

JESUS' TEACHINGS FROM THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND RELATED PASSAGES AND PARABLES

Why do we want to study Jesus' teachings? The songwriter writes:

The church's one foundation¹
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
by water and the word.
From Heaven He came and sought her,
to be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
and for her life He died.

Jesus died for us on a cruel cross of torture and arose three days later, so that we could spend eternity with Him! Therefore, we want to better know Him, follow Him and please Him. We can begin this process by studying His teachings, and then putting them into practice.

Here is a partial list of six specific reasons for studying Jesus teachings.

- (1) We must know Jesus' commandments. (Jesus said to His disciples in John 14,15²: "*If you love me, keep my commandments.*"³)
- (2) Jesus' teachings go beyond our actions, even into our attitudes and motives. (The Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 5:21-30; and Matthew 6:25-34.)
- (3) Jesus' teachings are contrary to the world's teachings. We want to be able to recognize the differences. (Isaiah 55:8,9: "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*"
- (4) We can't convert the world, unless we live as Jesus wants us to. If we behave like the world, the world has converted us to itself.
- (5) Jesus' teachings are brilliant and beautiful. Obedience to these teachings is the only way man can experience heaven on this earth.
- (6) We should want to please Jesus.

Before studying Jesus' teachings, let us take a brief look at the political and

1 1 Corinthians 3:11, "*For not other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (St. Paul)

2 Direct quotes from Scripture are in *italics* and, unless otherwise noted, from the New King James Version (NKJV). KJV is the King James Version, and CEV is the Contemporary English Version from the American Bible Society. Identifying locations for quoted verses are underlined.

3 Also, Matthew 7:21: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*"

spiritual climate in Palestine at Jesus' time. This will help us to better appreciate the impact of Jesus' teachings.

GOD'S PERFECT TIMING

Galatians 4:4: "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.*"

The CEV uses the expression, "*But when the time was right*". We might say when "the time was ripe." God's timing is perfect! The Jewish nation was in political turmoil, chafing under Roman rule, and was also in spiritual difficulty with God, but largely didn't know it (it can happen to us, also). But Jesus knew it and was trying to bring them back to God. Jesus didn't care to be an earthly ruler, He wanted to be their spiritual leader. But this set the stage for a conflict that ended with Jesus crucified on a Roman cross.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT JESUS' TIME

Caesar Augustus was emperor of Rome from 27 BC to 14 AD. He was a master ruler, consolidating and expanding the empire which Julius Caesar had built before him. Because he was a good politician, he was popular and the empire had a minimum of internal problems. Rome built roads (we would call it infrastructure), so travel was facilitated. Note the extensive travels of the apostle Paul. Roman law enforced by the Roman army enabled commerce to thrive.

God used these roads and persecution by Roman emperors to scatter Christians throughout the empire after Christ's death. Under Roman persecution, Christianity exploded and spread like wildfire after Christ's death. God's perfect timing was evident!

JEWISH POLITICS UNDER ROME

Rome generally was a good master, if her subjects didn't give her trouble. She was lenient. Rome allowed the local cultures and religions, and tried to rule through local leaders. But if the people rebelled, Rome could get nasty.

Most conquered peoples didn't give Rome much trouble. But Palestine was a sore-spot on the Roman map. Most Jews, the average man on the street, never accepted Roman authority and were in constant rebellion. They believed they were God's chosen people (John 8:31-47) since the time of God's promises to Abraham.⁴ Josephus⁵, the noted Jewish historian, tells of a rebellion in approximately 10 BC, when the Romans rushed in two legions of Roman soldiers under Varus to crush a rebellion. Varus then crucified 2,000 Jews whom he considered rebels. Oh, how the Jews longed for a Messiah to liberate them from the hated Roman rule!

⁴ Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 15:1-6

⁵ Antiquities of the Jews, book xvii, chap. x, para. 8-10

The Jews said they had never been slaves. (John 8:33) Did they really believe this? They had probably deluded themselves into believing they were free. Look at an event from recent history. Politicians told the German people that they didn't lose World War 1, but that their leadership had sold them out (even though they were starving and had no "fight" left). The Germans wanted to believe the politicians.

The German people wanted a dictator (an earthly "messiah") who they thought could lead them to greater glories. Likewise, the Jewish people wanted a strong man who could break the bonds of Rome. However, Christ didn't give the Jewish people what they wanted. Instead, Christ assumed the role of a spiritual Messiah (John 8:34-38), focusing on His peoples' spiritual condition. Unfortunately, sometimes people reject help. Here Jesus' people turned on Him.

This wasn't the first time in their history that the Jewish people rejected God's choice for them. In 1 Samuel 8 it is related that the Jewish people wanted an earthly king (1 Samuel 8:4-9) so that they could be like the other nations. Samuel, a staunch man of God, had been their God-appointed judge. Samuel objected, but God told Samuel to grant them their wish. And they suffered for it! Saul, the first king, brought much trouble to Israel.

Herod was the Roman-backed ruler. Herod wanted to please the Jewish people (and also put his name in history!). He started to rebuild the temple to a magnificence surpassing Solomon's temple. The chief priests and high priests had their positions as religious rulers by Herod's good graces (not a new thing in religious history - under communism church leaders were controlled by political leaders). They knew which side their bread was buttered on! There was also a political party called the Herodians, which supported Herod. These elements, Herod, the priesthood and the Herodians, all wanted peace and stability so they could enjoy their positions of power.

After Jesus raised Lazarus, He was becoming too popular with the people, so the priests and Pharisees thought about killing Him. They were afraid the Romans would destroy their nation (see John 11:45-54) if He kept on upsetting the status quo.

In conclusion, there were some who wanted Jesus to be a strong-man liberator, and they didn't understand, or didn't appreciate, that Jesus wanted to save their souls! And there were others who didn't want Him to stir up the people for fear they would lose their place in the Roman "sun". The interplay of these elements led to Jesus crucifixion. It was coming about according to God's plan.

SPIRITUAL CLIMATE IN PALESTINE AT JESUS' TIME

God gave the Jewish people the Law (Ten Commandments), in the wilderness after they left Egypt. (Exodus 20:1-17) They were also given laws about treating

strangers well, and forgiving debts to fellow Jews.

Over the years Jewish scholars tried to better define the Law, as if that were possible. They expanded laws to over 600 in number, and these became traditions. For instance, they had laws on how to wash pots and pans, or how far one could walk on the Sabbath. They also developed ways to circumvent the Law. They made new rules for divorce, making it easier, at least for the men; and they found ways to hide their assets so they wouldn't have to help their parents in their old age. (see Mark 7:1-13)

This expanded Law became a legalistic standard. Obey these and get salvation! Read Matthew 23:1-36 for Jesus' assessment of their laws and religion. It wasn't good. We must also beware that we don't fall into this trap!

So we can see again, that God's timing was perfect. Jesus was needed to set people free with His message of salvation, rather than this man-made law, which led to damnation. How did He do this? Jesus didn't propose scrapping the Law. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17: "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*" What was that fulfillment? In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives the Law that fulfillment, by telling us our hearts must be right with God, not just our outward deeds.

Let us study Jesus' teachings presented in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and related Scriptures. But first let us take a short look at some of Jesus' pre-Sermon on the Mount activity - Jesus' baptism and the Devil's temptation of Jesus.

JESUS' ACTIVITY PRIOR TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Prior to Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, there are two significant events in the life of Jesus - Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13-17) and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

Why was Jesus baptized? Did He need it? There are many opinions about baptism. Some believe it signifies or works forgiveness of sins, some think it signifies or works regeneration. Some think it's a witness of faith to others, some think it's a symbol of dying to sin (submersion) and new life with Christ (coming up out of the water). In the Old Testament, the sprinkling with water signified a cleansing of His people by God. The Jews of Jesus' day required people of other races to be baptized.

Notice the variety of ideas concerning baptism. Did Jesus need baptism? Certainly not! He wasn't sinful! Note one key phrase. Jesus says, "*...for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" (Matthew 3:15) We may not understand baptism, but we must do it, because God wants us to do it! I also believe that a benefit of Jesus' baptism was that we today, just as John the Baptist then, may know that Jesus is God's son, and that God through his Holy Spirit put the stamp of approval on Jesus.

Then Jesus went into the wilderness for His “duel” with the devil. I believe this is recorded for our benefit, so that we may know that the devil can be conquered if we use the Word of God. Also, there are other lessons here.

When the devil suggested that Jesus turn stones into bread (Matthew 4:3), Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, stating⁶ that there is more to life than food and that God’s Word should be our food. Jesus is comparing two things, the spiritual or eternal with the material or temporary. There are two other interesting passages in Scripture where Jesus makes this comparison. In John 4:34 Jesus says His food is to do what God wants. In Luke 12:15 Jesus says that a person’s life doesn’t consist of the amount of material things possessed. Jesus goes into an in-depth discussion of the eternal versus the temporal in Matthew 6 of the Sermon on the Mount. It is a subject worthy of deep thought by all followers of the Lord Jesus.

The devil also quoted Scripture⁷, daring Jesus to jump off a high building. Jesus told⁸ the devil he would not test God, just to show His power. (This is not like Peter of fable who called “wolf” once too often, and when the real wolf came, no one believed him.)

In the final temptation, the devil told Jesus he would give Jesus all the kingdoms of earth, if only Jesus would worship him, the devil. Jesus said, “*You shall Worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.*” (Matthew 4:10)⁹ Consider this: Jesus owned the whole world by “right of creation”. The devil’s offer is bogus. What does the Christian need the world for? We have more than the world! We are citizens of heaven! (Philippians 3:20) What more could we want?

After the devil left Jesus, Matthew 4:17 says: *Jesus began to preach and to say “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Jesus then chose four fisherman, Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, to be His disciples and invited them to be fishers of people.

Finally, Matthew 4 ends with (verses 22-24) Jesus preaching, teaching and healing. *Great multitudes followed Him - from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.* (Matthew 4:25)

This is the setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

6 Deuteronomy 8:3

7 Here the devil quoted Psalm 91:11,12 incorrectly, and omitted verse 13, which referred to Jesus crushing the devil.

8 From Deuteronomy 6:16 - See also Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:2-13 (refers to Meribah).

9 From Deuteronomy 6:13

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5-7. Chapter 5 starts with *And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.* (In those days teachers usually sat down while they taught.) Chapter 8 begins with, *When He (Jesus) had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.*

It also relates the first of Jesus' acts of healing. Jesus didn't just teach people but had compassion for them and healed them. When a man with leprosy asked Jesus to heal him, Jesus said, *"I am willing, be cleansed."* (Matthew 8:3) We must have compassion and help people, also! If we teach people to show them how bad they are, or try to "lay down the law", we will accomplish little, or nothing. If we teach people and don't try to help them, it will fall on deaf ears. But if we can demonstrate to people that the good we do, we do because that is what our Lord would have us do, we have accomplished something for the glory of God. (Christ taught this in Matthew 5:16.)

BLESSINGS - Matthew 5:3-12

Verses 3-12 are grouped together because each statement contains some form of the word "blessed"

Each verse, starting with verse 3 is a separate statement, except verse 12, which is an extension of verse 11. These statements have one thing in common. They talk about attitudes. Attitudes are the key. To be genuine, everything starts in the heart, or mind. If we do something because someone is watching us, or because we are forced to, it won't be genuine, and will avail nothing.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:35: *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things."* Jesus also says in Mark 7:20-23: *"What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile a man."*

Verses 3-12 discuss how we should think, not what we should do. Jesus wants our hearts to be right with God! Salvation is not earned by us, it is a **gift** from God. Good works can only flow from a heart right with God.

King David sinned a horrible sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. He then had her husband Uriah killed, and took Bathsheba for his own wife (2 Samuel 11:1-17,27). But when confronted by Nathan, God's prophet, he immediately confessed (2 Samuel 12:1-13). David did not argue with God, or try to excuse himself. With his prompt confession, David acknowledged God as his Lord.

Therefore, it is noted in 1 Kings 15:3 that the heart of David was perfect¹⁰ before the Lord (KJV). Note that the key here is prompt confession and no argument with God. In 1 John 1:9 it says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* We may not lose our salvation over one sin, but we must beware that we don’t take sin lightly and think that because we are believers that there will be no consequences. The Scriptures say in Galatians 6:7: *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”* Just as God *“sends rain on the just and on the unjust”* (Matthew 5:45), there will be consequences. David was severely punished by the death of the child conceived in this adultery with Bathsheba, possibly because David gave *“...great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme”*. (2 Samuel 12:14) **Sin can also ruin our witness to the world!**

Let us study the following passages as Jesus tells us what a perfect heart is. We can then pray, “Lord, give me a perfect heart.”, as we strive to follow Jesus.

Verse 3: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

The KJV and other versions use “poor in spirit”. But “poor in spirit” translates into “depending on God”.¹¹ The CEV gives the fine paraphrase, *“God blesses those people who **depend** only on Him. They belong to the kingdom of heaven.”*

It is interesting that Jesus speaks about this first - dependence on God, and God only. It is so important, that the word **depend** must be emphasized. We will see later that dependence on God is a key element in salvation.

When we acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy, when we say, “Lord, I know I can’t get along without You.” and, “I know that everything I have, or will ever have, comes from You.”, then we won’t boast of our accomplishments, or our self-sufficiency. Then we are not proud, but “poor in spirit”.

Jesus acknowledged God as his Father. When He raised Lazarus, Jesus prayed, *“Father, I thank you, that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but, because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”* (John 11:41,42). If we don’t pray to God when we have needs, we are missing a major part of dependency. If we don’t thank God for meeting those needs, we are missing another major part of dependency. God wants us to acknowledge our dependence on Him. Also, wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could have the kind of faith that Jesus displayed, so that we could pray so confidently!

God said in Exodus 20:5: *“For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.”* God is jealous for our dependence. He is angry when we seek help elsewhere. That is

¹⁰ See Appendix 3 - A Heart Right with God.

¹¹ In William Barclay’s “The Gospel of Matthew”, vol.1, pg. 91 is found the etymological justification for expressing “poor in spirit” as “depending on (or trusting in) God”.

relying on false gods. False gods may be anything - **our** abilities, **our** wealth, **our** intelligence. Note the emphasis on **our**.

St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:9: “*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.*” We trust God for our salvation!

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:20: “*but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,...*”. In other words, look to God for your future in eternity. When we put money in the bank, we depend on the bank to keep it safe for us. When we store up treasures in heaven we are showing the ultimate in dependence on God by trusting Him to keep these for us. We have no heavenly bankbook like that from an earthly bank, but we have the assurance given by God, as in Romans 8:16,17: “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*” We depend on God!

In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus tells us not to worry about our lives here on this earth, because our Father in Heaven knows our needs. Jesus says in vs 32: “*For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*” Only people who don’t know God are always worrying about such things.” Let this be our prayer, that God would help us to know Him to the point where we can dissociate our minds from all earthly worries.

Jesus cautions us about being so concerned about providing for our own needs that we forget that God is the one who takes care of us. In Luke 12:15-21 Jesus first talks about greed and says that , “*...one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.*” Then Jesus tells us about a prosperous man who stored up riches in his barns so he could enjoy himself. Greed and amassing possessions showed a lack of dependence on God. This man relied on himself and provided for himself, caring for no one else. God told the rich man that he was a fool (senseless) and would die tonight. Then God asked him who would get his possessions! **Do we ever attach too much importance to things?**

Another parable that Jesus told is found in Luke 15:11-32. The main theme of this parable is God’s mercy and God’s desire that people should turn to Him and be saved. But this parable also touches on dependency. It has been named “The Prodigal Son”. The younger son decided that he wanted his “independence” from the Father. While his money lasted he had a good (wild) time. When his resources were spent, things weren’t so good. He had to work at menial labor, caring for pigs. Then the prodigal son returned to the Father, broken and repentant. He had become “poor in spirit”. He said, in effect: forgive me, I did wrong, take me back, I need you. Then the Father was happy to accept him back in his home. Notice that the Father could do nothing with the son until the son became “poor in spirit” and came to depend on the Father. The son learned a lesson the hard way in

straying from dependence on the Lord. Do we ever stray into a state of independence from God? Do we have to learn the hard way? Sometimes we do. Let us pray that we remember the lesson of this parable, and enjoy living under God's protection.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:7-11 that our Father will hear us. This tells us that our dependence on God will not be in vain. Jesus says that our heavenly Father even wants to give us good things. When we forget God and rely on ourselves, we short-change ourselves. Even when good things are there for the asking, we struggle on our own way in futility. Let us remember that in this passage we are encouraged to go to our heavenly Father with our needs.

