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I.INTRODUCTION

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A.WHY THE COMMANDS OF JESUS?

Many years back people started telling me I was gifted to teach. After hearing this from a couple of people, and noting that people voted with their feet when they came to my classes, eventually I was convinced. What I taught was denominational material. If we stuck with it we would survey the major books of the Bible. Some things about this experience bothered me. First, why do we study books about the Bible and not the Bible. Second, my teaching seemed to have no impact at all on the lives of the people I taught. Something needed changing it seemed. So I started wrestling with the question of what to teach. Looking back the Lord told me what to teach. The idea just popped into my head. In any case, it is clear where it came from. I hope you recognize it and know where to find it.: "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded." This was the first instance of where I stopped looking to men for guidance, but started looking to God. I started believing that what we need to know, generally, is in the scriptures. If we are living within God's will, what we need to know specifically, in a given situation, will be provided, so that we may accomplish God's will.

The first time I taught the Commands of Jesus I created my own harmony of the gospels taking Luke as the most probable chronology framework. We met for two hours each week for about eighteen months. The next time I taught it we met for about forty-five minutes each week. This time it took three years probably more. Ironically, if I had used Mathew as an outline it might have gone much faster. Mathew is organized more thematically. On the other hand very few people hear something just once before they learn it. So if a topic is covered as many times as Jesus spoke about it, it is probably a good thing for most people.

I had yet another group to teach so I decided to organize the material thematically based on the principles or subject of each passage in the Gospels. When I made my harmony I had made a deck of cards, one card per passage. On it were the verses where the passage could be found in as many of the

Gospels as it occurred and a brief phrase to serve as a title. I started sorting the cards out by subject. This took more than one attempt. I then grouped these stacks together according to which of the Ten Commandments, plus a few other general subjects, they most closely related to. With the material arranged thematically the third attempt to teach the Commands of Jesus required about a year and a half of meeting once a week for forty-five minutes. This was decidedly better but there is more to be done. Much more to be done.

I have tried to keep to a minimum the amount of Biblical text found here. Most people will need to open their Bibles to find these passages. It is good to open your Bible. Some people have committed some of these passages to memory. Good for you.

The Lord wanted me to write this, I believe, and gave me a lot of what is written here. My hope and prayer is that this will be distributed free, because the Lord freely gave it to me. When I started writing in 2007 I could find little on the subject. Now, a couple years later, there are a couple works published. For the motivated and patient ordering a book on this very important subject makes a lot of sense. For those who want something immediately, free, and those who procrastinate, a complete work free on the internet makes sense also. The right to print or incorporate in other works what is written here is granted to individuals for use in building the Kingdom of Jesus Christ only. The right to print or incorporate in other works, which are to be sold, what is written here is withheld. Freely you have received, freely give.

B. WHAT TO DO WITH THE COMMANDS OF JESUS

1. **Go.** Read Mt 28:16-20

The Greek does not say "...go and make disciples..." It says "...disciple ...". "Disciple" is a verb as it is used here. Interestingly it appears to be used as a verb nowhere else in scripture.

Here is the big question regarding this command. If the disciples are commanded to go discipling all nations teaching them to obey all He commanded, are not the disciples being disciplined also being commanded to learn to obey all He commanded? This is the application: what are we as the disciples of Jesus doing to learn to obey all He commanded? I can't remember ever hearing a sermon on the subject, but perhaps I did. Certainly it was rarely preached before I began writing this. so I suspect most Christians never seriously thought about doing everything He commanded.

There is no denying Jesus gave commands. There is room to argue over how literally He intended each of His commands to be taken, as well as about what happens if we refuse to obey. As I see it Jesus forgives us when we repent. If we refuse to do any one thing He has commanded then we refuse to repent of not doing it. If we refuse to do it I think we are lost. We are not saved at all. Don't read too much into this. What is meant here is if we REFUSE to repent we are hell bound. Others disagree. As we work through the commands, passages will turn up that speak to this issue.

Laying the consequences aside should we not obey Jesus just because He saves us and what He asks us to do is right? Are we willing to say to Jesus in our heart, "You are the Son of God. You died to save me. Your love and mercy are so great that you died to save me even when I was a terrible sinner. I know I was a sinner and that the things I did were awful. SO I thank you for saving me. But, I'm not going to do what you tell because I don't want to and I don't have to." If you actually think that way, may God have mercy. You might just as well have nailed Jesus to the cross yourself. If Jesus has really saved us we belong to Him. And if we belong to Him we should do what He tells us even if we are pretty certain it would be wrong! And I assert that He is never wrong. So let's assume we all agree that we should submit to Jesus' will in this and do what He commanded.

What is Jesus actually asking the disciplers and teachers to teach us? Consider what He didn't say. Jesus did not command us saying: "teaching them what my commandments are", or "teaching them to

understand my commandments", or "teaching them how to apply my commandments to their lives", or "teaching them that they should obey my commandments", or "teaching them how to obey my commandments", or "teaching them to obey some of what I commanded". We are to be teaching them is **TO OBEY EVERYTHING** Jesus commanded. This includes all of the above and more besides.

In the past I have not done very well with teaching the entire package. This, then, is an attempt to fulfill the entire mission as much as possible. For the commands that I misunderstand it will be a miracle. Can I do this? Certainly not. Can God teach you to obey everything Jesus commanded? Certainly yes. Does He want to do this? Most likely. And the biggest question: will you submit to learning **TO** obey everything Jesus commanded? If so God's will will be done, in you. Perhaps this material will help you along the way.

This work is to help you learn. Not to teach you. God is the teacher. What I have written here could be wrong. I pray that it is not. I also pray that God will teach you his truth even when I am wrong. Perhaps He will push you to study the scriptures yourself to discover the exact truth. If this work does no more than lead you to search for better material and find something better it will have accomplished something.

This work does not pretend to be a commentary on the four gospels. If it was I would know how to read New Testament Greek, I would be very familiar with the culture of the Jews in Jesus time, having read every contemporary document found as well as what has been published to document the archaeological discoveries made in their land. I would be aware of what others have written by way of commentary on the gospels. The more widely read this work is, the more criticism I expect to collect on how uneducated I am and how unscholarly is my approach. Perhaps through this I will be referred to useful works on these subjects. Even now I probably could do more by way of research. Had Jesus commanded me thus, "...and when you have exhaustively studied everything there is and thoroughly understood all that was written, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded..." I would have studied first and written afterwards. But instead He said, "...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded, AND I AM WITH YOU..." If I did not believe that Jesus is with me as I work on this I would not have started at all.

Furthermore this is not written to apologize for a particular denominational theology. I will let the reader guess what brand of theology I endorse most closely. Regarding the theological controversies in Christianity, there seems to be more in the scriptures to refute, at least part of any particular denominational theology than to support all of it. With the Holy Spirit's help and power and an individual's desire, willingness, teachability and honesty I believe that God can teach that individual to understand anything. If we sent people to seminary or Bible school to learn to be desirous of learning the truth, willing to make an effort at it, teachable and honest there would be little left to argue about. I have never been to these places but based on what I hear the educated say, my suspicion is that we send people to Bible school and seminary to be indoctrinated and taught how to defend our particular denominational heritage and tradition. We are more concerned that the next generation be taught **what** to think, rather than be taught **how** to learn. But, rather than take offense at the preceding ask yourself this: "Do I agree that with the Holy Spirit's help and power and my complete willingness, teachability and honesty God can teach me to understand anything?"

C.LEARNING TO OBEY

To learn **TO** obey everything Jesus has commanded the disciple of Jesus must:

- 1.Know where the commands can be found,
- 2.Know what the commands are,
- 3.Know the principle behind each of the commands, if a deeper principle exists,

4. Understand the commands,
5. Understand the principles behind the commands, if a deeper principle exists.
6. Understand how to apply the commands in their life.
7. Know why the commands are to be obeyed.
8. Repent of not obeying the commands,
9. Learn how to obey the commands in their lives,
10. Learn to obey the commands,
11. Learn how to be held accountable, by other disciples, for obeying the commands,
12. Keep the commands.

In the past I think I did a better job of teaching the items at the top of the list than the bottom. For the rest all flow from the disciple's resolve to do them and the active working of the Holy Spirit to change the disciple's heart and life. For God wants to make of each of us a new creation. He wants us to be made to be like Jesus.

Perhaps it would be useful to consider one or two possible paths the Holy Spirit might take a disciple along as He changes the person from a unrepentant sinner to a Christ-like mature disciple. God the Father begins to draw the people towards Jesus. He may do this by putting a desire in their hearts for something spiritual, something they don't have and something that seems so far away. In my case I was given a desire to have a life with meaning. The material life I could see ended in death. Our race ended in death, our world ended in death, our universe ended in death. Because these things will end and will be forgotten, they are without meaning and valueless. That is how I saw it all, and that is different from the way things are. God, if He existed, did not end. If anything had meaning it had meaning in the eternal God. God could sustain all things and even if He did not, He would remember everything, who we were and what we did.

God may also put into the people a disgust with something in their lives. Something they did or are doing. They may see that escape is impossible from where they are. God, if He exists, is the only way of escape. Or instead He might have them consider the emptiness in their lives.

God will give the people the thought that they really don't know the truth. If they were sure there was no God, now they are not certain. He draws them into doubt. For doubt is a sword that cuts both ways. God urges them to begin seeking. They open their eyes and ask questions. They become observant and teachable. They are looking for the truth. They have become seekers.

God brings into the acquaintance of these seekers those who already belong to Him. He shows the seekers that in these followers there is a glimpse of what they want. They see some of the fulfillment of the desire they thought could never be fulfilled. They see those who were never prisoners of, or who escaped from, that thing from which there is no escape. Now these followers may actually appear better than they really are. God may let the people see past the human frailty of His followers to see what He has done in them, to see Him in them and to hear His words from them. He may cover their faults. This is not so hard. For the seekers have lived amongst faulty people their entire lives and may not see the truth that some of these things are faults, for they know nothing else. God may show them a spiritual reality in His people that the seekers have never seen before. And His followers might still not see it.

The seekers have objections of course. "If there is a loving God and Jesus is His son then so how come?..." At this point God connects these seekers with followers of His who have the answers. I used to debate with people in the forum of an on-line community. Most of the people there were under twenty. They had learned to parrot certain arguments. I found it fun to point out the illogic in some of

their arguments by just reversing the words. For example: "If there is a loving God then why do bad things happen to people?" I could answer with, "If there is no loving God then why do good things happen to people?" This is not mere flippancy. It is the application of symmetry that exposes a lot of questions that were previously not thought of. God leads the seekers to see that the water tight logic that denies that He is, is not so water tight. Ideas that were previously dismissed with the same arguments are no longer so adequately dismissed.

At this point the seekers have as many doubts on either side and for the first time honestly want to know the truth. A curious thing may happen. When conversing with believers the seeker takes the position of the unbeliever. But when with unbelievers the seeker presents some of these new ideas he or she has heard from believers.

The seekers begin to be troubled by not knowing the truth. They recognize that the truth will have a big impact on their lives. The growing desire to know the truth comes from God as He is drawing them. They make a great effort to find the truth. By this I mean that they begin to give the question a lot of thought.

At some point it may occur to them that the truth is already revealed. It is up to them to run with it. That was how it was with me. The thought occurred to me that I had all I needed. The ball was on my side of the net.

Now I think of it as a big experiment. If someone were to tell you that by applying several volts to a container of water that hydrogen could be collected at one pole and oxygen at the other, what would be the most convincing and conclusive way of learning whether this is true? Quite simply by trying it. It amazes me that we take for granted all the technology we have and forget that so much of it was developed using the scientific method. In the past people devised experiments that revealed the truth and principles of the natural world. What kind of experiment can we perform that will reveal God. If God is no smarter than us He is not God. If He is smarter He can evade any test we devise. But in a way He has devised tests for us. There is an experiment we can do. He offers us a deal.

We can do our best to do everything He has told us to do and then see what happens. God has said that our actions have consequences. If we do things His way the consequences will be different when compared to our previous life. Wherein we did very little His way, and all that by accident. This trying to do things His way will present us with some problems, but if we are honest and follow God every way we can something should happen. If God wants us, no matter how dumb or unobservant we are He will reveal Himself as we try to conform to His will.

When the seekers realize that there is some truth to what God says they are going to face a lot of trials. Others including the devil himself will actively resist losing a person. For anyone who does not belong to God in a sense belongs to the devil. They think the way He thinks and share his fate. The seekers themselves may think that maybe controlling their own lives and leaving things the way they are, is preferable to taking a big gamble on and with God.

But God and His followers try to help and teach and encourage the seekers by reminding them of what they hope to gain. The rewards of finding God are worth more than the troubles.

Eventually the seekers come to the point where they make a private but complete decision to follow God. The seekers have now become new believers. Frequently there is a lot of euphoria. It seemed that I was walking on air. Everything was good and life was great. I wanted to tell everyone and explain to them how I found God. Those who are already followers of Jesus will be supportive. Perhaps one or two might make an effort to help the new believer on the path.

But it might not go this way. many new believers have serious issues in their lives. Sins and destructive habits or addictions that have great power over them. Added to this, the devil attacks and attacks the

weakest ones the hardest. These “at risk” new believers need a lot of guidance, support, prayer, and a real relationship with God right away.

The sad thing is that the seeker was told by believers that Jesus would change his or her life. But when their lives do not change immediately they will be discouraged and faced with doubts. Jim Sheridan founded a ministry named “TIED”, which stands for “Training In Evangelism and Discipleship”. He said many things that have stuck in my mind, but the most valuable was that discipleship needs to begin within 48 hours of a person being saved. The new believers expect everything to be different. Get involved in their lives and get them involved in discipleship and fellowship activities so that many things are different.

Unfortunately most of us will have no better idea than to invite the new believer to church Sunday. For people saved on Friday night or Saturday this is not so bad. But God alone will have to support and protect and reach out to the new believers saved earlier in the week.

For many new believers having received the word of God may not be enough to overcome ongoing sin, temptations, and the lack of a tangible life changing experience. This will be their undoing. The devil will be there to test them and they will fall away. See Lk 8:13.

Perhaps every believer, no matter how immature, knows that believers are supposed to be baptized. This is a formal and public decision to follow God. In America the new believer will be taken to meet a member of the Christian clergy. This person will require the new believer to take a greater or lesser amount of instruction. This could be the beginning of discipleship but it must not be the end. Discipleship, as we have seen already, is more than taking a course, even more than a thirteen week course. A church membership course does not fulfill God's command to disciple either.

The new believers need a few things: They need to begin a dialog with God through prayer and reading the scriptures. They need to worship and praise God. They need help understanding and applying the scriptures. That's discipleship. They need people to come alongside and shepherd them from sinful living into holy living. That's discipleship. They need relationships of accountability wherein the followers of Jesus ask them the hard questions that uncover heart issues on the one hand and help to overcome on the other. That's discipleship. When these things happen the new believer becomes a disciple and it's no accident.

The new disciples begin to change and everyone notices it. They have a growing love for God and all He has done for them. There is a change in the way they act, talk, think and feel. They may have direct encounters with God. Their spiritual walk is going well. The disciple is becoming more mature. Hopefully this state of affairs lasts their entire life.

As time goes by the maturing disciples want to do something for God as an expression of thanks and to acknowledge how much He did for them. This is different from joining the church and wanting to pitch in with the work. The difference is who they are trying to please. The one you are really trying to please is the one you really work for. The maturing disciples want to not disappoint God in any way. They want to help build His kingdom. They want to know what work God wants them to do and their spiritual gifts. They want and ask Him to help them search out any areas in their lives that they should change. They want to know His ways and how to do them and do everything His way. They discover that Jesus gave his people commands and they want to keep them and do everything He commanded.

That is where a book like this has some value. This book cannot in itself convince and convict anyone to obey Jesus. It can not create the desire in the disciple's heart to want to please God. That conviction is in the disciple and comes from God. The motivation to obey comes from the heart. The purpose of this book is to provide part of the means. Written material together with the discipling of other followers of Jesus can be a benefit. But, of the two, the conscientious discipling of other followers is

much more important. But there won't be any discipling until the Christian makes a conscious choice to make pleasing God the highest priority.

D. THE BASIC ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMANDS USED IN THIS WORK:

II. Seek The Truth

III. Make the Lord First

IV. Love the Lord

V. Repent

VI. Be Saved

VII. Follow

VIII. Have a Right Relationship With the Lord

IX. Obey the Lord

X. Love Your Neighbor,

XI. Be Just

XII. Serve

The organization does not follow the probable development of a believer, rather, the beginning sections are the most foundational for discipleship. Some of the material is repeated in different places as it applies to different commands. I assume it bears repeating.

E. BIBLICAL NOTATIONS

Frequently Christians are so used to finding their way around the Bible that they forget that other people do not know where to look to find the various books. We need to be more sensitive.

Here then is a few words on biblical notations. Most Bibles have a table of contents where the names of the various books are listed with page numbers. Using this the various books can be found. There are 66 books, etc. We call them books. Some of them would be short books if printed by themselves. Most of the "books" in the New Testament are really letters. Several are only about a page long. We use two and sometimes three letter abbreviations of the titles of the books to save time. Many Bibles have a list of the abbreviations for the books near the table of contents. In this work I have tried to write out the names of the books except for the four gospels themselves. These are abbreviated as follows: Mt = Matthew, Mk = Mark, Lk = Luke, Jn = John. They are named for the men who wrote them. It is in the gospels that Jesus commands are found.

In a biblical reference the number before the colon (:) is the chapter. The numbers that follow are the verses. And so Jn 3:16 is the Gospel of John chapter 3 verse 16. The chapters in the Bible are numbered at the beginning of each one and the verses are usually numbered where the verse begins. So one would first find John then the third chapter and finally the sixteenth verse.

May the Lord bless you as you put yourself on the path to know and follow Him.

II. THE TRUTH

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2. Seek the Truth. Read Lk 11:9-13.

This passage comes out of a passage about prayer. At the same time it speaks of making an effort. Evangelical Christians sometimes refer to those, having not yet found Jesus as Lord and savior, as "seekers". For some are seeking the truth.

Most of the lost (and the saved) are seeking something else. The truth is way down the list of priorities. Some people are afraid of the truth. The truth is that they are selfish, irrational and out of control. Some suspect this and so do not want to delve into the truth about themselves any deeper. It is easier to focus on what you want right now.

I would rather hear the truth about being selfish, cold hearted, prideful, fearful, lazy... Once you have all the bad news you have nowhere to go but up. The upside of the truth is that it might reveal why I am here and how best to do it. From an existential perspective, the truth will ultimately make living better.

So if we are ready and hungry for the truth we can find it. Hunger is vital. You have to make an effort. If knowing the truth is just a passing fancy you will not make the effort needed.

To find the truth do two things. First read the Bible. Get some help with this. I would read the gospel of Luke first. After that Acts and perhaps Romans. Then Genesis and Exodus. Many people would say read the gospel of John first. John has much that Jesus said. Luke has what He did and said.

Furthermore I think John was aware that the other gospels were out there to be read so he does not repeat what was in them. This means he assumes his readers have read them. As you read ask questions. You can ask God of course but you need to ask in Jesus name and with humility. Jesus, because God has given humanity over to Jesus. We must approach God through Jesus only. Humility, because you must never think God owes you anything. Everything from God is a gift. He may reveal the principles behind what is written directly to you, but most likely His will is that you talk to people known to be following Him. For some asking someone else will be hard. A person used to knowing everything worth knowing is not going to want instruction from someone they look down on. Of course this attitude will be the first thing that has to go.

The second thing to do to find the truth is do everything God tells us to do. Do what He says as well as you understand it and as best you can. I could not begin to count the places in the Bible where God says that he will help those who follow Him. WE must not look back on what we did and think that God sees only that when He looks at us. If we turn on backs on our old way of doing things, He will forget about our old way of doing things. When we turn away from our sin we repent. Read Ezekiel chapter 18 paying close attention to verses 21-23. When you put your feet on His path He will be patient regarding the wrong you do out of ignorance. But if you make no effort to learn His ways it is as if you have chosen to ignore all of them. If you want to begin to do things His way talking to people known to be following Him is vital.

The idea behind all this is that doing things God's way, and turning away from your way, is repentance. Repentance brings you close to God. Jesus said "Repent for the Kingdom of God is near." Read that as "The Kingdom of God is near." "OK. So what do I need to do to get into the Kingdom of God now that it is near?" "Repent! Stop doing things your way. Do them God's way".

You might not be certain that the God that is revealed in the Old and New Testaments is real. All you need do is agree that He might be real. Commit yourself to doing things His way on the chance that He is real. The harder you work at doing things His way and not your old way, the sooner He will reveal

Himself to you as being real. It worked for me.

So you might ask, "Why do I have to work so hard to get close to God?" First, because you worked hard getting away from Him. You pursued what you wanted. You thought as the world thinks. You put your self interest before that of others. You hurt other people getting what you wanted. If you don't think so, ask people you have spent a lot of time with. But don't ask, "Do I" , ask "Have I ever...". Scripture says that all people have sinned. See Isaiah 53:6 and Romans 3:23. Because Scripture says that if we say we have no sin the truth is not in us and we call God a liar. See 1 John 1:10. God says all have sinned, and that includes you, but it doesn't include Jesus.

Secondly, Your sins are a barrier between you and God Jesus had to work hard to remove the barrier of your sins. He left His glory with the Father in heaven, was born a child in a poor family. He lived about 35 years and never sinned even once. He had no wife and no children. He became a homeless wanderer living off the charity of others. He taught whoever would listen. He healed people, drove demons out of people, fed people. He faced the criticism and the persecution of those who disagreed with Him and feared Him. He was innocent, betrayed, arrested, denied, tried, mocked, flogged, crucified and died. This is hard work. I wouldn't have gotten past the years without sinning. More probably I wouldn't go hours without sinning.

3. Have Ears that Hear. See Mt 13:9-17

I used to be quite angry at God. It wasn't His fault. It wasn't totally my fault either. Where I worshiped we were being taught that God is drawing all people to salvation. People close to me were still lost. I was praying for people and they were still lost. How can this be? Who can resist God's will. He made us, therefore He can make us repent.

It may be that God draws some people irresistibly to repentance and Jesus. These people will be saved. It may be that God draws some others but not irresistibly Perhaps God neither draws or repels some people. And perhaps God repels some people but not irresistibly Out of these three groups some of these will be saved and some not. Perhaps some people God repels irresistibly These people will all be lost. How can this be?

In a sense people have had a relationship with God all their lives. Perhaps these five groups of people in fact exist but that people move from one group to another. For a time God draws someone to Himself but after they have refused again and again He stops drawing.

We don't know what has gone on between people and God in the past. I think few people are honest about their relationship with God just as few are honest about their relationship with their spouses. And the more troubled the marriage the less honesty there is.

So where is the proof that God might repelling people He once attracted? See Mt 13:14-15, which is taken from Isaiah 6:9-10. These were the people of God, But they did not want to listen to Him. They started to close their ears to His truth. They started it but He finished it. He closed their ears. And Jesus quotes this passage as the reason why He spoke to the people in parables. We need to have ears that hear or God will close our ears also.

I stopped being angry at God when I stopped accepting what people said about Him, when He had said something different, and began to accept what He said about himself. I see some people that God is not drawing, and I read that God is not drawing all people.

If God loves everyone why would He not draw all people to salvation? But where does it say God loves everyone? It's true God so loved the world that... But read 1 John 4:9. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

The key here is "us" and "we" *might* live. Not so that everyone might live. It doesn't say, "This is how

God showed his love among everyone: He sent his one and only Son into the world that everyone might live through him.

