

LIFE PRINCIPLES

OF THE
MASTER

Based on the
Sermon on the Mount
—Matthew 5, 6, & 7

David Wilson

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Section One

Matthew Chapter Five

THE BLESSINGS

Matthew 5:1–3. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed means “supremely blest; fortunate, well off.”¹ “Happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous—with life-joy and satisfaction in God’s favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions” (Matthew 5:3 AMP).

As the people gathered around Christ, He led them to a small hill that formed a natural amphitheater. There in the midst of His own creation, He began to teach the principles of the kingdom of God. The crowd gathered about Jesus no doubt expected to hear and see great things from Him this day, for Jesus’ teaching and ministry had already begun to create an excitement in Israel.

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. (Matthew 4:23–25)

No doubt for many the words of Jesus were a strange mixture of heavenly truth and warning, far different from what they expected. Instead of announcing the reign of the Messiah and Israel's rule over the nations, Jesus spoke of a kingdom of grace. His teaching was a challenge to the way in which religion was understood and how the Jews conducted their worship.

Jesus' words still challenge much of organized religion and its adherents today. The kingdom of grace was not a kingdom the people wanted or understood, but it was the kingdom He came to establish, and all those who would become subjects of this kingdom would know the blessings of heaven. He went on to reveal the errors of religion so common in His day—errors that prevail in the religion of men to our own day.

As you read this book (and perhaps follow along with the companion audio lecture series), you need to be praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance and a willingness to follow Christ's teachings. Like religious people in Jesus' day, we may have misunderstandings of God and of His Word. Therefore, if we want the blessings of heaven and eternal life, we need to open our hearts and minds to listen and to follow the teachings of Christ. Many in Jesus' day thought they knew better and held on to their false religion, and the outcome was tragic. For us to ignore or set aside the teachings of Jesus while claiming to be Christians will also end in tragedy. (See Matthew 7:21–23.)

In all of Scripture, the Sermon on the Mount contains the largest section of the teachings of Christ in His own words and His clear teachings regarding the principles of heaven. All of Scripture, of course, is inspired by God and is the word of God, but here in Matthew chapters five to seven we have the direct teachings from “the Alpha and Omega” (Revelation 1:11). Let us stop for a moment to hear heaven's voice to each of us individually, and strive to understand if the religion we are following is correct and if the blessings we think we have are truly of God.

The rewards and blessings Jesus was about to offer the people of His day, and that which He is offering today, are not the blessings men so readily and eagerly seek. They are rather a progression of Christian grace and experience. And they are obtainable

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only by grace through faith. Without these blessings received into our hearts and lived out by faith, all hope of eternal life is vain. To know the blessings of heaven is to know God.

This is what Jesus is offering you, dear reader, right now. Will you lay hold of these blessings for your own by responding to God's Spirit?

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”

When Jesus spoke of the blessings to be obtained through a relationship with Him and being transformed by grace, He was not speaking of a physical or financial blessing. Jesus was offering to mankind the blessing of happiness and joy.

Jesus told the people that the only source for the blessings we most desperately seek is in becoming subjects of His kingdom. The poor in spirit are those who know that there is nothing they can do to save themselves. The poor in spirit realize there is no righteousness in themselves. Therefore, they can fully appreciate the help Christ will bestow. These are the ones Christ declares to be blessed.

The poor in spirit are those who are not self-exalted, who are of a humble disposition. They are not filled with intellectual or religious pride. Therefore, they are willing to be taught by God's Word. The poor in spirit are not ambitious for the honors of the world, but through the transformation of God's saving grace are ambitious for the honors of heaven.

The poor in spirit are those who understand themselves to be insignificant in God's sight. They have humbled themselves before the Lord under the conviction and drawing of His Spirit and have received pardon and mercy. Religious fervor and zeal cannot obtain the blessings of Christ and the subsequent rewards. For the blessings Jesus offers come through developing Christian character, which is received only by faith, which is then wrought out in us by the Spirit of God.

Scripture Keys: The poor in spirit

The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

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He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. (Luke 1:53)

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (Isaiah 57:15)

The sense of our need, the recognition of our spiritual poverty and sin, is the first condition of gaining acceptance with Christ, for He declares, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” The recognition of our need is the work of God upon our hearts. The poor in spirit are those who have allowed the Spirit of God to bring to them a sense of their need of a Savior. It is righteousness by faith allowing God to humble us so that He can save us.

The poor in spirit have the ultimate riches, which is the hope of eternal life that Jesus has promised to all who believe. Throughout our Christian experience, the recognition of our need and the realization of our dependence upon Christ must deepen and grow. This poverty of spirit is contrary to our modern world with its attitudes of self-promotion and self-esteem, short-term self-gratification, and looking out for number one. The mind of the world is built on *me* and *self*. Though this attitude has often come into the church, the words of Jesus are still true: Only those who are “poor in spirit” shall be partakers of the kingdom of heaven.

The understanding and experience of being poor in spirit has been revealed in Revelation 3:13–22 as one that will largely be lacking in the church of the last days. Consequently, Jesus is represented as being on the outside of the door of our hearts and churches, asking for an entrance. This indicates that Jesus is not in the lives of a large number of professed believers.

In Jesus’ day there was much religion and worship, much profession of a belief in the true God. But it was all a delusion built upon the doctrines of men. Heaven’s answer to this delusion of the human heart, in Jesus’ day and ours, is to receive the blessings of Christ. This must start with being “poor in spirit.”

“Theirs is the kingdom”

The people of Israel longed for the kingdom of God, but most had a wrong concept of the kingdom and the work of the Messiah. Jesus’ teachings shattered the false concepts of His day. If we listen carefully, Jesus’ teachings may shatter some of our views and understandings as well. And we should welcome it, for Jesus has assured us, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

We must be born again, renewed from above, to receive this kingdom. Jesus declared, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The entrance into the kingdom requires a new mind, new spiritual perceptions, worked out in us by the mercy of God. For it is not “by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

The kingdom of grace in our hearts is also the evidence that our hope of eternal life will be realized. And “the kingdom of God,” which belongs to the poor in spirit, whose reliance is totally upon Christ, brings “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17). The poor in spirit, those who are filled with the Spirit of Christ, will with the eye of faith “look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). The poor in spirit are those who have been made righteous by Christ, for the Spirit has begun a work in their hearts that they might see their wretchedness and seek the righteousness of Christ. These are abundantly experiencing the kingdom of grace, the forgiving and enabling love of Christ within. To the poor in spirit, those to whom the promise of the kingdom is given, it is declared, “Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14).

The kingdom of grace with the knowledge of sins forgiven and hearts renewed to love and serve God, with the hope of eternal life through the merits of Christ, is the beginning of the kingdom, for the kingdom of God begins within our hearts. (See Luke 17:21.)

Matthew 5:4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

What kind of blessing is Jesus speaking of here? Is He really saying there is a blessing in the sorrow and pain of mourning our beloved dead? While Jesus looks with pity upon the mourners of this world gathered about their dead, the mourning that Jesus is speaking of here is true, heartfelt sorrow for sin and what it has done to God. This mourning for sin is the result of seeing our spiritual poverty and sensing our need. The blessing that Jesus offers us is a growing and deepening experience with God, not a pick-and-choose list of blessings. Therefore, in the true Christian experience, our conscience will become increasingly sensitive to the evil of sin and all that is contrary to the kingdom of Christ.

The words of Zechariah describe well the work of the Spirit that leads to mourning, which brings a blessing from Christ.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

Scripture Keys: Blessed are those who mourn

To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. (Job 5:11)

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. (James 4:6–10)

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Those who mourn have responded to the drawing of Christ and have become repentant and submissive. They grieve over their failures and errors because Christ is grieved. The blessed who mourn are those who are filled with the Spirit of Jesus. They now weep with Jesus in sympathy for the world's sorrow and suffering, and they mourn for the sins and rebellion of the world.

Those who mourn are not cast down and going through life saddened and depressed. No, not at all. Rather, they know the joy, happiness, and satisfaction of being in God's favor and love. They seek to be God's instruments for comforting and drawing others to the Father of all mercy, for they have known the blessings of Christ. Thus they can declare, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Scripture Keys: They shall be comforted

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1-3; see also Luke 4:18-19.)

Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to thy word unto thy servant. (Psalm 119:76)

The comfort Christ longs to bring is to those who are meek, those who have submitted to His drawing love. Jesus' comfort binds up the brokenness from the bitter disappointments that sin

inevitably brings. The comfort Jesus offers sets us at liberty, freeing us from the prison of our sin and guilt. However, the comfort of Jesus can only be experienced as we become poor enough to realize our need and sorrowful enough to want to be freed. To these the promise is sure, Christ will “comfort all that mourn.”

God’s Word offers comfort, and it is His merciful kindness that makes that possible. The comfort is not in men, in our feelings, or in our circumstances. The only true comfort in this world of sorrow is in the promises found in the Word of God.

The true mourners are those who have sought to be “delivered ... from the power of darkness.” The comfort they have known is to be “translated ... into the kingdom of [God’s] dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13–14). This deliverance is the comfort that all who mourn shall experience.

Matthew 5:5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are the meek”

To be meek means “mild of temper, not easily provoked or irritated, given to forbearance under injuries. Submissive to the divine will, not proud, self-sufficient, and apt to complain of divine dispensations” [or God’s dealing].²

The meek are not weak. Rather, the meek are strong in God’s sight, for they are submissive to the divine will and thus enabled by God’s might. The meek are gentle and forgiving. When reviled, they will not revile again. They manifest a teachable spirit and do not have an attitude of self-importance.

The one who is meek seeks the way of Christ and is emptied of self, pride, and love for supremacy. The meek yield to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They are not anxious to have the highest places and the applause of men, but realize that the highest place is a life lived in submission to the Savior. The meek look to Jesus, hearing His voice through His Word and following Him.

Scripture Keys: The spirit of the meek

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (Colossians 3:12-13)

Scripture Keys: The inheritance of the meek

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. (1 Peter 1:3-4)

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, it is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of

the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (Revelation 21:1-7)

The spirit of the meek is the spirit of heaven. This is why the meek will see the promise fulfilled, for the “meek shall inherit the earth.” In a world of selfishness and the striving for power and position, even among religious people, the meek have learned that real power lies in surrender and obedience to Christ.

In this world it may seem as if the meek get nowhere, for we live in an age when it is the powerful and proud and self-assertive who hold the keys of this world’s wealth, fame, and accomplishments. However, Jesus teaches that these things are all temporary. Only those who are submissive to God can be entrusted with an eternal inheritance.

Matthew 5:6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

“They which do hunger and thirst after righteousness”

For everyone with a truly converted heart, the relation to God and to eternal things will be the center from which all other aspects of life flow. This will lead us to sense the need of God in our souls. This hungering and thirsting is a desire to know and serve God more. It is an evidence that Christ is moving upon our hearts in order to draw us more closely to Himself.

The sense of our own unworthiness, and the desire for the love of God to fill our hearts, leads us to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and Jesus has assured us this desire will not be disappointed. If we open our hearts to Jesus, we can more fully experience His love. All who long to follow God and seek His righteousness will experience the satisfaction of knowing Him. If the hungering soul is kept fixed on Christ, the work of the Spirit will give us a capacity for an increased knowledge of heavenly things so that our hungering and thirsting souls might be filled.

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Scripture Keys: Hungering and thirsting

The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple. I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments. (Psalm 119:130–131)

I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight. (Psalm 119:174)

Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. (Psalm 73:25–26)

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. (Psalm 63:1–3)

The result of coming to know God leads to an even greater desire to know and love Him. This has always been the case with God's true children. Hungering and thirsting after God creates in our hearts a deep longing that both satisfies our soul in the Lord and yet leaves us desiring to know God more.

“After righteousness”

We are to be in pursuit of, and following and in search of, one thing above all others and that is the righteousness of God. This righteousness comes from being pardoned and forgiven, leading to a love in our hearts in which we desire to follow and be conformed to God's righteous law and Word.

With so much religion in the world today we often think people know and understand certain biblical terms. However, this is often not the case. Therefore, let us define the righteousness that the child of God will hunger for. *Righteousness* means “purity of

heart and rectitude of life; conformity of heart and life to the divine law. Righteousness, as used in Scripture and theology, in which it is chiefly used, is nearly equivalent to holiness, comprehending holy principles and affections of heart, and conformity of life to the divine law. It includes all we call justice, honesty and virtue, with holy affections; in short, it is true religion.”³

Scripture Keys: In pursuit of righteousness

The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord:
but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.
(Proverbs 15:9)

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth
life, righteousness, and honour. (Proverbs 21:21)

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after
righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.
(1 Timothy 6:11)

One of the signs of those who have been touched by the love of God is a righteous life lived by faith in the Son of God. This kind of life leads us to pursue a deeper relationship with God and to cast “aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,” and to “run with patience [consistence, endurance] the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Scripture Keys: They will be filled

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3:16–19)

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And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9–11)

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. (Colossians 1:9–11)

To be filled is to be satisfied, not with the transient things of this life or with superficial religion, but with a satisfaction that grows and deepens, for the satisfaction is in knowing the eternal love of God.

Matthew 5:7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

“The merciful”

In the days of Jesus, under the rule of the Roman Empire, mercy was often lacking. Often, even the religion of the scribes and Pharisees shut out the mercy of God from a person’s life. Certainly in our day it seems as if mercy is lacking in heart, home, and society. Much of the economic activity and so-called entertainment in this world is anything but merciful.

Jesus once again cuts against the grain of the prevailing experience in the world to offer us the joy and happiness and satisfaction of heaven’s blessings. Tenderness of heart, which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves, is what it means to be merciful.

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The merciful are “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), and in them the compassionate love of God is experienced in the heart and then expressed in the life. All whose lives are touched by the heart of infinite love, knowing God’s mercy, will in turn seek to reclaim lost souls. They will not merely condemn the sinner. The merciful have sympathy for the poor and the oppressed.

To be merciful is to treat others better than they deserve, just as God has treated us. God delights to show mercy. He is kind even to the unthankful and the evil. God’s Word teaches us “be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

Scripture Keys: Mercy an attribute of God

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children. (Psalm 103:17)

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. (Titus 3:5)

Scripture Keys: The effect of God’s mercy in our own lives

Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. (Psalm 18:35)

By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil. (Proverbs 16:6)

The mercy and forgiveness of God shown to us will have an effect on our hearts if we do not become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. God’s mercy is the power that changes our lives and brings the joy and peace that mankind longs for but rarely experiences. The mercy of God transforms us from sinners to saints, and the mercy we receive from God prepares us for an eternal inheritance.

Scripture Keys: God's mercy to be in us

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36)

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8)

Those who have known the love and mercy of God are changed by that mercy, and they reflect in their lives the merciful attributes of their Father. This is not something that is forced; it is the result of the mercy of God in our lives and a decision of the will to allow the mercy of God to fill us. Only then can we share it with those around us.

Matthew 5:8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

“The pure in heart”

Much of the world (and, sadly, even Christians) seeks life's blessings, happiness, joy, and satisfaction in things that are impure according to God's standards. Jesus once again cuts against the grain of the human heart by telling us the blessings of life that bring true happiness and joy and satisfaction come from being in harmony with God, leading to purity of thought, motive, and action. The purity of heart Jesus speaks of is to be free from sensuality and from lust.

If we are to know the blessing of purity, we must guard well the avenues of the soul, especially what we see and hear. For as children of God, there is much we have no right to be partaking in. This includes most all aspects of modern media and entertainment.

To be pure in heart is to have a heart purified by Christ. The pure in heart will be true to godly principles in their thoughts and in their motives, free from vain pride and self-seeking. The

pure in heart will have a dislike for careless manners, crude language, and impolite expressions. The pure in heart will have a tender conscience that does not compromise with worldliness and evil for the sake of entertainment or to please others. The pure in heart seek to please God and therefore judge things by the principles of the Bible, rather than by prevailing attitudes in the church and society.

Scripture Keys: Purity of heart and life

Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.
(1 Timothy 3:9)

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.
(1 Timothy 1:5)

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.
(Proverbs 15:26)

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. (Psalm 24:3-4)

The purity called for in these verses comes not from us; it is the gift of God received by faith in Christ. Apart from Christ our human purity is thus described: “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Proverbs 30:12).

Purity may seem old-fashioned today, for impurity is so common in the world around us. Impurity is even the basis of many parts of the modern economy. For the child of God, purity of life

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is not an option. It is part of our growth in Christian grace as we receive the blessings of heaven.

If we are pure in heart, our thoughts and our words will be pure, and we will live righteous lives. Then we will know the blessing Jesus promised: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Unless our hearts are pure and our hands made clean by the “washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5), we cannot discern and know the beauty of God’s character or hold communion with the Holy One.

Scripture Keys: How purity is obtained

Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.
(Psalm 119:140)

The word of God received into the heart, lived, and loved brings purity. In Jesus’ day religion could not make anyone pure, for ceremonies and rituals were powerless to change the heart. The religion of Jesus’ day, like much of religion today, relied heavily on the religion and teaching of men. In our day, with so many religions and so many supposedly authoritative guides to God, there is still only one true way: the Holy Bible. It alone, when received into the heart, can make a man pure.

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. (Hebrews 10:22)

The washing comes through the salvation brought to us by Christ, through His Spirit, which cleanses the heart and life, leading to a tender conscience. It brings purity into our thoughts and actions.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
(Psalm 19:8)

The righteous commandments of God written on the heart by the Holy Spirit in the new covenant experience will lead us to live lives of purity.

