttons. It is about not flying into a retaliatory rage. Turning the other cheek is about not

letting a provocative external action produce hate, rage and revenge in your heart. It is about mastering your fight or flight reaction.

A man protecting his wife or a soldier defending his country is not necessarily flying into a retaliatory rage, nor are they hatefully bent on vendetta or revenge. Hopefully they are acting out of protective love.

Jesus is always concerned about what is in your heart. Sometimes we can open up our hearts to rage and hatred and revenge because of some painful external circumstance. We get slapped on the cheek so we brood about it and plot personal revenge, our honor must be assuaged and so forth. This is spiritual poison.

Turning the other cheek involves absorbing evil and stopping the cycle of retaliation and revenge.

The Bible is always about maintaining a dynamic spiritual balance between love and wisdom, and between spirituality and practicality. For instance we are to honor our parents, but if our parents tell us not to believe in Jesus, we must disobey them, but even if we have to disobey them as far as our faith goes, we should still support them financially. Or governments – in fact the Bible has seven completely different ways we should react to governments from revolution (as in Moses, Elijah, Elisha) to confrontation (Nathan and the prophets) to cooperation (Daniel, Joseph, and Paul) depending on the circumstances.

This applies to directives such as those we are looking at today:

- David would have been obviously wrong to turn the other cheek to Goliath.
- Paul specifically instructs both Timothy and the Thessalonians not to give money to people who a) should be out working or b) had dependents that could care for them.
- In Galatians a distinction is made between bearing one another's burdens and "each carrying their own load" of personal responsibility.

As we go on to look at the other directives we must do so in a balanced and wise way.

## Legal Action

If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

There is a time when legal action is pointless and it is simply better to "let them have the lot" than to spend years in court or to get an ulcer worrying about it. I have seen people who continually fret over every lie told by their opponent in court and whose whole life is totally consumed by the process of litigation. That is not the place of spiritual mastery.

There is a balance between being an easily exploited sucker and being fretful and litigious. There is a necessary proper assertiveness in today's corporate world. When I was doing consultancy work I had to often threaten litigation in order to get my check. The policy of large corporations is to hold the money until threatened with a lawsuit, and then pay the bill. I was normally paid within 48 hours of saying I would sue. I never had to actually go to court. At first I was upset but I eventually just got used to the routine. There is no spiritual

point at all in letting large corporations not pay their bills. Jesus is not advocating us to be suckers.

Jesus is talking about the sort of stuff that happens in small court cases where people fight tooth and nail over who gets the family dog. A few years ago someone was killed over a dispute over who got the computer. It is not worth a rage attack - just walk away and let them have it - it is not worth the grief. Show your noble side.

Many, many times I have lent money to someone and never seen it come back. Let it go, let them have it.

The lesson here is not to get hooked into petty battles over property and over "rights" and over defending every last piece of turf. There may be an appropriate time for legal action, but it has to be done calmly, properly and in the right spirit over something of true significance.

## Going the Second Mile

And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

Here I want to focus on how we can shame our enemies through our masterful super-natural reaction to their petty and nasty behavior.

The concept originated with the Persians who had messengers that could compel people to give them horses or to carry their loads. This was a government edict, the compulsion here is by a government or by an official of some kind. It is onerous, compulsory public service.

Instead of complaining and resenting and doing the bare minimum for the government messenger the Christian was to do double-duty. This had two effects. First, it would astonish the person and give occasion for Christian witness. Second, it strengthens our inner nature and make us better people for bearing the load. People who continually complain and resent become weak and small-minded whereas people who go the second mile become strong and noble. This astonished the Jews of the first century who wrote about Christians:

"He, that is, Jesus, hath warned and commanded you to do no more evil to a Jew; but if a Jew should say to a Nazarene, go with me one mile, he shall go with him two miles; and if a Jew shall smite him on the left cheek, he shall turn to him also the right."

Going the second mile is a very powerful witness to the strength of Christ within you. It is a sign of spiritual strength – not of weakness; it is exercising your spiritual will and not giving in to the natural man.

Going the second mile shows you are a different person to the rest of the world and indicate you are a person of love, of charity, of kindness and of high personal worth.

Going the second mile is appropriate when compelled to do so, and if the activity is morally neutral. Obviously we should not go the second mile in sin, dishonesty depravity or corruption.

Doing that “bit extra” is the sign of someone who truly cares about their work. Some students hand in the bare minimum, others give you a lot more than you asked for, guess who I recommend when people ask me for a reference?

## Giving and Lending

Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

If your neighbor wants to borrow the electric drill, then lend it to her. If your friend needs the bus fare give it to him. If people need a small loan for a genuine purpose – then give it to them. Life is about who you become, not how much you own. When you are kind and generous you become a better person for it.

Later on the New Testament qualifies this to eliminate laziness among Christians and people dumping their relatives on the care of the Church. Three rules emerged:

- a) People who are able to work must do so, and not depend on others.
- b) People who can care for their relatives should do and not ask the Church to care for them.
- c) The Christian life is not to involve, stealing, swindling or obtaining money under false pretences but constructive, creative work for a fair and honest wage.

However in normal life we get stuck from time to time. Often when people arrive in the USA life is hard for the first couple of years. Or people like students may have some other circumstance that places them under genuine pressure. In such cases we should be kind and help them. We should give them what they need without lecturing them. We should use our power to help others – even if it sometimes costs us a little bit. This sort of sacrifice pleases God:

**Hebrews 13:16** *don't neglect to do good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.*

The best thing we can give people is not money, but the “power to make wealth”.

**Deuteronomy 8:18** *but remember that the LORD your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm His covenant He swore to your fathers, as it is today.*

As the proverbs says: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”. Not only do we need to give people money but we need to give them training, budgeting skills and small business and career skills.

Still if our friend asks for the bus fare – we give it to them.

Then there is the topic of “pan-handlers” and beggars. Those experienced in this area say NOT to give because it causes more harm than good. There are times I will give if I feel a prompt from the Lord. However I do not give out of guilt or manipulation. Generally I only give to people I know. This also applies to solicitation from Christian ministries and aid organizations. With modern media and email there are more requests than I have cash. I try and distinguish between those genuinely doing good from those sharing and responding to a well-crafted sales pitch by a beggar or an aid organization.

That aside Christians should be noted for kindness, and generosity not penny-pinching parsimony under the name of false stewardship. We should treat others with dignity and respect and do to them, as we would like done to us, if we were in their shoes.

Would we like someone to lend us \$10? Then we should do that also.

Would we like someone to teach us to budget and to help us sort out our financial mess?

Then we should do that also.

Would we like someone to lend us the electric drill so we can put up the curtains? We should do that also.

If people accidentally wreck things I lend them I put up with it, if they carelessly wreck things - then I give them a lecture and hope they offer to pay, if they deliberately wreck things then I would insist on payment I order to get them to grow up.

## Conclusion

The Law of Non-Resistance teaches us to master our fight or flight reactions whether they be the urge to fight those who insult us or harass us, or to flee from those who demand something from us. By turning the other cheek and going the extra mile we will show the stuff we are made of as Christians and move to a much higher plane of spiritual living. This is of course to be balanced by love and wisdom and by other verses in Scripture. We cannot sacrifice other people's welfare on the altar of super-spirituality.

What Jesus is calling for is for the sort of self-control and sacrifice that proves self-mastery and Christ's presence within the person. We cannot react just like everyone else does. We should neither explode in vengeful anger or litigious in-fighting on one hand nor withdraw from onerous civic responsibilities and personal obligations on the other.

### **Prayer of St. Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love;

for it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life

## A Perfect Heart

**Matthew 5:40-48 NKJV** *"If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. (41) "And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. (42) "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. (43) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' (44) "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) "For if you love those who love you, what rewards have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (48) "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

Yesterday I found out that a person who had done me much harm had been greatly blessed by God. My initial reaction was "that's unfair; they should be punished, not rewarded for what they did". Then God reminded me... "Did not you not forgive that person and pray that they would be blessed and be happy. I have answered your prayer.". I felt like Jonah under the tree blaming God for being merciful to Nineveh and crying out "I knew You would do that! That's not fair God". God is merciful to sinners and kind to the unrighteous and cruel and wicked. He send His rain on the just and the unjust and material prosperity on saint and sinner alike. God loves His enemies and blesses those who curse Him. This blessing may include material things and the basic necessities of life.

**Matthew 5:44-45 NKJV** *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

A perfect heart is one that can love its enemies. It is like Nelson Mandela who, on assuming power in South Africa, did not take revenge. King David took no revenge on the family of Saul that had made his life miserable for so many years but instead looked for those he could bless. Thus God said of David that he had a perfect heart (1 Kings 15:3). Stephen as he was being stoned said "Lord do not charge them with this sin". Jesus Himself as He was being nailed to the cross said "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". Your attitude to your enemies is a good measure of how far the grace of God has penetrated your life. A true awareness of the grace of God will change how you view the faults of others. This is shown in the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew

18:23-35 where a servant who was forgiven an enormous debt refused to forgive a fellow servant who owed a quite moderate sum. God's response to such ingratitude is startling in its ferocity.

**Matthew 18:32-35 NKJV** *"Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. (33) 'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' (34) 'And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. (35) 'So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.' In the Lord's prayer we find the same thought expressed: **Matthew 6:12 NKJV** *And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.* The perfect heart is one that is perfected in love and which can love its enemies and forgive the debts and sins of others against it.*

The reciprocal side of this is that the grace we give is the grace we receive. Undoubtedly, especially at the beginning of our Christian walk, we receive far more grace from God and others than we give out. However as we mature in Christ there is a certain expectation that we will be gracious also. In fact there is a very firm expectation that we will be gracious also.

**Matthew 6:14-15 NKJV** *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) 'But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Our own continual forgiveness depends on us being "merciful servants" who forgive others also. This theme recurs through all the gospels as Jesus tackled the unforgiving legalism of His day head on.

**Luke 6:37-38 NKJV** *"Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) 'Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.' We need to give grace to others if we are to receive grace ourselves.*

How then do we attain to the perfect heart? I think this may be broken into two complementary parts. The things we need to stop thinking and doing and then the things we need to start thinking and doing. Many people stop short of loving their enemies because they have certain self-protective beliefs such as "It's not fair...", "They will just hurt me more." and "I can't love them, I have been hurt too much...". These beliefs need to be looked at in the light of logic and Scripture. Firstly, it is fair. If we expect others to forgive us and not punish us according to our sins so we should forgive others and not punish them according to their sins. Secondly, loving people does not necessarily mean that you will put yourself back into a dangerous and hurtful situation. It does mean that you will pray for God to bless them and that you will meet basic needs (such as food and drink) that you can safely provide.

**Romans 12:19-21 NIV** *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (20) On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Thirdly, you are not a prisoner of pain. Despite what* nsychologists may sometimes have said trauma does not leave you without choices. It is

not inevitable for hurt people to become bitter or neurotic. Many of the survivors of concentration camps are relatively whole people. Step by step you can choose to love your enemies and escape the dark dungeon called bitterness. Sometimes love grows gradually and you will have to gradually increase in love and decrease in anger. Use the cross as your starting point. Ask how Jesus on the cross sees them and would treat them. Look at them against the background of the cross and of God's love for them and plans for their life. As you do this you may find it much easier to begin on God's program of forgiveness.

Things we need to start doing.... We need to see loving and blessing our enemies as the path to personal wholeness and a perfect heart. It needs to be taken out of the "too hard basket" and put back on the agenda for ordinary bible-believing Christians. The second thing we need to do is to start straight away. Forgiveness is like a muscle that builds with use. And it needs to be stretched a little in order to grow in size. Forgive as much as you can possibly forgive today and you will be able to forgive yet more tomorrow. Bless people as much as you can today and you will be able to bless them more tomorrow.

As part of this process we need to constantly go to God for His perspective on the person or incident and we can only do this through prayer, the reading of the word and the timely advice of godly friends. I remember a time when a colleague of mine was belittling me at every opportunity. I come from a background where "face" is very important and her comments in front of others were cutting me to pieces. I wanted to retaliate with stinging sarcasm but I was also teaching through 1 Peter at the time and came to the verses.

**1 Peter 3:8-11 NKJV** *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; (9) not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (10) For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. (11) Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.*

I have always believed in putting Scripture into practice as literally as possible so when I was put down I returned a blessing - at first admittedly through inwardly gritted teeth. Over a very short period of time the situation changed and within three weeks her entire personality was transformed. It was the conviction of Scripture that gave me the strength to be obedient. At other times it has been God's quiet voice in prayer and at still others it has been my courageous friends sitting me down and telling me the truth. Loving our enemies and blessing them is not easy and we need all the encouragement we can get to do it.

I find that getting the right perspective on my pain is all important. When I am in pain I tend to look at the world as if I were the centre of it . Here are ten "pocket perspectives" that keep me sane:

- If justice was always dispensed immediately, swiftly and completely no-one would reach the age of 14. So I should let God be merciful and not demand swift justice all the time.
- Some people have their portion in this life and nothing in the next therefore I should not envy the wicked that prosper.
- Give God time to work and to bring others to repentance.

- I am allowed to think that I am right and God is wrong and has messed up - for about half an hour or so and then I'd better apologize. Being human is OK , feeling angry at God is OK, just get it over with and don't believe it for too long.
- If I am angry at God I shall never voice it publicly and bring shame to His name.
- God is on His throne and I am only a tiny little "insect" before Him therefore I should not complain and grumble and be bitter. That is not the right way to address the Almighty.
- The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.
- I may not have sinned in precisely that particular way but I have sinned enough so that my righteousness before God is totally inadequate. I am in no position to condemn others. I need grace too.
- What joy and benefit would it be to the world for my enemy to weep and wail in bitterness of spirit? Who needs another unhappy person -aren't there are enough of them already? It is far better that they be happy and blessed.
- Mercy triumphs over justice. Justice is not of paramount importance - love is.

These perspective statements may help you to grow in Christ and love and bless your enemies. They tend to revolve around whether our Christian life revolves around justice or around grace. If I get obsessed with seeing justice done I become narrow and bitter and hard. If I become obsessed with love, faithfulness and mercy I become perfect in heart. Grace is given even to those who make no effort at all. Grace extends to sinners.

**Romans 4:5 NIV** *However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

God loves His enemies and blesses them even though they make no effort at deserving it. There are however at least three "levels" or "ways" God blesses. Firstly God provides basic life necessities to the just and unjust alike by His grace (Matthew 5:45). Secondly He provides salvation and eternal life to all who trust Him (John 3:16). Faith is the only requirement. The gift of eternal life is completely unearned and independent of how well they live their lives or how much effort they put into their Christian walk. Thirdly He has a "crown of life" that is awarded for outstanding effort as a Christian (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 2:10). This crown is the reward for performance, salvation though is free. Our enemies may have houses, land and wealth and live in luxury but it is the Christian of perfect heart that will win the unfading crown of glory.

## Perfect Love



**Matthew 5:43-48** *You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (44) But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) so that you may become sons of your Father in Heaven. For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax-*

*collectors do so? (48) Therefore be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.*

### Introduction

In these verses Jesus tells us that it is what we become, not what we receive, that is most important. The whole point of loving our enemies is: "so that you may become sons of your Father in Heaven." And that we may be "perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

In other words, the perfect person, the person who becomes a son of God, is someone who bears no malice toward anyone but who has perfect charity for all. The person who is perfected in love is the truly perfect person.

This contrasts strongly with the view of the Pharisees that the perfect person was someone who kept every jot and tittles of the Law perfectly. The perfect of Jesus is firstly and most important inward, a perfection of love and when love is perfected it also fulfills the law.

The aim of all New Testament teaching is to produce Christian saints who are perfected in love. Over and over again Christians are told to love one another and not to take revenge. This is why gossip, squabbling, backbiting and disunity are so soundly rebuked – because they show that love has broken down.

The person who is truly connected to God will be filled with love because God is love. The person who is truly a "son of God" will be very loving – because God is love. And the person who is truly spiritual, so spiritual that he or she is completely Christ-like will be full of love because God is love.

God gives us trials so that we can overcome them in His strength and enemies so we can love them with His power and thus be perfected into the image of God.

## Greater Love

In today's verses Jesus tells us that the quality of Christian love must exceed the quality of pagan love. If our "being" is different then our "loving" must also be different. We must be able to love difficult people and even love obnoxious and rude people. We may not like the person, but we must love the person.

To put it simply love is how we treat them. We can treat a rude and ungrateful person kindly; we can extend help to an enemy who is hungry or thirsty or in need without necessarily liking them. This ethic has given rise to codes such as the Geneva Convention, which dictates how civilized people should treat captured enemy soldiers. The English may not have liked the Germans but when Germans were captured they were treated decently and healed and fed and clothed.

Ideas such as chivalry, courtesy, civility, honor, respect and professionalism all depend on treating people we do not like with due process, respect and kindness. The doctor may not like the person he or she is treating but must do a professional job anyway.

I am very disturbed by some comments out of the religious right such as this week's outburst from Pat Robertson about "taking out" Hugo Chavez. Advocating such violent action is the complete anti-thesis of all that Jesus is talking about in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the rest of the New Testament. To put it bluntly such sentiments are worldly and political and not the least bit spiritual and Christian.

Christianity is all about treating other people with great patience and kindness and respect. Christians feed the hungry, give drinks to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and do good to others - whether they like them or not. Christians stretch their love beyond ethnic and cultural boundaries and help people overseas and in places that we have never heard of. And true Christians seek justice for everyone regardless of their race, color or creed.

Sometimes we learn best if we take a single example and explore it in depth. So I am going to explore the doctrine of loving our enemies with reference to Christians and Muslims and I will use the parable of the Good Samaritan as the jumping off point:

## The Good Samaritan: Who Should We Love? Who Should We Hate?

### The Four Questions

True Christians and true Muslims cannot and will never come to any real agreement. To Muslims, Christians, while people of the book, are perceived as still in the "realm of war", not yet submitted to Allah. To Christians, Muslims, though respected, are perceived as unbelievers and are yet to be converted to Christianity. The differences between the two faiths are enormous, vital and substantial. A bible-believing Christian cannot follow

Mohammed or agree with many of the teachings of the Koran. A true Muslim cannot believe in the Trinity or the incarnation. These are impossibilities. The two faiths are irreconcilably different. The two faiths have been at war for centuries and the two faiths will always seek to convert each other. True believers in each camp will always see the other as sinners, outside the faith, and on their way to Hell. Given that biblical Christianity and fundamentalist Islam will never agree, and will always see the other as sinners then:

1. Should we kill someone because they are a sinner, outside our faith, and going to Hell?
2. Should we walk on by and let someone die, say in a car accident, because they are a sinner, outside our faith, and going to Hell?
3. Should we refuse to spend money on someone to help them recover back to health if they are a sinner, outside our faith, and going to Hell?
4. Should we hate our neighbor because they are a sinner, outside our faith, and going to Hell?

In short what is the realm of people I should love? And what is the realm of people a holy and righteous person should hate and detest? Are the boundaries of my love determined by the boundaries of my nation, ethnic group, customs, practices or my faith? Who should I show mercy to and who should I show no pity to at all?

These were also the urgent questions of Jesus' day when relationships between Jews, Romans and Samaritans were tense. Jews saw Romans as unclean Gentile dogs and despised the Samaritans as corrupted, idolatrous apostates. No good Jew would talk with a Samaritan. Romans saw Jews as stubborn troublemakers and Samaritans generally hated Jews and would not give anyone hospitality who was heading towards Jerusalem. In the midst of this irreconcilable religious tension Jesus told the following story:

**Luke 10:25-37 NKJV** *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (26) He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" (27) So he answered and said, "'you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" (28) And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." (29) But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (30) Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. (31) "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (32) "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. (33) "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. (34) "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35) "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' (36) "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the*

*thieves?" (37) And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

1. A certain lawyer asks Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life.
2. Jesus points the lawyer to the Jewish Law and asks him what it says.
3. The lawyer replies that eternal life comes if we love God with our entire heart mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.
4. Jesus replies - Correct! Now go and do this and you will live.
5. The lawyer hedges, it looks too hard a task, too big a job. So like a good lawyer he goes for the definition and asks "Who is my neighbor?". The real question being "who do I have to love?" or in the context of the original question about eternal life "Who do I have to love in order to inherit eternal life?" The hidden plea is "Tell me I can have eternal life by just loving a few people, give me a definition that lets me off the hook so I can justify myself."
6. So Jesus tells a story about a well-known and hazardous bit of road between Jerusalem and Jericho, the highway probably just outside where they were talking.
7. A Jew is robbed and badly beaten and left for dead, the clergy that were supposed to look after him and show compassion (a priest and a Levite) just walk on by. Jesus clearly thinks this behavior is wrong.
8. Then a Samaritan comes along and has compassion on the Jew (who to him is a sinner, outside the Samaritan faith and going to Hell)
9. The Samaritan does not kill the man but instead heals the wounded Jew.
10. The Samaritan does not leave the Jew to die but bandages him and puts him on his own donkey, so the wounded man rode while the Good Samaritan walked.
11. The Samaritan pays money to the innkeeper to take care of this man who is outside of the Samaritan faith.
12. The Good Samaritan promises to come back and check and see how he is going and to pay any additional expenses.
13. The Samaritan does not convert the Jew and the Jew does not convert the Samaritan. Both remain very different in their religious beliefs.
14. The Samaritan does not hate, but rather loves and shows practical mercy on, someone with whom he had an irreconcilable religious difference.

## The Application

Jesus told that story to answer the lawyers implied question "Who do I have to love in order to inherit eternal life?".

- Do I have to love sinners?
- Do I have to love people who believe wrongly?
- Do I have to love people of other races and cultures?
- Do I have to love those who despise and oppress me as the Jews despised and oppressed the Samaritans?

If you are to have the sort of love that God will take note of on the Day of Judgment; the sort of love that will cause Him to grant you eternal life, then the answer to all these questions is yes. Yes, you must love sinners. Yes you must love those who believe wrongly. Yes you must love people of other races and cultures. Yes you must love those who despise and oppress you. According to Jesus only this sort of love will be great enough to make you fit for Paradise. In another place Jesus teaches about what our attitude to our enemies should be:

**Luke 6:27-38 NKJV** *"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, (28) "bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. (29) "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. (30) "Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. (31) "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. (32) "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33) "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) "And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. (35) "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (36) "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (37) "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

Here Jesus is quite specific. There is no reward from God for behaving just like ordinary sinners. The righteous must live by a higher and holier standard and have a deeper and greater love. If sinners can show a little mercy then the righteous should show much mercy, if the sinners can lend, then the righteous can give, if the sinners can love their friends, the righteous could love their enemies.

If we are to demonstrate a greater love than that of the sinners, and bring ourselves eternal life on the Day of Judgment, then we must love our enemies. So Christians and Muslims must love each other, if they are to listen to the teaching of Jesus and inherit eternal life. Like the Good Samaritan we must show practical love, care, mercy and hospitality to people with whom we have an irreconcilable religious difference.

You do not have to convert to their beliefs in order to love them and help them. You can bandage their wounds without having to believe their religion. You need not follow their behavior or their lifestyle. You can still disapprove of their sins while you take them to hospital. You do not have to agree with their actions or whitewash their past atrocities. But you must not kill them for it either.