God is just. God is perfectly righteous and makes no compromise with evil. He is patient, but He will punish all evil without exception. The only reason that those who belong to Jesus will escape this punishment is because Jesus took the punishment Himself. And those who belong to Jesus are those who turn from doing evil and turn to Jesus for salvation and also turn to Jesus as Lord, turning to obey what He commands. Even those who claim Jesus as savior will not be saved if they continue to do evil. See Lk 6:46-49 and Mt 7:21.

There are people who care only for themselves, people who have no consideration for what is right, only what they can get away with. People God has called several times, but who refuse to go to Him. God loves those who want to do right. God loves those who repent. He reaches out to some and draws them to repentance He doesn't reach out to people who are righteous so much as He reaches out to people who want to be righteous. And nothing makes God rejoice like people who have done wrong, know they have done wrong, are done with wrong doing and are ready to do things God's way. See Lk 15:1-10

When God reaches out to you He will begin to reveal His truth. You must have ears that are waiting to hear it.

4. Pursue Righteousness and the truth will be revealed. Read Jn 7:14-18

I am frequently reminded that Through John the Baptist Jesus had many followers before He appeared publicly. John was sent to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah. He preached "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" And he offered a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The people knew they were sinners. They did not know what to do about it. John gave them a way to take an affirmative step toward God. And they did. Even the tax collectors and prostitutes went to John. In John they sensed a way back to God. I'm guessing that they might not have been able to explain how they knew that John was from God. It was said, "John never worked a miracle..." It was the Spirit of God calling them. For the people who really wanted to be right with God, John appeared as the way.

John for his part identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is what the people wanted. A way for their sin to be taken away, both the tendency to sin and the punishment for it. What John said Jesus had to offer was very attractive to them.

See Jn 10:1-5. The people of God recognize His voice. People who are trying to be righteous can sense at a deep level, perhaps in a way they can not explain, that something rings true when they hear something from God. When someone comes from God these people know this person is from God even if they can't explain it.

What is happening is that for people who are trying to do what is right, who are opening themselves up to God, the Spirit of God is drawing them. And so Jesus says NIV John 7:17 "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."

If you are open minded and wanting to do what is right, trying to do what is right, trusting that God is right, wanting God to help you be righteous, being humble and claiming no righteousness of your own; God's Spirit in you will tell you that Jesus words are the truth from God. You will sense that God is in His words, and then you can begin to believe that Jesus is the way the truth and the life and that we need to obey everything He commanded.

5. Drink if you are thirsty. Receive the light of the world Receive the living water and the eternal life. Worship in spirit and in truth. Read Jn 7:37-39, Jn 8:12 and Jn 4:1-42.

Jesus uses many terms and phrases in John's gospel to describe, and as metaphors for, salvation. A person might not understand one term or metaphor but perhaps they will understand another. It is a shotgun approach to teaching. Something is bound to connect with you.

Life, eternal life, everlasting life, living water, bread of life, light of life: these are not necessarily interchangeable terms as Jesus used them, but they have one thing in common, that being "Life". Life is everything we have. Eternal life, or everlasting life, is life that can not be over powered by death. In an arid land culture water sustains life hence "living water". Amongst the poor bread sustains life. "Bread of life" is superlative bread that gives super sustenance "Born again" is life reborn. "Born of water" means being born of the thing that sustains life in arid places.

In a time when there was no electricity or street lighting at night it was dark. People knew what it was to be lost in the darkness and unable to find their way, even in their own homes. So the "light of life", or the "light" would be the thing that guides us through our lives. Then again Sheol was the pit and the grave. The grave is the place to where all the living are traveling. The grave is dark, especially after they put the dirt over you. The "light" lightens everything where ever it is, even the grave. The "light" overcomes death.

Most rich people were rich because they were the son of a rich man. The king was king because he was the son of the king. It was a special thing to be the son of someone special. This is true in our culture, but in that culture self made men were more rare and so many people were born into slavery. Being the son of someone special was ever so much better than being the slave of someone. The "right to become children of God" was therefore an awesome concept.

In a time when there were no signs, except on the Roman roads, to know the way to a place was useful. One did not have to waste time being lost or misdirected. So having or knowing the "way" to live, or the "way" through life was awesome

In our culture many of us appreciate the difference between clean and dirty to the extent that we are miserable until we have our morning shower. But the Jews had the laws of ceremonial uncleanness You were not to touch unclean things. They would make you unclean. Sin made you unclean. The demons were unclean. The things of God were clean. To be "clean" was to washed from all sin and uncleanness "Sanctified" is similar. Sanctified is a Latin word we would translate as "made holy". To ancient Israel "holy" meant "set apart for God." Some things were ordinary and could be used for any ordinary purpose. Holy things were special and were set aside to be used only for a holy purpose. If you were "sanctified" or "made holy" you were special and set aside to be used for a special purpose related to God and not to be used for an ordinary purpose. God has plans for you. God is big so His plans are big plans.

In all times people tell lies to accomplish their ends. To know the truth about some things even if not all things is very important. When you know the truth you can't be misled. You can make good decisions. If you knew the truth you knew who to trust. You knew what to do. Truth is knowledge and knowledge is power.

"Grace" is undeserved favor. To receive God's grace was to receive more from God than you deserved. Once God starts to give you more than you deserve the sky is the limit.

The "Spirit" is the Spirit of God. They did not know much about the Spirit of God. But they knew it was God's Spirit in the prophets that empowered them to prophesy.

"Saved" means so much to us. "Saved" meant being saved from being lost. Lost meant lost never to be recovered. Like losing a loved one. You never get them back.

All these metaphors Jesus used to describe that we call salvation (in Jesus). But, where are the

commands in this. *Through Jesus we can and we should and we are commanded to:* have life, have eternal life, have everlasting life, drink living water, eat the bread of life, have the light of life shine upon us and in us, have the light that guides us, be born again, be born of water, receive the right to become children of God, get on the way, be made clean, be made holy, know the truth, receive God's grace, receive the Spirit of God, be saved.

Jesus said we need not and should not and are commanded not to: embrace death or the darkness, remain slaves, fall off the way, stay unclean, be just ordinary, embrace the lie, miss out on God's grace, be lost.

6. Don't make excuses for not seeking God. Read Lk 14:15-24.

As with any parable the best thing to do is to assign roles to the symbols in the parable. Sometimes this is tricky and becomes a trial and error process. The "certain man" is God. The banquet is the kingdom of heaven. The guests are the people of God. In Jesus day they would be the Jews. In our day it would be the Christians. The servant could be a prophet or other messenger from God. It is probably not Jesus because His role is much greater than that of messenger. The excuses the invited people give are excuses. For one it is the purchase of a field. For another it is the purchase of oxen. For another it is a marriage. Interestingly, in the Law if a man was newly married he was excused from military service.

The point of this is that these things are not logical excuses to missing a banquet. The field, oxen and wife will still be there when the banquet is over. Hence, the man is angry.

What excuses do people give these days for not pursuing the Kingdom of God: "There is no God, God does not love me, where was God when I needed His help, After I get my degree, after I establish my career, after I get married, after I have a family, after I make my fortune, when I am feeling better, when I am no longer ill, After I build my house, after I retire, After my spouse comes back, after my child comes home, after I've had my fun." People don't come out and say these things unless you press them, but sometimes the clues are all there.

My favorite and easily the most popular is "There is no God." About these people I say, "There is no logic." It is impossible to prove beyond any doubt the existence or nonexistence of God, generally. When He is in your face you will consider it proved that He exists. It would be more honest for people to say, "There is no evidence of God that I can see and understand to the extent that it is probable that He exists."

Sometimes I come across the opening to an ant's nest on the sidewalk. The ants do not seem to react to my presence. I wonder if they know I exist. I wonder if they know I am there. Now suppose I don't want them to know that I exist. Could I avoid using the walk? Could I stay out of sight? Could I be quiet? Could I stay down wind? As a man some things are easier than others, but for the omnipotent God all things are easy. I conclude that if God wants to hide His existence from people it is easy for Him to do it. God could look into your mind and calculate just what experiences you would need in life to be generally convinced He is not there. Then He could bring those events to pass, and there you are convinced He's not there.

But, why would God do such a thing? It doesn't matter. The point is that He could. Once you accept that God could be hiding from you, logically you must abandon "God does not exist." for "Why might God hide His existence from me?"

Put it another way. Most people used to think the Earth is flat. For most people there was little evidence that it was not flat. If it were not flat how could the water stay in the oceans? A few sailors or fewer astronomers might have evidence for a round Earth, but they could be considered nuts and the majority could go on thinking the Earth is flat. What personal indisputable evidence do you have that the Earth is round?

The Earth has made no effort to hide the fact that it is round, yet most people believed it was flat. How much easier for God to hide the fact that He exists. Honest logical people should think along these lines: "I don't perceive evidence that God exists. If God exists it would probably be a very important fact. If God exists I should be doing things differently so as to profit from that fact. I should make an effort to discover that God exists."

However logical and honest people are rare. I think it was Diogenes who was looking for an honest man. I think he never found one. I wonder what he would have thought of Jesus.

I think "God does not exist." is just a cover for "God does not do what I want." So we use dishonesty to cover up our illogic.

Don't miss your chance to have a good relationship with God because of meaningless excuses. You don't hurt Him a bit by ignoring Him, but you will do yourself great harm by not seeking Him. My fear is that the vast majority of people think, when they think, they will get even with God by ignoring Him. But, most the time they just think about something else. Deep down inside they know they should be working harder to connect with God, but it takes an effort.

Some people say "Go with the flow." Jesus told us where the flow goes. "Broad and easy is the road that leads to destruction, and many take it."

7. Seeking the truth means rejecting the untruth. Read Mk 8:13-21, Mt 16:5-12, Lk 21:8, Mk 13:1-6

Does Jesus expect us to think?

Apparently yes according this passage. While we are at it. He expects us to listen, to obey, to make every effort, to pick up our cross and follow Him, to love our neighbor, to have faith, to watch, to pray and never give up, to believe without seeing, to forgive, to walk as Jesus did. He asks a lot of us. When we say "forgive us" we are asking a lot of him.

But some of us are brighter than others. Even so, I know a man who can not read and yet he knows some spiritual truths that many perhaps most Christians do not know. How can this be? He wanted to know. God wanted him to know. By some means God presented these truths to him and he accepted them as truth. On these truths God can teach him more and deeper truths.

It makes sense that God will have all of us figure out what we can and then teach us the rest

How do we know what is true?

How do we know who to listen to?

Jesus said He was the truth. His words must be true. Words that align with Jesus words might be true. Words that contradict Jesus words must be false. Those who say things that contradict Jesus words are unreliable. Those who affirm Jesus words and never contradict them in word or deed are reliable.

8. Don't Think as Men think but as God Thinks. Read Mt 16:13-28, Mk 8:13-21, Lk 9:18-26

Peter was thinking as men think. This was his plan: Jesus would continue doing miracles and continue to grow in popularity. Eventually the people would make Him the national leader. Peter would get a high position in the new government. All this can't happen if Jesus dies.

God's plan was that Jesus would die taking the punishment for our sins so that the guilt of our sins would no longer come between us and God. Then He would send His Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of His people. The people can then be close to God forever.

Clearly these plans were mutually exclusive. Our plans and Gods plans are usually mutually exclusive also, unless we begin to think as He thinks.

I think there is a significant difference between being shrewd about human nature while building the kingdom of God on the one hand and building the kingdom on the principles of human nature only. Using human principles we can remove some of the obstacles that keep people from God. Having a church bus, a large parking lot, and scheduling the various church activities at convenient times will make it easier for people to attend them. But you can't make people believe. I have heard so many people say, "I wish I could but I just don't believe in this." Remember that it was the people who had faith in Jesus enough to roll away the stone. But, it was Jesus who raised Lazarus back to life. We need to pray for people that God may begin to draw them. We need to show them a life of faith in Jesus so they can see to what it is that God is drawing them. Comfortable pews, great sound systems, and spotless rest rooms will never create a hunger to know God. A suffering person of faith who God is clearly holding up through hard times will make people think and even say, "I wish I had what she has!"

Some churches don't see the hypocrisy in asking the believers to step out in faith and tithe. Even as the church does itself does not seriously consider giving 10% of its income to missions.

Using human principles it makes sense for people to cohabit before they get married. They want to see if the relationship will work. In contrast the spiritual principle is that we do what God says and as we move closer to Him we move closer to each other.

It is a human principle to figure out how to get what you want. It is a spiritual principle to change your wants.

It is a human principle to look out for your own interests. It is a spiritual principle to invest yourself in other people and find that your old self interests are so important and they are not your new self interests.

It is a human principle to do what God commands when it makes sense to us. It is a spiritual principle to do what God commands all the time.

Satan does not need us to think as he thinks to fulfill his plans for us. All he has to do is keep us from thinking as God thinks. Satan will have us look out for number one, seek knowledge rather than faith, build power and control rather than trust. Satan wants us to join him in the lake of fire. If we want to see as many people as possible end up there. Then we think the way he thinks.

9. How to Identify the False Prophets. Read Mt 7:15-20, Mt 24:23-27, Mk 13:21-23

Why identify the false prophets? Because they are ferocious wolves! What is this? Many perhaps most or nearly all can not pass up the temptation to obtain power given the opportunity. How much pleasure would it be if a few dozen people took you to be their spiritual leader and believe that everything you say is true. Assume that some are bright, some hard working, some wealthy, some influential in the society at large. Assume some are good looking. In affect they become your slaves because you can eventually talk them into anything and you will lack for nothing. This would be tempting.

There are people who are such astute students of human nature that they can gain power over some people, or at least great influence. I call it charisma. Most people do not exercise this power maliciously. They use it to their advantage. They don't need to be able to influence greatly or control every person or even most people. They just need to control some people, enough to justify the effort. I assume that people like this generally end up in management, sales or politics, where understanding people is really important.

The problem is when people like this get into religion and claim to have received revelations with the authority of God. They claim to be prophets. Read 2 Corinthians ch 11 & 12, Colossians Ch 2, 1 Timothy ch 1 & 6:3-5 20-21, 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 2 Peter ch 2, 1 John 2:18-29 & 4:1=6, 2 John 7-11, 3

John 9-11, Jude, Revelation 2:2, 14-15, 20-24. Why was so much written about this? Because it was a big problem and still is. Remember Jim Jones and David Koresh? It was their followers who died.

10. Make a right judgment. Read Jn 7:23-24.

Understanding what keeps us from making a right judgment is crucial to understanding how to make one. The arguments, regarding the truth, Jesus had with the Pharisees, teachers of the law, Sadducees, whoever, don't seem altogether unlike arguments between Christians. What becomes apparent about those arguments are four things: first people in error over emphasize some scriptures and ignore others, second they are prideful and so not teachable, third people tend to "parrot" what they have been taught, and fourth they have no faith that God will reveal the truth.

The problem of over emphasizing some scriptures while ignoring others is largely a problem of denominations that must of course become a problem of the leadership, pastors and laity. The Pharisees over emphasized "Do no work on the Sabbath." and ignored "Love your neighbor..." In my opinion: there is a denomination that over emphasizes "I give you the keys of the kingdom", and ignores "scripture can not be denied". In my opinion: there is a denomination that over emphasizes "...neither do I condemn you." and ignores "...friendship with the world is hatred towards God...". In my opinion: there is a denomination that over emphasizes "...by grace you have been saved, through faith..." and ignores "...be holy in all you do...". In my opinion: there is a denomination that over emphasizes "...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." and ignores "Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." In my opinion: there is a denomination that over emphasizes "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" and ignores "You need to persevere so that... you will receive what He has promised." I don't know what I over emphasize, you decide. I wish I had more "Love your neighbor as yourself."

How does this happen? We can't help it we all to a greater or lesser extent create in our minds a model of how everything works. Think of it as putting together a puzzle. The pieces represent facts and the completed picture a comprehensive understanding of the subject. At a very young age we conclude that objects don't just disappear they must be somewhere (when we are middle aged and

have a house full of junk and can't find many things we wonder if this is really so). That fact, known as object permanence, is like a piece to a puzzle that is a picture of reality. As we age we build mental models of how people think, some people at least, how the government works, how the industry in which we are employed works etc. As we grow in Christian maturity we construct a model of God and of how Christianity works.

Where there is no model at all there is little understanding. This results in the "parroting" of arguments our teachers taught us, but without our actually understanding them. Teachers who teach facts but do not help the students to understand how the facts fit together, really should not be teaching adults. At age nine we accept facts as facts and that's that.

Why must there be understanding? Because we can't properly apply the facts to a real world issue until we understand them. Therefore we can't apply scriptural truth to our lives if we do not have the understanding of the principles revealed by the scriptures. I am reminded of high school physics. You learn a number of equations. It is much easier to memorize the equations than to use them. Because without understanding we don't know which equation to use.

I think the way these models are expanded is this: when we have a new fact regarding reality we add it to the model in such a way that it does not contradict the model as it already exists. Powerful facts may cause us to reconstruct the model somewhat so as to accommodate them. When a new fact seems to confirm and explain other facts already incorporated into the model it reinforces the validity of the whole group. In life the importance or the centrality of certain facts in our lives determines the

emphasis they require. A fact that has been shown repeatedly to be true and with great effect will override a fact known to have exceptions or to be of less vital importance. This is the source of the over emphasis problem. What fits in the model is subject to over emphasis. What does not fit is ignored.

The problems with this mental model building when we develop a picture of Christianity are these: The sources of the facts do not have the authority in God's eyes that they do in ours. The impact of the facts on our immediate lives causes them to have an undue importance when compared to facts that apply in the next life. Of two contradicting facts having the same authority and impact we will believe the one that fits into our model easiest. Of two facts, one having the most immediate positive impact but the other having slightly greater authority we will accept into our model the former and discard the latter. Facts that do not fit our model are not put in standby but are thrown away. And even though we might recognize that all the proceeding are problems we know that reconstructing our model to accommodate new truth takes a lot of effort and causes great insecurity until it is completed. Furthermore the reconstructed model may require that we reconstruct our lives. This is a great material or relational disincentive to begin the effort. We may also have to admit that certain

arguments or people who we publicly disagreed with in the past are now found to be right. This invokes our pride as well, and this is where pride is another and great obstacle to learning the truth.

These problems of this mental model building of Christianity have an ill effect on our relationship to God and His truth. The problem is this: God says to us regarding something, "This is true". But, because of one or more of the problems above we say, "No it isn't" or at least live our lives as if we say "No. It isn't". Contradicting God has a negative impact on our relationship with Him. Duh!

This mental model building of Christianity has a great impact on how teachable we are. The stronger the model the better able we are to apply what we know to issues we encounter. The weaker the model the more easily we can be taught, and the more teachable we are. But how can we have the advantages of both a strong and weak model? The answer lies with the facts that don't fit in. Rather than throw them out, that is ignore them, we need to put them on standby.

A good man I never met but heard quoted at times was Prof. McGill at Roberts Wesleyan College in North Chili NY. He is purported as saying or saying in effect, "That's one for the mystery bag." The mystery bag is where scriptures that seem to contradict other scriptures have to go. Our hope is that there are no real contradictions in the scriptures there are only seeming contradictions. But rather than throw out the odd contradicting scripture we put it in the mystery bag. We pray about it, and keep our eyes and ears open. Because we hope that someday soon God will explain it to us.

God wants us to know the truth. Perhaps more basic truth must be learned first. Perhaps we must decide that we really want to know. If we stop to think of it: it must be easier for God to teach us the truth and give us understanding than to create the heavens and the Earth.

We need to move past "Who can understand God" and ask ourselves, "Does God want me to understand Him?" Do you want your friends, spouse, or children to understand you? If they do understand us and love us they must love us indeed. If they don't understand us and we know it, we wonder whether they really love us or just their conception of us. If God truly wants us to love Him with all we have, would He not then want us to understand Him so that we can love Him and not just love our conception of Him. We need to have faith that God can reveal and desires to reveal the truth about Himself to us sufficient for us to love Him. So it all comes down to, "Do I really want to understand God? And, not so that I can get what I want from Him but so that I can truly love Him"

III. MAKE THE LORD FIRST

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11. Have No Other Gods: Read Dt 5:6-7, Ex (Exodus) 20:3, Mt 4:8-10, Lk 4:5-8, 18:28-30

Jesus upholds and affirms this first of the Ten Commandments. He upholds a lot of what the Old Testament says. After you learn what Jesus says about the various types of laws in the Old Testament, you can begin to learn the ones He upholds. Then you can live a God pleasing life.

To worship Satan, or Baal (a Canaanite god) are obvious examples of worshiping a god other than God. To worship money or yourself are not so obvious examples, but just as wrong. Here is a simple test as to whether something is your god. "Can I say no to it?" If you can't say no to it, it is your god.

If you can't say no to your spouse, then your spouse is your god.

If you can't say no to one of your parents, then that parent is your god.

If you can't say no to your children, they are your god.

If you can't say no to your friends, they are your god.

If you can't say no to your job, (for example: you can't plan a day off and make it stick) it is your god.

If you can't say no to your money, (you can't give more than a token amount away) it is your god.

If you can't say no to your pride, (you can never admit you are wrong, or it drives you crazy when people tell lies about you, even about unimportant things) it is your god.

If you can't say no to your comfort zone, (you never try to do anything new, or go anywhere new) it is your god.

If you can't say no to your perfectionism, (you can't do something just well enough to get the job done, it has to be near perfect) it is your god.

If you can't say no to your hobby, game, sport, Music, TV, athletic activity, etc. (you can't take a few days away from it), it is your god.

If your free time has to come before necessary things, it is your god.

If you can't say no to sitting in your lounge chair and not getting up again, the lounge chair is your god.

If you can't say no to your things, home, car, boat, flowers, lawn, clothes, (you get much more upset, than most people do, when something bad happens to it) it is your god.

If you can't say no to some substance, (cigarettes, drink, drugs, food, dopamine, adrenalin) it is your god.

If you can't say no to your looks, (you can't leave home until you look just so) it is your god.

If you worry all the time. If you can't help giving in to your fears. If you make your choices based on avoiding negative consequences. Then fear is your god.

If you can't say no to it, it is your god.

Sometimes God seems to be telling us to do something for someone important to us, telling us that doing some things are a part of righteousness. As an example: We are supposed to love our spouse. Scripture says that wives should respect and obey their husbands, and that husbands are to love and

sacrifice themselves for their wives. But the time will come when God may be telling you to do something that is not in your spouse's best interest, not what they want, and not what they consider loving. Now what happens? What happens is that you find out whether God is really God.

Let's look at the various false God's and what Jesus says about them:

12. You Will Serve Something. Read Mt 11:28-30

Some people serve the past. They relive past hurts, defeats, disappointments, betrayals. They fantasize what they should have done, said, thought.

Some serve their conflicts. They have enemies and they know who they are. They fantasize about what they should have done and what they are going to do to these people. Some serve their ambitions, or careers. They do anything to get ahead.

Then we have all the classic addictions: alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling. It is easy to see how the addicts serve their addictions. Some masters are harder to see. Perfectionism, fear, codependency, control, work-aholism, the children are all things that can take charge.

I see a lot of survivalism. People who have been mastered by this devote all their time and energy struggling to survive. If there is any time or energy leftover they use it to anesthetize themselves so that they can forget that their whole life is about surviving. In the end they die having survived as best they could.

I also see a lot of hopelessness. After they have assured their survival, in the short term at least, they have too much time and energy to anesthetize. They have to face the fact that their lives are disappointing and that they are disappointing. They don't have enough energy to change. It's easier just to complain. Complain about anything outwardly. Inwardly they are defeated people because they know they don't have what it takes to find meaning.