Sometimes we fail in dependence on God, our Creator. Why do we fail? I think it would be hard to find all the reasons. But I think one reason is because we get wrapped up in the cares of the day. We think we have so many problems to solve, that we forget that God is the one who can solve them. We are so used to thinking in terms of "I", "I can do this", or, "I can do that". Maybe we take false pride in being a "self-made person". Rather, it should be, "How can I do God's will?" or, "How can I help someone?"

This idea of dependence on God is a prime example of the difference between God's wisdom and the "wisdom" of this world. The world says, "Don't be weak, be strong". "Don't be dependent on anyone else, stand on your own two feet." But that isn't God's way. That way cuts us off from God.

"For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Once we are poor in spirit and acknowledge dependence on God, then we are in the kingdom of heaven. This discussion could be linked to Jesus' discussion of salvation in [John 3:3](#), when Jesus tells Nicodemus that, *"unless one is born again¹², he cannot see the kingdom of God"* Here dependence on God is acknowledging Him as our spiritual Father. So, we can see that verse 3 is a salvation-related message.

An interesting question here is, "Can Christ be our Savior without being our Lord?" This is a much debated theological question, and I will not attempt a comprehensive discussion of that question here. However, from what I see in this verse, I would think it difficult to be completely dependent on God, accepting everything which He offers, which includes our salvation, and then acknowledging another god. Do you think that if God is a jealous God, he would consider that dependency?

Another important question here is, "Do we trust God more for our salvation than for our everyday needs?" If so, why? Is it that we know we are powerless to achieve our own salvation, but we think we can take care of all our earthly needs without God? How does God feel about that? How can we be a witness to the goodness of God, if we appear to live independent of God? **Without dependence**

¹² *born again* - CEV translates *born from above*.

on God in our everyday life, we jeopardize our Christian witness.

Verse 4: “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*”

What does this mean? Doesn't God want us to be full of joy? Yes, this is true. But the joy that comes from God comes because He has saved us. That is a continuous thing that should go on during both the good and bad times of life.

Some say this passage means that we should mourn (some translations use grieve) for our sins and those of the world. I believe this passage is even broader and means more than just mourning for sins. Jesus attached no modifying phrases to the word mourn. I believe that Jesus meant that we must be able to mourn in any circumstances. Christians are to be sensitive and their hearts shouldn't grow cold or callused. Mourning or grieving should lead to compassion.

In Luke 10:33 in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it says that the Samaritan “*had compassion on him*” (KJV) when he saw the wounded man. We need to grieve and have compassion when we see wounded or hurting people. We do not want to be like the priest or the Levite who crossed the street to avoid helping the wounded man. **Do we ever “cross the street” to avoid helping needy people?**

We should mourn for the lost of the world, for the believer who sins and goes astray, for a friend who has a death in the family, for the person who has lost his or her job, for the person who is in physical pain. If we can't mourn or have compassion for the lost, how can we talk about Jesus to these people? How can we understand or help unfortunate people if we can't mourn? **How can we show people the love of Jesus if we can't cry with them?**

Jesus mourned at the death of Lazarus. The Bible says, “*Jesus wept.*” (John 11:35-40) Jesus mourned either for the people who did not put their trust in Him or because of the sadness of those who mourned for Lazarus. In Mark 3:5 Jesus grieved for the people because of the stubbornness of their hearts. In Matthew 23:37 Jesus mourns for Jerusalem, because the people of that city wouldn't let Him gather them to Himself.

We should grieve for those who don't accept the Gospel, simply because Jesus grieved. **Our joy for having been chosen by God for salvation, should help us to grieve for the lost and to tell them of the Gospel.**

Sometimes we talk to people about the Gospel, and they don't respond the way we want them to respond. Do we harden our hearts toward them, and say, “Why don't they understand, we do?” But it is only by the grace of God that we understand. We must still approach them with grieving hearts!

“*...for they shall be comforted.*” But when we have occasion for grieving, God has guaranteed us that we will find comfort. God will comfort, even when the world can't. God has told us that with Him nothing is impossible. Sometimes we think everything is going wrong, and it seems as if we don't think comfort is possible, or we do not recognize God's plan for us. Later we see that God's plan is

best. **Only, we must believe!**

Verse 5: “*Blessed are the meek¹³, for they shall inherit the earth.*”

Meek! The world’s way is otherwise. Blow your own horn, nobody else will. Pat yourself on the back and feel good. But consider this! In Philippians 2:8 it says, “*He (Christ) humbled Himself and become obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*” If Christ had been arrogant and had decided not to humble himself and die for us on the cross, where would we be? Christ is the greatest example of humbleness. He took nothing for himself, he didn’t even have a place to lay his head, and He took no credit to himself.

In the fifth verse, like the third verse, “I” comes in again. In the third verse it was putting ourselves ahead of God and in the fifth verse it is putting ourselves ahead of others. It sounds harsh to say we are putting ourselves ahead of God. Quite often it’s not deliberate. It is our old nature, that nature that we’re trying to destroy. We have to work on that. We can’t be complacent about our old nature. **If we put ourselves ahead of God, isn’t it easy to put ourselves ahead of others?** Once we put God first it will be easier to be humble and to serve others, including our families and friends.

Putting “I” first is pride - the opposite of being humble. St. Paul explains it this way in 2 Corinthians 10:4,5: “*casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*” “I” or “pride” keeps us from knowing God, because we are so focused on ourselves. We must want to know God more!

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus says, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*” If we are not humble we will stand in the way of that light and the Father will not be seen due to our shadow.

In John 3:26-30 John the Baptist was told by people that everyone was going to Jesus (with the implication that John was losing his audience). John said in vs 27: “*A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.*” John understood where his power and authority were coming from. Do we let God control our lives? John also said in vs 30, “*He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.*” Can we become less important where God is concerned? Sometimes I think that I am growing or maturing in the Lord. Then I realize that I think that I am becoming more important to the Lord. Bad thinking!

Jesus told a story found in Luke 14:7-11 about a person who thought too much of himself and sat in the best chair at a wedding feast. He was then embarrassed by being asked to give his chair to another more important guest, leaving him with the worst chair. Jesus said, sit in the lowest place, then you will be honored when you are asked to take a better seat.

13 Meek - some translations use the word *humble*.

In Matthew 6:1-8 Jesus says don't show off when you give to the poor or when you pray. If you do, you're doing it for your own credit, and God won't give you credit. These things should be between you and God. And in Matthew 6:16-18 Jesus says don't look gloomy when you are fasting. In other words, don't do something to draw attention to yourself with the idea that people will ask you what you're doing, so that then you can boast. Isn't it interesting that Jesus knows about the little mind games that we play with ourselves and others? But God knows, and there will be no reward in heaven for that.

In Matthew 18:1-5 Jesus answers the question asked by the disciples, "*Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*" Jesus says that we won't get into the kingdom of heaven if we don't become humble as a little child. But if we become humble as a little child, we will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. There are at least two interesting points here. One is that we must shed these false ideas of our greatness or importance, these false ideas that we pick up as we live in this sinful world. These ideas are a cheap veneer. We must get rid of these ideas. The second point is that if we are humble, we can all be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. We can all be winners! The world will ask: "How can this be? There must be a Number One." But God's ways are not man's ways. God's ways are beyond compare!

Jesus discusses humbleness in a number of other scriptures. In Luke 22:24-30 Jesus says, "*he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves.*" and in John 13:4-17 Jesus demonstrated humbleness to his disciples by washing their feet. In Matthew 20:28 Jesus says, "*just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" In essence, Jesus says that if we want to be masters, we must learn to be servants. If we want to have a position in God's kingdom, we must give up our positions here on earth.

Interestingly enough, these verses of John 13 dealing with Jesus' humbleness in washing the disciples feet, along with many other verses from Jesus' teachings, show that God's way to the kingdom of heaven is the complete opposite to the world's formula for success. We must examine carefully in the light of the Scriptures anything that the world presents to us that looks good or enticing. **The world's way is not God's way.**

"*For they shall inherit the earth.*" How can this be? Sometimes it seems that the meek are pushed around and that the strong and aggressive are receiving all the "good things of this life". What does it mean that "*they shall inherit the earth.*" Is this literal or figurative? Some people think this is for some future time, as a millennium when Christ will rule on this earth. I believe (but will not be adamant about it) that this is figurative, in a sense. I believe that all the "good things of this life" that the strong and aggressive receive, are good by the world's standard, but

not by God's standards. These "good things" are meaningless for, or in, eternity. But the things that are meaningful in eternity will start to be enjoyed by the meek and humble right here on this earth. They will receive assurance from the Lord of their salvation. St. Paul says in Romans 8:16,17: "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*" They will be able to enjoy life on this earth with the knowledge that their eternity is settled. They will know, that even though they are meek and humble, that the Lord will care for and protect them on this earth. They will have a purpose on this earth, working for the Lord! That is the joy given by the Lord!

Verse 6: "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!*"

"*Hunger and thirst*", that is the key! God wants us to obey Him gladly with sincerity. He doesn't want us to obey Him grudgingly, as if we had to, but didn't want to. Righteousness is being like God. Here again "hunger and thirst" show a condition of the heart, wanting to, not feeling forced to.

The CEV says, "*God blesses those people who want to obey Him, more than to eat or drink.*" This places the desire for righteousness above our physical needs.

When we establish in our minds and hearts our dependence on God - which dependency includes our salvation - then we find that obeying God isn't such a bad idea after all. Jesus says in John 14,15: "*If you love me, keep my commandments.*" And as time goes on, we find that God's commands are for our benefit, and obedience pays off in a better life here on earth - a bit of paradise right here on earth.

"*For they shall be filled*" Some versions use "satisfied", the modern language equivalent of "filled". I believe that this means that God will give us satisfaction.

People with the qualifications of Matthew 5:3-6 will have their mind on God's track! They will ask for a more perfect being, they will ask God to work in their families and friends. They will want what God wants for them. God will fill them!

Remember Solomon and his request for knowledge and wisdom? God gave him riches and respect in addition to knowledge and wisdom. (1 Kings 3:5-13) In Matthew 6:25-34 Jesus tells how God provides for the material things without our concern. In verse 34 Jesus says, "*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*" So the clear message is - think as God thinks, want what God wants, don't do as the world does.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-27 that obedience is related to salvation. Jesus says that you can preach in His name, but you can be rejected if you don't obey God. Some people believe that once they say that they accept Jesus as their Savior that they can proceed to remain just as they are. But without obedience to God they

cannot become the “new creature” that St. Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new.*” Then Jesus says in Matthew 7:24: “*Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his home on the rock.*” We want our relationship to God to be built on a solid rock, don’t we?

We cannot substitute sacrifice for obedience, thinking that we can pay God off. In 1 Samuel 15:22,23 Samuel asks Saul, when Saul tries to cover up his disobedience with sacrifices, “*Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?*” Then Samuel continues, “*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.*” All our “works”, such as giving to the church or missionaries, helping the poor, spreading the Gospel, will suffer if they don’t have the foundation of obedience.

In Matthew 15:1-9 Jesus warns us not to disobey God by substituting either tradition or our own teaching for God’s teaching. Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, but we must not become complacent and think it can’t happen to us. Giving in to peer pressure, being influenced by newspapers or television, we can adopt some erroneous ideas - erroneous by biblical standards. Knowing that the human being is frail due to the effects of sin, we must continuously check the absolute standard of God’s Word (the Scriptures). And praying to God that He would keep us on His straight and narrow way will help.

Verse 7: “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*”

God created this earth and created Adam and Eve and gave them charge over it. (Genesis 1) What a fantastic trust! After Adam and Eve sinned, God could have obliterated them just as He obliterated Sodom and Gomorrah. But God didn’t. He showed them mercy through the promise of a Savior. (Genesis 3:14,15)¹⁴

God shows us mercy. God tolerates our sins and imperfections. We deserve His punishment. We don’t deserve His mercy. How many times could God have punished us, and He didn’t? Like the time we ran through the red light, and we didn’t get hit, or even get a ticket - or the time we offended someone, or the time we didn’t help someone who needed help.¹⁵ Here God has given us a promise. You show mercy as I would have you do, and I will show you mercy. Jesus told a powerful parable about mercy in Matthew 18:23-35. Jesus tells of a man who received forgiveness of a huge debt, so large he could never pay it. In our day we would say he was bankrupt. The king demanded payment, and the man could not pay. But the man got on his knees and pleaded for pity. The king canceled the debt. Then this man turned around and refused to forgive a man who owed him a

14 See Appendix 1

15 Of course, in this discussion, we are assuming that we are not testing God’s patience with continuous, deliberate sin.

very much smaller debt. Then the king called in the man whose debt he had forgiven and called him an evil man and punished him severely. The parallel is obvious. The king is God. We are like the man who owed the king a sum he could not pay. And we will not receive mercy if we do not give it. Is this parable an exaggeration? Is our debt to God payable by us? No, only Jesus could pay it! Yet somehow we hear statements like, “I could never forgive him, after what he did to me” or, “I couldn’t feel sorry for him, he deserves what he got.” These are attitudes that can be corrected when we realize that our King forgave us what we never could repay.

Jesus quoted Scripture from Matthew 9:13 and Matthew 12:7 (KJV): “*I desire mercy and not sacrifice* .”¹⁶ In each case Jesus was trying to help sinners. In Matthew 9:13 the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus for eating with the tax collector Matthew. In Matthew 12:7 the Pharisees were condemning Jesus’ disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had no pity on these people. They put legalism first.

God says, in effect, don’t give me a sacrifice if you don’t have a “soft spot” in your heart for your fellow man. A sacrifice won’t cover up for violating one of God’s commandments, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:39).

Consider this! Can we reject our fellowman and yet be a witness to him? **A legalistic, unfeeling practice of our faith will never “sell” our cause of bringing people into the kingdom.**

Matthew 7:1-5 presents a teaching closely parallel to this teaching about mercy. Jesus says, “*Judge not, that you be not judged.*”¹⁷ In Matthew 5:7 God says that if we show compassion, He will show us compassion. In Matthew 7:1 Jesus is saying don’t set yourself up as a judge. It’s dangerous! It’s dangerous because we’re imperfect and may be wrong. Would we want someone who is imperfect to judge us? Let God do the judging. **Showing mercy is to substitute compassion for condemnation.**

We must preach to people about their sins. But only sufficiently to convince them of their need for salvation. Then, if we don’t preach the message of mercy, the Gospel, the salvation message will probably never get out.

We cannot leave this topic of mercy, without mentioning Jesus’ story about the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37) It will widen the horizons of our thinking and action. A man was beaten and was left helpless. A priest and a temple helper, supposed to be of God’s chosen people, passed him by. In fact, they even crossed the street to avoid the injured man. Do we ever “cross the street” to avoid helping others? But a Samaritan, considered one of the lower class, helped him and cared

¹⁶ From Hosea 6:6

¹⁷ See discussion on Matthew 7:1-5, pp. 62-64.

for him. **God draws no boundaries and excludes no one when it comes to giving or receiving mercy.**

“For they shall obtain mercy.” When we are merciful, God guarantees us that we will be treated with mercy. This is the only verse in the Beatitudes where God says He will treat us as we treat others. This shows the importance God attaches to mercy. Let us pray that God will give us a heart of mercy, and make us a compassionate people.

Verse 8: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*

Everything stems from the heart! We can't be pure if our hearts aren't pure. Jesus says in Matthew 12:35: *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.”* And in Matthew 15:19 Jesus says, *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”* The physical person only responds as his or her heart directs. God can read that heart directly. He's the only one who can. He created us. That should be scary if our “heart is in the wrong place.” Since no one can read our heart directly, except the Lord, we must be extremely circumspect to make sure that our actions and attitudes express our purity of heart. This is a difficult task. One slip and the witness can be gone. If someone cuts us off in traffic and we respond with a bad gesture, we better not have a bumper sticker advertising our Christianity, or they'll probably mutter “there goes one of those d... Christians again!” Or if we mutter something inappropriate, we better not have any non-Christians in the car, or they'll think, “I'm not a Christian, and I can control myself better than that!” Or, maybe worse yet, if we have one of our children in the car, maybe they'll copy us.

The heart may be likened to a full cup which spills out its contents if it is bumped. So our heart has to be so full of pure contents that if we feel we are injured in any way, we respond with a “God bless you” and mean it. We also have to eliminate any mannerisms which might be construed by the world as ugly or combative, even if we don't mean them to be. This means we can't even let off a little of our so-called “righteous anger”. Here again, God's wisdom is at odds with worldly advice. Have you ever heard it said that it's good to let off a little “steam” now and then? What about the people who are hurt when we let off that “steam”? Remember, a pure heart won't let that “steam” build up.

In Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus discusses the dangers of anger. Jesus says anger is wrong. We can be judged for it. Anger can lead to bad words, the desire for revenge, violence and murder. Anger also damages the angry one. **When anger fills the heart, all else is crowded out, and our Christian witness suffers.** Also, why would we want to destroy ourselves with anger?