Muslims and Christians must not kill each other because of their religious differences. Murderers do not inherit eternal life. Only people who love their enemies can inherit eternal life. If your heart is cold, if you are filled with rage and anger, then you are filled with darkness and you will stumble and fall. John, one of the disciples of Jesus, wrote these wise words:

**1 John 2:9-11 NKJV** *He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. (10) He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. (11) But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*

There are some religious people, both Christians and Muslim, who go around saying "I have the light, follow me" and a few of them are full of hate and anger. Of these John says they are "still in darkness until now". People of great light are people of great love, they are not people of hatred and anger.

Anger and hatred is darkness - and blinds us. Our anger keeps us from seeing what is good in other people and so we do not see life correctly. Soon we add to our list of people to hate. Eventually we hate many people and love only a few and our soul is in deep darkness.

To sum up: God is love and love leads to eternal life. God is merciful and we should also be merciful. Our righteousness should surpass that of the sinners and our love should be much greater than theirs. If sinners can love those who love them, then the righteous must be able to love those who do not love them. The righteous must love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. The realm of those we are to love includes those we disagree with, and sinners, and those of other cultures and faiths; in fact it includes the whole world.

The realm of those we must hate in order to be considered righteous is nobody, it is empty.

In the modern world Muslims and Christians live side by side, travel on the same roads. Go to the same schools, work in the same offices. If a Muslim is injured by the side of the road I as a Christian will stop and help. If I am in a rush at work I would hope a Muslim colleague would show compassion. This world is too small a place and the modern city is too close and complex for us to fight and hate and kill over religious differences. We may not agree with one another, but we can and must love one another.

## Closer to Home

Ok how do we love our annoying neighbor, our boss and our in-laws and outlaws? I think the concept of having three kinds of love based on three basic circles of contact is useful. The circles are:

A) Positive – these people are safe and positive and do us good in some way. We should organize to see more of them. We should hang around people that are wise or good or encouraging or who believe in us and help us. We love these people by listening to them and accepting them at a deep level and opening our heart to them.

B) Neutral - these are the ordinary people of everyday life transactions. These are the people that tend to keep us busy and pay the bills. We love these people by being kind to them and fair and respectful but we do not let them get very close or take up too much time. We accept them into our world, but not into our heart. We also have the right to say “no” to them if they ask too much from us.

C) Negative – these are unsafe people we keep at a great distance because they are treacherous or dishonest or harmful in some way. In the Bible they include violent people, thieves, harlots, the sluggard, the gossip, the flatterer, the fool, and so forth. The more dangerous they are the less we should have to do with them. We endeavor to keep them away from our world and definitely do not let them anywhere near our heart but we will feed them if they are hungry and hope that they repent. If a fool or a violent man is thirsty – give him a drink of water, but do not employ him!

We find Jesus exercising this in the difference He gives to the disciples, to the masses, and to the Pharisees and Herod. Herod was so treacherous that Jesus refused to say anything to him at all:

**Luke 23:8-9** *And seeing Jesus, Herod greatly rejoiced, for he had desired to see Him for a long time, because he had heard many things about Him. And he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. (9) And he questioned Him in many words, but He answered him nothing.*

God send His rain upon the just and the unjust and provides food for even the most wicked person, but the close counsels of God are for the righteous.

God's perfect love is not indiscriminate or foolish, but it is very, very patient. God continues to do good to people who do not deserve it – and so should we!

## Spiritual Showing Off



**Matthew 6:1-6** *"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. (2) Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (3) But when you do a charitable deed,*

*do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly. (5) "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (6) But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

**Matthew 6:16-18** *"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. (17) But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, (18) so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

### Introduction & Background

Religion and theatre have always been closely connected. On one level the early Greek plays were always morality plays involving the gods and the first European plays were Christian

oratorios and Passion plays. On another level the priests of nearly all religions soon learned how to turn on a good performance to impress the crowds and bring in the tithes and offerings. From Zeus to Zoroaster any religion that wanted popularity had to know how to please the multitudes.

However there is a very, very fine line between acting and deceiving - and sometimes even between liturgy and lying. In fact the word "hypocrite" means "under the mask" or 'mask-wearer' and originated as a technical term in Greek acting, but quickly came to mean someone who was a fake.

Jewish religion with its immense Temple, elaborately dressed High Priest and thousands of sacrifices at major festivals was made for drama – and attracted actors. And some of these spiritual shows reached comic proportions of self-aggrandizement. Like politicians visiting disaster zones – but only with five hundred reporters and a helicopter and an assured spot on the prime time news.

After the exile in Babylon the returning Jews became very, very pious and acts of piety, such as those of the Maccabees who stood firm against a wicked Greek ruler - became a fast track to genuine social status. This attracted imitators and this imitation at times turned into humbug.

Even today there are some people who desperately crave an audience for their spirituality. For these people if the show is not "on" then the performance is "off". Their spirituality is wholly and solely for human consumption. Jesus says that 'such people have their reward' – they carve fleeting human attention, and that is all the reward they will ever get.



### God Is Watching Us And Cannot Be Fooled

Three times Jesus uses the phrase: "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (4, 6, 18) And twice Jesus refers to your Father who is in secret" (6, 18). In other words God is secretly watching us and knows all of our secret behavior and all of the thoughts and intentions of our heart!

God is watching us and cannot be fooled. No amount of spiritual pretense can con God into loving you even one little bit more. God

knows all your up and downs and loves you anyway. Spiritual acting is thus completely futile and only humility, repentance and contrition will impress the Lord.

By the way it is an immense spiritual relief once you figure out that it is absolutely useless trying to impress God with your spiritual performance. I will return to that thought later, but hold on to it.

First let us look at some Scriptures about how keenly God is observing our ordinary human lives:

**Psalms 139:1-4** *LORD, You have searched me and known me. (2) You know when I sit down and when I stand up; You understand my thoughts from far away. (3) You observe my travels and my rest; You are aware of all my ways. (4) Before a word is on my tongue, You know all about it, LORD.*

**Jeremiah 23:24** *Can anyone hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill the heavens and earth? says the Lord.*

**Romans 2:16** *in a day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.*

**Hebrews 4:12-13** *For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight, but all things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

**Malachi 3:16-18** *Then those fearing Jehovah spoke together, each man to his neighbor. And Jehovah listened and heard. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Jehovah, and for those esteeming His name. (17) And they shall be Mine, says Jehovah of Hosts, for the day that I will make up My treasure. And I will pity them as a man has pity on his son who serves him. (18) Then you shall again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God, and him who does not serve Him.*

God watches and records our lives, our actions are noted and written in books, every detail of our life is recorded and even the very hairs of our head are numbered. This can only mean one thing, that God is intensely interested even in the most ordinary of people. We are so precious to Him, that He sent His Son to die for us and that He sends His angels to minister to us (Hebrews 1:14).

There is even a special class of angels called "heavenly watchers" that observe the deeds, and particularly the attitudes of people. They are referred to in chapter 4 of the book of Daniel.

**Daniel 4:13-17** *I saw in the visions of my head on my bed, and behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from Heaven. (14) He cried aloud and said this, Cut down the tree, and cut off its branches; shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals get away from under it, and the birds from its branches. (15) But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field. And let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let its portion be with the animals in the grass of the earth. (16) Let his heart be changed from men, and let the heart of an animal be given to him. And let seven times pass over him. (17) This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, so that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will, and sets up over it the lowest of men.*

So these heavenly watchers and holy beings that can decide even the fate of kings who get too big an ego for the patience of Heaven to tolerate.

In the New Testament there are a few passing references to the lives of Christians being watched over by the angels:

**Matthew 18:10** *Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that in Heaven their angels always behold the face of My Father in Heaven.*

**1 Corinthians 4:9** *For I think that God has set forth us last, the apostles, as it were appointed to death; for we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men.*

**1 Corinthians 11:10** *For this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels.*

**1 Timothy 3:16** *and without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among nations, believed on in the world, and received up into glory.*

**1 Timothy 5:21** *I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that you guard these things without prejudice, doing nothing by partiality.*

**Hebrews 12:1** *Therefore since we also are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,*

So we see that God, and His holy angels are watching us and that our actions and attitudes, both are important. This intense scrutiny means that we can never ever fool God. There is no use pretending, God knows it all, records it all, has it all on tape. I think the comedy hour in heaven must consist of watching the most outrageous religious hypocrites in action, those who think they fool both God and man. The right approach to God is to have total transparency and humility. He knows all your mess and He wants to help you with it.

## The Fear Of Man Is A Snare

**Proverbs 29:25** *The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever who trusts in the LORD shall be safe.*

Religious hypocrisy comes because people fear the crowd and try to please it. When we fear the opinions of others and mold our lives for human approval we become severely compromised as human beings. We wear clothes we do not want to wear, go to movies we do not wish to see, do subjects we know we will dislike at college, take on a career path that does not fulfill us and even marry people we know we should not marry. People even take drugs, engage in hazardous sexual practices and take stupid safety risks – all for human approval. However our inner personhood is only kept safe by following God's will. If we trust God and listen to our conscience we will truly live the safe and blessed life.

## God Looks on the Attitude Not on the Acting

**1 Samuel 16:7** *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

The religious hypocrite has perfected the outward appearance, the ingratiating smile, the holier than thou accent, the long robes and so forth. They have a big white handkerchief and

a chorus of acolytes and singers, the lights flash, the trumpets blare - but God is generally totally unimpressed.

God does not look at the outward show but at the inward person, at their attitudes and intentions, and especially at their humility, love, faith and hope. When God finds someone with a good heart He blesses them mightily.

**2 Chronicles 16:9** *For the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*



## Don't Blow Your Own Trumpet

*(2) So whenever you give to the poor, don't sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. I assure you: They've got their reward!*

Sometimes a phrase from the Bible enters the English language such as being "my brother's keeper" or "laughter is the best medicine" or "by the skin of your teeth" and "blowing your own trumpet" comes from this verse in the Sermon on the Mount. This refers to rich people being carried through the streets on the shoulders of their slaves, with another slave going in front blowing a trumpet so all could come out and receive the coins thrown around by the lavish patron of the poor.

Blowing your own trumpet has modern equivalents such as insisting that the hospital wing be named after you, or sending out a press release every time you give - or the political pork barrel circus at election time. Anyway such people have their reward, votes, acclaim, temporary esteem but they cannot use it as "credit" when they get to Heaven - because they expended their entire reward in the here and now.

A particularly onerous kind of giving is patronage where a whole community comes to depend on the largess of a few large donors. This creates political and moral imbalances and creates dependency, flattery, deceit and all sort of gamesmanship.

## Keep Your Giving A Secret - Even To Yourself!

*(3) But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Instead we are to give quietly and secretly, hiding it even from ourselves, so that our "left hand does not know what our right hand is doing". This can be done through blind trusts, foundations, and via anonymous giving. You keep your sacrifice to yourself and let God bless you later on. Now you still have to do your legal reporting and your tax returns and you may have to tell your spouse where the money went. That is just being honest and is right and proper; God will not reduce your reward for that. The idea is that you give humbly and

secretly and not for human approval. Treasure in heaven comes when we learn to break the addiction to human approval and do things for God's secret approval.

## Pretentious Praying In Public

*(5) "Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. I assure you: They've got their reward!"*

We have probably all been in prayer meetings where sister so-and-so arose and prayed an eloquent prayer and it felt like it was purely for public consumption and went nowhere near the throne of God. Or we have turned on the TV and seen some evangelist bible in hand, on their knees, with eyes rolled towards Heaven and praying this wonderful dramatic prayer that had the spiritual anointing of hair oil.

Prayer is good, and we should all pray, but prayer is not a performance, nor is it theatre and it is certainly not a way of winning public approval. Prayer is holy reverent communion with God, not theatrics, antics and white hankies.

That said, there is certainly a place for public prayer, and for congregational prayer, which is reverent and humble, straightforward, plain and unadorned, and which is meant to truly lead people into the presence of Almighty God. The Lord's Prayer, which follows this verse is an example of a plain, concise, straightforward public prayer and we shall look at it in some detail next week.

## Private Prayer Pleases Papa (God)

*(6) But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

God is very pleased when we get alone with Him in private and share our heart with Him and pray to Him from the depths of our souls. In fact that this verse implies that private secret prayer is MORE likely to be answered by God because "your Father who sees in secret will reward you". Jesus often went alone to pray with His Father in Heaven e.g. after a long day of ministry in Galilee:

**Matthew 14:23** *And when He had sent the crowds away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray. And when evening had come, He was there alone.*

And two verses later we see that it was after this time of prayer alone that Jesus was able to walk on the water!

**Matthew 14:25** *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.*

It is good to have a small space that is our "God space", a chair in the garden, a spot by the kitchen sink, wherever you can, have a sacred corner where you can talk to God alone and lay out your prayer concerns without any one else watching.

## Look At What I Am Going Through For God!

*(16) "Whenever you fast, don't be sad-faced like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so their fasting is obvious to people. I assure you: They've got their reward!*

Many people just have to let others know they are fasting or dieting or exercising or whatever. "Look at what I am going through for God" is what their message is! If we are sacrificing in some way for God we should keep quiet about it, suffer in silence, and let God reward us in due time. Now this does not mean that you do not tell others who need to know – for instance your wife who cooks the dinner! But generally don't make a big song and dance about it or seek attention over it.

## Act Normal While Being Spiritual

*(17) But when you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face, (18) so that you don't show your fasting to people but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

The idea of the oil and the washing is to appear normal and even attractive. Jesus wants people to look normal while being spiritual. Christians should be truly spiritual but just look like "average Joes".

In fact Jesus never advocates goofy, weirdo Christianity.

The "anoint your head and wash your face" principle applies also to us missionaries, who can sometimes appear bedraggled and poor and quite unusual. I strive to blend in with wherever I am at and to look as normal and as attractive as possible.

The principle of "act normal while being spiritual" also applies to exaggerated styles of worship where people turn on a 'performance' rolling on the floor or crying out in a loud voice so as to appear that the Holy Spirit is upon them. This just discredits Christianity and is to be avoided if at all possible. God is a God of order and not of confusion.



## Spiritual Humility

**Luke 14:11** *For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

The hypocrites who do all these things are always trying to exalt themselves. God says they will be humbled, and they often are. But the folk that pray in private, act normal while being spiritual and who do not let

their left hand know what their right hand is doing, are humble folk, and such humble folk will be exalted and their acts of righteousness will be rewarded.

## Quiet Christianity

**1 Thessalonians 4:11** *and that you try earnestly to be quiet and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,*

**1 Timothy 2:2** *for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*

**1 Peter 3:3-4** *Do not let your adornment be merely outward arranging the hair, wearing gold, or of putting on fine apparel, (4) rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*

Christians are called to live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence. We are to do our work and live before God with a gentle and quiet spirit. Holiness creates quietness as we realize that God is in Heaven and we are on earth and that our role is simply to take our place in the vastness of God's work in the world.

Jesus values the quiet humble diligent people of the world who just knuckle down and live godly lives and who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Spiritual show offs get zero reward, but humble quiet Christians are precious in the sight of God.

## The Lord's Prayer - Introduction



### **Matthew 6:7-15** (Lord's Prayer Version 1)

*And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

*(8) "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. (9) In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. (10) Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. (11) Give us this day our daily bread. (12)*

*And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors. (13) And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power  
and the glory forever. Amen.*

*(14) "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

### **Luke 11:1-13** (Lord's Prayer Version 2)

*Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." (2) So He said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

*Your will be done*

*On earth as it is in heaven.*

*(3) Give us day by day our daily bread.*

*(4) And forgive us our sins,*

*For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*

*And do not lead us into temptation,*

*But deliver us from the evil one."*

*(5) And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; (6) for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; (7) and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? (8) I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. (9) "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (11) If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will*

*he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? (12) Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? (13) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

## Introduction

Last week we saw that God is watching us, and taking note of our quiet Christian lives in order to reward us. This week we will find that God is listening to us, and hears us and answers us in prayer.

We will spend the next three weeks looking at the Lord's Prayer and encouraging your understanding of prayer and your practice of prayer. This week we will do an overview of prayer as it is taught and practiced by Jesus and then next week we will do the first five phrases of the prayer, and finish it off in week 3 with the last six phrases from the Lord's Prayer. And because the Lord's prayer is in both Matthew and Luke we will look at both versions and the little bits of extra teaching that Luke throws in because they are also most valuable.

Just a few words about the importance of prayer: If any activity is absolutely essential to the Christian life it is prayer. Prayer is the means God gives us to communicate with Him. The Bible is God's Word to us, and prayers are our words back to God. Ideally they should be connected, so that it as we always pray in the light of the Word of God. Prayer is not magic, but prayer is essential.

Guy H. King No one is a firmer believer in the power of prayer than the devil; not that he practices it, but he suffers from it. ~

Matilda Andross - "Prayer is more powerful than habits, heredity, and natural tendencies. It can overcome all these. It is more powerful than the forces that hold the planets in place. Prayer, though it comes from the heart of an unlearned child of God, can suspend the laws of the universe, if such be God's will, just as the sun stood still when Joshua prayed. There is no other power on earth that the enemy of souls hates and fears as he does prayer. We are told that 'Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.' "

E.M. Bounds - "God has of his own motion placed himself under the law of prayer, and has obligated himself to answer the prayers of men. He has ordained prayer as a means whereby he will do things through men as they pray, which he would not otherwise do. If prayer puts God to work on earth, then, by the same token, prayerlessness rules God out of the world's affairs, and prevents him from working. The driving power, the conquering force in God's cause is God himself. 'Call on me and I will answer thee and who thee great and mighty things which though knowest not,' is God's challenge to prayer. Prayer puts God in full force into God's work."

John Calvin - "To know God as the sovereign disposer of all good, inviting us to present our requests, and yet not to approach or ask of him, were so far from availing us, that it were just as if one told of a treasure were to allow it to remain buried in the ground."

Oswald Chambers - "Prayer is not an exercise. It is the life of the saint."  
 "Prayer does not equip us for the greater work, Prayer is the greater work."

A.J. Gordon - "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed."

J. Vernon McGee - "According to my humble judgment, the greatest need of the present-day church is prayer. Prayer should be the vital breath of the church, but right now it is gasping for air. One of the great Bible teachers of the past said that the church goes forward on its knees. Maybe one of the reasons the church is not going forward today is because it's not in a position to go forward --- we are not on our knees in prayer.

We seek out panaceas to resolve the conflicts of the world and to heal our own personal and private wounds. Many are consulting the psychiatrist, the doctor, the minister, and anyone else who will listen. But we do not seem to recognize that the great need in our own personal lives is prayer. Prayer is the greatest neglected resource that we have; it's a power that we simply are not using today.

The disciples went to our Lord and said, 'Lord, teach us to pray' (Luke 11:1). They did not ask Him how to pray; they weren't looking for lessons on technique or an outline for ritualistic prayer. They had obviously heard our Lord pray, and they wanted to learn how to pray on the same high level as He did. This is a request many of us today need to make: 'Lord, teach us to pray.'"

I firmly believe in prayer, and of the absolute necessity of prayer for every Christian. It is not as if some were called to do all the praying while the others did all the doing. We must do both, and praying is doing! After 25 years of ministry I can tell you the results of my ministry are exactly in proportion to the intensity and faithfulness of the prayers being offered. For me prayer is not mystical, it is practical and it works far more often than not. Unanswered prayers are the distinct exception not the rule.

## Vain Repetition, Being Heard For Many Words – Attempting To Flatter God

The first thing that Jesus says is that we are not to babble on in vain repetition. God wants us to get to the point and The Lord's Prayer is a model of conciseness. It lists a bunch of highly important points, listed in order of priority and which addresses each priority in the fewest possible words. In fact it is a very business-like prayer, and prayer has even been called "doing business with God". God is a judge and a king and when one goes before a judge or a king it is right and proper to be brief and to the point or you will not be heard.

**Ecclesiastes 5:2 MKJV** *Do not be rash with your mouth, and do not let your heart be hasty to say a word before God. For God is in Heaven, and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few.*

Indeed most of the prayers in the Bible take less than one minute to pray and not one of them waffles on and on.

It is not the quantity of our praying but the quality of our praying that God notices. A sincere heartfelt "Lord, help me" is more likely to be answered than a long, eloquent but insincere performance. That is why prayer has to be a lot more than just "dabbling at God" in a half-

hearted and lackluster fashion. God wants real prayer, straight from the heart, prayer with strong spirit and deep feeling and living intelligence and great depth. The request is good and worthy then God hears it. So you are not more likely to be heard by God for a three hour prayer than a three minute prayer.

**1 John 5:14-15 MKJV** *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (15) And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*

God hears us because of the purity of our request, not because of our "many words". Just ask God plainly in a straightforward fashion without trying to butter Him up or impress Him. You do not have to make God hear you, His ears are perfect, nor do you have to twist His arm since from beginning to end the Bible tells us He wants to grant us what we ask for.

**Mark 11:23-24 MKJV** *For truly I say to you that whoever shall say to this mountain, Be moved and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he said shall occur, he shall have whatever he said. (24) Therefore I say to you, All things, whatever you ask, praying, believe that you shall receive them, and it will be to you.*

God is watching you and listens to you and knows all that you need and wants you to ask Him for things in a concise and respectful way. There are no tricks to prayer, but there are better and worse ways of praying and the worst way of praying is "the way the heathens do".



## Do Not Be Like The Heathens

Jesus tells us NOT to pray like the other religions, like the Muslims bowed to Mecca, or the Dervishes in a trance, or the Indians smoking peyote, or the Buddhists who have prayer wheels that repeat the same prayer mechanically so as to influence God or accumulate karma. Such prayer may seem impressive but they all treat God as either very stupid like a dotter old man who is easily flattered and needs to be constantly reminded or as very impersonal and mechanical like a force that can be harnessed.

The plain fact of the matter is that God is infinite love and infinite wisdom. In His infinite wisdom God can tell what is in your heart and so

cannot be tricked or flattered or cajoled or manipulated in any way whatsoever. It is like trying to charm your way past a totally objective traffic policeman who has very good evidence of your speeding. Flattering God in order to get something from Him is quite simply

a waste of your breath. Secondly because God is infinite love and infinite Personhood He relates to you and desires relationship from you. God does not respond to being treated like a force or even like an object. God's decisions are personal and qualitative not impersonal and quantitative. If god's decisions were impersonal and quantitative a dictator like Hitler could have forced millions of people to pray simultaneously and win any war on earth.

A good example of the difference between godly prayer and heathen prayer is found in the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings Chapter 18: **1 Kings**

**18:26-39 MKJV** *And they took the bull which was given them, and they dressed, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any who answered. And they leaped on the altar which was made. (27) And it happened at noon Elijah mocked them and said, Cry with a great voice, for he is a god. Either he is meditating, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey; perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened! (28) And they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves with knives and spears until the blood gushed out on them, as is their way. (29) And it happened when midday was past, and when they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor anyone who paid attention.*

*(30) And Elijah said to all the people, Come near to me. And all the people came near him. And he repaired the broken down altar of Jehovah. (31) And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the Word of Jehovah came, saying, Israel shall be your name. (32) And with stones he built an altar in the name of Jehovah. And he made a trench around the altar big enough to contain two measures of seed. (33) And he arranged the wood, and cut the bull in pieces, and placed it on the wood, and said, Fill four water jars with water and pour on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood. (34) And he said, Do it the second time. And they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And they did it the third time. (35) And the water ran all around the altar. And he filled the trench also with water. (36) And it happened at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your Word. (37) Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that You are Jehovah God, and that You have turned their heart back again.*

*(38) And the fire of Jehovah fell and burned up the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (39) And when all the people saw, they fell on their faces. And they said, Jehovah, He is the God! Jehovah, He is the God!*

The heathens pray all day in an extreme manner and get zero result. Elijah prays just 60 words, (about a 30 second prayer) and fire comes down from heaven! Let see how the heathen prayed:

1. They dressed up
2. They made a loud noise
3. They 'leaped on the altar' and were very energetic
4. They prayed for a long time

5. They cut themselves and carried on as if pain impressed God.
6. They were trying to get Baal to hear them.

By contrast Elijah:

1. Connected with the history and worship of the Jewish people.
2. Presumed God would hear and prayed sure of his relationship with God.
3. Prayed out of a concern for God's glory and name.
4. Staked himself on his obedience, not on his psychological intensity.
5. Prayed briefly and concisely using no special words or manner of dress.
6. Actually doused the sacrifice with water! He did not try to replace God's actions or substitute for them.