On occasion I meet someone for whom the world is their oyster. What I mean is that they have a lot of talent. They have a lot of options. For them life is a buffet of attractive choices. These people tend to be young. Some of the brightest when young become the drunkest when old. Being bright they have to work harder to deaden the senses and to forget. They work to forget that so many of the dishes on the buffet are traps, and that the others are just useless. It seems the brightest figure out the quickest that life is meaningless, for them.

Compared to all this it may be easier to pick up your cross and follow Jesus. The yoke that Jesus lays on us is easy compared to many things. I think what makes it easier is that our lives will never be built around and be all about the yoke. Ultimately the yoke is about righteousness. We will have to be righteous even when it is very burdensome. Jesus was righteous when He let Himself be arrested, even though it would mean injustice, abuse, flogging, crucifixion and death. But, Jesus life is not all about His death. His life is not built on it. His life is the life of a free spirit, free to create, free to love, free to help others be free, free to be any good thing. This is the abundant life. This is the life Jesus died to give to us. abundant life is eternal life we receive now. See Lk 18: 28-30. Mk 10:28-31 & Mt 19:27-30 are similar.

But righteousness is more like a leash than a yoke for in a yoke you can only go in one direction with no latitude. But a leash means a measure of leeway even though there is still only one direction to go. For so it is with righteousness. The righteous must live in a certain way and at particular times they must do a particular thing, but there are a lot of choices that they are free to make. I hear Christians pray much more often for guidance how to choose amongst their choices more than complain about the lack of them.

We will carry some yoke or another. The yoke that Jesus lays on us will constrain us from doing what is

wrong, but leaves us free to do the many things that are right.

13. Serve God Alone, Read Mt 6:24, Lk 16:13-15. Can you serve two masters? Can you serve God and something else?

The Scriptures have a lot to say about being prudent with money. In Proverbs Solomon warns us in Proverbs 6:1 not to make surety (put up security, cosign a loan) for someone. He warns us in Proverbs 6: 6 to work. He also says in Proverbs 13:11 that gathering money little by little will make it grow. These scriptures tell us to value money. They do not tell us to make it more important than anything.

Solomon also says in 13:11 that dishonest money dwindles away, that money is useless to a fool since he desires not wisdom (17:16). In Ecclesiastes 5:10 he says that whoever loves money never has enough.

This then is the testing:

If you will do anything to get money then money is your god.

If you will use your money for God's work then God is your God.

If you can't give away a significant sum of money then money is your god.

If you desire to acquire more and more wealth without any thought how you will use it, other than to make more, than money is your god.

If you save your money so as to be able to pay for something not directly connected to making more money than money is not your god. Examples of these are saving up for an education, a car, a house, a wedding, your retirement, a gift. Then these other things are more important and money is not your god.

If making and putting away money indefinitely without any reason seems like a good idea then money is your god.

If money is your god then God is not your god. If money is your god then God will leave you to your money and you will learn if your money can save you.

On the day of judgment you will be judged by whether you truly belonged to Jesus or not, and not by how much money you have.

14. Don't be Idolators

Read John 4: 20-26

The Samaritans worshiped God. But they did not know Him.

In Jesus' day the Jews acknowledged two scriptures, The Law and the Prophets. The Law was the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis through Deuteronomy. The Prophets were the major and minor prophets as we know them: Isaiah through Malachi, but not Daniel. They also included Samuel and Kings. After the time of Jesus they also acknowledged the Writings. These were Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon and Daniel. Jesus quoted the Psalms many times and considered them scripture. See Jn 10:31-36. If you are interested in the origins of the Samaritans, from the Jewish perspective, you can read 2 Kings 17:24-41. A more modern view takes into consideration a document known as the Samaritan Pentateuch, which are the first five books of the Old Testament. To the Samaritans this is the Bible. But, it seems that they did not

believe in the Prophets or the Writings. They denied the revelation that God has made in these scriptures and so they did not know God.

I write in the past tense, but in fact the Samaritans still exist and several hundred live in a community in Israel.

And this is my definition of idolatry. The denial of God's revelation of Himself. God says certain things are true regarding Himself. When we publicly deny these truths we are idolaters just as much as Aaron was when he made the golden calf and said, "These are your gods O Israel."

As we grow in maturity and become more Christ like we will be challenged several times to believe what God has said is true. But there is no reason to say about God things different from what He has said. Read what He has said and believe it best you can and avoid being a stumbling block to someone else by contradicting it.

III.A.DON'T PUT SURVIVAL BEFORE GOD

15.Man does not Live by Bread Alone Read Mt 4:1-4 & Luke 4:2-4

Thinking of all the fat, cholesterol, chemicals, etc. etc. in our food I sometimes am heard to say, "The only thing that will kill you faster than eating is not eating." This is not true of course but we are all aware that we must eat. No one takes for granted that food is there for the taking. We do take for granted that clean , healthy water is there for free. Many people around the world know different. But images of stick thin people and sacks of grain being sent to them are familiar to us.

We all know that we must eat to live. Not many of us are aware that we need the words of God. I have never gone hungry for food in this life for more than hours. But, I have lived through a spiritual famine for months at a time. At these times I am hungry for the truth, the truth that answers some important questions.

Why was I made? Why am I the way I am? Why am I not happy? Why do people, including myself, do things that may hurt, but will certainly ignore, the well being of other people? Where will I end up? What am I suppose to be doing? What must I stop doing? What truth must I remember at all times? What can I do to really make a positive impact on other people? What heart attitudes do I have that need to change? Why does it seem God is not doing anything around me? Why does God not answer my prayers? Why don't I see God reaching out to save the many lost people around me?

At times these are tormenting questions. Some I now have the answers to and some I don't. The answers I have had had an impact on my entire life ever since I received them.

For many of them I can remember the circumstances when I received these truths. Some I received while reading the Bible. Some I received while doing other things, but all of them connect to words in the Bible, and all can be confirmed by the words in the Bible.

The impact of these revelations is so great that I seem to live from one such event to the next. I am as a man living in a time of famine, where meals are very infrequent. But when I am fed, I am fed to the full. So I really do live on every word I have received from God.

16.Work for the Bread that Satisfies. Read Jn 6:1-35

What was it these people wanted from Jesus?

It makes me think of the story of the fisherman who caught a fish that offered to grant him three wishes. Three wishes that could be anything! Now imagine that the fisherman wishes breakfast lunch and dinner everyday for the rest of his life. Don't you think he could have done better than that. If instead he had wished for enormous wealth he could have paid for three meals a day for the rest of his life and still had almost all his wealth remaining and two more wishes to use. Food for life isn't valueless, but it is not as valuable as other things.

This is exactly what Jesus is talking about. Some people around Him wanted to be fed so they wouldn't have to work for food. Some wanted healing from lameness, deafness, blindness, or leprosy. Some wanted demons cast out of loved ones. No doubt the people possessed wanted to have them cast out as well. After Jesus did these things for people I get the sense that they went on their way. See Luke 17:11-19. Where indeed were the other nine? Why is it that Jesus fed 5000 men (to say nothing of the women and children) yet after His death and resurrection He has about 120 followers. What happened to the other 4880? Jesus offers us the Kingdom of God and everything that goes with it. That includes everything there is, but sin. Why settle for anything less and walk away?

I think many Christians are willing to take some of God's blessings yet shrink back from taking all His blessings. Some things require faith, a change of attitude, a change in the way we think, hard work, and even self denial. But most Christians are so weak they won't make these necessary changes to receive the blessings of a new life. Christian! Do you like your life so much that you won't make some sacrifices to have a better one?

17. Don't Worry About Food and Clothing. Read Mt 6:24-34 and Lk 12:22-34

In these passages Jesus tells us not to worry about food, drink, and clothing.

It is important to remember that The people who lived in first century Palestine were poor, certainly by our standards, but probably by first century standards as well. After 9/11 Some Afghan person living in America said, "Don't bother trying to bomb Afghanistan back into the stone age. It is already there." I'm thinking that Afghanistan would be the best modern example of a place where the people lived in a similar fashion to those in first century Palestine. We think like this, "If there is a recession I might lose my job, and maybe my house." They would have thought like this, "If there is a drought I might lose my family [to starvation]."

They did not have all the modern machines we do to make clothing. Shearing wool. spinning yarn, weaving cloth, and sewing garments were all incredibly more labor intensive than they are now. Amongst the dead sea scrolls were found rules for living in community. Among these rules were a system of penalties including one for indecent exposure. This indecent exposure would have been caused by wearing rags, but not having enough rags to wear.

There is one way they may have better off. I'll guess there were few homeless. A man could build a house out of mud. Today our building codes and zoning laws prevent a person with no money to build any kind of shelter. In any case they had something to worry about, and a lot more than we do.

Your Father in heaven knows that you need food, water, clothing, shelter, health, safety etc. It is enough to make an effort to obtain these things for you and your family. Don't focus your entire life on them. Focus on God and His kingdom. God will provide what you need.

Scriptures seem to illustrate three sorts of circumstances when God's people will not have what is needed. Most often it is caused by a correction arranged by God to draw the people into repentance. People sin. God takes things away from them so that they will stop, consider their ways, repent, and get back on the right path. When they have reformed themselves He restores their blessings.

A second sort is similar and occurs in Proverbs, where Solomon tells us that laziness will bring poverty. We may lose one or more of our blessings as the consequences of our actions and choices. If you treat your spouse bad enough they might leave. It isn't God's plan but it happens anyway. You reap what you sow.

The third sort is caused by testing by the Lord. Testing is when God afflicts or deprives us to see if we are following Him because of righteousness or because of the blessings we receive from God. The best illustration of this is the story of Job. Some time read the book of Job. Read the beginning up to the

point where Job's three friends begin to suggest that Job has sinned and so brought the affliction on himself. They assumed Job was in the first sort of affliction described above. Then read the end of the book. God allowed Job to be afflicted, (or afflicted Job Himself, depending on one's point of view) so as to prove a point. The point was that Job did not sin even when God was not blessing Him. Therefore everyone knows that Job was righteous because it is right. It may come to pass that God wants to prove that we are righteous also. If so, He will test us.

18. Don't Put Worries or Fears or the Traumas of the Past Before God. Read Lk 8:4-15 focus on 14, also Mk 4:3-8 & 13-20, Mt 13:1-9, 18-23

Lk 8 has the parable of the sower. I think of it as the parable of the soils. For it is really about the four kinds of responses there are to the word of God. In the parable of the weeds found in Mt 13 Jesus explains the parable by first assigning to the various things in the parable the things they represent. Then He explains the action in terms of what the actions represent.

In this parable Jesus does not explain who the sower is. Working backwards the lesson of the parable is that different people will respond differently to the same true word of God. The fault with people who do not respond lies with the person receiving the word not the person who shares the word with them. So I think that the sower represents God's people who are out in the world trying to share the word and shine light in the darkness. Jesus finds no fault with the sower who represents God people doing God's work.

The crop that is yielded is also not explained. I used to think that it represented people who were being saved. but, if that is the case then only people with a noble and good heart are being saved. But, the point of the parable is not that the nature of the one spreading the word is the key thing. The point is just the opposite. The nature of the one hearing the word is the key thing. So the crop does not represent saved souls. The crop is linked to the seed in v 8 with the phrase "a hundred times more than was sown." I think the crop represents the word of God in all its forms going out from the person with a noble and good heart. It is the spiritual fruit (see John 15) of a person truly born from above. It is the righteous acts of the righteous, righteous thoughts, righteous words, righteous actions.

Let's focus now on the third kind of soil. For I think our churches are full of this kind of people. Some "Christians" do not have righteous thoughts, words and actions. You never here them praising God. You don't see them encouraging others to be holy, or sharing the gospel with the lost. You don't see them helping people very much. They do not offer to pray for you. They do not quote the Bible or stand up for what is right.

They will listen to the word of God but not repeat it. They will listen to the praises of God but not praise Him. They listen to words of encouragement but rarely encourage others. They listen to the exhortations of others, but rarely exhort. They listen to the scriptures and sermons and lessons but rarely quote the scriptures or repeat what they have heard. They will tell you their struggles and will

let you pray for them but will rarely offer to pray for you. Some will accept help but rarely have help to give. Although some will might help as much as they are helped, but it will be material help, rarely spiritual help. They are spiritual sponges. They take in a lot of the word of God but it rarely comes out again.

I don't know whether these people have no faith or that their faith is just weaker than everything else. Their lives are not built around God. They are built around other things. Lk 8:14 lists three things that people build their lives on: worries, riches and pleasures. In our churches you see lives built on worries mostly. These people are wishing that there is a loving God who will help them, but they don't believe in Him or trust in Him. So they remain focused on their worries. The more they focus on themselves the worse life gets. It is a downward spiral with many people pretty much at the bottom.

If we are prone to worry we are afraid. We are living in fear. When it comes to a point is, when Jesus tells you to do something, but you give into fear and don't do it. If you obey your fear it is your God.

There are reasons why some people are more afraid than others. When you are wrapped up in fear what are you thinking? What are you remembering from the past? What are the consequences you are thinking about? Who comes to mind? Who's laughing, crying, saying I told you so? If we won't get help we have to be our own psychologist. You need to pick apart your fear. Just what are you afraid of? Are these fears rational? Are the consequences as bad as you imagine? Think it all through.

For example for a Christian what is the worst part about dying for Jesus? It will be agonizing. People will say I was a patsy for something stupid. My parents will be so disappointed. I don't want to die alone. How many of these fears are reasonable? It could hurt but for how long. Ignoring what others think (you don't answer to them) do you think you are a patsy to die for Jesus? Do you think Jesus was a patsy to die as He did? If not Him than not you. Your parents don't own you. Is what others think about you more important than what you think of you? You are never alone. Analyze your fear. There is a reason why some fears are called irrational. Reduce them to rational fears.

People with worries need to focus on other people with care that grows into love, and focus on God with hope that grows into faith. Little by little, as they focus less on themselves, God can work in their hearts with love and healing that will eventually overcome the fears and traumas.

19. Do not be Afraid. Read Mt 10:26-31, Mk 13:7-8, Mk 4:35-41, Lk 12:32 & 21:9-15, Jn 14:27

One of our fears is that God is not really in control of all things, or that He is not paying attention, or that He doesn't care. See Mt 10:30. This ought to lay to rest the thought that God is not paying attention or doesn't care.

Is God really in control. The problem is that we see things going poorly and figure that things are out of God's control. But, God has a plan for everything and all at once. He strengthens the faith of two people at once by having one help the other sacrificially.

God knows that things will look all wrong at times and that it will appear as if His cause has been defeated. So He warns His disciples three times that this will happen. See Mk 8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:32-34. He warns them they will be scattered. See Mt 26:31-35.

The problem they had was that they thought they knew how everything was going to pass. So they were not inwardly prepared. We need to keep our minds open about how God will carry out His plan and not have preconceived notions. We need to keep our eyes open to what God is trying to teach us about what may happen.

We need to suck it up when we face fears about things that are not that important. If little things make you afraid, they shouldn't. Get some help. Therapy is about understanding ourselves and more importantly our world view. Sometimes with help we see that our world view and our fears are irrational. Then we can take steps to change.

Let's take every opportunity to strengthen our faith and our relationship with God. If God literally took you by hand don't you think He could lead you safely through anything? Take His hand everyday. See things from His viewpoint. Read His word and learn His value system. Some Christians are afraid that they are going to lose something. For His part God sees this thing they are afraid of losing as useless or even harmful. He knows that it has to go. So He takes it from them. If they are weak and unprepared they might think that God does not care about them.

Here's an example. A guy is afraid that something will happen and the girl he is dating will no longer want him and he will lose her. God may know that this girl is not good for this guy and that the girl has

got to go. So events pass and the girl is gone. The guy must not focus on how God took away something wonderful from him. He must consider that God always does what is right.

Let God test your faith in small ways. Do small things that He might be telling you to do. See if God is not trying to build His relationship with you by having you learn to recognize His voice by giving you small things to do. But, don't run ahead of God and make up your mind what He wants before He has told you. Obey the commands of God that make no sense to you. If you do something just because He commands it and not because it makes sense you really are following Him. Otherwise, if you only do what makes sense to you, you are following you.

III.B.DON'T PUT MONEY BEFORE GOD

20.Don't Let Money Be Your God. Read Mk 10:17-27, Lk 18:18-27, Mt 19:16-26

We do not expect Jesus to say that only God is good. We think that Jesus is good. I think Jesus knew that He would be tested as His death approached so He did not claim to be good. As if He were thinking, "I call not call myself good until I pass the test."

So why did He say this? If God alone is good and no man is good then we must realize that we are not good enough to be saved. We realize that keeping the concrete requirements of the law are not enough to make us good. We know we don't keep the law in our hearts. The Law of Moses, as we call the law that God gave to Moses, and that Moses passed on to the Israelites, also had requirements that could only be met in the heart. Some of these laws of the heart are: Love the Lord with all your heart..., Love your neighbor as yourself, honor your parents, and do not covet, .

Scripture says that Jesus knew what was in a man Jn 2:25. I think He knew what was in this rich man and was trying to lead him in the line of thinking that he would have to understand if he was to be saved. He asks the man about his obedience of five of the ten commandments. Honor your parents is a heart commandment but for some, good people with good parents, it is not hard to keep. And the man affirms that he obeys them all.

Jesus says he lacks one thing and tells him how to obtain it. In asking the man to give away all his wealth He is asking him to Love God with all his strength and to have no gods before God. This the man was not doing and could not do. Perhaps he thought his wealth would provide most things he would ever need. Perhaps he identified himself too much as a rich man and not a child of God. Maybe he thought Jesus was crazy. In any case he could not do it. His wealth was more important than following Jesus.

Jesus does not ask all of us to give away all our wealth. We do need to consider that God might ask us to give up all our wealth, our comforts, our health, our families and our lives. Abraham did not expect God to ask him to give up Isaac the only son of his wife Sarah. We need to expect that God might ask us to give up anything or everything. We need to be prepared. If God asked you to, could you give up your wealth, home, car, hobby, health, children, spouse, parents, grandchildren, career,

friends, self concept, knowledge, intelligence, education, good looks, style, comfort zone, or life? All the time Christians are being asked by God to give up these things.

Someone will ask, "How will God ask me to give up my spouse?" Your spouse might die. God will ask you to believe that he, God, is righteous in all He does even if He takes your spouse away. You might say, "Let her die" but either way He is in control. Clearly if God wants her to live then she will live.

Stuff is money that was spent on something valuable. Stuff can be replaced if we have the money to buy it. So our stuff, like our money, must not be God. Read Lk 20:17-32.

21.Don't Pursue Riches Read Lk 8:4-15

Look again at v 14. What three things can choke a Christian and keep them from maturity?

So what is the problem with trying to be rich? Do you think you will be materially wealthy without thought, energy and time? Do you think you will be spiritually wealthy without thought, energy and time? So both material and spiritual wealth require the same things. Then it stands to reason that as much thought, energy and time you spend getting materially wealthy that much is not available to make you spiritually wealthy and visa-versa. So you really do have to choose spiritual wealth or material wealth. I suggest a balance. Earn a living either working for yourself or someone else but get it done in forty hours a week. No matter how little you have or how much you can make spend time with God and with God in his word. If earning a living consumes so much of you that you can't spend half an hour with God, with your spouse, and each of your kids then change. If you can't earn a living in 40 hours then give up your spare time don't give up God or your family.

This is not all. It will be hard to focus on God when you are preoccupied thinking about how to make money. It will take great discipline to put money making out of your mind if you are ambitious, or are facing a great opportunity or threat to your business or career.

22. Give the Tithe. Read Mt 23:23

This passage is not about tithing but in it Jesus says that the tithe is to be paid. This is 10% of your income, all of it, paid to God. God has no office where He receives payments so you must study and pray and seek His guidance as to where your tithe should go. It could be used in part for the benefit of the people described in Mt 25:35-36. In 1 Cor 9:4-14 we are told to support those who preach the Gospel. It is a justice issue. Someone shared the Gospel with us. Perhaps they incurred expense and no small amount of trouble getting the Gospel to us. Let those and others like them have the resources to preach the Gospel to others. If we are willing to attend a church and reap any benefit from it then justice demands that we give something back. Giving money and time and effort to the

church through which God blesses you is a justice issue, just as honoring your parents, through whom God made you is a justice issue.

23. The Proper Use of Money. Read Luke 16:1-15

Jesus told this parable to describe the proper use of money, and by extrapolation, everything else. This is a good opportunity to illustrate that parables speak to the principle Jesus is describing and not about other things. What the steward does is dishonest and fraudulent. Jesus is not endorsing such things. One will ask, "why use such a metaphor?"

Jesus deliberately uses a case where a person uses what is not their own to accomplish something useful. A parable about a person using their own wealth will not do. Jesus wants us to know that the wealth we have in this life is not really our own because we can not take it with us. Our wealth and many other things are temporal such as influence, relationships with the lost, our time on Earth, opportunities, etc. Jesus is saying, "Use the things that will not last to accomplish things that will last forever. The steward uses what is not his to keep to accomplish something that he believes he can count on. We should use our wealth etc to accomplish things that last, such as making disciples of Jesus.

When I was in school I felt that I didn't have the money to attend Christian retreats etc. Ultimately I had money and thousands to spare. So I was wrong. Perhaps attending the occasional retreat would have boosted my walk with Jesus.

Now Christian people spend money on bigger houses they don't need built in neighborhoods where they will never have the opportunity to befriend and help the poor. Or on expensive new cars, more clothes than they need, expensive vacations, and dinners at expensive restaurants. I am not saying it is wrong to ever do these things. I will say that it is wrong to think you need, deserve, or have earned

these temporal things. God has given you everything you have. I think it is wrong to spend money on these temporal things without thinking what eternal things might have been accomplished with the money by supporting missionaries and evangelists, sending a child to Christian camp etc.

When you stand before Jesus on that day the pleasure you received by spending on yourself will not be remembered. What you did and spent in love and to build His kingdom will.

24. Subject your Desires to the Lord's Discipline. Read Mt 6:19-23, Lk 11:34-36

It is not clear exactly what this passage is about. The parable is not explained. So what clues do we have. The passage is sandwiched between two that deal with wealth. It follows "Don't store up treasures on Earth." and precedes "You can not serve both God and money." What is the connection between the eye and wealth?

Another place where the eye is mentioned by Jesus in a metaphorical sense is 5: 29-30. In this passage the eye and the hand are both described as dispensable. How does your eye cause you to sin? How does your hand cause you to sin?

I can't be certain but I think the eye represents our desires. Our desire for most everything starts with seeing it. The greatest exception has got to be when we smell freshly cooked food. The visual desire for things does correspond with the pursuit of wealth because for most of history wealth was put to use by making it into useful things, using gold and silver to make vessels and other decorations. Fine art and garments although not incorruptible were generally resalable and so were somewhat liquid investments. Today we may not focus much on the liquidity of the things we want but we still see things and want them. Examples are houses, cars, boats, electronics, apparel, home decor, jewelry. I wonder is there is a blind person alive with a shopping-spending addiction.

Assuming the eye represents our desires what is Jesus saying. If your desires are good you will be full of light. If so can we change our desires? Or is He saying, that if our desires are bad we will be full of darkness and that is the end of it. Let's be optimistic and assume we can improve ourselves in this regard. What has to be done to make our desires good? Perhaps we need to exchange our desire for bad things for a desire for good things.

