

PROLOGUE

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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GRACE *and* TRUTH MINISTRIES

THE
SERMON
on the
MOUNT

What is a Disciple of Christ?

J O S E P H P . S U G R U E



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PREFACE

SO MANY PORTIONS OF THIS BOOKLET ARE TAKEN FROM Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship** that they are too numerous to footnote. I ask for the reader's understanding that while I have used much of what he has written, I know that I could not have conveyed it any better myself. That said, much of this is my own as well, and although Dietrich is comfortably at home with the Lord, I would have to say that this work is a partnership between him and me. I would encourage the reader to read his book, but the reader should first understand that neither book is for the lukewarm Christian or the faint of heart.

* Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Simon & Schuster Inc. First Touchstone Edition, 1995.

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INTRODUCTION

MATTHEW 5:1 – 7:29

BY THIS TIME IN OUR LORD'S BRIEF MINISTRY HE HAD multitudes from all over Palestine following Him everywhere. These crowds were traveling large distances with their sick, diseased, crippled, and demon possessed; and Jesus was healing them all. His popularity had grown, and each day was filled with the work for the needy, but for Jesus' part, the gospel was far more important than making the lame walk. The word gospel means good news, and the King of kings had come from heaven to bring that news – the kingdom of God was among them and all who would accept Him would be saved eternally. What good was it for a diseased child to gain perfect health only to die in their sins, separate from God in the Lake of Fire forever? Time would tell what the crowds wanted more: the healings or the teachings of Jesus. All who know the human race know the answer to that question, and it would be here on a hill in Palestine, on what would become one of the most famous discourses of all time, that such a division between them would begin to widen.

The night before, as He often did, Jesus went off to one of the familiar mountains in the chains of Galilee above Capernaum to spend the entire night in lonely prayer. This was an

important time of private communion with His Father since the discussion was about who would be His close ambassadors and representatives – the Twelve. Early the next morning He summoned those who had come to follow Him and from them He chose His disciples. It isn't long before the early morning is filled with the multitude that had been following Him for various reasons, and what they see this day is something different from the normal group of students that surround Him. Now they see twelve men who have been chosen from their midst, indeed, from the midst of the entire people of Israel, and distinctly set apart unto Jesus.

Jesus descended into the plain to do what He has done each day, heal and teach the forgiveness of sins, heal and teach the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, heal and speak of His coming to save sinners and set free the captives. He would cast out demons who would loudly utter, "You are the Son of God." And then suddenly, He went up to the mountain and through the clean air of that bright spring morning He spoke what has ever since been known as the Sermon on the Mount. Some distance below Him, in the plain, the many people heard the most astounding teaching ever spoken by a man, and even after it was done and all left – enlightened, confused, believing, and unbelieving – there have been millions who have heard the same words, as if they all occupied the plain that very day. I invite you to stand with me in that plain with them and let us open our hearts and minds to His words, whether you have heard this Sermon before or not, for these words are the words of heaven concerning the Messiah, the Son of God.

Our culture has grown used to some of the words. We have not grown up in a moral vacuum. Almost everyone has heard, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." Familiarity breeds contempt. We must read this sermon as if it were the first time we had ever heard any of its words, as if we were

there that day. If anyone was to do so it would arouse in them something like a sudden homesickness or longing for a loved one who was far away but is suddenly near. These words are the voice of God to man, and not about what man can be, but what he is in Christ. It is the words of God to man who is no longer in the Garden of Eden, and though he might only hear them in shame and in sorrow, seeking somewhere to hide, he does not. He hears them as a very real future since they are not a call for man to ascend to where God is, but a reality of the Divine coming to man. It is not God asking something of us, but giving something to us. It is true that the Sermon on the Mount is a call to the utmost limit of all possible moral conception, but it is not a goal that man is to seek, but the very ground upon which God has set a man who is in Christ. In every other system there is a "road by which, through self-denial, discipline, and effort, men seek to reach that goal. Christ begins with this goal, and places His disciples at once in the position to which all other teachers point as an end."* It is not the way of becoming a child of the Kingdom, but the way of one who has been made the child of the Kingdom. It is not a new law or a moral code, but a new life that all in Christ have been given by grace. It is the call to come home and to be forever with your loved One.

The twelve disciples have been chosen from the lost sheep of Israel, and this morning, as they are looked upon by those sheep as "His disciples," Christ is going to teach what His disciple is really like. How is the disciple related to God in righteousness? How is he related to sin and temptation? How does he relate to others in marriage and all other relations? It is in great contrast to the contemporary Jewish thought on these

* Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972. p. 528.

subjects. One cannot read the Talmud* and this sermon and even compare them or relate them, for they are not in the same league nor standing on the same ground. In Christ's words are a New Testament humility as well as perfection; there is a new life that can only come from God and is in God. It is not a list, rule, or ritual but a disciple's relationship to everything through Christ. It's as if Christ stands between the believer and everything else the believer beholds. It is Christ Himself.

The disciples have left everything to follow Jesus. As of now and this day forward they possess nothing but Him. They can call nothing their own and have forfeited all rights to anything. On the surface this doesn't sound like life but slavery, and in any other case, or with any other Master, it would be, but there is something here that escapes the eye of a great part of the world – who He is and what He has given. If I were to lose one thing but gain something else that is infinitely more valuable, would I complain about loss? And don't make the mistake that this is about achieving heaven. This is life for those who have already achieved heaven through faith in Christ. They lose much, but gain a hundred fold.

The disciples are a small flock, but Christ is after a much bigger one. These twelve will be His messengers, and they will find many to hear and believe their message, but they will also find great enmity. The portion of the world's people that bring all of their wrath against Christ, His gospel, and His word will fall upon them. Jesus' rejection will become theirs. Only Christ would call such people "blessed" who responded to His call, a call making them "poor, afflicted, and hungry." It is vital that we understand as soon as possible when studying this sermon that it is the "call" alone that made them and all disciples this way. They do not do it to themselves. A disciple

* The Talmud is the generic term for the documents that comment and expand upon the Mishnah, the first work of rabbinic law that edits Israel's oral traditions.

can be a millionaire and still be poor because his sole possession is Christ and he knows that the wealth is not his. If he was convinced it was God's will to give it all to the poor then he would without hesitation. The disciple possesses nothing, not even rights; all he possesses is Christ, and that makes him the wealthiest man alive or dead.

The Sermon on the Mount doesn't contain detailed systematic doctrine nor any ritualistic teaching. It contains the life of the one who has been placed in the Kingdom of God. It does not contain outward observances, for all of it deals with the inner man. It is not a new law or a new moral system, but entrance into a new life. What it states, which is as high as the heavens, is not to be achieved by man, but understood by the believer in Christ as the life with which he has been gifted. True, many Christians don't live it, but that doesn't prove that they haven't been given it. I may have a garage full of tools that I don't use and haven't the slightest clue how to use them, but I still have the access and ability to learn how to use those tools. Christ's teaching this day has never been heard before, and rightly so, for it is for the Kingdom that He brought from heaven. He came to found a Kingdom, not a school or an institute, and certainly not a new law or system.

Yet if the Sermon on the Mount contains a brand new condition of things, and is not like any other way, than its promises are not like other systems. They are not rewards for doing or the results of doing. "It is not because a man is poor in spirit that his is the Kingdom of Heaven, in the sense that the one state will grow into the other, or be its result; still less is the one the reward of the other."³ It is that a man is poor in spirit because he is in the Kingdom of Heaven. On the surface this seems more like a curse than a blessing, being that the poor in spirit have no earthly security, no possessions of their own, no

* Edersheim, p. 529

place on earth to call home, no nation on earth to claim their absolute allegiance, in fact, they have lost all. But we must ask ourselves what they have lost and what they have gained.

The things mentioned above are all earthly and temporary, and what the disciple now possesses is heavenly and eternal. Let's take the home for instance. By far, most Christians have a home, but it's not really theirs in the earthly sense. Their name may be on the deed, but although it is protection from the elements, it is not really "home." That designation is in heaven.

John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Now, if they lost their earthly home either financially or through natural disaster, they haven't really lost anything permanent or truly valuable. God will provide another place of shelter, but even if it was a mansion, it is not worthy to be compared with the home they have in heaven. So, we would conclude that by being placed in the kingdom of heaven by Christ and due to that, being made poor in spirit, they have actually been completely set free from slavery to earthly materialism. That's a gift, not a curse. And the fact that there are many Christians who sinfully value their earthly home only means that they fail to understand who they really are in Christ. They may be millionaires living in mansions and they don't know that they are poor in spirit, not because they choose to be, but because they are. This is not taking a vow of poverty. We are to enjoy all the blessings that God gives us, including great wealth if we have it, but we are not to value it as we do our possessions in Christ. We would give it away in a second if we thought it was God's will. We have been set free.

In this Sermon Christ is flinging open the gates of His Kingdom. All who believe in Him enter, and they all receive this life, which is His person and life. If we are ignorant of it

then we will not live it. The Bible is clear that there are carnal Christians who do not understand the life and hence have rejected it. If they have believed in Christ as their Savior then they are saved and all of this will be true for them in heaven. So why follow it now? For the child of God there is no other life. If he chooses carnality over spirituality he is attempting a life that he can no longer live and he will be miserable, missing out on the blessings of life in time. The Bible states that he will lose rewards, but he himself will be saved, 1 Corinthians 3:15. It is like an adult continuing to live as a child: childish things are for children and no one faults them for living such a way, but if they continue to act and live like children at an adult age then we conclude that there is something severely wrong with their minds. Earthly things fit us when we were earthly as unbelievers, but a believer in Christ has put away earthly things and his only life is heavenly.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS (THE BEATITUDES)

THE SERMON BEGINS WITH WHAT HAS COME TO BE known as the Beatitudes. This is the anglicized version of the title to this section added to the Latin Vulgate Bible. The Latin *beatitudinem* means happiness and this is exactly what the Greek New Testament states. Christ states nine things that make the child of God “happy” or blessed. The Greek word used is *makarios* and it means “pertaining to being happy.” Each time Christ states it He uses it in the plural – “happiness’s,” meaning that there are so many happiness’s for the child of the Kingdom of Heaven that they are too numerous to count.

Yet when we read them our first reaction is confusion. “How can these things make for happiness?” Shouldn’t riches, fame, power, and pleasure make for happiness? It is a terrible error to think that Christ is going to make every Christian poor, sad, lonely, and rejected. These things will come in their own way, but not even that is the point. When we have confusion about the things of happiness’s we are looking at them from an entirely earthly viewpoint. In these nine statements He is showing us how we have been set free from the bondage of anything in the world. To be a slave of the earth is not to be

a heavenly creature, and that is exactly what an unbeliever is. The carnal believer doesn't know that he has been set free and that's a tragedy since he is free, and there's no excuse for such ignorance, unbeliever or believer. He is the Lord of heaven come to earth with a kingdom that no one had ever seen, and within such a heavenly kingdom is not an earthly life. How could it be so? His kingdom has to have a heavenly life and it does, right here stated, contrary to all things earthly, and wonderfully full of happiness's for the freed slaves. Study it all and see if you can understand, and if you do, we will walk in the freedom that is Christ.

Matthew 5:1-3 And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

This teaching is for the disciple; the twelve as well as all believers who follow Him. The unbeliever has no business in such a life. It is impossible for him. Salvation has been the same since the beginning – faith in the Messiah as the one and only Savior. The believer in Christ is convicted by God the Holy Spirit that he is saved and that his life is now Christ. He is not asked to be this or strive to be this; he is this. In our first blessing the disciple is poor in spirit. This means that they have no security, no home, and no allegiance to any society on earth. For Christ's sake they have lost everything, even themselves. Yet everything lost has only been earthly and fleshly. What they have is the Kingdom of Heaven, and that

they can never lose. The blessings of His Kingdom are beyond what a man can ask or think. They have not even entered into the heart of man.

Luke 12:13-15 And someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me. But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?" And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."

Luke 14:33 "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."

Are we to give away everything we have and live on the streets or in the wilderness? To think that would be to look at the phrase "give up" in the wrong way. We are to give them up as belonging to us. We are to give them up as our priority in life. When God's will reveals to us to give to someone in need we do so gladly and without hesitation because our possessions are His and not ours.

The disciples have been set free from the earth, and in contrast to them are the national teachers of Israel who are fully grounded upon the earth. These enjoy greatness and renown and they are deeply rooted in the ways of the religion that they have perverted into worldliness and legalism, but they are not the ones called blessed. The blessed are these poor disciples who have lost everything and have gained Christ and His kingdom.

In society, Satan calls the poor blessed for political reasons and sociological ideology and not because of Jesus' call. In Satan's world system, the poor are exploited in a call for the redistribution of wealth, most of which goes to greedy and power hungry ministers of government, while the poor



remain poor. But the poor in Christ are made rich because they have gained Christ and His cross. Immediately, in Christ their material poverty becomes meaningless as they become possessors of Christ's kingdom. Satan fights the cross since by its grace all men can become rich in the kingdom of heaven. He falsely promises material blessings to every man, which, even if he could find a way to make everyone materialistically rich, would not one man be fulfilled.

Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

With every beatitude a gulf widens between the disciples and the common people. Just as with "poor" Jesus speaks of "mourning" as the world would define it according to its standards. The disciple does not seek the peace and prosperity of the world, in fact he refuses it since his own peace and prosperity come from Christ alone. He may have money and comfort and warmth, as so many Christians do, but he is not ultimately in pursuit of these things. Why would he? He already has all that he could ever dream in Christ. This mourning also refers to the fact that he is an unwelcomed guest in the world because he is a stranger in the world. He is ignored or scorned and even persecuted for his faith and way, since not only is it contrary to the way of the world but it exposes the hypocrisy and evil within the world, and not by pointing a finger at it and shouting "hypocrisy and evil." It is simply his lifestyle, his words, his conduct, his love and honor that the world finds so unwelcomed. It pulls back their thin veil of good and exposes their rejection of their Creator, His truth, and His Son.

Jesus said to His apostate brothers:

John 7:7 "The world cannot hate you; but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil."

And on His last night on earth, He said to His disciples:

John 15:18-21 "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me."

The irony is that the disciple of Christ loves the people in the world more than they could ever imagine or comprehend, and they are reviled for it. Because of this, sorrow comes upon them, but they bear it in the strength of the One who bears them. This sorrow will not be shaken off, for that would mean that they stopped loving man. It is borne in them by the Man of Sorrows and so they are comforted.

They find their comfort in the cross. Christ has suffered in the same way, but He was always comforted. Though many rejected Him there were also many who were saved by Him. If He did not offer His life for all, then He could not offer it at all. God's grace is not limited or bounded. There is no end or depth to the grace of God and the love of God which motivates that grace. They are unfathomable. So is the disciple. His love and grace are never ending, and many lives will be delivered that see Christ in Him, yet the world system and the people enslaved in it will reject him and count him a stranger of no value and without life. Hence, he will mourn, but he will be comforted.

Christ's home was and is in heaven and the same is true for His disciples. So they have lost their earthly homes and comforts, but what have they gained? They find their true home with their crucified Lord both here on earth and in eternity. For them, any loss is temporary and all gains are eternal. They mourn for others and mourn the contempt that meets their love.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

The disciple also knows that the ship is sinking while the crew and passengers sing and rejoice, and so he mourns for its fate and its fortune. While the world dreams of progress and enacts laws and ways to promote it, the disciple knows that they are missing the means of true blessing. Man envisions evolution and world peace and rejoices today in a future that will not come. The world will be destroyed and all who have rejected Christ will be judged. The love of God in the heart of the believer mourns over this truth while he reveals Christ to all that he can, and the world rejects him for this. "Why can't they celebrate the world and the future with us? Why are they so aloof, standing outside, have they no love for their fellow man?" But does the world understand the love of Christ? They confuse love with "being like them." They do not understand that no one loves them like a disciple of Christ does, which love impels him to stand outside and mourn and pray and voice the gospel of Christ.

This in no way means that the believer goes out of his way to look for suffering, which amounts to asceticism. The truth and the very real future judgment of God brings suffering into his soul out of his love for mankind, for God so loved the

world that He gave His only begotten Son. It also does not mean that all believers walk around sullen and sad. They are able to bear this natural sorrow through the cross of Christ and they are comforted. Sorrow borne does not look like the common sorrow of man who has no hope. Sorrow cannot tire them or wear them down, it cannot embitter them or cause them to break down under its strain; far from it, they bear it the same way that Christ did and they rest in the grace of God. It is not up to them to deliver man. It was up to Christ, and He accomplished it fully on Cavalry by dying for the sins of the entire world. Christ is their comfort. The community of cast-outs and strangers find their comfort in Christ and His work. In the kingdom of God they are home, both now and for all eternity.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the gentle,
for they shall inherit the earth."

This is most commonly known by the King James Version, "Blessed are the meek." Happy are the meek. The community of Christian disciples, strangers in this world, possess no inherent right to protect themselves. They do not claim these rights. They live under the laws of the land like anyone else and are protected by the military, police, and courts as anyone else, but if affording that protection hinders the gospel

or the truth from being heard and understood by the people of the world, they do not claim these rights. They live only for Christ, who when treated completely unfairly, did not open His mouth because the salvation of man was on the line. The disciple does the same. If someone steals from him or commits violence towards him, his first concern is the soul of his oppressor. When reproached he holds his peace; when treated with violence he endures it with patience; when driven away he yields his ground. The world sees this as unfortunate for him, but he rejoices in it.

The disciple is determined to leave his rights to God alone and therefore he takes no revenge, for “vengeance is the Lord’s.” They suffer injustice but do not cause a scene. They honor virtue when everyone around them is spitting on it. Thus they show by every spoken word and every visible gesture that they are not of this world. They reveal and thus offer that which is heavenly. What good is it for an unsaved man to attain his earthly rights and then forfeit his own soul? Such a man is to see, in the strange people of God, that there is a life that does not first and foremost seek such earthly rights and instead rests in heavenly rights. The Emperor Julian wrote mockingly in a letter that he only confiscated the property of Christians so as to make them poor enough to enter the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus says, “They shall inherit the earth.”

Those who live for the earth alone think they are gaining the earth, when it is the meek and gentle disciple in Christ to whom this earth really belongs. In the Garden of Eden it was told to man that he was to rule the earth, but in his infamous decision to reject God by eating the fruit he gave that rulership away. The Son of God condescended to become a man in order to give man what he was originally designed to rule. Now, it is Christ who sits at the right hand of God above all authority and power and only those who have believed in Him sit with Him. Those who reject Him cannot possibly rule this

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earth. They do so currently, but this will not last. Plus, it is not an eternal rule which the kings and presidents and prime ministers hold. They all die or are victims of a coup d’état and the office is passed to another, and so the reality is that no one really rules in time. But the King of kings and Lord of lords has ascended to heaven to sit at God’s right hand until all rule and authority be placed under His feet, and His brethren rule with Him. Since this is so, the protections of this earth are not what the disciple seeks or rests upon. He only looks to His Savior for rights and protection and his heart is vigorous for all who have not yet believed in Christ to hear His gospel.

Ephesians 2:4-6 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.

Those who now possess the earth by violence and injustice will lose it. This does not refer to the just judgment of God in time, which is seen, but has not yet been permanent. When one evil regime decays or is overthrown there has always been another one or ones that continue on. There has never been a time in human history when the earth possessed no evil nations. The inheritance of the gentle is the future earth. The earth will be made new by Christ at His return and the gentle will inherit it and rule with Him. After the final judgment of all unbelieving men and fallen angels, the entire universe and earth will be made brand new and sin and death will never enter it again. The inheritance of the meek is for all eternity.