God is personal and wise and good and cannot be manipulated by human religious antics. God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. That means that we do not come mechanically or in the flesh, but in the spirit; and that we do not come falsely and manipulatively - but in sincerity and truth.

## Your Father Knows What You Need

God is all-knowing and very smart, and is all-seeing and knows what we need before we ask. Therefore God does not need a million emails on the same topic! God is personally paying attention to your life and my life and arranging the worm for the sparrow and the mate for the screech owls and vultures in Babylon.

**Isaiah 34:14-17 MKJV** *The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the howling beasts; and the shaggy goat shall cry to his fellow. The screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest. (15) There the snake shall nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow; there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate. (16) Seek out of the book of Jehovah, and read; not one of these shall fail, none shall lack its mate; for My mouth has commanded, and His Spirit has gathered them. (17) And He has cast the lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them by line; they shall possess it forever, from generation to generation they shall dwell in it.*

If God cares about screech-owls, then He certainly cares about you! So pray to God assuming that He knows what is going on.

## Praying For The Big Issues That Include All The Little Issues

The Lord's Prayer is an example of praying for the big high-level issues that include all the other issues by default. When you pray "give us this day our daily bread" you include everything from the electricity bill to the groceries. When you pray forgive us our trespasses that include all the sins of the day and you do not have to go around listing them in some tedious process of self-reckoning. God knows all the details! In fact New Testament praying

is almost always the high-level prayers – prayers for wisdom or enlightenment or courage or for the filling of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of God.

In the following weeks we will look at each of these high-level prayers and see how powerful they are. To pray “They will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is asking for a world full of love and obedience and righteousness and truth and mercy. It is asking for the world “in which righteousness dwells” which will be ours after the Return of the Lord.

Jesus is trying to get us to move out of our preoccupation with ourselves and the “small stuff” and to see the big picture, in spiritual terms, and to pray powerful strategic level prayers. The other thing that Jesus teaches us to pray for ends not means. Jesus prays for “our daily bread” not the means of getting it – a job, winning the lottery etc. Or Jesus prays “thy Kingdom come” and leaves the method up to the Lord.

A good prayer envisions the high-level, strategic, God-honoring end state and desires it and pictures it and asks God for it and believes it has received it. Let’s look at Elijah’s prayer again:

*Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your Word. (37) Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that You are Jehovah God, and that You have turned their heart back again.*

Elijah does not say anything about the means – sending fire. In fact, Elijah does not ask for fire! Elijah asks for God to honor His own name and that of His servant! There are no details at all in this prayer! His prayer is just a strategic, high-level, God honoring request – which God answers in spectacular fashion. Another famous prayer is that of the fiery Presbyterian reformer John Knox who prayed “Lord. Give me Scotland or I die!” God answered with a mighty revival. What mattered was a God-honoring, high level strategic request stated concisely to a God whom he knew would hear him!

## Persistent Prayer

In the parable of the persistent pal, Jesus makes a difference between personal persistence and impersonal mechanical repetition:

**Luke 11: 5-8** *And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; (6) for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; (7) and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? (8) I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.*

The persistent pal keeps knocking because he has a relationship and is acting within that relationship to get what he needs. There is a reality to what is going on here, its personal, real and neighborly, the two people know each other and annoy each other as only friends can. Pagan repetition does not relate to God as a true friend but as a blind mechanical force to be harnessed for one’s own ends. But lets not miss the main point – Jesus wants us to to pester Him as a friend, to get on our knees and beg Him and cajole Him as only close friends

do. Jesus wants a real solid persistent relationship with us in prayer and invites us to press into God for that which we truly need.

## Ask, Seek, Knock

Jesus reinforces this with His famous saying about asking, seeking and knocking:

**Luke 11:9,10** *"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."*

In combination with the statement about persistence this means – ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking, and it is full of deep reassurances that our personal relationship with God will be deeply rewarded – It will be given, you will find, it will be opened to you, and “everyone who ask receives”. There is no messing around here, everything you do in persistent faith, living out of your personal relationship with God, is rewarded.

## Prayer Is Safe - Praying For The Holy Spirit

Jesus then goes on to tell us that prayer is safe, because it is not an impersonal force that can be wrongly wielded or go astray, but is in fact mediated by a good and loving Heavenly Father.

**Luke 11:11-13** *If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? (12) Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? (13) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*

You may have heard people say “You had better watch out what you pray for” as if a simple slip of the tongue in prayer could result in catastrophe. As if someone could accidentally leave the “not” out of “Lord lead us not into temptation” so it became “Lord lead us into temptation”, and that would happen! Of course it would not because God knows what we really wanted to say and also does not tempt anyone to their destruction. God is safe; God is the loving father hearing the request of the child. He is wise and good and only gives that child what is best. And this includes spiritual experiences and spiritual gifts.

If we want to go deeper in God and have more of the Holy Spirit then God is not going to send us a demon because of our presumptuousness. God is not evil and does not give us a snake instead of fish or a stone instead of bread, or a scorpion instead of an egg! Stones may look like bread, and a curled up scorpion can look like an egg, and a dangerous snake can look like an edible eel. But God does NOT give us such things! God does not deceive His children! God does Not give us evil when we seek good! In fact God's answer is positive and affirming: How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

God is safe and it is safe to ask God for the bread of a deeper understanding of God's word,

or for the fish of a deeper understanding of Christ Himself, or for the egg of Holy Spirit wisdom and creativity.

## Conclusion

Ok what have we learned about prayer today!

1. Prayer is essential to the Christian life
2. Prayer is not pagan
3. Prayer is concise – it is not the quantity but the quality
4. Prayer is focused on the ends and leaves the means to God.
5. Prayer is to a God who knows what we need before we ask.
6. Prayer asks for the big issues that include all the little issues
7. Prayer is the language of a persistent pal
8. Prayer is answered out of the faith relationship we have with God
9. Prayer is safe because it is a personal interaction with a good and wise Heavenly Father who decides the answers to our prayers

## Lord's Prayer - Part 1 - Putting God's Interests Above Our Own.

**Matthew 6:9-10 MKJV** *Therefore pray in this way: Our Father, who is in Heaven, Hallowed be Your name. (10) Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.*



### Introduction

Previously, we looked at Jesus' teaching on prayer and found that prayer flows out of a relationship of persistent friendship with a good God who sees us, hears us and who rewards us. We found that prayer is not magical but is rather a concise true expression of the desires of our heart to God who loves us and who cares for us.

New Testament prayer is highly personal and deeply spiritual and theological. By "theological" I mean it has "deep content" and a thinking person reading one of Jesus' prayers or Paul's prayers will be deeply impressed and profoundly moved. Prayer honors God and does not trivialize Him.

The Lord's Prayer is both a very simple and concise prayer and a very deep and theological prayer. It also covers a vast range of issues from obtaining our daily bread to the Kingdom of God. In fact it covers most of the major issues of life. Now, we will look at just two verses from the Lord's Prayer – verses 9 and 10. These are the big picture verses where we put God's honor and God's agenda and God's will first and foremost.

Now seeking God's honor and kingdom and will creates an immediate problem for us who want our own honor and kingdom and will. It seems that by asking these things we are annihilating our own desires, however in fact we are fulfilling them for when God's name is honored and His kingdom comes and His will is finally done on earth as it is in heaven then all our desires will be met in a way that delights us and astonishes us and meets all our deepest needs. In fact from one end of the Bible to the other we are told that it is as we honor God, that we ourselves receive honor, and that as we seek God's kingdom that we receive authority in our life, and as we do God's will that God also does 'our will' and answers our prayers and gives us our heart's desires.

Putting God first is not fanatical or sacrificial but is in fact the way out of our mess, the way out of our pain and the way out of all that is wrong with the world.

The alternative to delighting in God is to be self-absorbed - and beings self-absorbed are contrary to love and are at the base of all neurosis and inner pain. Being self-absorbed also makes us unable to treat other people as being as important as ourselves or to consider their feelings and interests as being equal to our own. Being self-absorbed thus lies behind all war, cruelty and abuse.

When we start seriously praying for the things of God – for His glory, His honor, His reputation, His Kingdom, His will and His transforming power to be unleashed then we are enlarged as persons. We start moving in larger circles of love and grace and our eyes are opened to glories we would never see if we stayed in the circle of our own concerns. It is as we ascend the mountain that we get the large view. Yet ascending the mountain is hard! Praying for God's interests does not come as readily as praying for our own needs, and it takes quite a lot of practice before our hearts truly cry out "Hallowed be Thy name!".

Nevertheless there is no alternative - for our soul's sake we must begin to pray deep worshipful God-centered prayers that focus on the interests of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

## Our Father

The Lords Prayer starts with the phrase "Our Father who is in Heaven" and this is a terrific title for God. It is both relational and authoritative at the same time. God is our "Abba, Father" in close relationship to us, but at the same time He is "In Heaven" in the place of authority. God is both close to us – whom the theologians call "immanence" and far above us which the theologians call "transcendence".

Some Christians go to one extreme or the other. They make God too close and too friendly so He loses all ability to command obedience, or they make God so distant and remote that He loses all ability to command love or to be useful to our daily lives. The title "Our Father who is in Heaven" gets it right, God is not one thing or the other, but both. He both loves us and commands us, is related to us, but is far above us.

The other good thing about the title "Our Father who is in Heaven" is the word "our". God is the God of all people not just of me and mine, we live, worship and exist in community. God is not just "my Father", as if I possess Him, or own Him in any way, He is the God of the Church, of all believers, and indeed of all humanity, even though some may not yet believe. This title takes us out of preoccupation with ourselves and reminds us that we pray as part of a praying community.

Now the term "Father" has a biblical and theological meaning that is a bit unusual for us. It means the source, the originating principle, the archetype. For instance Abraham is the "father of those who have faith" (Romans 4:16) and the "father of many nations" (Romans 4:18). This also applies to God:

**1 Corinthians 8:6 MKJV** *but there is to us only one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we by Him.*

**2 Corinthians 1:3 MKJV** *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,*

**James 1:17 MKJV** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.*

**Ephesians 3:14-15 MKJV** *For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named,*

So when we pray to God the Father we are praying to the source of all things, and of course the source of all good things, the Father of lights, and the Father of all human personality and community. When we say "our Father" we are getting in touch with the source of the

Universe and the source of ourselves. And this source of the Universe is benevolent and good and full of love.

Prayer connects us with the ground of our being, and centers us into that place where we should be as persons. Prayer tells us that we are part of a much larger picture that involves all of eternity. Somewhere deep inside us we know that we came forth from God and that we will go back to God. The Father of our soul is not a human being, or a genetic code, or a social order or a pope or a dictator. The Father of our soul is God Himself and thus we are sons of God. But where is this God? He is in Heaven!

## Who Is In Heaven

Heaven is the place of God's court, though God Himself is "beyond the heavens". It is in Heaven that God's throne dwells – and this dominates the book of Revelation. So when God is "in Heaven" He is in the place of authority where the destinies of men and nations are decided. When we pray to our Father who is in Heaven we are praying to a God who is in the place of judgment and of the control of human events including all the events of your life.

Heaven is also the place of absolute perfection as we see later on when Jesus' tells us to pray "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" so we are praying to a God who does all things perfectly and who only orders perfect things into our lives. We are praying for all the perfection of Heaven to be established also here on Earth.

Heaven is also the place where spiritual power dwells, and where "fire from heaven" comes from and where the powers of the Kingdom of Heaven have their source. The Father who is in Heaven is thus the source of all spiritual power and sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts, and transforms us within and makes us servants of God.

Hallowed Be Your Name - God's name to be held sacred

- Relationship with God to be appropriate and reverent
- Humanity to be in its right place
- Faith "hallows" and honors God.
- Name - God is not an abstraction but a personal Being with a name and a personal Presence.
- Praying for God to be truly worshiped as God and respected through all the Earth and for all rebellion against God to cease.
- This is equivalent to praying for world peace.
- It is also praying for revival – for deep worship of god to break out across the whole earth.
- The ultimate result of all missionary work is the hallowing of God's name across the whole world.
- Once God's name is hallowed then healing, miracles and obedience follows.

**Matthew 12:15-23 MKJV** *But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew Himself from there. And great crowds followed Him, and He healed them all. (16) And He warned them that they not make Him known, (17) so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, (18) "Behold My Child whom I have chosen; My Beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit on Him, and He shall declare judgment to the nations. (19) He shall not strive, nor cry, nor shall any one hear His voice in the streets. (20) He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not quench a smoking wick, until He sends out judgment to victory. (21) And in His name the nations shall trust." (22) Then one who had been demon-possessed was brought to Him, blind and dumb. And He healed him, so much so that the blind and dumb one both spoke and saw. (23) And all the people were amazed and said, Is not this the son of David?*

- Your Kingdom Come  
God's rule to be made manifest
- Kingdom also equals miracles and grace
- an intensely personal place
- a place of Christ's Presence and authority
- rules over persons, communities, churches places, cities, nations
- not our own personal kingdom
- we pray to be part of a much larger entity

**Matthew 4:23-25 MKJV** *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. (24) And His fame went throughout all Syria. And they brought to Him all those being badly ill suffering various diseases and torments, and those who had been possessed with demons, and those who had been moonstruck, and paralytics. And He healed them. (25) And great multitudes of people followed Him, from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and beyond Jordan.*

**Matthew 10:7-8 MKJV** *And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give.*

## Your Will Be Done

- victory over sin and rebellion
- an earth in which righteousness dwells
- the end of all crime, all hatred and of most human suffering
- a place of love
- not my will, God does not serve human wills
- God's plans to be worked out and prophecies to be fulfilled.

## The End Of Lawlessness

**Mat 7:21-23** Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

## God's Will Is Obedience That Leads To Relationship

**Matthew 12:47-50 MKJV** *Then one said to Him, Behold, Your mother and Your brothers stand outside, desiring to speak with You. (48) And He answered and said to him who told Him, Who is My mother? And who are My brothers? (49) And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, Behold, My mother and My brothers! (50) For whoever shall do the will of My Father in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.*

## God's Will Is Salvation And Restoration

**Mat 18:11** *For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*

**Mat 18:12** *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays, does he not leave the ninety and nine and go into the mountains and seek the straying one?*

**Mat 18:13** *And if it happens that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety and nine which did not stray.*

**Mat 18:14** *Even so it is not the will of your Father in Heaven that one of these little ones should perish.*

## Not Our Will But God's Will

**Matthew 26:39 MKJV** *And He went a little further and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.*

## On Earth As It Is In Heaven

- here in the real world
- tangible
- the defeat of decay
- love made real in perfect community
- heavenly perfection made visible
- no slackness or inefficiency about it.
- prayers to be answered in concrete form not just as ideas

- Healing – none sick in heaven, if God's will is done on earth a sin heaven there will be no illness or dysfunctional people or systems.
- Justice – if God's will is done on earth as in Heaven it will be done speedily and there will be no injustice, bribery or corruption.
- Praying for conflict! When we pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven we are praying for conflict because the Devil will resist such drastic changes.
- Many people do NOT want the Lord's Prayer to be answered.
- Praying the Lord's prayer is thus an act of spiritual warfare. We have to wrestle to ensure this world ends up the way God wants it to be.

## Lord Of Both Heaven and Earth

**Mat 11:25** At that time Jesus answered and said, *I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the sophisticated and cunning, and revealed them to babes*

Prayer unleashes Heaven's decisions on earth / Dynamic connection between the two

**Matthew 18:18-20 MKJV** *Truly I say to you, Whatever you shall bind on earth shall occur, having been bound in Heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall occur, having been loosed in Heaven. (19) Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as regarding anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in Heaven. (20) For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.*

We have only one spiritual Father and He is in Heaven

**Mat 23:9** *And call no one your father on the earth, for One is your Father in Heaven.*

## Conclusion

We are to pray with God's interests in mind because when God's interests are met then all our subsidiary interests will be met as well.

**Matthew 6:33-34 MKJV** *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. (34) Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow shall be anxious for its own things. Sufficient to the day is the evil of it.*

# The Lord's Prayer

## Part Two - Praying For Human Needs



### **Matthew 6:11-15**

*Give us this day our daily bread.  
 (12) And forgive us our debts,  
 As we forgive our debtors.  
 (13) And do not lead us into  
 temptation,  
 But deliver us from the evil one.  
 For Yours is the kingdom and the  
 power and the glory forever. Amen.  
 (14) "For if you forgive men their*

*trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

### Introduction

Today we are looking at the "human needs" part of the Lord's Prayer and these fall into four categories:

- a) Provision
- b) Forgiveness
- c) Moral Guidance & Protection and
- d) Deliverance from evil.

All of these requests see us as very needy people - needing even our daily bread, needing forgiveness because we are weak and sinful, needing guidance because we can so easily go astray and fall into temptation, and needing protection and deliverance to stand against the onslaught of evil because we cannot bear it alone.

These requests come from the deepest parts of our humanity and force us to admit who we really are - ordinary men and women with huge needs and with absolutely no way of making it through life without God's help.

Jesus calls us to radical humility. The most radical form of humility is to realize we are just like all those other messed up people out there. Christians are not perfect they are just forgiven.

Most people construct a social ladder based on what they are good at so they are at least two-thirds of the way up the ladder. So the good-looking people tend to judge others by their looks - because that is safe for them because they are better looking than most, and the very rich people judge others by their bank accounts - because that is safe for them

because they have far more than most, and intellectuals judge people by their IQs and degrees because that is safe for them because they do so much better than the average Joe, and bible teachers tend to judge others by how many bible verses they know and how accurate their theology is - because that is safe for us because that is what we do well. But all these social ladders are imaginary - that is they only exist in the minds of the people who make them up. They are human self-deception, and are just emotional security blankets that prop up our self-esteem.

All these ladders start out with I Am OK because.... I am in the top ten percent of butterfly collectors - or whatever. We think God will have to let us into heaven because we are good-looking or wealthy or smart or because we know a lot of bible verses. We do not want to admit that we are all sinners, that we are all not OK, in some very deep and significant ways, and that we all need God's help and provision, and forgiveness and protection and deliverance.

## Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

This is a prayer for both spiritual and material provision. The daily bread of God's Word and the daily bread of food and clothing and shelter and other vital human needs.

The term "bread" is often used in a spiritual sense in the book of Matthew.

**Matthew 4:3-4 HCSB** *Then the tempter approached Him and said, "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (4) But He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."*

**Matthew 7:8-11 HCSB** *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. (9) What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? (11) If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*

**Matthew 15:22-28 HCSB** *Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came and kept crying out, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is cruelly tormented by a demon." (23) Yet He did not say a word to her. So His disciples approached Him and urged Him, "Send her away because she cries out after us." (24) He replied, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (25) But she came, knelt before Him, and said, "Lord, help me!" (26) He answered, "It isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to their dogs." (27) "Yes, Lord," she said, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table!" (28) Then Jesus replied to her, "Woman, your faith is great. Let it be done for you as you want." And from that moment her daughter was cured.*

**Matthew 16:11-12 HCSB** *Why is it you don't understand that when I told you, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,' it wasn't about bread?" (12) Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the yeast in bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.*

So in one sense "bread" is the spiritual things we need such as healing, exorcism, teaching, the Word of God, etc. In Matthew 15 "the children's bread" is the working of miracles by Jesus. In Matthew 16 "bread" is teaching. In Matthew 7 it is the good gifts that come from God and in Matthew 4 it is the Word of God.

So "daily bread" is God's total provision for our lives - physical, spiritual, emotional and so on. It is especially that which is needed so we can be healthy and grow in God. If spiritual health requires a miracle, then that miracle becomes part of the "daily bread" that helps us grow.

The phrase "give us this day our daily bread" is almost repetitious in its emphasis on "this day" and "daily" thus implying we are praying this prayer every day out of our continual daily relationship with God.

Like the manna in the wilderness God's provision is on a daily basis and our prayers should be on a daily basis. The Christian life is lived "one day at a time" and grace arrives one day at a time. We still should plan and think and provide, but life is daily, a continuous tapping into God.

## And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors

Christianity is a community of the forgiven. We are forgiven by God and we also should forgive one another. Praying forgive us our debts assumes that we all have such debts before God. The debts spoken of here are our spiritual debts and obligations. Both the wrong things we have done and the good things we have left undone. The HCSB translation talks about a certificate of debt that we have before God:

Colossians 2:14 HCSB He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it out of the way by nailing it to the cross.

All the wrong stuff in our life is forgiven by God, indeed the entire crushing hostile weight of debt and sin and misery and folly is taken out of the way and nailed to the cross.

Since the Lord's Prayer is meant to be prayed every day as we ask for our daily bread then we should be asking for forgiveness every day as well. This is called "keeping short accounts with God" and is a very healthy spiritual practice.

There are two types of confession - general and specific. General confession is confession that you are a sinner in need of grace and you can simply say "forgive us our debts" and confess on behalf of yourself and of any community in which you have a definite belonging and role.

Specific confession is confessing a particular sin or occasion of sin. If you do something terrible and need to clear it up make a specific confession with God. This sort of confession can have great healing power:

**James 5:16 HCSB** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.* The intense prayer of the righteous is very powerful.

As we forgive our debtors" is the only human action in the whole Lord's Prayer. God makes prayer dependent on the condition of our hearts and angry, hateful resentful hearts are not pleasing to a holy God.

God is just and treats people as they treat others. If we are merciful, we receive mercy, if we are forgiving we receive grace, this is particularly true of those in our power so that if we treat our wife kindly our prayers are answered (see 1 Peter 3:7). The corollary is that if we are mean and nasty our prayers are hindered.

**1 Peter 3:7 HCSB** *Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

If you want your prayers answered - be nice to others, and treat them the way you would like God to treat you!

**Luke 6:36-38 HCSB** *Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (37) "Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure--pressed down, shaken together and running over--will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."*

And do not lead us into temptation, two bible verses are very important here:

**1 Corinthians 10:13 HCSB** *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so that you are able to bear it.*

**James 1:13-15 HCSB** *No one undergoing a trial should say, "I am being tempted by God." For God is not tempted by evil, and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone. (14) But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires. (15) Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.*

Temptation is the strong impulse to go off-track spiritually. Temptation is the attraction to the wrong direction, it is the evil desire. It is the movement from desire to sin that characterizes temptation. To be technically correct an alcoholic is not tempted by alcohol. The temptation came years ago when he or she was first attracted to heavy drinking and gave in to the decision to drink and keep drinking. Now alcohol is a sinful habit, a craving, and an addiction. But an addiction is not a temptation, it is a life pattern.