In Matthew 5:27-30 Jesus discusses the sin of lust, which leads to the destruction of God's marriage plan for man and woman. Covetousness is evil, like

lust. Only covetousness applies to things, especially wealth and power. These things, anger, lust and covetousness are some of the products of an impure heart.

Have a pure heart. Don't be angry. Have a compassionate heart. Don't lust. Keep from sins of adultery and covetousness. Anger and lust will be discussed further later in this paper.

Of course, it would be best to have such a pure heart, that if the "cup is tipped", only pure things would come out. But try as we may, we don't always achieve that blessed state. The Bible has good advice about speech. In Proverbs 14:29 it says, "*He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.*" In Proverbs 15:18 it says, "*A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.*" In Proverbs 16:32 it says, "*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*"¹⁸ And, very importantly, in James 1:19,20 it says, "*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*" Answering too quickly can cause irreparable damage, like hurting someone, or ruining our witness about Christ's love. Christianity is a "thinking man's religion". If we take time to think about "what Jesus would say" before we reply, or even take time out to pray about it, much damage would be avoided. And with this patience in answering, we will keep a rein on our impure hearts.

"for they shall see God." We must pray that God would give us a pure heart, so that we can see Him. **An impure heart is like a cloud between us and God.** We must have this goal that we may see God and that others would see God working in us.

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

We must be peacemakers. How can countries be at peace if the individuals within those countries are at odds? This verse doesn't just say "blessed are the peaceful." We must "make peace". This is an active role. Of course, we can't make peace, if we don't subscribe to the practice ourselves. Would it be unfair to say that God's people often stir up trouble? Maybe there's a feeling that in the family it's O.K. to "let our hair down". But the word will get out. Then there may be the idea that we will live in peace and harmony with our brothers and sisters, but that outside the family it's O.K. to be a little obnoxious. But the Lord Jesus' statement draws no boundaries. God's children have to start practicing how they're going to live in heaven right here on earth! **After all, we are already citizens of heaven, aren't we?**

We cannot be peacemakers if we engage in strife. Jesus says in Matthew 5:39: "*But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right*

¹⁸ I believe this passage is attesting to the difficulty of controlling the temper and the great value of controlling the temper.

cheek, turn the other to him also.” If we feel we have to get even, it is a result of pride. It will govern our life and we will not be able to be like Jesus. Remember that God cares for us, even when someone wrongs us! Then Jesus says in verse 44: *“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”* When we have love and concern for our enemies, or those who harass us, then we can become peacemakers.

Again, the world’s way is not God’s way. The world says “defend yourself, don’t let them do this to you.” Fight back! The Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be spread by fighting back. **The Gospel is spread by the meek and humble.**

“For they shall be called sons¹⁹ of God.” This is a wonderful promise. This is our desire, isn’t it? To be a child of God!

Verse 10: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Jesus here assures us that it isn’t a losing game to do the right thing, that is, what God wants us to do. Sometimes we get discouraged in our pursuit of doing right. Even within the family, don’t we sometimes feel our efforts on behalf of other family members aren’t appreciated? Sometimes we feel like quitting when we don’t get the appreciation to which we think we’re entitled. But we must not quit, because God knows our efforts.

The story of Joseph’s long-suffering while he was a captive in Egypt is found in the Old Testament in Genesis 39-41. Potiphar, a king’s official, put Joseph in charge of his household. The Bible tells us because of Joseph the Lord blessed Potiphar’s family and fields. Joseph was thrown into prison, because he was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife of attempting to rape her. Actually, Joseph was following God’s laws and was resisting her advances. Joseph was doing right by Potiphar and God. **Do we ever feel picked on when we are trying to do good?** But Joseph stayed on God’s side, and God looked after him in prison. After a long time (Genesis 40:4), God used Joseph to successfully interpret dreams for two men in jail. After two more years (Genesis 41:1), Joseph successfully interpreted a dream for Pharaoh. Then Pharaoh promoted Joseph to Governor of Egypt, second in power only to him. The Bible never once says that Joseph complained. Could we do as well? **God grant that we would have the confidence to weather out the storm when we are persecuted for doing right, and wait for God’s rescue!**

In the New Testament, persecution of the apostles is recorded in Acts 4:1-22. The apostles endured jail time, and threats to try to stop them from teaching about Jesus. The day before a crippled man had been healed through the power of Jesus. This also irritated the officials. Here again we see persecution of people who were doing right. **But the apostles did not stop speaking about Jesus (vs 20).** And

¹⁹ The KJV uses “children”.

the people were praising God.

Another story of persecution is found in Acts 5:17-42. The apostles were thrown into jail, but an angel let them out. The apostles were captured again and threatened. Peter and the apostles responded by saying, “*We ought to obey God rather than men.*” (vs 29) After more testimony to God, the apostles were beaten and released with a warning not to teach in the name of Jesus. But it says in Acts 5:41,42: “*So they (the apostles) departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*” “*We ought to obey God*” and “***Worthy to suffer shame for His name***”. What tremendous statements! May we be worthy to suffer “*for His name*”, and be happy about it! If persecution comes, will we keep on talking about Jesus? Let us pray that God will empower us to keep on speaking about Jesus, then and now.

Stephen preached about Jesus and was stoned to death. In Acts 7:51-60 is recorded the final act of that stoning. Stephen, as he was dying, said “*Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit. Then he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” (vv.59,60)* Stephen had the same spirit that Christ had when he forgave the people who crucified him. Could we do that well? **Pray that we would have the mind of Christ just as Stephen did.**

Another act of persecution is recorded in Acts 17:5-9. Christians were accused of breaking the laws of the Roman Empire. Is it possible that Christians in this country will be accused of breaking our laws? If so, will we continue to be a witness for Jesus?

What must believers in Jesus Christ do when faced with persecution? “*If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*” (1 Peter 4:14) If you are singled out for punishment, willingly accept it, even doing more than required. “*And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.*” (Matthew 5:41) This may just be the witness that persuades the persecutor to accept the Gospel!

“*For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” God does take care of those who do right. God assures us that it isn’t over on this earth, that there is a time of reward in heaven. Jesus also says in John 16:33: “*These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*” We must not be discouraged. God remembers every discouragement we have, and He will make it all worthwhile. So don’t be weary in well-doing.

Verses 11,12: “*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for*

great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Persecution isn't always jail, torture or beatings. One definition of “persecute” is “to subject to harassing or cruel treatment, as because of religion, race, or beliefs; oppress.” So persecution need not be physical, but it can in some ways be just as cruel. Reputations can be ruined, jobs can be lost. Out in the big, bad world, aren't we sometimes ridiculed for honesty or expressing “dumb” ideas such as advocating God's ways relative to marriage or abortion or homosexuality? But in spite of insults or persecution, we must keep on talking about Jesus Christ

We must not respond in the wrong way when insulted. In Matthew 5:39 Jesus says, *“But I tell you not to resist and evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also.”* In those days, to slap a person on the cheek was an insult, it was laying down a challenge, similar to the slapping on the cheek with gloves, to invite to a duel with the sword. However, **trading insult for insult will not win our case.** It may escalate to something worse. It may just ruin our witness.

Instead of retaliation, we should, *“Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.”* (Romans 12:14) Most importantly, Jesus said, *“...for great is your reward in heaven.”*

SUMMARY - Matthew 5:3-12

These first teachings of Jesus recorded in the book of Matthew are wonderfully unique. These teachings aren't just a group of “do”s and “don't”s. They emphasize God's commitment or promise to us if we think and behave as His children, that is, acknowledge Him as our Father and doing as He would have us do. There is our (1) dependence on Him (2) being able to grieve (3) being humble (4) wanting to obey Him (5) being merciful (6) having pure hearts (7) being peacemakers (8) suffering for doing as God would have us do and (9) being happy and excited when we are verbally or otherwise abused because of our commitment to Jesus Christ.

When we acquire these characteristics, we are being like God. This reminds us of Genesis 1:27 where it says that, *“God created man in His own image.”* This is the way we were created before sin came along. Jesus says, in effect, return to the way you were created, and the blessings will flow to you, and you will spend eternity with Me, starting right now.

But the battle is difficult. We have to pray for help. We have to get rid of our ego, our thinking too highly of ourselves (yet having joy that God is our mainstay). We have to be more sympathetic, and have more compassion for the lost and the less fortunate than we. We have to obey God, and more than that, want to obey Him (thirst after righteousness). We have to think in terms of having mercy, not

getting even. And we have to have pure hearts, because everything starts there. The pure heart can't help but produce things pleasing to God. And then, we have to not only tolerate insults, but be excited when the world picks on us because we are trying to do what God wants us to do.

I know that I need help, because just as things seem to be going right, something happens. The car has a problem, or a home appliance breaks down, or some other inconsequential thing like that, and I get irritable and let these problems take possession of me and drive God out of my mind. Just because I think I have to solve the problem all be myself! And I snap at people. Or when someone does something I think is wrong or just plain dumb, I say "serves them right" when they get the consequences. Or worse yet, if they don't suffer consequences, wishing they did! Instead I should grieve a little and step in and help - and praise God when He keeps me from mistakes. However, we must not be like the Pharisee who prayed, "*God, I thank You, that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers...*" (Luke 18:11) What the Pharisee didn't realize was that he was who he was by God's grace, not by anything he did.

SALT AND LIGHT - Matthew 5:13-16

The Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5 - Matthew 7. The first part of this famous discourse is found in Matthew 5:3-12. These verses deal with basic principles of Christianity, or necessities for inclusion in the kingdom of heaven. They are foundational teachings for the Christian and speak about attitudes and thoughts. Everything originates in the heart. To quote Jesus' words from Matthew 12:35: "*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*" But Matthew 5:13-16 has a different thought. Once we are in the kingdom of Heaven, what are we on earth for? We are here to be "salt" and "light". We will next discuss what this "salt" and "light" really are.

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

I have heard discussions of how salt brings out the best flavor, or how salt preserves things. But I think that Jesus used salt in this teaching because it was such a necessity; that everyone would understand His meaning. The important thing about good salt is that it affects whatever it is added to. **We are to have an effect on this world.** That's what we're here for.

We are to affect the world. Jesus says "*salt of the earth*". That means for everyone, wherever we may go. We are to be a witness. Jesus isn't here now. We are His representatives here on earth, "*salt*" is our witness - our thoughts, our behavior, our speech. And we should be "*salt*" for everyone, not just for those

whom we chose.

I don't know how many ways salt can go bad, but the point is that if salt doesn't do its job, we throw it out. This is a warning for Christians not to go stale. Don't drift away, don't forget who we are or what we're supposed to do. Also, there are bad influences that may make us lose our witness. Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:8: "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" At the same time that Satan is attacking us, he is masquerading as a good guy. In 2 Corinthians 11:14 St. Paul says, "*For Satan Himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*"

Jesus says that bad salt is only good to be thrown out. In Revelation 2:5 Jesus says, "*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; and repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent.*" What is a lampstand? The lampstand gives light. Here is our mission - to be salt and light - from God. Do we want to lose our mission?

There are arguments about what the symbolism of salt being thrown out means. Some would say it means being cast into everlasting hell. Others say that it means that God will put the offender on the sidelines, possibly with early death. The meaning of this could be debated. All I know is that I don't want it to happen to me. I don't want to offend my Savior and Lord. I don't want to be the cause of anyone stumbling. I don't want to let Satan use me for his purposes. Let us pray that God will make us good "salt" that does its job.

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

What is this light? We have no light of our own. We can only shine the light of our Lord Jesus. In the Gospel of John, it says in 1:4,5: "*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend²⁰ it.*"

The world fell into sin and darkness by severing its dependence on God. Study of Matthew 5:3 showed us that dependence on God is necessary for inclusion in the kingdom of heaven. In the garden of Eden, man believed the lie that the devil told him, and thought that he could indulge his own will. Indulging our own will severs our dependence on God, and puts us in the dark.

God sent Jesus to this earth to shed His light by teaching and also being crucified for our sins. So Jesus is the light that lets us see the way to salvation, where before we were blinded by the darkness of sin.

Jesus is not walking on this earth now. Jesus is relying on us to shine His light. If we don't shine that light, we are not doing His work, because He said in

²⁰ *Comprehend* - extinguish or overcome

Matthew 28:18-20: *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

Jesus didn't hide His light. He let it shine to the point where the religious leadership of his day, determined to put it out, crucified Him. Are we willing to endure hardships, even crucifixion, if necessary? Are we willing to shine our light, even when it gets us in trouble with the world?

When we shine Jesus' light, we must be careful that we aren't trying to shine our own. John the Baptist said in John 3:30: *“He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.”* A test for the genuineness of our light can be found at the end of verse 16. Will our light glorify us, or our Father in heaven? If it results only in praise for us, it really isn't genuine light. **Our goal should be that everything we do or say leads to praise for our Father in heaven, our Creator.**

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS - Matthew 5:17-20

In these verses Jesus talks about His work here on earth with respect to the Law and the Prophets. The Law and the Prophets were their “Bible”, their scriptures. After Jesus talked about “affairs of the heart” in verses 3-12, it is quite possible that He didn’t want people to get wrong impressions - like if your “heart was in the right place” it didn’t matter if you sinned a little. And people shouldn’t think that Jesus was above the Law. Maybe we think sometimes that since we have a “lock” on salvation, that we are above the Law. Jesus gives us a new point of view on the Law. He came to give “full meaning” to the Law and the Prophets. A meaning that we should want to do God’s will.

Verses 17-20: *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill²¹. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will be no means pass from the law till all be fulfilled. Whoever therefore beaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”*

Jesus said a mouthful, as the common expression goes. It is apparent that in those times already, some people believed that they could violate the Law. We have that thinking, even among Christians today. We know that we cannot achieve salvation through the keeping of the Law. But that doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t try to keep the Law. Some people think that because we cannot keep the Law perfectly, and since there is forgiveness with Jesus Christ, there is no need to make an effort. Read what Christ said! It’s a pretty sobering thought.

The commandment says, *“You shall not murder.”* (Exodus 20:13) But Jesus said don’t even get angry. (Matthew 5:21-24) The commandment says, *“You shall not commit adultery.”* (Exodus 20:14) But Jesus said don’t even lust. (Matthew 5:27-30) The commandment says, *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”* (Exodus 20:16) But Jesus talks about “cleaning up” our speech. (Matthew 5:33-37)

These are just some of the areas where Jesus tells us to exceed the requirements of the Law. Don’t just do the minimum requirement of “do”s and “don’t”s. Go beyond that! I believe that’s what Jesus meant by, *“but to fulfill²².”* (Matthew 5:17)

There was an idea in those days, just like now, that if you appeared to keep the Law, that was just fine. Fool your neighbor! Look good! This is similar to chapter 6, where Jesus talks about people that show off when they give to charity or do other good deeds, or those who show off when they pray, or by fasting. That

21 Some translations, such as the CEV, use “full meaning” for “fulfill”.

22 “the Law and the Prophets”

isn't the right idea. The right idea is to keep, or try to keep the Law because God wants us to.

“Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Verse 19)

What does this mean? Can we break the Law? Didn't Jesus teach obedience? Yes, obedience is a serious matter. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”*

I believe this is a figure of speech pointing out two things. First is that we are still sinful and make mistakes. We do break the Lord's commandments. And then we try to justify our behavior by rationalizing our behavior to other people (and ourselves). But second, it is far better that we do God's commandments and teach others to do them,.

The positions of *least* and *great* in the kingdom of heaven are relative, and describe rewards for our desiring to do God's will, and trying to get others to do the same. In the Lord's prayer it says *“Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:10)

Then Jesus says, *“...unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ...”* How righteous were the scribes and the Pharisees? The Pharisees taught, *“honor your father and your mother”*, but they thought up a way to put money in an “irrevocable” trust to God. Then when their parents needed help, they said, “Sorry, no money.” Now that looked good to other people. But they were twisting God's Law for their own evil purposes. That's scary. I'd be afraid to deal with an all-powerful God in that way. Let us beware, lest we deceive ourselves and try to fool God in any way. In Galatians 6:7 it says, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap.”*

True obedience comes from the heart. Jesus talked about the heart and attitudes in verses 3-12. We must want to obey God, just as we must want to be dependent on God. When we want to obey God, we will cease to look for “loopholes” in the Law. If we reject God's Law, we will suffer loss in the kingdom of heaven. But if we teach God's Law to others, we show our desire to see that God's will is done, and we will have an important place in God's kingdom (verse 19). This is a wonderful promise.