The desire for bad things is very familiar to us. More than anything else Christians must wrestle with their desires for things they can not have. Some things we are not able to have. But frequently we want things we can have only we know it would be wrong. We also have desires for useless things. Material possessions each by themselves are not bad. But if we must have everything then they are bad for us. Some things are useless in that we spend money for them yet they have no use. Or we spend money and time on them yet they are of not valuable use.

Good desires must be the desire for good things. Jesus tells us to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. We can apply this solely to ourselves or we can add seeking to bring others into His kingdom, to build His kingdom in them, to help them be more righteous. Do we want these things as much as material things, and pleasures? If not let us change so that our desire for these good things is stronger than our desire for bad and useless things. It is possible.

I was not a Christian until age 17. What I spend my effort on now are working to do the work the Lord has given me, which is teaching His people, Doing what I need to do to keep my family provided for in all things needful, that they might live and grow, and some that are just fun and comfortable, that they might know they are loved. I also have a desire to be with God Himself and to learn about Him even if it does no one any good at all. Sometimes I divert energy and time and money towards things that are fun primarily to me. But, I believe I am honest when I say that if I have an opportunity at a given moment of time to bring someone further into the kingdom, for certain, I would drop everything else to

do it. For most times teaching God's people seems fruitless, for so few want to learn. And even if they want to learn they do not want to change. But, when a chance arises to certainly edify someone it is rare and not to be passed over.

So how do we shift our desire from bad and useless things to good things?

Read Mt 6:19-21. This is how we shift our desire from bad and useless things to good things.

It is clear that this passage is about wealth. But I think we can extend it to include our energy, time, effort, thought, concern, etc. Jesus said that where our treasure is our hearts will be also. Where you invest time energy, money and thought, there your interest will lie. Also where your interest is, there is where we invest our energy, money and thought. So let us desire and invest our time, energy, money and thought, in the Lord and his kingdom. Let us give as little as possible time, energy, money and thought, to things that are useless. Let us give no time, energy, money and thought, to things that are bad. With the Lord's healing and time we will get better and better at this for we are conditioning ourselves to do right. For His part the Lord may take away things or reveal how bad or useless things are. He is disciplining us to not only do right but to think and feel right.

III.C.DON'T PUT SELF AND PRIDE BEFORE GOD

25.Do not put Your Power and Glory Before God's Read Mt 4:1-4 & Luke 4:2-4

Only a fool would try to match power for power and glory for glory, but for whose glory are we working to achieve. Do we want the best career, the best job, the best pay check, the best spouse, children, house, car, boat, clothes, jewelry etc. etc. for God? Because He does not want any of those things. So, who are they for? It is true that we want some things for the convenience, comfort, or pleasure of them. However, the most comfortable clothes are not what people spend time and money acquiring. Do we drive the sports car at the limit of it's capabilities? Really, what is the pleasure of jewelry if not our glory? The self seeking of glory is so integral apart of our values we hardly ever think about it

when we shop. We just say, "I want the best." We want the best. Do we ever give God the best we can? I think we usually think that whatever he gets from us will have to be good enough. Now when it comes to the church we can easily confuse our glory for God's. For whom do we grow the church or expand our class or ministry? When challenged we will say it is for God and for His people. Yet, if it is for Him, why do we struggle in prayer with Him to bless OUR work. After all, if it's for Him and He is happy with it the way it is, why aren't we happy if He doesn't make it grow?

This is an issue for me. I teach so I want to teach a lot of people so that they learn a lot of important things. Then I want their lives to be dramatically changed to the extent that they have a positive impact on people I have not met. Yep. I'm a regular egomaniac. Here's the proof. Would I be just as happy if God did all this through someone else? Am I just as happy if miracles happen at the other church in my community, many are saved at the other church, the other church really begins to grow etc.

The glory thing is bad, but the power thing is sickening. If we want power to affect other people for good, OK. But, if we want to be missed if we didn't affect people for good then we are wanting power for ourselves. And wanting power is not a good thing.

26.Know the Cost Read Lk 14:25-35, Mt 8: 18-22, Lk 9:57-62

To the man who says he will follow Jesus, Jesus points out that they are homeless wanderers. I think Jesus is telling him to measure the cost. But the passage from Luke is more thought provoking. Know the cost because if you can't be faithful in this it is better not to start.

What puzzles me about this is this. If Jesus is speaking of the sacrifices necessary for salvation then not

starting is fatal for certain. Better to start because even if failure is probable success is impossible otherwise. So He must be talking about something else.

I think the subject is salvation for certain but knowing the cost prepares us to pay it. Being prepared to pay the cost, to make the necessary sacrifices, Means that we will not be surprised and overwhelmed when the time comes for the sacrifices to be made. Expecting the hardship prepares us to endure it and makes us better able to succeed. In the military (not that I would know) people are trained to do something so well they do it without thinking. Does this prepare them for success? Yes.

So I think Jesus is saying, "There are going to be hardships you will have to endure. Don't take anything in this earthly life for granted. Be prepared to lose anything and everything. Don't try to hold onto anything, but me."

We may feel completely miserable during a big loss. In the case of losing a spouse , a child or a parent we might think we can not live without them. Not that I would know. But unless we can

seriously consider an alternative to going on we will get through it. I think of Christians facing torture and execution. But once they have been consigned by their captors to this fate what choice do they have? They will get through it. They will be tortured and killed and will be through it. The problem is when we have a choice. Jesus had a continuous choice to escape the hands of His enemies. See Jn 18:6. Why did this happen? Jesus has the authority all the time. If after they nailed Him to the cross He had thought. "I've had enough of this!" He could have said to the nails, "Let me go!" They would have let Him go. See Mt 21:21-22. In so far as crucifixion was designed so that the victim tortured themselves, (In order to breath the victim must put his weight on his legs, but these were nailed through the space between the ankle and the Achilles tendon) it would take a very great strength of will to hang there for hours knowing that you could just fly away anytime you asked. If we are laying in a hospital bed dying of cancer how will we escape? The temptation lies in the choice to escape.

When things are going well the temptation is not to escape our circumstances but to indulge ourselves doing what we want. We forget how important our choices are in the consequences they bear. The better things are going for us the more remote the negative consequences, of our choices, seem.

Jesus may be saying. "You will face hardships and desires. You will be tempted to avoid the consequences of following me, (for the world will hate you). You will be tempted to indulge in the pleasures that the world offers. You must never stop trying to do what is right. (There is no forgiveness for the sin you are about to commit, only the sins you repent of). Prepare yourself to struggle with your flesh. Sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must master it."

27. we need to be prepared.

Don't Live by the Sword Read Mt 26:51-54, Mk 14:47, Lk 22:49-51, Jn 18:10-11, Mt 23:1-3

Many people have a hard time reconciling Jesus teaching with the commands of God in the Old Testament. The Law of Moses was very specific about right and wrong. Murderers, rapists (generally), adulterers, fornicators (no matter the sexual orientation), people wearing the clothes of the opposite gender, kidnappers, and those worshipping other Gods were to be executed. God's people were to offer their sacrifices only at the tabernacle and later the temple. They were not to intermarry with the neighboring peoples. They were sometimes commanded to go to war. Sometimes the entire enemy population including the animals were to be killed, and all their possessions were to be burned. Other times the goods, animals and unmarried girls would be spared. A man could have more than one wife and were allowed to divorce them with a written

statement.

Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor and includes foreigners as neighbors, to turn the other cheek, to

love our enemies and pray for them, give to him who asks and lend to those who want to borrow. He told the accusers to cast the first stone if they were sinless.

The Law of Moses had it's more loving side. When Jesus says "Love your neighbor" we do well to know that this command is also in the Law. The Law required that there be a tithe set aside for the widow, orphans, and aliens. Aliens were to be treated with kindness as a matter of justice. The people were to help each other by returning found property, helping them when their animals collapse under the load. The people were to lend to each other without charging interest. They were not to sell food to the poor making a profit. If a poor man became your slave you had to treat him as a hireling, release in the Sabbath year and give him a gift at that time. So the law was compassionate even if it was not pacifist.

Jesus appears as a pacifist with His commands to turn the other cheek, forgive, and love your enemies. And then we come to Mt 26. Clearly Jesus intended that the disciples not fight to defend Him when He was arrested. He had to die on the cross and He knew it. Furthermore He says that all who draw the sword will die by it. Whether this is meant as a prediction or the promise of God is not clear. But it certainly seems to be a command not to initiate violence.

Was this meant to be applied in the personal sense or national sense? But which of Jesus many commands are spoken as being directed at the nation? None of them. All His commands are for individuals. Could these commands be applied to the entire nation and is this Jesus will? Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated or assumed that any gentile nation will be Christian. Certainly this is confirmed by our experience.

Should Christians try to make our nations Christian as much as possible? Certainly we are to be light and truth and examples of righteousness as we lead as many as possible to salvation. Nowhere is it suggested that we use the power of law or national policy to enforce Jesus commands on others.

We need to remember that God the Father put us (Christian people) under the authority of Jesus. But, until He returns there is more evidence that those not claiming Jesus as their God are not under his authority. See Jn 5:45 and 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. They will be under His authority at the judgment.

Now let us look at some obscure words of Jesus. See Lk 22:35-38. Even Jesus is a complete pacifist why did He tell His disciples to buy a sword? It probably has to do with the event of Jesus' arrest, which was about to take place. But, if the swords were required so that some prophecy regarding Jesus might be fulfilled, no one has pointed it out. Certainly a purse or bag were not.

I believe Jesus is telling us that the world is a hostile to Him and His people will need to arm themselves. Not so that we might live by the sword in lives of violence, but that we might protect ourselves and specifically in the context of being sent out by Jesus.

28.Humility, Love the Weak Read Mt 18:1-10, Mt 19:13-15, Lk 9:47-48, 18:15-17, 22:24-27, Jn 13:4-17, Mk 9:42, 10:13-16, Mt 11:25-27.

Perhaps the disciples asked their question in general but see Mark 9:33-34. I think they were specifically talking about themselves. If so Jesus reply is more to the point.

In what way are they to become like children? They are to be humble. Not every child is humble, but they tend to be more humble than adults. Here is an attitude I see a lot in adult men, particularly the middle aged, "Don't tell me what to do." Children usually don't do what you tell them, but at least they will listen and perhaps agree in their hearts that they should do what you tell them. Adults won't usually listen. "I'm an adult. I don't have to listen to anybody." Not that there are not spectacular exceptions, but generally children will submit, particularly if you take them by the hand and lead them through it.

It is easier to imagine that a child will let someone lead them by the hand through a situation they know

nothing about, than an adult being led by the hand through a situation they know nothing about. We probably could make lists of adults who trust no one I can't name a child who trusts no one Children are more trusting, which is a trait that makes them vulnerable to betrayal by others. Adults are less trusting a trait that will make them more vulnerable to be thrown into hell. For all have sinned and earned God's wrath. Only those who put their trust in God AND do what He says will be saved.

Jesus is saying, "Humble yourselves. Put your trust in God. Do what He says. Don't think about who is greater, you or someone else. Instead remember that God is much greater than you.

29.Humble Yourself, Read Lk:18:9-14

Ironically the Pharisee begins with thanking God. So where does he go wrong. I think his focus is on himself, and how good he is, or first, how bad he is not, but really how bad other men are, and not God or on what God has done or even what God has done for him.

He might have said," God I thank you I am not like other men, well some other men. 'Cause, I guess You made me that way, 'cause you can make anyone any way you want. Because you could have made me someone who would probably become an evil doer. And you could have made this man into someone who would be always righteous. You chose this for me and that for him, and who knows why, but you must have a plan. Maybe your plan is that we people need to stick together so my strengths help when he is weak, and his strength helps when I am weak. Maybe you are waiting

to see if we will look out for each other. So because any differences in us are only due to what you freely chose for us, there is no difference between us, so really we are the same, and no one is better than anyone else, but we have to answer for what we did with what we had. We have to face the challenge of whatever God has given us so we are in this together. We have a lot in common. We can relate to each other in that we each have our challenges. God made us in love to succeed, with His help, and not fail. He continues to love us and we should love each other because He is our Father and we are brothers."

The tax collector is a great example for us. He begins with," God have mercy on me, a sinner." I suggest you start all your prayers this way. God is light. Jesus is the truth. So beginning with the simple truth that we are sinners and need God's mercy is a good start. Of course this is only the start. God requires that we turn away from our sins and turn to follow Jesus. Nothing less will save us.

Some Christians take pride in being Christian. Although it takes effort to stay on the path it is God who puts us on it to begin with and God who helps us along the way. No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws them.. If it is God's sovereign choice that we are saved. We should feel blessed much more than deserving. God blesses us , but has not blessed someone else. We don't know why and it is dangerous to think we can. The wonder is in Him not us. With no effort He could let us wander off and save someone else.

What boggles the mind is that some Christians take pride in being a particular kind of Christian. I have worshiped with Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Methodists. In these groups some are better teachers than others, some are better examples than others, and some are better disciplers than others. You are blessed if you are around people that God is using to disciple you. It doesn't come down to what denomination you belong to. It comes down to whether or not people around you are following Jesus.

30.Humble yourself, Read Lk 14:7-11

Don't think yourself better than anyone else. Jesus decides ultimately whether one of His followers is more valuable than another. This will be made clear when we receive our final rewards. I think many will be surprised. Jesus Himself said "Many who are first will be last and the last first." treat every other Christian as if they have a secret life you know nothing about. And, in that secret life they do

great deeds of faith and service to the Lord. In the end they receive great praise and reward from Jesus. At this point you will feel silly if not ashamed for thinking yourself better.

31. Be humble even when you have done everything well, Don't expect, as you earned right, reward for doing what is right. See Lk 17:7-10. Mt 20:1-16

Consider how well you would have done without God's help. Consider how well you would have done if God had made you different. Consider how well you would have done if God had made you someone who was not very industrious. If you have done well it is more like God has done well. So, give God the glory.

Jesus said "What can a man give God in exchange for his life?" It was a rhetorical question, a question that is not looking for an answer, but rather, a question that points out a truth. You can give God nothing in exchange for your life. Everything is His, He made it. There is no work you can do to earn your salvation. For whatever work you do you are using what He gave you to work with.

If your teenage child borrows your credit card and goes out and buys something costing more than a thousand dollars with it, to give you as a gift for your birthday or Christmas. Would you be really pleased and have a lot of praise for that child. Probably not, because all the child has done is taken your money and spent it on you. What did the child contribute that was not yours. In the same way God is not impressed when we take what He has given to us, time, energy, money, talent, gifting, intellect, insight, the skill of our hands, charisma, or whatever, and offer it back to Him as if we have done some awesome thing.

Consider this, if God took away from you everything He gave you so that you could offer Him something that came from you alone, what could you offer Him? You would have nothing left to offer and so you have nothing to offer God.

We belong to Jesus. In doing this we are saved. In belonging to Him we are His servants. We must do what He commands us. We must do what is right. Whereas we are obligated to serve we have only performed our obligation. We have not earned a reward. Therefore we should not expect one. Furthermore we must not do what we are obligated to do solely because we will be rewarded. Let us do what is right because it is right. Let us do what is right because we belong to Jesus and we must serve Him and He requires that we do what is right.

At the same time we must not think that the Lord can not reward, or that He will not reward. He is delighted when we do what is right. He wants to reward us. Certainly there will be great rewards. We just must not think that He owes it to us.

In the passage from Mt the laborers hired first expect to be paid more than the others. We who have belonged to Jesus since childhood have *probably* served God more than others who came to belong to Jesus late in life. We might for that reason expect that our reward in the kingdom of God will be greater. But, if we truly belong to Jesus then everything we have, a long life of service or a short one, is His for the taking. We belong to Him and will share in His glory and blessing. It is enough. Let us give thanks that Jesus accepted our lifetime of service for Him for we would have wanted to do more if we could because He did so much for us. He did so much for us when we had done nothing for Him.

32. Don't be prideful and selfish, Read Mk 9:38-41, Lk 9:49-50

So what is going through John's mind? What is wrong with someone not one of Jesus' disciples casting out demons? What is John afraid of?

The context of this passage is about pride. Is it that Jesus does not get the glory? Yet it is done in Jesus' name, so He does.

There is a certain sense that the disciples were constantly thinking of their future glory even as they preach the Kingdom of God. I think the disciples wanted and thought they had a monopoly on Jesus. They did not want to share *His* with anyone else.

It is important to remember that the Lord has His own unique relationship with everyone, that is, in fact, none of our business.

This is seen in the various appearances of God to different people throughout the Bible. They are different. At the end of John's gospel we have Jesus saying to Peter, regarding John, literally "what's it to you?"

As you lead someone to Jesus and then disciple them, you represent Jesus to that person. You speak to them on His behalf. We know that with time the person must build their own relationship with Jesus. As much as they read the scriptures this will proceed quickly. If they don't it goes slowly.

Perhaps with a slowly maturing Christian the passage of time might lead the discipler to take for granted that they will always be talking to the disciple on behalf of Jesus. Eventually, hopefully, the disciple's relationship with Jesus begins to take off. We may be surprised to realize that we are out of line on one occasion as we are telling them something that Jesus is contradicting. Discipling is serious stuff. Stay on your toes if God has found you worthy to do this most important job.

33. Don't Use God to receive Honor from Men, Read Mt 6:1-6 & 16-18, Mt 23:5-12, Mk 12:38-40.

The phylactery is a device worn on the forehead that contains a passage of scripture. It is required to be worn by the Law of Moses in Dt 6:6-9. The Pharisees obeyed the law and then went the extra step of wearing a wider device. They put tassels on the corners of their garments in accordance with Nb 15:38. Then they went the extra step of using longer tassels. Supposedly this was a good thing in their minds and those of the people. This made them holier, they supposed. (It reminds me of the star bellied sneetches.) They also prayed in public and let people know they were fasting and giving to the poor. They did these things so as to gain the respect and honor from the people. They studied the scriptures because to be called "Rabbi", meaning "Master", is very honorable. They wanted very much to be honored.

It is better to be honored by God than by men. Not only this but, in Lk 6: 26 Jesus says "woe" to those who are spoken well of by men for they treated the false prophets this way. Honor from men is an indication of dishonor before God. If God tells you to do something and you do it as He has commanded be prepared to be thought strange and irrational by *Christians*. Ultimately people (including Christians) weigh your value in accordance with your value to them, not God.

34. Don't Pursue Honor from Men. Read Jn 5:31-47

When we pursue honor from men we want them to like us, respect us, treat us well, love us etc.. Why is this so incompatible with pursuing honor from God. Whereas if we pursue righteousness God will praise us men will not. Men as a general rule do not honor people who pursue righteousness. They honor men who do something for them, even if no more than make them feel good. See Mt 5:10-12 and Lk 6:22-23 and 26. How long do you need to work for a living before someone wants you to lie for them. Righteousness goes right out the window if our job is threatened. Honest people who are whistle blowers will be the target of revenge. People who don't do wrong and can not be depended

on to lie are considered disloyal and unreliable. Generally a person's best interest is at odds with righteousness not aligned with it. So we must choose to be righteous or please men. Don't think that changing sides in a conflict between people or groups of people will make any difference. The rules of life are the same no matter who's team you are on. The team captain wants you to pursue his best interest first and righteousness only after he is completely confident you are on his side. Sometimes

men want you to do wrong so they have the dirt on you . Then they have some power over you. You will cooperate with them because they threaten you with being revealed as breaking the rules, whatever they are. They don't want to trust you. They want to control you. For control is better than trust in the minds of men. For men trust only those they can control. The only leader not like this is God. He wants you to pursue righteousness because it is right not because He benefits.

Now the question remains who will pursue my best interest more. These men who want me to do wrong for them or God. Neither one are out for our best interest before all things. God pursues righteousness and expects the same of us. But God loves us. Men pursue their own best interest. They only pursue ours when theirs and ours are in complete alignment. They will love us when this is so.

For me the answer is clear. Men will throw me to the dogs when they need to. God never will. Men can not be trusted to do what they say. They say what they say to get us to do or think as they want. Therefore they lie. God says the truth if we want to hear it. He does not lie to get us to do as He says. It is easier for me to not be trusted by men and be on the side of righteousness than to do as men want and know that I am doing wrong and that God may set His face against me. Doing wrong in support of my best interest will not make me happy even if it works. I need more than the material comfort that honor from men can bring. I also need to have a life with meaning. Who would have carved on their gravestone," I wished I had been more selfish."

How about you? Are the advantages of doing wrong so as to be honored and supported by men worth more than the advantages of knowing that you lived a good life. Either you do believe there is a difference between right and wrong or else you just want to live right. I suppose there are people who have been so abused in this life that getting some measure of material comfort is worth more than any sense of righteousness. For them "right" means "good for them" and nothing more. People like this make me sad because the spirit that God gave them has been twisted right out of them.

III.DDON'T PUT PLEASURES BEFORE GOD

35.Don't Let the Pursuit of Pleasure Be Your God. Read Lk 12:13-21

At first glance this man appears to a worshiper of money. But, he does not think of acquiring money without end. He is thinking about retiring young. He is going to have a life of leisure. He is not condemned for having a good harvest of even rebuilding his barns so as to store more. He is condemned for not giving some back to God who made him rich in the first place. If God was his god he would have given God at least ten percent and more. But a life of leisure was more important. A life free of worry, striving for success, and stress was more important. He was oblivious to the fact that it is God who gives and takes away. God gave him the good crop. He shows contempt for God by ignoring God's all important role in His life.

36.Don't Pursue Pleasures Read Lk 8:4-15

Look again at v 14. What three things can choke a Christian and keep them from maturity?

Like riches the over expenditure of your time, energy and thought on pleasures will take away from the necessary time, energy and thought spent on spiritual things. As well as this pleasure requires money too. The pursuit of pleasure can be more damaging than money because pleasures can become addicting more easily. Someone tries using drugs and finds it enjoyable. Finding them enjoyable make drugs desirable. Drugs being found desirable will be tempting. Being tempting, they will be used. Being used a habit is formed. A habit formed must happen before a physical addiction is created. The strange thing about addictions is that satisfying the desire for the object of the addiction does not decrease the desire for it but, instead, increases the desire for it.

This is all bad enough, even tragic, but add to this the fact that It will be hard to focus on God, the one

who can deliver you, when you are preoccupied with the desire for your pleasure, habit, or addiction.

III.E.DON'T PUT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS OR OTHER PEOPLE BEFORE GOD

37.Don't Put Your Family Members Before God, Read k 3:20-21, 31-35, Mt 12:46-50, Lk 8:19-21, Mt 10:34-37

Three gospel writers agree Jesus said that His disciples were His family more so than His mother and siblings. If God's people come before our family how much more so God Himself.

This is what I think happened:

Jesus birth was surrounded by many manifestations of God, prophecies, dreams sent by God, heavenly signs, visitations by angels, besides worldly events such as gifts, visitations by distant travelers, intrigue and massacre.

But, time goes by and human nature is to forget things that don't seem to matter now. When Jesus is twelve he astounds his family by staying behind in Jerusalem and impressing the teachers of the law with His knowledge. More time passes, Joseph must have died during this period.

Jesus actually begins His ministry of miracles at His mother's request. In faith she asks Him to solve the problem of the wine running out at the wedding in Cana John 2:3.

Later on in John 7:1-5 we read that His brothers did not believe in Him. I don't know whether this precedes or follows the mission of theirs to retrieve Him.

I think that, while Jesus is wandering around in accordance with God's will, His brothers stayed home and cared for their mother. They would have been adults at this time. A woman in that culture was supposed to be under the care of her father, husband, son or some other male relative. The brothers do not believe in Jesus and convince His mother to help them retrieve Him before something tragic happened. Maybe she still believed in Jesus maybe not, but Jesus does not seem to include her among "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother". And apparently Jesus does not let them take charge of Him.