Temptation is to do as Adam and Eve and plunge out of the light into the darkness, to take the wrong road, and to believe the lie. Temptation comes whenever we are at a critical point - such as Jesus in the wilderness at the start of His ministry. The Devil turns up and tells us that there is another easier way than the cross.

Temptation is often accompanied by three things: a) a strong inappropriate desire that seems compelling, b) a confused or reduced state of mind that cannot think clearly about the consequences and c) a sense of great compelling haste and urgency that says "now" very loudly and is impatient with thought or reflection.

One of the easiest ways out of temptation is to simply go for a walk and think it over clearly and at length. The decision to take time out to engage your wisdom and to ponder the matter over before the Lord will knock 90% of temptations cold. Most temptations do not survive clear thought and the light of day.

Some temptations have physical sensations such as aromas, a sweet cloudy sensation, a floating detached feeling, a high, an expansive euphoria and feelings of great importance, grandeur and pride. Or there may be a crushing hammer-like accusing negativity that advocates giving up, running away or even thoughts of self-harm.

Now when we are at that point of choice God promises to help us and to provide a way of escape from the Tempter. There is always an out. You can turn away from the door of the wayward woman and not go in. You can run away from idols and false worship. You can decide to put the money back in the till. When you think you may be being tempted just pray "Lord lead me not into temptation" and God will answer. God will not let you be overwhelmed by these powerful forces.

God knows that every day we face vital life choices and that we need spiritual protection and guidance so we end up on the right track. We need to be humble enough to ask that God will keep us from wring spiritual choices - every day!

### But deliver us from the evil one.

One last thing that we should pray for is deliverance from the evil one. We need to be rescued from the Devil and all his schemes against our lives. For Jesus evil is a personal being, a fallen angel called Satan, who dominates and enslaves mankind and who wants to be the focus of all our worship. This predatory being makes war against the saints and we need God to deliver us from his schemes.

Praying "But deliver us from the evil one" is a continuation of the theme on temptation because the Devil is also called the Tempter. It is a plea to be rescued from Satan's plan for the total destruction of your body, soul and spirit forever in hell.

Now Christians have been given certain powerful weapons such as the name and the blood of Jesus, the spiritual armor of God, and the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit. We are to use these weapons and our spiritual authority and we are also to call upon God for deliverance.

We should walk a middle line here. On one hand we should not be naive. We should acknowledge the reality and power of the evil one and pray against it. On the other hand we should not be fearful and paranoid but trust in the love and sovereign power of God who can and will deliver us.

### For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

At the end of the Lord's Prayer we turn our eyes back to God and His glory and recognize that God reigns - even in this fallen sinful world. Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory is both an act of worship and an act of radical humility. It is not my kingdom, my power or my glory that is important - but God's kingdom, power and glory that is my supreme interest.

And these things are "forever". When we pray we are dealing with eternal things, grand things, supreme things and a simple prayer can affect things "forever". A prayer for someone's spiritual salvation may cause them to inhabit eternity forever. That prayer will still be having consequences a million years from now. If you want to influence the future history of the world - pray the Lord's Prayer!

### Amen.

Amen means "let it be so" or truly and is a Hebrew word that means true or lasting or confirmed and is related to the word for "truth" (emuns). It is often used at the end of Psalms and the signing of covenants. It is a solid affirmation of the previous statement, a bit like stamping it with a seal. If you agree with the prayer and affirm all it contains you say the

Amen at the end of it. "Amen brother". Amen is not just a spiritual full stop, it is a definite agreeing with that entire God is doing, and with that all the people said Amen!

## Serving God and Mammon

**Matthew 6:19-24 MKJV** *Do not lay up treasures on earth for yourselves, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. (20) But lay up treasures in Heaven for yourselves, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (22) The light of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body shall be full of light. (23) But if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If*



*therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (24) No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

### Introduction

Jesus actually has our best interests in mind when He tells us to get our priorities right in the area of money. He is not asking us to live in penury; rather He is asking us to live a life that maximizes our eternal rewards.

Jesus knows that money is round and rolls away. He knows that moths can eat the curtains and thieves can break in and steal the silverware. Money is a temporary good whereas grace is a permanent good. Money may be useful but grace is essential. Money is a means and not an end, we do not seek money for its own sake but for what it can do to provide for our families and help others. Once money becomes an end, becomes something we want for its own sake then it becomes an idol and can ruin the spiritual life of the Christian.

Most of what God does in our lives happens without money:

1. We are saved by faith and redeemed without silver or gold but by the precious blood of Jesus. **1 Peter 1:18-19 MKJV** *knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot;*

2. We receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and it is a gift that cannot be bought with money. **Acts 8:18-21 MKJV** *And when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, (19) saying, Give me this power also, that on whomever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. (20) But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. (21) You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.*
3. We are healed without the need for cash: **Acts 3:6 MKJV** *But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!*

The world of money and the world of spirituality are entirely separate. God created the heavens and the earth without money, parted the Red Sea without money, sent fire down on Mt Carmel in answer to Elijah's prayer - without money and Jesus fed five thousand people, healed hundreds of people and raised the dead without needing cash for any of those activities.

In the end the separation between cash and the Kingdom will be total:

**Revelation 13:16-18 MKJV** *And it causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or in their foreheads, (17) even that not any might buy or sell except those having the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of its name. (18) Here is the wisdom. Let him having reason count the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. And its number is six hundred and sixty-six.*

In the end you will be either in the economy or in the Kingdom, you will either be able to buy and sell in the market, or you will be able to go to Heaven. Those who still buy and sell will be those go to Hell, and those who are renounce money will be those who go to Heaven.

There are two worlds here:

1. The temporary commercial world called Babylon or the "kingdoms of this world". It is run by "the god of this world" - Satan. During the temptation in the wilderness Satan offered this whole system to Jesus and Jesus refused. Babylon is alluring and powerful but is passing away and is perishing. This commercial world operates by human and demonic effort and involves earning, buying and selling. It is arranged according to wealth and power. It is a jungle and the ruthless do very well. It is proud, fierce, destructive and sometimes even deadly. It consumes people and uses them up. **1 John 2:15-17 MKJV** *Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, (16) because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (17) And the world passes away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever.*
2. The eternal world of faith and grace and glory known as Heaven, the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom operates by grace and by giving and receiving, it is gentle and healing and lowly and humble and alive. It restores and redeems people and blesses them. **Matthew 10:7-16 MKJV** *And as you go, proclaim, saying, The kingdom of Heaven is at hand. (8) Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. You have received freely, freely give. (9) Do*

*not provide gold nor silver, nor copper in your purses, (10) nor a bag for the journey, nor two coats, nor sandals, nor staves. For the workman is worthy of his food.*

These two worlds are spiritually separate and under totally different Masters. One is run by the Devil and the other is run by God. But God is ultimately in charge! The Devil does not own all the money - rather God does and God will shake it out of the Devil's pockets:

**Haggai 2:6-9 MKJV** *For so says Jehovah of Hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. (7) And I will shake all the nations; and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, says Jehovah of Hosts. (8) The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, says Jehovah of Hosts. (9) The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former, says Jehovah of Hosts. And in this place I will give peace, says Jehovah of Hosts.*

The silver and gold is God's but Satan has usurped them into an evil trading system. The bible says Satan fell because his abundance of trade corrupted him. (Ezekiel 28:5; 15). Mammon is the bible's term for this demonic use of money. It is money used and as an idol or as an evil and oppressive power which takes hold of people and dominates their lives.

If we serve God, then He will provide what we need, when we need it -including the silver and gold needed to build His temple. But if we chase after money we can be spiritually destroyed:

**1 Timothy 6:6-10 MKJV** *But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into the world, and it is clear that we can carry nothing out. (8) But having food and clothing, we will be content. (9) But they who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which plunge men into destruction and perdition. (10) For the love of money is a root of all evils, of which some having lusted after, they were seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

## Christian Simplicity - Do Not Lay Up Treasures For Yourselves On Earth

Jesus tells us not to lay up treasures for ourselves on earth. In other words do not be materialistic (lay up treasures) or selfish (for yourself) or spiritually short-sighted (on earth). In chapter 12 of Luke's gospel Jesus tells a well known parable to illustrate this point:

**Luke 12:15-21 MKJV** *And He said to them, Watch and keep yourselves from covetousness. For a man's life is not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. (16) And He spoke a parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. (17) And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room in which to store my fruits? (18) And he said, I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and I will store all my fruits and my goods there. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat drink and be merry. (20) But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul shall be required of you, then whose shall be those things which you have prepared? (21) So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*

The proper Christian attitude is illustrated in chapter 8 of Mark's gospel:

**Mark 8:34-38 MKJV** *And calling near the crowd with His disciples, He said to them, Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (35) For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake and the*

*gospel's, he shall save it. (36) For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (37) Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (38) Therefore whoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man shall also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*

In other words Christians are to take up their cross and live lightly and simply for the sake of the gospel. Living lightly and simply is not the same as living for ten years in a brown paper bag on a barbed wire fence. You do not have to be extreme; you can keep your job and praise the Lord if you earn a good salary. But it is how you use that salary that matters. If your salary is simply a means to purchase ever more and more possessions and to fill up your barns to overflowing so you can selfishly sit back and take your ease - then you are like the fool in Luke's parable. But if your salary is being used to help the poor and support your relatives and bless God's servants wherever they are and are an active instrument for good, and you live simply so that other may simply live - then your salary is being used well.

Now I am not going to dictate what sort of car you can drive or what sort of house you can own. An extremely wealthy person may be able to drive a Rolls-Royce without being unduly materialistic. A simple question that might help is:

- Are the good things you own in circulation for God?
- Do you lend your time, talent and treasure to good causes?
- Are your possessions seen as God's possessions to be used for His glory?
- Are you giving and receiving, sowing and reaping?

Now I am not saying this out of concern for Minda and I or out of concern for the church finances. Minda and I are doing fine and are happy with what God has provided. The Church will manage. My concern is with the state of your own soul. I want you to be free of materialism and able to earn a lasting eternal reward.

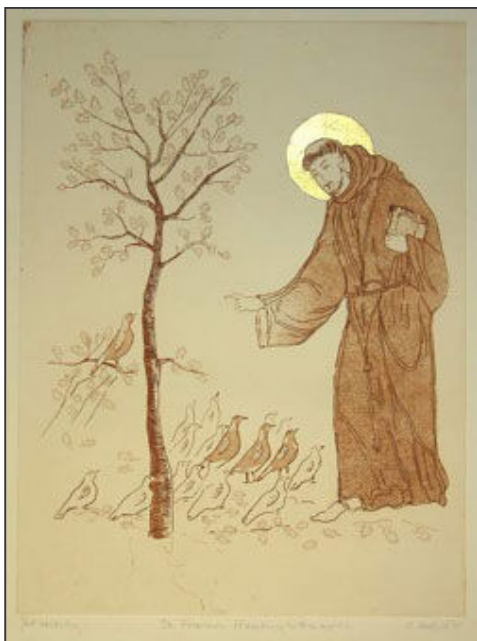
Which bring us to the next point of "laying up treasure in Heaven".

## Christian Savings - But Lay Up Treasures In Heaven For Yourself

Now at first the idea of "treasure in Heaven" sounds like a confidence trick made up by a televangelist. It seems shady to promise people a reward they cannot see and a time they cannot determine with no human method of verifying that such a reward exists. That is why I spent so much time marking out the difference between the commercial world and the eternal world. The eternal world is on a whole other plane of reality to that which we commonly experience and is much deeper, more lasting and more significant.

Let's look at two completely contrasting people - Moses and the Rich Young Ruler

**Hebrews 11:24-26 MKJV** *Having become great, Moses by faith refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's*



*daughter, (25) choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a time, (26) esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*

**Mark 10:17-31 MKJV** *And when He had gone out into the way, one came running up and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? (18) And Jesus said to him, Why do you call Me good? No one is good except one, God. (19) You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother. (20) And he answered and said to Him, Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth. (21) Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him and said to him, One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven. And come, take up the cross and follow Me. (22) And he was sad at that saying and went away grieved, for he had great possessions. (23) And Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, How hardly those having riches will enter into the kingdom of God! (24) And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answering again said to them, Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! (25) It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich one to enter into the kingdom of God. (26) And they were astonished beyond measure, saying to themselves, And who can be saved? (27) And Jesus looking on them said, With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible. (28) Then Peter began to say to Him, Lo, we have left all and have followed You. (29) And Jesus answered and said, Truly I say to you, There is no man that has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the gospel's sake, (30) but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the world to come, eternal life. (31) But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

Moses and the Rich Young Ruler were both people of power and privilege. But Moses walked away from it all and chose the Kingdom instead. Moses remains in history as a spiritual giant while the Rich Young Ruler is forgotten.

Jesus tells us that people who trust in riches find it very difficult to enter the Kingdom of God. They just cannot take up their cross and follow Jesus. They cannot walk away from it all. They think they can, but when it comes down to the actual moment, they cannot. At the final moment when their soul is at stake they chose to dwell in Babylon.

But some people do escape the gravitational pull of riches and this world and break through into the Kingdom of God. One of them was the rather spoiled son of an Italian cloth merchant.

Francis Bernadone was born in Assisi in 1182 to Pietro and Picca Bernadone. Pietro was a cloth merchant and probably the richest man in Assisi. He anticipated even more wealth as the young Francis had demonstrated keen business skills. Francis, however, was unlike his greedy father. Rich in natural virtue, he was always quick to share his good fortune with his friends and even with the poor. Known as the king of youth, for his joyful nature and popularity, his primary aspiration was to be a knight.

In 1205, an opportunity arose to fight for Pope Innocent III. Francis jumped at the opportunity, but thirty miles into the excursion he fell ill. As he recuperated, he heard the voice of God asking him: Francis who can do more for you the lord or the servant? Francis answered, the lord. God replied: Then why do you leave the lord for the servant, a rich lord

for a poor man? And Francis asked, Lord, what would you have me do? God said, Return home and you will be told what to do. From then on, Francis began to desire to serve the King of kings and to be a holy knight in His court.

Francis was a changed man, but the interior battle every soul must face had just begun. His love grew for the poor, and Francis himself began to embrace a life of poverty. In 1206, while on a journey, Francis met a leper and was immediately repulsed; but overcoming his lower nature, he reached out and embraced the man. Afterwards, he exclaimed, what had formerly been bitter, had become sweet; and what was formerly sweet, had become bitter. As he came to recognize Jesus in the poor and His beauty and Providence in nature, his conversion deepened.

One day while Francis was praying before the now famous San Damiano crucifix, especially pondering Our Lord's will, Jesus spoke to him from the cross: Francis, repair My house which, as you can see, has fallen into ruin. Immediately, Francis began to rebuild the church of San Damiano, which was in ill-repair and other churches as well. He begged supplies for the love of God. At first people mocked Francis thinking he was crazy, but his Gospel witness soon inspired a band of followers which included his former party friends, nobility, and clergy. He even won the support of Bishop Guido of Assisi who recognized grace working in the Poverello. His father, however, remained indignant.

In 1209, a formal way of life was adopted by Francis. After Mass, he was inspired to open the Scriptures three times. The three verses were as follows: 1) If you would be perfect, go and sell all you have and give to the poor, and follow me; 2) Take nothing with you for the journey; and 3) If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. Francis determined that he and his followers would observe these words of Our Lord without interpretation, and that they would be known as the Penitents of Assisi.

In 1210, Francis and his early followers journeyed to Rome to seek the approval of Pope Innocent III. The Holy Father, moved profoundly by Francis' apparent sanctity, blessed him and his companions and verbally approved the early rule. (The formal rule of the Friars Minor, still observed by Franciscans today, was written much later and approved in 1223.) Having labored joyfully to rebuild three churches, and ever sensitive to the Holy Spirit, Francis came to realize that God was using the order not merely to restore dilapidated buildings, but to rebuild the Church weakened by the secularism that threatens her in every age. His charity, humility, penance and preaching, and devotions, inspired many to return to the Gospel. His imitation of Jesus Crucified and countless miracles sparked a great renewal.

I do not know if you have seen the movie "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" about the life of St. Francis of Assisi but it gives a very moving account of his life and his Kingdom lifestyle.

There is treasure in heaven and people such as Moses, Jesus, Paul and St. Francis see this clearly. Once you get a glimpse of the glory of eternity and the temporary nature of human wealth and status then logic alone will make you change to a free and non-materialistic lifestyle. Consider living for a million years, what use is a 2005 Lexus then? It has rusted away long before! All this stuff will be dust and rust. Only who we are in Christ will matter then. If you are going to live forever there is no value in anything that is temporary.

## Simplicity vs. Poverty

Because this is a confusing topic for some people I want to clarify the main fear-that Jesus is asking us to be impractical and poor. In fact I will show that Jesus is asking us to live lightly and generously in confident God-blessed Christian simplicity. The difference between simplicity and poverty is that with Christian simplicity we are in control, it is our choice and we live obediently and reverently and generously under the blessing of God. With poverty the circumstances are in control and people are pushed down in life. Poverty is always a bad thing. Simplicity is liberating and joyful. Poverty is oppressive and miserable. Simplicity says, "I am not going to let "things" or "fashions" be in control of my life." It is taking control of how you live and not letting Madison Avenue and Hollywood run the show for you. Simplicity frees us from being controlled by "the world". The first step in Christian simplicity is to know where your finances are going so you can decide how to use money in a godly manner. You first have to take control of your money-and then direct it to where the Lord wants it to go. There are seven main priorities for Christian finances:

1. Supporting yourself, your family members and your aged parents. (1 Timothy 5:4,8)
2. Supporting those who teach you the Word. (Galatians 6:6, 1 Timothy 5:17,18)
3. Paying taxes to the government. (Romans 13:6,7)
4. Blessing itinerant apostles, prophets and evangelists. ( 3 John 1:5-8)
5. Giving to the poor and needy. (Matthew 19:21)
6. International relief especially for suffering Christians so there may be equality in the body of Christ. (2 Corinthians 8;10-15)
7. Giving to worthy Christian projects such as building the Tabernacle. (Exodus 35:22-29)

Now it is up to each Christian to decide how to implement these Scriptural guidelines under the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit. Giving should be free and willing and "not under compulsion" (2 Corinthians 8; 12, 9:7, Exodus 35:22-29). Christian simplicity is living free from "the world" so that we may serve Christ in His Kingdom. So we have a choice between a temporary economy that satisfies the flesh and an eternal economy that satisfies the spirit. We can look at our bank account and say 'all is well' or at Christ and say 'all is well'. We can trust in the greenback or in God. We can run ourselves into exhaustion on the materialistic treadmill of the world or we can join Jesus in the refreshing life of the Kingdom.

## Christian Seeing - The Heart And The Eye (Desire)

Jesus then goes on to talk about the way we see life:

**Matthew 6:21-23 MKJV** *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (22) The light of the body is the eye. Therefore if your eye is sound, your whole body shall be full of light. (23) But if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

In Bible language the eye is the source of desire:

**Ecclesiastes 2:10 MKJV** *And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I did not withhold my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my part of all my labor.*

And when this desire is out of control it is called the "lust of the eyes":

**1 John 2:16 MKJV** *because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*

Our heart tends to follow after what we treasure and admire and value. As Jesus says; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

So what we desire and aim for has a huge bearing on our inner life. If people desire pornography and images of lust fill their inner world - how great the darkness! If people desire power and ego and images of dominance fill them so they become dark and ruthless - how great the darkness! And if people crave wealth and money and possessions so they become cold and selfish and materialistic - how great the darkness! By contrast, if people visualize compassion, grace, revival, healing and desire the things of the Kingdom and the glory of God and if people desire a community of love and peace - then they are full of light and glory and are children of God.

## Christian Service - God Not Mammon

In the end Jesus leaves us with no room to wiggle out of His sayings. We cannot have it both ways:

**Matthew 6:24** *No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*

Money is a useful slave but a terrible Master. It is the commandments of Jesus not the dictates of Wall St. that should decide the directions of our lives. It is not a case of "he who dies with the most toys wins". When push comes to shove we must always obey Christ. If it is a choice of obeying the budget or the Bible, we must obey the Bible.

Some Christians manage vast amounts of money, but they rule that money and manage it and it serves Kingdom interests. You must own the money; the money must not own you!

How do we know we are free from the love of money? Here are four tests:

1. If we can give our money away freely without having regrets.
2. If we see finances simply as a tool and a servant of a higher agenda.
3. If the ups and downs of our finances do not produce any greater anxiety in us than the natural ups and downs in the weather.
4. If we find it easy to be honest, to pay our taxes and show financial responsibility.

If you can do these four things then you are free from the love of money. We need to live as citizens of heaven and participants in the Kingdom of God participating in the economy of Heaven of giving and receiving, of living by the commands of Christ, with our eyes and hearts set things above.

**Philippians 4:8 MKJV** *Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely,*

*whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things.*

## Jesus' Cure For Financial Anxiety



### Matthew 6:25-34 NKJV

*"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? (26) Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (27) Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? (28) "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; (29) and yet I say to you that*

*even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (30) Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (31) "Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" (32) For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (34) Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

### Introduction - We Have a Heavenly Father / Life Is More than Clothes

The central insight in these verses is that the God who sees and rewards our lives and who hears and answers our prayers is also the God who knows our needs in advance and the God who provides for them. Jesus is saying that Christians have a Heavenly Father who knows our needs and that we can absolutely trust Him to also meet those needs.

Now this runs counter to the general notion about God. The general notion about God is that God is the God of the Huge and Eternal and not the God of small things - like food and rent and electricity bills. Jesus counters this by saying that God is also the God of sparrows and

lilies and all creation and that if God provides worms for birds He can provide food and clothing and shelter for us.

The other big point Jesus make is about the non-materialistic nature of life: "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?". We are more than mere consumers or economic units, we are people with souls and destinies and character and with an eternal destiny. You and I are far more than the food we eat or the clothes we wear. It is not how much we own, but who we are that counts.

People who focus on obtaining material things become small-minded, in fact in the end that can even lose their souls. We need to attend to the food, clothing and material issues but as minor -sub-plots in the overall picture of our life. As someone once said "No one dying on their death-bed ever says "I wish I had spent another day at the office!" In the big picture of life material things are well down the list. It is how you treated people, the deeds you accomplished, what you said and wrote, the example you set for others, that will be remembered after you are gone. No one wants to be remembered solely or their Gucci hand-bag.

So the first two things in getting a handle on financial anxiety are: a) to know deep in your heart that you have a Heavenly Father who really cares for you. b) To know that you are far, far more than the sum of your possessions. You are an eternal being of great worth to God and that worth is independent of the state of your finances.

## God Provides On The Basis of Grace Not Works

The basis of God's providing is trusting in Him, and resting in Him just as the birds of the heavens do and the lilies of the field. The basis of grace is always faith not works. You do not "earn" God's provision by working hard. I have seen some very relaxed pastors paid well while some workaholic pastors were paid poorly. God responds to trust, not sweat.

Jesus uses two illustrations to drive this point home:

Look at the birds of the sky: they don't sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they?

Learn how the wildflowers of the field grow: they don't labor or spin thread. (29) Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these!

God grants us what we need because we are His creatures and He takes responsibility for creating us. The role of work is not primarily financial. The role of work is for us to serve God and society and to do good and bear responsibility and grow into mature human beings made in the image of God.