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar

and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

2 Peter 3:13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.

God did not forsake His earth or mankind. He became a man in order to reclaim both of them. This transformation is already underway. It began at the cross of Christ where the meek and gentle One defeated sin and death and Satan who had reign over both as well as the earth. Christ created His church which has persevered through much persecution against her. It is true that the church has often behaved very badly by going opposite of the truths of this sermon and the commands of God upon her, but there has always been, in every generation, a remnant of true disciples who have overcome and have walked in this way of blessedness despite being persecuted for it. They have never been conquered and the church, comprised of them, has maintained their doctrines, their goods, and their families as they await their promotion by their Lord who died for them and shared His very inheritance with them. When Christ's kingdom finally comes, the meek shall possess the earth.

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Some think of history as being very long. This is fueled by

the thought that man is millions of years old, but even if he was, history is truly just a snapshot. People live for a comparatively shorter time. Seventy or eighty years in light of thousands of years makes man think that since all seemed to remain relatively the same in his lifetime that all time has and will continue as it always has. This is not so. God is not slow, but patient because He desires all to come to Him and be saved.

2 Peter 3:3-7 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Happy are they who know that they will be satisfied. When a person is ravenously hungry but they know that a grand meal is certain to come, they rejoice in the knowledge that they will be made full. The disciple thirsts and hungers for righteousness, but never his own. First of all, he was made righteous at the moment of salvation, at the very moment he believed in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be



sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Theologically we call this positional righteousness. God's righteousness was given to us at salvation and we are forever righteous, but only due to the blood of Christ. It is imputed to us and it is a gift earned for us by the Savior. Yet this righteousness does not guarantee that we will think, speak, and act righteously. Every Christian has a thirst and hunger for the experience of righteousness but some Christians are deceived through ignorance that they will walk in righteousness in some other way than is actually in Christ. This is why the Bible over and over again emphasizes the importance of knowing and understanding the word of God. A believer can be fooled into thinking that a righteousness of his own is sufficient, but in fact it is terribly deficient and falls on the evil side of the spectrum. The righteousness that he hungers for is the righteousness of Christ, or put another way, being conformed in life to the image of Christ – thinking like Him and conducting himself as Him.

Philippians 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son.

The disciple renounces his own righteousness and seeks for the image of Christ in his life. He does not look to others for praise for his achievements, no matter how virtuous and divine they are. He always looks to the future and knows that he never comes to a point in his life where he no longer needs to grow in reference to that image. He continues to eat of the

bread of life and learn more of the capability of the righteousness of Christ. He continues to drink of the living water and understand more of how Christ can satiate a life that submits to Him. He is forever a student and learner and grower and he knows that the more of the unfathomable depths of Christ that he plunges into and explores the more he will be satisfied.

John 6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

John 4:13-14 Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life."

Matthew 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy."

As if their own needs and distresses were not enough, the disciples take on the needs and distresses of others and so show mercy to all. Again, the promise is that this is happiness. The people of the world are very concerned about their own worthiness and dignity and compete with others to have the best of it, but not so for the disciple. In fact, he has renounced his own dignity while he takes upon himself the needs of others. If it seems that his dignity is lost in the eyes of bystanders as he shows mercy to a person in need of it, he has no concern for the opinions of those who do not see. The disciple has an irresistible love for the down-trodden, the sick, the weak, the

wretched, the wronged, the outcast, and all who feel the terrible anxiety that this world can so easily heap upon a person.

His eyes are open to seek out those who are beset with guilt and sin, for he once was as well, but he now knows the deliverance that comes through Jesus Christ. The disciples are the ones who have been released from their cell in the prison but refuse to leave the prison until they can relay to all others that they too have been set free. They will be found consorting with the undesirables of society as our Lord was found with publicans and sinners. No distress or sin is too great for their pity and mercy. They exude irresistible love which is shown to be true rather than hypocritical or superficial.

In order to be merciful they cast aside what most men consider to be most valuable, their personal dignity and honor. They will be ridiculed for this and taunted as weak, but these objects of reputation pale in comparison to mercy. They owe their very lives to our Lord's mercy and so true divine mercy is of greatest value. They depend upon the Lord for all things, including the value and evaluation of their own lives. They forget about receiving honor and dignity, for sinners are out there in need of mercy, and the Lord calls to them through the agency of the disciple.

They forgo the question, "If I take care of others then who will take care of me?" They are blessed and they will receive mercy. The Lord of all mercy will take care of them and who better to do it? One day they will be wrapped in His arms and they will hear Him speak to them face to face, "Well done good and faithful servant. You were faithful in many things." Yet their heart is not after any reward from Jesus, but like Him, their hearts are for the lost, the down-trodden, and those burdened with sin. If no reward were to be had their mercy would not diminish, but there is a reward – the fulfillment of life as a disciple, to be Christ-like, to be merciful, and to experience the joy in mercy as his Lord did.

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

The pure in heart are those who are obedient to Christ. Pure is a word that means clean as opposed to dirty, as light is opposed to darkness. Purity is goodness as defined by God and a good heart can only exist when the will is fully submitted to the will of God. By following Christ and Him alone, the disciple is undefiled by his own evil and good. By "his own good" we mean the works that man defines as good and produces independent from God. This definition changes from generation to generation and from culture to culture. This "good" is uncertain and variable because it is man-made, and man is constantly in a state of flux. Man's conscience changes as his own needs and desires change, but such a state is alien to God who is immutable. God's good is the same throughout all generations, from the beginning to the end. From alpha to omega, He does not change.

Man has this crazy idea that virtue and goodness are progressive, and that they will and must evolve. This is the conclusion of man who thinks he is a god knowing good and evil. He judges and determines for himself so long as it is convenient to his needs. He believes that the old ways should stay in the past and that over time his reason and science has caused him to become "enlightened." This is a lie that feeds the pride of man and his sinful desire for independence from God. He wants to be his own god. "That was good then but we're living in the now. Get with the times. Grow up!" Purity hasn't changed since before God created the world until now and forever more. For the disciple, to be pure he has to submit fully to Christ's commands and way. This is what is clean. He must be obedient.

A plight on modern Christianity is the Christian who

believes that he is so free that he can live in a religion of his own creation. He claims that he has a personal and private relationship with Jesus while he fails to obey the commands that come from Jesus. This sermon is not for him, for he thinks he has found another way, a better way. This is self-deception. Christianity has a law of Christ, a law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and that law is not open to modification. In Christ there are laws of conduct, love, mercy, forgiveness, work, fruit bearing, giving, etc. There are laws concerning sex, marriage, family, employment, social life, consumption, and even play and rest. This modern Christian alters these laws to his liking and then calls himself free and enlightened. He truly believes that he has found a better way and that because the Lord loves him, and God does infinitely, that there will be no recompense for his lifestyle. He is sorely mistaken. A pure heart is not one who has devised his own plan. It is a heart that has fully submitted to the plan of God.

The pure in heart have surrendered their hearts in obedience to Christ. They renounce their own definitions of good and evil and take on Christ's revelation of good and evil, and they live free and not conflicted. The promise is that they will see God. A Christian who devises his own plan and his own good and evil has his sights set on that which is not God, but a god of his own making. The obedient disciple sees the truth in knowledge as well as in practice, and so he sees God. He does not see God physically, for no man can see God in such a way in this life and live, but he sees God with the eyes of his heart, and anyone who sees God will not be able to take his eyes off of His magnificence, beauty, and mystery. This protects him from seeing God in fantasy, which is incredibly dangerous since a fantasy god is nothing more than an idol which is a demon. The pure heart sees the one, true, living God and beholds Him in His glory, which glory is the only good addiction on the market. He will want more and God

will oblige him. The glory of God from the pages of scripture shine forth into the heart of the believer by means of the Spirit of God within and this is blessedness.

1 John 1:3 what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

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

The disciple receives peace when he believes in Christ because Christ is his peace. Christ has given the believer His very own peace. It may take time for the believer to realize this truth but that does not annul the fact that he has already received it. But here we have the added call to make peace. A one sided view of the word "peacemaker" has led Christians to become activists in trying to create world-peace and even resorting to violence to accomplish it, without seeing the plain and obvious contradiction. As a peacemaker the Christian renounces all violence, revenge, and contentiousness. In the cause of Christ there is nothing to be gained by such methods. The kingdom of God is one of peace while the world is constantly in conflict and at war. The disciple endures violence and bears up under it rather than creating it or fueling it. He receives persecution and suffering and maintains his grace, mercy, and love. When

others would break off fellowship with a sinner, the disciple remains and so in him are the seeds of great peace. Peace in the heart of another may not arise but the disciple is always offering it. He renounces self-assertion and provides an arena for peace in a world filled with war and hate.

He does not try to create world-peace for he knows that this is impossible until the return of the Lord who alone can do so. In every situation he is in and with every person whose company he finds, he is a peacemaker because his heart is full of love and confidence that his Lord has fulfilled and satisfied him with. He is not out to take something from another, but to give and give. When he suffers at the hands of the wicked he offers peace and not retribution. He carries the cross of His Lord and is an ambassador of reconciliation and so shows himself to be a son of God. He is a blessed peacemaker and peace giver, a child of the kingdom of God, and one of the many brethren of Christ. He is unmistakably a son of God.

Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The word righteousness is missing a definite article, and so it is not "the righteousness," which would refer to the righteousness of God in principle, but righteousness in general or righteousness in action. The disciple makes righteous judgments and performs righteous actions and is persecuted for them by a world that hates them. The world hates righteousness revealed because it exposes their own evil independence from their Creator and they find a solution, not in coming over to righteousness, but in silencing it. Due to his righteous life the disciple stands apart from the ways of the world. He

cares not for possessions, wealth, honor, esteem, pleasure, or rights for he knows he will be fully supplied by the providence of God for all that he needs and enjoys. He follows Christ and walks in a manner worthy of his calling and doesn't care for recognition, and what he receives as his reward from the world for revealing Christ to that world is rejection by the offended. Still, he is happy, and he has the comfort that the kingdom of heaven belongs to him. No one in the kingdom of heaven is offended by righteousness for all love it. This is his home and his rejection in this world is temporary, plus, there will be some, perhaps only one, who will see the righteousness of Christ flowing through him and come to believe the gospel, joining the disciple as a possessor of Christ's kingdom.

Christ has just begun His sermon and there is much more for Him to say, but what a start! We can imagine the listeners starting to ask themselves if they have heard this right. There is no place on earth where this has ever been said. The people in the plain that day may wonder, "Where is the place for such men as Christ has called the blessed? Is there an institute, a school, and island perhaps where they can live?" There is no place for them that they could call home, for their home is in heaven, but there is a place for them until that time, which is a home in their hearts and that place is the apex of this sermon – Calvary. The Beatitudes are the crucified Lord. He is the embodiment of this life and He most fully and publically displayed that life on the cross. The home of the disciple is the cross and his fellowship in this life is the Crucified. Where is the poor, mourning, gentle, righteous, merciful, pure, peace-making, persecuted Man? At Calvary hanging on a rugged Roman cross so that He may save all mankind. The disciple finds his home there, while he finds his hope at the empty tomb. Resurrection is his just as much as crucifixion, and they are reproved by the world for that very reason. They can throw stones at this home of the disciple but they will never

penetrate its peace or its power. He is safe and secure in the arms of the Savior and he looks at the scarred hands that hold him and the scarred feet that lead him and he hears, “blessed, blessed, blessed.”

Matthew 5:11-12 “Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The insults, the persecution, and the evil all confirm the blessed state of the disciple. It is on account of Jesus and so He alone must bear it, and He does.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

We are called to cast upon Him what evil we receive from the world. And we are not alone nor are we the first. This suffering is being accomplished by our brethren all over the world (1 Peter 5:9) and in days long past the prophets of Israel were also persecuted. The voice of the disciple is full of truth which is given in confidence, and he does not react to the suffering received for it, but is exceedingly patient, making for a frustrated accuser. The world wants to be rid of the disciples, but within generation after generation they are always here, always singing His praise, always offering his mercy and peace, always acting in His righteousness, and always patiently enduring the suffering brought upon them for it. They know that they will

enter the kingdom of heaven and their faithful Lord will wipe away every tear from their eye as He welcomes them home, and they also know that more will come after them who will soon join them in the Kingdom, in the halls of which the poor of spirit will rejoice and speak to one another that they are truly blessed.

Such persecution we do not bring upon ourselves. We are not self-imposed martyrs or willing ascetics. It is “on account of Me,” and it could not be otherwise. We are not to be insulted or shocked at the persecution or evil insults that come our way since it is not even directed at us. So we wipe off any “How dare you” attitude and know that it is the Lord who is being insulted and not us. The reproach falls on Him, it is He who bears the guilt. The cursed persecution that is targeted toward us is simply confirmation that we have been and are walking in fellowship with Him. The meek strangers who love the people of the world far more than they deserve provoke the world to insult the One who set them free from hate and gave them infinite, unfathomable love. Jesus calls them blessed while the world calls for them to be banished, and still they rejoice in this because theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they will walk its golden streets in peace and in the light of their blessed Savior forever.

CHAPTER 2

PRESERVING THE EARTH

Matthew 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how will it be made salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp, and put it under the peck-measure, but on the lampstand; and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

AFTER HEARING THE BEATITUDES WE MIGHT GET THE impression that the disciples of Jesus are too good for this world and that they would be better off separated from the social world to live as monks on a high mountain or in a walled off institute where only the learned disciples are permitted, but Jesus immediately removes this thought. He calls them the salt of the earth and this means that the disciples are the

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supreme value that the earth possesses. At the time, good salt was very valued and coveted, plus salt was vital to life, then as it is now. Today, salt is manufactured in such purity and quantity that it is cheap and plentiful, but this was not the case in the first century. We'll get back to that.

Jesus brought us to heaven in the Beatitudes and now He brings us right back to the earth and the reason we are here. Though the disciple is a heavenly creature he has an earthy purpose. That purpose is to represent Christ to the world as lights of the world. Jesus' ministry was to Israel, His work remained in that land, and His message was to the people of the land, Jews. But the disciples are given the world. The whole earth is committed to them and it is their responsibility. Salt preserved food in the ancient world, and the salt of the earth is the reason for the preservation of the earth. When the people of the world and Satan, the ruler of this world, want to cast out Christians, they are desiring that which would actually destroy them. At this time, the age of the church, the earth is sustained by the church, for it is God's purpose for the gospel to be issued through her.

When Christ ascended to heaven, He didn't drop millions of leaflets to the earth with the gospel message on them, nor did He distribute millions of Bibles, but instead He left disciples behind. The gospel would be carried in them, however, the gospel would be stagnant or impotent in them if they did not follow Him. While it is true that if the disciples did not speak that the rocks would, we have not yet heard of a rock giving the gospel. The witness of the gospel is not only in the words but also in the life of the disciple, and in every generation there have been a number of disciples who witnessed wonderfully with their words and their lives. They have been and will continue to be the salt of the earth.

Christ didn't say that their preaching was the salt but that they themselves were the salt. He did not say that they have

the salt but that they are the salt. He didn't say that they must become the salt, it's not for them to decide, they are the salt. Jesus doesn't even call Himself the salt. He entrusts His work to them.

But the warning is that the salt can lose its flavor and thus it would lose its effectiveness. This is why it is the disciple that is the salt and not the gospel. The gospel cannot be diminished or increased. It is God's truth and plan, and because God is immutable His gospel cannot lose its effectiveness, but the disciple can. When a disciple refuses to follow Christ then the gospel he carries becomes quite silent, and on top of that, his life is no witness at all. Christ is to shine through the disciple, but the disciple who is mastered by the flesh and the ways of the world covers that light with a basket. In the ancient world salt was dug out of mines or concentrated from evaporated or boiled briny water, and these sources varied in purity. Often, the salt obtained was contaminated with other minerals. That pure white crystal that we find aplenty in salt shakers everywhere was quite rare in those days. It was usually discolored due to the contamination, but whatever percentage of pure salt it contained, it was enough to flavor food, preserve food, and provide the electrolytes that everyone needs. But if the ancient contaminated salt got wet in any way, the salt (sodium chloride) would wash away and whatever insoluble contaminants would be left behind, which were not salt. The result was that one had something called salt that had lost its flavor.

In the same way the disciple can lose his effectiveness by losing his desire to do the will of God and then he is good for nothing, i.e. he cannot do any good. As luminescence is to light so good works are to the disciple who follows Christ. One must realize that there is only one good and it is not by man's definition. God is the only good and all goodness can only come from Him. The man not walking with God, not in fellowship, not following Christ can do nothing good. He

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has become tasteless. Tasteless salt in the ancient world was thrown out into the street and passersby would trample over it. Either we follow the call or we are crushed beneath it. The disciple has the gospel by which men are saved. If he refuses to be a witness, he will preserve nothing.

The call of Jesus is also that we are the light of the world. Just as the disciples are themselves the salt, they are the light. He did not say that we were to become the light and that we have the light. The light is not an instrument in our hands, like a lamp. The light is the disciple himself. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," and now the disciple is as well. The light is his whole existence so long as he remains in his calling.

It is the property of light to shine and so the disciple cannot remain hidden. He cannot put himself under a peck-measure or a basket. It is important to understand that we are not making the light but that we are the light and so we must shine. We must simply just be ourselves, but not the old self or the old man: the new man in Christ. Christ who is light made them light and they are therefore a community of disciples that the world should see. They are not to seek to be hidden from the world in an institution or a commune, which would be a denial of the call. The new creature belongs to Christ and it is no longer up to him what he shall be. He does not make this determination. He is the light and must shine by following Christ and being who he has been made to be. He does not have to create his life or come up with a smart plan for it. Christ, His Lord, Master, and King has given the disciple His own life, His own light, and His own plan, and in following that plan, in God's predesigned way, he will be visible to the world as is a city on a hill.

The peck-measure or basket that blocks the light is the call of Christ denied. It is the fear of men, desire for reputation, fear of ridicule and insult; it is cowardice. It is the original shame of man who saw himself naked after the fall due to his

disunion with God. The peck-measure can also be humanitarianism or liberalism which seeks for good by the judgment of man rather than God. This is the most deceptive basket since such a believer will convince himself that he is doing good, but it is only good as determined by fallen man. As we have said, good works can only be done by God.

The light results in good works just as natural light results in the ability to see. Walking as the light, the disciples find that God does good works in them. They follow God's will and they rely on God's word, Jesus' work on Cavalry, the Holy Spirit within, the plan from the Father, and all of God's grace, and they find that they desire and perform good works. They produce the fruit of the Spirit and the virtues of the Beatitudes: poverty (all material belongs to God), suffering for His sake, meekness, peace, rejection, love, etc. which are all manifestation of the cross and so wrought by Jesus.

We can confidently say that the light shines from the cross of Christ and from the cross flow His own good works. All good work from the disciples is tied to the cross and comes from its base. But one might say, "Wasn't it dark at the cross when Jesus sacrificed Himself?" and we would reply, "Quite right, but do you not know what happened there?" The simplest observer knows what took place at the cross. Every believer knows it and owes his life to it. The rejection and suffering of Christ became visible to the world in the thick darkness of Calvary. We hear what He said, "Father forgive them; today you will be with Me in paradise; John behold your mother." In our hearing we perceive the loud cry of Jesus, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" With our eyes we see the empty tomb and in our ears we hear the proclamation of the angels that He is not there. We remember what He said to the disciples, that in order to bear much fruit, He must die, and we hear from those disciples that through His death, being forsaken and judged by the Father, the sins of the world

have been forgiven. Is the cross shrouded in darkness or has the work of Christ become visible?