What did Jesus mean when He said, *“but to fulfill (the Law and the Prophets).”* (verse 17) I believe it was the attitudes of the heart that Jesus was referring to. Jesus says in Matthew 22:37- 40: *“ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets.’ ”* It is

easier to obey the Law when you love God, isn't it? When you're in a state of rebellion, it's difficult. When you love others, it's easier to obey the Law, isn't it? **The ultimate obedience to the Law is the obedience that stems from a willing heart.**

ANGER - Matthew 5:21-26

Anger is the subject of these six verses. One dictionary describes anger thus, "A strong feeling of displeasure or belligerence aroused by a real or supposed wrong." Anger can turn to malice, defined by one dictionary as, "A desire to inflict harm or suffering on another." Anger is a condition of the heart, and malice is the working out of this condition in evil actions. Anger is common among Christians. Some even like to call their emotion "righteous anger", as if they were the instrument of God! Maybe they don't realize what the Lord Jesus has to say about anger. And maybe they don't realize how anger can consume the angry one. When we see how strongly the Lord Jesus prohibits anger we will be motivated to become more mellow and eliminate anger out of our hearts.

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

Jesus is talking in these verses about anger as a progressive condition. Jesus knows our heart condition, that it can go from bad to worse. Jesus mentions murder, because He understands what anger can lead to. Here is the progression. First, we are angry. Then we call someone Raca,²³ a derogatory term, certainly showing no love for that person. This gets us in court, a relatively minor matter. But then it gets worse and we say that person is a Fool²⁴, a person whom God created and values. (God cared enough to send Jesus to die for that person, not just us!) Now we are in danger of the fires of hell. Why? Because we are getting closer to violence and murder. This is similar to the progression from anger to malice. Where there's anger, there's fire, and where there's fire, someone will be

²³ Raca (Aramaic) - Fool - intellectually empty-headed - we might say "stupid".

²⁴ Fool - Moros (Greek) - morally worthless - we might say "reprobate".

burned! The message is clear: get anger out of our hearts before it does irrevocable damage!

When anger fills the heart, all else is crowded out and our Christian witness suffers!

Not only are we to grieve for others and not be angry with them, we are to take positive steps toward reconciliation even when we don't think we're wrong! Jesus says in verses 23 and 24: *"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift."* Someone's angry with you, but you're supposed to make peace! That doesn't sound right, does it? That seems hard to swallow, doesn't it? But remember, Jesus endured the torture of the cross for us, and he wasn't guilty! In verse 9 Jesus says, *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons²⁵ of God."* This is a promise that makes it all worthwhile.

Where does anger come from? On the basis of these verses and verse 8, where Jesus said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart,"*, it doesn't look like Christians should be angry people, does it? The pure, or impure heart, is the answer. In the discussion of verse 8, the heart was likened to a full cup which spilled its contents when bumped. If the heart is pure, out comes good stuff, and if the heart is impure, out comes evil stuff. In many cases, and possibly nearly all cases, the heart is filled with impure stuff, and anger enters in. It's as if the heart is filled with dry stuff, and a spark comes along and ignites it. We may be irritable due to financial problems, or sickness, or an accident, or problems at work, like friction with a fellow employee on how to do a job, or threatened loss of a job, or worse yet, an argument with a spouse. And then the spark comes along. Someone disagrees with us, someone says a nasty word to us, or even inadvertently rubs us wrong. And then the fire is lit. And often the fire rages out of control. And isn't it true that in retrospect, so much of this was avoidable, if not ridiculous. If only we had listened to the words of Jesus! Even in the Old Testament, it says in Proverbs 14:29: *"He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly."*; in Proverbs 15:18: *"A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention."*; and in Proverbs 16:33: *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."²⁶* In the New Testament it says in James 1:19,20: *"So then my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*

Jesus has warned us of the dangers of anger. If we are wise, we will follow that

25 KJV uses children

26 I believe this passage is attesting to the difficulty of controlling the temper and the great value of controlling the temper.

advice and control our emotions. We must pray sincerely for a pure heart. We do not want to lose our witness.

Some people say that their anger was “righteous anger” and therefore permissible. What is righteous anger? If it is God’s anger, then an example is found in Mark 3:5 where Jesus was trying to teach the people about healing on the Sabbath. It says, “*And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, . . .*” Note that this isn’t the same kind of anger Jesus talks about in Matthew 5:21-26. Here Jesus was angry because the people had stubborn hearts, but He wasn’t angry at the people! It is important to note that He was sorry (*grieved*) for them. This isn’t the evil anger that Jesus talks about that grows like a cancer and results in evil. This anger that Jesus displayed in Mark 3:5 can better be described as displeasure.

If anyone had the right to righteous anger, it was Jesus. Jesus was condemned to death by the torture of crucifixion, and he wasn’t even guilty! But Jesus said, on the cross, during this torture, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*” (Luke 23:34)

Sometimes someone wrongs us, maybe a friend or even a family member. If we can look upon that with displeasure and then sorrow for them because of their sin, then maybe we can say we had “righteous anger”. In Matthew 5:4 it says, “*Blessed are those who mourn.*” Here we have the positive Christ-like approach - rather than get angry, we have the opportunity to show our sensitivity to other peoples’ problems by mourning for them and helping them.

Some of these things are hard to do, no doubt about that. We can’t always stop eruptions of anger. But we must try our very best. We must pray to God for the power to eliminate anger out of our lives. It is important to being a good witness - a witness that following Jesus has changed our lives. In recognition of the fact that sometimes anger creeps into our lives, St. Paul says in Ephesians 4:26,27: “*Be angry and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.*” St. Paul says don’t let anger get out of hand. And one way to do that is get rid of it this very day. Otherwise the devil will get the upper hand. We don’t want that, do we?

We must beware that we don’t judge where we’re not supposed to judge. We should, “*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.*” Also, St. Paul says in Romans 12:19: “*Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written²⁷, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.*” See where anger can take us. We think someone has wronged us, and that person didn’t; or we think someone deliberately wronged us, and that person had no idea they had done us any wrong. Can we afford God’s displeasure

²⁷ Deuteronomy 32:35: “*Vengeance is mine, and recompense*”.

and possible judgment of our actions when we judge incorrectly, and worse yet, possibly preempt God's prerogative of taking vengeance.

Jesus also cares about us. Anger isn't good for the angry one. A Christian physician wrote a book about anger and stress and said it was a leading killer. Anger can eat away at the heart and soul, and undermine the physical health of the angry one. In the process, the joy of God's salvation can be lost. There are extreme cases where people have died suddenly due to rage. What poisons the heart, poisons the mind and body.

MARRIAGE - Matthew 5:27-30

In these four verses Jesus discusses a shocking truth. He discusses what we have to do in order to eliminate things that get us into trouble. Jesus says radical "surgery" may be needed. Sometimes we play games with the Lord and keep temptation around, only to get in trouble. Maybe we haven't quite deserted the world's ways yet. Or maybe we think there's some pleasure in sin. Maybe we hope against hope that we can enjoy a bit of the world and a bit of heaven, too.

Verses 27-30: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

The main topic of this discourse is the importance of eliminating sin from our lives. Because marriage is so important to God, Jesus uses it as an example. It is a message that is recognizable to all generations. It is about marital unfaithfulness. Again, it is a sin that originates in the heart. Looking where we shouldn't look, thinking thoughts we shouldn't think, and being where we shouldn't be, can lead to the disaster of adultery.

Jesus says if your right eye is the problem, poke it out. If your right hand is the problem, cut it off. That would be better than the whole body going to hell. Does Jesus mean it? Our Lord didn't ever say anything He didn't mean. However, this is a figure of speech. It means that we must do everything necessary to remove what causes us to sin, no matter how difficult. For most of us the physical body isn't the problem. The problem is in the mind. That is why we must have a pure heart, because the heart controls the body. If we were blind, we could still lust. If one hand were cut off we could still steal. In fact, in some eastern countries where radical justice is practiced, thieves have had a hand cut off and still pick pockets with the other hand! This explanation is not an attempt to "water down" Jesus'

words. Jesus is still saying that we must take the most radical steps necessary to control our hearts and bodies. No matter how difficult the measures, the measures would be better than being cast into hell.

Looking where we shouldn't look, thinking thoughts we shouldn't think, and being where we shouldn't be. Is it too much to ask a believer to remove himself or herself from a place of temptation? Is it worth it to tarry with temptation and suffer in eternity? Would it be too much to move to a different place, a different city, or a different country, if necessary? The Bible talks about fleeing evil things in a number of places, such as 1 Corinthians 6:18 (fornication) and 10:14 (idolatry), and 1 Timothy 6:10,11 (covetousness) (all KJV). Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife²⁸ when she tried to seduce him. (Genesis 39:11,12)

Why did Jesus use lust and unfaithfulness in marriage in this example? Jesus could have used coveting things which belong to others, with the possible result of theft. Covetousness is a serious matter with God. God wrote a commandment for the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. It is found in Exodus 20:17: *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, not his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."* Certainly, covetousness falls in the scope of this teaching of Jesus.

Quite possibly lust and unfaithfulness were used by Jesus because of the extreme importance that God attaches to marriage. After all, it was one of the rules God set up for his creation. This will be discussed further in the next section.

How can we bring our minds into submission to God? We must use God's power to destroy evil thoughts. St. Paul talks about using God's power to destroy fortresses (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). We must go to the Lord in prayer, sincerely desiring to cure our thought problems. We must read and meditate on God's word to know what God's standards are. We must fill our minds with good thoughts, and leave no room for evil thoughts. St. Paul says in Philippians 4:8: *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy - meditate on these things."* One of the first things we must think about is the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross of crucifixion for each of us. And, secondly, we should think about getting the Gospel message to the lost. And we must continuously pray to the Lord that He banish evil from our minds, lest we lose the battle to temptation and sin, thereby losing our witness for Him.

DIVORCE - Matthew 5:31,32

In verses 27 and 28 Jesus gives a warning about letting our minds get out of

²⁸ A short summary of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is found on pg. 20 in the discussion on Matthew 5:10 about "persecution for doing right".

control. That's just as serious as the real act of unfaithfulness. Then in verses 29 and 30, Jesus warned that we must take all necessary measures to stop sin. Jesus has some stern warnings about divorce in these next two verses. These words on divorce and the previous admonition on letting sin take over our minds, are often not taken seriously enough by Christians or the Christian church.

Verses 31,32: *“Furthermore it has been said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ but I say to you whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”*

It says in Genesis 2:24: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* Jesus reinforced this rule when He said in Matthew 19:4-6: *“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”* But, unfortunately, divorce was common among the Jews, even before the days of Jesus. About 400 years earlier, in the Old Testament, God had warned His people in Malachi 2:15,16: *“But did He not make them one, having the remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence,” says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”* It is clear that God hates divorce.

In the days of Jesus, the Jewish man could divorce his wife for any reason. All the man had to do was write her out a paper - sort of like firing a worker, or as we say, giving the worker a “pink” slip or “walking” papers. The woman had no recourse. Also, she had no legal right to divorce her husband. The thinking in those days was that if a man gave his wife the paper and sent her away, he was free of God's law about adultery. But man's thoughts are not like God's thoughts. Man may think that he can by simple subterfuge circumvent God's laws. But man is wrong. Man cannot trick God.

This discourse of Jesus covers the case of a man divorcing his wife. It does not cover the case of a woman divorcing her husband. This is undoubtedly because a woman could not divorce a man in the Jewish society of that day. And Jesus is talking here in the Sermon on the Mount to Jewish people. But in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus makes it clear that what applies to a man applies to a woman. (Mark 10:11,12) It is postulated that Jesus was speaking to the Romans through Mark, and Roman women had freedom to divorce as well as men. At any rate, we know that Jesus wanted us to know that this prohibition on divorce applies equally well

to women and men.

In verse 32 there is this phrase “*except sexual immorality*”. Many people try to find exceptions to Jesus teaching on divorce by classifying anything and everything in the category of “*sexual immorality*”. They would like to include adultery²⁹ in this category, also. The original Greek word was *porneia*. The Lord Jesus was familiar with the word for adultery and the word *porneia*. And Jesus would not have been confused on this or any other point. Jesus taught forgiveness (“seventy times seven” - Matthew 18:22) and a marriage without forgiveness is not a Christian marriage. The word *porneia* does indeed refer to terrible sexual sin. These are sins so terrible they are outside God’s plan for normal sexual activity. One example of *porneia* would be one person indulging with another person of the same sex in homosexual acts. There are other deviant acts which we do not wish to discuss here. All these involve using sex in a manner outside God’s plan. And man’s conscience, unless completely muddled by sin, will tell him that these acts are wrong, if only he will listen. Again, as stated earlier, man would like to trick God. He would like to find loopholes in God’s word. However, God is not tricked, or as the Scriptures say, “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*” (Galatians 6:7) We must emphasize this in teaching our young people about God’s plan for their lives.

Just what is Jesus saying in verse 32? Jesus is saying that if you wrongfully divorce your wife, you are putting her in a position of committing adultery if she remarries. Now why is that? Why can’t you say to your wife, “I will give you a paper of divorce and you and I are free. You go your way and I’ll go my way?” This is wrong thinking because this wasn’t God’s creation plan. This violates God’s commandment that, “*they shall become one flesh*”. (Genesis 2:24) Also, Jesus said in Matthew 19:6: “*Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*” So, the person who marries the woman who is divorced is guilty of adultery because God still considers her married. And so far as the man who divorces this woman is concerned, it doesn’t matter if she doesn’t ever get remarried, he still is guilty of sin. He is guilty because he has put his wife in a position where she might sin.

Why is the man who divorces his wife guilty of sin, just because he puts her in a position where she might sin? Because the sin of a person divorcing another is not contingent on what the divorced party does afterward. If it were, we could justify all sorts of sins, on the basis that these sins don’t hurt anyone, like robbing the rich to give to the poor. The determination of whether a sin is a sin is not outcome-

29 The adultery referred to here is a single or time-limited digression with a sincere and complete repentance. A continued adultery with no repentance, a hardened heart, and no response to the pleadings of believers for a change of heart, may be another matter. See Appendix 4.

based.

The idea that a person is sinning if he or she puts another person in a position where that person may sin or be tempted to sin is a teaching of Scripture. It is not applicable only in the case of divorce. This topic is worthy of further consideration here. Jesus says in Matthew 18:6,7: *“For whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for Him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by which the offense comes.”*

Once again, it is clear that God hates divorce, so it is important for us to educate our families and other Christians to avoid divorce. One way is to make God-pleasing choices when selecting a lifetime spouse. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:14 (CEV)³⁰: *“Stay away from people who are not followers of the Lord!³¹ Can someone who is good get along with someone who is evil?”³²* After a poor choice for a mate, the only choice often is divorce or a lifetime of misery. We need to stress these things to our youth, before they make the wrong choices. After marriage, it’s too late.

SPEECH, PROMISES AND SWEARING - Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus talks about what our word must mean when we say something. Jesus talks about promises. Today promises are made with much rhetoric, but often are broken. But if we follow Jesus teaching, we will talk simply and plainly. Our words will mean more and other people will be able to rely on them.

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

Jesus never engaged in “loose talk”. Jesus used simple language and went

30 The KJV has, *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness.”* Two unequally yoked oxen cannot plow a straight line.

31 Many people would like to believe that there are “good” people who don’t belong to Jesus. But this is contrary to Scripture. There is no middle ground. Jesus says in Luke 11:23: *“He who is not with Me is against me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”* See Appendix 5.

32 To avoid having his chosen people straying into idol worship, God commanded his people from mingling with the Canaanites, so that they would not marry Canaanite women and worship their gods. See Exodus 34:10-16.

straight to the point. There was nothing devious in His speech. When Jesus said something, you could rely on it. His promises are genuine. We want to copy Jesus, so our speech must be direct and truthful. In Matthew 12:33-37 Jesus says that speech reflects what is in the heart. *“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”* This covers not just promises and swearing, but every word we ever say. That’s a scary thought, and should give us motive for not only cleaning up our speech, but our hearts. I know I need a lot of work in this area. I need to pray that the Lord will fix my heart.

When I was child, a common expression was “cross my heart and hope to die (if I’m not telling the truth).” Why did we say that? It was to convince others that we were telling the truth. Was that because we lied sometimes and felt we needed an extra embellishment in our speech to convince people of our truthfulness?

If we lie or exaggerate (stretch the truth), we will be afraid no one will believe us, and will try to convince them with these added phrases. But if we know we are telling the truth, we won’t feel any need to convince others. What if they don’t believe us when we are telling the truth? We shouldn’t worry. Put it in the Lord’s hands! But if we try too hard to convince someone of the truth of what we say, it may just be that they will suspect us of lying.