God mainly sends us financial help through grace-filled Kingdom relationships. It is by belonging to a network of people who love God that we are sustained. We see this in operation in the early Church.

**Acts 4:32-35 HCSB** *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. (33) And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. (34) For there was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them,*

*brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, (35) and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as anyone had a need.*

Where Christians are starving or in great need it is almost always because the social and church structures have collapsed. Even in desperate situations like Darfur the only food that is arriving is nearly always sent in by Christians. God is providing for a hungry world through His Church and through governments with a Christian conscience.

God responds to the needs of those who trust Him with abundant provision. In fact Christians are about 30% of the world population but they control over 70% of the world's wealth. This leads to the next point - the kingdom is the realm of provision.

## The Kingdom Is Realm of Provision

Jesus says: But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you." That means that those who seek first the Kingdom end up in the place of powerful provision.

The famous missionary Hudson Taylor once said: "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack God's supply." God promises provision to good honest folk leading good honest lives who trust Him and who put God's interests above their own. Often God's first provision is just a mustard seed, and He watches what we will do with it. Then if we are faithful with what we are given, then much more will follow.

God is looking for Kingdom-minded people who He can back with His provision: "2 Chronicles 16:9 HCSB For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are completely His. "

Some of the better known New Testament verses on this include:

**Philippians 4:19 HCSB** *And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

**2 Corinthians 9:8-12 HCSB** *And God is able to make every grace overflow to you, so that in every way, always having everything you need, you may excel in every good work. (9) As it is written: He has scattered; He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever. (10) Now the One who provides seed for the sower and bread for food will provide and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness, (11) as you are enriched in every way for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us. (12) For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God.*

The whole idea of God's Kingdom provision is so that you may "excel in every good work" and thus end up bringing glory to God. God provides for faith-filled Kingdom minded people who want to get on with the work of the Lord.

Church history is full of examples of great works of God starting from the most humble of means and being supplied by God and bringing glory to His name. One of the most famous was George Mueller, a German Christian who migrated to England and in Bristol and starting with just two shillings (50 cents in his pocket) built five massive orphanages, accommodating 2000 orphans. He operated these institutions by prayer alone!

Without making his wants known to any man, but to God alone, over a million, four hundred thousand pounds (\$7,000,000) were sent to him for the building and maintaining of these

orphan homes. In all 60 years since the first orphans arrived the Lord had sent food in due time, so that they had never missed a meal for want of food. In all that time the children did not have to go without a meal, and Mr. Muller said that if they ever had to go without a meal he would take it as evidence that the Lord did not will the work to continue. Sometimes the meal time was almost at hand and they did not know where the food would come from, but the Lord always sent it in due time, during the twenty thousand or more days that Mr. Muller had charge of the homes.

In 1834 Mr. Muller started the Scripture Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad. Its object was to aid Christian day-schools, to assist missionaries, and to circulate the Scriptures. This institution, without worldly patronage, without asking anyone for help, without contracting debts; without committees, subscribers, or memberships; but through faith in the Lord alone, had obtained and disbursed no less a sum than £1,500,000 (\$7,500,000) at the time of Mr. Muller's death. The bulk of this was expended for the orphanage. At the time of Mr. Muller's death 122,000 persons had been taught in the schools supported by these funds; and about 282,000 Bibles and 1,500,000 Testaments had been distributed by means of the same fund. Also 112,000,000 religious books, pamphlets and tracts had been circulated; missionaries had been aided in all parts of the world; and no less than ten thousand orphans had been cared for by means of this same fund.

At the age of seventy, Mr. Muller began to make great evangelistic tours. He traveled 200,000 miles, going around the world and preaching in many lands and in several different languages. He frequently spoke to as many as 4,500 or 5,000 persons. Three times he preached throughout the length and breadth of the United States. He continued his missionary or evangelistic tours until he was ninety years of age. He estimated that during these seventeen years of evangelistic work he addressed three million people. All his expenses were sent in answer to the prayer of faith.

From St. Paul to George Mueller and Hudson Taylor we have numerous example of God's faithful supply for large projects over long periods of time. They all had this in common - they were faithful honest folk who sought first the Kingdom of God and did God's work in God's way.

## Anxiety Accomplishes Nothing

Now you might think that running a large institution without a secure funding base would give most people a nervous breakdown. In fact if you are going to do much ministry at all you need to learn how to handle financial anxiety and God's often last minute provision.

The first thing about anxiety is that it is absolutely useless. Anxiety achieves nothing, it makes you no taller, and no one ever got slimmer by worrying about their weight alone. Anxiety is a big waste of emotional energy that could be better directed to finding a constructive solution. Anxiety takes control of our mental faculties when we need them most and makes them tense, clogged up, and ineffective.

The Bible is quite clear about the fact that anxiety is a substandard and silly response to life:

**Psalms 37: 5-8** *Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. (6) He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. (7) Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who*

*prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. (8) Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm.*

**Philippians 4:6,7**  *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; (7) and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

So we need to be able to move out of anxiety and into faith and these two passages give us some valuable clues on how to do this:

1. Commit your way to God and trust Him to bring things to pass.
2. Wait patiently for God's answer / don't fret - turn off the turmoil.
3. Pray earnestly to God with prayer and supplication.
4. Cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving and positive expectancy.

Anxiety drives people to take silly short-cuts they later regret, so waiting on God is a big part of the cure. Trust is the opposite of anxiety. If you trust God's promise then you are no longer anxious. Just as if you trust a chair to hold you up you are not at all anxious about sitting in it.

The best way to get rid of anxious thoughts is to replace them with trusting, prayerful thankful thoughts. Just as in the old saying: "Why worry when you can pray?" You have to practice substituting patience for fretting and pray for worrying. If you do this you will have a clear and useful and creative mind full of the Holy Spirit and wise for the solving of life's problems.

## Focus On the Solution Not the Problem

A faith-filled mind will see God's creative solution to life's pressing problem.

One of the great secrets of all the heroes of faith in the Bible is that they focused their mind on the solution and not on the problem.

Joshua did not worry about the giants in Canaan; he left them to God and focused on taking the Promised Land for the Lord.

David did not focus on how big Goliath was but on how big God was and on finding the right weapons with which to defeat Goliath. David worked on the solution instead of worrying about the problem.

When Peter and John came upon the lame man sitting at the Temple gate they did not get anxious about all his poverty and disease and their own lack of resources but instead gave the solution they had at hand.

**Acts 3:6**  *Then Peter said", "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. "*

The faith-filled mind focuses on SOLUTIONS. The faith-filled mind scans the horizon for God's creative answer then focuses all its mental energy on making that solution come to pass. There is always a divine solution for every earthly problem and we just have to search it out, focus our energy on it, and work towards it. God's solutions are seldom instant and magical. Joshua spent forty years fighting for Canaan, but it was eventually successful. God's

solutions work and we need to stop worrying and start implementing the solution God has for our situation.

## Take Control of Yourself, Then Take Control of Your Finances

A great many financial problems come from foolish human decisions or impulsive human behavior. For instance if you have just four junk food meals a week at \$5 each you are throwing away over \$1000 a year. Other more serious financial problems can come from impulse buying and shopping for emotional comfort. Or shopping for prestige and going and buying the same item at the most expensive store because it makes you feel like you have status. Immature enslavement to fashions, fads and the latest gadgets can also land you with big credit card bills. I estimate that most people would have 30% more usable income if they simply stopped doing dumb things with their money. Here are eight tips for financial self-control:

1. Have a definite set of goals you want out of life and only spend on things that further those goals.
2. Understand your cash flow - when major bills are due, when the income is coming in, when you can spend and when you cannot. Arrange your finances so there are few or no major surprises.
3. Do up an approximate budget and track how much individual items such as petrol or junk food are costing you. Make decisions about what is "in" and what is "out" of the spending priorities.
4. Control impulse buying. Discuss all major purchases with your partner or a good friend. Never shop on an empty stomach. Always ask: "Do I need this - and do I need this just now".
5. Give to good causes and have some funds set aside for Kingdom priorities.
6. Find creative ways to earn a bit extra, save a bit more and to spend a bit less.
7. Don't insist on buying the latest and greatest all the time. Buy second-hand or last years model
8. Go to [www.froogle.com](http://www.froogle.com) and compare prices on major purchases and find where it is on special. I frequently save 20% or more this way. Wait for specials and chase major discounts.
9. Have just one credit card with a low limit such as \$500 or \$1000 and pay the entire balance each month.
10. If you are in a major mess get proper professional financial advice.

## Take One Day at a Time

The last piece of advice in today's passage is:

**Matthew 6:34** *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Dale Carnegie in his book "Stop Worrying and Start Living" calls this living in day-tight compartments". It is focusing your mental energy on the task at hand instead of being distracted by a whole bunch of future problems. Someone once found out that about 95% of people's anticipated worries simply do not eventuate. All that worrying was a big waste of energy. Living in day-tight compartments helps us to have tightly focused creative minds that solve today's problems today.

This is not saying that you do not plan. Planning is not the same as worrying. Jesus says "Do not worry about tomorrow" but not, "do not think about tomorrow". God plans well in advance and he wants us to plan, but this planning is to be solution-focused Kingdom planning not fretful worldly planning. We can think and pray about tomorrow but we are not to worry about tomorrow.

Many people have an active fantasy life that anticipates all sorts of crises from terrorist attacks to home invasions and nuclear war. They spend enormous amounts of energy figuring out what they would do if they were attacked by a Great White shark and only had a pocket knife to defend themselves with. This may be a good form of mental entertainment but it is a useless waste of time and mental energy. These things are unlikely to happen and if they do happen they generally won't happen the way you worked out your solution with you as the all-conquering hero. This is just junk thinking and it needs to be put where junk goes.

One good way of not worrying about tomorrow is to use lists. I have a ten cent exercise book in which I write my "to do lists" for each day and a diary where I schedule the tasks for each week. First I write the lists of jobs in the exercise book and there will be thirty or so things to do, then I put them on days of the week in my diary say five or so tasks each day, then I do the jobs in order. This helps you to take control of your busy feeling and get over that clogged up mind full of things to do". It is a much more peaceful way to exist.

The next trick for living in day-tight compartments is to establish personal routines and rituals. You know what you are doing each day, and when you are doing it and how you are doing it. This greatly simplifies life and allows your brain space to be focused on the really important issues. For instance simply deciding that you will have dinner at 7 pm each day, and you switch off the TV and eat together, and say grace and have a certain order about who washes up - this deals with a dozen small decisions straight off and it establishes a peaceful and orderly home.

## Conclusion - Seek First the Kingdom

God is our Heavenly father who sees our situation, observes our actions, and who hears our prayers and meets our needs. God is actively involved with every small detail of your life. He

cares about you and wants to bless you. God wants you to stop worrying and start believing. And He wants you to stop running after this and that in the material world and to focus on the spiritual world and the Kingdom of God.

**Matthew 6; 31-34** *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" (32) For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

You have to seek first the Kingdom - the Lordship of Christ in every area of your life and those around you. And you have to seek his righteousness, you have to look at your life and straighten it up so that it is the right way up, according to God's heavenly pattern. The world may seek money and prestige and many possessions but we are to seek after God, His Kingdom and His righteousness, and if we pursue these things, the things that God wants us to pursue, then we will find that God takes care of our daily needs.

## Critical And Mocking Spirits



**Matthew 7:1-6 HCSB** *"Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. (2) For with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (3) Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, there's a log in your eye? (5) Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (6) Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls*

*before pigs, or they will trample them with their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.*

### Introduction

Today we are looking at the problem of critical and mocking spirits. This is one of the most common problems in human relationships and lies at the root of much conflict. There is a kind of person who is sure they are right and everyone else is wrong, they are wise and everyone else is stupid. This is a massive spiritual defect.

The truth is that all human beings are made in the image of God - therefore we will be right about some things, but we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, so we will all be wrong about some things.

People who go habitually around thinking "I am right and so and so is wrong" are under law not under grace. Such thinking is a punishing prison of the soul. Such people are always finding fault in other people's doctrine or their ideas or how tidy they are, or how they drive or various aspects of their personality. They mentally pick out all the faults of all the people in their world.

After a while such people tend to become rigid, hard and unyielding and their comments may become cruel. They can even become tyrannical. Every discussion has to end up with them being right and the other person being wrong. They become brilliant at debating but very poor at living and loving.

If this continues they lose their main relationships in life, their kids resent them, their partner leaves them, their friends stay away. One by one they get into blazing rows and relationship

wrenching arguments and lose those closest to them. They end up eccentric, isolated and alone, in fact one of the four main causes of loneliness is the need to be always right.

People who go around thinking "I am right, you are wrong" or "I am OK, you are not OK" often use this as a justification for hostility. I can yell at you because I am right and you are wrong and because I am OK, and you are not OK. Of course this can grow in scale so that the Hatfield's and McCoy's end up feuding over the assumption that "I am right and you are wrong and because I am OK, and you are not OK" and of course entire nations go to war on the same set of assumptions.

Lastly the stance of "I am right and you are wrong" makes all learning and change very difficult. New ideas and new technology is seen as a threat and constructive suggestions from others are not easily taken on board. In my corporate outplacement work the main people forms wanted to get rid of were people who would not adapt to change especially those who resisted it in the form belief that they were right and the company was wrong. So people who go around being "always right" are liable to be lonely, hostile, rejected and employed at a level well below that which they could otherwise be employed at.

Now the title of this sermon is "Critical and Mocking Spirits" - because this is a spiritual problem not an intellectual problem, it is a problem of attitude, not a problem of knowing this or that.

Every person is made up of body, soul and spirit and the human spirit is where our life's wisdom resides. Wisdom is how we handle information and the inner framework that we put our information into. The spirit is what makes us animated, wise, perceptive, and worshipful, it is where our deepest life intuitions are formed and where our fundamental perspective on life takes shape. The Bible describes at least 21 different conditions of the human spirit including bitter spirits, joyful spirits, broken spirits, dull spirits etc.

A person with a critical spirit is always finding fault with others, a person with a scoffing and mocking spirit aggressively disdains that which other people value. In other words these people have made certain fundamental decisions about how they will process new input. The person with a critical spirit searches for all the tiny, tiny mistakes. That is the first thing they look for, their mental activity is geared towards proving their theory that "I am right and you are wrong, I am OK and you are not OK". Since everyone human being has faults this is quite easy to accomplish. They forget that God is watching them and that one day they will also be judged.

## Do Not Judge

"Do not judge, so that you won't be judged." One of Scripture's rules of thumb is that God treats us in much the same way that we treat others, if we are merciful, then we receive mercy, if we forgive others, then God will forgive us, but if we judge others God will judge us.

Jesus puts it this way: (2) for with the judgment you use, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

We get a longer version in Luke 6:

**Luke 6:35-38 HCSB** *But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. (36) Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (37) "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not*

*be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (38) Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over--will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."*

Thus people who are severe on others, will be severely treated by God and those who are kind to others, will be treated kindly by God. I have met a few Christians who were very strict, judgmental and critical - and they will face a terrifying future on judgment day, for God will treat them as they have treated others.

How we treat others is at the very heart of the Christian faith and of stories such as the woman at the well or the Good Samaritan. Jesus often included people that other people excluded, people such as lepers, tax-collectors, prostitutes, and Samaritans. Jesus was a non-judgmental friend of the social outcast, of the poor and of the outsider. Despite the fact that Jesus was very holy, and was always right, people still felt safe with Him. Jesus managed to hold very high standards in His own life, while loving and including people who were broken and sinful.

So we can both have high moral standards ourselves (as Jesus did) and still love and include people who are struggling in life - as Jesus also did. We do not have to throw out our high personal standards - but we should not judge others.

Now there are two main words for judging used in the New Testament. The first word is "krino" and "krino" means to judge as a whole, or to condemn. This judges the whole person in one fell swoop e.g. "Bill is good, but Jim is bad" and this is what Jesus forbids. We have no right at all to entirely condemn another human being.

The other Greek word is "dokimazo" and "dokimazo" means to discern. You evaluate just one attribute of a person such as "Bill is not very good with the books but he is an excellent salesman." This is needed if we are to place people in the right jobs or assign them to the right ministry. Dokimazo judgment does not condemn people as a whole, in fact it is not interested in condemning or criticizing, it simply evaluates on the basis of the facts. Last Sunday Rene Forbes and I met with a man who we both felt was a con-artist. We felt we did not want anything further to do with his schemes and left the meeting early. That is a legitimate discerning judgment and we do not judge him as a whole person but simply in the aspect of his business dealings.

The Church should be a place where people feel loved and included and accepted just as they are. Yes God does want us to get our act together, but He gives us plenty of time and plenty of grace in order to do that. No one grows by being pulled part, judged and condemned. If we create an accepting, loving environment then the Holy Spirit will help people to change and to grow in grace.

## Specks and Logs

(3) Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but don't notice the log in your own eye? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and look, there's a log in your eye? (5) Hypocrite! First take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

In verses three, four and five Jesus talks about specks and logs. This is to do with how we see the faults in others, but yet refuse to see the quite obvious flaws in ourselves. Here are some common ways we do this:

1. We judge others by their actions, but ourselves by our intentions.

2. We only apply standards that are easy for us but difficult for others e.g. A rich person will judge others by their wealth or an intellectual will judge people by their academic ability.
3. We rationalize our faults as the result of our childhood or as not really being "too bad" while not giving other people the same benefit.
4. We blank out our faults entirely and manage to see ourselves as perfect. Such people can come across as extremely charming but are very pathological.
5. We hide our faults from ourselves but project them onto others, like pictures on a movie screen. So the person who struggles with lust, sometimes accuses other people of having lustful minds. We see this in certain fundamentalist preachers who preach most vigorously against adultery when they are having an affair themselves.
6. We invent a certain "trapdoor" standard that must be met or the trapdoor opens and the person plunges to Hell. It might be a doctrine such as the Trinity or predestination or a certain behavior such as tithing or speaking in tongues or handling rattlesnakes with immunity.
7. The "at least I'm not a homosexual" defense - making the criteria for judgment a sin that holds no temptation for you personally.
8. We "compensate" for our faults so someone might say: "Yes I have a bad temper but I am kind to animals."

Some psychiatrists have made long lists of these mechanisms that people use to hide their faults - they are called "defense mechanisms" and they defend the person from the painful realization that they have a log in their own eye!

There is an old saying that "when you point at someone there are three fingers pointing back at you". We might be right about the fault in the other person, but we also have many faults of our own. Jesus tells us that we need to "remove the log in our own eye" that is deal with our big faults first - before picking out the little faults in other people.

## Pearls Before Swine

Don't give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs, or they will trample them with their feet, turn, and tear you to pieces.

Now Jesus turns from the critical spirit to the mocking and scoffing spirit. Such a person mocks and scoffs at religion, scorns the Bible and disdains spiritual truth. Jesus says "do not waste your time with such people, you will only get hurt".

There are some people who seem to lack all spiritual sensitivity. They have no inclination to worship, and lack all sense of the holy. Some are sophisticated intellectuals while others are coarse and vulgar. They react to spiritual truth in a three step process:

1. Trampling: They scorn and devalue the gospel and discard it and attack it. Your pearls of wisdom are thrown aside and trampled underfoot.
2. Turning: They change in nature, five minutes ago you may have been talking to an intelligent rational person but now they are ranting and raving. They go suddenly from friendly to hostile.

3. Tearing: They rip into you in a blistering attack and intend to hurt both you and your faith.

If you tried to share the gospel at a meeting of the ACLU you would probably get this exact reaction.

Some of the reasons that people absolutely refuse to hear the gospel include:

1. Fleshly inclinations - Romans 8:7
2. Intellectual and philosophical opposition - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
3. Our fallen nature - 1 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 2:1-3
4. The Devil's blinding of the heart - 2 Corinthians 4:3-4,
5. Legalism - 2 Corinthians 3:14
6. Cultural and spiritual strongholds - 2 Corinthians 10:4-5
7. Human ignorance - Ephesians 4:17,18
8. Evil actions - Colossians 1:21

When you run into tough opposition when there are three things you can do:

1. Pray
2. Use logic, apologetics, and human arguments to break up the fallow ground.
3. Leave the area.

Jesus is telling us that there are some people we should NOT share the gospel with! There are some people who are too bigoted, too dangerous, and too hostile to witness to.

**Matthew 10:14-15 HCSB** *If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that house or town. (15) I assure you: It will be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.*

There are some parts of the world that missionaries have left because the reaction to the gospel was so hostile. It is simply impossible to share the truth in any meaningful way with people or they will kill you. What then can be done? You cannot share the gospel openly but you can pray. At the moment it is Ramadan and Christians all around the world are engaged in thirty days of prayer for the Muslim world and for places and peoples who resist the gospel. This barrage of prayer is gradually winning spiritual victories and opening minds and hearts to Christ.

## Conclusion

We deal with critical spirits and mocking spirits all the time in life and we need to realize that these are irrational spiritual perspectives that are driven by inner needs of the person and lies they have consciously or unconsciously believed.

There are large chunks of humanity that are unfair and irrational and they will judge you mercilessly over trivia and react to you harshly concerning your faith in Jesus Christ. They do

this to defend their own egos, or in order to maintain their sinful lifestyle and especially to avoid the need for personal change.

We need to realize that we live in a spiritual universe that is occasionally rational but often isn't. People who are committed to an anti-Christian stance, who occupy the opposite camp in the culture wars, who ridicule the Bible and attack morality will not be convinced by reason. The problem is not intellectual, or logical, its spiritual. The Devil has control of them, and their own appetites have control of them. In fact nearly 80% of the culture war is about people enslaved to various sexual sins not wanting to feel guilty.

What is the answer to such spiritual opposition - prayer and the Word of God. We have weapons of righteousness we can use, the darkness may grow but we can light a candle. God does not leave us helpless, the gospel will eventually prevail

## Seek And Ye Shall Find



**Matthew 7:7-11** *Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. (8) For each one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. (9) Or what man is there of you, if his son asks a loaf, will he give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a snake? (11) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him?*

**Luke 11:5-13** *And He said to them, which of you shall have a friend and shall go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, (6) for a friend of mine has come from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him? (7) And he answering from inside may say, Do not trouble me. The door is now shut and my children are in bed with me. I cannot rise and give to you. (8) I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needs. (9) And I say to you, Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you. (10) For everyone who asks receives. And he who seeks finds. And to him who knocks it shall be opened. (11) For what father of you, if the son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake for a fish? (12) Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

### Introduction - A God Who Is Good

This passage encourages us to ask God for things and gives us the clear assurance that our Father in Heaven will give good gifts to those who ask Him. The idea behind this is that we have a good God, who we can communicate with, and who responds to our spiritual searching in a positive fashion.

God is interactive! God is responsive! God hears your earnest requests and answers them. God is intelligent and wise and only answers those requests that will bring justice, truth and goodness into the world. What these verses are telling us is that we have a God who loves us, a God we can trust, and love, and receive good things from.

People tend to have a negative view of God, seeing God as being responsible for terrifying acts of judgment such as hurricanes, earthquakes and meteors, and not as responsible for the beautiful weather of a glorious day at the beach.

Yet the truth is that God is amazingly joyful and loving and kind and loves to do us good. He is called the "blessed God" because He is full of blessings. God is light and there is no darkness in Him at all. Thus God is always positive, joyful, kind, loving, just and fair.

Faith is the way we get the goodness of God to appear in our lives. Asking is connected to receiving, seeking is connected to finding, knocking in faith is connected to the door being opened. It is the believing heart that gets Heaven's answer.