The work of Christ on the cross and the person of Christ who was capable of such a sacrifice is to be visible in each believer. It is not to be hidden but revealed in the believer's own good works which are themselves the result of Cavalry, being from the same source. We are not to just talk about it, but it is to be the whole person of the disciple. His Lord and the cross are his thinking, his speech, and his action. The disciple has been made in Christ's image and so he takes up his own cross and follows Christ. Anyone can see it if they happen to be looking. We are not to make a big show of it so that we receive attention, that would be directly against the cross. We are to simply follow Him, and God will call the ones who will look upon the good works of the disciple.

From this place flows all of the good works of the disciples, and because of Him they are the light of the world. There was no merit to them. God has made all possible through Jesus Christ and has restored our union with Him. We must now be who we are and be that city on a hill that shines forth, and in our union with Him, remove all fear and conformity with the world that would reach for the peck-measure. The community of disciples are to stand together at the foot of the cross and their light is to shine forth from the cross that looms above them.

Christ didn't say that they would see God, but that they would see the good works of the disciples and glorify God. Notice that the world is not even to see the disciples. They are not the focus, but the good works alone. They would glorify God either by believing the gospel or by rejecting it. It is obvious that a man's acceptance of the gospel glorifies God, but why does rejection of it do the same? God provides the only means of salvation and He is the only light. Those who reject the gospel continue in darkness. If man could make himself light or wisdom then he would be gloried, but he cannot.

All that man does alone is darkness and comes to destruction while all that God does through His disciples is good and righteous. When man rejects God's gospel he is revealing its light just as much as the man who accepts it, yet sadly, he does not reap the benefits of it.

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CHAPTER 3

LAW NOT DESTROYED BUT FULFILLED

Matthew 5:17-20 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."

AFTER TEACHING THINGS WHICH ARE FAR BEYOND THE Mosaic Law the disciples may have thought to themselves that their freedom in Christ would mean that the law would

be destroyed, but Christ makes clear that we are to keep the law and teach it. Jesus has told the disciples that they now possessed all things through the grace of God and that they were heir-apparent to the kingdom of God. They are with Him now and following Him. They are the salt and the light as He is through them. The current, popular notions of right and wrong have just been superseded by Jesus. One would not blame them for thinking that Christ was dealing a death blow to the law and removing it entirely. But now He reveals that this is not the case at all.

Reading on into the New Testament we find that we are no longer under the law and this of course is entirely true. We are told that we are under a law, but not exactly the Mosaic one, rather it is called the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2) and “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). So then, is this a completely different law and is the Mosaic Law destroyed? This question was so bothersome to many in the early church that as early as the second century a man named Marcion started a church that posed a real threat to the Christian church. He was convinced that the fierce god of Israel ruled the world and was a different god than the god of love who was revealed through Christ and the apostle Paul. The differences between the law of Moses and the doctrines of the New Testament led him and many others to believe this dualism. Marcion accused the Jews of tampering with the text of Matthew and he altered 5:17 to: “Think ye that I am come to fulfill the law and the prophets? I am not come to fulfill, but to destroy.” Many others after Marcion have held to this interpretation, but as we will see, no alteration is necessary. The law of Christ or the way of the church is not entirely different from the old law. Rather it is a fulfillment of it. The old law is not destroyed but fulfilled and Christ came to fulfill it.

Some might think to just throw away their Old Testament, but that would be hasty. Christ is without question speaking

of the Old Testament law and He instructs the disciple to keep it and teach it. He tells the disciples that they are bound to it. We have to find how that statement fits with the writings of the epistles. The law is not repealed but fulfilled, and we will see how it is to be obeyed by the disciple of Christ living in the time of the church. The question for us is not whether Christ or the law has final authority, since one cannot have Christ without being obligated to the law; rather, the proper question asks, “In what way are we bound to it in Him?” and this question can be answered clearly and simply in Christ’s statement and the New Testament epistles.

The law of Moses consisted of rituals, feasts, animal and non-animal sacrifices, the Sabbath, cleansing rituals, food restrictions, a tabernacle or temple, tithing, and ethics. I’m sure I’m leaving something out but this will suffice. Out of this list, the fulfillment of the law by Jesus would take a few of things completely out of the picture, while leaving others to be fulfilled through Him. The rituals, feasts, and sacrifices all spoke of the coming Messiah and His sacrifice. Since at the time of the Sermon He was obviously present, and soon after the true sacrifice would be completed on the cross, the rituals, feasts, and sacrifices would no longer be needed, and in fact, performing them would now be blasphemy since it would suggest that He hadn’t come yet and hadn’t died yet. Next, the Sabbath was a day of forced rest in which the Israelite was to reflect on the promises of God’s covenant to them. Like the rituals, this is also complete in Christ. While His Millennial reign is still in the future, the basis of the covenant, Christ, has been fulfilled due to His cross and His being now seated at the right hand of God above all rule and authority. Also, Christ has given us His rest. This rest or peace is a daily, or rather, moment by moment rest in Him. The Sabbath is no longer needed. The cleansing rituals can also be taken away since the believer in the church is pronounced perfectly clean by the blood of Christ. He can

still have a spirit soiled with the flesh and the world (tasteless salt), but that is a temporary condition and not a position. Positionally, eternally, and where it counts the most, in the eyes of God, he is pronounced clean. The same is true for all food restrictions. These restrictions had their place before Christ came, but after He came and after He fulfilled the law, these were clearly removed, as Peter witnessed.

Acts 10:13-15 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!" But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy."

Tithing was a form of tax and not free-will giving. Tithing was a part of the law so that the temple and the priesthood would be supported. After the fulfillment of the law by Christ there is no longer a specialized priesthood of Levites and there is no longer a temple. All believers in the church are priests and their bodies are the temple of God. This is all due to the fulfillment of the law and so tithing is no longer a part of that which we are to keep and to teach.

There is one thing left to the law of old once all the rest is deemed obsolete by the coming of Christ and His finished work, and that is its ethics. Every violator of the law was guilty of the whole law and certainly ethics would be the area of greatest violation. God's ethics are far, far higher than man's, and so we would surely conclude that we disciples would also violate divine ethics as sinners, for there is no sinless perfection for the disciple this side of heaven. Are we then in violation of the whole law and so unable to keep it as the Lord commands us? In this as well Christ has fulfilled the ethical requirement of the law. When the law was violated in any way, an animal sacrifice was required and when Christ came, He became the true sacrifice for all sin. The blood of Christ

fulfills all of the law and though we are still required to fulfill its ethics, all of our sins are completely paid for. We are clean.

Some may say, "Well great, throw out the whole thing." But this would be in error since the believer, the disciple, is called to the ways of the Beatitudes and all the commands in the New Testament. These commands are righteous and they contain fully the ethics of the Old Testament. We are to walk in these things since we are in Christ. To say we follow Him and not follow His ethics is to lie to ourselves and to not follow Him.

Christ stands between the ethics of the law and the believer, and it is precisely for this reason that the law of Christ is new. The ethics or commands do not stand between the believer and Christ as if they were the means of drawing close to Him. He is in us and we are in Him, and through Him we have the power to follow the commands of God and through Him we have the forgiveness for the times that we fail to do so. This is the fulfillment of grace. For any believer to view this as a free pass to live a life of sin would reveal his complete inability to understand Christ's calling and would be a sure sign that he had become tasteless salt.

Romans 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!

When we look at the ethics of the old law we find that they are all summed up in two commands.

Matthew 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great

and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Galatians 5:14-15 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another.

The law of Christ (Galatians 6:2) or the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2) is not a better law than the old one, but one in the same. The difference lies in the fact that in the Old Testament it went unfulfilled and in the New it is completely fulfilled by Christ, and for this reason the disciples are commanded to have a better righteousness. The Old Testament saint was commanded to love the Lord God and to love his neighbor, but the Christian is commanded anew to love God and his neighbor with the very love that Christ had.

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

Hebrews 10:1 For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.

Hebrews 10:9 For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

Hebrews 10:15 Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

How could any Old Testament saint love in the way that

Christ perfectly and divinely loved? The love of the Old Testament saint was a shadow of the love of Christ just as his sacrifices, rituals, tabernacle, etc. were shadows of the Son of Man to come. The law of old is not destroyed, it is rather fulfilled in the believer who follows Christ, who possesses the righteousness of Christ and who can now walk in that righteousness by means of the word of God and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus loved the Father and loved His neighbor to the point that He laid down His life. His love was divinely pure and perfect and He gave this love to every disciple by which the disciple fulfills the ethics of the law to the maturity and stature that is Christ, which charity, love, compassion, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, joy, peace, rest, etc. etc. are fully unveiled in the New Testament as belonging to Christ and now to His disciples.

Romans 5:5 the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Only in personal communion with God is the law fulfilled and only in fulfilling the law is there communion with God. As was said, if a Christian seeks the ways of the flesh and the world then he is not in communion or fellowship with God; he does not follow Christ. The error of Israel was to equate the law with God. God is not the law but the Lawgiver. The gift was confounded with the Giver. They believed that they could attain salvation and justification by keeping the law and so they rejected both the help of the law and the salvation of God. The temptation of the disciples is to claim fellowship with Christ without fulfilling the law, and this is also an error. The law shows the way of godliness in divine virtue and ethics as well as that which is contrary to the righteousness of God. To walk in a manner that is not worthy of Christ's calling is to walk out of communion with Him. To commune with Christ

we must fulfill the law, and now, in Him, our righteousness must be His, better than that of the Pharisees.

Jesus was the only man to fulfill the law. No one can grasp this without believing in Him. When His actions and His words claimed that He had come to fulfill the law, so many of the Jews actually called Him a blasphemer of the law and as such they wanted Him crucified. Ironically enough, His crucifixion was the only way that He could complete His fulfillment of the law. So then, He alone is the fulfiller and now it is He who comes between the disciple and the will of God for the disciple as revealed in the law of Christ. The law that we live by is only possible through Him, and when He commands us to fulfill it, He is tightening our bond to Him. Not only are we with Him forever but we are also to walk in the same manner that He walked. Our essences and our lives are eternally bound. Adherence to Him is adherence to the law.

The fact that the law is fulfilled by Jesus actually makes it truly valid for the first time. We are not to just teach it but to do it. The disciple who follows Jesus will find himself both teaching and doing the ethics of the law as Christ did. The distinguishing factor between the church and Israel is not a different righteous ethic or virtue but a better one. The righteousness of the disciple exceeds that of scribes and Pharisees.

The scribe knew that he was not only to teach the law but to fulfill it, but he also knew that he could only do this imperfectly. He was bound to fail and have an animal sacrifice required of him. The disciple of Christ is also to teach and fulfill the law, but the great difference is that he can do it perfectly. Yes he is a sinner as the scribe is, but what the disciple has which the scribe did not was Christ standing between him and the law, the One and only One who fulfilled it, and the One in which he lives in communion. The disciple understands that righteousness is not a duty owed but something that he possesses and is a truly personal relationship

with Christ. The righteousness of the disciple is not something that he achieves by obeying, but a gift given to him by Christ. It is a call to fellowship with Him and to follow Him. The Old Testament saint is told to love the Lord God with all his heart and to love his neighbor as himself, and now the believer in the church does so to the measure and stature that belongs to Christ Himself.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

If one looks at the ethics of the Old Testament he will find that they are repeated in the New Testament. Love, mercy, faithfulness, rest, goodness, and on and on. He will also find that the law has been fulfilled and so all rituals and actions that spoke of the “coming” of the Messiah no longer have any justification. To perform them is to not believe in His having come and died and resurrected. But he will also find that in the New Testament there is an added fact to all of these ethics and that is he is to do them in Christ, as Christ did, and to do so perfectly. This is a substantial change, and why wouldn't we expect it to be so since Christ has come and fulfilled the law, and we are in Him, possess His righteousness, and are to follow Him.

CHAPTER 4

OUR BROTHERS ARE CHRIST'S BROTHERS

Matthew 5:21-26 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent."

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IF A PERSON IS GOING TO LIVE BY THE LAW THEN HE IS required to keep the whole law and to bear the reproach when he is a violator. The religious leaders in Jesus' time were very proud of their grasp of justice, but did they really grasp it? They stated that if you committed murder that you would be liable to the court. That is good, but under the same scale of justice, anger was permitted. It is not that anger should be addressed under state or federal law, but in relation to God, the believer is in violation of God's law when he is angry at his brother, and being in violation, it is required of him to the last cent. If you say you are going to live by the law then you have to stand by all of the law.

A disciple can never divorce his relationship with God from his relationship with his fellow believer or brother. The incarnation is the ultimate reason why this is true. Christ became like His brethren in all things.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

When a believer gets angry with his brother, swears at him ("Raca" = "empty headed"), or publically insults or slanders him ("you fool"), he is guilty of murder and forfeits his fellowship with God. His brothers are Christ's brothers and Christ is not ashamed of any one of them.

Hebrews 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

A barrier erected with another believer through anger of slander is a barrier erected against the fellowship of God, and worship, sacrifice, prayer, or service to God is worthless and unreal. If

we attempt worship of God while we have something against our brother we are in effect saying that we are willing to serve God but not God's children or the Lord's brethren and yet God, whom we claim to serve, has commanded us to. Christ became like His brethren so that He could serve them and save them, and how many of them were deserving of Him? Could any man claim that he was deserving of Christ's humiliation and sacrifice?

1 John 3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

1 John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

We can imagine a congregation full of gossip, cliques, jealousy, strife, and contention. Yet for about an hour on a Sunday they seem to put all of this aside as they congregate to sing songs, pray, listen to the word of God preached, and give money. All of it is a waste of time. First be reconciled and then go and worship. Such reconciliation is not accomplished by meetings or interventions but only by God's love. Hence, as the Pharisees and Rabbis were teaching the people of Israel that murder was a sin but anger was not, they were in essence teaching them not to love. Anger is an attack on another man's life. It refuses his freedom and aims at his destruction. Every idle word against our brother that we may think so little of is a clear sign of our own perceived importance above him and our utter contempt for him. An angry word against him is an attack that is meant to hurt him. It is a stab at his heart and a blow to his soul and that is why the Bible associates it

with murder. When we openly disgrace him we are in essence inviting others to join us in our death blows. We want others to despise him as we do and this murder of character, of the soul of a person, is most ungodly. God so loved the world that He became like His brethren in all things.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails;

In love a congregation can be made up of people who have a wide range of personalities and backgrounds and yet function in worship and service in perfect unity. God's love is the perfect bond of unity, Colossians 3:14, and a congregation with such love has a rich and true worship of God and God can use them mightily in revealing His kingdom to the world.

Christ says that the disciple should make friends quickly with his opponent while on the way, which leads us to see that we should not hesitate to apply grace, forgiveness, and humility to another. We might want to look for the right time or the right situation, but there is nothing to wait for. Now is the time and now is when we should reconcile. Anger should not ever be harbored in the soul. If we find it we need to remove it immediately by thinking the truth. To serve our brother, to please him, to love him rather than murder him, is the way of self-denial, which is the way of love and the way of the cross.

John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

CHAPTER 5

TRUE FREEDOM IS NOT A LIFE WITHOUT RESTRAINT

Matthew 5:27-32 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. And it was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

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ADHERENCE TO JESUS MEANS TRUE FREEDOM, BUT TRUE freedom is not a life without restraint. Some define freedom as the ability to feed every desire, but this is anarchy in which chaos reigns. The Lord does not allow a free reign of desire. A person who pursues every desire has no master and therefore no guidance. He will pursue good desires and evil desires and be in conflict. Since he is a fallen creature he has no mechanism within himself that can steer him in the proper direction. This is not freedom, for it leads to destruction and pain and loss. The disciple is not given free rein to love unless it is accompanied by God’s love.

Gal 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

God is unseen and so is the spiritual life. God’s plan does not depend on anything material nor does it in any way stand on man’s desires. Man’s lust generally falls in to four categories: pleasure, power, wealth, and fame. These categories have many subcategories and none of them are evil in themselves, but only become evil when they are lusted for. Wealth is not evil unless it becomes a lust and then it is viewed as a means of fulfillment or happiness, which it is not. Christ is speaking of adultery and men lusting for women. Sex is not evil in and of itself, but it becomes such when it is the object of lust. This is true of all lust.

God has given pleasure, power, recognition, and wealth to all of His children. His gifts are not defined as such by the world, but that only proves that they are far more valuable and fulfilling than what the world offers. God has given sex in marriage to be enjoyed by those who in commitment to Christ are committed to one another. God has given pleasure in the very joy of Christ. God has given spiritual wealth such as surpassing grace, unfathomable love, and eternal life. These are

priceless and eternal. God has given surpassing power through God the Holy Spirit and the word of God. And God recognizes every believer as being in union with Christ and served by angels. Therefore, why would the disciple want to substitute these priceless fulfillers of man's soul for the cheap copies that are in the world?

Hebrews 1:13-14 But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies A footstool for Thy feet "? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

Hence lust is a lack of faith in the blessings from God. Lust is impure because it is based completely on unbelief. The Lord of glory is the source of all things and to not trust Him to fulfill is to believe in fallen man as His substitute. Nothing that fallen man can do is able to stand next to God's blessings. They cannot be compared. Man's own attempt to fulfill his desires can only end with the same results that come with every other pursuit in independence of his Creator. A substantial effort is invested, some results are seen but it is not long before they are known to be a shadow of the real desire, and so the results are discarded and the process is started over with another investment of effort. Any of the gains of lust are trivial compared to the loss it brings. To man, the next effort is a different one, but to God they are all the same: attempts to fulfill desire without Him, the Creator of all things good. Man discovers that all such efforts have the same result, instead of fulfillment there is loss, but there is always the hope of the next effort. Christ is telling the disciples to quit on this endless cycle because they now belong to Him and He has fulfilled all their desires.

The disciple must understand from Christ's word, from the

word of God, that he is fulfilled in every way imaginable, or in fact, unimaginable.

1 Corinthians 2:9 "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him."

So then the believer has no business pursuing the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. The disciple finds his fulfillment in the unseen God and knows that only in His way will there be true satisfaction and satiation. In such a way the eyes of the heart, the eyes that are within the disciple, see what God sees and so they are pure. All lust starts with the inner eye and then the outer eye is set to the task of locating the object of lust. When the eyes of the heart are impure they cannot see God and so they cannot fellowship with God.

We must now determine if the Lord means what he says about tearing out eyes and cutting off hands figuratively or literally. If we don't take it literally then what He says has no meaning and we would be evading the seriousness of the commandment. If we take it literally then we find our position on lust to be absurd. Surely, a lot of Christians would stand out as having no eyes and no hands and the ones who had them would be known to be liars. So what do we conclude? We are put in a position with no alternative but to obey. "I'm not going to pluck out my eye, so I will obey." It's not a fear tactic but a matter of importance. If I am a new creature in Christ then I have no alternative but to obey my Lord. In grace, when I fail I will not hide it or blame another, but will be fully open with God and acknowledge my wrong and then I will recover my obedience and rely upon His cross and His forgiveness. I will not be passé or flippant about His command but know that it is my life, my calling, and my destiny.