We also play games with language. Maybe we were taught not to use certain words frivolously, such as “God” (or God damn), “hell” (or go to hell), or “damn it”. So we use expressions such as “Gol’ darn”, “go to ‘h’”, “go to blazes”, or “darn it”. We may think it adds emphasis to what we are saying. That’s not straight-forward like Jesus’ speech. The Jews of Jesus’ day did it also. In Matthew 23:16-22 Jesus says, *“Woe to you, blind guides who say, ‘whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it. Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.”* The Jews had certain man-made rules of proper language, but they cleverly tried to circumvent these rules. They said you shouldn’t swear by a gift on the altar, but you could swear by the altar. You shouldn’t swear by God, but you could swear by the temple. You shouldn’t swear by God’s throne, but you could swear by heaven. Jesus didn’t approve. In effect Jesus asked: who do you think you are fooling? He then said, *“When you make a promise say only ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. Anything else comes from the devil.”* (CEV) These are extremely tough standards, but we must adhere to them.

Invoking the Lord’s name, or heaven, or anything on earth, it seems to me, is

like securing a debt with worthless collateral. Not that anything associated with the Lord is worthless, but we cannot presume to control the Lord's name or creations. Maybe that's what Jesus meant when He said, *"Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black."* Will the Lord back you up, or will the Lord strike you dead if you're lying? That has happened, as in the case of Annanias and Sapphira. But that isn't always the case (how fortunate). We can't control the Lord. We can't make the Lord come down here and vouch for us. But we can, by always telling the truth and speaking plainly and simply, establish a reputation for truthfulness. **Wouldn't it be wonderful if non-believers said, "I know I can rely on his or her word because they are Christians!"**

REVENGE - Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus discusses anger in verses 21-26. Anger leads to the desire to get even or seek revenge. In verses 38-42 Jesus discusses what to do if we are "picked on" or injured. Jesus certainly had the right or credentials to tell us about anger and revenge, since He was punished and tortured to death with crucifixion, and during this pain He said, *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."* (Luke 23:34)

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

There are so many wonderful teachings here, but we rarely hear them in our churches, or Christian conversation. Why is it? Are these teachings too hard to accept? They are difficult teachings to accept, because we are used to thinking and being like the people of this world. We do not like to let something go by. If someone takes something from us, we like to get it back. We like to make them pay. We get so attached to our possessions, that often we are reluctant to help when someone needs help. We have to let go of things, they really belong to the Lord. He can take care of them, and us. If we are cheated, the Lord can settle the account. If we are attacked, the Lord can defend us. Remember, the Lord said, *"Vengeance is mine, I will repay."* (Romans 12:19)

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is called getting even. But Jesus says, don't do that! What kind of witness about the Father would Jesus have had to the people of his day, if He had been contentious and fought with everyone who disagreed with His teachings. If He had, would He have been able to preach about love your enemy, or even love your neighbor?

"But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek to him also."

Does that mean we are never to resist evil, go to war or resort to self-defense? I don't believe this is true when examining the whole of Scripture or the context of this statement. Here Jesus is talking about individuals in a one-on-one situation. Applying this statement to wars which are governments and peoples fighting each other we must examine other Scriptures. We don't wish to do this here, except to say that God didn't condemn wars, and sometimes even led His people into war throughout the Old Testament.

In this verse, someone slaps us. This is not an assault. It is an insult. The insulter wishes to provoke a fight. Do we respond? Not if you listen to Jesus. You turn the other cheek. This is not easy! You continue to let him assault you. You refuse to be a party to a fight. To do this sometimes we have to swallow our pride. Here we can put into practice being a peacemaker. (Matthew 5:9) Many times we can diffuse a fight by not responding.³³ That's God's way!

"And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." This quote from Jesus is often interpreted to mean that one should put forth an extra effort for one's own self-interest. For instance, to get ahead on the job, you might voluntarily put in extra hours. There's nothing wrong with that.³⁴ But, I think in Jesus' example it's much more than that. Here it's "walking the extra mile" in God's interest. In Jesus' time, you could be forced by Roman law to carry a Roman soldier's pack one mile, and only one mile. But then he couldn't force you to carry it any more. Suppose you are forced to carry a soldier's pack, something that you disliked (a Jew of that day would have hated it!). Then you said to the soldier that you would carry his pack another mile. What a witness! I think the soldier would have been impressed. To forfeit our own self-interest involves depending on the Lord (verse 3), being humble (verse 5), and having a desire to serve the Lord.

"Give to him who asks you and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away." This last verse deals with generosity and helping people. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Samaritan³⁵ gave the innkeeper money for the keep and care of the wounded man. The Samaritan didn't ask the wounded man to repay him before he would help him. He didn't even ask him for collateral (or take an imprint of his credit card!) before he helped him. This was a witness of the Samaritan to his love for his fellowman. We don't want to do less than the Samaritan, do we?

In the Old Testament Jewish law given by God, the Jew was not supposed to prosper at the expense of his fellow Jew. Jesus doesn't want us to prosper at the expense of any one in need. If someone has a need, and we wish to meet that need, we should give, not lend. We won't go "broke". God won't let us. (Matthew 6:25-

33 Proverbs 15:1: *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.."*

34 I certainly believe that it is good to extend Jesus' principles to everyday life.

35 Luke 10:30-37

34) Many of us, and I'm included, haven't sufficiently tested God's grace and promises to care for us. We could be God's means of helping other people who are in need. And what a witness that would be - to God's glory.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES - Matthew 5:43-48

"Anger" was discussed in verses 21-26 and "revenge" in verses 38-42. Jesus prohibits both. But now in verses 43-48, a positive plan is given by Jesus. This plan isn't natural for man in his imperfect condition. But we must live according to this plan.

Verses 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, bless them who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.."*

In the Old Testament it says, *"If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you."* (Proverbs 25:21,22) *"heap coals of fire on his head"* was an expression of generosity in those times. Even before the time of Christ, generosity to enemies was a principle from the Lord. Also, it says in Leviticus 19:18: *"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."* This covers "anger", "revenge", and "love".

Jesus tells us to love our enemies, not just our friends. Many people think of love as an emotional thing, the sort of thing a man and a woman experience in marriage, or the sort of thing experienced among family members. But the love³⁶ referred to here is a rational thing. Christianity is a "thinking-man's religion", not an emotion-driven religion. We are not supposed to base our love on our inner feelings. If we did, we probably wouldn't love many people. Loving people is having a concern for their eternal souls and for their physical being here on this earth. Jesus concerned himself for men's souls first and then their physical beings. In Mark 2:2-12 Jesus forgave the crippled man his sins first, then healed him.

We may not like a person's physical appearance, or we may dislike their personality. People can get on our nerves or offend us. Some may be dirty and poor. But we must remind ourselves that Jesus told us to love them. Knowing this,

36 The Greek word for love here is *agape* - a self-sacrificial love, that seeks no reward. The love of Jesus Christ, that caused him to go to the cross for humanity, is a perfect example of *agape* love.

even though our emotional-self balks, our reasoning-self tells us to change our attitudes toward that person.

Jesus tells us with brilliant logic how God our heavenly Father works. He says God sends rain on both the good and the bad people. Now, someone will say, “that is so obvious, we all know that.” If that is so, why can’t we understand that God has love for all people and wants all to be saved. Also, why are Christians often disappointed when evil people or unbelievers have success in earthly things when they don’t?

Jesus ends by saying, “*Therefore you shall be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect..*”

This is the summary of the whole thing. Isn’t this an extension of the idea that “*God created man in His own image.*”? (Genesis 1:27) (KJV) God wanted man and woman to be like Him, that is, they should think and act like God. Man shouldn’t have anger. Jesus didn’t! Man shouldn’t seek revenge! Jesus didn’t! Man should love his enemies. Jesus did! Jesus cried for them and said on the cross of death, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*” (Luke 23:34)

When we finally realize that “love your enemies” is a command of Jesus (and God the Father) and not an option, then we can better quell our anger and our desire for revenge or getting even. Then, I believe we can better obey the great commission and evangelize the world. We cannot evangelize the world by force. **The Gospel can only be spread by showing the love of God!**

Take another look at verse 46. Jesus tells us, “*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* Tax collectors were the crooks of that day. We are to be different. Note that some people cultivate only the friendship of people who can do them some good, like advancing their career. That is the world’s thinking. If we do that, how can we be a witness to the grace of God? Grace is giving a gift with no reward and more importantly, with no expectation of reward.

In Luke 14:13-14 Jesus says, “*But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*” The rewards of this earth do not compare with the rewards of heaven.

So note that the whole message of verses 43-48 is contrary to man’s natural, sinful thought processes. That is why the Christian must beware. The Christian has to think about what the world says is good and evaluate it in the light of Christ’s message. That’s why I call Christianity a thinking-man’s religion.

COMMENTS ON MATTHEW 5

Jesus laid out the foundation of Christian theology in the first part of the Sermon

on the Mount. This foundation certainly isn't working our way to heaven. Man is too imperfect for that. His works are too flawed. But Jesus defined the way to eternal life as a submissive heart. Even in the Old Testament King David was justified by a "heart after God". Jesus said attitudes were most important: Blessed are those who depend on God, blessed are the humble, blessed are those who want to obey, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers. Once we become blessed in these things, we are traveling the narrow road to life with God.

We should follow Christ because He bought us with his own blood. That should be reason enough! But to what purpose? We can't know all God's purposes, but we can be thankful that He had mercy on us and chose us.

One of the purposes is spreading the Gospel. Jesus says, "*You are the salt... You are the light... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:13-16) Verse 48 says, "*Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*"

Here are some keys to a good witness. Be what we profess to be, in everything, always. Obey God's commands, eliminate anger and lust from our lives, be direct and simple in speech. Love everyone, including our enemies, with no thoughts of revenge. Act as God would have us act! Situations and crises happen so quickly, we don't always have time to think things out. Only if our hearts are ready, conditioned by Jesus, can we succeed in doing God's will. I pray that the Holy Spirit will keep working on us.

DIRECTION OF MATTHEW 6

Where does Matthew 6 lead? Some people believe that Jesus is just an assembly of platitudes, encouraging us along the way. Yes, Jesus encourages us. But Jesus is straightforward and hard-hitting, and He is very definite about the “right way” and the “wrong way”. Jesus draws a definite line. There is no middle ground. Jesus said, “*He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.*” (Matthew 12:30) Also, “*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*” (Matthew 6:24) If you’re on one side, you’re on safe ground. If you’re on the other side, watch out, you’re on sinking sand! I won’t discuss here if this means loss of salvation, loss of blessing, or punishment. I only know that I want to follow my Lord and Savior.

Is our focus on heaven or on earth? In Matthew 6 Jesus makes the point that either you are saving for eternity or you’re saving for this earth. You can’t do both. Christian, deny yourself! Have you heard that statement? If you can’t deny yourself anything, what’s left for the Lord?

Jesus talks about money and materialism in Chapter 6. But Jesus concentrates first on attitudes. In Matthew 6:1-18 three acts are discussed, “giving”, “praying” and “fasting”. These three acts belong to man’s relationship with God. Jesus tells us how to keep it that way, and what happens when we use these acts for our own glory. Jesus also gives us a model prayer, which is often called the Lord’s prayer.

Jesus then talks about what we ought to strive for in Matthew 6:19-21. Shall we save for the things of this earth, or the things of heaven? Jesus tells us why to save for heaven. With our eyes on heaven, we can live on this earth with a purpose and direction.

Jesus then throws in a caution in verses 22 and 23. Stay focused! Don’t lose sight of the goal! Otherwise, you will get lost!

Then in the last part of Chapter 6 Jesus discusses money, or materialism, and then states that you’ll either follow God or the things of this earth (vs. 24). Jesus then undermines all arguments for worry by stating that God can and will take care of us (vv. 25-33). Jesus is asking for total dependence on God as discussed in Matthew 5:3.

A key verse is verse 33: “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*”

In verse 34, Jesus discusses the futility of worrying about the future. Just like anger, worry about the future can harm the worrier.

Let us examine each of these ideas.

GOOD DEEDS AND GIVING - Matthew 6:1-4

In these first four verses of the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus discusses how we are to do, or not to do “good works”. Again, we see the importance of attitude in everything we do. God looks at the mind (or heart), not at the outward action as men do.

Verses 1-4: *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”*

We cannot earn salvation. It is the free gift of God. We cannot get to heaven by doing good deeds. That is made clear here and in other Scriptures.

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

How did God plan for us to live? At the time of creation, God said, *“Let Us make man in our own image, according to Our likeness”*³⁷ (Genesis 1:26) That is, we were to be like God, to think and act like God. But due to man’s and woman’s sin in the Garden of Eden, we lost that perfection and needed salvation.

We know that our good deeds (works) are not the way to salvation in God’s plan. God’s grace provides the way to salvation through belief in Jesus Christ. So why boast about good deeds? Good deeds don’t impress God and don’t earn salvation for us. So why should we boast, unless it’s our way of impressing other people? Can the admiration of others really be worth that much?

Good deeds are a vital part of God’s plan for us **after** we have received salvation by God’s grace. We are to be like a fruitful vine, bearing good fruit. (John 15:1-17)

What is the purpose of good deeds? Should the result of our good deeds be our own glorification? No! In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus talks about us being the light of the world. Isn’t Jesus the only true light? Our good deeds can only be light to the world if they reflect the light of the Lord Jesus. That is why Jesus says in Matthew 5:16: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* God is a jealous God. He wants our good deeds to glorify Him!

If we do deeds for our own glorification, these deeds are useless to God. When we do something for ourselves, it is useless to God. As Jesus says, *“they already have their reward.”* (CEV)

37. “God said, “Now we will make humans, and they will be like us.” (CEV)

It is apparent here that we do good deeds either for God or for our own glorification. There is no middle ground, we can't do both. Jesus said either you're for me or against me. We can recall the discussion of Matthew 5:3 on dependency. God is a jealous God. He wants our good deeds to glorify Him. Doing good deeds for God and our dependence on God are linked together also in this sense: that we depend on God and we work for God. **God is our boss, isn't He?**

St. Paul understood to whom to give the glory. In Acts 14:8-18 is related the event in Lystra where St. Paul had healed a man born with crippled feet. The people wished to make St. Paul a god. But St. Paul protested, saying, "*Why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.*" (verse 15)

People have said, "What is the use of doing a good deed, if no one knows about it? How can God use that?" We must let God take care of that. It is absolutely amazing how God can take a "secret good deed" and use it to His glory. God may let others know about a secret good deed of ours, but let God decide that. All we have to do is obey our Lord Jesus Christ and stand out of the way!

PRAYER - Matthew 6:5-15

This part of the Sermon on the Mount includes what has been named the "Lord's Prayer". Some people have said it should be named the "Disciples' Prayer" and that the prayer Jesus prayed in the Gospel of John, chapter 17, shortly before going to the cross should really be named the "Lord's Prayer". The rationale for this is that Jesus really was praying directly to the Father in John 17, but that the prayer in Matthew 6 is an example of how the disciples should pray.

It doesn't matter what title you give it, this prayer in Matthew 6 covers everything we need for our spiritual and bodily health and welfare. This section also gives us instruction about how to pray, and repeats the warning of the last section about giving, that these things should be kept private between us and the Lord.

Verses 5-15: "*And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*

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

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

(8) *Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have*

need of before you ask Him. _

(9) *In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*

(10) *Your kingdom come. Your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven.*

(11) *Give us this day our daily bread.*

(12) *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

(13) *And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

(14) *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

(15) *But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Note that the sentence, “*Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.*” in verse 5 is identical to that of verse 2. We can seek self-glorification not only through showing the world our “generosity”, but by showing the world our “piety”. However, these self-serving acts will not be rewarded in heaven.

Sometimes we can be deceived if we don’t know the Word of God. When I was much younger I went to a prayer meeting and was overawed at some of the beautiful prayers from some of the saints. They went on and on.³⁸ I really believe they were men of God, but I don’t think they knew the Word of God in the matter of prayer. Problems were described to God, who knew the problems better than we. Solutions were described to God, who knew the solutions better than we.³⁹ How I longed to be able to pray like that. I always worried about forgetting certain key phrases, or descriptions. I was not on God’s wavelength! And it bothered me that I couldn’t seem to get proficient in prayer.

After careful reading of the Sermon on the Mount and other Scriptures, I realized that prayer was a privileged, secure line of communication with God. What a burden that took off my shoulders. I didn’t have to achieve a certain level of proficiency in communication to talk to God. God could hear me! (I wouldn’t want to tell you how old I was before I learned that lesson!)

The need for private prayer is emphasized in verse 6. Corporate prayer is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, but I believe that corporate prayer is restricted mainly to concerns of the corporate body. Again, considering that prayer is a private line of communication with God, it should be exercised daily for talking to God about our most personal hopes and concerns.

Looking at verses 9-15, we can see the purposes of prayer.