When reproved by God through the prophet Nathan King David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” ... “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer” (Psalm 51:10; 19:14). This will also be our prayer if we desire to know the blessing of the Lord. The blessings Jesus has for us will make us pure in heart; able to see and perceive the love of God now in our daily lives, and then face to face when “this mortal shall have put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Scripture Keys: They will see God

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. (Job 19:25–26)

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:1–3)

Unless we accept by faith the redeeming love of Christ, we cannot know God. Only those who have been “renewed in the spirit” and “created in righteousness and true holiness” can truly know the love of God (Ephesians 4:23–24). All other views of God are eclipsed by the errors coming from the teachings of men. To truly know God means to experience the blessings of heaven, leading to a pure heart that can more clearly understand the holiness and

goodness of God. All man-made religions leave us in sin to one degree or another. If we create a god after our own order, we will never be able to perceive and know the true love of God.

The Holy Spirit opens the truth concerning God and Christ to our understanding. The pure in heart see God in a new light as they have “received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). We need not wait for heaven and eternity to see God; we are to see Him now, as we know Him as our Father and friend. As He purifies our hearts by faith, we are to have a growing understanding and perception “that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Matthew 5:9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers”

Jesus’ blessing is not directed to the ambassadors and emissaries of governments who, over the ages, have sought to bring warring parties to peace. The peace Jesus speaks of is not simply the absence of war. The peacemakers are those who have been “justified by faith,” brought into “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). God has never been at war with us; it is mankind who has been at war with God, evidenced by an evil heart of unbelief and “alienated and enemies in ... [our] mind by wicked works” (Colossians 1:21).

Therefore only he who yields to the drawing of the Holy Spirit, consenting to renounce sin, and yielding heart and mind to the love of Christ, can become a partaker of heavenly peace. The child of God will live a life that will reveal the love of Christ. By our lives of commitment to Christ, by our words and deeds leading others to renounce sin and yield their hearts to God, we become peacemakers. This shows we are the children of God.

Hatred cannot exist in the heart of him who has known the love of God that “passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and who is at peace with God. He whose life is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven. By a peaceable and godly life, he will make the peace of heaven known to others.

Scripture Keys: How to obtain peace

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 15:13)

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:2-4)

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Romans 14:17)

Scripture Keys: We are to make effort to have peace

Let him turn away from wickedness and shun it, and let him do right. Let him search for peace (harmony; undisturbedness from fears, agitating passions, and moral conflicts) and seek it eagerly. [Do not merely desire peaceful relations with God, with your fellowmen, and with yourself, but pursue, go after them!] (1 Peter 3:11 AMP)

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)

We cannot seek peace by pursuing just any spirituality or religion that seems best to us or suits our ideas. Though we may think we have peace in so doing, this is a false peace. The lack of peace in our hearts is due to sin and our estrangement from God. Therefore, only a peace that comes from God will lead to God. In addition, only “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds.” And notice the source of all real peace: It is “through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Scripture Keys: The children of God

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:1-3)

In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. (1 John 3:10)

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:1, 4)

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children. Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. (Ephesians 5:1, 10)

As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance. (1 Peter 1:14)

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45)

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. (John 1:12)

We become true children of God as we become united with God in Christ. We are then brought into peace and harmony with God in our hearts and minds and actions. Religion can never accomplish this. It could not do so in Jesus' day and cannot do so today. The convicting work of God's Spirit brings to us a sense of our need or spiritual poverty. And the only one in all the universe who can heal us is Jesus; therefore, all the adherents of religions that seem so peaceful have only a human-developed peace. What we need is the peace of heaven, and this comes only as we become adopted and transformed children of God.

The teachings of Christ were of a most startling nature. They still are today. The Jews, because of their apostasy and sin, had long been an occupied nation, as they had been many times over the centuries. As Jesus spoke, the Roman Empire was in control and was the dominant power in the world. When zealous Jews sought to rise up and overthrow the yoke of bondage, they were brutally repressed. No doubt the people thought they were being persecuted. But Jesus declared that there is a blessing in persecution. Oh, how strange were these words of Jesus.

Matthew 5:10–12. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

As we seek by word and deed to present the love of Christ, and as we teach the Word of God and set forth before the people the righteous standard of God, we are bringing the light of heaven into Satan's kingdom of darkness. He is moved to resist us, and he uses other men to accomplish his purpose. Therefore, persecution and reproach to some degree will be the experience of all who have the Spirit of Christ. The nature of the persecution may change with

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the times and the circumstances under which we live, but the principles that lie behind the persecution are the same ones that have slain the children of God ever since the days of Abel.

Jesus is saying to us, “Child of God, I understand all that is unappreciated and misrepresented by men. All My children, no matter how much maligned and reviled, can rest in Me as your vindication and righteousness.” Jesus also promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

Scripture Keys: Blessings for the persecuted

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. (John 15:18–20)

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12)

The blessing here is not for all who are persecuted in this world because of race, religion, or political affiliations or views. No, the blessing Christ is promising is for those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, those who are partakers of the blessings of heaven and whose hearts are changed thereby. They are the righteous who will know the blessing of heaven in the midst of persecution. As Christ’s followers come into harmony with God, they will find that the opposition to the cross has not ceased. Principalities, powers, and wicked spirits in churches, in government, and in society high and low will stand against all who seek to yield themselves in loving obedience to the laws of Christ’s kingdom. Therefore, rather than causing grief, persecution for righteousness’ sake should be a source of encouragement to the child of God, as they follow Christ in the narrow way to the kingdom.

Scripture Keys: Persecuted for righteousness

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. (1 Peter 3:14–16)

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. (1 Peter 4:14–16)

Scripture Keys: How persecution is manifested

Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words. (Jeremiah 18:18)

Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (John 12:42)

The slander of enemies and supposed friends may injure our reputation, but it cannot stain the hidden man of the heart, which is fixed upon Christ and His word. We may be cast out of churches and homes; however, no human authority or satanic power can separate us from Christ. Though our words, motives, and actions may be misrepresented and falsified, and our work and influence curtailed

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thereby, as we rest in Christ with a conscience void of offense, we can be at peace. Like Moses, we may endure our afflictions as “seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27) as we by faith look “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Endnotes

1. James Strong LL.D., S.T.D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).
2. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).
3. Ibid.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND INFLUENCE

God's intention for the people of Israel was that they would be a light shining in a dark world. Through living out the high and holy principles of God, Israel should have been far in advance of the nations of the world in moral integrity and social advancement.

God's intent in blessing Israel was that they would in turn be a praise to Him and a blessing to one another, shining the light of God's truth throughout the world.

Sadly, Israel fell into apostasy and idolatry very quickly after the exodus from Egypt, and they continued to do so in varying degrees for hundreds of years. After the Babylonian captivity, Israel was largely broken from following the idolatry of the nations around them. However, the idolatry of the nations became the idolatry of human opinion which caused Jesus to declare, "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7). The Jews had become exclusive and bigoted and had failed to be a witness to the world around them of the love and mercy and goodness of Jehovah.

Many churches and Christians today have failed in their task to let their lights shine. They have become self-centered, satisfied with building up their own churches and leaving the world around them to perish. Many make a profession of religion and attend religious services while the heart is unchanged. The grand truths of God's Word are not actively sought out and brought into the heart and life.

Jesus' words to the Jewish church still ring out to the church in the twenty-first century.

Matthew 5:13. Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

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You are the world's seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. (Matthew 5:13 TLB)

What will happen to the world if Christians lose the grace of God in their lives? This is a pertinent question. The advancing apostasy and worldliness seen in churches throughout the world is the result of Christians losing their savor. The world itself, which to some degree is to be kept from its continual moral fall by the influence of Christian witnesses, is becoming worse and worse. This is the result of the lack of the grace of God in the hearts of professed believers.

The words of Christ present not only our privilege and duty as Christians; they also give us a startling warning of what our fate will be if we become like salt that has lost its flavor. The teachings of Jesus are not given so that we can pick and choose to follow the ones we like at our own convenience. They are life and death. To be religious without following the words of Christ will leave us outside the kingdom of God.

“Ye are the salt of the earth”

Christians who are purified through the truth possess saving qualities derived from their relationship to the Father. This is what keeps the world from total moral corruption. The true believer influences the world by living a life that is influenced by heaven's principles. By our words, deeds, and character, we act as a preservative in a world of moral darkness.

When the love of God fills the heart, it flows out to the world. God's love is the motive for our actions. His love in us forms and influences the character, which is our thoughts and feelings, and therefore our actions. As we know and experience the love of God, it will influence our entire life and affect those around us. Only the love of God in us can make us the salt of the earth.

Scripture Keys: The salt of the earth

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Colossians 4:6)

The speech of true Christians, who are under the influence of the Spirit of grace and following biblical principles, will be different from that of the world around them. Their speech comes from the heart that is under the guidance of heaven. In the speech of a Christian, there is “neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Ephesians 5:4).

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:14–16)

For we are the sweet fragrance of Christ [which exhales] unto God, [discernible alike] among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. (2 Corinthians 2:15 AMP)

The knowledge of Christ lived and shared is a preserver of morality in the world. This influence, if rejected, will ultimately lead to eternal loss.

“If the salt have lost his savour”

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. (Mark 9:50)

The salt losing its flavor represents the life of every professed believer in whose life the power of God has departed. To such a

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person Christ says, “I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:15–16). The person who makes a profession of faith in Christ but lacks the grace and power of God is still religious outwardly, but has little or no influence in the world for heaven. They have lost their spiritual connection with heaven; thus, their influence is not a savor unto life. They have become dull or stupid in regards to their condition and spiritual things. This was the condition of many in Jesus’ day. Sadly, it is the condition of many today as well.

Without a living faith in Christ as Redeemer and King, it is not possible for us to have a saving influence. As Christians, we are to “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). We cannot give to others that which we do not possess ourselves. If there is no true service for Christ, and no sincere love for Him, we cannot have a genuine Christian experience.

Unless the Holy Spirit can communicate the truth of Jesus to the world through us, we are like salt without flavor. We make the Word of God of no effect. This tragic experience is the result of ignoring the blessings of heaven, for only as we partake of the blessings Jesus offers can we truly be His disciples. Without the blessings of Christ received into the heart and experienced in the life, we will have a religion that is devoid of the saving influence of heaven.

“Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12). As salt must be kept away from impurity, so it is with us. By God’s grace we are to be delivered “from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Galatians 1:4). If we yield to the evil around us, it will overwhelm us. We will then be Christians in name only, having become like the impure world around us. We will be like salt that has lost its flavor. “It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” (Matthew 5:13).

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Matthew 5:14–16. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Scripture Keys: The source of light

For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (Psalm 36:9)

No individual or church can be a light bearer for heaven unless they have known the light that proceeds only from God, and His Word.

For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life. (Proverbs 6:23)

For us to receive light and share that light, we must receive the word of the Lord as our guide. The doctrines of men cannot bring the light; they are only darkness. Further, we must accept the counsel and rebuke of the Lord for ourselves so that the darkness of error and sin may be cast out of hearts. Then we can be lights in the world.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:4, 9)

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

God is the only source of light; therefore, for us to let our light shine is to allow the love and peace of heaven to be in our hearts.

As Christians, all our light is derived from Christ, for we can only be reflectors, much as the moon has no light of its own. We are

dead in trespasses and sins, but when the love and light of Christ shines into our hearts, we are turned into a channel to reflect the light of the Son.

The light is not ours; it is derived from God. So when we shine, it is not us but it is “Christ [who] liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“Ye are the light of the world”

As we receive the light of truth and the love of Christ, we become channels to reveal God to our fellow men. We become like a city set on a hill. Christ desires to communicate, through His disciples, heaven’s light and grace to the souls who are in the darkness of sin and error regarding God and are therefore ready to perish. To the degree that we fail to let God’s light shine in and through us, to that degree will the world be deprived of the light and influence of the truth and love of God.

This was the great tragedy of the people in Christ’s day. They had a profession of religion and the truth, but had no light to give. They had a religion based on the doctrines of men rather than on the light and truth of God. Today many are following in the same pathway.

Scripture Keys: Letting your light shine before men

The light of the [uncompromisingly] righteous [is within him—it grows brighter and] rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked [furnishes only a derived, temporary light and] shall be put out shortly. (Proverbs 13:9 AMP)

And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday. (Isaiah 58:10)

Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse

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nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.
(Philippians 2:14–15)

By seeing the good works of believers, the world will be led to know that there is a God in heaven. God's true children reflect His light to draw others to the knowledge of God. The light of God in us gives the world a glimpse of heaven so that they may appreciate the love and mercy of God.

The light of heaven is revealed in the trials of life patiently borne, the gifts of heaven received with thanksgiving and praise. When temptations are resisted and the meekness, kindness, mercy, and love of Christ are revealed in our lives, we are like lights in the world to glorify God. The life and light of the Christian is to be seen in contrast to the darkness of the selfish heart, in contrast to the man-made light of false religion. Living a life in darkness is to live a life centered in self and sin. Those who live to themselves are separated from the light of Christ, and they will find in the day of judgment that their lives will end in darkness.

Scripture Keys: Giving glory to the Father

Let your light so shine before men that they may see your moral excellence and your praiseworthy, noble, and good deeds and recognize and honor and praise and glorify your Father Who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16 AMP)

Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.
(Philippians 1:11)

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. (Romans 4:20–21)

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

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If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. (1 Peter 4:14, 16)

We glorify God when we receive the light of truth into our hearts and that light changes and transforms us. A life lived for God, which seeks to follow His way in a world of darkness, gives Him glory. When we allow Christ to live in our hearts by faith and live lives of kindness, we are glorifying God. When we love God enough to keep His commandments in a world that is following moral relativism, we glorify God. When we share the gospel and warn the world of its danger and its obligation to God, we give Him glory, and His light is shining in us.

My friend, there are only two kinds of religion in the world: one of faith and experience that comes from the true God and leads to Him, and the darkness of man-made religion in all its forms. The Jewish church had the light of God's word, the prophets and the patriarchs, the knowledge of God, and the plan of salvation. But their light had been placed under a bushel of human creeds and traditions, and the Jewish nation and the world were darker because of it.

What about the church today? What about you and me? Has our influence become like salt that has lost its taste? Has our light become darkness? Sadly, for many, the answer is yes. But there is hope, for Jesus spoke these words not only to warn the Jews of long ago but us as well. And in the warning is also an invitation to receive light and love from God. "Then spake Jesus again unto them [and unto us], saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

THE LAW MAGNIFIED

Throughout this study we have seen how the words of Christ have challenged us and the organized religion of our day. It was the same in Jesus' time. His teachings were a radical departure from the religion of men and the religious institutions common in His day. Christ was the foundation of the whole Jewish system, and He sought to sweep aside the traditions and precepts of men that had obscured and to a great extent buried the truth of God. As the truth of heaven was made known in the life and teachings of Christ, the people thought He was sweeping away the truth they believed in, not knowing they were largely following error and tradition. Jesus sensing their unspoken thoughts, said:

Matthew 5:17–19. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

“I am not come to destroy the law”

Jesus lived a life of holiness in fulfillment of the law, and His fulfilling the law did not mean abolishing it. The portion of the law that pointed to Him as the Lamb of God (the sacrifices and offerings and types) was fulfilled and accomplished in His ministry. The moral law was lived out and amplified in His life. The truth of heaven was so distinct from the commandments and traditions of men that men thought the truth of Christ was in error and their traditions were the truth. It is the same today with individuals and churches

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who claim to believe in God and in His Word but deny both so that they may follow their creeds and the teachings of men. As it was in Jesus' day, the truth seems strange, and a lie a pleasant thing.

“Shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven”

Will the transgressor of God's law get to heaven, and there be treated as the least in that kingdom, in a humble and lowly position? No, not at all. For God will not save the disobedient. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived” (1 Corinthians 6:9). In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus makes very clear His meaning regarding the fate of those who break His law. They are, “least in the kingdom of heaven.”

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matthew 7:21–23)

Iniquity is lawlessness and sin, breaking the commandments of God. Those who live this way despite their profession to love God will be outside the kingdom, not having any part in the reward of the redeemed.

Some who are zealously religious believe and teach that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding if the Spirit leads us. However, we need to ask what spirit is this? It cannot be the Spirit of Christ, for of His Spirit we read, “The Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (Hebrews 10:15–16). Further, we learn that those who become children of God are the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you,

and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2). He who disobeys God’s law and by word or example teaches others to do the same is a traitor against God’s kingdom. Jesus says of such that they “shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). This means there will be no place in God’s kingdom for them as they are transgressors of God’s law, and no transgressors are admitted into the holy city.

Can we rationally think that in God’s eternal kingdom, he who breaks God’s commandments, and whose teaching by precept and example leads others to also break God’s commandments, will be in heaven, though in an inferior state? How can the obedient be with the disobedient in heaven?

If ever there was a group of individuals who broke God’s law and taught others to do the same, it was the Jewish religious leaders. And did Christ flatter them with the hope of heaven as they lived in disobedience? Jesus gives the answer. He says that their righteousness was not sufficient to enter heaven. (See Matthew 5:20.) While appearing outwardly righteous, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9), Jesus said they were as “whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27).

Elsewhere Jesus said that the religious leaders were filled with murder in their hearts and thus under Satan’s rulership. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Jesus also said their worship of God was vain. Simply put, it was useless, of no value. They laid aside God’s law for their tradition, and Jesus gave no indication they would be saved.

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, full well ye reject the com-

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mandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, honour thy father and thy mother; and, whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, if a man shall say to his father or mother, it is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:7–13)

Some may think the Jews whom Christ addressed would not believe in Him, that is why they were lost and considered least in the kingdom of heaven. “But I have faith in Christ, therefore I am saved and will go to heaven, keeping God’s law is not as important as having faith.” Let’s hear the words of the apostle Paul. “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31). Paul further declared:

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:1–4)

It seems apparent that faith in Christ and walking in the Spirit will lead to the righteous requirements of the law being lived out in us by faith. Paul clearly says that the carnal, unregenerate person is not only unfit for heaven, but is also a lawbreaker, which shows that he is really a hater of God.