The Lord then deals with the disciple in marriage. Many

reasons were given for divorce by the establishment in Israel, but the Lord takes all of these away. His prohibition on marriage is a liberation of marriage. He liberates it from selfish and evil desire and consecrates it to the service of love, which is only possible for the disciple in fellowship with Him. God gave marriage as a gift to mankind and in God alone was marriage defined. Man's selfishness destroys it. In the Garden the first man and woman cleaved to one another in perfect union, but through the fall and disunion with God man found disunion within himself and disunion with his mate. But in Christ are all things made new. The love of Christ in the hearts of two disciples who are married find an even greater union than the Garden. The husband and wife now have Christ between them and love is the perfect bond of unity.

The freedom to divorce for any reason is not freedom since it destroys the institution of marriage and makes it something else than marriage by God's standard. How could there be freedom in marriage when the very fabric of what it is as defined by the Creator is taken away?

God does not condemn the natural instincts of the body. He fulfills them for the body and the soul in marriage. Christ has taken marriage to the eternal and lofty level of the relationship of Himself to His church. While the man in unbelief may desire multiple partners over time, God reveals the truth that this will only hurt his body and his soul. God gives man fulfillment in commitment where the service of love is not temporary but lifelong. A partner who commits to lifelong service of love is a fulfillment to the soul and will be just as much to the body since the body is not only stimulated by its own neural network but also by the thoughts of the soul. In fact, their physical stimulation will be very great since it is the soul which amplifies the body's stimulation. Therefore, the one seeking divorce for any reason outside of adultery, lacks faith

in God and this is what is condemned. As has already been made clear, lust is unbelief and divorce is also unbelief.

The disciple's adherence and dedication to Christ is extended to his marriage. Christian marriage is marked by discipline and self-denial. The word "unchastity" refers to any sexual deviance from God's order and for marriage it would refer to sex outside of the marriage, adultery. All sexual deviance is a sin against the body of the sinner and against the body of Christ. Our bodies are the holy temple of God and they belong to Christ. What partnership has Christ with a fornicator or an adulterer? In the commitment of marriage there is a partnership that is as deep as the one existing between Christ and His church.

1 Corinthians 6:13-15 Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be!

What the world sees as a restriction is in fact a great liberation. Christ came to set the captives free and that means that their lives are free, including their marriages. This is impossible when man is enslaved to his lusts and desires, but Christ has destroyed them through His own crucifixion. He died for the sins of the world and He destroyed the power of the sin nature. Hence the believer must come to know who he is in Christ and then he will know and see that the way of the Lord, the way of the disciple, is the only way of life for him. It is the only way of life and freedom. If the world's way was good enough, if the flesh's way was sufficient, then why would the Son of God become a man and die so that He could strip them of their power? There is no life in the world

or the flesh and Christ was crucified by the one so that He could give the other.

Gal 5:24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

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CHAPTER 6

THE DISCIPLE IS ALLOWED TO ONLY TELL THE TRUTH

Matthew 5:33-37 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; and anything beyond these is of evil."

THERE HAVE BEEN SOME STRANGE INTERPRETATIONS OF this passage over the years. Is Christ saying that we should never take an oath? There is grave danger in misinterpreting passages of scripture. The obvious reason is that it produces a falsehood in the mind concerning the passage in question, but also, since scripture is one large living organism that is "the

truth” or “the mind of Christ,” every passage is intricately connected like the billions of neurons in the brain. When one is affected the others will be as well. A false doctrine can cause other false interpretations of related doctrines, and since “the truth” is the life-blood of the disciple, false doctrines are like a blood born disease.

In order to understand the very important lesson that our Lord is giving about vows, we must first understand what a vow or an oath actually is. On the surface it is a promise made by a man to another, to God, or to himself. It can also be a contract in which the vow is the promise to keep up one’s end of the bargain. An oath made before God is an appeal made before Him in public, calling on Him to be a witness and then to avenge the truth. But why would men need or use such things? The existence of oaths is due to the fact that there are lies. Since we don’t live in a world void of lies and since each man and every man is capable of a lie, oaths are given before God so that the lie can be avenged by God and if no lie is hidden in the oath, then the promise is upheld by God. Jesus destroys the lie by abolishing the oath altogether.

By telling us to make no oaths at all, Jesus is taking away the option to lie. He is destroying untruth in the believer. He takes it off the table completely.

The lie causes the oath and Jesus seized on the lie by forbidding the oath. The lie can hide in the oath as it so often does. The lie can actually be the oath, which is perjury. But what about the one who designs the oath? In Israel it was customary to swear an oath by the temple or the gold in the temple and they actually classified one oath above another in importance (Matthew 23:16-17). Christ called them fools for this and pointed out that in swearing by the one thing they are swearing before God ultimately. The one who designs the oath can be secular and corrupt and so the oath itself is corrupt and therefore the lie is born right into the oath.

Israel came to believe that only oaths were words answerable to God and all else was not spoken in the presence of God. It was as if they decided when they spoke before God, which was in the form of an oath, and when they could speak outside of God’s presence, or not in an oath. There is similar thinking in our day when people think that certain buildings or places are holier than others, like a church or a place where someone claims to have had a vision, and in these places the speech of people is altered because they fear that God is closer than in other places. This is ridiculous. There was once one sacred building and it is no more. All things are laid bare to our omniscient and omnipresent God in all places. This type of thinking is also abolished when Jesus abolishes all oaths. He is in effect saying that all words are spoken in His presence.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Hebrews 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

So then, without oaths, yes is simply yes and no is simply no. We do not lie. We say what we mean and we do what we say, yes or no. We represent the truth and so there is no lie in us. Remember, we are not sinless. It doesn’t mean that we will never lie again, but that we always seek not to lie, and when we sin in this area, we recover under the grace of God through confession or acknowledgment of the lie to God. The disciple is simply to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and not just when he thinks he might get caught, but at all times and in all places.

Jesus calls the oath evil or of the evil one because it gives

occasion or acknowledgment to the lie and Satan is the father of lies. We are a light to the world in all things, even our words. The possibility of a lie should never be entertained.

One may wonder if this implies that a believer can never take an oath of any sort. Certain organizations cannot function unless those in them take oaths stating that they willingly comply with the organization. This is not of the same character that Christ is speaking of. Such oaths are very infrequent whereas the oaths that Christ speaks of are of the everyday variety. It is proper for a foreigner to take an oath to obey the laws of the land he desires to become a citizen of. Likewise, it is proper for a soldier or a politician to take an oath to obey and defend the Constitution. In marriage, since it is a public acknowledgement of legal and spiritual dedication and union, it is proper to profess vows in public. In such cases, one cannot say that he is a Christian and that fact exempts him from these oaths. These organizations function for believers as well as unbelievers. They are akin to signing a contract before taking a job thus committing oneself to the conditions of employment. These are not the things that Christ is speaking of. He is removing all protection, camouflage, and reason for lying.

Disciples have nothing to hide. Hiding sin and evil is mentally exhausting. The disciple knows that he doesn't need to hide anything from God, and not just because he knows that God sees all, but because he knows who he is in Christ and so his weaknesses and flaws can be fully opened before God and himself and he finds that God will heal these wounds and forgive, refresh, and strengthen him. A man's whole being should be exposed before Him, his evil laid bare. Sinful men hate this. They wish to wallow in their darkness rather than expose it to the light and be healed.

John 3:17-21 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved

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through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

The flesh has been crucified at Calvary. That has been brought to the light for all to see, for Christ is the light of the world. The cross is God's truth about us. It is ultimately the only truth about us. It was the cost of our salvation and so our life. Only the cross can make us truthful, but the man who rejects Christ chooses the lie and the oath that protects and hides the lie, and so he chooses darkness over light. Since the light exposes the lie the darkness is afraid of the light, but when we know the cross, we are no longer afraid of the truth. We don't need any more oaths.

The truth means light and open exposure without barriers. Lies are barriers and so they destroy fellowship. A person may think that lying will maintain a relationship, but it is only a matter of time before they destroy it. Untruthfulness destroys fellowship. Since the disciple is to walk with Christ in fellowship with Him and in reconciliation with his fellow man, he has to always live in the truth and abandon the oaths and thus the lies. Truth establishes trust and so it makes for genuine brotherhood.

CHAPTER 7

OVERCOMING EVIL

Matthew 5:38-42 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

CHRIST FULFILLED THE LAW AND THE DISCIPLES FULFILL the law through Him. This command of retribution (Exodus 21:23; Leviticus 24:19-20) like any other is to be fulfilled in the disciple. In the Old Testament, God reveals the reason for this law, "Thus you shall purge the evil from among you." (Deuteronomy 19:19) The law has within it a divinely established system of retribution. It seems that Christ is abrogating this law when in fact He is showing us the way to fulfill it. By patiently

enduring evil, by not resisting it, we actually eradicate it. So why didn't they do that in Israel in the Old Testament?

Israel was a nation, while the church is not. This is a major distinction. The church is not Israel. They are distinct from one another. Since Israel was a nation, the personal rights of the people had to be protected or else the nation would fall into chaos. The "eye for an eye" provided the restrictions needed so that crime and violence would not run rampant. To establish a proper community and for that community to survive, evil must be eradicated. Evil will always exist in the shadows and the dark places that everyone knows exists but no one talks about, but if evil becomes common and accepted and open, then the community ceases to be one and the people are plunged into the randomness of chaos and individual survival. As a theocracy, the nation of Israel could not descend into this. If the nation was to be dealt with it was by God alone and so to His nation God included politics and law. The church does not contain politics or laws.

The church is under the law of Christ, and part of that law is not to resist evil but to turn the other cheek. The law of the church is the law of love. The rights of the church are the rights to know Christ and follow Him. All earthly rights have been forsaken by the church. The law and government are designed to eradicate evil and in a completely different way the church finds the same result, and it is much more effective. The church is a community of believers, all believers everywhere, and they are without political or national ties.

Israel was the chosen people of God and the chosen nation of God in the time of the Old Testament. If the nation was threatened by outside military conflict, as they so often were, they had to meet force with force. Certainly when they entered the Promised Land under Joshua they met force with force and took the land away from those who had no intention of giving it up. But the church is not a nation. The church is the

invisible bond of unity that exists between all believers everywhere. The church is the body of Christ, and since it does not possess borders or governments, it eradicates evil in a much more effective and different way.

What happens to evil when it is resisted? It fights back harder than the last time, using all energy and resources to achieve its goal. Evil power will only succumb to a greater power, and then, only reluctantly. If the church fought back against evil, then evil would fight back harder. If the church were actually to win a conflict against evil through aggression then there would just be another source of evil just waiting to get its chance. However, if evil finds no resistance, it will eventually stop since it fails to find the war that it's looking for. Without opposition, evil soon runs out of fuel. Plus, it's not as if evil can actually ever triumph over the church. What the church is has been given by Christ through His finished work and no one can stop or undo that. Christ sits at the right hand of God until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. Evil can't win. Christ and His church have already won, so why fight back? Conflict only adds fuel to evil and evil is desperately low on power.

Why is Satan evil? It is because he opposes God and God's goodness. When we patiently endure evil, though we will be hurt in some way, we will find that we have defeated it, and we will also find that we showed to evil the face of Christ. Through our patient endurance we allowed evil to look right into the face of Christ and only in that way is there the chance that the evil person will turn to good through faith. All resistance must be forfeited and all revenge renounced, leaving the evil and the evil one fully in the hands of the Lord. All vengeance and salvation belongs to Him.

When violence, insult, and scorn face Jesus Christ they stand exposed and condemned. If the disciples were to pay back with violence then evil would only be looking at itself

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as in a mirror and would find itself fueled and recognized as powerful. But in the face of Christ it has no breath. It becomes weak at the knees and does what only its inner coward can do, and that is to flee.

If the church were to act like a nation then it would have to exclude some people. All nations need immigration laws, in which for protection and survival certain laws are applied to distinguish those who may enter from those who cannot. The church has no qualifying laws. All who believe are a part of the body of Christ, the church. The church invites and doesn't exclude. Paul was all things to all men so that he could save the more.

So in a Beatitude fashion the followers of Jesus renounce every personal right. When met with injustice they do not claim their rights. The disciples are absent of possessions and bound to Christ alone. Does this mean that the church has no protection? Wouldn't such an attitude of endurance destroy the church? The church has to ask herself if her Lord and Husband, Provider and Protector is actually real. We leave all aggression for God to deal with. Vengeance is His alone. Let evil run itself to exhaustion because it has no resistance. Resistance only fuels it. Evil begets evil. Patient endurance and trust in the Lord are more than its match. The last ounce of resistance must be abandoned. But, one may ask, what about violent crime like murder and rape? Are we to turn the other cheek? These things are major violations of the law and if they are allowed they will destroy a nation. In such cases the issue passes from Christian patience to national law and the violators need to be prosecuted under that law. If you are the one in ten million who has their home broken into by a violent criminal, defend yourself and your family vigorously. The same goes for war. If a citizen is called to fight for his country he must go and fight, Christian or not. But these are rare cases and not the norm. The Christian is commanded to

provide for his own family, and he can do so in almost every situation while showing grace and endurance to all. The rule of grace and mercy exists so that evil will find exhaustion and that sinners will be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ.

In Christian patience and endurance the believer is free from the tyranny of his own ego. He doesn't fight for his own life, the Lord does. He is unconcerned when he might look weak in the eyes of others who want him to fight. He knows that he is not weak but strong. He relies fully on his Lord to fight the battle. He is strong in endurance and resilience. He is strong in the bearing of burdens. He does not recognize any rights of evil, for it has none. Rather, he exposes evil for what it is.

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CHAPTER 8

THE EXTRAORDINARY DISCIPLE

Matthew 5:43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

"LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR" WAS CERTAINLY GOD'S COMMAND in the law, but "hate your enemy" was not there. This was only implied by the Jews and popularly accepted. They

concluded that if the first is true then so must be the second. Jesus doesn't only instruct them to get rid of the made up second part, He takes the command to love your neighbor and includes your enemy, and as such He states that you are behaving like a son of the Father who is in heaven. This takes the focus off of us and puts it on the Father. How did the Father behave towards His enemy, which at one time, before their salvation, included all Christians? He loved them, and He loved them so much that He gave them His only begotten Son. If we love our enemies we are acting just like Him and we look like His sons.

We are to see our enemies as our brothers. We are to pray for them, love them, and greet them. We were once just like them, entrapped in the futility of mind and flesh. We also hated and persecuted and casted insults. The more we hated, the love of God atoned for it. The more our enemies hate us the more we love them (Psalm 104:4-5). After all, who is more in need of God's love: His enemy, who is headed down the road of perdition to eternal ruin or His son, who is filled with His love at all times? If we fight back against them, don't pray for them, don't love them, don't greet them, then they only see themselves in us and not God. By returning love for their hatred, by standing at their side in prayer and asking God to bless them with sight, by greeting them as a brother, they are seeing Christ in us. They may go right on hating, but Christ doesn't change, and He never stops offering His hand in love. And while He sits in heaven, He does this through the disciple. Love in the midst of its enemies found an apex at the cross of Christ and it was, is, and ever more will be the ultimate in glorification of God.

Having Christ's love allows one to see the world and the people in it from an outside vantage point, and he sees the natural world in its true light. He sees clearly where there is hatred, sin, evil, darkness, etc. There Christ is absent. He can



also see godliness and it is clear that it exists solely because of Christ. But this doesn't impel him to condemn the one with contention and love the other. Because of the love of Christ he sees that the ungodly are in desperate need of Christ who would cure and clean all the filth that they love, no matter how ungodly that may seem. Christ died for all and so all can be made alive. The disciple doesn't see judging through the love of Christ, but compassion, mercy, forgiveness, grace, and the cross. He in fact loves the enemy of Christ, who is his enemy.

Loving an enemy does not condone his evil. Love offers deliverance and reconciliation from the greatest position of strength and truth rather than timidity or weakness. The disciple is not drawn into evil, nor does he agree with it, but he does not judge his enemy. He rather offers him salvation in Christ in love. Why a person may be his enemy, whatever the reason, is of no importance. All reasons are just as erroneous. The disciple doesn't ask this question, for to understand it he would have to think like his enemy, and there is no good in that. Rather he engages his enemy in love, serving him sacrificially for his betterment and without hypocrisy. It is not passive endurance but active love. The disciples are to bless them and do good to them. We are to serve them as one who stands by a brother in distress in order to sooth and comfort, and not in hypocrisy, but in the effort of real healing. We all once had bitter hearts that needed healing from the only One who could do it, and for the disciple to be the instrument in the hands of his Lord for such a purpose is the most satisfying of works.

Our enemies are not those that we harbor hostility towards. That would be preposterous. No room is made anywhere for such a notion that we determine our own enemies. Our enemies are those who cherish hostility towards us, and they don't hate us, they hate Christ. They desire us to be like them, but we are not and could not be. We are of Christ and it is He whom we follow, and because of this we are not like them at

all. We do not retaliate but love them and treat them like a brother. So then, this love* is not the typical and common love of man for man. This is not the love that we may have for our spouse or parent or child or congregational member. It is not a love of attraction or one that seeks anything for itself. It is a love that gives and seeks for the benefit of another. Such a love is as alien to the world as another universe, but it is Christ. Because we walk in it, it makes us strange.

Verse 47 in the NASB states: "And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others?" In the original Greek of this verse, we find first off that the phrase, "than others" is not written. It is implied by the translators to help the interpretation, but there is no need for it. Literally the Greek says: "And if you greet your brothers only, what more?" This is still a bit clunky in English, but what adds clarity is the word translated "more." It is *perrison* and it means "extraordinary, what abundance, unusual." In other words, if you are just like the unbeliever who only greets his brother, how are you extraordinary or unusual? "If you greet our brothers only, how are you extraordinary?" Christ is unusual when compared to the world and so is the disciple. The disciple is extraordinary, but not by some asset of his own, but by his proximity to Christ. What makes him unusual is that he is filled with Christ's love.

At salvation Christ makes us extraordinary. We become in union with Him and are made perfectly righteous. The truth is opened up to us as is the very glory of God that we may behold it, 2 Corinthians 4:18. The things of God were foolish to us before, but now they are laid bare and through the Holy Spirit they will be revealed to us, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. We now behold in the world where the graces of Christianity are absent, and we see the sin and evil that results and find ourselves repulsed. Christ made us brand new creatures and gave

* The Greek word used for God's love is *agape* and it is defined as complete sacrifice in giving virtue and grace to another for his benefit.

us His very life, Colossians 3:4, and because of this we take upon us a certain death in sacrifice for our enemies. Extraordinary indeed.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 but just as it is written,
 "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,
 And which have not entered the heart of man,
 All that God has prepared for those who love Him."
 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

The extraordinary is outside of the natural. Those engulfed in the natural cannot see their own world nor themselves from the enlightening viewpoint of the outside. Only the *perisson* is able to see and therefore love. This love is not the love of country or family or friends, for all who are in the natural do that, but *agape* comes from heaven in Christ who is unnatural and hence only those who have been made new creatures in Christ, who are forever citizens of heaven, i.e. who are outside or extraordinary, can love with Christ's love. The lifestyle

of such a disciple has already been described starting with the Beatitudes, and there is still much more to come. He has the life of Christ and this he must understand so that he will never be duped to again settle for the natural. It is the life of the follower of Christ, the life of the Beatitudes, that which lights up the world, which owns nothing in this world, who is a stranger, who is meek, who has a deep thirst for righteousness, who is merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, a lover of his enemies, and he is persecuted for it.