God wants to manifest His character, His goodness and His love in the daily details of your life. God wants to abundantly bless you. For this blessing you must believe, you must have faith and you must hold onto God as you ask, seek and knock.

## Ask And Ye Shall Receive

Jesus tells us 'Ask and you shall receive.... For each one who asks receives;' and later on His brother James writes in his epistle "you have not because you ask not". (James 4:2). The Bible encourages us to ask! God wants us to come to Him and to come before the throne of grace in time of need:

Hebrews 4:16 Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

There are many, many passages that encourage us to ask, but we must ask "In God's will". Now asking "in God's will" generally involves three things:

1. You must be asking for something that is righteous, positive, hopeful, joyful and loving, something that fits the goodness of God.
2. You must not be asking for that which is evil, lustful, worldly or selfish.
3. You must ask in faith without doubting and know in your heart that God has heard you.

**1 John 5:14-15** *And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (15) And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*

**James 4:1-6** *From where do wars and fightings among you come? Is it not from this, from your lusts which war in your members? (2) You desire, and do not have. You murder, and are jealous, and cannot obtain. You fight and war, yet you have not because you ask not. (3) You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it upon your lusts. (4) Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever desires to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (5) Do you think that the Scripture says in vain, The spirit that dwells in us yearns to envy? (6) But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.*

**Mark 11:22-24** *And answering Jesus said to them, Have faith of God. (23) For truly I say to you that whoever shall say to this mountain, Be moved and be cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he said shall occur, he shall have whatever he said. (24) Therefore I say to you, All things, whatever you ask, praying, believe that you shall receive them, and it will be to you.*

**James 1:6-8** *But let him ask in faith, doubting nothing. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed. (7) For do not let that man think that he shall*

*receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, not dependable in all his ways.*

Now one thing that is very helpful in prayer is to develop a clear faith-picture of your request coming true. You can even draw the picture or cut out magazine picture and stick it on your mirror. The idea is to see in your mind, and eventually in your heart, the prayer coming true in loving, joyful and positive and hopeful ways. You have to take your mind off the problem and start seeing the solution by faith.

God did this with Abraham a number of times but we will just use two of them as an illustration:

**Genesis 13:14-18** *And after Lot was separated from him, Jehovah said to Abram, Lift up your eyes now and look from the place where you are northward and southward, and eastward and westward. (15) For all the land which you see I will give to you, and to your seed forever. (16) And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, then shall your seed also be counted. (17) Rise up and walk through the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it to you. (18) And Abram moved his tent and came and lived in the oaks of Mamre, which is in Hebron. And he built an altar to Jehovah there.*

God tells Abraham to look around as far as he can, to walk through the land and claim it, to picture his descendants living in it. To wander about saying "this land is given to Abraham by God, this land is my land". Every time Abraham looked outside he saw his Promised Land.

**Genesis 15:5-6** *And He brought him outside and said, Look now toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them. And He said to him, So shall your seed be. (6) And he believed in Jehovah. And He counted it to him for righteousness.*

God gave Abraham a faith-picture by showing him the stars. Every time Abraham went out and looked out at the night sky he would remember the words "so shall your descendants be". This was a powerful, positive faith-filled picture that Abraham held onto for twenty-five years until Isaac was born.

We need to believe God's promise to us so clearly that we can almost taste it.

Asking is more than tossing a wishful prayer up to heaven. It is holding a heart request for something that is beautiful and good before God and believing that it will come true. It is seeing the solution in the spiritual realm and believing that it will be brought to pass in the actual physical realm.

Now we often try to substitute something else for "asking in faith" such as:

1. Wishing
2. Vaguely Hoping
3. A Ritual
4. A Magical Practice
5. Bribing God
6. Sacrifice
7. Being Good

8. Thinking Hard
9. Short-cuts / Ishmael's
10. Believing A Favorite Doctrine
11. Belonging To An Organization
12. Memorizing The Bible
13. Strong Emotion
14. Spiritual Experiences
15. Religious Philosophy

We simply do not trust God to hear our request and then fulfill His promise. Really believing God is hard, and it is so rare that Jesus once said:

**Luke 18:8** *Yet when the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?*

One last thing on asking - the difference between asking in faith and testing God.

**Matthew 4:5-7 HCSB** *Then the Devil took Him to the holy city, had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, (6) and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: He will give His angels orders concerning you and, they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." (7) Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."*

The Devil tries to trick Jesus into thinking that there are only two choices here:

1. Refuse to jump and thus imply that God could not be trusted to rescue Him as His Word says.
2. Jump and quite obviously get killed.

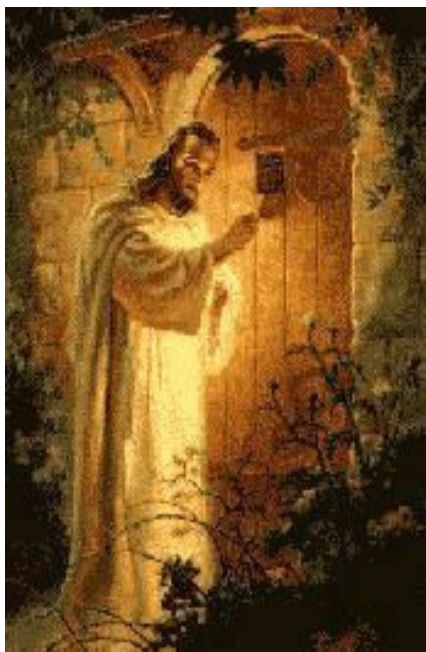
It is a spiritual dare "Do you really believe or don't you? What if your life depends on your faith and God's promises?" And Jesus response is basically: "I do not accept stupid dares." It would be akin to playing "chicken" on the highway and expecting God to protect you.

There is a question - what is the difference between faith and folly? The difference is necessity. Jesus did not need to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple and it served no useful purpose. However He did need to walk on water to reach His disciples in the boat during the storm. Taking risks that you simply don't need to take is folly. The rattle snake handling cults are not spiritual and full of faith - they are foolish and testing God.

## Seek and Ye Shall Find

The next admonition of Jesus is "seek and ye shall find" - but what are we supposed to seek:

1. Seek after God / the Lord (Acts 15:17, 17:27)
2. Seek first the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33)
3. Seek God's will (John 5:30)



4. Seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10)
5. Seek glory, honor and immortality (Romans 2:7, John 5:44)
6. To excel in building up the Church (1 Corinthians 14:12)
7. Spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14;1,2,12)
8. The interests of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:21)
9. The things above (Colossians 3:1)
10. To lead a quiet, productive and useful life (1 Thessalonians 4:11)
11. The city of God (Hebrews 13:14)
12. Peace (1 Peter 3:11, Hebrews 12:14)

In other words we are to seek godly things not worldly things. We are not to seek after things to spend them on our own lusts and vanity. And we are not to seek after things that lead people astray - such as seeking money, power and fame.

If we do seek good and godly things then we will find them. If we seek after the Lord, He will be found, if we seek God's will, we will be able to do it, if we seek eternal life; we will have it, if we seek spiritual gifts and keep on seeking them, and they will be ours.

Seeking takes a lot longer than asking. Seeking by its very nature is a process that requires effort. If you are going to seek and save the lost your seeking may take you to India or Turkey. If you are seeking to build up the church your seeking may take you to Bible College for a few years to learn how to go about it.

Seeking is a purposeful activity that involves the sustained pursuit of godly life-goals.

Seeking also involves the willingness to accept the answer, no matter what it is. If you say: "I am seeking God's will, as long as it does not involve becoming a pastor or a missionary or anything very difficult." then you are not really seeking God's will. A scientist cannot say: "I am seeking a cure for cancer as long as its not difficult." If you seek something of value then you must accept the answer and the process that goes with that seeking.

When Jesus says 'and every one who seeks finds...' this implies "if you do not give up". The verb is present tense which can imply continuity - to seek and keep on seeking. Some things we seek may take twenty years or more to come true. Yet other things may be answered instantly. When I read about the spiritual searching of some of the greats - people like Augustine, Wesley and Bunyan who spent years of struggle before finding inner peace with God. Complex people can take a long while to arrive at a simple but profound spiritual conclusion. For instance it took me a good ten plus years to accept the validity of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the charismatic and Pentecostal movement - whereas someone else may have easily reached that conclusion in a few weeks or days.

Seeking involves gradually changing what we understand and believe. If you seek to become holy then you will gradually give up that which is not holy. You will give up the worldly and

profane and focus on that which is godly and beautiful and true. That change does not happen overnight for most people. If you seek spiritual gifts then you will have to learn about them and practice them and use them and develop them and change the way you do ministry to accommodate your new found gifts.

Seeking changes us as we move towards the godly goal. We find not just the goal we seek, but we find ourselves in the process. For instance if you go and seek and save the lost you start to find out things about who you are, and how you communicate and how you react to stress and disappointment and to people who do not want to hear the gospel. Eventually mastering the task of sharing your faith makes you a far better person. In seeking the godly goal we also end up seeking God and finding our truest selves.

## Knock and the Door Shall Be Opened

Jesus then goes on to say: "Knock and it shall be opened to you." This is obviously knocking on a door of some sort on order to gain entrance. Now the Bible talks of both physical doors and spiritual doors, and I think Jesus is obviously talking about spiritual doors here. There are at least seven spiritual doors that I can find in the New Testament and they are:

1. Christ Is the Door

**John 10:7-9** *Then Jesus said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. (8) All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. (9) I am the door. If anyone enters in by Me, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.*

2. The Door of Heaven

**Revelation 4:1** *After these things I looked, and behold, a door was opened in Heaven. And the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me, saying, come up here, and I will show you what must occur after these things.*

3. The Door Of The Soul

**Revelation 3:20-21** *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me. (21) To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame and have sat down with My Father in His throne.*

4. The Door of Salvation

**Luke 13:23-30** *And one said to Him, Lord, are the ones being saved few? And He said to them, (24) Strive to enter in at the narrow gate. For I say to you, many will seek to enter in and shall not be able. (25) And once the Master of the house has risen up and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, and He shall answer and say to you, I do not know you; from where are you; (26) then you shall begin to say, We ate and drank in Your presence, and You have taught in our streets. (27) But He shall say, I tell you, I do not know you; from where you are. Depart from Me, all workers of unrighteousness! (28) There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and yourselves being thrust out. (29) And they will come from the east and the west, and*

*from the north and the south, and will recline in the kingdom of God. (30) And behold, there are last ones which will be first, and there are first ones which will be last.*

5. The Door Of Faith

**Acts 14:27** *And having arrived, and gathering the church they related all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the nations.*

6. The Door of Ministry

**1 Corinthians 16:8-9** *But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost. (9) For a great and effective door opened to me, and many are opposing.*

**2 Corinthians 2:12** *And, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord,*

**Colossians 4:2-3** *Continue in prayer and watch in it with thanksgiving, (3) praying together about us also, that God may open to us a door of the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I also have been bound,*

7. The Door of Influence

**Revelation 3:8** *I know your works. Behold, I have given before you an open door, and no one can shut it. For you have a little strength and have kept My Word and have not denied My name.*

These are the doors at which we can knock. We can ask for our own salvation or for opportunities for God's Word, or to enter into heavenly realities, or for a door of faith to be opened in a closed nation or for a door of influence to be opened for a faithful ministry.

Sometimes we have to keep banging on the door for a while, doors for the gospel sometimes open slowly and we must be persistent in knocking. God wants us to enter into the Kingdom and to enter into life and to enter into faith and hope and love and the heavenly Jerusalem and into the things of the Spirit. He wants us to keep pushing our ways through those doors.

But every entering is also a leaving behind. When you walk through one door you leave the old room behind. Before we can enter into new realities we have to be prepared to leave old realities behind. If we want to enter into Christ, we must leave sin behind, if we want to enter into the kingdom, we must leave the world behind, if we want to enter into life, we must leave sin and death behind. And if we want to enter into the Spirit we must leave the flesh far behind. And if we want to enter into spiritual freedom we must leave legalism far behind.

God will open the door you are knocking on as soon as you are serious about actually going through it. You can have a deeper spiritual life any time you want, as long as you are serious about doing that and leaving vanity and the undisciplined life far behind. God wants you to desire holy things and to ask for them, seek them and knock on His door to enter into them.

## Good Gifts

Now there is a view among some folk that spiritual searching (asking, seeking and knocking) is dangerous, and can lead you into insanity or even into demon possession. That is how heresies come about they argue. Just stick with the safe basics and don't go near the end times, or the book of Revelation or spiritual warfare, and certainly don't go to bible college or

you will end up as nutty a fruit-cake. This is the Devil lie to keep Christians spiritually inactive and immature in the faith. The truth is quite the opposite:

**Matthew 7:9-11** *Or what man is there of you, if his son asks a loaf, will he give him a stone? (10) Or if he asks a fish, will he give him a snake? (11) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him?*

**Luke 11:11-13** *For what father of you, if the son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake for a fish? (12) Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

**John 3:34** *For He whom God has sent speaks the Words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.*

The argument here is from the lesser to the greater. If sinful, selfish human beings know how to give good things to their children, then how much more will a good, wise, loving Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him? God will not give you a serpent or a rock, God will not give you a demon or send you insane, instead He will give you the Holy Spirit, and teach you accurately and well and satisfy your spiritual hunger with good food.

So it is safe to come to God and to search out spiritual things and to ask, and to seek and to knock on Heaven's door.

**James 1:5** *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and with no reproach, and it shall be given to him.*

## Conclusion

Jesus is teaching us that God is not inaccessible or unresponsive. Nor does He only respond to special people. Jesus says "For each one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened." Thus it is not only missionaries, pastors, priests and nuns who get their prayers answered or who hear Gods voice, or who receive spiritual gifts. The most ordinary Christian can safely go on an earnest spiritual quest and ask, seek and knock for things from Jesus Christ.

Some of God's greatest saints have been shoemakers, fishermen, tax-collectors and shepherds who simply sought God in the midst of their daily work until one day God turned up in a burning bush, or on Lake Galilee or at their tax-booth and called them into ministry. You can start the life of faith right now; you can decide to live a different kind of life, driven by a faith-vision and a spiritual quest for more of God. You will not end up a lunatic, but you may well end up with a Christ-like character.

# The Golden Rule



**Matthew 7:12 NKJV** *Therefore whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

## Introduction

This is the Golden Rule about how we should treat other people. It is unique to Christianity. Other moral codes say it in the negative form "do not do to others, those things that you would not like done to you". This prohibits people from being mean, nasty and cruel. But the Golden Rule asks us to be a blessing, and to do those things to others, that we would like done to ourselves.

The interesting part of this command is that it does not involve the Scriptures. You do not need to look up the Bible to figure out how to obey the Golden Rule. All you have to do is to look inside yourself. You have wants, needs and desires and they are important to you. They are also important to other people. So if you want to know how to treat other people, then ask yourself "how would I like to be treated in this exact same situation".

1. If you want safety and security then you should act so that you cause other people to feel safe and secure.
2. If you want people to care about you - then you should care for others as well.
3. If you want people to be helpful to you - you should be helpful to them.
4. If you want fair remuneration - then you should pay fair remuneration
5. If you want mercy - then you should be merciful
6. If you want forgiveness then you should be forgiving
7. If you want significance, then you should help others to become significant.
8. If you want wealth then you should help others to become wealthy.
9. If you want love then you should love others.
10. If you want people to pray for you, then you should pray for them.
11. If you want to be happy then you should try to make others happy as well.
12. If you want encouragement and understanding then you should be encouraging and understanding.

The Golden Rule is grounded in our equal and common humanity. The things I desire are quite likely to be the things you desire also. We have similar needs and a similar sense of how we would like to be treated. Everyone wants to be treated fairly, everyone wants courtesy and kindness and good manners, everyone wants safety and security, everyone wants recognition and a say in the decisions that affect them.

As I say in nearly every sermon, God treats us the same way that we treat others. God shows mercy to the merciful and forgives those who are forgiving, and blesses those who bless others. God is also stingy with the stingy and shrewd with the shrewd and very tough on those who are cruel to others. By this rule of thumb, if we meet the legitimate desires of other people - then God will meet our desires.

The Golden Rule is BOTH a wonderful moral precept and key to great blessing.

a) It is a wonderful moral precept that would lead to justice, fair wages, democracy and end to all war and cruelty. You cannot obey the Golden Rule and be a tyrant and a torturer. And the rich corporate executives who obeyed the Golden Rule would give good health coverage to their workers and ensure job security and share profits. For that is surely what they would like for themselves. If everyone on earth obeyed the Golden Rule we would live in a safe and happy world where all the basic human desires were fully met.

b) Secondly the Golden Rule is a key to great blessing because God watches how we treat others. If we do kind, good, caring things for others, then God will do kind, good caring things for us. We reap what we sow and what goes around comes around. If we sow good deeds and care for others as we care for ourselves then God will care for us as He does for the angels in heaven.

## Therefore

Our verse starts with the word "therefore" and when you see a "therefore" in Scripture you should ask what is it there for!

The therefore point back to the section we saw last week on seek and ye shall find and about God giving good gifts to His Children. So what is the connection? How is the goodness of God meeting our needs connected to the Golden Rule? If God gives to those who ask, and if God helps those who seek to find, and if God opens doors when people knock and if God gives good gifts to people - then how should we act? The answer is obvious!

God's goodness is connected to God's sense of justice. God wants to bless us and to answer our prayers and to pour out his love. God desires to give good gifts to His children. And if His children are living by the Golden Rule then He is very happy to bless them. But if we are being mean and selfish then God withholds His blessings until we learn to use them better.

If we want God to meet our needs and give us our desires, then we should meet other people's needs and give them their desires - within our capacity to do so. God wants us to be channels of His blessings. Selfishness blocks the channel. The selfish person receives but does not give out. They are like a blocked sink. It soon fills up and God turns off the taps of Heaven. And the living water soon goes rancid and revolting because it is stagnant in our souls. When you start giving and being a blessing then you "unblock the sink" and the water can flow out and God can turn the taps on again and fill your life with blessings.

The "therefore" tells us that we do not just live as recipients of blessing. We have to be a blessing as well. If we get our prayers answered, then we need to also be the answer to other people's prayers. This applies particularly to those closest to us:

**1 Peter 3:7 HCSB** *Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

Thus a rude husband, who does not care about his wife's needs, will not get his prayers answered. If you do not meet the desires of those closest to you, then God will not meet your desires.

People who want to live a golden life, should live by the Golden Rule.

Self-centered, selfish materialistic people simply cannot have good spiritual lives. It is utterly impossible. In a needy world selfishness is a form of cruelty and God does not bless cruelty.

**James 5:1-6 HCSB** *Come now, you rich people! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming on you. (2) Your wealth is ruined: your clothes are moth-eaten; (3) your silver and gold are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You stored up treasure in the last days! (4) Look! The pay that you withheld from the workers who reaped your fields cries out, and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts. (5) You have lived luxuriously on the land and have indulged yourselves. You have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned--you have murdered--the righteous man; he does not resist you.*

**Amos 4:1-2 HCSB** *Listen to this message, you cows of Bashan who are on the hill of Samaria, women who oppress the poor and crush the needy, who say to their husbands, "Bring us something to drink." (2) The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness: Look, the days are coming when you will be taken away with hooks, every last one of you with fishhooks.*



## Whatever You Want Men to Do To You

The Greek behind the first part of this simple phrase is probably best translated All, whatsoever you wish and hope for. It covers every desire and every act of the will, and is extremely general. "Whatever you want" covers every legitimate desire of human nature.

It is the simplest and most complete ethical code ever developed. Simply use your own desires as the yardstick for how to treat others.

- If you were injured in a car accident would you want people to drive on by - or to stop and help as they were able and competent to do so?
- If you hit your thumb with a hammer do you want people to laugh at you, or do you want people to get a Band-Aid?

- If you lived in Africa during a famine what would you want the West to do - buy plasma TVs or give to the poor?
- If you were a student again would you want your teacher to play favorites and mark some students better than others, or would you want fair and just marking?

You do not need to be a theologian to live by the Golden Rule. You do not even need to have much empathy or understanding of others, all you need to know is what you yourself would want done in exactly the same situation.

Some people might say "I don't want anyone to do anything for me; I will look after myself thank you." Does that mean that you never want appreciation or help with the washing up, or fairness in the courts? No man is an island, we all need others, and we are all needed by others.

Now this obviously only applies to normal legitimate needs. The needs of a masochist, who wants to be beaten with a whip, do not mean he should go around beating other people with a whip. Some people have pathological needs and addictions but Jesus is obviously not talking about those here.

This may include things like a need for autonomy, space, and a need for privacy, so that sometimes the best things you can do is to leave a person to sort things out themselves. If you always do your kid's homework they may not grow up to be good scholars and clear thinkers. We have to factor in some fairly complex long-term needs into the equation.

For years the Australian Aboriginals have been given a lot of money without having to work. They could just sit at home and get \$50,000 a year. Last week this was phased out so they now need to do some community work for their welfare - and everyone is happy. The Aboriginals are actually glad of the change and being valued as people capable of doing useful work. Few people really want to be on the end of the hand-out mentality with the exception in a short-term crisis.

Children need the security of discipline and clear rules. Most kids actually want parents to be firm with them. There is also a strong human need for justice and law and order and even criminals want to live in an honest society.

So our needs are desires are the starting point for our ethics. All you have to do to be a good human being is to know what you want, then do that exact same thing for other people. The opposite of the Golden Rule is narcissism, people who love themselves but do not care about how other people feel. They think "I am the only real person in the Universe, everyone else just exists to meet my needs and when they cease meeting my needs they can be disposed of". Such people never put themselves in someone else's shoes nor do they consider someone else's emotional pain. A close cousin of narcissism is elitism. Elitism says "I am superior and they are inferior, so I deserve much more than they do." Finally there is arrogance: "I am right and they are wrong so I can treat them in an inhuman fashion." These three attitudes of narcissism, elitism and arrogance lie behind most of man's inhumanity to man. Slavery is impossible if we treat others the way we would want to be treated, so is torture, sexual exploitation, sweatshops, and the like. If the whole world is just like me then it should have the same rights and blessings that I have and I cannot deny this to any human being.

## Do Also To Them

The next part of the verse is do also to them - and commands us to take positive action of some kind. Christianity is a positive faith and positive faith always is translated into positive action. Bible-believing Christians do not sit around in a mystical trance ignoring the entire world around them. Bible-believing Christians know their God, and are strong people who take action to change their world.

**Daniel 11:32 HCSB** *With flattery he will corrupt those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will be strong and take action.*

Christianity is not a private religion nor is it a mere collection of personal opinions about existential and philosophical matters or a static performance of traditional rituals. Christianity is a lifestyle, a set of commandments for living and a spiritual method for transforming society. They fully understood this in the early church under the leadership of the apostles:

**Acts 2:41-47 HCSB** *So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. (42) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. (43) Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. (44) Now all the believers were together and had everything in common. (45) So they sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. (46) And every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.*

**Acts 4:31-37 HCSB** *When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak God's message with boldness. (32) Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common. (33) And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on all of them. (34) For there was not a needy person among them, because all those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, (35) and laid them at the apostles' feet. This was then distributed to each person as anyone had a need. (36) Joseph, a Levite and a Cypriot by birth, whom the apostles named Barnabas, which is translated Son of Encouragement, (37) sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

**Acts 9:36-42 HCSB** *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. She was always doing good works and acts of charity. (37) In those days she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs. (38) Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who begged him, "Don't delay in coming with us." (39) So Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them. (40) Then Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, "Tabitha, get up!" She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. (41) He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive. (42) This became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*

**Acts 11:27-30 HCSB** *In those days some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (28) Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine throughout the Roman world. This took place during the time of Claudius. (29) So each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers who lived in Judea. (30) This they did, sending it to the elders by means of Barnabas and Saul.*

The believers understood the need of doing good to others. Everyone was doing good of some kind - from the humble Dorcas who made clothes for widows through to Barnabas who sold land and donated the proceeds to the church.