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is en-

mity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (Romans 8:6–9)

Jesus teaches that all who by their life or teaching disobey the law's requirements will be "least in the kingdom of heaven." Being least in this context means being lost. This applies equally to the professed believer and to those who do not believe.

Matthew 5:20. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

"The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"

Imagine if Jesus came into our churches today and declared to the congregations, "Except your righteousness exceeds that of your priests, your pastors, your elders, and your apostles, you will not enter into heaven." We look to our religious leaders as an authority on religious knowledge and as examples of spiritual attainment. "If our religious leaders will not make it to heaven, what chance is there for us?" we might say. This was no doubt the thought of the Jews as Jesus spoke these words. However, we need not despair. Christ is not trying to keep us out of the kingdom. The problem with many is that the religion of men has been substituted for the Word and standards of God. And no man, be he leader or led, will enter heaven following his own standard of righteousness.

Christ has provided abundantly for our salvation. There is only one way to heaven: Christ, our righteousness. And there is only one truth: the Word of God. All the supposed righteousness men can obtain outside the righteousness of Christ, and any truth held on to that is not the truth of God's Word, will lead us in the wrong direction, and we will be lost in the end. Despite the religious leaders' pretensions of piety, their human inventions and ceremonies

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and performance of the outward requirements of the law could not make them holy. Indeed, no human works, no matter how sincere or religious, can make any man righteous before God.

Why can man, in his religious zeal, not make himself righteous? A legal religion of forms and ceremonies, even if correct, is insufficient to bring the soul into harmony with God. The rigid religious orthodoxy of the Pharisees was lacking in humility of heart and sorrow for sin, and in love toward others. Their religion knew nothing of the love and mercy of God and was a stumbling block to sinners.

Jesus set forth the true way of heaven in contrast to the religion prevailing in His day. The religious leaders had no power to preserve their own hearts from moral corruption, and their lives could exert no saving influence in the world, for they did not have true love for God and saving faith.

With many of the Jews, their service for God was in reality a religion of self. Even the righteousness they sought for and thought they had was the result of their own works. They thought they were keeping God's law, yet it was based on their own standards and ideas. They turned the holiness of God's requirements to their own selfish benefit. In their endeavor to make themselves holy, they were trying to "bring a clean thing out of an unclean" (Job 14:4). This religion was a failure then, and it will be a failure for all who follow it today.

Jesus declared that human righteousness obtained by rigidly adhering to man-made laws and traditions would not merit for any man the blessings of heaven. This was the religion that made up the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It was insufficient to obtain salvation in Christ's day, and it is still insufficient today.

Yet despite Jesus' warning, many people are trusting in mere human righteousness. Paul declared that this righteousness was of no value, even though performed with great zeal. "All these things that I once thought very worthwhile—now I've thrown them all away so that I can put my trust and hope in Christ alone" (Philippians 3:7 TLB).

We need to make plain what the religion of the scribes and Pharisees was all about, for it is often repeated in one form or an-

other among the religious adherents of the world and, sadly, among many Christians as well.

Whereas Israel, though ever in pursuit of a law [for the securing] of righteousness (right standing with God), actually did not succeed in fulfilling the law. For what reason? Because [they pursued it] not through faith, relying [instead] on the merit of their works [they did not depend on faith but on what they could do]. They have stumbled over the Stumbling Stone. Brethren, [with all] my heart's desire and goodwill for [Israel], I long and pray to God that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a [certain] zeal and enthusiasm for God, but it is not enlightened and according to [correct and vital] knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness that God ascribes [which makes one acceptable to Him in word, thought, and deed] and seeking to establish a righteousness (a means of salvation) of their own, they did not obey or submit themselves to God's righteousness. (Romans 10:2-3 AMP)

Today many have religious dedication and enthusiasm for God just like the Jews in the days of Christ. But zeal, while commendable, is not sufficient to obtain salvation for anyone. For if religious fervor and sincerity could save even one man, Christ need not have died. We need hearts and minds that are enlightened and transformed by the Spirit of God according to His word, the Holy Bible.

Despite a world full of religious people, the understanding of most, including many Christians, is one where man is seeking to establish a righteousness of his own. However, acceptance with God cannot be found in "having mine own righteousness, which is of the law [or any other religious practice], but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9). Receiving the righteousness of Christ results in a life submitted to His will, following His word and obeying His law. When we are covered by the righteousness of Christ, we will receive the blessings Jesus talked about in the first few verses

of Matthew chapter 5. Then we can have the righteousness that will give us an abundant entrance into heaven.

Scripture Keys: False righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees

Christ, at various times in His ministry, sought to reveal to the people the errors of their religious leaders, to whom they looked as the voice of God. In the following verses we can see more clearly the nature of the religion of the scribes and Pharisees, which to a great degree is still the religion of many today. Friend, if this is your religion, may you hear the words of Jesus: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Only those who recognize their sinfulness and make Christ their sufficiency shall obtain the righteousness of God and have entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (Matthew 3:7–9)

Seeing the popularity of John the Baptist, the Pharisees came to be baptized by him. Rather than being convicted of sin, they thought this act would increase their influence and make other men think more highly of them. John warned them they must have the spirit of repentance, which would be manifest in changed lives. It mattered not, he said, that they had a fine religious lineage or belonged to the right church. They needed a righteousness like that of Abraham, for Abraham believed, trusted in, and leaned on God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. This heartfelt humility and trust in God were sadly lacking in the religious leaders and those who followed them.

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For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. (Luke 7:28–30)

Who is “the least” that Jesus is speaking of here, who are considered to be greater than John in the kingdom of heaven? It is those who responded to the Spirit’s drawing and the preaching of John that brought conviction to their hearts, leading them to repent of their sins and receive the baptism of repentance. The Pharisees refused to repent and acknowledge their great need of God’s righteousness. John’s preaching brought conviction to the honest of heart. But the Pharisees held the commandments of men above the Word and commandments of God. This led them to grow ever more self-satisfied, and their hearts became harder and harder. Thus, they were unwilling to accept the saving truth of Christ, the Son of God. They would have no place in heaven, for in transgressing God’s law and rejecting His righteousness, they would not be there, for they “rejected the counsel of God.”

In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. (Luke 12:1)

The religion of the Pharisees was that of hypocrisy. They thought and acted as if they were God’s children, but they were living a lie. In heart and life they were far from God. They refused to follow God’s way in deference to their own way. Friends, nothing has changed. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees is still the religion of many today. And unless we repent and come apart from this hypocritical religion, we will be lost.

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But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. (Matthew 23:13)

The religion of the Pharisees is alive and well in our day. Its adherents refuse to humbly submit to the ways of the Lord. Even worse, those who are under the convicting Spirit of God, desirous of something more than church membership and human attainment, who turn to the Lord with all their hearts, are often discouraged and turned aside and brought back into the bondage of mere human religion by misguided religious leaders.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23:25, 27–28)

A religion that is confident of God's acceptance merely because of an outward form of godliness, while the power of love and conversion are missing, is like a well-kept graveyard. Man's religion is like many cemeteries: beautiful on the outside, yet filled with death, devoid of the saving life and love of God. It is without the life-giving love of God that is seen in a life that is pure and a heart that hungers to please Him. The religion of the Pharisees appealed to the mind, but did not have the power of God to change the heart or save the soul. This religion excludes the inner working of the Spirit upon the heart, which leads to a transformed life, therefore within we "are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matthew 23:28).

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sep-

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ulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. (Matthew 23:29–31)

Honoring the truth outwardly, while not following the truth from the heart, is the same as honoring the memory of the dead prophets while ignoring the truths the prophets taught. This was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Truth must be lived and imparted to others. Apart from that, it loses its life-giving power. If we do not bring the truth into our hearts and lives by God's grace and strength, we merely honor dead prophets with our lips while in our hearts we have the same spirit that killed the prophets.

Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. (Luke 11:43)

To be thought well of by other men, and to be seen as religious in the eyes of others, was the religion of the Pharisees. In contrast, Christ's way comes from God, and in love serves God and our fellow men, all to God's glory, not our own. Jesus said, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

Scripture Keys: True righteousness

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

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We are clearly told here we are to seek God's righteousness. But is that not what the Pharisees were doing? The problem lies not in the seeking but in the method of obtaining righteousness. With the religion of the Pharisees, "though ever in pursuit of a law [for the securing] of righteousness (right standing with God), actually did not succeed in fulfilling the Law. For what reason? Because [they pursued it] not through faith, relying [instead] on the merit of their works [they did not depend on faith but on what they could do]" (Romans 9:31–32 AMP). If the scribes and Pharisees were seeking righteousness in the wrong way, how are we to obtain righteousness?

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. (Psalm 51:1–3)

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3–7)

Righteousness by faith has been the means of salvation from the fall of Adam, and it will continue to be so until the end of time. It is solely the work of God upon our hearts and can be accepted only by faith. It requires the humbling of man and his pride so that God can do for him what he cannot do for himself. The great controversy between Christ and the people of His day, particularly

the religious leaders, was between the faith that leads to God and the man-made religion that leads away from God.

Having exposed the pretended righteousness of His day and the futility in following the commandments of men, Jesus now teaches what it means to rightly keep the commandments of God as a result of experiencing the righteousness of God by faith.

Matthew 5:21–22. Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

“Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time”

Thou shalt not kill. (Exodus 20:13)

When Jesus came along teaching the simple but far-reaching nature of the law and the prophets, the religious leaders thought He was doing away with the standards of God. The problem was not with the law but with the manner in which the religious leaders interpreted it, then perverted it and taught it to the people.

Christ taught that the commandments are exceedingly broad, and they penetrate to the very motives that control our hearts. Jesus started with the sixth commandment because men tend to think, *As long as I do not take a person's life or transgress the commandments outwardly, then I am keeping the law.* Jesus went much deeper in exposing the sins of men. He taught that we are guilty of violating the commandments by the attitudes and thoughts we have.

“That whosoever is angry with his brother”

Those who indulge in anger or resentment, bitterness or jealousy, are opening their hearts to Satan. All these attitudes must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven's law. For killing another is not just the taking of life; it includes

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the emotions and thoughts that violate the spirit of the moral law. The religion of the scribes and Pharisees appeared outwardly righteous but was inwardly corrupt. In their thoughts and emotions, they were guilty of the sin of murder. This was not a new commandment that Jesus taught; rather, it was the truth of God rescued from the rubbish of tradition and human religion, for the Old Testament taught, “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: ... thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Leviticus 19:17–18).

Whoever allows malice or unkindness in their heart is given heed to Satan’s spirit. When a revengeful, bitter, or jealous thought is dwelt upon, the sin of murder lies hidden in the mind. Therefore, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15).

We stand condemned by the law of God, not only for our actions but also for our thoughts. The Word of God declares, “They which commit such things are worthy of death.” This applies not only to those who transgress the law in thought and action, but also those who “have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:32). Much of the entertainment people enjoy in the form of movies, TV shows, and various games transgress God’s law. The themes of these games and programs are largely based on the sins of men. To claim to be a Christian while taking pleasure in that which is a violation of God’s Word makes a lie of our profession. Unless we repent we shall be found outside the kingdom of God with “murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Revelation 22:15).

Oh, how many who profess to know and love God will someday be arraigned before the judgment seat of God to hear that they are lost, for they have been guilty of the sin of murder.

For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.
(Ecclesiastes 12:14)

“Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca”

The word *raca* is of Chaldean origin and means, “O empty one, i.e., thou worthless (as a term of utter vilification).”¹ Whoever speaks scornfully to his brother with an attitude of religious superiority is also in danger. For in the gift of Christ for our redemption, God has shown how high a value He places upon every human being. We must remember that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). Since mankind can only be saved by God’s grace, we have no right to speak in contempt of another human being for whom Jesus died. Jesus’ words declare that God will hold us accountable for every word spoken in contempt of another.

“Whosoever shall say, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire”

We all do foolish things at times. And sometimes people need to be rebuked with firmness. But Jesus is not speaking of the common foolishness of man here; He is referring to a specific term of contempt: to think in our minds or to say with our mouths, “You cursed fool! [You empty-headed idiot]!” (Matthew 5:22 AMP). The words that are spoken, which proceed from contempt and hatred in our hearts, reveal our soul’s lack of the grace of Christ. Therefore Christ is warning us that we are in danger of eternal damnation unless we repent.

Matthew 5:23–24. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

“First be reconciled to thy brother”

Many are zealous and earnest in their religious services, yet strife exists between them and their brethren. These are not simply differences of opinion, but differences that lead to anger or bitterness. The teaching of Christ demands that such things be reconciled. God requires us to do everything in our power to restore harmony. Until we do this, He cannot accept our religious service. And why not? If we cannot get along with our fellow men, whom

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we can see and interact with, we cannot get along with God, whom we have not seen.

Matthew 5:25–26. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Jesus is speaking here of issues of law and moral obligation. As believers we must meet our moral and legal responsibilities, and not try to hide behind legal barriers to avoid our just debts or moral duty. Rather than putting others in the position of having to seek the redress or the help of courts, we should honor our word and meet our obligations, and with prayerfulness and Christian integrity settle our issues out of court. It is wrong for Christians to be so careless in their affairs that others feel the need to seek redress against us in the courts of the world.

As believers we should live “having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:16).

Matthew 5:27–28. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time”

Thou shalt not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)

“Thou shalt not commit adultery”

“In common usage, adultery means the unfaithfulness of any married person to the marriage bed. In a scriptural sense, all manner of lewdness or unchastity, as in the seventh commandment. Idolatry or apostasy from the true God.”²

“But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her”

Lust means “to have carnal desire; to desire eagerly the gratification of carnal appetite. To set the heart upon, i.e., long for (rightfully or otherwise).”³

“Hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”

The heart Jesus speaks of here means, the “thoughts or feelings.”⁴

When thoughts of evil are dwelt upon, even though done privately in the secret recesses of our mind, it reveals that sin still has the mastery of our heart. If we find pleasure in that which is impure in God’s sight and allow ourselves to indulge in lustful or sensual thoughts, we can see in the open sin of another, with all its loss of respect and reputation and heartache, the true nature of the evil that we have hidden in our own thoughts. Our sins, whether committed outwardly or merely in thought, will condemn us as transgressors of the law of God.

Today, exciting love stories and impure pictures are common. Music videos and TV shows display images that defile the imagination. Novels based on sensuality are eagerly read by many. Photographs, magazines, and calendars showing females in various states of nudity are readily found on sale, and such images are even used to advertise everyday products. Corruption is rampant. But the child of God cannot accept these things. We must diligently avoid them. The words of the psalmist are especially true today: “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me” (Psalm 101:3). If we do not hate these images of lust and passion and seek to avoid them, we will end up committing adultery, if not in outward action, inwardly in our hearts. Familiarity with evil and sin will, to one degree or another, lessen our regard for heaven’s standard of purity and truth.

Matthew 5:29–30. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that

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one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

“Pluck it out, and cast it from thee”

Sin, and our own desires that are contrary to God’s will for us, can have such a stronghold that putting it away seems as great a sacrifice as cutting off the hand or plucking out the eye. Yet if our conscience has been aroused enough by God’s Spirit that we know something is wrong or questionable, it is better to make the sacrifice and do what is right. Though the cost of obedience and doing right may seem high in comparison to the immediate benefit to be gained by continuing on in our own way, it is better to cut off the hand or pluck out the eye.

The child of God has to guard well the avenues of the soul to avoid the prevalence of evil so common in the world today. This will involve inconvenience; it will also mean being misunderstood by those who do not recognize the evil. It will involve avoidance and turning away. It will take great effort for the child of God to remain pure in a world of sin. But no one except those who are made pure in heart by the grace of Christ shall see God. (See Matthew 5:8.)

To those around you it may appear as if you are cutting off much of what makes life a joy, but is it really? Living for God is the only source of true joy and happiness. So let the world think you are cutting off eye and hand. But let your heart be filled with the love of Christ, leading you to guard the eye of your understanding and guard your hand, which is your actions, seeking the knowledge of God so that you may have the favor and joy and blessings of heaven.

Many who heard Jesus were beginning to understand that the law of God should be obeyed in spirit as well as in letter. Jesus’ hearers were starting to see the difference between the righteousness of God and that of their religious leaders. Jesus amplified three of the commandments and explained the depth and breadth of their re-

quirements, and His magnification of these three commandments applies to the whole of the moral law. Christ's teaching exposed the fatal mistake of the Jews who thought outward obedience was enough. Further, the example of Christ's obedience to the law in heart and life, in principle and in letter, aggravated the religious leaders who followed merely human traditions.

Matthew 5:31–32. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

“It hath been said”

When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. (Deuteronomy 24:1)

Human laws made marriage simply a contract that could be ended at will, and women were often nothing more than property, to be cast away at any time. This is still the case today in some cultures. Because of easy divorce laws, either party can end their obligations. Many people just live together with no legal obligation to each other, and without joining in a covenant promise before God. Relationships of this order are adultery in the eyes of heaven. Remarriage, apart from God's standard being met, is also adultery, whether or not it is recognized as such by churches or society. Jesus raises this issue again in more detail in the following verses.