The extraordinary is practical and not just an abstract idea that is believed but not performed. The disciple's life is a life of doing, a life of action, as was the cross. We first learn of it in thought but then we perform it in action. God has a purpose for His disciples, and although their wisdom and power and spirit are invisible, the manifestation of them are not. The disciples are a city on a hill and a light in the house upon which a basket is never put. It is not eccentric, which men only like in order to garnish attention, but rather quite simple in practice. It is "unreflecting obedience" to the will of God. Christ in His humanity became what His Father wanted Him to be, went where His Father wanted Him to go, and did what His Father wanted Him to do, and the disciple does the same. The questions of what and where are not for him to ask, for they have been provided by the Father, and the disciple follows them as Christ did. This is the extraordinary in practice, not endlessly arguing minor points of doctrine, as some theologians do, but learning the simple and pure truth and then doing it.

As the disciple acts as the extraordinary in this very natural and fallen world, it is a guarantee that he will suffer for it. If he does not suffer undeservedly then his life is not the activity of which Christ speaks (Philippians 1:29). This does not mean that he goes out looking for a suffering or that he will suffer all the time, for there will be many times of great

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rest and prosperity, but suffering will come in the form of persecution, insults, and even violence.

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

CHAPTER 9

THE ONLY REASON TO DO GOD'S WILL

Matthew 6:1-4 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

TWO TIMES OUR LORD USES THE WORD "BEWARE" IN His sermon; when He tells us to beware of false prophets, and here, where He tells us to beware being spiritual to be noticed by men. The word *prosecho* could literally be translated, "to hold to your face." It means to take heed, to pay close



attention, to beware. This shows us that some traps are easier to spot than others. A false prophet who is not very good at being false is easy to spot, but unfortunately they are not all like that. The ones who are good at the art of being false are the ones we must beware of. So when it comes to teaching that is proclaimed to be from God, we should hold it close to our face in order to examine it closely against the standard of the word of God, and then we will see it to be either true or false. The other thing to examine closely is the motivation for the reason why the believer seeks to perform any righteousness.

We can seek to do God's will as a disciple for the purpose of being noticed by others or we can seek to do God's will for the sole purpose that it is God's will. Since in both there is the seeking of God's will, one can easily be deceived in the former case. In the same way, if we believe the message of the false prophet, thinking it is from God, we will also be seeking God's will, albeit falsely. In wanting to be noticed by men our motivation is ourselves and therefore we only serve the human; for this there is never reward. In being fooled by the lies of a false prophet our substance is the so-called truth of the creature, and again we only serve the human. We closely examine the words of the teacher and we closely examine our own souls when seeking to conduct ourselves righteously. We must be alert and beware of both of these tragic pitfalls.

In Matthew 5:16 the Lord said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." and now He seems to be contradicting Himself, but of course, there can be no contradiction here. The extraordinary life of the disciple will certainly be noticed by others. The disciple desires his new life, which is Christ, to be manifest in the world around him so that those in the world may see Christ and believe and be saved, but the visibility is not an end in itself. If visibility has become the believer's motivation then he has lost sight of his

primary aim, which is to follow Christ. He follows only a reputation. If the Christian life was lived only for the visible then it wouldn't need to be lived when out of eyesight. The disciple is light, and light, like the sun, shines upon crowded cities just as much as it does upon deserted places. What Christ is getting at here, which marvelously dispels the notion that some of the listeners might get, is that we are not to practice our righteousness for the sole purpose of it being noticed by others. And by teaching us this, He is taking from us the pride that would grow in our hearts from doing good, which omniscient Christ understands would definitely happen.

Jesus does not want us to sit around reflecting on how extraordinary we are in Him. The regenerated believer can now actually perform the righteousness of God, but without the proper guidance, which Jesus is now giving, he would find himself watching himself do such righteousness and marvel at himself with a resultant pride that would grow beyond anything he would have had before. With such a false guidance the next natural step would be to only focus on the overt appearance of righteousness and ignore the inward wisdom and power where righteousness truly resides. By watching ourselves we end up only play-acting on a stage and the righteousness that we have in Christ only sits dormant within us.

Because we are made righteous at salvation, we are those who can follow Him and imitate Him. We are extraordinary and that is our new "normal." However, we are not to look at who we are as superior to the unbeliever. Our position in Christ is superior to any unbeliever's position, but we are only to see ourselves as normal, and since it is God's desire that all men be saved, residing in Christ is normal. Any unbeliever we meet may become "normal" in a second if he believes in Christ as his Savior. Therefore, in no way should we feel ourselves to be superior, rather, we are inviting the unbeliever to join us in righteousness through Christ.

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Since we are righteous, performing righteousness is to be our common life. It should be as common as sitting down for dinner. Would we not sit down to eat if no one were watching us? Would we only put on shoes to go outside if someone were witnessing our technique? There is no need to scour the horizon for witnesses before we perform God's righteous acts. People will witness Christ in us as God wills. There is no need to consider what a shame it was that no one beheld us and congratulated us. We do what we have been made to do – righteousness – whether someone sees it or not.

Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

As those who have been made righteous in Christ we are simply to be who we are, righteous. God imputed to every believer the very righteousness of Christ at salvation. It's not that we are to hide it from ourselves, but that we are to fix our eyes on Jesus and not ourselves. We are to follow Him and consider Him and not become absorbed with our deeds. If we do, we will want everyone to see us and mark how great we are and we will become completely enraptured with our overt look. We are to take no notice of ourselves or of what we are doing. We are righteous and righteousness is natural. God desires this for every man and so it is offered to every man. Whosoever may believe and enter His kingdom, and in the kingdom being extraordinary is normal.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Truly, God desires all men to be extraordinary, but the many who reject the gospel are not. The disciple is only

unusual in a fallen world. In heaven he will not be. In seeing ourselves as ordinary for heaven we hide our external selves from ourselves, and hence our left hand doesn't know what our right hand is doing. Naturally it is impossible for the left hand to not know what the right hand is doing, but this idiom points to the fact that our righteous acts are not premeditated so as to maximize the chance of being noticed by others. Since what we do is a direct result of who we are, then our righteous acts are spontaneous, unpremeditated, and uncalculated. If they are not spontaneous, because the disciple fails to fix his eyes on following Jesus, then he is nothing more than a window dressing. Care is taken to order things before the eyes of the passerby so that his attention will be captured. The work of righteousness is the work of love, which is always from within. The disciple does the will of God from the heart and he does so spontaneously when the opportunity presents itself.

We are even unaware of our love and righteous deeds done for our enemies, for if we love them as God does, they are no longer our enemies. Therefore, the only assessing that the believer does is to ask himself, "What is the will of God in this situation?" and then he gets about doing it.

If we are doing for the purpose of being seen by others then we have our reward in full – our audience. However, the reward from God for the disciple who produces the fruit of righteousness solely because he loves and follows Christ is far greater. We notice that Christ doesn't state what the reward is, for if He did, we would be focused on that. We must see the reward as nothing more than the privilege and opportunity to perform the righteousness of God. Only in this way can we save ourselves from the sure corrupting influence of the flesh. The rewarded crown itself bears the name "righteousness," 2 Timothy 4:8, and so the crown is the act. It is the doing. It is the ability given by the miraculous power of God for a fallen sinner to actually produce God's own righteous

work. And it's not as if no one is going to see it. God will make it visible to whom He desires and when He desires. We need not care about it. God said that there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed and none of us could ever hope to have the wisdom to choose the perfect time and circumstance, the when and where, to show it. God alone will do so.

We close this chapter with the example of the cross. God the Father judged Jesus for three hours while He hung on the cross and this was invisible to all. Calvary was even enshrouded by thick darkness. How did God judge Him and in what way could so many sins be judged in three hours? No one knows that save the Trinity, and yet the effects of that judgment are visible everywhere in the world. His cross wasn't a show of suffering for the world to behold. It is true that many were witnesses of His physical suffering, but that wasn't what saved us. What earned salvation for anyone in the world who would believe in Him was His judgment for sin, His being forsaken by the Father, and this no one could see. The cross' true purpose was not to be seen by others but to save all. The disciple, when he works the works of God, has the same mind as God and so he performs in the same way. Making things look good is a human quality. We never exchange divine love for such base things.



CHAPTER 10

HOW TO PRAY

Matthew 6:5-8 “And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.”

THE FACT THAT JESUS TEACHES THEM TO PRAY IS PROOF that proper prayer is not a natural or inherent thing, even for Christians. Most everyone will throw up a “God help!” in a disaster or ask Him for things that are greatly desired, usually with a promise to do something in return for the items

requested, but no person naturally knows how to pray properly, and so Jesus teaches us. Prayer is a very powerful tool in the hands of the disciple, and with it he goes directly to God the Father and receives from the Father what he asks. On the surface that looks like a blank check in which the believer just fills in the amount and gets what he wants, but of course it is not like that. I don't suppose the world would have lasted more than a week if that were true. This is why we need direction.

Prayer is the most personal and intimate time that the disciple spends with his Father. A number of things are in view as we do this, and the Lord points them out in vv. 9-15. But before we get to that we are told what we must not do. We must not pray for the sole reason of being known as a good praying Christian. We must not think that it is how we pray or how many words we use or what kind of words we use that matters. What matters is respect for God, humility before Him, and faith in Him to do what He has expressed that He will do.

All prayer is directed towards the Father and from the vantage point of secrecy. Yet even this does not allow the Christian to exercise such a wonderful gift. Jesus Christ must always be the Mediator. We cannot go to the Father but by Him and so we always pray in His name. We can say, “Father in the name of Jesus “ but it is more than just reciting a script. We must know and understand the simple yet very real fact that we could never approach the Father in prayer but through the Mediation of Christ. So, the disciple is in secret: he is not praying to be heard by others, he respects the power and wonder of his Father, he comes to the Father in the name of Jesus, and he has confidence in faith. He has confidence in faith because he is privileged to know that the Father knows what he needs before he even asks. This is limitless confidence.

If God didn't know the prayer beforehand then we might think that we should spend a lot of time wording it just right so there is no confusion. We would focus on how we should

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speak and what exactly we should speak. But since the Father does know, we need not fret about such things and we can focus on Him and His will and simply apply faith in prayer.

Praying in secret doesn't mean that we can't pray in public or in a prayer group, but that we are not doing it to be noticed by men, just like when we give to others and serve others. It is clear that we are to do nothing for the purpose of being recognized. Most prayer is actually done alone and in secret, but this fact alone doesn't remove the possibility of violating the negative command to "not be as the hypocrites." Even in secret there is the danger of the believer turning himself into a spectator. The publicity of the marketplace is only another naïve form of publicity that we can produce in ourselves as we watch ourselves pray or perform some Christian service. We can watch ourselves pray from within our own minds and secretly congratulate ourselves for being diligent prayer warriors or for wording our prayers so majestically and spiritually. If you do this then you have your reward in full. As I look at my own prayer I answer my own prayer. We take note that we have prayed suitably well.

Naturally a disciple can hear himself praying, but he must not pray in order to "pray well" or to "pray many words" or to in any way be known for anything to others or to himself. He is simply approaching his Father with boldness in order to petition Him and thank Him. It is a private audience of a child with his Father and not a self display. It is as if a child comes to his father to show off a drawing that he did at school. He seeks an audience with his father, but only to parade his art work. There is nothing wrong with this in little children, but not in adult children of God. We are actually going to the Father to speak with Him in private, and to do so about very important things. We are not going to Him in order to show off our use of language or our extensive vocabulary. We are seeking His will, His way, His comfort, His forgiveness

(which is really our forgiveness of ourselves), His bread (which is really our own faith in His providence), and His leading.

Jesus told us that the Father will "repay" us. What is the reward of the disciple who properly prays? It is the answer to his prayer, which is of far more worth than anything else. Certainly the disciple's reward is not a payment of a type of pleasure, fame, wealth, or power in the worldly or earthly sense that all the world is looking for. If it were, there would be a lot more people out there praying. The disciple receives pleasure in knowing that he will be answered. The Father knew what he needed before he asked. This is not stated so that he won't ask, saying to himself, "Why ask for what God already knows and has then already answered?" This is stated to give him confidence and nothing more.

The disciple finds fame with the Father alone. Not that the Father admires him in any way but that he is known by the Father and the Father hears his every prayer. With this truth, why would he seek such notoriety with any puny human or group of puny humans? The disciple finds wealth in answers. Knowledge is power. The Father will teach him and will clarify his confusion. The Father will do the same for those whom the disciple intercedes for. This is true wealth. The disciple will find power. God's power will be revealed to him and all that he needs will be supplied. Providence is confidence and comfort without worry or anxiety and that is also power.

Matthew 6:9-15 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 And do not lead us into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.^{*}

For if you forgive men for their transgressions,
 your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
 But if you do not forgive men, then your
 Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

When Jesus gives the disciples the “way” of prayer, He cannot mean to have us recite this word for word, over and over. We are not to be mindless in prayer, which is all that endless repetition becomes.

1 Corinthians 14:15 I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also.

Christ told us that we may ask the Father what we wish in His name;

John 16:23 Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name.

Breaking down this prayer, the disciple is guided in what to pray for.

It is also of great importance to remember that the disciple

^{*} [‘For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’] is not in the original text of Matthew’s gospel. It is not found in the earliest Greek manuscripts or even Latin manuscripts. It was added some time after in order to adapt the prayer for liturgical use in the early church.

is praying to God the Father, the Almighty, omniscient, and unchangeable One. He is not praying to another man or the greatest man, but to God. Due to this we find some things in this outline of prayer that on the surface may seem contradictory, but when we remember that we are speaking with our immoveable Father, we see clarity and seamlessness.

First of all, the disciples are to call upon the Father. We find that our Lord prayed to the Father and so must we. Secondly, His name is hallowed or holy. The word holy has lost its meaning over the centuries, but it is a magnificent word that means to set apart something so as to protect it from defilement. It is like setting aside a fragile and valuable item in a protected place. God is holy and is not of sinful man or the sinful world. His name is not to be counted among the vile and base things of men and the world. He is perfect and just and righteous and we revere Him as such. To come to the Father in prayer without reverence is to not see His name as hallowed. Some say that He won’t hear us if we do this, but I say that God is omniscient and omnipresent and so He hears everything. I also say that God is full of grace and mercy and so He will respond to the unhallowed prayer, but not in the way that the arrogant or ignorant believer desires. God answers our true need and not what we think we need as we look through the smoke and haze of ignorance. If we do not revere the name of God as holy then He will answer our prayer by arranging our lives for the sole purpose of opening our eyes to His holiness, and He has an almost infinite number of ways He can do this. It is true that all prayers are answered, just not in the way that is expected; so keep on praying, and if you think that God is not hallowed enough in your heart then ask Him for that.

“**Your kingdom come**” is the revealing of our confidence in Him despite what our environment may look like. We ask Him to assure us of this fact. Though the world remains under

the power of the evil one for a while longer, the disciple knows that Christ is going to return and establish His kingdom on earth. Plus, the disciple in the church is a part of that kingdom, though it is not now visible. He is in union with Christ who is the King of kings. So the believer prays with confidence and seeks confidence and assurance when he falters or is becoming weak because the eyes of his heart have focused too much on the many parts of this world and the many people in this world who reject God's kingdom to come.

Psalm 2:1-6 Why are the nations in an uproar,
And the peoples devising a vain thing?
The kings of the earth take their stand,
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the Lord and against His Anointed:
"Let us tear their fetters apart,
And cast away their cords from us!"
He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The Lord scoffs at them.
Then He will speak to them in His anger
And terrify them in His fury:
"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain."

It should be made clear that in prayer we are not asking for His kingdom to come. That verges on blasphemy and at the least, ignorance. The kingdom is coming. God promised this to Abraham a very long time ago and it is coming even if there is not one person anywhere praying. We are not asking for it to come, we are asking for assurance in our faith and confidence in the midst of a dark world that seems to be the exact opposite. We are also praying that we may find the greatest expression in exposing this fact to those who are blinded of it. So many in this world are ignorant of the coming kingdom or have heard of it and rejected it as nonsense. We must pray

for God's help and guidance in reaching the world with that message, the gospel.

"Your will be done." The disciple prays that the will of God not be hindered in his own life and in the life of others. When we are praying for an unbeliever to hear and understand the gospel, we are praying that God's will be done in their life. The same is true when praying for a believer who has fallen away or for another believer's healing or guidance. Really, when we pray for anything that may assist another person, we are seeking for God's will in their lives. God's name, God's kingdom, God's will must be the primary object of Christian prayer, for our own life and the lives of others. This is also true of our enemies when we stand in for them because they won't pray. We come to the Father on their behalf.

So often we haven't got a clue as to what to pray for in another person's life, but God knows what we need before we ask Him and so we pray for them anyway. Because God's will is going to be done, we have confidence that God will do it all, barring the violation of their free-will choice.

Romans 8:26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

"Give us this day our daily bread," refers to our faith in the providence of God. A disciple should never be ashamed to pray for his daily needs, but he is not to do so with doubt in his mind. God will provide our needs just as He does to the little sparrows and the lilies of the field. Yet, just like His instruction to Israel in the wilderness concerning the manna from heaven where they were to only gather a day's worth and no more, so the disciple is to only be concerned for the needs of today and he is to let the needs of tomorrow take care of

themselves. We are to thank God for our fulfilled needs as we set out to gather them and rely upon Him for their presence and attainability. We work just as the Jews had to gather in the morning, for the late morning sun would melt the manna, and we know as they were to know, that God each day will provide our needs, and so we should never be anxious for tomorrow.

The fact that we ask the Father to give us today's bread and the fact that we know that He will is not a contradiction. For anyone else besides God it would be, but not with Him. We ask and give thanks as sons and disciples who have gratitude. We know we will receive but we don't take it for granted in a prideful and arrogant way. Faith is not contempt or arrogance. Asking Him for needs is respect of Him and His grace in providing those needs. It is never a deal with God that you better ask or He might not give to you, for we know that expectant, ungrateful people everywhere have their needs met every day. It is an obedient and respectful son who does not simply grab what's his and devour it with no thought of where it came from and with no thanksgiving to the One who gave it. It is almost like asking someone to kindly pass the salt at dinner rather than saying, "Gimme the salt now!" It is true respect and thankfulness for the Father's providence each and every day.

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The Greek words for debt and debtor are from the same root which means something that is owed. It can refer to money or it can metaphorically refer to our own debt to God and the debt that others have against us, which is sin. Jesus is referring to the later. All disciples sin against God and others sin against them. The conundrum that occurs here is the fact that our sins were forgiven in total through the blood of Christ.

Col 1:13-14 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Col 2:13-14 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

God is not a man. If I were to ask a man to forgive me of a debt against him after he already made clear to me that it was forgiven then I'm dumb and insulting him. However, with God we are stating to Him our recognition of the very fact that we have been forgiven of all sin and are humbled and full of thanksgiving. This is perhaps the grandest thing of all – that we've been completely forgiven of our sin and we have no debt with God, yet practically every day we sin against Him. We are not asking as a man does to another man who has doubt, we are confirming before God that we are sinners who are forgiven. When we recognize our sin we don't try to hide it from Him or blame another for its reason, we openly acknowledge it to Him and agree with Him that it is sin against Him. This grace doesn't open up the floodgates to a lifestyle of sin, rather, it calls a disciple to even more obedience. The fact that he is forgiven humbles him to the core. He knows he is forgiven, not because God arbitrarily chose to do so, but because of Christ's death on the cross and so "Father forgive us our debts against You" is not stated (in whatever way you choose to state it) so that we can actually be forgiven, but in recognition and faith and thankfulness that we already have been forgiven in Christ. Since this is so, how could we ever refuse to forgive our brother who sins against us?