The closer you follow Jesus the more bizarre you will seem to people. Family members, employers, neighbors, coworkers and other people who have a stake in you will try to put you back on the path of doing what is "normal". You are not doing what they want or even expect. They will struggle to straighten you out. You must resist. You must do what God's tells you no matter what others think.

Certainly you do not want to antagonize anyone unnecessarily. You must be shrewd. But the time will come to fish or cut bait, the time when it's follow Jesus or not. Prepare yourself to do what is right.

Jesus expects you to be faithful to your promises you have made to others and to honor your parents. He expects you to obey the law and to fulfill your reasonable obligations. He said "give to Caesar what is Caesar's".

For not yet adult children, how does one honor and obey them and God when the parents are opposed to God? Where does honorable obedience to your parents end and disobedience to God begin? You receive from your parents. It is through them that God provides for you. Up until the age of fifteen I think that parents should be obeyed in regards to where you are to go. If they say don't go to church, don't go. Some older children generally can choose for themselves where they may be, within certain limitations. Even so, if my parents were greatly opposed to my going to church I would obey them up to age eighteen and beyond if they are still providing for me more than I contribute to the family. If you are pulling your weight it is not reasonable for your parents to dictate where you are to be all the time. You could at this point be living on your own. Perhaps you should be.

If I were fourteen and my parents ordered me not to associate with Christians at school I would have to

seriously consider this. My parents may think my Christian friends belong to a cult. If I had children of my own do I think they should obey me if I told them not to associate with their school mates who belong to some cult?

It is important to remember that God will never put us into a trap if we are following Him as best we can. If we are doing what we know God does not want us to do we should not think that He will give us any guidance or help. If we are doing everything to obey God we should expect He will help us and that He will guide us away from doing what is wrong. So do everything God tells you to do and pray to Him for guidance as to when to obey your parents and when not to.

I do not believe parents have the right to dictate what you think therefore you can always pray. Let God tell you if you should read your Bible if told not to. He said "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's".

I have heard more than once where people were in a trap but God set them free. A Christian woman was married to a Muslim man and had children. These children wanted to be baptized. The father forbade it. Now God has said in Acts 2 that believers are to be baptized. This woman prayed to God. God turned that man's heart so that he let his children be baptized. Who can resist God's will? Romans 9:19.

38. Don't Put Worries About Social Proprieties Before God. Read Lk 10:38-42

This is an example of when doing the right thing in the proper way can be wrong. Martha is motivated by hospitality to invite Jesus to her home. As her guest she wants to treat him properly and sets about to prepare all the food.

In those days to bake bread you would heat the oven by building a fire in it. This gave you time to grind the grain into the flour. You began the meat course by catching the chicken, lamb or calf etc. A proper meal was a lot of work.

Perhaps Martha assumed that her sister Mary would naturally help with the work, or perhaps she just became exhausted and impatient with the work to be done. She probably was trying to bring off the best meal she had ever prepared in consideration of who she was serving. Perhaps she was jealous and felt abused that Mary was learning everything that Jesus was teaching while she, the hostess, did nothing but work. I have been here myself. My wife and I invite a bunch of interesting people over well knowing that we will not have any meaningful conversation with any of them. We will be too busy.

Martha may have asked Mary to help her before she appealed to Jesus. Jesus replies that Martha is worried and upset by many things (including putting His meal together), but that only one thing is needed (the Kingdom of God). Martha has her priorities wrong. Mary has her priorities right. Jesus teaches us that we should seek, pursue and take hold of the Kingdom of God at every opportunity even if we offend the conventions of society or even the Biblical concept of hospitality.

39. Don't Put Your Family Members Before God, Read Lk 12:49-53, 14:26

Not everyone has figured it out, but some have, on both sides. Humanity is at war with God and with each other. God has the right to make demands of us, to judge us, and to punish or reward as seems right to Him. This is so because He made us.

A man plants a tree on his land. It's not likely that he would plant it on someone else's land. It grows and bears fruit. It gives shade to all who pass by. Can that man cut down the tree if he wants to? Generally yes. A man builds a house and rents it out to tenants. It is very improbable that he would build it and not own it. After many years can the man have the house torn down and build something else in its place? Generally, yes. A woman paints a picture. It hangs in her house for many years. Perhaps she lends it to someone. Can she get the painting back and then destroy it. A woman starts a

business. She employs people and provides goods or services to her customers. Can she after many years decide to close the business and liquidate the assets. Generally yes.

If a party has an agreement with another to build or make something on their behalf in return for money etc. they have relinquished control of what they have made. But they would not build anything without such a profitable agreement.

The point is that, generally, if you make something it belongs to you and you have power over it. God made everything from which everything was made. I might make a paper airplane, but God made the elements carbon, oxygen and hydrogen that make up the paper. Whereas mankind has great control over the forests and the manufacture of paper, God retains control of which forty-six chromosomes we are made of.

But people want to control their own lives. It is not so much that people want to be able to choose between many options. Many people want to escape or deny the consequences of their freely made choices. They refuse to admit that God has ordained certain principles of the human condition. They deny that He made them, that He rules over them, that He has commanded them to be not neutral but righteous, that He disapproves of their actions, that He will bring their choices to judgment by His son Jesus, and that He will punish all evil deeds. So people as individuals are engaged in a contest of will with God who is Lord over them.

Because people deny that other people are just as valuable as they are and should have the same rights that they claim for themselves, they are also in conflict with other people.

Those who affirm God's truth and obey Him make nearby targets for those in conflict with God. And so in a family the family members are in conflict with each other. Those who affirm God are in opposition to those who deny Him. Those who try to control others are in opposition to those who resist being controlled. The greater the anger directed at God and His truth the greater the anger directed at His people.

So should we give up putting our Godly beliefs into practice so as to have peace in the home? No! Standing up for God and the truth is more important than our relationships with family members just as He is greater than we are. If we deny the truth by our silence and inaction He will deny that we belong to Him.

III.F.DON'T PUT TRADITIONS BEFORE GOD

40.Avoid unclean thoughts more than unclean hands and food. Read Mt 15:1-20, Mk 7:1-23, Lk 11:37-40

I try to wash my hands before I eat or touch food. I don't do this to avoid being ceremonially unclean. I do this to avoid getting sick or making someone else sick.

The law of Moses contained many ordinances. Some were moral, some legal, some social, some pertained to the liturgy of worship and sacrifices, some were dietary, and some were regarding the clean and unclean.

The foods that were unclean had to do with the animals that they came from generally. But eating any animal that had been killed by a wild beast is unclean. Fish with scales and fins are clean. All other seafood is unclean. Beasts with a cloven hoof and which also chewed the cud are clean. All other beasts are unclean. Locusts, grasshoppers, katydids etc that hop and fly are clean. All other tiny creatures are unclean. Birds are generally clean, but predator and scavenger birds are unclean as I recollect it. People were not to eat unclean things

Dead creatures and dead people are unclean. Some diseases and bodily functions are unclean. Sex is

unclean in general. Eating without washing is unclean. If you did something unclean you sometimes had to wash your clothes etc. and be unclean until evening.

Some things were to be avoided. You were to avoid entering the house of a person not a Jew. Some things, like sex, were not to be avoided, but they made you unclean. You could not do some things when unclean. Like eat the Passover. This was a bigger issue for priests because it kept them from serving at the temple.

On the whole these things don't seem real important. Certainly they were not as important as sin. And that was Jesus point. Touching something does not make you unclean. Sinning by thought, word, or deed does. false testimony, evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly, are condemned by Jesus as sinful.

Jesus makes a direct contrast between the traditions of the Pharisees and the law of Moses. The Pharisees had this contemptible method for saving money by abandoning their parents. They used the concept of dedicating to God. If something was dedicated to God the person who dedicated it could not dispose of that property any other way except by giving it to God. So the Pharisees would say to their needy parents, "Anything I might use to help you is dedicated to God." Meaning not "everything I have is dedicated to God." but "anything I might use to help you is hereby dedicated." So by this method they were forbidden to actually helping their parents.

In this they prove that they are ungodly. They worship God only with their lips and not their hearts. Their worship is in vain. We must follow God in all ways, attitudes, thoughts, emotions, words, actions, habits, all things. If we find that we are not we must change whatever is lacking.

Jesus also states that the teachings of men are useless. Worship of God based on human rule making is useless. Human rule making is endemic to all sorts of evangelical denominations. We have to belong to the church God sends us to but most evangelical churches have some rules made by men. If God has a rule He wants us to obey I think it would be in His written word. If we need it He knew we would before those words were written.

41. Fasting Read Lk 5:29-39, Mt 9:14-17, Mk 2:18-22, Mt 6:16-18

This Luke passage is one of the harder passages to interpret with great certainty.

First, the subject is eating and drinking with sinners. Jesus says He is calling sinners to repentance The sinners will believe God wants them back if God comes to get them.

Second, the subject is fasting. Jesus says that while He is with them they should not fast but celebrate. Generations of God's people waited their whole lives and still never learned how God would save them. See Mt 13:16-17, Lk 10:23-24, Lk 2:25-38. Finally God's salvation is revealed in Jesus. This is not a time for fasting but a time of celebration.

Later when Jesus has died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, there will be fasting. So we should fast now. Fasting is associated with prayer so we should fast in the context of prayer.

Third, we have parallel parables, the patch on an old garment and the new wine in old wine skins. There are other occasions when Jesus uses back to back parables to explain something. If we don't understand one, perhaps we will understand the other. It is not clear what the patch of new cloth and the new wine represent. Also it is not clear what the old garment and old wine skins represent. It is clear Jesus is saying mixing the new and the old is disastrous.

The context is the discussion of fasting. In the first Jesus says this is not the time to fast. He would not contradict Himself in the parables that follow so we must assume a connection between fasting and the mixing of the old and new that does not work. If fasting is the old thing, what is the new? The only

thing suggested is the bridegroom, which is Jesus. So we can conclude that fasting is the old thing that should not be mixed with Jesus, the new thing. But, Jesus says His people will fast when He is gone. So we are not there yet.

It has been suggested that Jesus is speaking of a generality of which fasting is a specific. The generality is the contemporary ways of Judaism. So what does this mean?

Jesus does condemn the practices of the Pharisees with few exceptions (only the casting out of demons and trying to win converts come to mind). By way of religious practice Jesus condemns giving so that everyone knows it, praying so that everyone knows it, using religion to gain social standing, adding their rules to God's law, and more besides.

But what new thing can we learn here? The fasting of John's disciples is a clue. I think it is this: trying to wrap up the new covenant, which is Jesus, in old ways of religious thinking and doing, does not work. John was into fasting, living in the wilderness, and other self denials. Jesus never endorses this. Self denial is inward focused, holiness through self denial.

Jesus message began with repentance, and proclamation of the kingdom of God. I think Jesus is saying "Repent, sin not, and build the kingdom." Apart from the avoidance of sin following Jesus is outward focused. Self denial will come soon enough with the persecutions that will accompany proclamation of the kingdom.

Put Your treasure and your heart in a good place. Read Lk 12:31-34

What if we were like Jesus? We would have built our lives around the work God gave us to do. We would never worry or fear for what tomorrow might bring because we know God has us in His hand. We would give our wealth away in order to build the kingdom never fearing that we might need it someday. We would testify to the truth of Jesus by living as if He is really with us supplying everything we need and having a love relationship with us. We would want to give and give big testifying that He is much more important than having wealth.

So seek His Kingdom first. Do God's work. Trust God to do your work, the work of providing for you and your family. If you really want to build the kingdom it will be the target of your thoughts, energy, time, talents, gifts, and giving. And that is where your treasure will be.

IV. LOVE THE LORD

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42. Love the Lord...The Greatest Commandment, Read Dt (Deuteronomy) 6:5, Mt 22:34-40, Mk 12:28-34, Lk 10:25-29

I can't think of a way to love God not included here. So love God in every way. How can we be righteous if we don't love God who is the most righteous and the upholder of righteousness. If we were righteous, but owed God nothing else we would love Him for the fact that He is righteous and so working for the very thing we are working for, and for the help He offers to the righteous. Obviously God would be our greatest ally and we would love Him for that.

But, we do owe God something. Believing that He made all there is we owe Him our loyalty because He made us. We also owe Him our loyalty because He provides everything we need to live day to day. Because He made everything He also has the right to decide what is right and wrong. But, God is not arbitrary in His views regarding righteousness.

God stands for and defines what is right for us. If you love Him and try to do what He approves you will have a better idea what to do in those situations where it is otherwise unclear.

Corinthians 13:4-8

4. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy, boast or is proud
5. It does not behave unseemly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil;
6. It Rejoices not in wrong doing, but rejoices in the truth;
7. endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
8. Love never fails:

I think it appropriate to try to be patient, humble, trusting, hopeful, respectful and not rude or selfish in our relationship with God. To love God means to respect, honor, and support God, to speak well of God, to avoid disappointing God, to be sensitive of the feelings and values of God, wanting to be with God, wanting to know all about God, wanting to know the thoughts of God. Some of these subjects we will cover in other commands, but some might be best covered now.

In your relationship with God are you respectful? Do you remember that He made you? Do you remember that He does not tolerate evil?

In your relationship with God are you selfish? Do you always think first of what you want Him to do for you? Are you mindful of how well you are doing what He desires when you ask Him to do things for you?

When you talk about God to others do you support, speak well of, and honor Him?

How hard do you avoid disappointing Him? Are you mindful of His values?

Do you want to be with God? Always? Do you want Him to go away so you can do what you want without Him watching?

Do you want to know all about God? Do you want to know what He thinks of everything? Do you read the Bible? Do you believe what it says about Him? Do you believe what He says about Himself?

Is your relationship with God all about you? Is it about what you want, and need, what you suffered, what you know, what justice you should have gotten or should get, etc?

Are you afraid of Him, with fear that goes beyond respect? Do you think He is out to get you? Do you think He has been unfair to you or others close to you? Do you think He is watching you to catch you the next time you do something wrong, and then you'll get it? Are you waiting for the ax to fall? These are all negative attitudes about God. If you think or feel these things then at heart you think God is not always righteous. You need to admit this and begin to talk it out.

Satan has been lying to us about the righteousness of God from the beginning. And we have believed it. If you have believed that God is anything less than righteous you have believed one of Satan's lies. It is time to get to work disbelieving it.

IV.A.RESPECT GOD

43.Take God Seriously. Read Mt 22:1-14

Some made light of the king's invitation. They forgot that he was the king. In our democratic society we take for granted that we are free and need not respect anyone. We don't do anything just because someone has told us to.

Sometimes people forget that the police and courts have authority over us in certain situations. If a policeman tells you to pull over you must pull over. In court if the judge tells you to shut up and sit down you have to shut up and sit down.

In most of the world or for most of history respect had to be shown to those who rule. So most readers of this passage would be amazed to hear that people just ignored the king's invitation. That is why Jesus said this. It is absurd and dangerous to ignore God's invitation.

I remember watching a film called "Shogun". In it a Japanese war lord orders one of his samurai to bring his children and kill them in front of him tomorrow. Now the samurai had the choice of abandoning his loyalty and escaping with his family. In this case the war lord would be rid of a samurai who was unreliable. But this particular samurai was honorable and loyal, as he was sworn to be. So he brought his children to the war lord to kill them. The war lord stopped him from doing this. From that point on both men knew that the samurai could be trusted with anything.

What amazed me was that a man was able to receive such obedience from another man. How can it be that we don't give our 100 % obedience to God? A man may or may not have this right depending on what the other has sworn to do. But, God has this right as the result of no oath, but because He made us. He made us and can unmake us and then remake us just as easily. Surely this means He has complete authority over us. How is it we don't respect and obey Him completely?

In the passage some of His people just went off and did something more interesting and more profitable, in their view. Others, who apparently hated Him, killed His messengers. Those the king had killed. The others He decided not to include. So He fills the banquet hall with whoever else could be found.

Even so a man was there who did not respect the king enough to come properly attired. He was "bound and thrown into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." This phrase is a formula Jesus uses to describe hell.

Respect God. Do things His way. It's His way or the hell way.

44.Do not blaspheme Read Mt 12:24-32, Lk 12:10

So what does this archaic term "blasphemy" mean? In short it means misrepresenting God. When we say something about God that is not true we blaspheme. In Jesus day blasphemers might be stoned to death. In our culture people blaspheme all the time.

Some say God does not exist. God's name for Himself is "I Am". When there was nothing else, or where there was nothing else, for in the eternity in which God exists time does not. Others say terrible and hateful things about God. Some create a false God in their own image. Imagining that He must think the way they do. "Just a few years ago I was so smart I had to wear diapers. Now I am so smart I must know what God must be like because He is smart, like me." I can't think of a more outrageous presumption. There are many who believe that above all, God must be nice. If righteousness is always nice then God is nice. Even the righteous would not describe righteousness as nice.

In Romans chapter one Paul says that some things about God should be obvious to everyone until they get so caught up in wickedness that they can't think straight.

Let's assume that God is more knowledgeable, intelligent and understanding than we are. I think He understands us better than we do. I think He must certainly understand Himself better than we ever can. Let us simply take what God has said about Himself and believe it. He gave us a book. In it He is described. We may not be able to interpret it well. We may find contradictions that we can't resolve. But let us assume that God has revealed Himself in His book and it is the truth.

Can we accept that it is the truth? Can we accept that God is the way He is and the way He is has nothing to do with the way we would have Him be? Can we accept that what the Bible says about God is the truth? And this is the biggest question, do we really want to know the truth about God?

If we don't want to know the truth about God we had better keep our mouths shut rather than talk about Him or blasphemy is inevitable. If you were God and someone refused to learn the truth about you but instead told lies about you, when the day comes to judge, how would you judge them?

45.Honor Jesus Read Lk 22:14-20, Mt 26:26-28, Mk 14:22-24

This is a huge justice issue. I remember an old hardware store that I used to go to. The owner, at least, was rather conservative politically. Now we need to not overlook the past when the war protesting students took over the street in front of his business. Any way he had a cartoon pinned up showing two hippies walking down the street planning their day. They had to get their food stamps, pick up the children from the government funded day care center and on and on it went describing how they were taking advantage of all these government funded programs. At the end of it all they plan to meet up to "...protest the dirty rotten establishment." The irony and injustice of all this is that they are protesting the very government that provides them with all these free services. Naturally conservatives think this is funnier than liberals do.

Setting aside all that God has done for us, in so far as He made us and placed us in a world that He also made, which would be paradise except that we miserable sinners live here, let's consider Jesus. Jesus died on the cross, to take our punishment on Himself. He took the bullet for the team. He earned all the blessings of the promises of God by living the perfectly righteous life. He earned it but He shared it with us. These blessings are awesome and will last for eternity. The rest of the world, being yet lost, does not owe Jesus anything for the salvation He provides. For they do not accept it. But we who live in hope of passing out of this world into the paradise that Jesus opened up for us certainly do.

So what can we do for Him. Nothing material certainly. We could love Him. that would be good. But justice demands that we remember what He has done for us, and thank Him and honor Him. How much should we honor Him? Our honor for Him should be as great as what He has provided for us. If eternity in heaven is a much greater thing than eternity in hell then that is the measure of the honor that we owe Him.

We can worship Him and praise Him in words and with song. We can stand or we can kneel and by that acknowledge that He is greater than us as well as better than us. We can praise Him and testify to what He has done before the lost whether they bear to hear it or not. We can put Him first in our lives, ahead

of everything we and the people around us want. The best we can do is to do everything He tells us to. But, in our heart we should honor Him

On top of all this Jesus asks that we remember Him in the breaking of bread, the holy communion that He established at the last supper. This is a simple recurring opportunity to reflect that He gave His body for us, and that was no metaphor. We might have well have eaten His very body for He had to die to save us and by no other means can we be saved. It is as if we were starving and the only way we could survive was to kill and eat Him and He commanded us to do it. That is a metaphor. We killed Him when we sinned. And the Father sentenced him to die when He said that we would be delivered, no metaphor.

I like it. I have to stop and reflect what am I doing. I'm remembering that Jesus gave His life for me and I took it. That is the bread, remembering. The wine is the blood of the covenant. This is not so much as remembering as renewing our covenant with Him. What Is the covenant? We do what we should that we might continue to belong to Him. In belonging to Him we share in His suffering and in His blessings. At the first Passover the blood of a lamb was spread on the door frame. This meant that those inside belonged to God and the angel of death passed over them. With the wine of holy communion we drink the blood of Jesus, we belong to Him, and the righteous justice of God passes over us.

46. Don't try to control God. Read Mt 16:1-4, Mk 8:10-12, 16:14-20, Lk 11:28-32 Jn 4:46-54, Jn 10:31-39.

These passages all have to do with signs. They may seem contradictory. In Jn 10 Jesus says that if the Jews can't believe in Him then they should believe in the miracles He did. So signs are good. In Jn 4 Jesus says that without signs the people will not believe. Signs are good but it disappoints Jesus that the Jews need them. In Mk 16 Jesus confirms His words spoken by the apostles with signs and wonders so that the whole world might believe. So signs are good. Yet in Mt 16 Jesus condemns the Jews for asking for a sign.

I conclude that signs done by God are good but signs demanded by the Jews are bad. The difference must be the attitude. People struggling to believe receive a sign because of Gods mercy. People demanding a sign from God are demanding mercy. Mercy is giving or receiving something better than what we deserve. If the thing is earned then it is not mercy. If the thing is demanded it is not mercy. The Jews were presumptuous. They can't make demands of God. When God is ready to be

merciful then He will provide signs to those who He chooses,

Ironically Jesus provides many signs. In fact it almost seems that the gospels were written to communicate the signs Jesus did. See Jn 20:26-31. These particular Jews had not seen the signs or had not believed them. But, they did not ask everyone to provide signs. So they must have heard that Jesus did these things. It is as if they already have the answer yet they continue to ask the question. God considers this disrespect He has provided the answer yet they do not believe Him.

I worked with people who would ask me questions regarding what management was trying to accomplish. I would answer them as best I could for there was nothing to hide. They did not believe what I told them so after a few of these experiences I stopped answering their questions. I said, "If you are not going to believe me then don't ask me."

47. Fear God, Stand with God, Read Lk 12:4-10, 57-59, Mt 10:22-33, Mk 3:28-30

Here is an attitude I see allot in adult men, particularly the middle aged, "Don't tell me what to do." Children usually don't do what you tell them, but at least they will listen and perhaps agree in their hearts that they should do as they are told. Adults won't usually listen. "I'm an adult. I don't have to listen to anybody."

People who will not submit to any authority on Earth are on a collision course with the greatest authority. God has authority over everyone and everything simply because He made it. Even if you don't think philosophically that God has authority over you because He made you, you will concede that God has authority over you because He alone controls your destiny.

Many people could murder you if they really wanted to. Only God can kill you and then throw you into hell for eternity. Even your enemies know that when you are dead you are irrevocably beyond their reach. They can do nothing more to you. You are never beyond God's reach.

God does not want us to hide from Him in fear that we will do something that will cause His wrath to fall on us. God wants us to live out our lives mindful of the fact that we live in His world, He made us, He has made known what He demands of us, He knows everything we think, feel, do or say. We will have to give an account to Him for all that we have done, and that He will reward and punish us in accordance with what we have done.

if you live out all the details of your life in a manner consistent with the big picture, you will never face God's wrath. But, everyone, the righteous and the evil, must respect God for who He is and the authority He has over us.