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause

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shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. (Matthew 19:3–9)

Divorce is not the will of God, but the manifestation of the hardness of the human heart. Jesus was seeking to bring His hearers back to God's ideal standard and will. When we enter into marriage we are not simply making a promise between a man and a woman. As Christians, we are making a covenant promise to God. God intended man and woman to enter into marriage with prayer and due regard for the solemnity of such a partnership. There is much in marriage, and in the subsequent family that is brought forth, that God intends to use to teach us about His love and His kingdom. Therefore, to divorce and remarry for any reason (other than adultery and unfaithfulness by one of the partners) is wrong in God's sight.

As in Jesus' day, the reasoning of men seeks to undo what God has said. In casting aside God's Word, even the Christian community is reaping the sorrow brought about by the breakup of home and family, and by entering ill-advised marriages that are not based on God's Word.

Matthew 5:33–36. Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself [swear falsely], but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time”

And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:12)

If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:2)

That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth. (Deuteronomy 23:23)

“Swear not at all”

The people of Christ’s day had added to many of the teachings from God’s Word, or subtracted from them, inserting the ideas and teachings of men.

Christ taught that our words, and the intent those words convey, should be from the heart, and rationally and intelligently spoken. We need not make great oaths or claims in the performance of our promises. It is common for people to lay claim to their belief in or relationship to God as the proof that they will do such-and-such. In Jesus’ day it was common to “swear by the altar,” to “swear by the temple,” or to “swear by heaven” (Matthew 23:18–22). However, when we make an oath as a pledge of our sincerity, using the name of God or something belonging to Him, we swear by that which is not ours.

Jesus taught that one whose words do not express the real attitude of his heart, even though he uses impressive oaths, cannot be called truthful. Jesus goes on to explain how we should speak.

Matthew 5:37. But let your communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

“Let your communication be yea ... nay”

The speech of a child of God should be truthful. Truth is of God, and deception in any form is of Satan. People like to speak with an oath to add authority to their claims; however, it often hides their deception or inability to perform what they say. As a Christian, “your word is enough, to strengthen your promises with a vow shows that something is wrong” (Matthew 5:37 TLB).

Indeed our words should be simple and straightforward, for as Christians we have no need to impress people or appear to be what we are not. Often, while our words may sound impressive and apparently exhibit strength of character, more often than not they reveal weakness of character. This is why Jesus said, “Whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matthew 5:37).

Scripture Keys: The speech of a Christian

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. (1 Peter 3:10)

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29)

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. (Ephesians 5:3–4)

In these few verses of Matthew chapter 5, Christ shows us the difference between the righteousness of human religion and the righteousness of God. Further, He briefly but compressively shows us what it means to keep the commandments of God. It is the re-

flection in our heart of the righteousness of God made possible by a living faith. My friend, I pray you will not be satisfied with mere human religion and attainments, but that you will seek the righteousness of Christ as your own, for without this, all hope of eternal life is vain.

Endnotes

1. James Strong LL.D., S.T.D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).
2. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).
3. Ibid.
4. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, op cit.

CHRIST'S TEACHINGS ON HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Matthew 5:38–39. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

The Jews in Jesus' day were highly concerned with "It hath been said." This is true today as well. We are more concerned with hearing what others say about God's Word than with studying the Word of God for ourselves. We accept the teachings of the pastors, priests, and bishops of the various churches and denominations rather than following God's Word. Like the Jews, we have the truth, but it is wrongly applied.

The Word of God loses its life-giving power when it is perverted by the teachings of men. Jesus sought to undo the tangled web men had woven around the clear teachings of Scripture. Dear reader, will you allow Jesus, through His word and by His Spirit, to untangle the web of human religion that may be hindering your understanding? I pray so.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said"

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying.... And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. (Leviticus 24:13, 19–20)

"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"

This provision in the laws given through Moses was a civil statute. People overlooked this and twisted the Scriptures to justify revengeful thoughts or actions. However, no one is justified

in avenging himself or herself, saying, “So-and-so has done this to me, and I must get even.” Jesus’ teaching condemns the honor killings that take place in some countries, or in seeking to get even with someone you believe has wronged you. In fact, even the thought of such things is wrong in the eyes of God. The Word of the Lord declares, “Say not thou, I will recompense evil. . . . Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work” (Proverbs 20:22; 24:29).

Here again was an example of Jesus clearing away the rubbish of human opinions and practices to exalt the truth of Scripture. Christ is still working through His Word and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to sweep away today’s erroneous human opinions and practices. This is why the Sermon on the Mount is still Christ’s voice speaking to us in the twenty-first century. It matters not if we quote the Scriptures to justify our false actions or attitudes, for Scripture wrongly interpreted or applied gives us no justification in God’s sight for our wrong. More often than not, using Scripture to justify a wrong is simply the result of a heart that is not converted and that still loves sin.

The spirit of revenge is the spirit of the world, and whether or not the laws of the land bring the evildoer to justice, the child of God who is a partaker of the heavenly kingdom cannot seek to exact revenge. For the law of the kingdom declares, “Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:17–19). Paul is teaching the same principles as Jesus. By the grace of God renewing our lives, we are to live peaceably with others, regardless of what they do to us, exhibiting the principles of the kingdom of God in our lives.

“Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also”

In Christ’s teachings, we have noted His consistent concern for our thoughts and motives, not just our outward acts. Rather than having a spirit of revenge, the law of Christ’s kingdom calls

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for submission to God's will. We are not counseled here to invite persecution or physical assault. Rather, Jesus is dealing with the emotions and thoughts of the heart, which must be brought into harmony with the laws of the kingdom. In Jesus' day, to follow Him was to enter the straight and narrow way, and this is still the case today.

Let us note two verses from Isaiah's prophecies concerning Christ's example.

I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6)

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

Jesus, by His own example, is saying, "When you are abused for living for Me, do not exact revenge, but turn the other cheek by turning to Me and submitting to My Spirit and way." We cannot use force and the strength of might any more than Jesus did. "Well," you might ask, "does this mean we should allow ourselves to be assaulted and abused?" Let us turn to another example of Jesus and the apostle Paul.

And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? (John 18:22-23)

While Jesus did not fight back, He did remind the people that their actions were out of place and contrary to Jewish civil law. Here we find Jesus upholding the law of justice yet not fighting for His rights that had been so badly trampled.

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But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. (Matthew 10:23)

Here Jesus is teaching us not to stay in situations where we will be unable to avoid persecution. Rather, we should look for areas more conducive to sharing the gospel. Yet, like in Jesus' day, there may come a time when persecution is unavoidable. In those situations we are to rest in the love and care of God rather than fighting our persecutors. "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:14).

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them. (Acts 22:25-30)

But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. (Acts 25:9-10)

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Paul used the laws of the land to secure his just rights as a Roman citizen. But when the laws of the land and the laws of God are abused and set aside, we can only flee, as Christ told us to do. We can use the laws of the land to defend the right, but when this fails, we, as children of God, cannot fight on the level of the unconverted. We must flee or turn the other cheek, and rest our case with God, as both Jesus and Paul did.

Matthew 5:40–41. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Is Jesus saying that if we are sued, rightfully or wrongfully, for one thousand dollars we should hand over two thousand? No. He is not telling us to voluntarily give more than required, but rather not to resist, even when the law goes beyond its requirements.

Why would Jesus say such a thing? “Jesus,” you might say, “don’t You know we have rights and laws?” We are to be children of the King. But when we are fighting for our rights, we often lose sight of the rights and privileges of being children of God. God can, if He wills, restore to us just as fast as others can take away. What is important is to maintain our integrity in following the dictates of God’s will.

Jesus teaches that we are not to resist the demands of those in authority, even when more is required than is fair or right. So far as is possible, we should perform every obligation laid upon us, even if it goes beyond what the law of the land requires.

In Jesus’ day the Jews were an occupied people, and it was not uncommon for the Romans to demand the common citizens to do things for them. This was a galling thing for a freedom-loving people. Many wanted to protest and shout and resist, but that would get them nowhere, and it might make things worse. Jesus is telling us to do something very hard: to submit to Him and take the unfair burden and do it willingly as unto the Lord. Today there are many incidences in our lives that are of a similar nature. It is then that we must take up our cross and follow Jesus. This is

a test for us, and one that is often difficult, yet it is the way of the kingdom.

Matthew 5:42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Now, here is a challenging statement! I lived for many years in a third-world country where there was a significant amount of poverty, laziness, and irresponsibility. If I were to take Jesus' words literally, I would have found myself unable to meet my own obligations or to fulfill my calling from God. I would have been so busy giving money, time, and resources to those who came in a steady stream that my real work would have been eclipsed.

I personally struggled with the words of Jesus as I began to help people, usually strangers who came and asked for help. Soon the word got out and more people came. What was I to do with the words of Christ? I was in a dilemma. As I prayed, the Lord allowed me to see that most of the giving I was doing was to those who were being deceptive and manipulative. You see, there is a dual obligation here. The obligation of the giver is to be kind and tenderhearted, not exacting usury to take advantage of another's misfortune. The obligation of the borrower is to repay his debts. The one who asks for charity is not to do so dishonestly. And he who gives is to do so as unto the Lord, not with pride.

The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth. (Psalm 37:21)

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother. But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)

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The teachings of Christ do not condone carelessness in our giving. Rather, as Luke records it, He is teaching us to be as our Father in heaven, who is kind to all. “But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36). Christ is simply teaching us to have a spirit of kindness rather than self-centeredness, with a spirit willing to give according to the needs presented and our own ability to meet those needs.

Matthew 5:43–44. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.

The word *neighbor* here is referring to one of our own class, race, or religion. Jesus is teaching that our love should not be constricted, for heaven’s love takes in the whole world. As Christians, who might our enemies be, or what is their attitude toward us? The word itself means “foe, an adversary; one who hates another and wishes him injury, or attempts to do him injury to gratify his own malice or ill will.”¹ As Christians, we should not have any enemies so far as the attitude of our hearts. Yet in this world of sin, the true child of God will have enemies, often unknowingly. The law of the kingdom of Christ is that we are to treat our enemies with kindness. That cuts against the grain of our natural heart and emotions, yet it is the way of the cross.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said ... hate thine enemy”

Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Nevertheless the Lord thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, be-

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cause the Lord thy God loved thee. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever. (Deuteronomy 23:4–6)

When God made this prohibition, the Moabites had not simply opposed Israel but God Himself. It was not meant to be a commandment to hate everyone who opposes us. Even God does not do this. But people took God's words and applied them wrongly. Jesus was in no wise undoing the teachings of the law or the prophets, for He was teaching the principles found in the Old Testament Scriptures. He sought to set forth the truth in opposition to the false ideas of men. Men in Christ's day, as in ours, twisted the Scriptures to support their own ideas or to excuse their sins. They misapplied the Scriptures, and Jesus sought to undo their falsehoods.

Scripture Keys: Loving your enemies

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. (Proverbs 24:17–18)

I should have denied the God that is above, if I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul. (Job 31:28–30)

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. (Romans 12:14)

“Bless them that curse you”

“Oh, Jesus, You are just too radical! How can we live this way? What You are teaching is not realistic.” No doubt these were the thoughts of many in Jesus' day. And it is the opinion of many to-day. We do not come out and say, “Jesus, Your words and teachings are not reasonable.” Rather, we simply profess the name of Christ and then do not follow what He says. The teachings of Christ are the ways of heaven, and we are men and women of the earth. Yet

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by the grace of God and the renewing of our minds, the principles of heaven are to supplant in our hearts the principles of the flesh. “Set your affection [mind] on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2–3).

Instead of cursing those who injure us, or wishing them evil, we should seek to win them from their evil ways, even as Christ treated with kindness those who persecuted Him. We should exercise Christian courtesy toward all we come in contact with, even those who may be our enemies. “Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is honest and proper and noble [aiming to be above reproach] in the sight of everyone” (Romans 12:17 AMP). So far as our attitude and actions, “if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Romans 12:18). As children of God we should represent the spirit that rules in heaven. Our actions toward our enemies should not be of the same character as the world. A spirit of revenge or bitterness has no place in the heart of a Christian.

Christ would have us love those who oppress us and do us harm. We must not express in words or actions the spirit they manifest. Yet while we are required to be Christlike toward our enemies, we should not, in order to have peace, cover up the faults of those we see in error. To be kind to the unthankful is a mark of heaven’s influence in our lives and shows that we are the children of God. Therefore, regardless of the lies, the slander, the loss of property or influence, or the persecution that comes from the hands of our enemies, we are never to have the same spirit or act in the same way toward them.

Matthew 5:45–48. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even scoundrels do that much. If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:46–48 TLB)

Scripture Keys: Attributes of those who are children of the Father

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children. (Ephesians 4:32, 5:1)

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”

The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. (Luke 6:40)

The perfection of character called for here is to treat others as God has treated us, with grace and forgiveness. We will not be exclusive in our favors or affections to only a select few, and then ignore and despise all others. Rather, the child of God will treat all who come under his influence with kindness.

Like our Father, we can never give hate for hate, ill will for ill will. This may seem like suffering, yet we are told that “the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,” will allow us in this life to “have suffered a while.” Why does He allow this? God desires to “make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

The religion of “they said” is the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. The religion of the doctrines of men is in contrast to the way of Christ. What will it be in your life, my friend? The way of heaven or the religion of men? One leads to eternal life and the other to eternal loss. Choose wisely, for your happiness in this life and your eternal destiny are dependent on whether you follow Christ or the religion of men.

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Endnotes

1. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).

Section Two

Matthew Chapter Six

TRUE AND FALSE WORSHIP

Matthew 6:1–2. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

“Do not your alms before men, to be seen of them”

With many of the Jews it was customary to perform their deeds of charity in a prominent manner. They sought to make known their giving in public. To facilitate this false show of charity, announcements making known their generosity were made. Large gifts were given in order that men might praise them; their desire was to be seen and known by others as generous and righteous.

Is this same attitude in existence today? I have seen various churches and civic groups giving special donations to hospitals, orphanages, and the like on TV. How did the network find out about their charitable work? It appears the station manager was called in to advertise the good work of the giver.

I have seen people go forward in churches to give their donations for building projects, and shouts of amen and applause break out for the larger gifts. This makes those who have little to give ashamed to give, for their small gifts will not attract the attention and praise of the people.

Men of means will give to a hospital, school, or church with the understanding that some plaque or other such public acknowledgement will identify them as the donor. Others receive honorary

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degrees and memberships to prestigious organizations simply by virtue of the size of their gifts.

Are not these and similar public displays of giving the same as what transpired in Christ's day? And why? The spirit of the Pharisees is the spirit of unregenerate human nature. And the religion of unregenerate human nature is a religion of outward forms and ceremonies to be seen of men.

In all our acts of charity, the motive or purpose should not be to secure the praise and honor of men. The true children of God will not make their good works an opportunity for display to receive praise. Those who desire the flattery of men in order to build up their own reputation are Christians in name only.

Jesus spoke to the crowd gathered about Him on the mount and warned them against giving merely for the honor and praise they might gain. He taught that those who bestow their gifts so that they may receive the praise of men would have no reward in heaven because their giving was not prompted by the love of God in the heart. They gave to secure the reward of worldly honor and approval rather than to glorify God. Therefore, the only reward they would have is the praise of men.

The teaching of Christ shows that no offering of money or property can gain for us merit or right standing with God. We cannot earn righteousness by any good works we can do.

Matthew 6:3-4. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

The children of God should act from heavenly principles. Our giving should be motivated by wanting to bring glory to God and to help our fellow men. Sometimes the motive in giving is selfish. While this manner of giving may achieve its intended purpose, it is not acceptable to God. Whether recognized or not in this world, all our giving should be from a heart that desires to help because it's the right thing to do, and doing right is pleasing to God.

Matthew 6:5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

The Pharisees had special times for prayer. When the appointed time came, they would stop whatever they were doing, whether in the street or the market or any public place, and give their formal prayers in a loud voice. This worship, offered in self righteousness or to merit God's favor, was condemned by the teachings of Christ.

Jesus often had to make plain in the minds of His hearers the difference between the religion of men and the religion of God.

To help us understand the teachings of Christ here in the Sermon on the Mount, let us look at Matthew chapter 23.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. (Matthew 23:5–9)

“They make broad their phylacteries”

Phylacteries were small cases containing certain Scripture passages, worn during prayer on the arm and on the forehead. This was a man-made perversion of God's word, done to attract attention and to be seen as holy and pious. True obedience to God has no need of outward show. The real evidence of a spiritual life will be made manifest by transformation of character, leading to works that please God.

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And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. (Deuteronomy 6:5–8)

The Jews, in their misguided zeal, took these words and made them into a command that the precepts of Scripture be worn. However, God's intention in this command in Deuteronomy chapter 6 was for the people to open their hearts to receive the love of God, which will be manifested in willing and loving obedience as God's law and principles become our own by faith. This relationship of love and trust will be made known as our thoughts and actions are guided by heaven's principles, thereby guiding our family and home life; in short, entering into every aspect of our lives. That is true worship. But the Jews had substituted the commandments of men and apparent outward piety for real love and service to God. Therefore, their religious service, from almsgiving to prayer, became a show of mere human works devoid of the love of God.

“And love the uppermost rooms at feasts”

It was customary at feasts and other social gatherings for guests to be seated according to their social and financial standing in society. Those accounted most highly were seated accordingly and were attended to and given special favors. The Pharisees were very desirous of these honors, sometimes even scheming to receive them. Whatever our social attainments (or lack thereof), the child of God is to seek the benefit of others and the glory of God, not the recognition of social standing. Those who neglect the blessing of heaven Jesus first offered at the beginning of His teaching on the mount will seek instead the blessings that come from the praise and religion of men.

“And to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi”

But be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ. (Matthew 23:8–10)

Christ is teaching here that no man is to place his spiritual interest under religious leaders, to be guided and directed by the mind and will and decrees of another. From the days of Christ to our own, many people put more confidence in the spiritual leaders of their churches than in God and His Word. We are to look to God alone, as our Father and spiritual guide and authority. All men are but servants of the great God and King.