Even knowing and believing the finished work of Christ on our behalf does not guarantee that the disciple will be free of the guilt that removes all joy and peace. The flesh that we all have within us loves to condemn itself because it is

frail, weak, and unsure. Our power in prayer, in privacy with our Father, is the key to applying faith to the ever present danger of guilt and condemnation. When we speak to Him about our forgiveness we remember why we are forgiven, how He alone accomplished it, how finished the work really is, and how there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In essence we are finding the faith to believe that our debt against Him has been taken out of the way, having been nailed to the cross, and we find any guilt or condemnation to be taken out of the way as well.

Also, even knowing we are completely and totally forgiven does not guarantee that the disciple will not be free from the desire to get vengeance upon the man who sins against him, or to entertain a grudge or bitterness and to not completely pardon him. Hence prayer, our private, intimate, personal time with our Father seeks this power as well. It is a natural product of the flesh to not forgive and to seek some kind of retaliation or retribution, and the disciple seeks in the Father the power to forgive fully. The disciple is to be like Christ, and how could he ever be if he doesn't forgive others? Forgiveness of sin with man's redemption unto God was the whole reason for His coming. In prayer we speak with God, seek His guidance, seek His help in believing, seek His knowledge and we keep doing it, over and over, knocking, asking, seeking, and so finding.

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” We find the same solution to a confusing instruction. Can God actually lead us into temptation? God Himself answers that with a resounding “No.” So why in the world would we ask Him to not lead us into temptation?

Since God can only lead the disciple in the blessed way of the path of Christ and He cannot lead us into the many temptations that lead away from that path, when we pray, “do not lead us into temptation” (in whatever way we choose to

state it), we are in essence asking God to help us to follow Him alone. No matter how mature we may get as disciples we will always be in danger of thinking a certain way in a given situation is God's way when it is not. None of us ever become sinless or flawless. In a state of ignorance we may think we are following the way of Christ when in fact we are headed towards strong temptation. In prayer, everyday, we are to ask the Father to open our eyes to the false way, and for our hearts not to be deceived, as they can so easily be. Being alone, out of fellowship with God, we walk headstrong right into evil. In our private audience with the Father we are asking for wisdom and guidance to walk in our upward call in Christ.

Despite all the assets that the disciple possesses, and no matter how maturely he wields them, he will still find himself in the sphere of great temptation. His prayer turns from “lead me not” into “preserve me in the hour of temptation.” Temptation is around the disciple every day and sometimes it besets him with greater gravity than at other times. In the midst of heavy temptation he must confidently take a private audience with his Father and ask for the wisdom and power to endure it. It must be stated that he cannot ask for knowledge of the word of God or the will of God that he has not yet acquired, for if that were true then learning the word of God would be unnecessary. He asks for wisdom and guidance in applying the truth that he has attained to the situation of the temptation at hand. God will answer this prayer just as He will answer all prayers that are according to His will. The disciple must be patient in obtaining his answer. And finally, such a prayer in God's will does not mean that God will immediately remove the temptation. In fact, He will not remove it, but He will provide the way of escape, which is not out of the trouble, but the strength, courage, and wisdom to persevere within the trouble and maintaining His peace, joy, and love.

“For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” The sins of all believers have been forgiven, but what is in view here is obviously fellowship with God. The propitiatory work of Christ guarantees that all who believe in Him have eternal life and their sins will not be judged, but the principle of forgiveness here is as the Jews understood it from the Old Testament. Forgiveness was, and is in this context, the blessedness of walking in God’s good pleasure in fellowship with Him. For the disciple in the church age, he is the branch and Christ is the vine. If he abides (a lifestyle of fellowship) in the vine he will bear much fruit. If he does not abide in the vine he is cast away and thrown into the fire, which is not eternal damnation, but the fire of the discipline that all believers feel when they are rejecting their call as disciples. The disciple follows the way and life of Christ. This sermon has shown that way as being of Christ and only in Him. It is fully His life and His way and the complete loss of earthly life and rights for His sake. If a believer refuses to let go of the earthly and fleshly and will not cling to that which is good, he is constantly out of fellowship with God and he feels the weight of divine discipline as well as having no experience in the life that is Christ. He does not have the fruit of the Spirit, and when this is true for a new creature in Christ, he may as well have no air to breath or no blood pumping through his body giving life and vigor. To be in fellowship with God is to think like Christ, speak as Christ would speak, and act as Christ would act. If he has none of Christ’s love in his heart then he has no forgiveness, even though he himself has been forgiven of everything, and as a result he has no fellowship or abiding presence in audience with Christ.

The disciple forgives all things since he thinks like Jesus and knows that he has been forgiven of all things in Him. He

leaves any vengeance in the hands of his capable and merciful Lord and he looks at his own enemy with compassion and mercy. He is Christ-like and so he is in fellowship with Him.

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Zechariah 7:5 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months these seventy years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?'

Isaiah 58:3 'Why have we fasted and Thou dost not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and Thou dost not notice?'

Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire,
And drive hard all your workers.'

When we continue to read on in this passage in Isaiah, we find that God actually informs them of what fasting really is, and as it turns out, it is not treating the body painfully as a show of devotion. Fasting, as defined by God, is actually performing good towards one's neighbor.

Isaiah 58:5-7 "Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself?

Is it for bowing one's head like a reed,

And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?

Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?

Is this not the fast which I choose,

To loosen the bonds of wickedness,

To undo the bands of the yoke,

And to let the oppressed go free,

And break every yoke?

Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry,

And bring the homeless poor into the house;

When you see the naked, to cover him;

And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"

This clearly shows that what God calls a fast is not bowing one's head and sitting on sackcloth while his stomach aches for food, but rather it is in loving his neighbor and doing good

CHAPTER 11

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS SELF CONTROL

Matthew 6:16-18 "And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face so that you may not be seen fasting by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."

IT IS INTERESTING TO KNOW THAT NO PERIODICAL FAST is commanded by God in the Old Testament nor in the New. We read of fasts by certain people and in Zechariah 7 and 8 we read of fasts on the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months that will be turned to joy in the Millennium, but without specifics and no actual command by God to fast. However, God does mention the fasts of the people being done without the proper attitude.



towards him. Such a fast is not just done on periodic days but every day. So why is our Lord instructing disciples on fasting?

We know from the Mishna* that the Jews practiced fasting regularly, but we also see that the way in which the religious Jews practiced fasting in the time of Christ had lost the idea of spiritual discipline and they regarded the act as a means of winning favor with God.

Christ knows that His Jewish disciples will likely continue to practice fasting. Just as there is no command for us to fast there is no command not to fast, but there is in His instruction a strict command not to fast for the purpose of garnering attention from others, which is not a fast for God but only for oneself. Unfortunately, His instruction was not heeded by many in the church since the flesh of man desires approbation, and asceticism is one way of obtaining it.

In the very early world, after the fall of man, fasting would periodically be compulsory in times of famine or in nomadic peoples who had not mastered agriculture or had land unsuitable for it. Pagans, worshippers of false gods, under such conditions would have found it easy to conclude that fasting was the will of the gods. Then it would be easy to further conclude that in times when fasting wasn't necessary, that to do so voluntarily would please the gods. Since food is essential and pleasurable, but at times very scarce, fasting became a form of self denial in many cultures. It became associated with sorrow and so with religious duty. This attitude evolved to include all kinds of bodily mortifications, including sacrifice of life itself, even child sacrifice. This came to be understood as a way of expiating grief over sin in ascetic penance to the gods. Hence fasting was an integral part of all pagan religions, and this had

* The Mishna is the distillation of centuries of oral law that were the rabbinic interpretations of the written Mosaic Law. This included oral interpretations that went back as far as a few centuries before Christ, but were put in writing around 200 A.D.

an effect upon Israel, who so often worshipped false gods. The same effect happened to the Christian church.

The earliest Christians did not consider themselves followers of a new religion. All of their lives they had been Jews and still were. At an early date Christians practiced fasting by adopting from the Jewish practice the two weekly days of fasting, Mondays and Thursdays, while some Christians changed to Wednesdays and Fridays, likely in reference to the days of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. As time went on, in preparation for events like Easter or services where converts were baptized, there was a time of fasting and penance beforehand. This became the origin of modern day Lent.

Christ does not condemn fasting but tells us how it should be done. Since there is no command for it, if it is done, it is something the disciple does voluntarily, not compulsively, and for whatever reason he sees fit in his own conviction, for each believer is a priest and represents himself before God. From the passage in Isaiah 58 quoted above we would include any sacrifice or service that the disciple is performing for another, for just like going without food, the disciple would be sacrificing his personal time or wealth. He may be denying himself some legitimate function so as not to cause a weaker brother or sister to stumble. Sacrifice, or laying down one's life for another would include denial of anything, including food, for a legitimate reason. This is the practice of self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit, and so a key aspect to the Christian way of life. Therefore, according to Christ's instruction, when we perform these spiritual functions we are not to look any different than if we were not sacrificing.

Self-control means that I don't always satisfy the appetite of the flesh, whatever form that appetite may take. Often in service of others there is a call to self-renunciation. The Holy Spirit doesn't force us. We must choose to deny ourselves and trust the Spirit to give us the power to carry it through.



The attempt at discipline is not enough to accomplish it, as almost everyone has found out in their personal experience. Self-denial does not come natural to the flesh, and the attempt must be made based upon faith in the indwelling Spirit and in following Christ's example. We are to be aware from the word of God of the rebelliousness, constant pride, slothfulness, and self-indulgence of the flesh.

Matthew 26:41 "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

When we choose to deny ourselves, we must trust in God's power within us to accomplish it. If we are disciples we have His word in us and His Spirit in us and together they have more than enough power for us to see any self-denial in the will of God through to the end. Trust is a humiliation of the flesh. As Paul stated, "I buffet my body and make it my slave." The flesh hates to be denied since it lusts for kingship. It hides under a false impression of the word "liberty." It tells us that it is free from all compulsions and thus only in this is liberty, but liberty without the proper authority is always anarchy and not liberty at all. Our authority is the One who sits at the right hand of God until all are made a footstool for His feet. Our freedom consists in having the power to be like Him in our thinking and conduct as disciples. Such freedom sometimes demands self-sacrifice in love. So then, the disciple is free indeed, but freed from the flesh so that he may follow Christ, hence he is simultaneously Christ's slave. When "in Christ" a "free slave" is not a paradox.

The disciple is not to put on a gloomy face or look fatigued or agitated for the purpose of being seen as one who is really sacrificing. If he does he has gotten his reward in full. When we fast, or pray, or serve, or lay down our lives we are to look and act as we do in times of rest and ease. We are to be in sacrificial service as we are when we're on vacation. For this to be true we

must really be doing what we do in service of God and not in the care of being recognized by men. The Christian is not called to be an ascetic, but at times of service he does have to practice asceticism by denying himself of something that he may normally partake of. This sacrifice of time or energy or wealth is done unto God first and foremost and then unto people, and if it is, we will not care whether we are recognized or thanked. Our reward is with our Father and, as we have seen, that reward is being able to actually live the life of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not looking for the Father to give us anything else, though in His matchless grace He may, but just to walk in the image of Christ is the ultimate reward.

We are to reject asceticism for the sake of asceticism alone. But if we find that the flesh has far too frequently ruled over us with the result that we failed to serve our Master, then it is time for an assault on the flesh, but not through brutally treating the body, but through Bible study and prayer, and with these, a greater diligence.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.*

2 Peter 1:10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you

2 Peter 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless

* "Disqualified" is the Greek word *adokimazo*, comprised of the word *dokimazo* (to be tested to determine the purity of a thing) and the negative *a* prefix (not). The word means un-testable or not being pure and so would fail the test.

Salvation does not guarantee self-control in life. The Corinthians were believers, and they were carnal. When the Christian thirsts and hungers for righteousness then he is a disciple. If a Christian desires the flesh above the Spirit then he will find himself daydreaming about spirituality while justifying the reality that his flesh is really in control of his life.

Romans 6:12-13 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

The carnal Christian knows he is to pray and has faith that he should, but he doesn't, and the same is true for service, study, sacrifice, love, etc. The picture of self-control may be a dream in the mind but not an actual part of life. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and the Spirit will empower it in the life of the Christian who takes the steps towards it by faith.

The motive for self-control is simple: to be equipped for better service. It is not an end in itself. It is to lead to the service of God in anything He wills. It is not a function of the flesh so that it may show itself off to others or even to one's self as an achievement. The disciple hungers for it, and his faith in the word of God for instruction and his faith in the power of the Spirit to make it a reality give him the power of service unto God and therefore unto others.

Self-control is not a parody to show others that we have it. We are not to desire for them to see it in us so that we may be praised, but to remove all hindrances to service. To do so for publicity gives us publicity as a reward, but this is not the true reward of the child of God, for his reward is to fulfill that for which he has been born-again. We "anoint our heads and wash" so that in our service, in our sacrifice, it is not us who

takes center stage, but the Lord who is working through us by means of His Spirit. Nor are we to self-glorify by admiring ourselves in our work of service. This would only hinder it. Neither we nor others should be focusing on the server, but only on the Lord of glory, who through ultimate self-denial has laid down His life for all. The Lord is referring to the proper hidden-ness of Christian behavior, which is a humility that is wholly unself-conscious.

CHAPTER 12

NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS

Matthew 6:19-24 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

CHRIST NOW TURNS TO HUMAN DESIRE WITH CLEAR instruction. It may seem at first glance that He desires us to

live as hermits who possess nothing material, but He is not talking about what we have but what we desire. Laying up treasure is investing, and investing is a hope of return and that return is desire. He certainly doesn't say that we should not hope of fulfilled desire, but that our desire should be pointed in another direction than the earth. It should be pointing heavenward. Hence we face the confrontation of earthly and heavenly desire. Can I have both? The answer is clearly no. I can have earthly, material things and serve God, but I cannot serve two masters.

Speaking of having a master, nothing must come between Christ and ourselves. I can have treasure and goods of the earth and not have them come between me and the Lord at all. No treasure, no aspect of self, and no desire must come between the disciple and his Lord. All the material things that belong to the earth are destined to perish with the earth and therefore are temporary. Christ and the disciple's relationship with Him are eternal, and so to put something temporary in the way of a relationship with the eternal, meaning fellowship with Christ, even for one day, is stupidity.

The New American Standard states, "if therefore your eye is clear," when in fact the Greek word translated "clear" is *haplous*, which means singular. The eye of the heart must behold Christ alone. The disciple is to look to the Master alone as he knows that the Master will provide all of his needs, Matthew 6:33. And when we state "alone" we precisely mean that there is no compromise. The eye of our heart is not to be filled with Christ and law, or Christ and world, or Christ and self, or Christ and religion, but Christ alone. Whenever we look at anything, including the word of God, we perceive it through Him. I think everyone knows that the Bible can be manipulated for a person's own goals. Such a person perceives the Bible with their own desire in mind. When we perceive the Bible with Him in mind we see the truth in its pure form,

indeed as Christ Himself sees it, and we also recognize and reject all false doctrines. The Pharisees thought they could find eternal life in the Mosaic Law, but the Law does not justify or save anyone. The Law, seen properly, shows very clearly that every man is a sinner in need of a Savior and that the prophets point to that Savior, born of a virgin, Jesus.

John 5:39-40 "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life."

Our eye must be single, having Christ alone fill it, and when it does it will be clear to see all things in light of the truth, and then the whole body will be filled with light and be able to act accordingly. The tongue will speak truth, compassion, encouragement, and love as opposed to anger, vile bitterness, gossip, slander, and strife. The body will do the works of righteousness rather than the works of unrighteousness. It is in the word of God that Christ is perceived, and as we study it, opening the eyes of our heart in faith to all of its treasures, we behold His glory and none other will do.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

We are not to fill our souls with the light that is Christ

only when we suspect that some work or service needs to be done. We are to always be ready for service, for its opportunity can come at any time. Therefore, we are to fill our souls with the singular light of Christ at all times, beholding Him at all times. This doesn't mean that I don't think of my work or my spouse or my children when I need to, but that I always work and serve and love as a disciple of Christ. After all, that's who He made me to be. It's like looking at your wife from the standpoint of a husband. If you are her husband you do not lose sight of that. You never say, "Today we are just friends." You're not only friends, nor are you only acquaintances or siblings, and as a husband you don't have to be reminded of that, so you treat her like a husband. The same is true for the disciple of Christ. He focuses on his job, and his marriage, and his family, and his children as he should, but always as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:18-25 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart. Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

We stumble when it's hard to see; when our eye is dim. The world is temporary. If my eye is filled with something of

the world there will come a time when it no longer exists to fill my vision. One might say that he can behold the temporary world for decades, and when young and looking forward these decades always seem to be quite extensive, but when a person is sure he is nearing death, he always looks back at his life as being so short. Time never loses its relativity while eternity knows no such thing as relativity. We must therefore conclude that time is not the truest reality, while eternity is nothing but reality. Let's take a mirage for example. It is something that fills our eye as real for a time, but then it eventually fades away. A mirage can only give pleasure for as long as it lasts. Even during its short life it is only an imagined pleasure. It's always in the future. A few more steps and I'll get there, and all the while, any pleasure is anticipatory. Christ is eternal and so is not a mirage. He sits at the right hand of God. He will never fade away. He alone, as one with the Trinity, is the only real person, and so to behold Him is to have continual joy rather than fading, temporary pleasure. Joy is contentment or happiness in all circumstances. Joy does not increase or decrease because life seems bad or good. It exists in times of adversity and prosperity, and that is because it is an eternal gift of the fruit of the eternal Spirit of God. Of course, we are in the world and we cannot ignore the world, but we are to see it in His light and when we do then we will live in it as those who are not of it.

Colossians 3:1-3 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Worldly possessions are to be used and not collected. The flesh desires to make idols out of them, polishing and beholding them. So often the flesh wants others to acknowledge how

wonderful the possessions are, and in fact, we often get more pleasure from the covetousness of others than in the possession itself. Things are not alive so as to possess a desire of their own, but when we make idols out of them, it is almost as if they do become alive, and when they do, they desire all of our attention and not just a part of it.

Satan wants the homage of the entire person. If the person concedes to giving some of himself to the devil then the devil will not be satisfied until he has the whole man. He will not stop until he has the whole thing. The draw of worldly possessions is a lie. Almost every time I drive by an old rusted out car or RV abandoned in a yard I think of what it looked like when it was new and that someone paid a lot of money for it, took it home, washed it a few times, cared for it, polished it, but then one day it started to be neglected and eventually it became unusable and discarded. In our relationship with Christ there will never be decay or neglect, nor will there be regret. Even though our human bodies decay, our inner man is renewed day by day, 2 Corinthians 4:16.

As God provided manna to the Jews in the wilderness, so Christ will provide all of our needs. He will plainly state this in Matthew 6. In the wilderness, the Jews were given just enough manna for each day and they were not to save any for the next day. God promised to provide for the next day and He always did. The disciple of Jesus can save, but his desire must not be in his savings. We have bills to pay, mortgages and such, and we have to save, but we are never to fear that we will not be provided for. We may come on hard times financially and lose our homes or our possessions, but these become part of the trials for the disciple and not a cause for worry or anxiety. We were told that trials were going to come and that as Christ suffered in this world so must we, but though we are struck down, we are not destroyed, 2 Corinthians 4:9. Christ will always provide what we need.