Everyone recognized each other as equally precious children of God though they may have differing roles in the body of Christ. This basic equality of all Christians was the reason for the financial aid that was practiced:

**2 Corinthians 8:9-15 HCSB** *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: although He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich. (10) Now I am giving an opinion on this because it is profitable for you, who a year ago began not only to do something but also to desire it. (11) But now finish the task as well, that just as there was eagerness to desire it, so there may also be a completion from what you have. (12) For if the eagerness is there, it is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. (13) It is not that there may be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality-- (14) at the present time your surplus is available for their need, so that their abundance may also become available for your need, that there may be equality. (15) As it has been written: The person who gathered much did not have too much, and the person who gathered little did not have too little.*

Now I am not saying that we all have to go and live in a Christian commune. Mostly Christians are called to bloom where they are planted, in whatever role in life they are called to. But I am saying that Christians need to make a life-long habit of doing good according to the Golden Rule.

Thus the Golden Rule requires four changes to most people's lifestyles:

1. NOTICE the situation, observe the human needs in your environment
2. THINK - what would I need in that same situation
3. PAUSE - from your own agenda
4. GO - into action on behalf of that person.

For instance, you are leaving the supermarket and you see a lady with three small children and a huge load of shopping struggling to get out the door. First you notice the situation and allow it to register in you, then you think "what would I want someone to do for me in this situation", then you pause from your own agenda of heading to your car, and then you ask "Ma'am may I help take your groceries to your car." If the lady says "Yes" then you can give her assistance.

## A Biblical example is the Good Samaritan

Luke 10:30-35 HCSB Jesus took up the question and said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and

fled, leaving him half dead. (31) A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (32) In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33) But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. (34) He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35) The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'

The Good Samaritan noticed the man in pain, he then worked out how to treat the man as he himself would like to be treated, and then he paused from his own travel agenda, got off his donkey, put the injured man on it and went into action on the injured man's behalf. The Good Samaritan is a great example of the Golden Rule in action.

The Golden Rule is meant to build golden churches where people love one another from the heart. Nothing is worse than to go to a church that ignores you as a person and which does not care about your needs. Such a place is simply a religious theatre and is not a biblical NT church! Now no church does this perfectly because no church is full of perfect people. Certainly the pastor and the elders are the primary examples of love and care but we all need to do our part. There are thirty-three or so "one another" commands in the Bible, these commands cover what we do to each other and are for every church member to put into practice - love one another, encourage one another, be considerate to one another etc. You don't have to be in the ministry to have a ministry. If you want to have a ministry that changes lives then starts consciously and deliberately living by the Golden Rule!



## For This Is the Law and the Prophets

The whole New Testament tells us our Christian duty all comes down to just one thing - the Golden Rule of loving our neighbor as yourself:

**Mark 12:28-31 HCSB** *One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked Him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" (29) "This is the most important," Jesus*

*answered: Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, The Lord is One. (30) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. (31) "The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."*

**Romans 13:8-10 HCSB** *Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there is any*

*other commandment--all are summed up by this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.*

**1 John 3:21-24 HCSB** *Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us we have confidence before God, (22) and can receive whatever we ask from Him because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in His sight. (23) Now this is His command: that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as He commanded us. (24) The one who keeps His commands remains in Him, and He in him. And the way we know that He remains in us is from the Spirit He has given us.*

The whole Bible is summed up in the Golden Rule. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. If you love people as you love yourself you will not murder them, or steal from them, or disrespect them, or lie about them in court or sleep with their wives or covet their goods. You do not need Ten Commandments or 613 regulations from Moses. Instead you need just one - the Golden Rule. If you believe in Jesus and live by this commandment you will be doing all that God ever wants and God will bless you and will answer your prayers.

It is a very nonreligious rule. You don't have to go to a Temple or make complicated sacrifices. That has all been fulfilled by Jesus Christ. You just have to do one thing - love your neighbor as yourself, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. If you want to know how good a Christian you are just use the Golden Rule as the measuring rod. How are you going at showing practical love to your friends and family and coworkers and church members!

## Conclusion

The Golden Rule asks us to be a blessing, an active practical real blessing to the people in our lives, doing to them the exact same things we would like done for ourselves. The Golden Rule invites us to become part of a community of mutual blessing where we do good to others and they in turn do good to us. God is watching, listening, and observing our attitudes and actions. When He sees us living by the Golden Rule then He blesses us, answers our prayers and opens the windows of Heaven for us. Remember God treats us the exact same way that we treat others, so if we are good to other people, then God will be good to us and - even more so because He has more power to bless than we can ever imagine!

God is preparing us to be part of an eternal community of love and blessing in Heaven. He is making us into people who can give and receive love in large quantities. Love is the true measure of the Christian. How wide and deep and high and long is your love for God and your love for people? Do you treat other people as you would like to be treated or are you impatient, judgmental and critical? The time has come to think about your Christian life and to answer one question:

Is the love of Jesus Christ evident in my lifestyle as I love my neighbor as myself and live by the Golden Rule?

## Discovering The Narrow Gate



**Matthew 7:13-14 NKJV** *Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

**Luke 13:22-30 NKJV The Narrow Way** *And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. (23) Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there*

*few who are saved?" And He said to them, (24) Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (25) When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' (26) then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' (27) But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' (28) There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. (29) They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. (30) And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last."*

### Introduction

When Jesus speaks of a "narrow gate" and a "broad way" He is talking about two very different modes of existence. The following table draws out some of the contrasts between the narrow gate way of wisdom and spirituality and humility versus the "broad way" of sin and folly and pride.

Narrow Gate	Broad Way
Wisdom	Folly
Higher Nature	Lower Nature
Spirit	Flesh
Holiness	Worldliness
Living Faith In God	Idols, Superstition, Luck, Myths & Legends

Narrow Gate	Broad Way
Righteousness	Lawlessness
Kingdom of God	Kingdom of Darkness
The Cross Accepted	The Cross Rejected
Taught of God	Doctrines of Demons
Word of God	Traditions of Men
Fruit of the Spirit	Works Of The Flesh
Born-Again To A New Nature	Attempts to Fix The Old Nature
Grace	Legalism
Patiently Seeks Things Above, Heavenly Reward	Impulsively Seeks Self-Gratification, Pleasure
Forgiving	Resentful
Peaceful, Conciliatory, Willing To Yield	Self-Assertive, Divisive, Contentious
Humble Quiet Wisdom	Envy and Selfish Ambition
Compassion	Selfishness
Loves God	Materialistic
Impartial	Corrupt
Following Christ	Following The World, The Flesh and The Devil

## The Narrow Gate Is Christ and the Christian Life

Christ is the door, the narrow gate that must be found and is our entrance to Heaven:

**John 10:7-9 HCSB** *So Jesus said again, "I assure you: I am the door of the sheep. (8) All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. (9) I*

*am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.*

**Hebrews 10:19-22 ISV** *Therefore, my brothers, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, (20) the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), (21) and since we have a great high priest over the household of God, (22) let us continue to come near with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith, because our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water.*

And the pathway we follow is the constant pursuit of the fruits of the Spirit:

**2 Peter 1:3-11 MKJV** *according as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue, (4) through which He has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, so that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (5) But also in this very thing, bringing in all diligence, filling out your faith with virtue, and with virtue, knowledge; (6) and with knowledge self-control, and with self-control, patience, and with patience, godliness, (7) and with godliness, brotherly kindness, and with brotherly kindness, love. (8) For if these things are in you and abound, they make you to be neither idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (9) For he in whom these things are not present is blind and cannot see afar off and has forgotten that he was purged from his sins in the past. (10) Therefore, brothers, rather be diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you shall never fall. (11) For so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

## Seeking the Narrow Gate

The narrow gate is not locked, but it is hard to find, so some effort must be made, and some diligence and suffering put in. Salvation is free to all, but it must be found. If I hid a million dollars in the church car-park it would be free to however found it, but nevertheless some seeking would be required. The person, who did not seek, would not find.

Many modern evangelists have made out that salvation requires no effort at all, other than saying a short prayer. They argue that any other doctrine would be "salvation by works". That is confusing the issue. The fact that God asks us to search after Him is not the same as God requiring us to do special religious works such as attending the feast days of saints or pilgrimages to Mecca. We cannot work our way to Heaven, but we have to seek after Heaven.

God is not a vending machine that hands out "Get Out Of Hell Free" cards to whoever prays a little prayer. God is a complex spiritual and personal being who wants us to seek genuine relationship with Him and to love Him with all our heart, mind and strength.

True Christianity involves a true life-long commitment to God - not easy-beliefs

**Matthew 16:24-25 HCSB** *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come with Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. (25) For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of Me will find it."*



Many people are given a chance to believe, and hear the gospel, but make no or an inadequate response. That is why Jesus says many be called, but few chosen".

**Matthew 20:16 KJV** *So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*

In the time of Noah salvation was very restricted - only eight people out of the whole world! This was after 120 years of Noah's preaching! Everyone heard the message but only his own family responded to it, then the door of the ark was shut.

**1 Peter 3:20 HCSB** *who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared; in it, a few--that is, eight people--were saved through water.*

Just how many people are saved is up to God, but everyone should continue to press on into salvation and take their spiritual life as something of the utmost seriousness.

## Two Ways

There are higher" and lower" ways of viewing the same reality. Some people when given a gift see the love and thoughtfulness, while others just work out how much it cost the giver and simply see it in monetary terms. Or on visiting a forest some stop and sense the beauty, while others trample noisily and heedlessly around oblivious to the speech of Nature. Or in reading a book some try and find the deeper meaning and learn from it, while others just want to get through it and write the term paper. Take a bunch of teenagers to an art show and a few will stop and ponder, while many others will simply point and giggle. One of the ways the Bible describes these higher and lower natures is as spirit and flesh.

**Romans 8:5-7 HCSB** *For those whose lives are according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those whose lives are according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit. (6) For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace. (7) For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so.*

This higher way of thinking is the "mind set on the Spirit" and is equivalent to the mind set on things above.

**Philippians 4:8 MKJV** *Finally, my brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things.*

**Colossians 3:1-3 MKJV** *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. (2) Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.*

**Isaiah 32:8 HCSB** *But a noble person plans noble things; he stands up for noble causes.*

The Christian is called to higher ground, to a noble way of thinking. We are to think about lovely, good, high-minded things and to set aside the vulgar, trashy, fleshly and selfish thoughts so common to our age. We have to start thinking differently, following the Spirit and thinking our own deep inner thoughts, hearing the tune of a different drummer". If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. ([Henry David Thoreau](#), *Walden*, Conclusion, 1854)"

The mind set on the flesh is death. The lower way of thinking leads to loss of impulse control, addictions, and many frustrations in life. The mind becomes filled with the psychological equivalent of rotting garbage and stinking thinking" develops. Sin is never fully resisted or transcended. Instead it is often pondered, and even indulged. Gradually the soul becomes darkened and deadened to all that is higher in life - including God.

The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. The higher and better way of viewing life leads to the ability to function properly in life, to achieve goals, to react rightly to life's problems and to master numerous skills with grace and wisdom. Sin is resisted and uprooted and transcended by walking in the Spirit. This is not necessarily a very religious life, full of church services. Rather it is a noble life full of quiet and good thoughts and actions.

A rough analogy would be the contrast between fine classical music and punk rock. Fine classical music leaves me feeling peaceful and mentally alive, full of good thoughts. Punk rock is full of violence and anger and sin and leads to rage and to suicide. (I am not saying you have to like classical music to be a good Christian.) These are illustrations of ways of thinking - higher and lower.

Now the mind set on the Spirit meditates on Scripture, sees beauty in nature, prays often, thinks on Christ, and looks for beauty and truth in all things. The mind set on the flesh is only interested in gratification of one kind of another - from sexual gratification, to revenge.

So the mind set on the Spirit puts aside the clamor for instant gratification and goes on a quest for God, for beauty and for truth of all kinds - whether it be cultural, historical, scientific or theological. The mind set on the Spirit is saturated with reverence and awe and lives in the constant joy of the surprises of God.

**Hebrews 12:28-29 HCSB** *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us hold on to grace. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe; (29) for our God is a consuming fire.*

The spiritual mindset judges all things spiritually and is able to understand Scripture and view life with purity and grace.

**1 Corinthians 2:12-16 HCSB** *Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, in order to know what has been freely given to us by God. (13) We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. (14) But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually. (15) The spiritual person, however, can evaluate*

*everything, yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone. (16) For: who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

**James 3:17-18 HCSB** *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. (18) And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Paul seems to have had a real pastoral problem with lower thinking" people on Crete and characterized their inhabitants as being liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. When he sent Titus there he said:

**Titus 1:15-16 HCSB** *To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; in fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled. (16) They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and disqualified for any good work.*

So we see that the lower nature, and the lower way of thinking, makes people unfit for doing God's will. For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so."

Indulging sin, coarseness, vulgarity and fleshly appetites is not harmless. It subverts our whole being as Christians and makes us useless to God. The broad way, the way of the flesh and the vulgar crowd, leads to destruction. It leads to us becoming slaves of our sins and our impulses and reduces life to a continual craving for this or that. When Jesus says broad is the way that leads to destruction" he is speaking as one who knew human nature better than anyone else. Being self-destructive is the easiest thing in the world. There is nothing easier than drunkenness, gambling, and sexual immorality. There is nothing easier than being a fool, you do not have to pass any tough exams for that! There is nothing easier than being proud, arrogant, boorish and opinionated. And there is nothing easier than throwing tempter tantrums and hitting people and engaging in acts of reckless violence. And there is nothing easier than blaming others for your own mess. Stupid, self-destructive living is so popular because it is easy.

## Discovering the Narrow Gate

The easiest way to discover the Narrow Gate is to head towards Christ and away from the world. For instance:

1. To be thankful when everyone else is grumbling.
2. To be pure when everyone else is impure.
3. To be full of praise when everyone else is cynical.
4. To be generous when everyone else is being selfish and stingy.
5. To be kind when everyone else is competitive.
6. To be humble when everyone else is being assertive and arrogant and ambitious
7. To be gracious when everyone else is being rude.

8. To be at Church when everyone else is out shopping or at the beach.
9. To build unity when everyone else is forming cliques.
10. To reach out in love when everyone else is being angry and hurtful.

This is called 'walking in the opposite spirit' and it is the simple assertion that you don't get to the Narrow Gate by following the world's standards of behavior. The Geneva Commentary has this to say on this verse, "The example of life must not be taken from the multitude".

The famous hymn writer, Isaac Watts had written:

Broad is the road that leads to death,  
And thousands walk together there;  
But wisdom shows a narrower path  
With here and there a traveler.

The Narrow Gate has to be discovered, for it is not at all obvious. In fact the natural man is unable to see it at all. The natural man thinks it is folly to be Christ-like and madness to give away money and pleasure and the approval of men for something as intangible as spiritual growth. The Narrow Gate appears before us the moment we make our own spiritual growth a priority and when we decide that the pursuit of truth must come before the pursuit of pleasure. When the angels observe us getting real, about getting hold of God, then wonderful things happen.

## The Narrow Gate Leads to Blessing

A small gate can lead to a vast treasure - like that of Tutankhamen's' tomb. And the Narrow Gate leads to eternal life and enormous blessings that far outweigh anything that the world can give us. Jesus tells us that it is a gate that leads to life: Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

It is a difficult path, but it leads to many good things, and to hundred-fold rewards. The word, "difficult" is from the same Greek word that means, trouble and tribulation. It is a troubled and constricted path. It hurts. We find ourselves pressed on every side by the world, the flesh and the Devil, but it is a good path that leads to good things.

**Acts 14:21-22 MKJV** *And preaching the gospel to that city, and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, (22) confirming the souls of the disciples, calling on them to continue in the faith and that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God.*

There are many troubles and much tribulation for the person that truly chooses to go through the Narrow Gate, but that path leads to the Kingdom of God. Pilgrim's Progress is a great book that tells the story of a pilgrim called Christian who leaves the City of Destruction behind in search of the Celestial City. His path is hard and full of trials and temptations such

as the Slough of despond and Giant Despair but the end is well worth it. The sad fact is that Jesus tells us "few are they that find it". Only a few people can be bothered with all it takes to be a true Christian.

Therefore let us be determined that we will find the Narrow Gate and persist in the way that leads to life!

## Wolves In Sheep's Clothing



Matthew 7:15-23 HCSB *"Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. (16) You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? (17) In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. (18) A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. (19) Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) So you'll recognize them by their fruit. (21) 'Not everyone who says to Me,*

*'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' (23) Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!'*

### Introduction

Every now and then we hear about some outrageous cult such as David Koresh and the Branch Davidians or we get a knock on our door from the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses. We are aware of cults but few people are fully aware of the damage they are causing to society. According to the respected Wellspring Institute:

The magnitude of the cult problem is staggering. Estimates of the number of cult members in the United States range well over 10 million. An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 cults exist in the U.S. Many of those who leave such groups will sustain lasting psychological problems. Few of those will understand the extent or the nature of the damage they have sustained.

To put the problem in perspective, note the following statistics:

The chances of succumbing to a destructive cult are twice as great as those for catching chicken pox.

The chances of contracting measles are approximately 1850 times less than those of joining a destructive cult.

The chances of joining a cult are more than three times greater than the chances of contracting AIDS.

The only social and health problems that exceed the harm inflicted by cults are drug and alcohol abuse, family violence, violent crime, accidents, all forms of cancer combined (cult involvement exceeds the total of any one type of cancer), syphilis, gonorrhea, colds, and flu.

When I was in Australia I used to do cult research and seminars and assist with cult exit counseling. One highly destructive cult in the Australian outback was so ruthless it even employed a hit-man to kill someone who left the group. Other cults broke up marriages and most left people very confused and psychologically damaged. Religion is powerful and affects us deeply and when religion goes wrong it messes people up deeply. On average it takes two to five years to recover from cult involvement, with some people never recovering.

That is why Jesus tells us to be very careful about the spiritual teachers that we listen to. We should not believe just anyone who makes religious claims; we should stand back and check them out to see the fruit on their lives. If the fruit is bad – as with David Koresh or the Moonies or Scientology – then you should stay clear of it.

## False Prophets

Well what is a "false prophet"? The Greek word here is "prophetess" and means someone with spiritual or ethical insight, even Greek mathematicians and philosophers were called "prophetess". It is closely equivalent to "spiritual expert" or "guru" or "seer". It is a very broad word for a spiritual expert of some sort and is not exactly the same as the Old Testament prophets but includes them as well. It is basically just someone with spiritual or ethical leadership based on insights and teachings. A false prophet is just basically a bogus expert on spiritual matters. They do not have to make prophecies about the end times, or have dreams and visions; they can just teach that which is wrong and lead the sheep astray.

## Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

These bogus spiritual experts are called 'wolves in sheep's clothing' this is Jesus quoting a well-known parable of Aesop.

(From <http://www.aesopfables.com/>) A Wolf found great difficulty in getting at the sheep owing to the vigilance of the shepherd and his dogs. But one day it found the skin of a sheep that had been flayed and thrown aside, so it put it on over its own pelt and strolled down among the sheep. The Lamb that belonged to the sheep, whose skin the Wolf was wearing, began to follow the Wolf in the Sheep's clothing; so, leading the Lamb a little apart, he soon made a meal off her, and for some time he succeeded in deceiving the sheep, and enjoying hearty meals.

## Moral: Appearances are deceptive

The false prophets are like the wolf in sheep's clothing and their real intent is to devour the flock. They have the appearance of sanctity but are inwardly greedy, manipulative and exploitative. Paul says that they will appear to be "ministers of righteousness" while in fact being servants of Satan.

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15 HCSB** *For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (14) And no wonder! For Satan himself is disguised as an angel of light. (15) So it is no great thing if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their destiny will be according to their works.*

**2 Timothy 3:1-7 MKJV** *Know this also, that in the last days grievous times will be at hand. (2) For men will be self-lovers, money-lovers, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, (3) without natural affection, unyielding, false accusers, without self-control, savage, despisers of good, (4) traitors, reckless, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it; even turn away from these. (6) For of these are those who creep into houses and lead captive silly women loaded with sins, led away with different kinds of lusts, (7) ever learning and never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth.*

Acts 20:29-30 HCSB I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them.

False teachers would not get too many followers if they told the truth such as: "I am just after your money" or "I am really just a fake who wants his ego boosted". They have to tell lies and make false representations and some of them are very good at it.

Generally speaking if someone is "too good to be true" or "too smooth" or "too perfect" then they are hiding something. Real people have visible faults and imperfections. People like the apostle Peter or Thomas are real people with real humanity. Fake humanity is the sign of an actor or a hypocrite.

Christians have to learn the difference between character and personality. Personality is the exterior mask that people wear. It is how they project themselves to others and is not their true self. Character is the deeper self. Some people with boring personalities can have great character and some people with wonderful personalities can be charlatans and rogues. Here in California the cult of personality is strong and religious fakes abound. We have to be a lot more careful about who we choose to follow.

## You Shall Know Them by Their Fruit

OK then how do we know true from false? Jesus says "you shall know them by their fruit". The fruit of the ministries of David Koresh and Jim Jones and the Reverend Moon is obvious - ruined lives. If a ministry clearly produces neurotic and bizarre individuals such as Scientology has with Tom Cruise, then that is a sign that it should be avoided. If a ministry makes people highly guilt-ridden and anxious and rigid and unnaturally conformist like the Jehovah's Witnesses does then you clearly have a problem. Or if there are massive family

problems such as with the polygamist Mormon fundamentalist break-away groups then you know you are not looking at a good tree with good fruit.

On the other hand if I go to a church and experience sound bible teaching and love and the people are normal and are free to be themselves and are growing in God, then that is good fruit. If the people go on to lead good lives and raise good families then that is a sign of good fruit in the ministry.

It can take some time to work out if a ministry has god fruit or bad fruit but there are certain warning signs:

## Attacks on Jesus and On God

All cults draw the person away from the truth concerning Jesus Christ ; this is done in a number of ways:

- (1) By denying Jesus Christ is God
- (2) By identifying Jesus with other bible characters or spiritual people e.g. by saying that instead He is the archangel Michael or Satan's brother conceived when the Father had sex with Mary.
- (3) By saying that Jesus was god with a small g and that we all can become god, as the Mormons (Latter Day Saints) believe.
- (4) By saying God is "The Force" or some sort of creating/evolving energy, not personal, does not possess the ability to love, forgive, hold judgment etc.
- (5) By saying Jesus did not come in the flesh but is instead a divine principle a Cosmic Christ or other such being.
- (6) By seeing Christ as just human nature achieving at top potential - human potential. we all have "Christ in us" and our job is to "get in contact with it" and achieve our inner potential. However this "Christ" is not a historical person
- (7) Jesus not historical - "Christ consciousness" is substituted for faith in a historical Jesus.
- (8) Jesus not God became the Christ when he attained Christ-consciousness at age 30.
- (9) Two Jesus theories - outer historical and inner mystical Jesus.
- (10) Jesus one of many ascended masters
- (11) Jesus just a good man, prophet or teacher.
- (12) Holy Spirit not God but a force emanating from God.