The practice of looking to spiritual leaders as ones of authority in the place of Christ has led to a desire for ecclesiastical superiority, which puts men in subjection to other men. This spirit will always result in spiritual injury to those who have been addressed as “father,” and to those who put undue trust in such religious leaders. This practice confuses our understanding regarding the authority of God.

Jesus rebuked the vanity of the religious leaders who loved to be called Rabbi, meaning “master.” He declared that such a title did not belong to men, but only to God. Priests, scribes, and teachers of the Word of God were all brethren of those they led and taught, all children of one God. Jesus taught the people that they were not to give anyone a title of honor that would indicate that he had any control of their conscience or faith or was somehow superior to them in matters of religion or standing with God.

If Christ were on earth today, surrounded by the religious teachers of our age who are called Reverend and Right Reverend and Father and Vicar, He would surely instruct us, as He did the Pharisees, “Neither be ye called masters; for one is your Master, even Christ” (Matthew 23:10). Often those who take these titles are greatly lacking in spiritual wisdom and true righteousness, and contradict the honored titles they possess. Titles such as Reverend and Father often become a cloak to hide worldly ambition, false-

hood, and sin. Many religious leaders lord it over the people as if they were somehow special and to be more esteemed than other men. But Jesus taught a different way. “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:11–12). As children of God, we must think for ourselves, study the Word of God for ourselves, and have a relationship with God for ourselves. We are not to be in spiritual subjection to any man or church, for we have one head, and that is Christ.

Matthew 6:6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

“But thou, when thou prayest”

In the name of Jesus we may come into God’s presence in faith. No human being on earth (or supposed saint in heaven) is needed to act as a mediator on our behalf. In the private place of prayer, we can pour out our inner desires and longings to the God of infinite love and mercy.

Christ invites us to take to Him our joys and burdens so that we may experience His sympathy. We are to take to Him our sorrows so that we might receive His love. In prayer we may take our weakness to Him so that we might receive His strength, and our empty souls can be filled by the fullness of His love. We are to seek God in secret, telling Him of our needs and pleading for His help. And we will not pray in vain.

Neither on the mount nor at any subsequent time did Jesus or His disciples ever teach us to look to or pray to Mary. We do not need the help of Mary or the saints to approach God for His grace and favor. This teaching is not found in the Bible.

Prayer is a call to intimacy, and as with any human relationship, intimacy and companionship is a private affair. Thus it should be with our prayers to God. Our prayers, even if in public, should not be to draw attention to ourselves. Neither should they be set formal prayers, for Jesus teaches us:

Matthew 6:7–8. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Vain repetitions are that which is “worthless; having no value substance or importance. Empty, unsatisfying; deceitful, not genuine; showy, ostentatious; empty, unsatisfying, not effectual.”¹

Men can pray one of two types of prayer, the prayer of religious form and custom often accompanied by set words and repetition, and the prayer of faith that comes from the heart. The offering of prayer when the heart feels no need of God is formal prayer. This can come from prayer books or memorized and formal responses. We should be careful in all our prayers to speak only that which is on our hearts and what we really mean. Neither the eloquence of formal prayers nor the length of the prayer has any merit in itself.

Our prayers can be vain repetitions if they do not express the longings of the heart. We should ask our Father and friend for His kindness, favor, and enabling grace, believing He desires to answer our petitions when praying according to His will. This is the prayer of faith.

Jesus’ story of the publican is a good example of a prayer. He felt his need as a sinner, and his great need motivated the cry from his heart: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

The heathen often look upon their prayers as having merit to atone for sin and recommend them to deity. Thus the longer the time spent in prayer, the greater the merit. People today fall into the same trap. This leads some into cloistered monasteries, where hours each day are spent in formal, repetitive prayers. It leads others to long prayers, where God is addressed in a shouting, demanding way that would even be insulting if it were spoken to men.

The idea of prayer being a means of gaining merit with deity is found in many systems of false religion. The Pharisees had taken as their own this pagan idea of prayer, and it is still prevalent today, even among professed Christians. The repetition of set, customary

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phrases from prayer and worship books, or from memory, is often of the same character as the “vain repetitions” of the heathen. This would include praying the rosary, speaking in tongues, and prayer of any kind that does not come from an understanding heart. We would never speak to another person in such a formal and repetitious way. Why should we speak to God this way?

When Jesus condemned “vain repetitions,” He meant words continually repeated without careful thought or proper understanding. We are to realize we are addressing the God of the universe. Even with all our zeal, God cannot be honored with the careless, unmeaning repetition of many words.

I did not grow up in a religious home, but at the evening meal it was customary for us to recite, “God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food, amen.” While those words were true, they were said, at least on my part, with no true knowledge of God. This prayer was merely vain repetition because it did not express the desires of the heart with understanding.

Jesus rebuked the wrong attitudes regarding prayer that prevailed in His day, much of which still take place in one form or another.

Jesus goes on to explain what it means to pray correctly.

Matthew 6:9. After this manner therefore pray ye: our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Christ did not teach us how to pray in order that we might repeat these words without understanding so they become another vain repetition. His intent was not to teach us the words to use in prayer but to show us the attitude and focus of our prayers. Christ intended that our prayers should be simple, and with earnestness, and from a heart that recognizes its need and turns to the God of heaven as our Father, who will help and sustain us.

“Our Father which art in heaven”

In coming to God as a Father, we acknowledge our dependent relation to Him. As His children, we are to trust His kindness and goodness, and in all things yield to His will, believing that His love

and care for us is unchanging. Recognizing God as Father is not a New Testament concept first introduced by Christ. It was taught and recognized by the Old Testament believers as well.

Scripture Keys: Our Father in heaven

Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. (1 Chronicles 29:10)

Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting. (Isaiah 63:16)

But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. (Isaiah 64:8)

Those who can truly pray “our Father” are those who “have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15).

If we call upon God as Father, we must be willing to be guided by His wisdom and to be obedient to His will. As children of God, we are to make His honor, His work, and His kingdom our life interest. Only then can we rightly pray, “Our Father.”

“Hallowed be thy name”

To rightly hallow the name of the Lord means to give Him respect and to show reverence when addressing or speaking of Him. However, to truly hallow the name of the Lord goes beyond reverence. It is possible we can become as the Jews were in Christ’s day, and show great outward reverence for God, yet by our lives actually profane His name. We truly hallow God’s name by our life and our words, our worship and our deeds. We cannot truly hallow God’s name unless, in life and character, we are consecrated to God. This is possible only as we humble ourselves and become poor in spirit, accepting the grace and righteousness of Christ.

Matthew 6:10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

“Thy kingdom come”

To pray these words correctly means to make Christ’s principles our principles, for we are to seek “first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). These words, when prayed from a sincere heart, will lead us to seek to win souls to Christ and to support the work of propagating the kingdom of God through the everlasting gospel to all “that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6). As we give ourselves to God and win other souls to Him, we hasten the coming of His kingdom.

However, praying without corresponding works makes our prayers ineffectual. For us to pray “Thy kingdom come,” the kingdom of grace must be established in our hearts.

With every kingdom there is a king; therefore, to pray rightly is to make God our King, and Jesus our Lord and Savior.

“Thy will be done”

We must pray for grace that God’s will and purpose may be worked out in us. This prayer is a call to live a life of consecration, seeking to live out God’s will day by day, so that we might show how the will of God and heavenly principles are lived out in this world of unbelief and darkness.

The prayer, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10) is also a petition that the reign of evil on this earth would be brought to an end, and the kingdom of glory established.

Scripture Keys: The will of God

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what

is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
(Romans 12:1–2)

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]. (Romans 12:1–2 AMP)

Matthew 6:11. Give us this day our daily bread.

“Give us this day”

The world in Jesus’ day was self-centered and independent. This is even more true today. We forget how dependent we are upon God. Christ would have us recognize that our food and indeed “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Jesus has taught us to ask every day for what we need. This includes our daily needs and for spiritual help and blessings. In daily asking for our needs, God would have us to learn how dependent we are upon Him. Then in humble recognition our hearts are to be drawn out to Him in love.

Jesus said, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

Christ further declared, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for

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ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). As dependent as we are upon God for our daily sustenance, so we are dependent upon Christ for salvation, and both are found only in God through Christ. We cannot truly pray, “Give us this day,” for bread alone; we must recognize our spiritual needs as well.

Scripture Keys: It is God that gives

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. (Acts 17:24–25)

For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:6)

Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. (Acts 14:17)

But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Recognizing God as the giver of all good things does two things for us. It crucifies our self-satisfied hearts, and it helps us to love God because of the knowledge of how reliant we are upon Him, even though we are undeserving. The proud heart of man, even if religious, finds it hard to ask God for everything and recognize that He is the giver of everything. Yet this will be the attitude of all those who rightly call upon God as Father.

Matthew 6:12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Luke 11:4)

Jesus is speaking of the debt we have gained by our sins and the subsequent guilt and condemnation we have incurred. We are to recognize that the debt of sin is too great to be paid by any human endeavor. Further, as we experience the love God has toward us, we are to be “forbearing [of] one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13).

Jesus is not teaching us that in order to be forgiven we are to ignore our just dues from our debtors. But if they are in a situation of not being able to pay, they are not to be treated harshly, neither oppressed, nor brought before the courts of law. Jesus is not advocating that theft or fraudulent actions go unpunished. But an unforgiving spirit is not the attitude of a child of God.

“Forgive us our debts”

The forgiveness of God that Jesus is teaching us to pray for and receive is more extensive than many suppose. God declares, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” God adds to His promise by stating, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:7–9).

God’s forgiveness is not like that of man toward his fellow man. Man’s guilt before a holy and righteous God far exceeds our sins toward one another. Therefore, God’s great mercy far exceeds that which we can truly comprehend. It is higher than the heavens, yet abundantly granted if we believe. To prove how faithful God’s promise to forgive is, He draws our attention to the natural world

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and declares, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11).

God’s Word stands behind His promise to forgive. We are encouraged to look to the unending cycle of weather, seedtime, and harvest as additional evidence of God’s faithfulness to forgive when we pray and accept it by faith.

Knowing God’s forgiveness is to experience redeeming love that transforms the heart. That is why being forgiven leads us to also be forgiving. King David had a proper understanding of forgiveness when he prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10).

If we are to receive and then impart the forgiving love of God, we must believe the love that God has toward us. “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). Our forgiveness and reconciliation with God does not come to us as a reward for our works. It is not given because of any merit gained on our part. It comes as we recognize our spiritual poverty and need and pray, “Father, forgive us of our sins.”

“As we forgive our debtors”

As we receive forgiveness from God, we will forgive others. The love of God draws us unto Him, and that love will transform our hearts, creating love for others. However, we should not suppose that forgiving others plays a part in our own forgiveness. No, for it is experiencing the love of God for us that in turn works out in us a forgiving spirit. If we have an unforgiving spirit toward those whom we know, we have not truly known the love and forgiveness of the Father.

In this world of sin, people will at times wound us by their words and actions. We are not to hold on to our grievances and dwell upon our injuries, no matter how hurtful or unfairly re-

ceived. As we hope and pray to be pardoned for our sins against God, in the same way we are to forgive everyone who has done evil against us. If we will not forgive those who have trespassed against us, our prayers for our own forgiveness will not be heard. Forgiveness is transforming, for Jesus said:

There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. (Luke 7:41–43)

Matthew 6:13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

“Lead us not into temptation”

When we pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” we must understand that temptation is enticement to sin. This does not proceed from God, but from Satan and from our own wayward hearts. Scripture declares, “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man” (James 1:13).

We are to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” which means to ask the Lord to keep us from the temptations of our own heart or coming from outside influences. Jesus said we are to “watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). There is a difference between being enticed to sin and entering into temptation, which is indulging in the sin we have been tempted with.

While we pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” we are to avoid as much as possible that which would tempt us. And as the temptation comes, we must turn to God in prayer. We must follow the Word of God if we would have His strength to overcome. We often pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” and then fail to prayer-

fully guard our thoughts and actions, and are thus often led “into temptation.”

As we pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” we must understand that God sometimes allows Satan to tempt His children with trials and difficulties, as He did with Job. This is sometimes allowed so that our faith may be proved and tested. Then, “when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). If we rely on our own strength, we shall fail in the trial. But if we recognize our weakness and trust wholly in God, He will provide a way of escape.

Why does temptation have power over us? Because selfishness exists in our hearts and we love the sin that temptation brings more than we love God. Only as we know in our hearts the great love of God will temptation appear to us in its true character. Then we will earnestly pray that it will be expelled from our minds and hearts. Only as the Holy Spirit turns our hearts to Christ, and our hearts are softened and drawn to Him, will the temptation lose its power, and for this we must pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”

“Deliver us from evil”

The evil we are to be delivered from “is any deviation of a moral agent from the rules of conduct prescribed to him by God. Corruption of heart, or disposition to commit wickedness.”²

God desires to work out in us a godly character. He therefore allows us to be faced with difficulties in life, even persecution and hardship. And why would God allow this? You see, with every temptation overcome, and trials and difficulties met by faith and trust in God, we are gaining “patience. ...and experience” (Romans 5:4), which develops “hope” or confidence in God. Then as we overcome all things through divine power, we are letting God’s light shine through us to glorify Him.

As we pray as Christ has instructed us to, we are to surrender ourselves to God’s guidance, asking Him to lead us in the path of right. We cannot pray with a sincere heart, “Deliver us from evil,” and then think and act in whatever way we choose. We must prayerfully seek God’s way and allow Him to lead us. We shall then listen

to His voice saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21).

We are on dangerous ground if we allow our allegiance to God to waver by contemplating the advantages to be gained through yielding to temptation. Sin in this life will only lead to eventual sorrow and shame when indulged in. Sin’s power can blind and deceive our minds so that temptation to sin may entice us with the advantage or pleasure to be gained, but it is temporary at best. By contemplating the apparent advantages to be gained by yielding to temptation, we put ourselves under Satan’s influence, and then we will be left alone with no protection from his power.

As much as possible, we should close every avenue by which the tempter may gain a hold of our hearts by calling on the name of the Lord for help. When we believe in the love that God has for us, we can be secure. God’s love is a fortress that shields us from the snares of Satan. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

Matthew 6:14–15. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Forgiven as We Forgive

We do not gain forgiveness by forgiving others. We are forgiven solely by the merits of what Christ has done and our belief and acceptance of that work on our behalf. Our belief and acceptance of Christ is to work a change in our hearts and therefore will lead us to have a forgiving spirit, even as God has been merciful toward us.

An unforgiving spirit brings estrangement to families and friends, and even negatively affects society. Many people carry in their hearts a spirit of animosity, revenge, and bitterness, and then pray to God asking for forgiveness. We do not correctly understand the lesson of Christ; we cannot pray for forgiveness while having an unforgiving spirit. Since each one of us has a constant need of God’s love and mercy, we have no right to exercise an unforgiving

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spirit in our hearts. We cannot with safety exercise a spirit of bitterness and malice in our hearts toward other men, for all of us “have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Matthew 6:16–18. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Jesus goes back to the theme found in the beginning of chapter 6, which is the error of religious works done to gain the attention and sympathy of men or merit with God. Whatever we do should be done for God, because a religion that desires to please man very often neglects to please God.

Those who exercise this spirit do not receive their reward from God, but from the men who praise and honor them. They feel a certain satisfaction publicly proclaiming their piety, and this is all the reward they shall have.

The other lesson to be learned here is that the service of God is a joy and a delight. In the example of Jesus, there is a fast, which was made to appear most disagreeable, and done to show an apparent zeal for God, yet it was totally unacceptable to Him. On the other hand, those who fast and perform religious duties for the love and honor of God make it a delight. Even if discipline and hardship are to be born, it is done as a service of love for God, without attracting attention to our supposed piety and earnestness.

Scripture Keys: The fast of self-righteousness

Why have we fasted, they say, and You do not see it? Why have we afflicted ourselves, and You take no knowledge [of it]? Behold [O Israel], on the day of your fast [when you should be grieving for your sins], you find profit in your business, and [instead of stopping all work, as the

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law implies you and your workmen should do] you extort from your hired servants a full amount of labor. [The facts are that] you fast only for strife and debate and to smite with the fist of wickedness. Fasting as you do today will not cause your voice to be heard on high. Is such a fast as yours what I have chosen, a day for a man to humble himself with sorrow in his soul? [Is true fasting merely mechanical?] Is it only to bow down his head like a bull rush and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him [to indicate a condition of heart that he does not have]? Will you call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? (Isaiah 58:3–5 AMP)

Fasting merely as a religious duty, or as a means of recommending ourselves to God, will be of no value because the heart is far from God and we are living contrary to His will and commands.

Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a proud, self-righteous Pharisee, and the other a cheating tax collector. The proud Pharisee “prayed” this prayer: “Thank God, I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don’t commit adultery, I go without food twice a week, and I give to God a tenth of everything I earn. (Luke 18:10–12 TLB)

Fasting, and indeed all other religious endeavors, when done in a prideful, self-righteous spirit, is of no value in God’s sight.

Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the Lord doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. (Jeremiah 14:10–12)

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Fasting before the Lord while living in disobedience is vain and unacceptable to God. Indeed it mocks Him.

Scripture Keys: The spirit of the true fast

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday. And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (Isaiah 58:6-7, 10-11)

The fast of self-denial so that we may help others in need is acceptable and pleasing to God.

It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord.

And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the

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heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the Lord in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. (2 Chronicles 20:1–6, 14–18)

A fast when in difficult positions, in recognition of our utter helplessness, combined with prayers of praise and recognizing God's great power and goodness and His ability to deliver us, is the spirit of a true fast.