If the Jews in the wilderness collected excess manna for the next day it would spoil overnight. When we look at material things as something to accumulate then we spoil them. Of course we can own material things, but is our desire and hope in them? Do we lay them as a foundation for our happiness? If we do then we spoil them and then we cannot enjoy them.

Christ states, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” If my treasure, that which I love and protect, is material things then my heart is given over to them. The heart of the disciple has been made for eternal fellowship with Christ, to love Him and to walk with Him; our treasure must be Him. How much greater is Christ than all the material goods of the earth? Man labels some rare metals and stones as precious, yet if he ever finds that any of them are in fact abundant on the earth, they immediately become common and cheap. Christ is rare amongst men, the rarest, but He is big enough to be the Savior of all and He has offered Himself to all. All may have Him and all can be saved by Him. All can be disciples of His and see life truly fulfilled. He is the only treasure.

It is actually quite easy to answer the question of where our treasure is when we realize that we do not have the option to place it in both heaven and on the earth. Heaven and earth are completely different, and the heart cannot be split between them. It is not hard to determine what our heart is for: when we are at the end of all lies to ourselves, it is what we love and value. We can determine this before long since eventually we always end up doing what we love. We just have to wait and see with open eyes. It is likely that a Christian lies to himself that his heart belongs to Christ when he is actively trying to divide his heart between Christ and material goods. But that lie can't go on for very long because he will eventually hate one master. He will know this because he will eventually commit himself to the function of one of them, the one that he truly loves.

So then, since we live in the world we must be able to

clearly answer whether we are legitimately using the world's goods or whether we are unlawfully accumulating them, and all we have to do is to answer the simple question, “Does it hinder my relationship with Christ?” There is no need to lie to yourself, although your flesh is a pro at it. Be honest and determine if a thing is hindering you from loving God above all things. If it is, then get rid of it. Don't wait. If you are mature enough to answer the question properly then you are mature enough to rid yourself of it. I'm not saying it won't be painful, nor am I saying that you will not stumble in your effort, but don't lie to yourself by thinking the time isn't right, “maybe tomorrow,” when you well know that tomorrow will turn into the next day and the next year and in such a spiral, tomorrow may never come.

Let's face it, man seeks for treasure. I don't think there is anything more exciting for a kid than to hunt for treasure. My friend and I, when we were little, used to draw up our own treasure maps and then we would pretend that we found the map by accident. Our imaginations were good enough to really pull it off. Then we would spend all afternoon looking for the treasure that wasn't there, but along the way we'd find all kinds of things. Does God want to surgically remove this passion of treasure hunting? Actually, He does not, and in fact, He has gone to great lengths to fulfill it in us with treasure that is far greater than anything we could have hoped for on earth. It is God's will that we have a treasure, and not after we die, but now, during our lives here on earth. It is true that it is in heaven, but we must remember that heaven came down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and although He has ascended to sit at the right hand of God, He lives inside every Christian. Heaven is within us and that's where the treasure is.

1 Corinthians 2:9-11 “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart

of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves;

The treasure is the inheritance of Christ which in time can be summed up in the fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Think of relationships with God's love in them. Think of a career with God's joy and peace in it. Think of every day bearing the fruit of goodness, patience, and kindness in everything you do. Think of facing every trial with self-control, patience, and peace. This is the treasure in heaven and in every case it has eternal ramifications, something that earthly things cannot possibly do. This treasure glorifies God and what glorifies God goes on forever as God goes on forever. How does treasure hunting look now?

Our hearts must be fully His. We cannot serve two masters. It is impossible to do so. When we serve Christ as our Master, our eye will bring in light to the whole body and the whole body will be full of light and therefore able to think and do according to the Master's will, which is life indeed.

I used to wonder why God wouldn't show off His children while they live in this world by giving them great earthly treasures, sort of like a millionaire flaunting his money by giving it to his kids. It is because God and the world are incompatible. The world is fallen and ruled by Satan, and so to make



the things of the world the outward manifestation of God's glory to His children would be contradictory to who they are.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

1 Timothy 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

It is obvious that the world and its goods make a bid for our hearts. If we accept and get them then what do they become? They become security, pleasure, comfort, approbation, and a pleasure to the eye and body, but all of it temporary. Imagine temporary security. How is that security? In Christ we have eternal security. Our hearts only have room for one devotion, and although there are a lot of competitors for that devotion, none of them live up to the standard of "eternal." Our singular eye is to be devoted to Christ alone.

It is impossible to exhaust the study of this entire subject. It must be thought about very frequently, here and there, for a moment and sometimes for hours, in prayer and

in contemplation, for the enemy is cunning and wise. Think of the other things that bid for our devotion. Can they actually deliver on what they promise? Obviously, they cannot, so then why are they always a temptation? It is because it is not actually the thing or the person that tempts us, but the idea of what they could be. We're back to the mirage again. It's actually not the "person" that we worship, but the idea of what they can be to us. We think that marriage or children or a career will become something wonderful to us, but we haven't thought it through. When we finally get the spouse and the career and the new smelling car they finally become in our eyes what they really are and then our devotion, always hungry, flies off in search of another. It is always the dream of what things can be that make devotion, and none of them can deliver. We need something eternal. Someone!

A more subtle trap is the thought that we can combine our devotion to Christ with the devotion to the thing. This is a dark and subtle lie that countless Christians have fallen for. A disciple is dedicated to One. There is no compromise. His one eye is to be filled with the only light. Attempting to love two masters, deliberately or not, will turn our love for Christ into hatred. The fact is that dividing our love for Christ is to not love Him at all. The charade will continue as long as we can maintain it, but eventually our true love will demand a coup d'état against Christ and we will find ourselves hating Him.

The world's goods only find their fulfillment when they have won the hearts of men, and they have been pining for them since the beginning. This means that alone they are nothing. They only find value when they are adored, which tells us that without adoration and lust they have no meaning. They have no real substance in themselves. However, God alone stands as worthy of praise and glorification, whether there are others who know it or not.

3 E O O R P

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be [Greek: *eulogetos* = worthy of praise and glorification] the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Jesus tells us that there is no compromise. Either we love God or love earthly goods. It makes no difference if the love is conscious and deliberate or not. It is more likely that it won't be deliberate and that we fooled ourselves into thinking that we could serve two masters. We shall indignantly repudiate the suggestion that we hate God and will be firmly convinced that we love Him. This is a stubborn and hard hearted ignorance fueled by our pride and desire to be satisfied with ourselves. The simple matter is that when we have lost our single eye we are no longer in fellowship with the Lord. We can certainly get that fellowship back, not with works, but by simply setting the eye of our heart upon the only One who is worthy of glory.

CHAPTER 13

THE DISCIPLE DENIES ALL ANXIETY

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He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith? Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Matthew 6:25-34 "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single cubit to his life's span? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will

LIFE IS MORE THAN FOOD AND DRINK AND THE BODY IS more than clothing. This means that man has been made for more than merely existing. He is called to something far greater, and yet even the simple life of just existing causes him great anxiety. Certainly, if a person is in a situation of famine and is hungry or stranded in a desert and thirsty, then some anxiety is understandable, but for the disciple, even these situations are not times of despair. In America it is very rare to go hungry or be in danger of death by dehydration. However, for the world's most prosperous nation, these things do not cease to be a source of anxiety. Instead of being worried about food in general, people are worried about what kind of food, how much, what beverages can be gotten, or what fashionable clothes can be worn. Therefore, even in abundance we can become anxious. Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and we fool ourselves into thinking that they can provide security and fulfill every desire, not only for our bodies, but for our lives – our souls.

The NASB properly translates the word "life" from the Greek word *psuche*, which refers to soul life. *Bios* is a Greek word that can be used for biological life alone, but He did not use that word. *Psuche* means life as it is lived, or how it is meant to be lived by a disciple of Christ with power, love, joy, peace,

and vigor. For the disciple, life is all of these things because his life is Christ and that is a life that has a purpose, which transcends food and drink by light years. That purpose has already been stated by the Lord, which we have already covered, but of which more detail and explanation is to come throughout the inspired epistles of the New Testament. So then, since such a life is more than sustaining itself alive, why in the world should the disciple be anxious about sustenance? The clear answer is that he should not. Yet, he might wonder if he should be anxious for the spiritual life? Again, the answer is no.

Let's first look at the anxiety over material goods. A common problem in the soul of mankind is the desire for security. It is the desire for surety concerning all that man wants for the rest of his life. This is one of the reasons that people envy the rich. This desire seems to be fulfilled for them. Man usually knows that there is a difference between wants and needs, but he often confuses the two. Needs are for security. If a person has everything that he needs then he will live secure. Wants are the extra that he wishes he had. Everybody has wants or unfulfilled desires. The confusion comes upon a man when he starts to see his wants as needs. If a want or desire becomes a need in the mind of a man, then the want is now needed for security, and everyone desires to know that they are secure. If a man thinks that certain possessions can give him security, then now he has two cares – security and the possessions that he thinks can give it. He is still anxious about his security since he can never really know if he has enough possessions and he is anxious about the possessions themselves; will they be taken, will he lose them through neglect, will they lose their value, etc. So then, by looking to possessions, he has not eliminated his anxiety over security, but has in fact added another anxiety on top of it. He cannot drive out worry with more worry. He in fact gets the exact opposite of what he intended.

3 L E O O R P

This is precisely why Christ talks about only two days, today and tomorrow. There is a joke that asks, "What two days of the week start with the letter 'T'?" to which the not so wise man answers correctly, "Two, today and tomorrow." Goods are never an insurance against tomorrow. We simply cannot be absolutely sure that they will get us through tomorrow or even be there for that matter. If I lived at the base of Mt. Vesuvius and went to bed on the night of August 23rd in A.D. 79 and thought that my possessions would all be there tomorrow, I would have been dead wrong (pun intended). Though it is an extreme case, to say the least, it shows that I can't be 100.0% sure of tomorrow.

Anxiety is made for tomorrow. Provisions are meant for today and only today. This doesn't mean that we are not to plan. Christ is talking to people in an agricultural economy and they absolutely have planned for the great amount of labor that has to be done, but a person can do everything right and a crop can still fail. They and we are not to be anxious about it, for the promise is that our Father will provide, as is evidenced by all the animals and flowers around us that live quite well without our help. Tomorrow must be left entirely in the hands of the Lord, for it is outside of our own hands in any case.

Does this mean that we are to worry about today? Christ did not say that. He did say that today has trouble, but so will tomorrow, since very soon it will be today. Trouble doesn't equal anxiety for the disciple. Christ faced the most trouble of any man, greater than the combination of all the troubles of all men in history, yet He did not worry, and the disciple is to be as He was.

This is truly a statement of the gospel. As God gives His Son for eternal life, so God will give us enough provisions to live for today. Just as eternal life removes the anxiety that lies all around death, so God's providence removes any anxiety

that revolves around tomorrow. God gives to us so that we may live that which is life indeed, the life of a disciple of Christ.

Only God can really care.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.

Only He has the power to truly care for others. We certainly try to care for others and ourselves, but we are not so stupid to think that everything they are and we are depends upon us. Our care only helps in some way, and in the end we realize that if we had really cared for another in the love of God, that it was God working through us, and so again, our person, our humanity, is removed from the equation. So then we are completely powerless and there is only one thing to do: cast our cares upon Him and deny all anxiety.

The Christian does have to work, but he knows that bread is always a gift from the Father. It is true that it almost always comes to the one who plows, sows, cares for his crop, reaps, threshes, grinds, mixes and bakes. The process makes most believe that bread is the result of man's work, but this only proves that God so often faithfully gives it, and even to people who give no thought to Him. God gave the seed, the soil, the water, the sun, the chemistry of photosynthesis, the mind and muscles to work in the right manner so that the grain grows well. A farmer could do everything right and still see his crop fail for any number of reasons. It is God alone who gives it.

If we imagine bread to represent everything that we need in life, we know that we can't absolutely secure it no matter how much we work. Work is good for the disciple and it is loved by him because he does it as unto the Lord, and a part of that joy is knowing that the outcome of his labor does not depend upon him. If it is true that a person is solely

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responsible for something as important as provision, meaning life, not only for himself, but for his wife and children, then he will definitely accrue a great amount of anxiety. When the responsibility is in the Lord's hands he works with joy.

The disciple is not lazy. God has given him the power and ability to work and he does so with vigor, love, and thoughtfulness. The lazy man is not a man of God since he is selfish. The mind and muscles are designed to be used. To not use them is to say, "No thanks" to God who gifted them. The mind and conscience are gifts to man from God, and in the disciple they are filled with the greater gift of the knowledge of his Savior and both the mind and the conscience are designed to be used under the guidance of God's word. The word of God is alive and powerful, Hebrews 4:12, and alive, powerful things are meant to be used powerfully in life.

The example of the birds and lilies and grass is an enduring one and one which surrounds almost all of us every day. Birds do work. A bird flies from place to place constantly looking for food, but who puts the food there that she may find it? Work is also going on inside a plant through photosynthesis, but who provides the soil, water, and air? But they do not toil or spin – they don't lay up a store for tomorrow and so they automatically glorify their Creator. In Christ the reward for work is the work itself, just like the prophet's reward was to prophesy (Matthew 10:41). The disciple's reward for bearing fruit is that God enabled him and empowered him to bear divine fruit and this with the promise that he will in the future bear an even great quantity of fruit. Bread is never a reward. It is a gift from the grace of God.

The kingdom of God has nothing to do with materialism. There is no room for excuses of any kind. A believer may not legitimately say that he is anxious for things because his church needs them or his family needs them and so he is "righteously anxious," if anyone ever used such a term. We cannot

even be anxious for the kingdom of God, as if it is ever in peril or that it needs anything from man or earth. Plainly, worldly cares are not a part of discipleship. We are to only thirst and hunger and seek for the righteousness of the kingdom of God and then rest on the promise that all things, all of our needs for today, will be added unto us. In heaven, if the Lord were to ask each disciple, “Did you lack anything?” every single one would say with inner amazement, “Nothing, Lord. In fact, I had an abundance.”

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CHAPTER 14

THE LORD STANDS BETWEEN THE DISCIPLE AND ALL OTHER PEOPLE

Matthew 7:1-12 “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be

opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

In chapter 5 we witnessed the extraordinary character and quality of the Christian disciple. In chapter 6 we witnessed the inner, hidden, single-hearted righteousness of the disciple that shines forth the person of Christ to the world. By virtue of these astounding truths, the disciple finds himself to be holy, set apart unto the Lord, and therefore separated from the system of the world. He adheres only to the Lord and to a life that is beyond dreams, eternal, righteous, and unfortunately, rare. It would be easy to see how these truths, somewhat understood amongst a group of Christians, might lead them to adopt a superior attitude in reference to the unbelievers in the world, and justify passing a righteous judgment upon them (at least they would erroneously imagine it was righteous). They might imagine that such a separating judgment from the world would draw them closer to Christ, when in fact, it would only lead them far away from Him, and the judgment they levied upon another will fall right on their own necks.

Christians have been judging for a very long time. What boggles the mind is that the same have likely read this passage. There is a reason that Jesus has said this at this part of His wonderful sermon, and not at the beginning. After revealing

that the disciple has come to know that he is completely changed into the image of Christ, that he is blessed beyond imagination, that he is set apart unto God in righteousness and truth, and that he follows Christ alone, only then does Jesus, knowing the hearts of men, make sure to clarify that this in no way justifies the pattern in man that desires to judge others. If they do they will be judged by God. We find that to cut ourselves off from others in the world in judgment is to cut ourselves off from fellowship with Christ.

What has been made abundantly clear is that the disciple follows Christ, and only Christ, and so he is to be like Him in all His ways. So, when the believer approaches an unbeliever he is not presenting himself but Christ. Christ is between the disciples and all others, even other believers. The Lord is always the Mediator. When I approach an unbeliever I am approaching him as if Christ were approaching him, and what does Christ bring to him? Certainly it isn't judging his sin or condemning his evil. Christ cannot die for sin by being judged for it and then come along and judge another for it. Christ brings forgiveness, salvation, grace, mercy, the offer of all things good and eternal to every man; He brings love.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

John 16:8-9 "And He [the Holy Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;"

Christ said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin, but then mentions one and only one sin – not believing in Him. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer, and when that believer, as a disciple of Christ who has within

himself the hidden treasure of love and glory, approaches one who is unregenerate it is not judgment for sin and evil that he brings, but great love in the message that there is only one thing amiss in their lives. It is not any of the things that they thought was wrong with them. This is the good news! They have yet to believe in Christ as their Savior. Every other evil and sin has been atoned by Christ when He died for them. This is the total opposite of judging them.

Discipline and evaluation always comes from the Father. It is the Lord who will evaluate all believers at His Bema Seat,* and since that is true, how can we possibly evaluate others? It would be like a student in math class testing and grading other students, bypassing the teacher, submitting the grades to the administration, and all before anyone has taken the final exam.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

There is another plain aspect to Christian judging that is almost always overlooked. If a disciple were to judge an unbeliever for their sins then he is simultaneously acquitting him of his good. The problem with this is that the unbeliever has no good in him, none. The only true good in this universe is from God and the unbeliever cannot think or say or do any of it. This is not to say that a person of the world has no "good"

* *Bema* is a Greek word that primarily means "a step" (Vines Expository Dictionary). It was used to denote a raised place or platform, reached by steps, which eventually became used for the step that an accuser or a defendant would stand upon in a law court. It is used in 2 Corinthians 5:10 for the "judgment seat of Christ," where the believer will be evaluated for his good works done on earth. He will not be judged for sin, since Christ has already been so judged.

in him by the world's definition. It is simply that as a fallen creature who is alienated from God, he cannot perform any divine good or good deeds as God would do them. All of us have to be rightly related to God through Christ in order to perform God's good. This is precisely why the Holy Spirit convicts the world of only one sin, the sin of unbelief in Christ. If the disciple judges an unbeliever's sin then he sends the wrong message to the unbeliever – that he has some good in him. If the pagan thinks there is some good in him then he will look within himself for his salvation and not to Christ. Only the completely lost need a Savior.

It is not that we ignore evil. We know and recognize evil if we know the truth, but we do not bring judgment to it. We see it as an occasion for forgiveness and unconditional love. By doing so we bring Christ to their evil, and with Him, forgiveness and salvation. Neither does the believer and unbeliever meet as free men who can freely exchange ideas and conclusions and evaluate each other on worth and stature. One is a slave to sin and death and the other is free and holds the key to all shackles. The believer comes to the unbeliever with a gift from Christ and not an attack from a pedestal.

The disciple doesn't stand aloof from all men. Though he is holy unto God, he, like Paul stated (1 Corinthians 9:22), is all things to all men. By what Jesus stated so far, the frontier between the old life and the new life was clearly drawn, and it would be so easy to equate such a change in position as withdrawing from the unsaved and judging their lack of faith and worldly lifestyles. We must ask ourselves, "What other lifestyles do worldly unregenerate people have available to them if they remain as they are without Christ?" When we judge their evil, we are judging the same evil that is inside of us.