48. Stand with God, Read Lk 21:12-19, Mk 13:9-13

In some piece of Russian literature I read, in translation of course, there was related the story of a Russian soldier who lived the wild worldly life. He was captured by the Turks. They told him to renounce Christianity and become a Muslim or be killed. He would not renounce Christianity.

Someone asked him why Christianity was so important to him now but not when he was free to pursue the wild life.

His answer was that when he was living the wild life he never thought about it but now faced with the plain and clear choice he had to choose what he knew to be right.

Some would say the once you are saved you are always, eternally and irrevocably saved. If so then Jesus did not mean what He said when He said we must forgive, we must not blaspheme the Holy Spirit, our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees, we must stop doing evil, we must put His words into practice, we must use what God has given us to do His work, we must be prepared, we must watch, we must make every effort to enter the narrow gate, and in this case we must acknowledge Jesus before men. But let us set aside the consequences of disowning Jesus before men if we can't agree on this. Let us agree that we are commanded to acknowledge Him.

But, every time we sin are we not disowning Jesus? Are we not taking something else as our God? Aren't we on the broad and easy path? In a way yes. But, Jesus seems to be saying, like the Russian soldier, that there are events when we come to the final fork in the road and we must choose rightly. I really don't know but I think it has to do with the amount of volition. Our sin is much more grievous when we have carefully considered our choices and have decided to turn our back on Jesus.

My other thought is that the more God has given you, the bigger your sin if you sin. There were many adulterers in Israel but it was David's son who was killed by it. There were many who offered incense "on every high hill and under every spreading tree", but it was the two sons of Aaron who died for it. There were many generations who did not trust in God, but only the one God brought out of Egypt died in the desert for it.

Consider Lk 12:47-48. it makes sense that more is demanded from the one given more, but what greater thing was the Russian soldier given? If anything it was this: he was given the opportunity to affirm Jesus as Lord before the unbelievers, even at the cost of his life, and die as a witness for the truth.

49. Watch and Pray. See Mt 26:36-45, Mk 14:32-41 and Lk 22:39-46

Jesus tells the three that they should watch and pray for the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Did they do it? Did they do it enough? See Mt 26:56, 69-75, Mk 14:50-52, 66-72, Lk 22:54-62.

We must not take it for granted that we will die in peace. Sometimes disaster gets very close before people see it. It may be that we will find ourselves in the position where we must either stand with Jesus and die (on Earth but not forever), or deny Jesus and live (on Earth but not forever). How will we react? Will we pass the test. The only ones who know they will pass the test are those who passed the test before, yet miraculously lived to be tested in this way again.

We should not back away from the concept and put out of our minds the thought that we will be tested in just this way. Instead we should pray that we will pass the test. We should gather around us the verses that we encourage us to stand with Jesus, such as the parable of the grain of wheat, the story of Stephen. It would be good to read the "Book of Martyrs".

We should remember that we will all die someday. Perhaps a progressive terminal illness when we are old will be a long lingering death, and much worse than a few days of torture and a quick execution while we are young. What I think of is the same I thought of when I sought God at the first. I wanted my life to have a purpose and a meaning. Meaning does not come with survival. It comes with a life lived in accordance with that meaning. The end of a long and useless life may seem more tragic than the end of a short meaningful one.

Let us strengthen ourselves against the fear of dying by not giving into the other fears we live with such as: losing our job, going bankrupt, broken relationships etc.

50. Do not put God to the Test, Read Mt 4:1-11 & Luke 4:9-12

It is possible to assume, I suppose, that now that you are a Christian God will keep you from all harm. Being able to throw yourself off a tall building without harm is an extreme example. Most of us will never do this. But some Christians assume they should never have to suffer health problems, wayward children, psychological issues such as depression, or a tragic past etc. Therefore don't be surprised when you face trials. Don't test God by assuming you should live a life free of trials. Jesus suffered much for us so that we might belong to Him. In belonging to Him we share in His glory. We also share in His suffering. It is a package deal. Let's accept what we must and credit it to Jesus as His suffering and contributing to His glory. Perhaps we accept the sufferings we share with Christ He will have mercy on the people around us and allow His strength to be revealed in our weakness and thus draw them to Himself through that revelation.

51. Don't treat what is holy as if it were not holy. Read Mt 7:6

The first seems straight forward. The second not at all. Previously we considered the ancient concept of "holy" as meaning set aside for God and His purposes. Dogs were not regarded as pets.

Dogs were used as watch dogs. They were fed the carcasses of dead animals. They were fed what people were not allowed to eat.

The principle seems clear enough. Some things are to be set aside for God. Don't treat them with contempt. The application to the Christian life is not so certain. What things do we have as Christians that are holy? Our scriptures are holy. They come to us so that we might understand God and conform to His will. How might we treat the scriptures as unholy. We might dispute the source of the scriptures treating them as if they were another kind of ancient writing. We might use a Bible to hold up a coffee cup. We might use stories from the scriptures as material for jokes.

We have the Holy Spirit. Jesus has warned us not to blaspheme the Holy Spirit for we will not be

forgiven. The Holy Spirit is active in our lives doing things through us if we submit to His leading. If we treat what He has done as another ordinary thing we treat it as unholy. He is not a source of luck but blessing. The manifestations of the Holy Spirit in other people are not funny or to be mocked. To honestly doubt that it is the Spirit doing something in someone else is OK. For there are many spirits in the world.

Throwing pearls to pigs is tougher to figure out. All I can think of is we are warned not to try to use the manifestations of the Spirit or other things of God to impress the unbelieving world in an attempt to accomplish some worldly goal rather than a holy one. These unbelievers might turn on you.

Suppose you have the gift of preaching. Using it to impress people with your speaking ability so as to get a job doing something else like selling or whatever, would be wrong. If you want a job selling, fine. But don't invite a prospective employer to church to hear you preach so as to impress him. I am really at a loss to come up with a better example.

51. Don't add rules to God's Law. Read Mt 23:4, 13-15

If God has made a law it is pretty obvious that we must adhere to that law. We need to do what He says to do and not do what He has said not to do. It is not so obvious, but is it not just as true that we must not add laws to God's law? If taking a law away from God's law is wrong is not adding a law to God's law just as wrong?

I remember finding passages like this:

NIV Proverbs 4:27

27. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil. See also Deuteronomy 5:32, Deuteronomy 28:14, Joshua 1:7, and Joshua 23:6.

I thought if the left means not keeping the law God has given then what does the right mean? It occurred to me that the right would be making laws that God did not give and calling these things God's law which are not God's law.

Anyone can make a law, but when we call the law we made God's law we have lied about God.

The Pharisees created laws that were not God's laws but they treated them as if they were God's laws. They forgot where these things had come from. At first they were trying to create a legal "buffer zone". They would have a rule which kept people from coming near to breaking God's law.

The best example I can think of would be the rule that served as a buffer for God's law regarding flogging. See Deuteronomy 25:1-3. A man was not to be given more than forty lashes. So the rabbis looked at this law and thought, "Someone might miscount. They might count forty when the true count is forty-one. So we will have a law that says no one must be given more than thirty-nine lashes. Now if someone miscounts the guilty man will receive only forty and not more than forty." This makes sense to me. And it is not petty, particularly from the perspective of the man receiving the lashes. This rule they made makes sense, but it is not right to call it God's law, simply because God never said it.

The problem arose from them adding so many laws to God's law and calling them God's law that the people could not obey them all. They made all these laws but they did nothing to help the people keep the laws. That is what Jesus accused them of.

So what is in here for us. Some Churches, church leaders and denominations like to make rules. The problem arises when they treat as sinners people who do not keep their rules. A person sins when they do what is wrong. Who is to decide what is the wrong that makes a person a sinner? God. When we consider our rules to be God's rules, and treat a person like a sinner because they broke our rule, we make ourselves their judge, as well as misrepresenting God. Don't do this.

Remember Jesus cursed the Pharisees seven times. Seven is the number of perfect completion. Jesus cursed them perfectly and completely. What will He do to us if we treat as sinners people who break our rules, we who broke God's law and accepted Jesus grace, the salvation He offers us?

52. Give God what you owe Him. See Mk 12:13-17, Mt 22:15-22, Lk 20:21-26

Herod was the king of Galilee. Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. The Herodians would be the people who supported him. His party as it were.

It was a good trap. They were squeezing Jesus between national and spiritual pride and treason. The patriotic Jews thought they were the people of God and that they should, with God's help, rise up and throw the Romans out of their land. If they expressed this they were subject to being charged

with rebellion, and could count on the Herodians to turn them in. If Jesus said pay the taxes He was a traitor to his people. If He said don't pay the taxes He was a rebel. They had him whatever answer he gave.

God is God of the absolutes. And yet His truth is not always quite that simple. God is righteous above all and then comes justice. Sometimes He gives people what they deserve. That is justice and we don't want it because if we get what we deserve we will die. Sometimes God is merciful. We need this because we need His mercy to live. But we want His mercy for ourselves as we scream that He execute justice on our enemies. The principal behind Jesus' answer is justice. The Pharisees were too busy trying to trap Him to consider what was right. Because of justice, we owe God everything, for He is the source of everything. At the same time He has provided some of His blessings through other agencies. He provided us life through our parents, so we must honor them. Justice demands it. God demands it. But what if our parents contradict God. God has His own relationship with them. He has a way that honors them even as we obey Him. A wife is to obey God and yet honor and obey her father or her husband according to the law of Moses. Everyone was to keep their vows made to God, but if a woman made a vow and her husband, upon hearing of it, says "no" she is released and does not need to keep the vow. See Numbers 30.

We need to honor those through whom God has blessed us: doctors nurses etc. who keep us healthy, teachers who teach us, employers who pay us, firemen and police and military who protect us, the government that serves us in many ways. If we are blessed we must honor the means by which God has blessed us. See Deuteronomy 25:4. See Romans 13:1-8. Sometimes the government and God are in conflict. See Acts 5:27-41. If we put God first we will never be in a trap. He will show us the way out. I have said, "God is crazy about justice." And so He is. If we obey Him we will be just in all our ways.

So we owe God everything, but what did the Jews owe the Romans. The Romans dispensed justice, punishing law breakers. They protected the land of the Jews from foreign invaders. I'll guess they maintained the roads and the Jerusalem water supply. In return for this the Jews owed the Romans taxes. Obedience to the law and occasional labor. Was it a fair arrangement? God will decide. Jesus seems to be more concerned with the Jews obeying God rather than the Romans being just. His answer was in effect, "Yes pay the Romans the taxes you owe for they serve you in a fashion. And repent and obey God in all things for He has provided everything."

Also see Mk 12:1-12. God did everything for the nation of Israel. From promising the land, through the deliverance from Egypt, to David's Empire, to the liberation from Babylon. God did for them

what He has done for no one else. The fact that they rejected His plan for them is a huge injustice.

What about us. What have we received? We have the forgiveness of our sins, the promise of eternal life, the presence of God's Holy Spirit within us. Some of us have received revelations and seen the power of the Spirit. We have received so much we owe God everything. So offer God everything.

Mentally give God everything and let Him give back to you what He wants you to keep, and that may well even be better than it was when you offered it.

V. REPENT

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53.Repent, Read Mt 4:12-17, Mk 1:15, Mk 6:12

So much of what Jesus did was in response to some person, fact or situation. He fed thousands because they Were hungry, healed probably hundreds because they Were disabled or sick or leprous, raised people from death as He encountered dead people, cast out demons as He encountered the possessed, answered questions, reacted to things He saw His disciples doing. Even walking on the water was in response to a logistical issue,

Once Jesus asked His disciples who He was. Once Jesus took three disciples up on the mountain to witness the transfiguration. Three times He prophesied that He would suffer. At least twice and perhaps more times He sent His disciples out to preach and heal and cast out demons.

The exceptions to these notable events are instructive. People are notable for what they did in certain circumstances, but what people "are about" is what they do the rest of the time. So what was Jesus about I ask.

What things did He do regularly? On occasion Jesus led His disciples away from Israel for rest. He traveled to Jerusalem for the feasts. He Went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He prayed in lonely places. He gave money to the poor. He had His disciples baptize people. He preached a regular message. One could say that He regularly healed and cast out demons.

Basically He led a holy life. Two things stand out as not being part of the holy life of a truly God loving Jew. First the miracles, healings, and casting out of demons, these Were not things that a God loving Jew could do. Next the preaching, a God loving Jew would not be a preacher necessarily.

The miraculous healings etc. Were signs that Jesus was from God and that God loved His people and was working to bring them back to Him At this point Jesus message is seen as what He was really all about. See Mark 1:38-39, "...so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." There you have it.

But I think few Christians could tell you what message Jesus preached. The gospel writers do not make much of it. They emphasize the miracles and the remarkable things Jesus said. They probably took for granted that people would know Jesus message. The message is very important. It is not emphasized but it is there if you have eyes to see it. The message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

I don't hear much preaching about repentance these days. It is not interesting, it is not inclusive. It makes us sound dated, intolerant and judgmental Perhaps the reaction in Jesus day was only slightly more positive. Most of the Jews knew they Were sinners. Most of the Americans do not.

Jesus preached this not to be popular but to save lives. Unless you repent you will die in your sin. Then comes judgment Then comes condemnation. Then comes the Weeping and gnashing of teeth, and that, forever. Jesus was trying to save as many as He could. Salvation begins with repentance

Repentance is this. you turn away from your old ways of doing things. you do this because you know they are wrong. you may have deep remorse and even loath what you have done. That helps, but it is turning away from it, being done with it that is most important. "I have done wrong. I will stop doing wrong." Repentance is resolving to yourself that you are done sinning.

Now read Jn 8:1-11. Focus on Jesus words in verse 11. Jesus does not condemn her. He did not come to condemn. But there will be a day of judgment On that day she will die. She will die unless she did what

Jesus told her to do. "Leave your life of sin." See Jn 5:14. To the man who was an invalid for 38 years Jesus said "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." What is worse than being an invalid for 38 years? Being in hell forever. What can the man do to avoid being thrown into hell? Stop sinning.

Now right away some will say, "We can't stop sinning. We need God's help in Jesus to stop sinning." True enough but after we get God's help through Jesus will we stop sinning? If nothing is impossible for God and we resolve in our hearts and minds not to sin, must we go on sinning. Let us try really hard to stop sinning. Then God's help through Jesus will be ever so much more effective. Certainly more effective than believing that sin is inevitable so why fight it?

That is what repentance is. We leave behind our life of sin. If we do not we can not be saved. See Mt 7:21-27. If we keep doing evil we will not be able to stand on the day of judgment we will die the second death.

I am not saying that we must earn our salvation by doing good rather than evil. Jesus earned our salvation through a life of perfect righteousness. We earned by sinning eternal punishment for ourselves. He exchanged the reward He earned for the punishment we earned. We accept this exchange by taking Jesus as our savior and lord and by belonging to Him and by turning away from sin, which is repentance

Even so we can disqualify ourselves from salvation if we will not stop sinning. See Mt 7: 21-27 again. The evil doers Jesus condemns must have taken Jesus as their savior if they took Him to be their lord. But they did not stop sinning so they did not belong to Him, and He never knew them. They continued to do evil and lost their salvation.

54. Repentance is better than righteous talk. Read Mt 21:23-46.

Jesus does not object that the chief priests and elders of the people have the right to ask what is the source of His authority. After all what is to keep any fool from teaching the even more foolish something totally foolish.

Jesus brings up John the Baptist. He was an example of a fool to the chief priests and elders. But what did they do with John? If John was a fool preaching nonsense they did nothing to stop him. If John preached God's truth, they did nothing to embrace it. Perhaps Jesus was leveling this criticism at them. That they neither protect the people from false prophets nor do they accept prophets from God.

Jesus could also be drawing a comparison between Himself and John. He could be saying, "you did nothing about John, why trouble me?"

In fact Jesus is very disappointed with what they did with John the Baptist, and this is a good time to bring up the subject. He lets them have another chance at evaluating John. They do not do any better this time. They refuse to agree that John was from God.

The chief priests and elders of the people correctly conclude that It is better to repent of doing wrong and begin doing right than to start out doing right and then begin to do wrong. This concept is written big in Ezekiel (18:21-28)

The future and the past are not important. What is important is the present. Why is this so? Because you have little control over your future and no control over the past. Righteousness is about the choices you make. you can only make choices now.

Jesus draws a comparison between the two sons in His parable to the tax collectors and prostitutes on the one hand and the chief priests and elders on the other. The former took advantage of the invitation to repent God had offered through John. The latter did not. They are like the second son who said he

would do right but did not do it, who started out right but did not finish.

In addition Jesus points out their extreme waywardness in that, the priests and elders saw the tax collectors and prostitutes repent, and refused to confess that this was a miracle of God. Even though they know how hard it is for people to change. It proves that Jesus was right in saying that they Were not really interested in God or His work. This proves that they needed to repent as much as anyone else.

Jesus goes on to tell the parable of the vineyard tenants. In this it is clear God has judged the people of Israel as being rebellious and no longer the people of God. In the face of this judgment to come the leaders of Israel still will not repent and submit to God's will.

And so God has created a new nation to be His people. These are the Christians. But the Christians must watch or they also will lose their place. The leaders of Israel ignored God's power at work when, through John, He led the tax collectors and prostitutes to repentance. We must be careful that we do not miss out on seeing God at work. For if we do not recognize God at work we may miss fulfilling His will in us.

The Pharisees chief priests and elders of the people Were not really interested in God so they passed out of God's will. If we are not really interested in God we also will pass out of His will. How can this happen? When the focus of our lives is on something other than God we are not watching for God. When we focus our attention on things such as enjoying ourselves, achieving our goals and ambitions, worrying about the future, dwelling in the past, or just the struggle to get by we are not focused on God.

Many people are only interested in what God will do for them. The idea of eternal life in paradise sounds good but it is not as important as the present. If God will not help us with our problems such as health , family, our past, money or what ever frustrates us, we soldier on without Him. We miss the point. If God is not focused on our problems we should not focus on them neither. We should focus on God. If God will not help us with our desires for a mate, a child, a career, money, success, fame, having fun all the time, we pursue these things without Him. We miss the point. If God is not focused on our desires we should not focus on them neither. We should focus on God. The things we focus our attention on are our gods. If God has our attention for just a few minutes during the Weekly worship service while the rest of the hour we spend thinking about our problems and/or desires, He certainly is not our God. And He will leave us to our gods to save us. And they will not

save us.

55. Don't wait to repent. Read Lk 13:1-9

Within a few days of 9/11 this passage came to mind. What would Jesus have said about 9/11. (We didn't start calling it 9/11 for a couple months at least.) Jesus would say, "Do you think that those who died on 9/11 Were bigger sinners than you are. I tell you they Were not. But unless you repent something worse than what happened to them will happen to you."

Some scriptures head line this passage as "Invitation to Repentance" The meaning of this is that when disaster falls God is inviting us to repent. It works like this. Something in my life goes terribly wrong. It makes me stop and think, "Why has this happened?" Then I might think, "Why has God allowed this to happen?" Hopefully I then think, "What do I need to repent of?" If you can say out loud, "What do I need to repent of," without something immediately coming to mind, God has written you off completely.

Don't think you will repent later. Repenting later is no repentance now at all. Furthermore God can not be mocked. If you put off repentance long enough you won't have it in you to repent. Thinking, "I'm

not so bad." is not repentance. By our standards most people are not so bad. Yet Jesus says most people are going to hell. We won't be judged by our standards. We will be judged by God's standard. God's standard is Jesus. If we are as good as Jesus we pass the test. Jesus never did anything wrong, in God's view. Perhaps you think or have thought, as I have, that you never did anything wrong. What you think of as wrong does not matter. God is the judge. What He thinks is wrong is all that matters. I don't think you can refuse to repent for a lifetime and then repent as you see death approach.

Also you can die in an instant and find yourself before the throne of judgment without having repented. God can not be mocked. He can take you out at any instant, judge you and throw you into hell. Don't plan on repenting later. The safe thing to do is to repent now.

Blessed is the person that will take sin seriously and take repentance seriously without having to suffer some disaster. Blessed is the one who considers everyday what they have done. Who listens to the Holy Spirit saying what was wrong and repents right away.

56. Lead the way in Repentance. Read Lk 22:31-46.

I don't think I have ever heard a sermon on this verse or even heard it read in church. I think what Jesus is saying is this: "you, the twelve, must be tested. What was written about me must be fulfilled 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered', and besides this, you have been given much and will receive much more to come. It is just that you be tested. And many will learn by your example."

"you can't believe it but you will all run away. you Simon will deny that you even know me. I have prayed that your faith may not fail. I already know that it will fail in that you will deny me. I pray that you will have faith enough to know that you can repent and I will forgive you. you can begin again to do what is right."

"Because these things will happen to you to such an extreme, you will repent and understand faster than these others. I need you to help them as they deal with the fact that they all ran away, but that I love them, they can repent and come back to me. you will all have the opportunity again to stand for me at the risk of your lives, and for some more than once."

To us Jesus says, "Learn to repent of everything wrong big and small and help others to learn as well."

Jesus began His ministry with the word "Repent!" Let us repent everyday. Let us become experts in repentance. We can't do everything right. We will always sin from time to time. Hopefully we sin less and less and with regard to lesser and lesser things. But whenever we sin we can repent immediately and spend very little time cut off from God by our sin. We can have an almost uninterrupted loving, intimate relationship of following closely behind and beside Jesus.

57. Be reconciled to your brother. See Mt 5:23-26

Reconciliation is a part of repentance. Repentance means I have done wrong. I know it. I turn away from those actions. I mean to never do them again. In the same situation I would do something different. I wish I could undo it. In some cases we can partially undo it. That is reconciliation and restitution.

These things really test our commitment to Jesus and His ways. It will cost us something great or small. It may cost us our pride to tell someone we were wrong. It may cost us our lives. Whatever it costs us if we will not pay it then these things are our God and not Jesus. What we refuse to give back will not save us at the ultimate trial.

At this point you may think "This is crazy!" That's OK. The wisdom of God is foolishness to men. And we are only men. God knows we think His requirements are crazy. At this point, start the process by not

saying "I'm never going to do that." Instead say "Maybe someday I will be able to do that." Say "God is so great and powerful He could make me able to do this." He is too. And why would He not? Perhaps not today, as He tests you to see if you are really resolved to do His will not just for today. But if you are really resolved to do His entire will and do what you can today until you both know you are committed to this. He will help you. Why would God not help someone to do what is right *IF THEY WANT TO DO EVERYTHING RIGHT?* He certainly desires right more than wrong. If you are resolved to do only some things right you may be on your own.

Don't think that attempts to be reconciled will be well received by your past victim. They do not owe you that. God does not owe you that. Don't think that God will bless everything else in your life because you did one difficult right thing. Don't have any preconceived notions at all of what it will be like or how it will work out. Do it because it is right. God does what He does because it is right.

VI. MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO BE SAVED.

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58. Read Mt 7:13-14, Lk 13:23-30, Read Mt 13:9-17, Lk 14:28-35

If Jesus ever said something scary this is it. The idea that someone wants to belong to Jesus, and tries to belong to Jesus, but can't, is sobering. If I make enough effort I belong to Jesus, and I have to thank God that I do. But how is it that some don't. Two things come to mind and there are a lot of scriptures to confirm it. The first is sin. If you won't give up your sinning you are not making enough effort to be saved. If you are putting something before God you are also not making enough effort to be saved.

Those who claim Jesus as their savior will not be saved. Those who do God's work will not be saved. Only those who do God's will will be saved. See Mt 7:21. Trust in Jesus and Jesus alone to save you and do everything He commands you. And the first thing He commands is to repent.