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us. (Ezra 8:21–23)

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Fasting in recognition of our utter inability to help ourselves, and calling upon the Lord for His sustaining grace so that His name may be exalted, is the spirit of true fasting.

And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments. (Daniel 9:3–5)

Daniel fasted as he prayed and sought the wisdom of the Lord, so that he might understand God's will for His people and so he could understand the visions he had received. In fasting and prayer, Daniel recognized and acknowledged the sinfulness of Israel and that there was nothing in himself or the people to recommend them to God. Pleading for God's mercy and acknowledging Israel's utter helplessness was the focus of Daniel's petitions. This helplessness and dependence on God was the motive of Daniel's fast.

Fasting, when done for religious reasons, must be done according to God's counsel. It must never be done with the idea that it somehow gains merit with God. Further, all our religious works must be for the glory of God, never to draw the attention or praise of men.

Endnotes

1. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).
2. *Ibid.*

CHOOSING WHOM WE WILL SERVE

In this life there is no neutral ground. We either serve the true God of heaven or we serve the enemy of man and God, a being the Scriptures call Satan or Lucifer. The Bible speaks of two opposing kingdoms. Each of us belongs to the kingdom of God or the devil. The Bible describes the difference this way: “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10).

In this chapter we will learn some of the ways that we make choices that determine whom we are serving. Jesus has clearly taught us that profession of religion is not adequate to save anyone. What is needed is His grace in the heart and life, which transforms and renews us in the inner man. Many of those who heard Jesus were religious, yet in heart and life were choosing a different master from the Lord God. In the next verses He tells us which decisions determine whom we serve. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

Matthew 6:19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.

“Lay not up ... treasures upon earth”

The things humanity often strives for, even the necessary things of life, wear out. They depreciate in value and last at best only for our short-lived life. We spend tens of billions of dollars yearly trying to protect our possessions from the onslaughts of nature and evil men, only to die and leave our possessions behind. Is there not something better? Jesus says yes. He declared, “I am

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come that they [you and I] might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The love of money controlled the hearts of many in the days of Christ. Worldliness and the weary cares of life exerted great influence in the lives of most people and crowded out God in the soul.

Life is that way today. The desire for possessions and wealth exerts a controlling, even bewitching, influence over society, even among God’s professed followers. The desire for treasures upon this earth has a corrupting influence upon mankind. It burdens us with care, debt, and eventually perdition as we put our treasures where God should be. Thus men become idolaters, making possessions their god. Many professors of religion do not have real faith and do not live by godly principles. Many are doing what Jesus has told them not to do—seeking to lay up treasures upon the earth. They are not obedient to Christ’s directions. They lack real confidence in God. Far too often, men in the world, and sadly in the church, in their attempt to gain riches, find themselves accumulating burdens and concerns until their minds become totally taken up with them. They are eager for gain and always anxious about losses. As possessions are acquired, there is a desire to have more. The more we possess, the more we desire to possess.

With this spirit of seeking earthly treasures, we become blinded by selfishness and spend the greatest portion of our time and effort securing perishable treasures. With our priorities so mixed up, eternal interests are neglected. Dedication to God and faithfulness to His Word become a matter of minor importance as we have less time and interest to dedicate to that which will benefit our spiritual nature. The great issues of life and eternity and the truth of God are not kept in mind. This is shown by our words, our plans, and our actions that tend to be centered on earthly treasures. We keep just enough belief in God to deceive ourselves, but God’s influence in our lives is minimal and our earthly plans are primary.

We need to give heed to the words of the great Teacher, for they were spoken not only to the people of His day but also to us today. There is a danger that we may lose sight of eternal things, and everything that really matters in life is forgotten in the pursuit of worldly gain. The glory of the world to come is eclipsed by the

corruptible things of earth. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34). With our attention on earthly possessions, our thoughts, our plans, our motives in life will all have a selfish caste, and our hearts will become spiritually darkened with covetousness and selfishness.

How many have devoted their whole lives to acquiring wealth, yet are poor in knowing the love of family and friends and experiencing true inner satisfaction and peace? Then, when adversity comes upon them or their health is lost or their possessions are swept away, they have nothing left in this life and no hope of a future life. When our lives come to an end, we will not be able to take the possessions we strived for with us. Thus we lose our earthly treasures and eternal life as well. This is a terrible investment. That is why Jesus warns us to get our priorities right.

Matthew 6:20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”

Christ is portraying here the value of eternal riches, in contrast with the treasures of earth. Our purpose and aim in life should be to obtain treasure in heaven. As we do this, the spiritually numbing influence of a desire to obtain wealth in this life is weakened.

Laying up treasure in heaven includes all investments of our time, money, and interests that will build up a Christlike character. This investment in character will lead to a kind, just, and merciful heart. To lay up treasure in heaven is to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33), which leads to a change of heart, mind, and purpose. To seek this treasure means to unite our hearts and lives with that of Christ. We lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven by being rich in good works.

This work of laying up treasure in heaven is of the greatest importance. This is the only true long-term investment, for it will last for eternity. We must think seriously, and contemplate rightly, and look beyond the short-term interest and gains of this life. All

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that we can give to save souls and to bring God glory is to invest in the bank of heaven.

Everyone is responsible to God and will have to give an account of his or her stewardship. Property and means in our possession are not ours to use as we see fit and to use for selfish indulgences. We are stewards of God, “for all things come of thee” (1 Chronicles 29:14). Therefore we are to use our means, time, and talents for the glory of God and His work to reach the lost. If we give heed to the words of Jesus and lay up treasure in heaven, we will use His goods entrusted to us to bless humanity.

Those who acquire means great or small, and use them for doing good, and who live and work from the principled understanding that they are only stewards of God, will not be in danger of laying up their treasure upon the earth.

To truly lay up treasure in heaven is to have a mind renewed and fixed on heaven’s principles. Then our transfer of means and time and influence to the treasury of heaven will be based upon the principle of love and guided by the Scriptures. For if the renewed mind and love are not my motive, all my giving “profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3).

Scripture Keys: Heavenly treasures

In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble. Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. (Proverbs 15:6, 16)

And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the Lord is his treasure. (Isaiah 33:6)

He always protects his people and gives them wisdom and knowledge. Their greatest treasure is their reverence for the Lord. (Isaiah 33:6 TLB)

I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. (Psalm 119:14)

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To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:27)

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5)

In the above verses we gain an insight as to what heaven's treasures are all about. Thieves cannot take them, they do not wear out over time, and no failure of banks or adverse economic conditions can take them from us. And unlike the treasures of this world, heaven's treasures will accompany us into eternity.

What are these treasures of heaven? A heart and life content in the Lord and in His love and providence. This treasure will free us from much of life's pressing worries and physical afflictions. And what does it take to acquire such a treasure? Just your heart surrendered to God.

The treasure of heaven is to know and reverence God. To know the Creator does not hinder our happiness but can only add to it. To know Him who sustains all of creation, and who will sustain you and loves you, and to love Him in return, brings a return on your investment of faith, love, and hope that will last for eternity.

The treasure of having the testimonies of God's Word gives us a stable foundation for life that does not change with the fickle ways of men. This allows us to make long-range forecasts, for we are able to plan for eternity regardless of what transpires in this world.

The wisdom of God and the hope of salvation are likened to riches and precious stones. This treasure is priceless regardless of the conditions prevailing in the affairs of men.

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These riches and many like them are often overlooked as offering a poor return, not worthy of much time or effort. However, they are the only riches that last. I pray you will invest your heart and life wisely, while there is still time to secure the treasures of heaven.

Matthew 6:21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The word *heart* means “the thoughts or feelings (mind).”¹ “The seat of the affections and passions. The seat of the will; hence, secret purposes, intentions. Conscience. Strength vigor.”²

“There will your heart be”

Where is your heart? This question is of vital importance, for it determines our eternal destiny. We show where our treasure is by our words and actions. As we focus our attention on this world the eternal considerations of the future, of our responsibilities toward God and His truth, will become of secondary importance. We can be involved in the outward forms of worship, but our service will be unacceptable to the God of heaven. We cannot serve God and mammon. There can be no half-and-half service. We will either yield our whole hearts to God, or we will give our time, energies, and attention to the service of the world. And what we seek as treasure shows how important God is to us. If our attention is on the things of earth while claiming heaven as well, God will not accept our halfhearted service, for He says, “Give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe My ways” (Proverbs 23:26).

Matthew 6:22. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

What is the eye that Jesus is speaking of? As we will see in the Scriptures below, it represents the understanding, the perception.

Scripture Keys: The light of the body

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18)

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (Psalm 19:8)

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:7)

What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit [attitude] of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. (Romans 11:7–8)

Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children. (2 Peter 2:14)

Christ spoke in symbols that teach spiritual truth of a vital nature. He speaks of the spiritual eye, or the conscience, with which we determine good and evil. If the eye of the soul, the conscience, is focused on God's glory and seeking His will, the whole body or life will be filled with the light and truth of God's love.

However, if the conscience, the "eye," is guided only by human understanding and perception and is not under the grace of Christ, the mind, the will, the understanding is spiritually diseased.

"If therefore thine eye be single"

To have an eye single to the glory of God means wholehearted devotion to Him. We must determine in our hearts to be sincere and unwavering, to know and follow the truth and to obey it re-

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ardless of the cost. However, all the attributes of dedication and service that Christ is asking for are impossible, unless the Holy Spirit helps us to see our spiritual poverty and we choose to cry unto the Lord for deliverance. As that change is wrought out in us, we hunger and thirst for more of the righteousness and knowledge of God. The spiritual experience Jesus is continually speaking about is not ours to possess unless we are aided by God's grace.

We must have an eye that is single, determined and focused on seeking God's glory. This will lead us to have a determination of purpose that will leave self and what others say out of the question, as we are single-minded to only follow the way of the Lord. We are not to consider what advantages may be gained or lost by neglecting God's will, rather we are to have a settled purpose to do right and be right.

Scripture Keys: Full of light

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
(Psalm 119:105)

For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life. (Proverbs 6:23)

Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)

When the body or life is full of light, it is guided by the light of God's truth. It is a life lived in harmony with God's Word and the moral law. It makes Christ, the light of the world, our light and hope, and by His grace we will resist the darkness of error and sin and compromise in the world around us.

Matthew 6:23. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

“But if thine eye be evil”

To have an evil eye is to have a mind, or conscience, darkened by sin and compromise. It means to be wavering and halfhearted in our allegiance to the light of God’s Word. As our understanding becomes darkened, it will affect the entire spiritual life.

Scripture Keys: An evil understanding and conscience

But unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. (Psalm 50:16–17)

Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. (Psalm 52:3)

And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. (2 Chronicles 12:14)

This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. (Jeremiah 13:10)

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (Isaiah 5:20)

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. (Matthew 15:19)

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. (Hebrews 3:12)

According to these verses, what is it to have an evil eye (mind, conscience, understanding) that is darkened? Turning

from the Word of God, yet professing to be a follower of God, causes us to be full of darkness. We ignore, despise, or simply neglect the Word of God and His instructions. To have an evil eye and a life full of darkness is to love and seek the evil more than the good, and this comes about as the result of not seeking the way of the Lord. We become confused and call good evil and evil good. With this heart or mind of unbelief we go further and further from God, the source of all light and truth, and this leaves us in still greater darkness. Sadly, this life of darkness may exist while we still profess to love and serve God, claiming to have the light. This is the great danger of not surrendering to God and obeying His Word. The light of truth we claim to have becomes darkness.

“Thy whole body shall be full of darkness”

When we regularly resist or ignore the Spirit, the light and conviction of truth fails to impress us. Many religious people come to the place where they do not respond to the Spirit of God. It is this state that Jesus speaks of, where even “the light that is in thee” has become darkness. Whatever truth we do know that is not lived and practiced loses its life-giving power. Many trust in the truth they know but do not practice it, and therefore it becomes perverted and increases the blindness of the soul.

Temptation gains its hold on us when we allow the mind to waver, deliberating, Shall I follow God or shall I follow the temptation? This leads to being inconsistent in our trust in God. If we do not constantly choose to give our hearts and minds to God, we are in darkness, for only God is light. If we separate ourselves from Him there can only be darkness.

If we persistently cherish the evil over the good, as we willfully disregard the pleadings of divine love, we lose the desire for righteousness, we lose the desire for God, we lose the capacity to receive the light of God’s truth. Yet we may not lose religion. In fact religion often covers much darkness. Unless we “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6) because we have opened our hearts to the Lord, we will have little hunger or desire for the

things of God, despite holding on to the outward show and profession of religion.

Satan is always ready to influence and work on the mind of any who will give him the least bit of encouragement, through neglecting the truths of God's Word. Those who have the opportunity to know the light of God's truth and love, yet refuse or neglect to live by it, will grow spiritually confused until the darkness of error and sin blinds their spiritual perception and their whole course of life. In contrast, the knowledge of God as revealed in His Word will become brighter and brighter if we follow the path of true obedience.

Scripture Keys: Light or darkness?

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. (1 John 1:6)

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:3–5, 8)

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. (Ephesians 5:8–11)

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

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This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:17–24)

Matthew 6:24. No man 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. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Scripture Keys: You cannot serve two masters

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.... For as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. (Romans 6:16–19)

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. (John 8:34)

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Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.
(1 Corinthians 7:23)

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. (2 Peter 2:19)

Now am I trying to win the favor of men, or of God? Do I seek to please men? If I were still seeking popularity with men, I should not be a bond servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

All men are servants. The question is, whom do we serve? In the geopolitical world, neutrality at times seems to be a virtue. But there is no truly neutral country, as pressing issues will always force decisions. In the spiritual world, neutrality is never a virtue; in fact, no one can truly occupy a neutral position, for we will either love and serve God or we will choose Satan as our master. If we do not give ourselves wholly to God we are under the control of Satan's power, listening to his voice, and are his servants, regardless of our religious profession or philosophical belief or worldview.

Jesus said, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). For many, the Christian life is a failure, despite their profession, because they are always wavering. They do not have the determination and commitment to serve the Lord. They are drawn by the Spirit and almost surrender all for God, but then fall back into indifference. In this condition people often remain religious, thereby thinking that somehow they are on God's side. But they are not. The conscience is becoming desensitized and the Spirit's voice is not discerned. If we neglect to follow the light when it is brought to us, its rejection brings a corresponding darkness, and though professing to serve God, we actually serve Satan.

“You cannot serve God and mammon”

The word *serve* means “to obey; to yield compliance or act according to. To comply with; to submit to. To be subservient or subordinate to.”³

The word *mammon* means “riches, wealth; or the god of riches.”⁴ It also means “confidence, i.e., figurative wealth, personified); avarice (deified).”⁵

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred [been seduced] from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:9–10)

Many are determined to be rich or simply what they call comfortable. This is their aim, and in their zeal to acquire riches or to obtain comfortable circumstances, eternal considerations are often overlooked. What is considered riches or comfort varies from country to country. It can be a few hundred dollars or hundreds of thousands. The problem is not with the possessions but with our heart’s focus and attention that goes out after riches, which lessens our commitment to God. This is the great spiritual danger that comes upon so many.

When we are in this state, Satan blinds us. We may convince ourselves that our striving for riches is for a good purpose, yet we deceive ourselves. For in all things we are to seek “first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33). If this is not our purpose, in the end we will seek to gather riches for ourselves. In this some have “erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent. He that hasteth

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to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. (Proverbs 23:4; 28:20, 22)

Those who trust in God and serve Him are not attracted by the world. Those who seek for earthly treasure as a substitute for a full commitment to the Lord are in the process of separating themselves from Him unless they repent.

He who tries to serve God and the world will become unstable in all his ways, for both God and the world require the whole heart, and we have but one life and mind to give.

And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:23–25)

There are many who profess Christ and the truth, and yet their hearts and affections are not truly with Him. In attempting to serve God and mammon at the same time, we become double-minded. By trying to serve two masters, we become spiritually unstable and cannot serve God rightly. All riches and possessions of this world are to be subordinated to the will and word of God.

Matthew 6:25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Jesus puts things into focus. He tells us to look at nature and draw lessons about God's care. The things of nature do exactly that for which they were created. We were made to know and love God. If we make that the first business of our lives, we can be assured

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that just as God takes care of the things in nature, He will take care of us.

Matthew 6:26–32. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Scripture Keys: The care of God

Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:22)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:1–3)

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. (1 Peter 5:6–7)

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all

understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

If we know God as our friend and Savior and Creator, we can trust Him to provide. This is not to encourage idleness or laziness or carelessness in our affairs. Even nature is not idle or careless. Jesus is teaching us to trust in the love He has for us and believe that He will never leave or forsake us. The unbelievers know not God, so their efforts are always on getting and their focus on the short term, leaving God largely if not totally out of consideration. Jesus said His children must have a different priority in life.

Matthew 6:33. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

“Seek ye first”

The word *seek* means “to go in search or quest of; to look for. To inquire for; to ask for; to solicit; to endeavor to find or gain by any means.”⁶

Jesus is teaching that we are to put God and the principles of His kingdom first, last, and best in everything. We are not to involve ourselves in any business or pursuit or pleasure that would hinder us from seeking His righteousness in life and character.

We are to focus not on this world but on the things of eternity. We are to go about our life and work, our relationships and pleasures, guided by the principles of God, seeking to follow His Word and striving to please Him. If we value eternal and spiritual things, as God does, we will understand what is really important in this world. It will not be the latest movie or fashion, or popularity and position, or the sensuous stimulation of modern life. It will be the simple things of faith, trust, and love, given to us by God. As we cultivate these attributes the real value of life is found.