We were all unregenerate once, and in that place we were all burdened with excessive sin. If we are disciples we purpose to do and commit far less sin, but we are not sinless. At times

we can find ourselves thinking again just like an unbeliever, though it may be for a moment. How is it that we all don't live in excessive guilt over the sin and evil that still exists in us? We know we are completely forgiven and we know that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1). If we judge the unbeliever, we are judging ourselves, which is something that we are not allowed to do since only God is our judge. So Christ says, "And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

The log in the Christian's eye would be the misunderstanding that holiness is a justification for separation from the unbeliever in judgment. What speck will we actually see in our brother's eye when the log of judgment is out of our own? If we remove judgment from our own eye then we will see that there is only one thing out of place within him: his lack of faith in Christ. We will also see his vast and gaping desire for peace, forgiveness, love, a true Father, and eternity. In other words, in seeing the speck that is in his eye, we will see ourselves.

We long for forgiveness, salvation, peace, and love and we have it in Christ. This doesn't mean that our longing disappears completely, though we would no longer label it as longing. It has changed to gratitude. True gratitude never forgets what was given and by whom. We find that same longing in our brother, and we as disciples have brought Christ to him to fulfill it. Did Christ not die for him also? Did Christ only offer such priceless gifts to you and not to him? These are essentially the thoughts of the Christian judger, and because they are, he has walked far away from fellowship with Christ rather than closer. So Christ says, "Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and

the Prophets." Love the Lord with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself, and to love him as yourself is simply to see yourself in him.

The same evil and sin is just as much in us as it is in every man. If we are going to search for evil we must first find it in the closest place – ourselves. If we are looking for it in others than we are really stating that we have not found it in ourselves, or we may be saying that we have discovered it within ourselves, but grace applies to us and not to others. We are not stupid or naïve to say that stealing a slice of bread is just as bad as murdering an innocent man in cold blood in order to take his bread, but the root of both of them is the same: it's just that one is far more unrestrained. Selfishness, the desire to be a god above all others, lust, and pride are in every man. When we judge another we are judging ourselves, and this is never the reason we come to mankind with the gospel. Can we imagine ourselves watching a Christian man coming to a person in need of salvation and witness the Christian tell the other man all of his sins and evil thoughts and then just walk away? It is the same as judging the other. Christ has already judged us all in Himself on Cavalry. He has taken our judgment upon His own body. We could never take His place. We bring Christ to the other and not ourselves, and when Christ comes, the most magnificent gifts are offered without cost.

What might seem out of place in this segment of the sermon is that Christ again mentions prayer, but it fits perfectly. When studying a passage we are to never leave its context. Great errors in doctrine are made when that is done. The context is judging and specifically not judging, and as we have noted, there are certain truths that need to be very clear in the understanding of our hearts if we are going to obey successfully. Finding clarity is always a call to prayer since clarity only comes from our Father in heaven. As Christ clearly says, I ask to receive, I knock and a door will open, and I seek so I can find.

ASK AND RECEIVE:

What is it that I want to receive? If I'm going to be a judge I want to receive vindication or justification of myself. I'm already justified, but not because my sin is less than another's, but because Christ died for Me and gave me life. If I seek justification by judging another than I apply justification to myself in one way and to others in another way. This is not at all true of justification, since it is freely offered to all men. So then, judging is blindness and that is not something that anyone seeks to receive, but to be cured of. As a disciple I am seeking sight and light and that is found in love – in Christ. Judging is blindness but love is illuminating. Love opens my eyes to the need that is in my brother, which need Christ will fulfill, and Christ has come with me to meet his need. Love sees the other forgiven at the foot of the cross along with myself, right next to me, beholding the same Savior as me. Therefore, in prayer I am seeking the sight of love so that I am a true witness to the light every day.

KNOCK AND IT SHALL BE OPENED:

What is it that I want opened? It is obvious that the only thing that needs to be opened in this context is the heart of the unbeliever to Jesus. If we are judges we want the evil of their sins to be opened before us so that we can pronounce our judgment upon them and then we comfortably claim our superiority as Christians and leave them behind, knee deep in the mire of darkness as we sanctimoniously walk away. Such behavior is far from Christ. Rather, we are to look past all our opinions. I am not forbidden to have my own thoughts about the other person and to realize his shortcomings, but only to the extent that it offers to me an occasion for forgiveness and unconditional love, as Jesus has always proven to be to me. I want the unbeliever's mind to be opened to the truth that only one thing is wrong with him, his lack of faith in Christ. In this

way I am like John the Baptist, sent to warn and prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah. John knocked on the door of Israel and bid them to open their minds to the truth that no one could be justified by keeping the Law, as so many of them thought, but only through the cleansing that would come from the Messiah. We go to God and knock, asking Him to help us always to see the ways of properly knocking with Christ upon another man's soul. Yet, one caution is given; "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

At first this seems to say that we shouldn't give the holy gospel to the world at all, but this is a reference to pushing too hard. The gospel, until the time of the final judgment of man by God, carries with it a certain weakness. Its weakness is that it can be rejected. We are not to bully or torture another into believing the gospel. When the gospel is rejected, the gospel does not reach out with holy hands to choke the air out of the person until he gives in. No disciple has the right to force the issue. If the gospel is given and the person or persons continue to remain as dogs and swine, to continue to push the truth in some hope of proselytizing them will only cause them to trample those pearls under their swine feet. They will spit on forgiveness and stomp on mercy and profane the holy gospel. We will in essence be pushing the beautiful gospel against blind rage. We must know when it is time to shake the dust off of our feet and go when the gospel is refused.

During this age the gospel veils itself with this weakness. It will not overpower the fanaticism of other ideologies, and therefore we must not bring it with as fanatic an ideology. The gospel is the truth of life and death and not an ideology. The gospel suffers rejection and the disciples bearing the gospel must suffer the same. Would we wish to be strong where the gospel is weak? There are hearts whose doors are closed to the

gospel and pounding on them will not only not open them, but they will be even more tightly and strongly barricaded. If the gospel has a certain weakness in this age then those who carry it carry that same weakness, and they will be scorned and rejected as much.

Matthew 5:10-12 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND:

What is it that I seek? If I am a judger I seek his shame from my pedestal. If I have the heart of God's love then I seek his reconciliation to God. We do not see Jesus or Paul reciting the same script when witnessing to different people from different backgrounds. Paul followed Jesus' example who took a genuine interest in the lives of others. Certainly not in their sins, for we do not offer a cheap grace that condones sin and evil. We offer a gospel in which sin caused the greatest death by far. Through Him sin has been fully condemned. Jesus had compassion on others. He spoke to their needs. He spoke to the rich man seeking eternal life differently than He did to the tax-collectors who didn't ask Him for eternal life. He overturned the proper things so that they could discover the one thing, Him. Like looking for a treasure in a field, but with understanding and insight, He overturned the right stones and the right fallen branches in order for others to discover the treasure. We go to the Father and ask Him for this insight. God indwells the believer, and through His supernatural way

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He will convey that very wisdom to us so that we may seek where we should be seeking.

So why are we to do so continually? We ask, seek, and knock continually because there are always a continual stream of unbelievers in this world that we come across every day. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. The opportunities abound. Souls full of desire for eternal things are all around. We do not wish to miss one opportunity, and so we keep asking, seeking, and knocking to God so that Christ in us may successfully ask, seek, and knock unto others. We intercede for them and by doing so we put ourselves in their place. From that place we remember our Lord's words, "Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them." From such a place we have no advantage over others for we treat them only as we would like ourselves to be treated. We see the evil and sin in others and we see it in ourselves. We are beneficiaries of the grace of God which saved our lives. In the place of the condemned we scream out to God for their reconciliation. Our only desire for them is that their hearts change to belief in the one and only Savior. This is the law of the prophets, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

CHAPTER 15

THE NARROW GATE

Matthew 7:13-23 "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to

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Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

THE NARROW GATE IS CHRIST HIMSELF, WHICH SHOULD not surprise us after studying almost all of this sermon. He leads to life, but there is another way that men can take, which the Lord makes abundantly clear is wide and leads to destruction or death. We must not focus on physical death in this broad way, although it may certainly be involved. It is the death that is the absence of Christ's life that is in view, which is a death that does occur in a person who is physically alive. If a disciple dies at a young age, as a martyr for instance, then he is blessed to be in heaven with his Lord. If an unbeliever dies at an old age, he experiences true death, which is a final separation from God. He has actually lived that death throughout his whole life since he has always lived separated from God. So why is the destructive way broad and the blessed way narrow? It is not because God wills it so, as if He is torturing us or making salvation hard. The destructive way is broad because so many, sadly, have taken it.

It is important to look at the sermon as a whole, which we attempted in the last chapter, and must also do here while we realize that we are at the end of it. There was a separation of the disciple from the world and unto the Lord when he accepted Christ as his Savior by faith. This is true for every believer in the church since they are all in union with Christ, but for the disciple, such a separation or sanctification is true of his lifestyle as well. Hence the church is separate from the world, and the believers in it, all of them to a person, are to be disciples that separate themselves in life and conduct. This is the narrow way. At the same time they are not to judge the world and physically

separate from it, but within it shine the glorious light of the person and work of Christ as a city on a hill as they walk in His way. We understand that not all Christians make such a commitment of faith to live as they are in Christ. Such carnal believers are usually not found in churches that purely focus on the teaching of the word of God in the serious matter of producing disciples of Christ. But one last thing must be said as a warning. There will be those in the church that the disciples might not have thought of. There will be those who profess to be Christians and are not, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, they are recruiters for the kingdom of darkness. They are false prophets in sheep's clothing.

The life of the disciple was one that was extraordinary (*perisson*). He was to love his enemies, give to those who took from him, never entertain anger or lust, be a man of his word, practice divine righteousness but not so to be seen, love as Christ loves, live as Christ lives, seek for the salvation of others and not their condemnation, let his life shine in the world, etc., and all the while taking no account of himself. This is certainly the most narrow of lives, and due to the abundance of people in the world who reject it, and the sin nature within every disciple that continually tempts him to reject it, there are wide, yawning chasms sitting on either side of this very narrow way. It is easy enough to stray from the narrow way and fall headlong into the chasms of the world by succumbing to temptation and settling by laziness of mind for the dark and broad way. Amongst the Christians who are thirsting for the way of Christ's righteousness, the false prophets are placed in order to give them the slightest shove when they are tottering on the razor's edge which is the life of Christ. But, we must not fear. While it is true the way is narrow, by one simple rule, keeping our eyes on Him, we will walk this seemingly impossible way. We must not fear our failures and so fear ourselves. Not being afraid of ourselves is a manifestation of grace.

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Don't look down! We've probably all heard that if we have been precariously standing at some dangerous height. If we were walking alone on a path that could fit two people abreast we would have no problem staying completely on it without one step on the fringe, but put that same path a few hundred feet in the air where the fringe is certain death and we would all be too scared to walk it. In that situation what we fear is ourselves. We think of the possibilities that would have us falling to our deaths and we'd rather not try. But if Jesus were to tell us that He was going to go before us, and if He were to assure us that we would be perfectly safe, we might find courage. He would have one simple command: "Keep your eyes on Me. Do not look at the path, do not look down, do not look at your own feet. You keep your eyes right on Me." This analogy works, but like all analogies, it is not perfect. We are not on a cliff face. Our dangers are love of self, pride, and ignorance. From these three, or really two, since love of self and pride are the same, flow the sins of fear, anxiety, worry, bitterness, anger, and lusts in all categories. Our eyes off self and on to Christ through a full knowledge of His word is the key to walking securely on the razor's edge that is the narrow way.

The fact that within the church there are wolves in sheep's clothing who look and behave outwardly like any other Christian, can cause quite a bit of paranoia. We might find ourselves suspecting everyone and then eventually suspecting ourselves of being pretenders or Christians in name only. We all talk and act like Christians, but there is the possibility that in some of us there are dark powers mysteriously at work. Why would such a person attend a church? There are many reasons that a person might want to be a part of a group, something bigger than himself alone. He may simply want the camaraderie or he seeks friendship or romance. Perhaps he believes his church attendance and his act within it might bring him power and influence and money and fame. Christians are taught to

believe the best about others and not judge. What better place for a wolf than amongst trusting and naïve sheep. How is a Christian to know them, and maybe a more important question, how does he know that he himself is a Christian?

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Paranoia and distrust would ruin the church because the body of Christ is based on Christ, the Head, and therefore unity. There is one church, not many. So how can we not be paranoid and still discover the wolf in our midst? We simply wait. The bad tree will produce bad fruit. The bad tree will look good on the outside for a while, but given enough time God puts them in the right circumstances and the bad fruit will shine forth. We can still be disciples who do not judge and discover that a professing Christian was likely not one, and we can bring Christ to him in love just like we would to any unbeliever. So yet again, we just exercise patience and wait on the Lord to reveal it to us. And when it comes to ourselves personally, if there is a doubt in any of our minds that we may have been fooling ourselves and we're not Christians at all, "the Spirit will bear witness with our spirit that we are children of God." The work of the Spirit is within us and He has the power to witness to us that the promise from Christ is true and unchanging. We are not told that we will know ourselves by our fruit, as if there were works to do to confirm our status as His children. I cannot see the heart of another. For him, I must wait for his fruit to show itself before I can hope to confirm, or doubt, he is a Christian. But, I can see my own heart and the Holy Spirit from within speaks to it. The Bible simply says that the Holy Spirit within you reveals to your spirit that you are a child of God. This is a promise to all who believe in Christ, and it is supernatural, as is every part of our relationship with Him. However, when it comes to others

whose souls we cannot read or feel, we must wait for an overt manifestation of bad fruit before we can suspect them of being Christians in name only.

Can we determine for sure, without a doubt that they are unbelievers? No. If a Christian can step outside the narrow gate then he can look like an unbeliever. The Lord tells us to exercise caution, for instance in entrusting him with a position of importance in the church or in service of the church. We continue to shine forth the gospel of peace to him, for Christ is the only judge and the only one who knows with complete certainty.

It is a mindboggling thing to imagine that such wolves can say that they prophesied, cast out demons, and performed miracles in the name of Jesus. One wonders if they just said that they did but they really didn't. If they professed to be Christians and were not, we might expect that they professed to do supernatural things and did not. If we assume they were able to perform something that would qualify as a sign, then we would have to assume that they were empowered by Satan to do so. In which ever case it is, it still doesn't qualify as doing truly divine, supernatural things and therefore they were total frauds and liars. Hence the Lord could truly say that He never knew them.

This final statement by our Lord ties us right back to His first statement in this sermon, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Poor means that though they possess things and some wealth, they really do not own it. Everything is lost for the sake of Christ. To such people belong the kingdom of heaven and so the King of the kingdom would know them. When the Lord says that He never knew the impostor, He is saying that the pretender was not a part of His kingdom. All believers in Christ are a part of His kingdom, and the disciple who understands the blessedness of having a heart that has lost everything for the sake of Christ, no matter what happens to be currently in his possession, is known by Christ to be a close follower of Him. Every disciple relishes

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and rejoices in the fact that the Lord knows him for exactly who he is because the Lord takes great pleasure in him. He takes pleasure in all the saved and knows all the saved as His own, but He also takes pleasure in the righteous calling He has given to every one of them to become disciples.

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CHAPTER 16

THERE IS ONLY ONE
THING TO DO WITH THESE
WORDS – ACT UPON THEM!

Matthew 7:24-29 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.” The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed

at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

NOW THAT THIS HAS ALL BEEN HEARD, WHO HAS heard it properly? He gives that answer at the end – the one who acts upon the words. He does not allow the hearers to go away and make of it what they will, picking and choosing what they find helpful, testing it first to see if it works. He does not give them free reign of interpretation in order to misuse it. They must act upon what was said and only what was said. None was left out. Nothing needs to be added and nothing should be taken away.

No one has ever been honored for talking and not doing. These are called hypocrites. They are actors. Christ is not looking for actors. The Father seeks for true worshippers, those who worship in Spirit and in truth. Christ is calling for real doers. Wanting to do is not the rock. If we are proposing questions, problems, interpretations, and arguments then we are not doing.

By being told that we have to do all that was said means that what was said will always have power over us. There will never be a time when any one of us gets mature enough to be above the word so that we may pick and choose which parts to obey and which to ignore, and then to judge others for attempting to do the same. We must always do or we do not stand on the rock, and eventually the storms of life will topple us over. A thousand commentators may interpret the Sermon on the Mount a thousand different ways, but the disciple only interprets it one way, and that is obedience in doing it. One Christian may ask another what he thinks about the Sermon, but the only question in the disciple's mind is if he is performing it; to this there is no debate.

In performing His words, the disciple is depending completely on Christ. In debating the value of His words the

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Christian is depending on his ability to evaluate. Which of these is the rock? When the storm comes, the one who depends solely on Christ will stand since nothing can overcome the union of the believer and his Lord, but the one who depends on self will fall greatly. The self-dependent believer is also in union with Christ, but he has refused to stand on that union, and he has chosen rather for the sandbank of his own opinion.

One believer may tremble at Christ's words in fearing that they are too difficult to perform, but the Master does not ask the slave to do something that is impossible for him and then punish him for it. That would only make the Master an evil one, and certainly our Lord and Master is no such thing. Since God has empowered every believer in the church age with His Spirit who indwells him, every one of us who wants to perform the words will be able. We are entreated to reach forward to this upward call and trust the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us in it. If we walk by the Spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh, and in addition, we will produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. To say I can't do it because it is too difficult is only an excuse not to do it, which is a likely indication that I am still loving the lusts of the flesh and the world. If we love Him we will follow Him and we will do what we have been called to do, and we will do so in great joy.

Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Peter 1:4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

We may herald our strong faith to the world, but if we are not doing what we have been called to do then it is only words. It is better to say nothing and simply do. God will take such a life and show it to the world as He sees fit. Empty words do not stand up to the fierce storm, but the one who has been following His will stands firm, and to those whom God privileges to see such a disciple standing steadfast in the midst of the hurricane, or standing steadfast after the fierce storm has gone away, will see his good works and glorify the Father. Never take from Christ His words and then mold and manipulate them into a form that you might think is easier to do. Any change, any addition or subtraction is a crack in the foundation and when the storm comes the house will fall.

The Sermon was a kind of storm in itself in which the hearers, not in expectation of hearing any such thing, were swept away, pushed and pulled by His words and authority. He was finished and they were left breathless. His storm had ceased and the listeners must have wondered what had just happened to them. They stood there astonished. They came out that morning for teaching and healing and they were given the words of heaven. Crashing into their finite human ears were the truths of the heart and way of the Messiah, the Son of God, the bread that had come down from heaven, who was calling all of them and all of us to be with Him as He is to the Father, and to follow Him in being as He is – not a facsimile of Him, but His very mind and way. If you have read this and you are also astonished then I am so grateful, not for any words that I have written, but simply in the understanding of His words. Some of Jesus' listeners walked away astonished but soon unbelieving, as if the farther they got from that spot the less they believed the words and the more they returned to their former way of thinking, which they concluded was good enough. Please don't put these words down and do the same. Christ's words are eternal and everywhere. We cannot walk

away from them. Some of them walked away also astonished, and by faith, changed forever. I pray that you are changed forever. Every person has been offered salvation through faith in Christ and all who believe have been called to the life that is Christ. That is a truth upon which none of us should become familiar and we should be astonished every time we consider it.

The twelve disciples did not walk away, but stayed by Jesus' side. All but one of them would change their hearts over the years and come to understand just what the Lord stated here, and they would live it. Another by the name of Paul would be added to their number, and their transformation of mind and faith would be so great that they would alter the entire world forever. In whatever is our personal calling, every one of us have been called to see ourselves in Him and live in this way that our Lord has stated – His way. His way is now yours forever.

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