It is a characteristic, not proof, of the saved that they grow with time to be more and more like Jesus. If you are not changing to be more and more like Jesus then you need to make more effort. If you went to the altar years ago but nothing has changed in your life you need to make more effort. I am concerned that you will be lost.

It is not in the powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit that show we are saved. It is a changed life, the fruit of the Spirit, the increasing obedience to Jesus word. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded. If we do what Jesus commanded we will certainly do what is needed for salvation.

How much sin does Jesus allow us. As for the past, repent and you will be forgiven. That means you are resolved not to sin. Going forward through the present into the future you are not allowed to sin. Jesus said, "Go and sin no more." See John 8:11. If you allow yourself some sin even one you have not repented of that sin. God is patient as He waits for people to repent, but He makes no compromise with evil.

Let go of your sin, all of it. Do whatever it takes. Jesus said, "Better to enter into eternal life maimed than to have your whole body thrown into hell." See Mt 18:8-9. Ask God if your sin is OK. If the Holy Spirit does not say "no!" then you are not hearing Him.

Put nothing before God. God said, "You shall have no other God's before me." This is something that God tests in His people all the time. He puts His hand on something in our life and says, "Can I have this?" Sometimes we come to a fork in the road. We have to make a choice between two things. The one thing is God represented usually by something He has commanded. The other choice is something very important to us. With the choice we make, the truth is made known of what really is more important to us.

We may be hearing God's call to do certain things. Maybe it is something simple like, "Go to church." or "Join the men's group." But then we say, "I'll do all that when the house is finished." Is the house your God? Will the house save you from your sins? I see people do something like this: "When the house is finished..." But when the house is finished they are into something else. And they don't do what they said they would. The value of a man does not rest with what he has earned, bought, built or done. None of these things last. What lasts is the word of the Lord and those who have found eternal life.

I don't want to be legalistic because God is not. Regarding these things of our personal priority He does not look at the tiny details of what we have done. But He is always looking at the heart. One man may

rarely be in church, but pays attention. Another man is always there, but his thoughts are not. His mind is somewhere else and not on God. The man who is closer to God, who has put God first is the one who is almost always there and who is almost always focused on God when he is there and who is focused on God a lot of the time even when he is not there.

If we can't spend a half hour with God everyday, focused on Him, because we are too busy. Then all the things for which we found a half hour for are more important, such as: TV, reading the paper, chatting at work, seeing a film, reading a book, pursuing our hobby, talking on the phone, listening to music, playing a video game, surfing the net. The list of spiritually useless things people waste their time on goes on and on.

59. Believe. Read Jn 1:1-28 and Jn 3:25-36

Why must we believe? Is it possible to have faith in Jesus and to obey Him if we do not believe? And is it possible to obey Jesus if we do not believe and have faith?

We can not save ourselves. Even after we accept Jesus, were it possible to never sin again this would not be enough. Obeying God is the best testimony of repentance. But though we must repent, repentance and obedience can not save us. For we sinned in our earlier life. And sin must be judged, condemned and punished by God. God is light, in Him there is no darkness. He is completely righteous. He can not let it go.

If God made something (humanity) and although it was not made to do evil it was capable of it, and this thing did do evil, and God did nothing about it, God would be guilty of condoning evil. He would be an accessory to the crime of evil. Consider it from His perspective. He has made all there is and made it to be good. Until the fall recorded in Genesis 3 there had never been any evil or sin. God allowed the possibility of sin and evil when He made mankind. This is because mankind is free to choose good or evil. This the animals can not do. God faced a dilemma. The most righteous scenario is that He would make creatures capable of choosing good or evil and they would choose good. But if they choose evil God has made evil possible in a world where evil was not possible. How can God be righteous if He allows the possibility of evil? He would be unjust to allow evil. God promises that He will judge, condemn and punish evil. In this way justice is fulfilled. The punishment for people who do evil is hell.

But Christians have done evil as well as the non-Christians. How is it that there is no punishment for them? There is punishment for them but not on them. The punishment the Christians have earned is laid on Jesus.

How can we partake of the salvation that Jesus has provided? In a few words, we need to belong to Jesus. If we belong to Jesus He protects us from our punishment by taking it upon Himself when He died on the cross. So how do we belong to Him? We must do several things, we must confess and repent of our sins. We must obey Jesus. We must believe in Him and have faith in Him. If we do not have faith in Jesus we do not believe in Him nor do we believe Him. How can we think we obey Him if we do not believe Him.

See Lk 18:7-8. It would be an injustice against Jesus for us to accept His salvation without believing in Him, believing Him, or having faith in Him. It would be too great of an injustice against Him. To belong to Jesus we must have faith in Him, confess and repent of our sins and we must obey Him.

60. Be born of water and the Spirit. Read Jn 3:1-21

How can one be born of water? By water Jesus means the water of baptism, being baptized in Jesus name. How can we know this is so? See Jn 3:22-23. See Mt 28:18-20.

How can one be born of the Spirit? There is only one "the Spirit". That is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God.

See Jn 1 29-34. Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit. See Jn 6:60-63. The words Jesus spoke are spirit and are life. See Jn 7:37-39. Those who believe in Jesus will receive the Spirit. See Jn 14: 15-18. If we obey Jesus we will receive the Spirit and Jesus will come to us through His Spirit. Read Jn 15:26. Jesus will send the Spirit from the Father to...Who? Those who belong to Jesus. How can we know this? Read Jn 17:2,9,24. John chapters 13 through 17 are the words Jesus spoke at the last supper. He was with His people and in ch 17 was praying to the Father for His people. Read Jn 20:22. Jesus breathed on His people and they received the Spirit. Those who believe in Jesus and obey Him receive His spirit and belong to Him. Jesus will speak to His people through His Spirit. Will we listen? Will we obey? If not, will we belong to Him?

61. Feed on Jesus. Read Jn 6:51-58 But read all of Jn 6

Hopefully the concept of feeding on Jesus stopped you in your tracks. Is Jesus food, and is He the only food we can eat? Let's look at the metaphor. Jesus is the way the truth and the life and no one can come to God except by Him. See Jn 14:6. He said it so it must be so; that we can only be saved by Him. Also, we must take desperate steps to be saved See again Mt 7:13-14, Lk 13:23-30, Mt 13:9-17, Lk 14:28-35, Mt 11:12-15. Consider that to save us Jesus had to die. The requirement that Jesus had to die, the desperate effort required of us, and the singleness of the means to be saved make the concept of feeding on Jesus a good metaphor. We must be desperate enough to eat Him. Our eating Him kills Him and there is no other way. Jesus comes to us and says "Here is my body. Eat it or die." I'm thinking that the saved understand the suitability of this imagery. If you find it repugnant I don't think you understand how desperate your situation is and the drastic measures required to save you. See Lk 16:16. Force is required to be saved.

We need to be disparate enough to admit that our sins were lethal. They will kill Jesus or they will kill us. We have to be desperate enough to belong to Jesus, abandoning everything else. It used to be that when people were married they were asked, "Do you take this...to be your...forsaking all others?" You may had a commitment to another but all that is set aside when you marry. When you belong to Jesus you forsake everyone and everything for Him.

But there is more than metaphor here. Jesus said my body is real food, and my blood is real drink. The Jews took Him literally as did His disciples. He did not dispute that it should be taken literally. He didn't explain His words, for they had understood Him. In holy communion we eat His flesh and drink His blood as He said. Paul warns us to carefully recognize that Jesus is literally in the holy communion. If we don't recognize Him we partake at the risk of our lives. See 1 Corinthians 11:23-30. Many denominations teach that holy communion is only symbolic. But how could a symbol kill you?

But some will say, "Jesus is obviously not literally in the bread!" But it would be more accurate if they said "Jesus is not physically in the bread" For they can see that Jesus is not physically in the bread. And seeing is believing. But seeing is not believing. Seeing is knowing. What if there are tiny particles of Jesus in the bread? What if there are Jesus molecules in the bread? We would not see them yet they would be there. This is ridiculous. But if Jesus were spiritually in the bread rather than physically in the bread. He would be literally in the bread and not just symbolically in the bread.

Here is another metaphor. Two men draw up a business contract and sign it. Is the contract a symbol? Is it just a symbol of their agreement? Is it physically their agreement? Is it literally their agreement? Is it legally their agreement? If it is only symbolically their agreement, then if it were burned their agreement would still exist even if no copies had been made. If it is physically their agreement, then if it were burned their agreement would not exist even if copies had been made. But if it is legally their agreement it is still binding if it can be proven that it existed whether it now exists or not. Jesus says

that there is a covenant, a contract, between Him and His people. When we share the wine in communion we enter into that covenant if we believe it is Him.

Here is another metaphor. When you pick up your Bible and open it to the Gospel of John, what are you looking at? Is it a symbol of the Gospel of John? If so you would learn nothing from it. If it were physically the Gospel of John, you would be looking at a manuscript about 1900 years old. It is literally the Gospel of John. For you are looking at His words. It is spiritually the Gospel of John for it contains the same spiritual truth.

63. Lose all rather than be lost, Read Mt 18:8-9, Mk 9:43-48

First we need to consider how literal is Jesus being in this passage. What sins do we commit with our eyes? Lust begins with the eyes as do envy and covetousness. For so many things that we want, our wanting begins with seeing. But Jesus says gouge out one eye. How much less lust, envy and covetousness would we have if we saw through one eye not two? Not much, I think. We would lose our ability to perceive distance but we would still recognize what we are looking at, and so we would still want it.

So many sins are carried out with our hands, Theft comes first, but also murder and every form of violence. Violence would definitely be more difficult with one hand, but not impossible. Theft would not be that much more difficult. So much theft is see and grab at least with smaller objects.

What sins do we commit with our feet?

Kicking each other, but it's not a big problem. Jay walking, walking on the grass, stomping the flowers. The problem with the feet is where they take us. But having one foot we would still get there, just slower.

So a strict literal interpretation does not make sense. But you have to consider the literal first. I think that many liberal Christians are bound for hell because they thought Jesus meant something else when He said "Go and sin no more!"

So what if we gouged out two eyes, or cut off both hands or feet? Not having any sight would mean a great reduction in lust from a distance. No hands would make theft a lot harder. But there would still be lust. In cultures where women are covered head to toe there is still lust. It has been said that a glimpse of a little ankle can be exciting. The mind fills in the details. And of course we would still hear the women's voices. Did you ever listen to a woman on the phone or radio or on a recording and decide that she sounded hot? Then you meet her and decide that she does not look hot. You do not need your eyes to lust. They just make it a lot easier. Therefore Jesus is speaking metaphorically.

Time to examine the metaphorical. Whereas lust, envy, and covetousness are stimulated by sight, and they are all kinds of desires, the eyes represent what we desire. The hands represent what we do. The feet represent where we go. I'm surprised Jesus didn't mention the tongue. Because most sin is in what we say. So let's add the tongue now. Many Americans are eating themselves to death so let's add the stomach. The eyes are our desires, the hands our actions, the feet our travels, the stomach our appetite, the tongue our words. I'm pretty certain that Jesus never meant the reproductive organs, but some have thought so. See Mt 19:10-12. I know I think things that I should not be thinking so I will add my brain. Many people are too lazy so let's add the buttocks to the list. For all those who are way too nosy let's add the nose. And for those who like to hear gossip or obscenity let's add the ears.

Now we can restate what Jesus has said comprehensively. "It is better to enter into life without your hands, your feet, your eyes, your tongue, your stomach, your genitalia, your brain, your buttocks, your nose, or your ears than to have all these things and be thrown into hell." When the metaphor is unpackaged we have: "It is better to enter into life having lost your ability to: do anything, go

anywhere, want anything, say anything, eat anything, make love, think, rest, learn anyone's business, hear any news, than to have all these things and be thrown into hell." Hell is a very nasty place to be for a short time let alone a very long time. So we conclude that giving up everything to avoid hell makes sense.

But, deep inside we think that we should not have to give up what we naturally do, what we reasonably do. Therefore, what Jesus is saying is this, "Give up anything that is going to kill you. Give up what is normal, natural, and what you take for granted if it is killing you. That's what it might take, to live." Paul says the same thing. See First Corinthians 6:9-13. The wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. If doing what is natural and reasonable leads to sin, give it up, before it kills you.

63.Be Wise. Read Mt 25:1-13.

There is a relatively wide opinion on what this parable means. For one thing it describes wedding customs that are greatly different from ours. Not the least of which: the bridegroom is marrying ten virgins at one time. My thinking is that Jesus does not choose the wedding as the theme of the parable because there are a lot of details that have theological meaning. He chooses this setting because of the emotional impact produced, that a lack of prudence leads to a complete rejection.

Even so let us assign roles to each of the characters and events. The bride-groom is the authority so He must be God. Specifically He must be Jesus. Jesus says that He goes to prepare a place for us. See Jn 14:1-3. This is what a bride-groom did. After the betrothal he would go build a house for the bride. When it was prepared he came and brought the bride home. Also see Rev 19:6-9. The church, that is the multitude of those who belong to Jesus, is the bride of Christ.

The ten virgins represent ten followers of Jesus. The five who did not bring oil in jars were foolish, imprudent and not diligent. They represent followers of Jesus who are foolish, imprudent and not diligent. The five who brought oil in jars were wise, prudent and diligent. They represent followers of Jesus who are wise, prudent and diligent.

The long period of waiting represents the wait from the time we begin to follow Jesus until His glorious reappearing.

Others read more detail into what follows than I do. I don't see what follows as a sequence of events. I see the following as being in fact just two events. The first is the long term of the present age during which the same things are repeated over and over again in many lives. The second is the judgment which ends the age.

The observation of the foolish virgins represents the observation of some of the followers of Jesus all along, that they have not been wise, prudent and diligent. The advice of the wise virgins to buy oil is the advice that diligent followers have been giving to the non-diligent followers of Jesus all along. "Do what is diligent, buy oil", meaning be diligent followers of Jesus keeping all His commands. This has always been good advice.

But when the day of judgment is at hand it is too late. At last the foolish virgins realize the importance of being diligent but it is too late. The time for diligence has passed. Now is the time of judgment. The errand of the foolish virgins in the night to buy oil and the arrival of the bride-groom while they are gone, the shutting of the door, the return of the virgins, and the condemnation they receive must be taken all together, and as meaning "Judgment has come there is nothing more that can be done.

Wandering about the streets of the city at night was not something that people normally did. There was no light. Without a torch the people you met could not be identified. The night was the time for thieves, murderers, adulterers and prostitutes and those who visit adulterers and prostitutes. These five virgins would in all likelihood be mistaken for prostitutes.

The bride-groom is an important man, perhaps a king. Who else would marry ten women at one time. He can't marry a prostitute. He must marry a virgin so that there will never be any doubt that the children she bears to Him are in fact his. Therefore when the five foolish virgins return he treats them with contempt suggesting that they are in fact fornicators, adulterers or prostitutes.

What is represented by the errand, return and dismissal of the five foolish virgins is this. The "followers" of Jesus who do not prudently obey what He has commanded are not in fact following Him. Any attempt to obey when Jesus' return is seen to be eminent is useless. It is too late. Judgment is come. The phony followers will be cast out into the darkness. It will be seen that they were not really following Jesus at all. They were pursuing other things. What other things does not matter. Doing what Jesus has told them to do was all that mattered and it is not what they did.

The only thing we have to do is: everything He tells us.

64. Be Ready. Read Mt 24:42-44, Lk 12:35-40, and

Lk 21:34-36, Mk 13:32-37

This is another passage that might require some background. Generally people put out their lamps when it was time for bed. Oil cost money. There would probably be some hot coals banked in the hearth so they could start a fire the next day.

If during the night someone is pounding on the door someone would have to get up carefully walk to the fire pit or fire pot and light a taper of some kind then find the lamp and light it. They could answer the door and be able to tell who it was pounding on it. This took time.

If instead someone was expected at the door during the night. One or more servants would sit up dressed and ready. A lamp would be lit and trimmed to save oil. If someone came to the door a servant could quickly trim the lamp for light and open the door. This is how servants would be prepared when they knew their master was out at night but would be returning home before dawn. They would be ready to spring into action to let Him in the door and do whatever he required.

Servants who knew their master was out at night and would be returning home before dawn yet had put out the lamps and undressed for bed would be considered useless and quite stupid. Such servants deserved a beating for being unprepared to let their master into the house requiring Him to stand outside in the dark an easy mark for thieves and murderers.

And so in this passage Jesus is telling us to be diligent and prepared for when He returns. We need to be as we ought to be when He returns. Well then, how ought we to be? We ought to be obeying all He has commanded us.

65. Leaders of Jesus' church must be ready for His return. Read Mt 24:45-51 and Lk 12:41-48

When a man traveled away from home he had to leave someone in charge of the household. Assuming there was no wife or son or other close relation and even if there was as few as two servants one servant must be in charge to see that everything runs as it should while the master is gone. Typically the master was a farmer. There was a lot of work that had to be done in a certain way and at a certain time. Running the household was an important responsibility that called for someone smart enough to get it done and diligent enough to see that it was done.

By far the largest amount of labor done on a farmstead would be to grow food. Food was money. A certain amount of grain insured that a person would be able to live and work for a certain period of time.

Servants were only profitable if they produced more than they consumed. If not, they would be sold. Each servant needed enough food to provide the energy to work. Depending on the servant and the

work they did they required more or less food. Too little food and they slowly lost weight until they could no longer do the work. Too much food and they would put on fat or just burn it up. Most servants would gladly eat more than they needed to just as we do today. Being fed too much food could tip the balance between profitability or not for a certain servant. Therefore the job of allotting the daily food to the household was an important responsibility.

In the parable of the prodigal son the son remembers that his father's servants were well fed.

In the metaphor at hand Jesus compares two hypothetical servants. One executes the responsibility assigned Him. When the master returns he finds that the servant has been trustworthy. Being trustworthy with an important thing meant that the servant would be trustworthy with a really important thing. And so the responsible servant is given great authority and responsibility. This is considered both an honor and a reward just as a promotion in one's job is today.

The other hypothetical servant is wicked. He neglects his responsibilities and instead uses his authority to lord it over the other servants dealing out unearned punishments as an expression of dominance and power. No doubt every slight and injury, real or imagined, the servant suffered at the hands of the other servants would be avenged and several times over. Not only this but the servant eats more than he should and probably the master's choice foods that he is not allowed to eat.

On top of it all he drinks and gets drunk. It is unlikely that a typical master ever gave his servants any wine at all. What would be the profit in that. And of course being drunk would increase all the other damage being done and add to it the fact that the other servants could now run amok as well, for the drunken chief servant would not know what was happening.

The master of the wastrel servant will of course return at an unexpected time. That was the nature of travel and business. He is so enraged, and rightfully so, that he no longer has any use for the servant. But rather than assigning Him hard labor in the vineyard or fields or even selling Him the master proceeds to brutally murder the servant. This was not legal according to the law of Moses but probably not unheard of or completely unexpected in Jesus' day.

Finally Jesus takes His listeners right out of the metaphor and adds that the wicked leader of Jesus' people represented by the wicked servant will be assigned a place with the unbelievers. This is to say he is thrown into hell.

In the passage in Luke Jesus goes on to say that people who know what they needed to do but did not do it will be greatly punished. To know what Jesus wants you to do and to not do it is to be wayward and disrespect Him. When Jesus tells you to do something you will have no doubt it was Him who told you (no one in the scriptures ever was in doubt that God had spoken to them when He had). When Jesus tells you to do something you will have no doubt what it was He told you (no one in the scriptures ever was in doubt about what God had told them). Once Jesus has told you to do something you need to do it just as much as you need to obey the Ten Commandments.

VII.FOLLOW

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66. Give up your life to follow Jesus. Read Mt 4:18-22, Mk 1:16-20, 2:14-15, Mt 9:9, Mt 13:44-46

For many years I have dread the day when Jesus will tell me to leave everything I have and go somewhere to do His work. So what really bothers me about this?

I think that Jesus will call me to go work for nothing leaving me nothing to support my family with. At the same time I need to support them. My children are now adults and though they are not independent they certainly have what it takes to be. How would I take care of my wife? She might find gainful employment, but she won't be able to keep this house. On top of this I have my parents and no siblings. Who will take care of them. So far they are taking care of themselves, but...It is important to remember that God is righteous *all the time*. Why would God trap a person trying to follow Him in a box where he can't do what is right? The problem is me. I don't totally trust Him if I think that He would do such a thing. But this is not to say that He would not put me in situation where I might have to choose between Him and something else.

Then there is the fact that I am not a good traveler. I can keep from getting lost but I don't really relax away from home. I am too conscious of what can go wrong when you travel. On top of this I only speak English. But, the Lord will always do what is right. He might think it right that I up and go, and up and go I must.

When God the Father spoke to His people in the past, they never had doubt that it was Him, And they never misunderstood what He wanted. You will read no where in the scriptures, someone saying "I didn't know it was you!" or "I didn't know that was what you wanted!" or words to that effect. If He speaks to you, you will know it is Him and what He wants.

Now there is some question as to whether we always recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit. See First John 4:1-6. We need to know the scriptures. A voice that contradicts them is not God.

We also need to know the difference between what God has said is right and what God's people have said is right. The Pharisees added their own laws to God's. How dare they do this. Then they condemn those who did not keep their laws. But, modern Christians have done this also. Where in the scriptures does God say: Don't smoke, don't drink, don't dress the way other people do, Read only the King James translation, don't dance, don't play musical instruments, don't go to the doctor, don't go to the theater, don't eat meat, don't marry, home school the children. That's all I could think of in two minutes. It is hard enough to keep God's law: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, love your neighbor as yourself, forgive your brother from your heart, give to him who asks, teach them to obey everything I have commanded. We don't need more laws certainly.

So Jesus told many men to follow Him leaving behind whatever had to be left. And Some did. Where would we be if they had not?

If God tells me to do something and I am certain it is God then I will understand what He wants and I need to do it, whether I'm suited to it or not. Once you know God has told you to do something it has the same authority as if it were one of the Ten Commandments.

67. Let the Dead do it... Read Mt 8: 18-22 and Lk 9:57-62

Jesus probably invited many people to follow Him. We know He invited the first four disciples and Mathew. He later chose the Twelve. Later still He chose the seventy-two. We elsewhere look at the rich young man. Here we hear two of the responses.

First, "Let me go bury my Father." It is not likely that his father had just died and needed burial. In the middle east to this day they bury people the day they die. Most probably the man's father was old and would be gone soon. The man wanted to care for, and honor his father. Jesus' response is outrageous. He suggests that those who stay behind are not dead physically but dead spiritually. He says the spiritually dead are capable of burying the physically dead, but that only the spiritually alive can proclaim the Kingdom of God.

What I hear in this is "Don't ever let any work that the unbelievers can do distract us from the work that only the followers of Jesus can do." I also apply this to charitable giving. The unbelievers will give money to many worthy causes such as overcoming cancer, poverty, illiteracy etc. The unbelievers will not support Christian missionaries and evangelists. Therefore we must support these

things related to the Kingdom of God. I also extend this concept to spiritual gifts. At present I am the only Bible teacher at my church, whereas there are some number of people who can work on the church repairs and fund raising events. I must not let church repairs and fund raising events distract me from teaching, whereas I am the only one who does it. If I am doing all I can to teach and still have time and energy left over then I can do these other things.