Verse 9 - The first is to ask help in honoring God. We should be zealous that everything we do reflects God glory. We should dread the day when we do or say

38 Contrary to verse 7.

39 Contrary to verse 8.

something that harms the good name of God. In Matthew 5:16 it says, “*Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*”⁴⁰

Verse 10 - In verse 10 we ask God to extend his kingdom on earth, so that all will obey Him. Wouldn't this be an infinitely better place to live in, then! Jesus also says in Matthew 28:18-20: “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth! Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”⁴¹

Verse 11 - We are to ask God for food, so that our physical bodies will survive. This is a reminder that God provides for us, not we ourselves. Often in the confusion of our daily lives, we forget who really takes care of us. Matthew 6:25-34 tells us not to worry, God will take care of us. Aren't we worth more than the birds, yet God takes care of them (vs. 26).

Verses 12,14,15 have to do with the health of our souls, our spiritual lives. We are to ask God to forgive our sins. Jesus commands this. It is not an option. And we must forgive others, too.⁴² This isn't an option, either. This is being Christ-like. We are to imitate Him. We cannot understand God's grace if we cannot forgive. And if we do not forgive, a time may come when we will doubt that God can forgive us. And in verses 14 and 15, Jesus is clear that forgiveness comes only to those who forgive.

Verse 13 - Just as we asked for food to live, we are to ask for God's protection from temptation and evil. We don't want to fight either the devil or the world system by ourselves, do we? St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:12,13: “*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*” Prayer to the Lord and the Word of God⁴³ should be our first line-of-defense.

The Lord Jesus prays for us. In Luke 22:31-34, Jesus prays for Simon Peter as the devil is going to “*sift you as wheat*”. Even before Peter's spiritual trial (his denial of Jesus at the crucifixion) the Lord Jesus is concerned about him. And there are rewards. In James 1:12 it says, “*Blessed is the man who endures*

40 Jesus' direction on how we can participate in honoring God.

41 Jesus' direction on how we can participate in spreading the kingdom.

42 Forgiveness, and Jesus' powerful parable on the subject, are discussed in the section on Matthew 5:7, pp. 16,17

43 Jesus fought off the temptations of the devil in the wilderness by quoting Scripture (see Matthew 4:1-11), also, see pp. 5,6.

temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

Summary of Prayer - Matthew 6:5-15

The objects of this prayer should be the focus of heaven-bound believers. It's not for money, it's not for the adoration of men, and it's not for pleasure. The Lord's prayer is our communication to God, our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer; acknowledging Him, giving Him credit, asking that everyone will obey Him, asking Him to supply our needs, and then stating that we will be like Him in forgiving others, and then asking Him to protect us.

Prayer wasn't designed for our glory. And if we use it in any way to enhance our image, we can not expect God to answer or reward us, as it says in verse 5. We can't pray to God and for men's approval. We can't do both. Prayer must be a communication with God. Any effort to impress men in this process will break that line of communication.

We don't stand and pray in public in this day and age, but the Pharisees did. But it is clear that prayer is to be between us and God. And God wants it kept that way (verse 6).

In verses 7 and 8, we are told that God knows our problems and needs. After all, God created us. Why do we pray, then? We shouldn't pray because we have to, but because God wants us to depend on Him. In 1 Peter 5:7 it says, “...*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*”

God wants us to ask for His help. God wants us to show our dependence on Him. That is all. He doesn't need all the details. He knows the problem inside-out. He is all-knowing. He doesn't need proposed solutions. He already has solutions better than ours! I believe God wants us to come in complete trust and just ask, “Please, Lord, fix it”.

Beside the Lord's prayer, may we pray for anything else? I don't know the specific answer for each request. I think that everyone should examine his own conscience in these matters, using Scriptures as a guideline. If still in doubt, talk to the Lord in prayer, ask, and let Him decide if you should receive it. (If it be your will, Lord.) And remember that Solomon asked for God-pleasing things such as wisdom and knowledge to rule God's people, and God gave him much more, including riches and fame, far more than any king before or after (2 Chronicles 1:11,12). Here is another paradoxical Scriptural teaching: seek first the Lord, and you'll receive more. Seek earthly things, and you won't find the Lord.

FASTING - Matthew 6:16-18

The same warnings apply to fasting that apply to good deeds and prayer. Fasting must be between the individual and God.

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

Jesus says don't look gloomy when you are fasting. In other words, don't do something to draw attention to yourself with the idea that people will ask you what you're doing, so that then you can boast. Jesus knows about the little mind games that we play with ourselves and others. So Jesus says, *“Assuredly, I say to you they have their reward.”* And there will be no reward in heaven for that.

Verse 16 has this same warning regarding rewards in heaven as verses 2 and 5. This warning in regard to “good deeds”, “prayer”, and “fasting” emphasizes the fact that God is a jealous God and will not share His glory. We cannot make “points” with God by showing off in front of men.

I don't believe that fasting is required in the New Testament. But if an individual is conscience-driven to fast, let him follow his or her conscience and fast. If one is driven in this way, he or she certainly won't flaunt it in the face of others. That would destroy fasting as an adjunct to communication with God.

TREASURES IN HEAVEN - Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus discusses treasures. We need this directive from our Lord, because we see the children of this world (unbelievers), and tend to copy them. We get caught up in the ways of the world, and start to think of ourselves and the things we want. We must stay focused on heavenly things. After all, we are citizens of heaven, aren't we?

Verses 19-21: *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth., where moths 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 and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Jesus has a lot to say about money and riches. Jesus discusses many aspects of money and wealth. Jesus' discussions are so extensive, that it could be said that everything a Christian needs to know about money from an eternal perspective has been discussed by Jesus.

From an eternal perspective, treasures in heaven are all that is important. St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:18, *“...we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*

What are treasures in heaven? There is no collection box in church or account in the bank marked “heaven”. We can't personally put money or goods in heaven,

but God can place rewards for us in heaven! St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:9 :
“*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” We can trust God to hold treasures for us in heaven, just as we trust God for our salvation.

I don't believe we can know what the rewards will be in heaven. We can't comprehend even in a small way what heaven will be like. God's greatness is so superior to our understanding. But we can be sure that the rewards will be infinitely better than we can understand at this time.

Treasures in heaven are using our resources, which include wealth, in ways that God has commanded us, and in ways that further the extension of His kingdom, such as spreading the Gospel. We will look at (1) the winning of souls and giving up things for Christ (2) helping God's people and giving to the poor (3) obedience (4) humbleness (5) perseverance and (6) tribulation.

(1) In the great commission Jesus commanded us to go and spread the Gospel. Matthew 28:18-20: “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth! Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*”

We must try to evangelize people whom we meet everyday. In addition we must support missionaries who go to other countries. Jesus says in Matthew 19:29,30: “*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*” When we give up something for missionary work, we can take part in their work, and take part in this promise.⁴⁴

Even in the Old Testament there is reference to the winning of souls. Proverbs 11:30 says, *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.* (KJV)

Here is a possibility for a heavenly reward. It would be a supremely indescribable joy to that person who, while he lived on this earth, brought the salvation message to some otherwise lost soul. I base this possibility on the story about the finding of the one lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7. There was tremendous happiness in heaven over the finding of one lost sheep!

It should be mentioned here that God is relying on us to spread His Gospel. Since Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, there is no one left, but us who believe, to spread that message of salvation. We must think and act as Jesus teaches us in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount - the Beatitudes - Matthew 5:3-12 - so that we can be the witnesses that He wants us to be, that is, the “salt” and “light” described in Matthew 5:13-16. I pray that we have sufficient compassion for the

⁴⁴ This is similar to the principle given in 1 Samuel 30:24. Support people are important.

lost to give us an urgency for “saving” the lost.

(2) God has said much to us about helping other people, both His people and the poor and needy. God hasn’t told us not to help unbelievers! God loves all and wants that all should be saved. He makes the rain to fall on the “good” and the “bad” (Matthew 5:45). We can’t evangelize unbelievers if we only “talk” to believers. And in section (1) we saw the importance of spreading the gospel.

Jesus says in Mark 9:41: *For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his **reward**.*⁴⁵ We are to be generous with our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is like being generous with Christ. How can we be stingy and not help others with whom we are going to spend eternity? Let us start practicing now, right here on this earth! In modern terminology this is called working for our team. God wants team players!

And what about our enemies? Jesus says in Luke 6:35,36: *“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return and your **reward** will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For he is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”* What is this about lending? There’s nothing wrong with lending. But if you’re not paid back, write it off. God can make it good. God will reward you in heaven!

But what about the poor? God says in the Old Testament in Proverbs 14:21: *“He who despises his neighbor sins, but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.”* It says in Proverbs 22:9: *“He who has a generous eye will be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor”* and in Proverbs 19:17: *“He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will **pay back** what he has given.”* So it can be seen that the Lord cares for the poor in a special way. The Lord cares for the less fortunate, and so should we!

Do we neglect the poor, because the poor can’t help us? Lest we get into the habit of thinking in terms of pay-back, Jesus gives us this admonition in Luke 14:12-14: *“When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you shall be **repaid** at the resurrection of the just.”* This story is both literal and figurative! It not only talks about food for the poor, but cuts across all the activities of life. It is about generosity to the less fortunate. We must develop a new mind-set about helping the needy.

We get used to the world’s way of thinking, and think in terms of what is good for us, and forget about the less fortunate. Let us pray that the Lord will change our way of thinking. And from an eternal perspective, God’s rewards are better

45 This text is repeated in Matthew 25:31-46 in a greatly expanded form. It is worth studying.

than man's rewards.

Jesus demonstrates the folly of saving everything for ourselves and neglecting others in the parable of the rich fool found in Luke 12:16-21. In the discussion of Matthew 5:3 it was emphasized that the rich fool made the mistake of depending on himself (his full barns) and not on the Lord. In focusing on himself, he didn't help anyone else. So God took him from this life.⁴⁶ There would be no rewards for him in heaven!

(3) Obedience⁴⁷ is an important part of the Christian life. Jesus said in John 14:15: *"If you love me, keep My commandments."* Also, Jesus said in Matthew 5:17: *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill."* Jesus emphasized obedience and obeyed the Law perfectly, even in His heart and soul (no sinful thoughts). In Matthew 5:19 Jesus gives us this promise, *"...but whoever does and teaches them (the commandments) he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* If you obey God and promote God's "orders" to others, there will be a reward in heaven.

(4) Humbleness! That is not the world's way. But Jesus spoke much about it. We cannot promote Jesus or obey the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) if we are pushing ourselves. Humbleness was discussed extensively in the discussion of Matthew 5:5:⁴⁸ *"Blessed are the meek,..."* Jesus told the story of the man who took to himself a higher position at the table at a wedding feast than he should have (Luke 14:7-11). He got pushed down. But Jesus himself washed the disciples feet (John 13:4-17). The world's way is to elevate oneself, often at the expense of others. But that's not God's way, and God doesn't want it to be our way.

Jesus talked about being as humble as a little child in Matthew 18:3-5: *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me."* "greatest in the kingdom of heaven", that is the **reward**. What a wonderful promise! But, you may ask, how can that be? Can we all be the greatest? Isn't there only one? That is the world's logic. That is not God's logic. We can all be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

(5) Perseverance is the ability to "hang in there" until the end. The apostle says in 2 John verses 8,9: *"Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full **reward**. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the*

⁴⁶ Luke 12:20: *"But God said to him, 'You fool! Tonight you will die. Then who will get what you have stored up?'"* God's statement here should shape our thinking.

⁴⁷ See the discussion on obedience in the section on righteousness, Matthew 5:6, pg.14.

⁴⁸ pg. 12

doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son” Don’t wander from the truth. The apostle had just finished writing about two of God’s basic laws in verses 5 and 6: “And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” So, being a believer is like running a race. We are to run hard until the end!

(6) Tribulation is discussed in Matthew 5:11,12:⁴⁹ *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” “Be happy and excited! The race isn’t over on this earth. Even if we are tortured or killed for Christ, we can rely on God to have our rewards in heaven. Also, Jesus says in Matthew 10:28: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

What good are earthly treasures? Jesus says that earthly treasures are vulnerable to moths, rust and thieves, but that heavenly treasures are eternal. In Luke 12:15-21, the rich fool stored up his treasures in big barns to live a life of ease. The night the rich fool died God asked him an important question. This question should give us much thought: *“...then whose will those things be which you have provided?”* This question is so important, that the answer should govern our lives.

Doesn’t it seem reasonable to invest in an investment that can’t go bad, an investment that is eternal? Does it seem reasonable to invest in earthly treasures that can rust, spoil or be stolen?

Jesus says that our heart will be where our treasure is. If our treasure is earthly things, it shows us where our heart is. Are we always thinking about luxuries we can buy, or the next “toy” we can possess? Are our thoughts earth-bound? Jesus is giving us practical advice. Jesus is telling us how we can test ourselves. He is trying to help us! If we invest in heaven, soon, more and more, our thoughts will be directed toward heaven - our eternal home.

Notice that even though our thoughts are directed to heaven, we must be of earthly good. We just don’t only pray and talk about heaven. We don’t just put on the garb of piety and withdraw from the world. We assume an active role in building the kingdom of heaven, when we store up treasures there. We are helping people. We are helping spread the gospel. We are enlarging the kingdom of heaven. We will truly be citizens of heaven, even on this earth. (Philippians 3:20)

SINGLENES OF PURPOSE - Matthew 6:22,23

Versus 22 and 23 are about light and the eye. Jesus is using a figure of speech to

49 pg. 22 (see also pp. 20,21, Verse 10)

bring “home” a moral point. There are a number of ideas about the meaning of this passage, although they all are similar. We are using the King James Version here because we believe it is a little closer to the original text, but we will discuss a second interpretation.

Verses 22,23: *“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thine whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”*

The key to this text I believe is the word “single”.⁵⁰ In a moral sense it was used to denote singleness of purpose. We might also use the expressions “stay focused” or “keep your eye on the goal” or “don’t be side-tracked”. The evil eye is out-of-focus and puts us in the “dark”. This interpretation is in harmony with the context of what is being said in chapter 6. What is chapter 6 all about? Isn’t it about choices? The choices are working for God or for ourselves, saving for this earth or for eternity; and in the last part of this chapter, choosing between God or the things of this world. Isn’t this what Jesus is telling us: stay focused, keep your eye on the goal, don’t be side-tracked, so that you don’t aim for the wrong goals, the worldly goals? Do we get side-tracked? Thinking about ourselves first, putting ourselves first, and getting wrapped up in the cares of this world, gets us off the “straight and narrow road”. To help us keep our focus, we must pray for help.

The word “single” is also sometimes translated “clear”. The clear eye gives us spiritual insight, the evil eye spiritual darkness. So we should keep the eye clear by prayer and studying Scripture. The advice in this interpretation is certainly scripturally sound and good advice at all times. Possibly Jesus’ figure of speech implies both translations.

Saint Paul was keenly aware of singleness of purpose, or staying focused. But St. Paul talks in terms of a race. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, St. Paul says, *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all thing. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* He doesn’t uselessly beat the air, and he makes his body do what he wants it to. Throughout this epistle St. Paul emphasizes self-control so his witness won’t suffer.

In Hebrews 12:1-3 the apostle says, *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set*

50 See “Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words”, pg. 1058.

before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” The apostle reminds us that the heroes of faith of Hebrews 11 are all around us. These are people whose lives were a witness to their faith. This should be inspiration for us to shed sin that slows us down in our witness for Christ. We should not be discouraged, but rather we need to focus on Jesus. Why? Because Jesus endured by looking through to the end. So, to stay focused, we must not dwell on the present problems, but view the eternal goals and rewards.

GOD OR RICHES - Matthew 6:24

In verse 24, Jesus talks again about wealth or riches. The teaching in this verse is difficult for some people to accept, even Christians. Jesus’ statement goes against the conventional wisdom of the world.

Verse 24: *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”*

Mammon means riches or wealth. Today we translate all our wealth into monetary terms. We state our net worth in dollars. But in Biblical days, not all wealth was measured in monetary units. Remember the parable in Luke 12:16-21 that Jesus told of the rich fool? The fool talked of his wealth in terms of grain and goods, and the size of the barns needed to store these things. Today we often talk about materialism. One dictionary gives the definition of materialism as “preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, as opposed to spiritual or intellectual values.” I believe a fitting translation of the last line in verse 24 would be: “You cannot serve both God and the god of materialism.”

What is the meaning of the word “serve” as used by Jesus in this verse? The word “serve” is the verb derived from slave and implies “bondage”. So we will look to Jesus words in Luke 17:7-10 to understand the force of the word “serve”.