Scripture Keys: God's kingdom

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, the kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20–21)

For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (Romans 14:17)

Jesus answered and said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1–3)

“All these things shall be added unto you”

Our Father in heaven knows what our daily needs are. Jesus said that He cares for all of creation. Can He be less caring of the needs of His children? Of course not. This is why Christ has drawn our attention to the things of nature, so that we may see and believe, and thereby trust in God. We are Christ's possession by creation and redemption and are of more value than the things of nature, which He also cares for.

Though the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom and our eternal reward is yet future, we do not need to fear that the necessary things of this life will be left uncared for. If we give ourselves to God's service, He who cares for the lilies and the birds will provide for our needs.

Matthew 6:34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

So do not worry or be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have worries and anxieties of its own. Sufficient for each day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:34 AMP)

If we have given ourselves to God, to do His will and seek His ways, we have no need to be anxious for tomorrow. If we have chosen to serve God, who knows the end from the beginning, the events and details of our life in the future, though hidden from our view, are open to the eyes of Him who inhabits eternity. Therefore let us believe that God loves us and “know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord,” are “thoughts of peace” (Jeremiah 29:11). If we will rest in this knowledge, we need not worry about the future. We must learn to trust God the way a small child trusts a loving parent. If we do this, our troubles and cares will be born by grace, for our will is swallowed up in the will of God.

We can trust in Jesus every hour and every day. The Bible has declared, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deuteronomy 33:25). By His grace we may bear all the burdens of the present and perform our duties. We only trouble ourselves when we take on the burden of anticipated future troubles. As we exercise this state of mind, which is really a form of unbelief, we bring tomorrow’s unknown burdens into today. When we do this, we manifest a lack of confidence and trust in God. Do we believe He cares for us? If so, we can know that future difficulties will be met in God’s providence. He promises grace and strength only for one day at a time. He teaches us not to trouble ourselves with the cares and perplexities of tomorrow; for “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34).

Someone might say, “My troubles and perplexities today are because of what I know for a fact will come tomorrow.” You may have bills to pay and obligations and difficulties to meet in coming days, and today you can see no prospect of a way out. We are nevertheless to order our affairs according to God’s will. We are to

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trust and pray. Though we may pass through difficulty, God has said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Troubles and difficulties are the lot of humanity in this sin-cursed earth. But Christ is there to sustain us and enable us. He is able to deliver us from the difficulties in ways we do not now foresee, if we will but trust and obey. As we live this life of faith and trust, our worry will be removed as we cast all our cares upon Him.

Scripture Keys: Trusting in God

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6)

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.
(1 Peter 5:7)

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.
(Isaiah 26:3–4)

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

We are not to be anxious for what will take place or what we will do weeks or months or years in the future, for the future does not yet belong to us. Only one day at a time is ours, and during this day we are to live for God and are to submit our purposes and plans day by day to God to be guided by Him. It is in doing this that the promise shall be ours to experience, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee” (Isaiah 26:3).

Endnotes

1. James Strong LL.D., S.T.D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).
2. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, op cit.
6. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, op cit.

Section Three

Matthew Chapter Seven

JUDGED AND JUDGING

Matthew 7:1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.

“Judge not”

What does Jesus mean when He tells us not to judge? When people are doing wrong or teaching error, they often cite these words of Jesus in their defense. Are they correct in doing so?

Jesus tells us we can know the false prophets by their fruits, which means we must make an evaluation based on evidence. We cannot judge a person’s heart or motives, but we must be able to determine truth from error and right from wrong. This involves a judgment, but it must be based on the Word of God and not our own standards.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged,” said Jesus. This means that we are not to set ourselves up as the standard. There is only one standard, and that is God’s Word. We are not to make our personal opinions, our personal views of duty, or our interpretations of Scripture a standard for others to follow and then condemn them if they do not measure up. We are not to criticize others, speculating and surmising as to their motives and then passing judgment upon them.

The efforts of religious leaders and misguided individuals to earn salvation by their own works will surely lead them to establish human rules, “the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7), as a barrier against sin. Since the religious leaders in Jesus’ day failed to keep the righteousness of the law by faith, they devised their own rules and regulations, hundreds of them, in a useless effort to obtain righteousness. All this worked to turn their minds away from God to

self-seeking. God's love died out of their hearts, and with it the love for their fellow men. This led to a judgmental attitude toward any who failed to meet their man-made criteria of what they thought was truth. The religious leaders condemned even the Son of God because He did not reach their human standards. Men passed judgment on the Son of God! What a terrible deception comes upon the human heart that rejects the way and will of God.

“For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). What happened to the Jewish leaders will happen to all who substitute the falsehood of man-made religion for the truth of Scripture. A system of human standards and rules will then lead its advocates to place unrighteous judgment upon all who come short of their human standards.

Scripture declares, “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (1 Corinthians 4:5). We cannot read the hearts of our fellow men, for each one of us is faulty before God. Therefore we are not qualified to sit in judgment upon others. We are only capable of judging from outward appearance.

God alone, who knows the secret motives of our hearts and who deals justly, decides the final case of every soul. There is but one Judge in heaven and earth, and that is God. Whoever takes it upon himself to pass condemnation on his fellow men is usurping the prerogative of the Creator. We can and must judge right and wrong, truth and error, by God's standard in the Bible. However we can go no further, condemning others when we do not know their inner soul. That remains the realm of God only.

Matthew 7:2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

The word *judgment* in the above verse means “the right or power of passing sentence.”¹ “To try to condemn.”² To judge means

“to try; to examine and pass sentence on. To censure rashly. To doom to punishment.”³

“For with what judgment ye judge”

It is not safe for us, with our limited understanding, to take upon ourselves the responsibility of condemning others, for we cannot read the heart. Self-centered as we human beings are, we tend to judge according to appearances when all is not known to us, and in this we can make serious mistakes. Since we are imperfect, we are not qualified to sit in judgment on others. Jesus is teaching here that the censorious attitude that we exercise will come back upon us, for we will reap what we sow.

If our hearts and lives were open to us as they are to God, we would better understand our shortcomings and defects, and we would see how great a need there is for a work to be done in ourselves. We would cry out, as did the prophet Isaiah, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). If we could see ourselves as God sees us, we would have a better understanding of our own need of the long-suffering mercy of God and the sympathy of our fellow men. Then we would have no desire to condemn others based upon human standards and prejudices.

Christ is not teaching us that we should not uphold biblical standards of conduct and truth, which requires an evaluation of evidence that can be known. To adopt that position would leave the church in utter chaos. Rather, Christ is directing His rebuke to those who are criticizing others while they themselves are lacking in spiritual grace, judging the motives of others and seeking to condemn them while excusing or covering up their own faults. Those who exercise this judgmental spirit are often looking for the shortcomings in others, and these are what they will see and comment upon. They fail to see many good qualities, and therefore dwell upon, distort, and magnify seeming inconsistencies.

Judged as We Are Judged

Matthew 7:3–5. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

A hypocrite is “one who feigns to be what he is not; one who has the form of godliness without the power, or assumes an appearance of piety and virtue, when he is destitute of true religion.”⁴

In the act of judging we may become guilty of breaking God's law, for our own faulty character will be revealed in our treatment of others. Those who are blinded by the devil to their own faults and imperfections of character are often the most ready to engage in finding fault. Many would consider this work discernment, or rebuking sin, or crying aloud and sparing not. And certainly that work must be done.

However, such a work must be based on the Word of God, and our own hearts and lives must be guided by the love and grace of God. Those who judge often have a lack of tolerance and love, and this leads them to make much out of little. He who is quick to judge others is often guilty of sin and error in his own life, and may find himself uniting unintentionally with Satan, who is the accuser of the brethren.

Many zealous religious adherents will try to force men to comply with their ideas of what is right. This was the spirit of the Jews in the days of Christ, and what individuals and churches have done throughout the ages and will do until the end of time. They will go one step further and seek out the state to enforce their creeds and uphold their decrees. It happened in Jesus' day and still happens today.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou

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condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? (Romans 2:1–3)

The scribes and Pharisees were unyielding in their religious rules, and they could be very harsh in their assessment and judgment of others and unreasonable in their condemnation. They represented themselves as judges among the people, while at the same time they justified their own failures and sins. The criticism of Christ and His disciples by the religious rulers was harsh and was based on the traditions and commandments of men. This caused the Son of God to be misrepresented to the people. In the assessment of the Pharisee, his own sins were but a small mote, while the faults he saw and condemned in others he represented as a beam.

If we allow ourselves to continually look for defects in others, we cannot rightly know the love and mercy of God. The habitual act of looking for evil in others leads to the development of the same evil in us, or even greater defects, for by beholding we become changed.

Even those who profess to uphold and follow the words of Christ have far too often neglected these words: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Rather than following God’s way if a brother errs and does not meet our ideals, we show a hard, unsympathetic spirit. This is not the way of heaven. It is following human impulses and standards. The offender is cast aside, while the attitude shown toward them may have been worse than the errors supposedly committed.

Matthew 7:6. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Life Principles of the Master

Don't give holy things to depraved men. Don't give pearls to swine! They will trample the pearls and turn and attack you. (Matthew 7:6 TLB)

Jesus is comparing the truth of God's Word to pearls, and He warned His disciples to beware how they used their time and efforts to bring truths of eternal value to those who would not appreciate it. This certainly sounds like a judgmental spirit! However, Jesus' prohibition regarding the judgment of others was speaking of judging men's hearts and motives, the inner soul of the man.

Those who show no desire to be freed from sin and have no desire to know the truth should be treated with courtesy. But if they reject the gospel message, they should be left until the Spirit can reach their hearts. This involves a judgment in applying the standard of God's Word regarding right and wrong, truth and error, attitudes and actions. But in no wise do we have the right to condemn a person's soul, for even the most debased can respond at some time to the drawing love of God.

By the word *swine* Jesus means a class of individuals who have no desire to escape from the slavery of sin. Yet there are those who are living in sin who can be reached, which is why we need discernment and why, wherever the seeds of truth can be placed, we should do so, "for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that" (Ecclesiastes 11:6).

Pray right now that God would speak to your heart so you can see your faults and failures before the Lord. We need to pray for the ability to judge our own hearts under the light of God's convicting Spirit. Ask the Lord to teach you to uphold His Word and truth without excusing evil, and to do so with His compassion and grace. My friend, my hope and prayer is that you will allow Christ to judge your heart and lead you to repentance. Amen.

Endnotes

1. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*. (San Francisco, California: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967).
2. James Strong LL.D., S.T. D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).
3. *American Dictionary of the English Language*, op cit.
4. Ibid.

ASKING AND SEEKING

Matthew 7:7–8. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

“Ask, and it shall be given you”

Many in this world are seeking God, though they know Him not. They are following what they believe is truth. But unless God first seeks us, mankind’s seeking after God is in vain, and it can take many false paths.

What are we to ask for? We are to ask God for His blessings each day. We are to ask daily and often for the Lord’s guidance and help to abide with Christ. We are to pray for the things necessary for this life and the power to live lives of godliness. We are to ask God for wisdom and grace to know the right and the power to do the right.

We are to pray for strength, faith, and love, and the power to resist temptation. The more often we ask, the stronger we will become for the duties before us.

Scripture Keys: Ask, and it shall be given

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. (Jeremiah 6:16)

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. (Luke 11:13)

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And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Matthew 21:22)

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. (James 1:5–6)

Why does Jesus emphasize the continual need to keep asking, knocking, and seeking? Is it because God is unwilling to hear and therefore we must pester Him, like a child with a disinterested parent? No, not at all, for our Father is not like man. Rather, it is recognizing our great need that leads us to always ask, seek, and knock. It teaches us that mankind's seeking can only be satisfied in a relationship with God.

Scripture Keys: Asking in the name of Jesus

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:23–24)

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13–14)

Asking in the name of Jesus is not merely beginning or ending a prayer in Jesus' name. It is praying to be guided by His Spirit and seeking His will in our lives.

Scripture Keys: We ask but do not receive

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:3)

Life Principles of the Master

Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. (John 9:31)

Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me. (Psalm 66:16–20)

We cannot presume upon God's mercy by living in sin and expecting His favors. But when we repent and turn to Him He will hear us, for He is merciful.

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. (Proverbs 1:28–30)

The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous. (Proverbs 15:29)

He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination. (Proverbs 28:9)

Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts. (Zechariah 7:12–13)

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And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1:15)

If we are living contrary to God's will, our prayer life, be it ever so earnest, is in vain. In human relationships, if we say one thing to a person's face and then do something that hurts or disappoints that person, this is unacceptable. It is even more unacceptable with God. When we say we love Him and pray to Him, and yet live in disobedience to His will and law, God will not answer our prayers, lest we become confirmed in our religious disobedience. Yet God will always answer the sincere prayer that is seeking His forgiveness.

Scripture Keys: Conditions to answered prayer

And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. (1 John 3:22)

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14–15)

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:7)

“Seek, and ye shall find”

“Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace thereby good shall come unto thee” (Job 22:21). God is seeking us, and the desire that is awakened in our hearts to seek Him is the evidence of His love and the drawing of His Spirit. “If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee” (1 Chronicles 28:9). Our desire to seek God is the result of His work in seeking us, therefore, we must continue to seek, continue to allow ourselves to be drawn to the Lord.

Scripture Keys: What we are to seek for

Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually.
(1 Chronicles 16:11)

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and
I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

To them who by patient continuance in well doing
seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.
(Romans 2:7)

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which
are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.
(Colossians 3:1)

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to
come. (Hebrews 13:14)

Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and
ensue it. (1 Peter 3:11)

Seeking God is to be our lifelong quest and purpose, and our seeking shall not be in vain. For as we seek God, we shall find our rest and our strength in Him. The strength and rest we find in Christ is the means for the healing of mental, physical, and spiritual ills. Mankind seeks many things, but Jesus is telling us there is one thing above all else we should seek for. That is the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His peace, and the hope and promise of eternal life. To seek to know and love God is of the highest importance, for it means life. (See John 17:3.)

Scripture Keys: Seeking with all our effort

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search
for me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13)

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But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. (Deuteronomy 4:29)

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. (Psalm 63:1)

It is in proportion to our appreciation and value of spiritual things that we will seek for their attainment. "Seek and ye shall find" (Luke 11:9). This is what we need to do every hour of our lives, for if we seek the right way we shall find it. We must feel our need of help from the Lord and ask for it in humble prayer.

Our lives are to become a constant seeking for God, with a consistent infilling of His grace. This call to ask, seek, and knock is not because God is aloof and hiding from us. No, the fact of the matter is that mankind is aloof and hiding from God. This is manifested in unbelief, unconcern, and false religion, where we seek God on our own terms.

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you"

We are to knock so that the door of heaven's blessing may be opened to us. We come to God by His drawing love, and the invitation is extended to all who will respond to His abundant grace. Christ invites us to intimacy and communion with God. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1).

We cannot weary the Lord, and the knocking is not a matter of getting the Lord to answer us. Rather, the command to keep knocking is a call to faith and an unyielding hope that will not let go.

Scripture Keys: A time is coming when it will be too late to knock

Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. (Luke 13:24–28)

And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 25:6–13)

The parables quoted above indicate that a time is coming when salvation's door will close. Then the careless and unbelieving and the false professors of religion will desire to seek the Lord, but it will be too late. Therefore, we should give heed to the admonition now to "seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment; seek righteousness,

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seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (Zephaniah 2:3). The time to seek the Lord is now.

Matthew 7:9–11. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

As evil and selfish as the heart of man is, he can still love and provide for his children. How much more will God, in whom there is no evil or darkness, provide and do good things for His children, for He is full of love and mercy and compassion.

Scripture Keys: The good things of God

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. (2 Peter 1:3)

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:13)

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (Romans 8:32–37)

Life Principles of the Master

For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. (Psalm 84:11)

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Matthew 7:12. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Many have heard of “the golden rule,” which is the rule of heaven and was taught by the law and the prophets. Christ’s teachings were not new revelations but the old truths of Scripture freed from the traditions of men. The law, the prophets, and Jesus alike teach us to treat those we know and those who are strangers to us in the same way we would desire to be treated. The standards of the world are not the standard for the Christian. We are not to copy the practices common in the world, seeking to benefit ourselves at the expense of others. All people we deal with are to be treated fairly, even in small matters. Any unjust act toward our fellow man is a violation of the law of Christ, whether he is rich or poor, educated or uneducated, saint or sinner. All are to be treated according to the principles of God’s kingdom.

THE TWO WAYS

Throughout His sermon, Jesus taught that the religion of men leads us away from God, and that true faith leads to God and eternal life. As Jesus begins to bring His instructions to a close, He makes it clear that there are only two roads we can follow, and they each have eternal consequences. We are all on the way to heaven or to eternal loss.

I encourage you to give prayerful consideration to the words of Christ so that you might know where you are going. If it's in the wrong direction, I pray that the Spirit of God might convict you and that you will have the desire to follow Jesus.

Matthew 7:13–14. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate”

Strait is an old English word meaning, “narrow (from obstacles standing close about). Strict; rigorous.”¹

The path to eternal life that Christ has set before us is narrow, and the gate is difficult to enter. This is not because God has made it so; rather, it is because the way to heaven prohibits pride, selfishness, and sin. There is another way; it is an easier road that is broad enough for all to enter, but it leads to destruction. The way to eternal life means constantly climbing, for it is an upward way. We must be willing to go with the few, sometimes even alone so far as human help and sympathy. However, Jesus who is calling us to enter the “strait gate” will walk with us. The only alternative to the narrow way is to go with the multitude of humanity who choose the downward path and the broad way to eternal loss.