If a group teaches any of these things, then it is NOT historical, biblical Christianity. Such a group is not teaching the truth about God as recorded in the Scriptures and should be avoided by Christians.

## The Characteristic Behaviors of Cults

Cults are remarkably alike in that they exhibit certain "odd" behaviors in order to appear more spiritual than the truth and freedom that is in Jesus Christ. In the end though these "super-spiritual behaviors" are profitless and often make a person eccentric, bizarre and spiritually proud.

**1 Timothy 4:1-7 NASB** *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) by means of*

*the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (3) men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (4) For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; (5) for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (6) In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. (7) But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness....*

Our first four behaviors from the above passage are:

1. Involvement with spirits - which deceive them.
2. Forbidding marriage
3. Restriction on some foods
4. Ungodly Superstition

We see cults forbidding marriage, or arranging marriages or in the case of David Koresh claiming all women belonged to him. Most cults have some dietary restrictions and forbid certain kinds of foods, not out of common sense or health reasons but out of the desire to "be spiritual" or attain "energy" or to seem pure and exalted above the common lot of mankind. Thus people substitute food for character and handling for holiness. They think "I am good person because I do not eat pork" rather than "I am a good person because I love God and my neighbor." This leads to a false sense of spirituality that is so common in cults.

In his letter to the Colossian church Paul writes:

**Colossians 2:16-23 NASB** *Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—(17) things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (18) Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, (19) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (20) If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, (21) "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (22) (Which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) -- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? (23) These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*

Here Paul lists a few more behaviors associated with the false spirituality of cults:

5. Legalism - do not handle, do not taste, and do not touch.
6. False humility
7. Harsh treatment of the physical body taken as "purification"
8. Worship of angels and other beings
9. People getting into great details about what they have seen in the spiritual realm.
10. Enormous spiritual pride
11. Experience takes over; Christ is no longer central and no longer a source of life.

12. Emphasis on religious festivals, new moons and Sabbath days.
13. Their regulations appear to be wise but are in fact ineffective for restraining fleshly indulgence.
14. Self-made religion - worship made up by man rather than truly revealed from God and inspired by God

The apostle Peter also had a few words to say about this self-deluded form of worship:

**2 Peter 2:18-19 NASB** *For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, (19) promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.*

Thus we see that cults are frequently:

15. Boastful
16. Promises false "freedom" - many cults do this.
17. Appeal to the lusts of the flesh - a wise sales tactic
18. Slaves to sin and corruption

The final words must be with Jude the brother of Jesus who writes:

**Jude 1:8-16 NASB** *Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. (9) But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." (10) But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. (11) Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (12) These men are those who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; (13) wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. (14) And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, (15) to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (16) These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.*

19. Boastful to the point of rejecting all authority, even that of angels.
20. Pollute their bodies
21. Shameless
22. React abusively against whatever they do not understand.
23. Live by instinct and run headfirst into evil.

Some cults involve the promotion of the grossest immorality under the banner of "love-ins" and David Koresh's gross immorality was so he could "experience the depths of sin" for the

world. These 23 points cover most of the behaviors commonly associated with cults in Scripture. Any one of them should be a "red flag" to a Christian. When three or more of them are present, the group is almost certainly wandering away from the will of God.

## You Have To Walk Your Talk (Being A Great Communicator Is Not Enough)

After talking about good fruit and bad fruit Jesus goes on to outline the need for a godly life: Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Being very religious is not enough. Lip-service does not fool God. If you say "lord, Lord" then you should obey the one who you are calling Lord! Jesus makes quite clear that obedience is necessary when He says: but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Grace does not mean that you have a license to sin. You have to walk the talk. Some Christians seem to think that being a communicator is enough. That if they are good at witnessing or writing or the Internet and can explaining Christianity to others, then that is enough, so that God will be pleased with their communicating and they can go and have an affair or be greedy or proud or supercilious. Wrong! Christians have to walk their talk. Even if you have a television audience of twenty million people you still have to live a godly life. Many televangelists and Christian conference speakers live more like film-stars than saints. There are exception, people like Bill Bright and Billy Graham did both – they were a godly men and great communicators.

## False Miracles in the End Times

"On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' (23) Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!'"

These verses refer to the last days many bogus ministries will arise and do false miracles by the power of Satan. **2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 NKJV** *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. (9) The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, (10) and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (11) And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, (12) that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Satan is a great counterfeiter. He devises false teachers and false prophets (2 Peter 2:1), false apostles with false gospels (2 Cor 11:1-15) and false miracles (2 Thess 2:9). In the end times these will combine into a powerful deception that will even seem to threaten the existence of the church itself. Scripture states seven times that false miracles will mislead many (Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Thess 2:8-12, Rev 13:13,14, 16:14,19:20) and it seems that this will involve a large section of the world's population (the Greek word

for many has the connotations of a majority). Those deceived will believe that they are serving God in the name of Jesus when in fact they are "workers of iniquity".

Here is a "artist's impression" of what I believe this final deception will be like:

It will be breathtakingly spectacular with great wonders happening. Fire will fall from heaven to earth on command. People will be spectacularly and genuinely healed. There will be triumph over the forces of nature and a sense that a new "magical realm" has arrived on earth. It will appear to be a wonder-full breakthrough into the instant and easy life. Many people will talk of Utopia being realized and world peace a certainty. The Beast, an apparently benign dictator will appear to be both militarily and spiritually invulnerable. There will be a centralized rule of law on earth under him. The slogan will be something like "Peace through strength" ... "and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev 13:4) The world will sparkle with magic and dazzle the senses. God and Christianity will seem strangely irrelevant, morals as things of the past. The promise of instant gratification will over-ride everything and people will wonder and be in awe of this marvelous new age, its "promise" and its "freedom". It will suddenly feel OK to be selfish and wonderful to take part in magic. A false prophet will emerge who will at first appear to be saintly, lamb-like, and meek.. "He had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon." (Rev 13:11) He will win the trust of many. When all the world is convinced then he will lead them into worshiping the image of the Beast. People will follow first of all because of the cunning promises, then because of the great signs he performs and lastly out of the sheer power of economic compulsion. Then as blasphemy increases and Christians are persecuted God's judgments will be poured out on the Earth and the "magical kingdom" shown to be a powerless sham. Few will repent. Most will try harder in their magic and harden in their rebellion until on one day they all assemble at a place called Armageddon to do battle with God - and lose.

The false miracles at the end of the age will have one main object - the deception of the whole earth into following an idolatrous system of worship - "it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived;" (Rev 13:14) . The end-times religion will be both idolatrous and magical. Idolatry is the substitution of the creature for the Creator. Magic is any system that claims to give people access to God's power without having to accept God's will. This false religion, led by a false prophet will have enormous power and be able even to call fire to fall from heaven in the presence of all (Rev 13:13). The deception will be enhanced by appearing to have a superficial resemblance to Christianity (Matt 24:24) and may even use the name of Jesus in its magical formulas ... "have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" (Matt 7:22). The "masterminds" will be an "unholy trinity" - the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They will be potent sources of demonic spiritual power which will work false miracles. (Revelation 16:13-14)

The focus of this deception will be the world leaders; the deceiving spirits will "go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle....." However the net is a wide one and will catch everyone who is greedy for economic gain. "Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name" (Rev 13:16-17) . In fact unless God has written your

name in the Book of Life you will fall under this deception. (Revelation 13:8) It will be a multi-faceted assault on the Truth by the forces of evil. Paul describes it as "every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing," (2 Thess 2:10) there will not be a deception missing from Satan's plan -every kind of deception will be there! And prominent among all these deceptions will be "all power, signs, lying wonders," (2 Thess 2:9).

## Conclusion

Spiritual deception is alive and well on planet earth. It is practiced by everyone from the poor old Jehovah's Witnesses to Muslim suicide bombers to the government of North Korea and the cult of Kim Jon-Il. It affects hundreds of millions of people globally and will increase as we approach the End Times. We need to be aware of it and to be wise and very careful about who we choose to believe.

## The House Built On The Rock

**Matthew 7:24-29 MKJV** *Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. (25) And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded on a rock. (26) And everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them shall be compared to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. (27) And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the wind blew and beat on that house. And it fell, and great was its fall. (28) And it happened, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His doctrine. (29) For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*



**Luke 6:47-49 HCSB** *I will show you what someone is like who comes to Me, hears My words, and acts on them: (48) He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn't shake it, because it was well built. (49) But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The river crashed against it, and immediately it collapsed. And the destruction of that house was great!"*

### Introduction

Jesus tells us that He expects Christians to do what He says. The difference between the wise man and the foolish is not wealth or intellect or political power, it is that the wise man does what Jesus says and the foolish man does not do what Jesus says.

Jesus tells us that the security of our existence depends on what we do with what we believe. First we must believe Jesus' sayings, and then we must put them into action!

At one point in my university studies I did two huge biochemistry subjects in nutrition and exercise physiology. I know and believe a great deal about nutrition and exercise. I have the theory, but I do not often put it into practice, therefore I do not get the full benefits of what I believe.

To continue the exercise analogy; You do have to believe the right things first of all. If you believe that the five essential food groups are the chocolate food group, the caffeine food group, the barbecue food group, the pizza food group and the hamburger food group then you will be in trouble. But let's assume that you have the latest food pyramid guide and the diet books and the exercise books and the Bowflex machine and the exercise mat, a gym membership and a personal trainer. You may still be very unfit. You need to actually do the exercises and you need to actually stick to the diet.

So it is with spiritual things. In the Sermon On The Mount Jesus gives us guidelines for living healthy spiritual and emotional lives and we only get the full benefit if we put them into action. Theology is fascinating, but being fascinated is insufficient, we need to live it out in real life. Jesus wants us to live obedient Christian lives.

**1 Timothy 4:7-8 MKJV** *But refuse profane and old-womanish tales, and exercise yourself to godliness. (8) For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the present life, and of that which is to come.*

In other words just as some people exercise physically and gain benefit; the Christian should work at being godly and at obeying all the commandments of Jesus Christ. Obedient discipleship is not an optional extra for the super-Christians; it is required of all Christians and is what gives a solid foundation to our lives.

## Obedience Brings Stability

Jesus says that obedience to His words brings solid stability to our life that allows us to survive the shocks and storms of life. Let's look at some examples of how this is so:

1. Obeying Jesus instruction on forgiveness and kindness and mercy will allow us to keep our relationships so that our friends and family and they will still be with us during the tough times.
2. Obeying Jesus instructions on money will ensure that we are not materialistic or up to our ears in debt.
3. Obeying Jesus' instructions about lust and adultery of the heart will allow us to keep our marriages strong.
4. Obeying Jesus' commands about anger and rage will keep us from landing in hospital, jail or the morgue.
5. Obeying Jesus commands about oaths and vows will keep you from being trapped in foolish promises.
6. Obeying Jesus instructions on prayer brings blessing and answered prayer into our lives making it stronger.
7. Obeying Jesus commands about not judging and criticizing will save us from creating resentment in others and we will make friends and not enemies.
8. Obeying Jesus' instructions about the Golden Rule will make us good human beings who other people want to have around and the good we do to others will be returned to us seven-fold.
9. Obeying Jesus instructions to be careful about false teachers will keep us from being spiritually deceived and ripped off.
10. Obeying Jesus and going through the narrow gate means we will find eternal life.

In each of these ten things obeying Jesus leads to a stronger and better life, free from the hazards and snares that so many people fall into.

On to of this obedience brings real blessing so that God brings good things into the lives of those that keep His commandments:

**Romans 2:6-10 MKJV** *who will render to each according to his works; (7) indeed to those who with patience in good work are seeking for glory, and honor, and incorruptibility, everlasting life. (8) But to those who indeed disobeying the truth out of self-seeking, and obeying unrighteousness, will be anger and wrath, (9) tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man who has worked out evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Greek. (10) But He will give glory, honor and peace to every man who works good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

**Romans 8:28 MKJV** *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

**2 Corinthians 10:4-6 MKJV** *For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, (5) pulling down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ; (6) and having readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*

**1 Peter 1:13-16 MKJV** *Therefore girding up the loins of your mind, being sober, perfectly hope for the grace being brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (14) as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, (15) but according to the Holy One who has called you, you also become holy in all conduct, (16) because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

Let me be clear, I am not advocating salvation by works. Christians are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9) so that they can live obedient lives doing good and being holy in all their conduct for we are new creations, made for good works which God has prepared beforehand for us to do. (Ephesians 2; 10)

**Ephesians 2:8-10 MKJV** *For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.*

God did not redeem us from sins just so we could go on sinning! God saves us and redeems us with the expectation that we will go on to live righteous, godly and productive lives in all holiness and truth!

**Romans 6:1-2 MKJV** *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? (2) Let it not be! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

**Romans 6:22-23 MKJV** *But now, being made free from sin, and having become slaves to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life. (23) For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

God expects Christians to head towards holiness and blesses every step that we take in that direction!

## Disobedience Brings Instability

The contrast with house built on the rock is the house built on the sand, the people who hear Jesus' words and do not obey them. Jesus says that their lives will topple over with a great destruction:

1. People who give way to their lusts and addictions are soon enslaved by them and pay the price.
2. People who are dishonest or who do not manage their anger end up in trouble with the law.
3. People who commit adultery destabilize their family life.
4. People who unthinkingly join cults destabilize their spiritual life.
5. People who serve Mammon go astray from the faith and pierce themselves with many a pang.
6. People who are unforgiving and unmerciful find that God is unforgiving and unmerciful to them.
7. People who hate their enemies and engage in wars and feuds end up in endless conflict and litigation.
8. People who are judgmental and critical, mocking and scoffing end up foolish, isolated and disliked.
9. People who engage in hypocritical praying and fasting for public approval receive no reward from God.
10. People who choose the wide path that leads to destruction end up in Hell.

**2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 MKJV** *in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, (9) who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,*

The gospel has to be both believed and obeyed. One follows on from the other, for if you truly believe something then you will live by it and obey it. It will enter into your calculations about life.

People who are disobedient to the commands of Jesus Christ suffer the consequences both now and in eternity. The sort of people who get drunk, have affairs, gamble heavily, and follow various cravings and impulses end up with very unstable lives. Their health suffers, their emotions suffer, they end up in a financial mess, and lurch from one crisis to the next.

People who unleash their anger on others end up with broken relationship and wrecked careers and some even end up charged with assault like Russell Crowe did this week. Pride, envy and selfish ambition are monsters that create "disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16).

Sin leads to chaos and great vulnerability. Their lives are like a house of cards that is soon blown over by adverse circumstances. The stock trader Mark Leeson made foolish trades that sunk Barings Bank; everything came crashing down because there was no foundation there.

Judas Iscariot is a great example of how disobedience leads to disaster. His weakness was money. He liked it a lot and as the disciples treasurer he would steal from the common purse. Eventually stealing led to resentment of those who were generous and to the "wasting" of the ointment that Mary poured out on Jesus. And resentment led to rejection and revenge and the betrayal of Jesus so that Judas became possessed by the Devil, and committed suicide as the "son of Perdition". Judas' life fell apart because he chose a path of disobedience, rather than the path of repentance and faith.

Judas was there from the beginning, he heard all the teachings of Jesus and saw most of the miracles of Jesus and went on the short-term missions trips. Judas could have passed any bible college exam on the life of Christ with flying colors. But there was just one problem – Judas did not put his great knowledge of Christ into practice.

Instability comes from ignoring the plain commands of Jesus that you already know about. Instability comes because you decide it is easier and more pleasurable to live in sin. Look at the unstable and wild places on this planet full of gangs and terrorists – they are always places where the teachings of Jesus are not being put into practice. Then look at the stable, good, peaceful places on the earth and you will find places where many of Jesus' commandments are being obeyed.

## The Storm

"And the rain came down, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house."

The same storm hits both houses just as hard. The righteous and the wicked live in the same world. Perhaps these guys were neighbors. The storm hit both houses at the same time with the same intensity, and one stood firm and one crashed with a great downfall. Just because we obey Jesus it does not mean that there will be no storms. But if we obey Jesus we will always survive life's storms.

The storm contains rain, flood and wind which represent the three of the main stresses in life:

1. the steady rain of stressful small stuff.
2. The flood events of the rise of iniquity and of major social catastrophe.
3. The winds of changing times and intense spiritual attacks.

## Surviving the rain of small stuff

- a) We do not be anxious about anything but with prayer and supplication we make our requests known to God. (Philippians 4:6, 7)
- b) We reduce life's complexity by living quiet meek and humble lives and walking in the truth and thus dwelling in the peace that this brings. (Matthew 11:28-30, 1 Timothy 2:2)
- c) We walk in the Spirit by faith and have godly priorities that enable us to redeem the time and manage our lives. (Ephesians 5:15-20)
- d) We cultivate the fruit of the Spirit and the wisdom of God. And avoid the lusts of the flesh and demonic lower wisdom and stinking thinking. (Galatians 5:16-23, James 3:13-18)

## Surviving the flood events of the rise of iniquity and social catastrophe

- a) Faith - God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)
- b) Looking for signs of God at work in the situation - Come behold the works of the Lord! (Psalm 46:8)
- c) Peace - Be still and know that I am God! (Psalm 46:10)
- d) Hope - We cultivate an eternal perspective that knows this world is passing away and that such events are temporary. (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:7)
- e) Wisdom - We dwell among the righteous and in the place of the protection of God. (Psalm 16:1-6)
- f) Love God and Call On Him – (Psalm 91:14-16)

## Surviving the winds of changing times and intense spiritual attacks

- a) We know and can discern the times and can respond appropriately. (Ecclesiastes 8:5,6; Luke 12:56, 1 Chronicles 12:32)
- b) We put in the full armor of God. (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- c) Be alert and resist the Devil and all his tricks and schemes. (James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8,9, 2 Corinthians 2;11)
- d) Because we know our God we can be strong and do valiant exploits. (Daniel 11:32)

Life is difficult but if we obey the commands of Jesus we will develop the spiritual skills needed to survive life's storms. If we ignore Christ's commands we will not develop the spiritual skills needed in life but instead we will erode the very foundation of our existence.

We cannot get rid of stress, but we can live through stress and become better and more solid people inside. You can choose to be better or to be bitter. You can choose to be strong in the crisis, or to complain endlessly and rebel loudly. You can have faith that God will come through, or you can grumble against Him and be destroyed. If we obey the commands of Jesus we will react the right way when the trials come. We will be solid and strong, we will have the solid foundation of a life well lived and that will see us through.

## The Collapse

And it fell, and great was its fall. - When a wrongly built life collapses it is not just damaged, it is utterly ruined.

**Proverbs 24:16 HCSB** *Though a righteous man falls seven times, he will get up but the wicked will stumble into ruin.*

Proverbs makes much of this:

**Proverbs 11:3-8 HCSB** The integrity of the upright guides them, but the perversity of the treacherous destroys them. (4) Wealth is not profitable on a day of wrath, but righteousness rescues from death. (5) The righteousness of the blameless clears his path, but the wicked person will fall because of his wickedness. (6) The righteousness of the upright rescues them, but the treacherous are trapped by their own desires. (7) When the wicked dies, his expectation comes to nothing, and hope placed in wealth vanishes. (8) The righteous is rescued from trouble; in his place, the wicked goes in.

**Proverbs 11:27-28 HCSB** The one who searches for what is good finds favor, but if someone looks for trouble, it will come to him. (28) Anyone trusting in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.

**Proverbs 28:18 HCSB** The one who lives with integrity will be helped, but one who distorts right and wrong will suddenly fall.

## The Authority of Jesus

28) And it happened, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His doctrine. (29) For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus is not offering opinions, He is offering absolutes! Nor is Jesus offering carefully foot-noted and referenced academic treatise, He is speaking as the one sent from God, the expert, the one who truly knows the truth. The scribes were divided into schools of opinions over this or that and they tried to accumulate bits and pieces of authority to back them up. But Jesus simply spoke from God. His favorite phrase was "Truly, truly I say unto you". Not 'as Hillel says or as Moses says" but straight from Himself and from no other.

Here is Jesus speaking about the vast heavenly authority behind His sayings:

**Matthew 24:35 HCSB** *Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.*

**Mark 8:38 HCSB** *For whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."*

**John 5:24 HCSB** *"I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life.*

**John 6:63 HCSB** *The Spirit is the One who gives life. The flesh doesn't help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*

**John 8:31-32 HCSB** *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, you really are My disciples. (32) You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

**John 8:51 HCSB** *I assure you: If anyone keeps My word, he will never see death--ever!"*

**John 12:46-50 HCSB** *I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me would not remain in darkness. (47) If anyone hears My words and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. (48) The one who rejects Me and doesn't accept My sayings has this as his judge: the word I have spoken will judge him on the last day. (49) For I have not spoken on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a command as to what I should say and what I should speak. (50) I know that His command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."*

**John 14:23-24 HCSB** *Jesus answered, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (24) The one who doesn't love Me will not keep My words. The word that you hear is not Mine but is from the Father who sent Me.*

**John 15:7 HCSB** *If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.*

**Matthew 13:18-23 HCSB** *"You, then, listen to the parable of the sower: (19) When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path. (20) And the one sown on rocky ground--this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. (21) Yet he has no root in himself, but is short-lived. When pressure or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he stumbles. (22) Now the one sown among the thorns--this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the seduction of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (23) But the one sown on the good ground--this is one who hears and understands the word, who does bear fruit and yields: some 100, some 60, some 30 times what was sown."*

## Conclusion

The words of Jesus are serious words, they are spirit and they are life, they are words we must listen to and words we must obey. Only Jesus seriously claims to have words that will outlast the heavens and the earth. Only Jesus speaks the words that will judge us on the Day of Judgment. Only Jesus speaks words that bring eternal life.

These are the words that make us fully human, fully alive and fully spiritual, which is why I have devoted my life to teaching them to other people. These are the words, which if they abide in us, make it possible for our prayers to be answered and which make us fruitful and which set us free. These are not like the words of the newspapers which are here today and are burned tomorrow. These are the words of truth which we must hear and we must obey.

In the passage in Luke about the house on the rock it says "and he dug deep" to lay the foundation on the word of God. We have to dig deep into the Scriptures and study them, meditate on them, think about them and then apply them in our daily life. We have to move from ignorance to knowledge, from knowledge to understanding and from understanding to belief and then we need to put our belief into practice.

Think of playing golf, at first you are ignorant of even the basic rules of the game, then you gain knowledge, and after watching Tiger Woods on TV for a while you gain a little understanding, then you gain the belief that you might actually like to play golf. But you are still not a golf player. You have to pick up the clubs and get on a course. Then you play your first nine holes and wow its hard! The ball goes everywhere! It is not like Tiger Woods at all. So you get golf books and golf videos and you learn a bit, then you go out and practice a bit, then you correct that, and learn a bit more, and you practice again. There is this constant interplay between learning and practicing. That is just like the interplay between bible study and obedience. We learn a bit, we try it out, and we get puzzled, study a bit more, put it into practice and grow spiritually one step at a time. Our goal is not a perfect round of golf, but a perfect Christian life full of grace and glory.

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