The slave of that day was the property of his master and was under the master’s total control. In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus explains the servant-master relationship. The master comes first, the servant last. The slave was truly in servitude⁵¹. So this is saying, in effect, that you can’t be under the total control of God, and under the control of the god of materialism. Some people would like to have one foot in heaven and one foot in this world. This says it can’t be done. Could you serve the god of materialism just a little bit and still serve God totally? It doesn’t seem likely.

51 , For example, instead of “he served him”, we might better say, “he slaved for him“.

Does this mean we can't have anything? Do we have to dress in rags? Do we have to drive a "junker"? Or worse yet, do we have to walk? No! We have to understand the meaning of the word "serve". We must control our wealth, it must not control us. When Solomon was serving God, God talked to Solomon in a dream. Solomon asked for wisdom and knowledge so he could better rule God's people. Because Solomon's heart was with the Lord, God also promised him riches and fame. (2 Chronicles 1:7-12) But Solomon's case should be a warning to us. Later in his life Solomon strayed from the ways of the Lord. Could it be that his wealth "went to his head"?

We must control our wealth and talents! We must use them for the Lord. How could we give to the poor or the Lord's work if we had nothing? Jesus talked about giving alms. We are told to be "salt" and "light". That is not only being who God wants us to be, but using our talents and assets for God's glory.

The first beatitude was, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit... .*" (Matthew 5:3) Here we discussed total dependence on God, and the fact that God commanded that dependence by saying the we should not worship idols or any god except Him. That rules out serving mammon, the god of materialism. If we are actively practicing dependence on God by prayer and thanks, we are not likely to pursue riches.

At the risk of being repetitious, we will cite the parable of the rich fool again. (Luke 12:16-21) Our Lord Jesus was so good at making a point or points by use of a parable! The rich fool let his possessions dominate him. He didn't rule his riches, they ruled him! What did he do with his riches? Did he help anyone? Did he put his assets to work for the Lord? No! Then the Lord asked him just prior to his death who was going to get what he stored up.

Another teaching of our Lord's which has relevance here is the parable found in Matthew 25:14-30. This parable is about stewardship and is worthy of further study. It is about how to use our money (actually the Lord's money). If we consider everything we have as given to us by the Lord, we won't have any trouble with those assets ruling us. We will say, "Thank you, Lord, for what you've given us. How can we use these assets in a way that pleases you?"

How to use assets for the Lord? This applies not just to giving to the Lord, but how we spend assets for ourselves. When we buy anything, we will have to answer questions such as "how big", "how much", "how fancy". These are questions that may stretch our conscience, but I believe that God wants us to make rational decisions.⁵² Christianity is a thinking person's religion! We have to consider what God has given us and how we are going to use these gifts. I believe

⁵² St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7, about giving to the Lord, "*so let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.*" St. Paul writes a magnificent discourse on Christian giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

that this is part of our witness. Other people, particularly non-believers, are watching us.

Not letting the god of materialism control us is a job that demands constant vigilance. Peer pressure, envy of what our neighbor has, thinking we are entitled to something, wondering why God apparently blesses others, particularly unbelievers, and not us; these are things that may take our focus off the Lord and cause us to go the ways of the world. If we focus on what God would have us do, we can learn to devalue material things and anything else the world values, and put these things in their proper perspective.

WORRY, OR CARES OF THE WORLD - Matthew 6:25-34

God won't let us down! After telling us not to worship riches or the god of mammon, would God let us starve? If we trust Him for our salvation, shouldn't we trust God for our every-day living? Let us see what Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-34.

Verses 25-34: "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat of what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more cloth you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' For all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Note the length of this discourse by Jesus. Jesus goes to great lengths to assure us of the way God sustains this world. **God has thought of everything.** After this assurance by Jesus, we should be confident that God will take care of us. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:9: "*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Again, the question arises, if God chose us for salvation, would He let us starve?

Jesus talks about worry. Jesus is interested in us. He doesn't want us to worry. Worry is destructive to the worrier. The more we study the effects of worry, the more we find out about its ability to destroy our health, both spiritual, mental and

physical. Pray about it. The Lord wants us to unload our concerns on Him. It says in 1 Peter 5:7: “*casting all your cares upon Him, for he cares for you.*” And then, what is the use of worrying? This is a hard lesson to learn. We can begin to learn by meditating on these words of Jesus, and watching Jesus in action. He had no residence, no place to lay His head. He depended completely on the Father. Verse 33 says, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*”⁵³ If we’re about God’s business, God will see to it that we don’t go short. Jesus was a prime example of that. He was on God’s business. Yet God the Father took care of Him.

Jesus says the birds don’t store food in barns. Which reminds us again of the parable of the rich fool found in Luke 12:16-21. Would God take care of the birds, and not of him? Will God take care of the birds, and not of us? God forbid? We can depend on Him completely.

What about our witness? What about being “salt” and “light”? If we who know God don’t depend on Him, how can we convince unbelievers to depend on God? I pray that we will all give up our self-reliance and come to depend on God more and more.

COMMENTS ON MATTHEW 6

Matthew 6 covered topics such as giving, praying, fasting, storing up treasures in heaven, keeping our focus or direction, not relying on riches and wealth, and not worrying. These things have much to do with our relationship to God. Where are we putting our emphasis? Is it on earth or on heaven? Is it for now or eternity? And if our relationship to God is right, we will be a powerful witness for the Lord, and we will be instrumental in spreading His kingdom. What a privilege!

⁵³ The CEV says, “...put God’s work first and do what He wants. Then the other things will be yours as well.”

DIRECTION OF MATTHEW 7

Matthew 7 is the shortest of the three chapters in the Sermon on the Mount. First, in verses 1-5 Jesus discusses the dangers of taking upon ourselves the task of judging others. In verse 6 Jesus tells us not to try to convince the unconvincible. In verses 7-11 Jesus discusses the value of seeking after God. The “Golden Rule” is stated in verse 12. In verses 13 and 14 Jesus reiterates that there is only one way to God. All roads don’t lead to eternal life with God! In verses 15-20 Jesus says a tree is known by its fruits. In verses 21-23 Jesus makes a startling statement that not all who call God their Lord will go to heaven. And last of all, in verses 24-28, Jesus discusses “building” again. Are we building on a solid foundation, or are we building on sinking sand?

In chapter 7, just as in chapters 5 and 6, Jesus discusses with overwhelming logic eternal life and death. In telling people about Jesus, we must convey certain truths to them. These are truths such as Jesus Christ being the only way. And that just saying we follow Jesus without obedience is dangerous. We must warn people if they are building on sinking sand. And then, just because we are saved by God’s grace, we don’t have the right to judge others. That is God’s prerogative. Our job is to spread the Gospel. We don’t have to worry if people accept the Gospel or not. Let God be the judge of that.

JUDGING OTHERS - Matthew 7:1-5

This is a brilliant teaching of Jesus. All Jesus teachings are brilliant, but in this teaching Jesus dissects our human nature, just as if He were looking into our hearts - and He is!

Verses 1-5: *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with what measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘let me remove the speck from your eye; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank in your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.’”*

Isn’t Jesus’ logic magnificent? Don’t we like to overlook our own faults? And then we look at our neighbors faults. Maybe that makes us feel better! But we should be more interested in God’s absolute standards, not in comparing ourselves with others.

Verse 1 says, *“Judge not, that you be not judged.”* The Greek word used here for “judge” is *krino*, meaning to judge or pronounce judgment. I believe the word *krino* is translated condemn, instead of judge, in some versions, to attest to the fact that most people do condemn when judging others. But I think the NKJV and KJV

is best here, and the translation might well be “don’t set yourself up as a judge.” However, even the NKJV and KJV sometimes interchange “judge” and “condemn”. In John 3:17 the NKJV says, “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” Here the same word *krino* is translated as condemn, but I believe that again Christ is saying that He came into the world not to be a judge, but a Savior. Jesus said in John 12:47: “*And if anymore hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him, for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.*” Again, the word “judge” is the word *krino*. Jesus says here again that He came to Jesus focused on His ministry of salvation. So should we! We have better things to do than criticize others or “set them straight”. Let God do the judging. We have enough to do to evangelize the world!

A hypocrite is an insincere person. Jesus says that we should get serious and clean up our own “act” first. Then we can “straighten up” our neighbor.

I believe, from a study of these verses and the context of these verses in the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus is talking primarily about person-to-person, or one-on-one relationships. Jesus wants us to love our neighbor, not be critical of our neighbor, and to be a good witness to our neighbor. We can’t do that if we set ourselves up as judges. Nobody likes a judgmental type!

Some people have enlarged the meaning of “judge not” to mean that you can’t have a moral opinion. There are other narrow opinions about these words “judge not”. I believe that we must try to understand what Jesus is saying. And I believe the essence of Jesus’ message is that we shouldn’t be judgmental. We have better things to do. It’s as simple as that.

Some people may think that these verses bar them from jury duty. If they really think in good conscience that they shouldn’t do jury duty, then let them go by their conscience.⁵⁴ However, I believe that God is the great Judge in this universe and He has passed down many of His rights to duly established governments. And our courts are just such God-approved instruments. The Old Testament is full of examples where God passed down certain powers. King Solomon exercised judgment powers when he proposed to divide a child between two mothers. (1 Kings 3:16-28) In Matthew 18:15-17 a situation is described in which one person sins against another. The aggrieved person talks to the sinner and tries to point out to him his error. If necessary, more people are brought into the picture, and, as a

54 St. Paul has a discussion about eating food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8. I believe the arguments here are applicable to other cases of conscience, such as jury duty. If one is convinced of a certain course of action and there is no explicit Scriptural directive on this subject, do not argue with others of opposite conscience. Is it worth being at enmity with a brother? Could Jesus have spread the Gospel if he were adversarial? This is similar to the principles in casting pearls before the swine. See next section, “Don’t Waste Wisdom.”

last resort, the church. Moral judgment is exercised here, but never judgmentalism. The aim here is to bring the accused to see the error of his ways, not to beat him down.

DON'T WASTE WISDOM - Matthew 7:6

Jesus talks about how we should use our resources, also, when we should not try to convince people of the Gospel.

Verse 6: *“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; not cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”*

This is an amazing statement from Jesus who also told us in Matthew 28:18-20 to evangelize the world, that is enlarge the kingdom of heaven. But, Jesus also said in Mark 6:11: *“And whoever will not receive you or hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust from under your feet as a testimony against them.”*

Is this a paradox? Is there a time when we should cease trying to tell people about the Gospel? I believe that “*what is holy*” and “*pearls*” are figurative language for God’s Word and the Gospel. “*Dogs*” and “*swine*” are adversarial people who are actively resistant to the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus told us in the great commission in Matthew 28:18-20: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... .”* We talk to people about Jesus. If they don’t respond, we talk to them more about Jesus, as long as they listen and don’t become truculent. We can’t use non-response as an excuse for not talking to people about Jesus. However, if people actively resist or threaten us, we should back off because they may attack us and they may slander the Gospel. There is enough resistance to the Gospel already. Don’t make it worse. Let the Holy Spirit take care of the problem! Remember that Jesus didn’t argue with people who didn’t agree with Him!

If we argue vehemently with people about the Gospel, we can only lose. **People can’t be convinced of the Gospel by argument.** Only the Holy Spirit can convince them. Argument will only harden their hearts. And then we may be led into sin, by losing control of ourselves. Jesus said we are not to get angry in Matthew 5:21,22 (we say things we really shouldn’t say when we get angry) and to love our enemies in Matthew 5:44, and to be peacemakers in Matthew 5:9.

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK⁵⁵ - Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus promises that our Father in heaven will hear us, if only we talk to Him. More prayer and a desire for wisdom in godly things are required here.

Verses 7:7-11: *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be given to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you*

⁵⁵ Ask, Seek, Knock - The underlined first letters here form the acronym, ASK. Some translations use Search instead of Seek, but the acronym still holds.

who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask Him.” —

Jesus assures us that our heavenly Father will respond to everyone who asks, searches, or knocks. Our heavenly Father is much better than our earthly parents. So, why do we not receive? Is it because we don't ask enough? Is it because we try to do things for ourselves, and don't depend on God? (Matthew 5:3) Sometimes God blesses us even when we don't ask, so how much more will He give us if we ask? We must try God.

The question will be asked, “Will God reveal Himself to everyone, even unbelievers, who seek Him?” Yes, God has assured us of this in this passage! Why don't more people find God, then? Because many people really don't seek God, but they want to understand who God is with their own limited intellect. We can never understand God with our feeble intellect. It's impossible.

THE GOLDEN RULE - Matthew 7:12

This is a short message from Jesus, but it really packs a punch. Whole books could be written about it. Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if everyone followed it?

Verse 12: *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them. For this is the Law and the Prophets.”*

The world has a similar golden rule, but not quite the same. It goes like this: “Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you.” Unfortunately, sometimes we Christians are satisfied to follow the world's rule. We go out of our way not to hurt someone. We go out of our way not to insult someone. But, we must do more and better than that.⁵⁶ We should do things for the benefit of others, even if they don't respond in kind. What a witness that would be for Jesus! We should help needy people, with earthly rewards being the farthest thing from our mind. But there will be treasures in heaven!⁵⁷

There is a similarity between Jesus' “golden rule” and Matthew 5:9 which says, “God blesses those people who make peace. They will be called His children!” Some times we interpret this to mean “keep peace” rather than “make peace”. Matthew 7:12 and Matthew 5:9 feature the active role. The world's interpretation is passive.

THE NARROW GATE AND THE GATE TO DESTRUCTION

⁵⁶ Another example of doing more than the minimum is found in the discussion on Matthew 5:41: *“And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.”* See pp. 39-40.

⁵⁷ See discussion on “TREASURES IN HEAVEN - Matthew 6:19-21” pg. 51-56.

Matthew 7:13,14

Some people say that all roads lead to Rome and apply this concept to eternal life. Jesus tells us how wrong they are!

Matthew 7:13,14: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

A strong statement from Jesus! This counters the popular misconception that all you have to do is die to get to heaven. Jesus says “few people” will find salvation.⁵⁸

People like to take it easy. When it comes to spiritual things, we tend to be lazy. Since the intrusion of sin into the world, we tend to love pleasure. Didn't Jesus say in verses 7 and 8 that we should ask, search, and knock. Jesus wants us to find salvation. **But we can't serve mammon (Matthew 6:24) and find God.** Praise the Lord that sometimes he wakes us up, in spite of ourselves. But we must not shut God out.

Jesus understood people. He knew they were by nature at enmity against God. So Jesus gives us this warning. Don't take the easy way out. Don't buy into the world's approach of eat, drink and be merry. Don't do as the rich fool in the parable of Luke 12:15-21, where the fool thought that life consisted of enjoyment and “things”. That is the road to destruction: self-indulgence, pursuit of material things, and a life apart from God.

How can we tell if we're on that road to destruction? It's nice and broad and easy to follow. If practically everyone else is on our road, we're on the wrong road! If we're living for ourselves, if we care for no one else or God, we're in trouble. We're headed in the wrong direction. Then we better pray. Then we better ask, search, and knock!

YOU WILL KNOW THEM BY THEIR DEEDS - Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus says that if you want to evaluate a person, do it by what they do, not by how they look.

Matthew 7:15-20: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.”*

There is a lot of wisdom here. We might say, that if you want advice, go to a person with a proven track-record. A farmer would understand Jesus. He

⁵⁸ See Appendix 5 - “The Exclusivity of Jesus Christ and His Teachings”.

evaluates trees by their fruit. We should evaluate people by their “fruit”, especially if they are talking to us about God or eternal life. But sometimes we listen to people whom we shouldn’t listen to. We must exercise good judgment and evaluate people and their deeds by Scriptural standards.

This advice of our Lord’s is also good advice in everyday things. How many people lose their possessions or savings because they listened to people whom they shouldn’t have listened to? Do we want to lose the benefits of following Jesus Christ, either here or in eternity?

A WARNING ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE - Matthew 7:21-23

Jesus talks about what it takes to receive eternal life, and sounds a warning.

Verses 21-23: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say in that day, ‘Lord, Lord’, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demon in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”*

What does it take to receive eternal life? We believe that Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. God’s grace sent Jesus to that cross. That was a free gift from God. That means that we didn’t contribute in any way to that gift. But we must believe in Him to receive eternal life. But what does the word believe mean? It isn’t simply saying we believe. It’s much more.

In John 3:3 Jesus says, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, that unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* And in Matthew 5:3 Jesus says, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Both of these statements show that obedience to God is part of salvation. Does that mean that obedience on our part buys us salvation? Definitely not. Then, doesn’t obedience buy us just a little part of salvation? Definitely not! St. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For you are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* St. Paul makes it clear that our work has nothing to do with our salvation. So, isn’t it a paradox if we say that obedience accompanies salvation? No, because obedience is a result of salvation, not a cause. We can say it is a mark of salvation.