If we choose to hold on to sin, we will find the way to life too narrow to enter. Our own ways, our own will, our sinful habits and practices, must be given up if we would follow the way of the Lord. If we are going to serve Christ, we cannot follow the world's opinions or come down to the world's standards, regardless of the pressure to do so. Heaven's path is too narrow to carry with us pride of position and confidence in worldly riches. It is too narrow to hold onto self-centered ambition, too steep and rugged to climb if we are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4).

Christ walked the narrow way before us, and by His Spirit He will walk with us. The narrow way must be our way if we are to enter the paradise of God. Since Christ has gone before us, we are assured that we can successfully follow Him. And this "hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews 6:19–20). Jesus, who became a man, "took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16). Thus Jesus knows what it means to follow God in the narrow way. Jesus "Himself, hath suffered being tempted, He [therefore] is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

Let us not think that the narrow way to heaven means to go through life downcast and lonely. Not at all. Millions have been faithful before us, and Jesus wants to lead you to heaven as well. The only question is, will you let Him? "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Satan flatters mankind and makes it appear that the downward path is the way of happiness, but it is all a deception. Worldly plans centered in self may present great prospects and promises holding out the hope of enjoyment, but we shall find that our happiness is temporary. The broad road that leads downward may appear as the way of ease and good, and it does offer us the opportunity to

“enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25), “but the way of transgressors is hard” (Proverbs 13:15). The light of hope, which shines from the entrance of the broad way, inviting our confidence, will in the end fade into the darkness of eternal loss.

Through His Spirit, Christ will walk with us to strengthen, guide, and direct us, for He will not leave us to walk the narrow pathway alone. Indeed it is not possible to walk the narrow path without Him by our side. To go down the broad road means to do whatever your heart and conscience leads you to do. However, it also means being left alone to go our own way. Though all who enter the narrow way were at one time walking down the broad way, the longer we stay on this path, giving no heed to the Spirit to turn back, the momentum of going downward makes it increasingly difficult to change course.

Scripture Keys: The way of the strait path

I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16:8–9, 11)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:1–3)

Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. (Psalm 25:1–4)

Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the way. The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord

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are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great. (Psalm 25:8–11)

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:103–105)

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. (Proverbs 3:13–18)

To enter the strait way is to know the joy and love of God in our lives. It is a path of discipline and trial, but it is the only path that has the presence and blessing of God. The narrow way, while often growing more difficult, also becomes more joyous. The light and hope of heaven becomes brighter and more real the longer and higher we climb. In contrast, the broad way presents joys at first, but the longer we descend that way, the darker and more hopeless it becomes.

“Broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction”

The whole human race naturally follows the road to death, for we can readily enter the broad road with all our natural inclinations, with all our selfishness and pride, dishonesty and immorality. On the broad road there is room for every man's opinions, philosophies, and religious practices. There is room enough to follow our own inclinations and to do whatever our self-love may de-

cide. We naturally follow the path that ends in death, unless we are drawn away from it by the grace of God. The broad road promises us life, excitement, religion, the pleasures of sin, and a thousand more allurements. But we must listen to Jesus, who is teaching us the words of life. He declares that the broad road “leadeth to destruction” (Matthew 7:13).

Christ’s word warns us of the way of evil that is the broad way, and He says to us, “My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path” (Proverbs 1:15). “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Proverbs 4:14–15). In contrast to the broad way, Scripture says, “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18). Sadly, however, the majority will choose a way that becomes increasingly dark. “The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Proverbs 4:19).

Scripture Keys: The end result of the broad road

Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite’s hope shall perish: Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider’s web. (Job 8:11–14)

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19–21)

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers

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of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–10)

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness. None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.

They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. (Isaiah 59:1–8)

Matthew 7:15–16. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

“Beware of false prophets”

False prophets and teachers have been active in the past, and they appear in our own day. They may claim to be champions of truth, professing to have a great burden for the work of God and His kingdom. They may claim to love God and His Word, yet they

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teach false doctrines and pervert the truth. They put false interpretations on the Scriptures, and falsify and misrepresent the words of God's servants who teach the truth. Many who listen to the false prophets do not have "the love of the truth" and are therefore susceptible to believing "a lie" (2 Thessalonians 2:10–11). These false teachers will deceive them, and because of this they will be found on the broad road, yet thinking they are going to heaven.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:16)

Teachers of falsehood will arise, and the affect of their teaching is to draw people away from the narrow path and the strait gate, while still maintaining their profession of religion. The words of Jesus are clear: Beware of them, take heed, and watch out for danger. Though these false prophets and teachers appear outwardly to love God and teach His Word, these are but a form of concealment, for though they appear in sheep's clothing, yet inwardly they are ravening wolves. Jesus gives a test by which false teachers may be distinguished from the true. "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matthew 7:16).

With heavenly discernment, comparing all things to the Word of God, we can see the difference between the true teacher of God and the false just as readily as we can see the difference between thorns and grapes and figs and thistles. The fruit and the thorns are not at all alike, and neither are the true teachers of God and the false prophets.

We are not to evaluate these false prophets and teachers by their pleasing words nor by their popularity. We must go to "the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20). "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27).

What message do these false teachers bring? Does it lead you to "fear God, and give glory to Him?" (Revelation 14:7). Does it

lead you to manifest your love for Him by obedience to His Word and His commandments? If men do not teach the obligation of the moral law, God does not recognize them as His ministers. If they pervert the gospel and distort the Word of God, and if miracles, signs and wonders, and money are leading components of their work and ministry, avoid them, regardless of their apparent sincerity or popularity.

Does their influence and teaching lead people away from earnest and obedient discipleship into feel-good religion and worldly compromise? If so, we may know that their claims to be teachers of God are without foundation. Do they follow the latest marketing techniques or psychology to build up their churches and ministries? If so, beware of them, for they are of the world and not of God. These teachers and false prophets are doing the very work that originated with the prince of darkness, the enemy of God, for they pervert the way of the Lord. Jesus said, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name" (Matthew 24:4-5).

Jesus has promised us that we can know the false prophets by their fruits, and that "the very elect" (Matthew 24:24) need not be deceived. We need not conjecture as to the motives of the false prophets and teachers, but we must exercise righteous judgment. Do they meet the standard of the Word of God? If not, they are merely wolves in sheep's clothing.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. (1 John 4:1, 5)

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For 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. And the world passeth away,

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and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (1 John 2:15–17)

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. (2 Peter 2:1–3, 12–15)

Jesus is telling us to beware of the deceptions that would endanger our souls. He warns us to beware of false teachers and messengers who often do not know themselves that they are wolves, for many are deceived, being guided by Satan without realizing it. The work of these wolves in sheep's clothing, no matter how sincere or loving they may appear outwardly, is to tear and scatter the flock of God. This is manifested most often by leaving the people comfortable in sin and worldliness, living lives of Christian profession but largely devoid of commitment and obedience to God and His Word.

False prophets and teachers will utter smooth things and lying doctrines that appear to come from God's Word, and people may be sincere in accepting these erroneous doctrines. But will their sincerity save them from the tragic result of believing a lie while they reject the truth? The Bible is the standard of truth and holiness, and if we would carefully and prayerfully live by this Word, we will not be deceived. We must give heed to this admonition: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Matthew 7:17–20. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

The fruit that is borne shows the nature of the false prophet and the false teacher. This fruit will be seen in their lives, their teachings, and in the effect of their work and ministry. Though they may claim the name of the Lord, they do not have a true and vital connection with Christ; therefore, they will deviate from what God says in His Word.

Scripture Keys: The fruit in the false prophet or teacher

They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (Proverbs 1:30–31)

In neglecting, ignoring, or rejecting God's Word, the false teacher is left to follow his own understanding. To the true child of God who is studying and following the Word of God, this falsehood can be seen in the fruits of his teaching. The ministry of these wolves is contrary to much of the counsel of the Lord in Scripture.

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The labour of the righteous tendeth to life: the fruit of the wicked to sin. (Proverbs 10:16)

The false teacher leaves people thinking they are saved while they're still in sin. They become comfortable in their sins. After all, they have a profession of Christ and they are going to heaven, or so they think.

Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images. (Hosea 10:1)

The false teacher is like an empty vine, having little or no fruit from the Lord. They have a semblance of the truth of God, but their teaching comes from themselves, not from God.

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins. (Jeremiah 12:1-2)

The churches led by false teachers may grow numerically and financially, having success in the eyes of men. But what does their fruit lead to? There is abundant profession and praise, but their hearts are not guided by God and His truth.

Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men. (Hosea 10:13)

The work of the false teacher is based on lies. The people believe those lies, leading them to trust in their own ways rather than seeking God's way. They exalt the men among them instead of honoring the great and mighty God by fidelity to His word.

Scripture Keys: The effect of the ministry and teaching of a true prophet or teacher

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (Matthew 3:7-9)

With the true messenger, it is not enough to make a profession of faith. There must be corresponding works that bear evidence to the reality of the claims.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. (John 15:4)

True teachers of God realize that there is no goodness in themselves. They acknowledge with their lips and show by their life that their strength is in Christ alone.

But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. (Romans 6:22)

The ministry of the true teacher of God will always promote a life of commitment and true service to God. This will be seen in their personal lives and will be the fruit of their ministry.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

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In the life and ministry of the true teacher there will be a growing love for God and His truth. This will be their message to others so that they might also know this love. The true teachers and those under their ministry will seek the ways of God. Their lives are sincere as they earnestly strive to live for God. The praise, honor, and attention in the ministry of the true teacher are to bring God glory.

Matthew 7:21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Jesus warns us about professed Christians who think they are on the narrow way, walking with Jesus to eternal life, but in the end they will find out they were on the broad road.

Jesus describes the false prophets and messengers and their followers, telling us what their tragic outcome will be. It would do well for us to pay close attention to the words of Christ, for we may find ourselves unknowingly on the broad road to death. Prayer and praise do not prove that we are converted. Jesus said that those who are lost do not do His Father's will. They do not follow the law of God. If this is our case, we need to thank the Lord for awakening us from our delusion and repent.

Scripture Keys: Not every one shall enter into heaven

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things, which I say? (Luke 6:46)

Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, verily I say unto you, I know you not. (Matthew 25:11-12)

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way,

and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.
(James 1:22–24)

Woe unto them! For they have fled from me: destruction unto them! Because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me. ...They have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law. Israel shall cry unto me, My God, we know thee. (Hosea 7:13, 8:1–2)

Behold, ye trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, we are delivered to do all these abominations? (Jeremiah 7:8–10)

Profession without obedience is the fruit of a false experience. All who follow the false prophets and teachers may make high claims to serve God, but in reality despise Him. This is manifested by a lack of true commitment and obedience. Jesus warned the people of His day, and He is speaking to us today as well, telling us not to rely on profession alone, for profession is not sufficient to give us entrance into heaven. Unless Jesus is truly Lord of our lives, profession means nothing. Jesus must be in our hearts, not just on our lips, for we must be doers of God's Word and will, not hearers only.

Scripture Keys: Doing the will of the Father

Cause me to hear thy loving kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. (Psalm 143:8, 10)

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In ev-

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ery thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:15–24)

I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. (Colossians 1:9–12)

Matthew 7:22–23. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord”

The professors of religion who Jesus described are those who make wonderful claims, and apparently weave Jesus into all their work. The sheep’s clothing, the profession of Christianity seems so genuine. The counterfeit can only be discerned as we go to the Scriptures and to God’s great moral standard. There we will find that they are transgressors of the law of God.

The distinction between the claims of men and the assessment of Christ could not be more striking. On one hand, Christ claims He knows them not, while the professors of Christ make the claim that all their wonderful works are done in His name. Could there be a mistake? No, for Christ never errs in judgment. Despite their claims and apparent religious zeal, Jesus declares that they are workers of iniquity and lawlessness. They have not been born again and therefore “cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

The true children of God have had their sins forgiven, and they are empowered by Christ’s Spirit to live lives of obedience. (See 1 Peter 1:2.) The death of Christ, accepted by faith, works in them the righteousness of the law. (See Romans 8:3–4.) For the new covenant Christian, born again by faith and redeemed by the blood of Christ, God’s Holy Spirit writes the moral law, which is “holy, and just, and good,” upon their minds. (Romans 7:12). Then they can declare, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).

Despite their profession and great religious zeal, those whom Jesus declares as lost will be lost, because their lawlessness proves that they are not children of God. Christ says of these people, “I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:23). Oh, may this not happen to you, my friend!

Scripture Keys: The fate of those Jesus did not know

The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. (Proverbs 10:29)

It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. (Proverbs 21:15)

For, lo, thine enemies, O Lord, for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. (Psalm 92:9)

For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall

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not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.
(Psalm 5:4–5)

These words of Christ in Matthew 7:22–23 depict the sad end of the self-deceived. Though they have been outwardly religious, and have apparently lived Christian lives, bitter disappointment will be theirs at the day of final reckoning. “Is this fair?” you might ask. These self-deceived ones had the Word of God, and the Spirit sought to convict them, but they ignored it, declaring, “We are saved, we are going to heaven.” Because they “received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,” they were left to believe “strong delusion” (2 Thessalonians 2:10–11). Self-will was woven into all they did, for they did not do the will of God.

“Lord, Lord,” they plead, “we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.” Yet Jesus declares, “I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:25–27). Though attending churches and laying claims to the favor of God and believing they were going to heaven, this class was all the time serving the prince of darkness.

These persons prefer their own imaginations and inclinations to God’s holy law and the requirements of His Word. They have deceived themselves, for they loved a lie more than the truth, and unrighteousness more than righteousness. These who have professed Christ have clothed themselves in the garments of their own righteousness, which God has declared are “as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). They think they are “rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;” and know not that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17). The book of Revelation reveals this is the state of many in the church at the end of time.

Jesus is revealing to us the great tragedy of many modern-day Christians, claiming to be saved but still in their sins. Unless they repent they will be lost for eternity.

Matthew 7:24–27. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain

descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

“Built his house upon a rock”

Like the wise builders of Jesus’ day who constructed houses on solid rock foundations, is the one who receives the words of Christ and makes them the foundation of life. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah wrote, “The word of our God shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8). Peter, with the words of Christ’s sermon still fresh in his memory after many long years, quoting these words of Isaiah, added, “This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25). The word of God is the only sure and unchanging thing our world knows. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

We build our character, our spiritual house, on Christ by faith in His redeeming grace. True faith means to follow the words of Christ. We do not do this to earn God’s favor and merit heaven; rather, it is because, as undeserving as we are, we have received the gift of His love and salvation.

Faith that works by love is made manifest in works of righteousness. The followers of Christ are expected to do God’s will, not just claim to. The house of our character is built through the surrender of the will to Christ and obeying His word.

In the illustration of Jesus, the house that was built upon the rock stood firm amid storm and tempest. The stability of this house illustrates the spiritual lives of those who build upon the sure foundation, the rock that cannot be moved, which is Christ. We are to build our hope of salvation and our character “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20).

“Built his house upon the sand”

When we trust in erroneous doctrines, we are building upon sliding sand. Those who are building their spiritual lives on the sand may feel that they are right. They will come before God and say, “I have done this, I have done that.” But upon examination they are found to have built upon the sand of human opinion and the doctrines and commandments of men. When their lives are compared to “the law and the testimony” it will be proven that “there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Instead of building their faith on the sure foundation of Christ and His word, they have been building upon a false hope.

Those building on the sand are transgressing the law of God. They come to Christ boasting of what they have done, expecting His favor. But they have failed to lay hold of the righteousness of Christ.

Those who receive the false theories and doctrines of Satan are building upon the sand. They are among those who “will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3–4). This led them to accept “another Jesus” and “another spirit” and “another gospel.” (2 Corinthians 11:4; see also verses 13–15.)

As sincere as their belief and practice may have been, feelings and sincerity are no substitute for faith based on the truth of the Bible. In mercy Christ may overlook some of our misunderstandings of Scripture if we truly love and trust Him. Yet those who built upon the sand perverted the gospel of Christ. The warning of the apostle Paul is this: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Today, as in Christ’s day, many erect a standard of their own making, thinking to gain heaven even though they neglect to do God’s will. But all such people are building upon a false hope, a foundation of shifting sand. It is not enough to profess to believe in Christ, saying that Christ saves us when we do not live and love the truth He has given us.

He who builds on the foundation of human ideas and opinions, and the ritual and ceremony of man-made religion, and trusts in works that he can do independent of the grace of Christ, is erecting his structure of character and the hope of eternal life upon shifting sand. Through his carelessness, or prejudice, or the deceptions of the natural heart, he cherishes a self-righteous spirit. He puts human wisdom in the place of God's wisdom, and Jesus warns of how terrible the consequences will be.

“The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew”

To the one who builds his hope and faith upon a loving, trusting relationship with Christ and follows His word, the promise comes: “So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him” (Isaiah 59:19). Storms of trial and adversity will come upon us in this life, but we shall not be moved from our foundation, for our hope and faith is fastened upon the eternal Rock, Christ Jesus, and in the day of final reckoning we shall be accounted worthy of eternal life.

Trials and testing are the lot of all men. But for those who build their lives on shifting sand, their hope often crumbles under the storms. Others appear to prosper in the midst of life's adversities. But when God examines and tests these men, their character is “weighed in the balances, and . . . found wanting” (Daniel 5:27). We have only one life to prepare for eternity, and if our house is swept away because of having built on the sand, we will lose everything.

With words of admonition and warning Jesus brings the Sermon on the Mount to a close. His words sound down to our own time and reveal two classes of people. Either we are living for Christ and preparing for eternity, or we are living for ourselves and preparing for eternal loss. Build wisely, my friend, for how and what you build your life and future hope on will determine your eternal destiny.

Endnotes

1. James Strong LL.D., S.T. D., *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).