In John 3:3 Jesus says we must be *“born again”*.⁵⁹ What does this mean? *“Born again”* signifies by God’s power. Just as being born on this earth means that we are born into an earthly family with an earthly father, *“born again”* means that we are born by God’s power into God’s family, that is, God is our spiritual

59 *“Born again”* - some translations, such as the CEV, use *“born from above”*, conveying the idea that this is a spiritual rebirth.

Father. When we acknowledge God as our spiritual Father, then we become obedient children.

Jesus also said in Matthew 5:3: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit,”* Can you imagine a person, *poor in spirit*⁶⁰, wholly dependent on God for everything, both salvation and life on this earth, and not being obedient?

Now that we have shown that obedience is a result and mark of salvation, we can fully understand why Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”*. (verse 21)

St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new.”* St. Paul says, *“all things have become new”*. That covers obedience. Before, we were disobedient, now we are changed and become obedient. People who claim to be born again and say they haven’t changed anything in their lives, should examine themselves in the light of these Bible verses, Matthew 7:21-23. And we who are believers, should always strive to be obedient, lest we be a poor witness for our Father in heaven.

BUILD ON SAND OR ROCK - Matthew 7:24-29

Would you like to build on solid rock? Jesus spoke with the authority of God! Nobody before or since taught like Jesus did! We can be assured as we learn from Jesus that we have something that will last for eternity. Praise God!

Verses 24-29: *“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken Him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears, these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall. And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teachings. For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”*

Some people believe that Jesus is just a nice collection of teachings or platitudes. But Jesus is our Savior. We can spend eternity with God, if we truly in our hearts accept Him as our Savior and Lord. St Paul tells us in Romans 8:16,17: *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”* We don’t have to be in the “dark” about our salvation. The Holy Spirit assures us. Just as the Holy Spirit

⁶⁰ The relationship between *“poor in spirit”*, and dependence on God, was discussed in the section on Matthew 5:3, found on pp. 8-11.

assures us of our salvation, Christ talks with the authority of God. Christ tells us that those who build on Him will be saved, but those that don't will be lost.

I believe this passage also applies to Christians. Even though we are saved, we want to be continually building on solid rock. We want to be building for eternity, storing up those treasures in heaven. If we take "time-out" from building on solid rock, we will be building on sand, and will be losing rewards in heaven.

COMMENTS ON CHAPTER 7

Jesus tells about the folly of setting ourselves up as judges. Then Jesus tells us to ask, search, and knock. We must want to find out about God, and God will answer. Then **Jesus warns us, there is only one way to heaven.** Jesus is very definite about that. There are only two roads, one to heaven, and the other to destruction. **All roads do not lead to heaven!** Then Jesus tells us how we can recognize the "good guys" from the "bad guys". You recognize false prophets by their "fruits". Coming right after the discourse on the narrow gate, Jesus could well be warning us not to be deceived by the teachers of this world about entry to eternal life. Then, Jesus adds that not just calling God "Lord" will get you into heaven. We have an expression for that: "lip service". Lip service isn't enough! We must also be obedient to the Father. Sometimes we don't like to hear or think about that, but we must! Then Jesus finishes up the Sermon on the Mount with a discourse similar to the one in chapter 6 on "Treasures in Heaven". Jesus says to build on solid rock - for salvation. Don't build on sand - for destruction. Let us pray to our Lord God that the Holy Spirit will guide us on the Narrow Road to Eternity with Him and help us to build on Solid Rock here on this Earth.

DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN

The Sermon on the Mount ends at the end of Matthew 7. Chapter 8 starts with, *When he had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshipped Him, saying, "Lord, if you are willing, You can make me clean."* 'Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing, be cleansed." Immediately, his leprosy was cleansed.

Jesus didn't walk away and take a rest after a very long teaching session. Jesus practiced what He preached. He healed the leprous man. What about us? I have to ask myself that question, and I fall short. When the man asked for healing, Jesus said, *"I am willing,..."* and healed the man. **Are we willing?**

Maybe we think that we can't heal anybody. But we can encourage them, help them and pray for them. God can heal them! We must have that confidence.

We aren't restricted to only helping the physically sick. We have many abilities we can use for the Lord. And certainly we can help the needy in many ways. There are many people who are poor and there are many people who have spiritual

needs; and most importantly, there are those who need the Gospel. We must make Christianity not only a teaching religion, but a helping religion, to the glory of God! Amen!

APPENDIX 1 - Jesus Prophesied

Genesis 3:15: “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and Her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*”

Galatians 4:4: “*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*”

Throughout the Old Testament Jesus was either prophesied or made reference to numerous times. These references were not always either completely or partially understood. We who believe are fortunate. The prophesies have been fulfilled and are there for us to view, and we have believed - by the grace of God! But those who don't believe are unfortunate, because the evidence is there and will condemn them. Jesus said, “*Ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*” (*Matthew 7:7,8*) And Jesus is true to His word.

The question might be asked: what good are these prophesies if the people of the Old Testament times couldn't understand them? The good of the prophesies is that once they are fulfilled we can have confidence! We know that Jesus Christ was real, not an impostor. God doesn't ask us to believe without any evidence.

In John 2:19 Jesus said, “*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*” The people thought Jesus meant the temple Herod was building, but Jesus meant His body. Verse 22 says, “*Therefore when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that he had said this to them, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*” Prophesies are an authentication for us of the Word of God.

Genesis 3:14,15 - This first prophesy about Jesus was given immediately after the fall of man in the Garden of Eden and predicted the outcome of Jesus' crucifixion. The fall was the sin of man (and woman) in disobeying God, and in the process severing dependence on God. Man said, in effect, I'll listen to Satan.⁶¹ I don't need to follow God's orders or advice, I can get along without God.

The prophesy is discussed here to show that God already, in His mercy, provided mankind with a way out of his sin 4,000 years before Jesus appeared as the Christ. When the “*fullness of the time had come*” (Galatians 4:4) was 4,000 years after man's fall!

Verse 15 - “*He shall bruise your head,*” refers to our Lord Jesus' victory over Satan by dying on the cross as an atonement for mankind's sins, freeing mankind from bondage to Satan.⁶² “*...you (Satan) shall bruise His heel,*” refers to the

⁶¹ Satan spoke through a serpent. Since then serpents are considered synonymous with evil.

⁶² This does not mean that everybody receives salvation. Man can reject that gift. Belief and

agony and torture Jesus endured on that cross.

Did the people of the Old Testament understand this prophesy? Would we have? Not likely. But now we understand this prophesy. Of course, the Holy Spirit enables us to understand. Not that the prophesy after fulfillment isn't obvious, but man in his natural state resists the obvious when it comes to the things of God.

Let us pray that more and more people will have a desire to find God and his salvation through Jesus Christ, and that we may be instrumental in this work.

APPENDIX 2 - Another Example of God's Perfect Timing

God's timing is perfect. We may not understand it, but it is perfect in that it accomplishes God's purposes. For example, we saw that God's timing was perfect in the case of Jesus' birth. The conditions were right for the rapid spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman world. And Christianity spread like wildfire.

There was another case where God wanted to save a group of people. This group was the Canaanites. How was God trying to do this? God held the Israelites in captivity in Egypt 400 years, to give the Canaanites, who are called Amorites in the Scriptures, a chance to repent and change their wicked ways. Remember how God had earlier agreed to spare the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if Abraham could only find 10 good people! But Abraham could not (Genesis 18:16-19:29).

After 400 years God saw that the Canaanites were so depraved (Genesis 15:16) that He released the children of Israel from Egypt and led them to the promised land, with orders to eliminate the evil Canaanites. Unfortunately, the Israelites didn't follow orders and allowed some of the Canaanites to live. The Israelites became so contaminated by the Canaanites' evil that they eventually lost the promised land (through the Babylonian and Persian captivities).

Sometimes we question God's timing, and say, "Why so long"? Is God asleep? God's time frame is not our time frame. We must be happy and thankful that God waited for us to come around! Praise the Lord!

obedience are factors. See John 1:12, John 3:3 and Matthew 7:21-23.

APPENDIX 3 - A Heart Right with God

King David had a heart that was right with God, not because he was sinless, but because his attitude toward God was right. When David sinned, he confessed immediately to God, with no argument. Agreement with God was essential. There are other cases in the Bible where there was no agreement over sin, or else excuses were offered by the offender. A few cases are covered here, to show the disastrous results for the offending individual. The cases of Cain and Saul in the Old Testament are cited; and the case of Judas, contrasted with Peter in the new Testament, is cited.

In Genesis 4 it is related that Cain was angry because God was pleased with his brother Abel's offering, but not with his offering. God told Cain to get his heart right, or sin would take over. Sin did take over and Cain killed his brother Abel. When God approached Cain about the murder, Cain pretended he didn't know about it. Cain didn't confess. God punished him by making the land unproductive for him and forcing him to wander for the rest of his life. Cain still didn't confess but complained that his punishment was too great. But God banished him to the land of Nod, which means wandering.

Saul's disobedience⁶³ to the Lord is found in 1 Samuel 15. The Lord, speaking through Samuel, his prophet, told Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions (vs. 3). Saul didn't follow the Lord's orders, but let King Agag live. Saul also spared the best sheep and cattle (vv. 8,9). Saul told Samuel that he had obeyed the Lord (vs. 13). Instead of an immediate confession, Saul argued with Samuel (vv. 15,16,20,21). When Saul told Samuel that they saved the best animals for sacrifices, Samuel said, *"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he also has rejected you from being king."* (vv. 22,23) Finally, in verse 24, Saul admitted that he sinned, but he still gave excuses. After this the sad story of the murder by Saul of the priests and their families, his attempt to murder David, and the loss of his kingdom and suicide are told in the remainder of the Book of 1 Samuel.

In Matthew 26:47-56 the betrayal of Jesus by Judas is recorded. There is no evidence in the Bible that Judas had ever made a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The suicide of Judas is recorded in Matthew 27:3-10. In verse 3 it says that Judas was sorry for what he had done. But Judas made no confession to God and committed suicide (vs.5). Judas heart was not right with God, and we can only assume that Judas was lost for eternity.

Peter also betrayed Jesus, but in a different way than Judas. Peter had made a

⁶³ This wasn't Saul's first disobedience to the Lord. See 1 Samuel 13:1-16.

confession of faith to Jesus. In Matthew 16:15-17, it says: *He (Jesus) said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon BarJonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* Note that Peter had made a confession that sealed him for eternity.

However, in a moment of panic, Peter denied knowing Christ in Christ's hour of trial.

Not much is said about the inner workings of Peter's mind between the trial and Jesus' resurrection. But we can assume his heart was right with God because of this previous confession and the conversation Peter had with Jesus after the resurrection, which is recorded in John 21:15-19. Jesus asks three times of Peter if Peter loves him (vv. 15-17). Peter responds twice, "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*", and the third time Peter responds, "*Lord, you know all things; You know that I love you.*" With these three questions, our Lord Jesus reminds Peter of Peter's three denials during the hour of trial. And Peter responds three times, in such a way as to reaffirm his confession in Matthew 16:16 in which Peter said, "*You (Jesus) are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Peter's heart was right with God, and he was forgiven. In John 21:18,19 Peter was told that he would die in such a way as to honor God.

The incidents cited here show that if our hearts are right with God and we sin, we will be acceptable to God if we confess our sin, with no argument.

APPENDIX 4 - Is Adultery Sufficient Cause for Divorce?

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

Many translations more modern than the King James translate the word *porneia* as "unchastity", "unfaithfulness", or "sexually unfaithful". The CEV uses "*some terrible sexual sin*" with a footnote that this "probably refers to the wrong kinds of marriages that are forbidden in Leviticus 18:6-18 or to some serious sexual sin." The forbidden acts described in Leviticus 18 are sexual acts with certain relatives (incest), with the same sex (homosexuality) or with animals (bestiality). These are described as "disgusting practices".

Adultery does not normally fall in the category of *porneia*. However, deliberate, persistent adultery with an unrepentant heart with one or more persons of the opposite sex, could quite possibly fall in the category of *porneia*. Why is this? King David had a heart right with God even though he committed adultery,

because he immediately confessed and repented. But, continuous adultery may be classified also as unfaithfulness, or as a serious sexual sin, or as *porneia* because of the evil heart of the one who commits the sin.

The person who commits persistent adultery also is not a born-again believer. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9,10: *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, not sodomites, not thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.”* Since the person who is unfaithful in marriage is an unbeliever, he or she can be treated as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:12,13: *“If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him.”* The KJV uses the words “be pleased” instead of “willing”. The reasoning here is that persistent adultery does not equate with “willing to stay” or “pleased with” and justifies divorce.

If the above line of reasoning is correct, it would appear that the offended party in a case of adultery has to examine his or her conscience to determine if the offending spouse is a born-again believer who is truly repentant, seeks forgiveness, and is making every effort to make amends and preserve that marriage in the future; or if the offending spouse is adamant in his or her evil ways and has no intention of obeying the Lord. If the former case holds, then forgiveness⁶⁴ should be offered (this will not be easy). If the latter case holds, divorce would seem to be justified.

In cases where divorce is justified, Scripture does not necessarily command it. There are cases where many excellent Christian spouses, after examining their consciences, have opted not to divorce for reasons such as the good of others, particularly the children. These saints are to be admired, encouraged and helped whenever possible.

APPENDIX 5 - The Exclusivity of Jesus Christ and His Teachings

The belief system founded on Jesus Christ and the Scriptures (Bible) has many exclusive features. Note that we did not use the term Christian religion or church, because too many people equate these terms with a physical organization, many members of which are not true believers. The true church and true Christians are only known for sure by Jesus, and they are those who believe His words and are obedient to God.

Unfortunately, too many people, inside and outside the church, believe that Jesus is just an assemblage of platitudes (nice, empty sayings). They talk as if Jesus and other religious leaders, such as Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius and

⁶⁴ The Scriptures say much about forgiveness, such as in the Lord’s Prayer, Matthew 6:9-15.

many living leaders, all want to lead us to the promised land. And, as long as they are sincere, we can trust them for the truth. Even Jesus is often portrayed as someone who loves everyone, therefore all will be saved. They say Jesus will approve anyone who does good works and loves others. Obedience to God, and trying to be the new creature that God wants us to be, is seldom spoken of. How often have you heard the comment, "I'm a good person."?

Let us look at some of Jesus sayings, and see just how definite Jesus is about what we have to believe, and how we are to live out these beliefs.

Jesus said, in John 14:6: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life! No one comes to the Father except through Me."* Jesus doesn't allow for another way to eternal life. This should be a sobering thought! Buddha won't do it. Mohammed won't do it. Nobody else can provide eternal life.

What about sitting on the sidelines, or not having an opinion. Some say that Jesus is too nice a person to let people go to hell, just so long as you don't oppose Him. In Matthew 12:30 Jesus says, *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."* That sounds like Jesus is saying that if you are neutral, you are against Him, doesn't it? You're on one side or the other, if you like it or not! Is this harsh? Jesus is very narrow minded, isn't He? He has every right to be, by right of creation. Aren't we fortunate that God provided a way through Jesus for our salvation after we went astray? Praise the Lord!

What about having two bosses. The Bible calls it "two masters". In Matthew 6:24 Jesus says, *"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one or love the other; or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."* Money includes all earthly possessions. Jesus is so wise and discerning. We may think we can forget God and worship materialism, maybe just a little bit, but then we can return to God. But it rarely turns out that way. The things of this world taste so good, we want just a little more, and then a lot more. And where does this leave God. We can't live with one foot in this world and one foot in heaven, too!

Some people think that belief can end right there, with no action, like an acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord, but with no obedience. Jesus is very positive about this also. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.."* Lip service won't be enough.

Jesus is starting to look more like a strong man now, and not just a lovable, weak old man. First Jesus says that He is the only way to eternal life. Then Jesus says that you have to take sides, His side or "against Him". Then Jesus says you can't be on both sides. You can't be a "fence sitter". The people of Jesus' day didn't always like what Jesus said. Jesus told them who the "other side" was. Jesus told

them they were slaves of sin (John 8:34), and that their father was the devil (John 8:44). The “other side” was the devil. If you’re not with Jesus you’re with the devil. You may not think so, but if Jesus isn’t controlling your thinking, the devil will fill the vacuum.

As expected, people of Jesus’ time didn’t take kindly to being called children of the devil. So it is today. If someone preaches the truth about man’s condition, he will sooner or later run into opposition and even enmity. It happens in families where loyalties are divided. So, Christianity can become a divisive force. And Jesus recognized this. Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-36: *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”* Jesus further explains this division in families in Luke 12:51-53: *“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter -in-law against her mother-in-law.”*

Jesus has called on us to choose sides. Have we? I pray that the Holy Spirit will empower us to function as Christians who have chosen sides! Praise the Lord!

11/08

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