God made this clear to me during the following events: I had been invited to help with a youth ministry. I have never thought myself gifted to work with youth. I had not committed myself to attend all the meetings etc. A meeting was planned to follow right on the heels of the Bible study I lead. The time came for this meeting to start, but I sensed that the Bible class was not ready to end. So I blew off the meeting and lead the class for another 40 minutes. During this time several people opened up and shared some things from the heart. This is both rare and needful and thus precious. But, it would not have happened had I left to attend the other meeting. I consider this a sign from God not to let even good, needful Christian work distract from the work I am gifted to do. The logic is simple enough. The work that God has gifted you to do is the work that God has chosen you and told you to do. Do what God has chosen you to do.

Second, "Let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus' answer is again outrageous. You can't plow a field by looking back. You must look forward to keep the plow on course. You can't be distracted by what is behind you and properly perform what is before you. If you must say goodbye to your family before you start God's kingdom work, then your family is more important to you than God's kingdom. God will find someone more worthy to do His work. Another way to see this: You have had your whole life to be with your family. You finally have, for the first time, a chance to do kingdom work. If you do not have a greater desire to begin God's work right away then you do not have desire enough.

68. Deny Yourself. Read Mt 16:24-28, Mk 8:34-38, Lk 9:23-26, 12:4-10, 14:27-33, 17:33, Jn 12:23-26, Mt 10:38-39

What does it mean to deny ourselves? I think of it as abandoning your self interest. You no longer look out for number one. Or you have a new number one to look out for. Not only this but you deny your impulses and desires. You put to death the old selfish human flesh self and all of its ways and live a new life in the Spirit, doing what the Spirit desires.

Why must we deny ourselves? How did it come to this that we need to die in order to live? The problem was the way we were living. We were getting by maybe. It was as if we were eating too much, drinking too much, smoking, using drugs, sitting on the couch watching TV all the time. Never going to the doctor or the dentist, eating nothing but snacks and those off the floor. We were French

kissing everyone we met. We worked in chemical plant where we never received any safety training at all. We were working around open vats of flammable liquids while smoking cigarettes. Sometimes for

fun we played in traffic or Russian roulette. That is what our lives were like. We were sinning almost all the time and sin will kill us. Is it any wonder everything needs to change for us to live with and belong to Jesus?

But someone will ask, isn't there something good in my old life? But the best things we did we did in such a bad way they were no use at all. Someone will say "I'm a family man." But examine your relationships with your wife, children and parents. Are not all these relationships selfish insensitive and undisciplined at best and controlling, demeaning and toxic at worst? Every facet of our lives can be improved therefore it must be improved. God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. How could He ever say, "A little sin is OK, A little darkness is OK. You still do some things not as well as you can but it is OK you are trying hard enough." Not likely.

What if Jesus took some of the penalty for your sin say a half. He did enough to subject Himself to getting betrayed, arrested, falsely accused and tried, mocked, insulted, beaten, flogged, dragging the cross. What if when He got to Golgotha He said, "Well, I did enough don't you think? I did plenty. All those sinners will just have to spend sometime in hell. They can spend every other day in the lake of fire."

69. Testify. Read Jn 15:27, 17:18, 20:21, and 21:18-19.

What does this mean? We have experienced God in our lives. We need to share with other people, as many as possible, what God has done. It is not our problem whether they believe it. That is their problem. But how can they believe if the followers of Jesus will not tell them what God has done. They can read the Bible for themselves, but will they believe that all those miracles really happened? Not likely. They will think that they are just fairy tales. We need to tell them what has happened in our lives.

It is a strange thing, but when you tell someone your story they may think you are crazy but they will keep it to themselves and they will listen. Part of it is they are being polite. Part of it is that calling someone a liar is bad for your health. And part of it is that they may want for themselves what you are describing even if they don't believe you actually have it.

Jesus said that no one can come to me unless the Father draws Him Jn 6:44. Perhaps the Father will begin to draw someone just as you share your testimony with them.

So what is our testimony? It is everything you know that God has done for you. It is every experience you know you have had with God. It is like legal testimony. You are prepared to swear under oath that God really did those things and to describe how you know it is so. You are a legal witness. But what if someone says they will kill us unless we admit it is a lie. What better way to convince them. "I would rather die confessing that these things are true than to live and deny they ever happened." Our word martyr comes from the Greek word meaning witness. The witness would rather die than admit that this is all a lie. Why is that? Because it is the truth. Not many of us will have to die for the truth, but we all will have to live as if these things are true or we will die.

Now for some tips regarding our testimony. Go over your testimony in your mind so that you can share it without taking up a lot of time. Provide the details of where, when, how, who, etc. Keep the story of how you found salvation under two minutes and everything else shorter than that. You need the permission of your listener to share these things. Ask, "Do you want to hear how...?"

One way to have someone be interested is when they say something to you about some aspect of life or spiritual things. You share how you used to think before you became a believer. You say, "I used to think such and such about this, but then something happened." If they ask what happened you share your testimony about your salvation. When you are done you share your new opinion about the topic you were discussing. If you get a chance you can ask "Has anything like that ever happened to you?"

Now with your salvation testimony you need to know what is required to be saved. I believe you have to repent, that is admit you were wrong and turn away from your old worldly way of doing things. Then you have to ask Jesus to forgive you and to save you. Then you have to resolve that you are going to live the rest of your life His way because He is now your savior and Lord. This is the gospel in a nut shell. You need to put together when you did these things. If you never did you don't belong to Him.

70. Do what you see God doing. Read Jn 5:16-21.

What precedes this passage is the healing of the man who was an invalid for 38 years. What follows is a discourse on how the Father has given authority to the Son.

In v 19 Jesus says that He can do only what He sees the Father doing. Now let's apply some logic. Jesus is greater than us. It follows that Jesus is more potent than us. It follows that we can not do anything that Jesus can not do. Therefore if Jesus can do only what He sees the Father doing. We can do only what we see the Father doing.

Jesus intends that we be like Him as much as possible. See Mt 10:24-25. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher. Disciples were students of the man discipling them.

See Mt 20:17-28. Jesus came to serve. The greatest among us will serve the rest. Therefore to be great serve as Jesus did. Be like Jesus.

See Jn 14:12-14. If we have faith in Jesus we will do what He did. Therefore we will do everything that Jesus did, but only what we see the Father doing. Therefore we must do everything we see the Father doing.

In Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby states that if we see God at work it is an invitation to join in that work. I would say it is required that we join in that work.

Will we know what to do? Perhaps not or perhaps always. I remember a large group of teens going to the altar doing an altar call. One of the old pastors at that camp went down to do something, but what, there were teens everywhere. It was impossible to even tell which of them they were praying for. So he knelt by them raised his hand and silently prayed for the whole lot of them. I think he did what he was to do and that the Lord was moving in that event.

We will know better what to do if we have been diligent to read, to study, to learn, to serve, to love, to follow, to walk hand in hand with God. If we do everything that we can, will not God do everything needful that we can not?

See Jn 11:34-44. Only Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead. He gave the people the work that they could do. All they could do was believe and take away the stone. They did and a great work of God was done.

In v 17 Jesus says that His Father is working to this very day, which is the Sabbath. Therefore the Father works on the Sabbath. Jesus is also working and on the Sabbath. We are Jesus servants. It makes sense that being His servants we should work while He rests. The servants do the work the master gives them. If our master sees fit to work on the Sabbath we also should work. But, we should be careful to do His work on the Sabbath not ours. That is the work He gave us to do not the work we think we need to do.

VIII. HAVE A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

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71. Don't Pray Like This. Read Mt 6:5-15

v 5 Whereas the hypocrites want to be seen praying by men so as to win their praise. In being seen by men they accomplish their objective. Couldn't they also be rewarded by God? They don't pray to be rewarded by God. The focus is not on God. There is no relationship with God in their prayers. They are not talking to God and God is not listening.

v 6 Jesus contrasts God, His Father, with the hypocrites. They pray to be seen, God is unseen by human eyes. If you pray in secret then only you and God know you are praying. To whom are you

talking to? You could be talking to yourself. I inevitably get distracted by my own thoughts when I pray and end up talking to myself. Other than that you are talking to God because He is the only one to hear. In talking to Him you are building a relationship with Him.

v 7 We need to think we will be heard only because God is listening. The pagans hope to influence their god's by manipulation. We are not to be like them trying to manipulate God by the volume of our praying. We are not to manipulate God at all. As a parent it has been comical to hear my children ask me for something, trying all the while, to influence me with subtlety. But, how subtle can a child be? God knows your thought before you do. You may wish to influence Him by all means. But you will influence Him by loving and trusting Him alone.

God wants to build a relationship with each of His people. Attempts to manipulate or control God break down the respectful loving trust relationship and build a relationship based on knowledge, power, and control. In this instance I mean knowledge of someone so as to be able to control them, not knowledge of someone as the result of a love based relationship.

Trying to control God is the same as using magic. Magic is power and control based on a knowledge of a supernatural world. I loath things that smack of, some kind of control or manipulation of God, which is, magic. If we would not attempt to get what we want by chanting incantations, mixing potions, or sticking needles in something inanimate, then let us stop trying to influence God by praying using a certain formula, many words, writing our request on our hand, or any other way.

How do you feel when you realize that you are being manipulated? You feel diminished, disrespected and demeaned. You do not want to be treated this way. Therefore don't do to God what you don't want done to you.

72. Pray Like This. Read Mt 6:5-15, Lk 11:1-4

The Lord's Prayer divides into two halves. The first is about God and our relationship to Him. It is right that it come first as "Our" not "The". "Our" means possession and relationship. "Father" means a familial relationship. When Jesus appeared to Mary the Magdalene at the tomb He said "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Jesus has opened the way to a closer relationship with God. God is happy to belong to us. And God is willing to be our Father. If you were raised by a good father you know that God will take care of you. He will love you. To Him you are precious. And, he wants you to grow into spiritual maturity.

We are reminded that God is in heaven. He is greater than we are. We will never have a relationship as equals. It would be wrong because we are not equal.

I wonder how many American adults know what "hallowed" means. But it is popular to use this word

because it comes to us from the King James Bible, and has been repeated so often. Similarly we may wonder what makes God's name different from Himself. "Hallowed be Thy name" could be better rendered as, "May everyone remember that who You are and Your reputation, and everything about You are set apart and above everything we know."

The kingdom of God is the nation of all His people, whether dead or alive, whether now or when Jesus comes again. It is frequently called the "kingdom of heaven" in the gospels. The Jews were careful not to take the name of God in vain. So careful that they did not refer to Him directly. So they called His kingdom the kingdom of heaven. We are wishing and asking for the kingdom of God to come as well as blessing it and Him.

We are wishing and asking that God's will, what He desires and has chosen, be done as well as blessing it and Him. It is important to remember that what He wants is done when we do not want to do what He wants us to do. If you think as the world thinks, and we all do, doing what God asks us to do is scary.

Now we enter the second half of the prayer where we ask for what we need. First we ask for food, and I think that this can be extended to asking for everything we need to physically survive. Note that we ask for daily bread and not long term security. We may be more content and at peace when we have security, but it makes us complacent and less trusting of God. We need God to build our love-faith relationship with Him. Being dependent on Him and having Him bring us through great difficulties will build a much greater relationship with Him than being set for life.

We ask that our sins be forgiven, but more specifically we ask that we be forgiven to the extent that we forgive others. If we are not forgiving others we are in effect cursing ourselves. We really must, must, and must forgive everyone everything. We really really need to ask God to help us to forgive everything done by everyone.

I much prefer to render "don't lead us into temptation", as "Do not put us to the test." As in "don't test us the way you did Abraham." God can and does test people. If you start boasting about your strength you can expect God to test how strong you are. The vast majority of our strength comes from God. When He tests us He takes away some, most, or all of His strength in us. Don't boast of anything but the Lord. Let Him be all the strength in you. In contrast James tells us that God does not tempt anyone. It seems pointless to ask Him not to do that which He will never do.

See Mt 26:31-45, Mk 14:27-41, Lk 22:39-46, Jn 13:36-38. The disciples did not see the need to pray for the strength not to fall to the temptation to do whatever needful to save themselves. They really did not believe Jesus when He told them how the night's events would unfold. They definitely did not believe they would run away. They thought they were strong. This is easy to do when danger is far away. We can imagine ourselves strong. When danger is near it is easy to consider for the first time the many aspects, facets, and subtleties of bodily danger and fear. I have seen and experienced irrational fear. I have seen a man froze with fear who in his own mind was not froze but was still moving.

The best portrayal of this I have seen was in the film, "Saving Private Ryan", The clerk who knew languages was froze with fear. Watch that scene closely and more than once if you can. Someday you may be faced with your own fear. Recognize that you do not think straight in those circumstances of "flight or fight" as it is called. Prepare yourself by praying that you will not fall into the temptation to save your self at the cost of everything else.

The evil one is strong. You want protection from him. You may think you are strong enough to resist him. But, are all your loved ones strong enough too. He messes with us by messing with the people around us. So ask for protection from him for yourself and the people around you.

73.About Praying and not giving up. Read Lk 11:5-13

Some of this I have heard and some I surmise. At night it was dark in Israel. There were no street lamps. Inside a house it was darker at night. There was no window glass so the wall openings were large enough to let out smoke. But were small enough to not let out all the heat. There was no light in the house. No candles or lamps would have been used as night lights. Clothing was expensive. Poorer people might wear hand me downs. There was no bedding for poor people. People slept on mats on the floor. Perhaps only the parents had cloaks. The whole family would sleep together under them when it was cold. To try to get up in the dark would be difficult as the whole family would have to be awakened and then the stumbling around in the dark would begin. Houses had one or two

rooms and few possessions but one had to avoid stepping on the wife and kids. This would be a huge inconvenience.

Pretend that the above describes your reality at night. So now someone you know comes to your door to pound on it to get you to wake up and give him some bread. You are not going to do it. You will tell him to get lost. Because getting up in the dark is a huge inconvenience.

But there is a bigger inconvenience. Having someone pounding on your door all night. Eventually you realize that he is not going away on his own. So to get rid of this guy you will give him what he wants. Or perhaps you will open the door and beat him.

What is Jesus saying. He is saying keep praying for something until God realizes that you are never going to quit. Then He will give you what you ask. God knows how long you will pray. If you are never going to quit He knows this. If you will eventually give up, He already knows this. But, do you know it. You need to be resolved that you can never stop praying. For some things, we know we will never stop praying.

It is not the effort required that keeps God from extending Himself to save people or to grant some other request. It is that God already has a perfectly righteous plan that flows from His perfectly righteous will. We are asking Him to do something that is less than what He has planned. But there are two things that might cause Him to change His mind.

The first is that we are doing all we can to live holy and righteous lives. The righteous must listen to the righteous, perhaps not accede, but at least listen. If we are righteous God will listen to us. We may not get what we ask but He will listen. If we are not living holy and righteous lives then we are not listening to Him. Why then should He listen to us?

The second is trust. We trust in God as our loving Father our hero as it were. If we are truly His children following Him as best we can, it pains Him not to give us the good and completely unselfish thing that we ask for.

For me, I will pray for the salvation of my family members until I am dead, they all are dead, or some are dead and all the rest are saved. Christians do not abound in my family. If I don't pray for them who will? They are getting old and are hopelessly resistant to change. Only God can save them now. And why should He. These people have been turning their backs to Him for decades. Unless God moves Himself and puts forth His power they will die in their sins. I am asking God to get up out of bed and save these people. When God and I both know I won't give up then He will begin to go to work.

God won't make a choice for someone, but He can make life pretty difficult until someone gives in.

Consider Jonah and Paul.

74.Have Faith and do anything, Mt 21:18-22, Lk 17:5-6, Read Mt 7:7-11, Mt 17:14-20, Mk 9:14-29, Lk 9:37-42, Mk 12:41-43, Mt 8:23-27, Mt 13:54-58, Mt 14:21-36, Mt 15:21-28

I probably struggle with the Mt 21 passage more than any other. I think many people at times have believed 100% that God will answer a particular prayer, but He did not. I know I have had that experience. I suppose the problem can be solved by saying that I only thought I believed 100%.

The mustard seed is the smallest of seeds. It's size is what matters here in Jesus' metaphor. If you have the tiniest amount of faith the mulberry tree will obey you. But, this would seem to contradict Jesus saying you must have complete non-doubting faith.

I can't help but believe that God is not going to answer many prayers said without doubt when those prayers are selfish. I don't think that my faith without doubt can over rule His sovereignty. He rules the universe not me.

See NIV James 4:2-3

You do not have, because you do not ask God.

3. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Perhaps there is a true faith, about which I know nothing, of which the tiniest amount can move a mulberry tree, and a large amount of which can move mountains. This true faith is completely non-doubting.

Perhaps what Jesus is saying is that the tiniest amount of faith can accomplish things but we have none at all. He laughs at the concept of increasing faith when there is none to start with.

This is what I can take from this passage: It is useless to ask God for selfish things. It is disrespectful to God to ask Him for anything if you don't believe He listens to you or there is no "chance" He will do it. Do your part to build your relationship with God. Trust that He loves you and hears you. Understand that there are times when His completely righteous will can be changed just because one of His children trusting in His love and living in accordance with His will has asked Him for something unselfish. The asking has made God's changed will more righteous than His unchanged will. So the prayer has moved God.

Above all the preceding, remember there is nothing God can not do. But that there are many things He will not do. God will never do what is wrong and He will never break a promise.

75. Pray and don't give up Read Lk 18:1-8

In the first verse Luke tells us what the lesson of this parable is. Perhaps Luke did not think everyone could figure it out so he added the meaning to be certain.

Again to unpackage the parable we must assign roles to the characters. In verse 7 we read that God will bring about justice for His chosen ones. In the parable the one with the power of delivering justice is the judge. So the Judge is God. The widow is the one pleading to the judge for justice. In v 7 it is the chosen ones who cry out to God. So the widow represents the people of God. In v 3 another character is mentioned. That is the adversary. He has wronged the widow or at least she thinks so. But, we have no reason to doubt her so we assume he has in fact wronged her. V 7 assigns no one to the adversary. The biggest adversary of the people of God has always been Satan. His "spirit" in the world hates Christians and Jews alike.

The widow (God's people) continuously pleads for justice from the judge (God) against her enemy (Satan). The judge (God) gets wearied of hearing it so He grants her (God's people) justice against her enemy (Satan).

Now Jesus makes the judge out to be an unrighteous person. As such he is not a good metaphor for God. But that is the point. The judge can be moved by persistence alone. How much more will God be

moved by love, by His promises, by His Son, by His Spirit, by justice, by mercy, by compassion, as well as our persistence.

But, what about our faith? What must weary God much more than our persistence is our lack of faith. We ask but we assume God will not answer. We can all make lists of things we asked for and didn't receive. I suspect we more quickly forget what we did receive than what we didn't.

Would it be discouraging to have someone ask you to do something? So you go about getting it done only to find that they made some other arrangement. Now your effort is wasted and it is clear they don't think much of you at all. Now how do you feel? Hurt, disappointed, insulted, diminished Well God must certainly be disappointed in us when we ask expecting not to receive and not waiting. Jesus bewailed the lack of faith in people more than once.

I pray for the salvation, discipleship, maturity and blessing of people. I recognize that I am asking for something huge. I know God can do anything, but what if God's righteous justice has already judged so many people, (just as so many people stop thinking about God) and that He has given them their last chance, and that they have turned away from Him. Justice demands that those who have turned away from God so many times eventually lose their ability to choose.

Now how much prayer with persistence, compassion, mercy, a life of holy obedience and faith will it take to make granting me my request more righteous than condemning those who have slammed the door in God's face? I don't think I can do it. But if God saves none of these people I know that He is righteous in all His ways.

Notice that Jesus does not say we will get what we request. He says God will give us justice.

Getting justice is getting what is deserved. Mercy is getting better than what is deserved. I deserve punishment for my sins. Jesus saving me is pure mercy. I would be better off if I received a little mercy and my enemy a lot of mercy. Than I would be if my enemy received full punishment for his evil doing and God gave me only a little of the punishment I deserve.

It also occurs to me that I could have a stronger relationship with God if I also asked for things that God can grant without negating His righteous justice with regard to those who turn their backs on Him.

76. Spend some time alone with God. Read Lk 5:12-16 Read Lk 6:12, Read Mk 1:35-37, Mt 6:6

V 16 is what we focus on now. Jesus was alone when He went out to some wilderness places to pray. I can only assume that He went alone. Clearly He was alone in Mk 1:36. In Mt 26:36 He has the disciples wait while He prayed alone. In Mt 6:6 Jesus recommends we be alone in secret. So I think it established that Jesus prayed alone in wilderness places. So what is the advantage of praying alone?

When a person really needs to have important communication with a spouse or child or whoever, they will seek an opportunity to speak to that person alone. Communication can be the most honest when it is not done before an audience. Try as we might we are so accustomed to behaving in a certain way in front of people that the presence of anyone else will have an effect on how we present what we are trying to say. I think this true also with our relationship with God.

My prayers are different before other people. I think of myself as eloquent and I can put some words together. I can't help but try to choose my words and word order so as to sound deep. I must ask myself whether I am praying to God or performing for men. Even so I don't think we can abandon corporate prayer no matter how well or poorly we speak or no matter how distracted we are.

When alone I usually pray using the Lord's prayer as an outline and going into a little, or a lot more, detail. I feel that I should spend some time speaking to God at length. I feel it is an offering. A little offering would be cheap.

My best praying is when I am alone and my thoughts have run through some issue of life and I realize that I or someone else will need God's help. Or perhaps I have a question for God. Or perhaps I have figured something out. These are the times when I feel that my speaking to God is the most direct and focused. These times are short and don't happen every day. These prayers seem to me to be the best, because I have no other goal then to communicate directly and specifically to God.

If there is a principal here I think it is this. Do what it takes to focus completely on God with no other agenda but to say something to Him.

IX. OBEY THE LORD

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77. Obedience to the Lord. Read Lk 11:27-28

Why is the mother of Jesus blessed? Is she blessed or is she to be blessed. Has she received a great blessing or is she deserving of great blessing?

I think the unknown woman is saying "You are a great blessing to your mother!" No doubt Jesus is, particularly when you consider that the most evil people on Earth were the children of their mothers. Those women were not blessed to see how their children turned out.

I am blessed to see how Jesus has turned out. To me, He is the most incredible person there ever was. First, he never did anything wrong. It is impossible for any other man, woman or child alive or dead to never do anything wrong.

Second, He sacrificed Himself to save evil people. Being completely good in His living Jesus must appreciate, ever so much more than we do, how evil we are. Some of us have changed a lot since we began following Jesus. Some of us not so much. All of us should be able to look back on our past actions with shame and disgust. For us those shameful acts seemed like a good idea at the time. For Jesus they have always been disgusting. And yet he died so that people, like you and me, having done these terrible things can be saved from the punishment we deserve.

So Mary was blessed to bear such a good and holy son. But, there was a down side. Where are the grandchildren? Jesus suffered and died somewhere between the ages of 33 and 36. He never married. (Don't make me laugh with any suggestion that the Da Vinci Code has any basis in fact). He never had any children. He prepared Himself for His mission. His mission was to proclaim the kingdom of God and to die that people might enter into it. It was no small thing to accept that your

first and best son would never have a traditional life. It was a great suffering to witness the results of His flogging and His terrible death.

Jesus makes little of whatever blessing Mary received or should receive for bearing and raising Jesus. In His mind it is insignificant compared to the blessings to be received by those who obey God the word of God. Mary the mother of Jesus, if she did not obey God's word, would have found herself in the same hell as the mothers of evil people. And the mother of the most evil person alive, if she obeyed God in all things, would find herself in the Kingdom of God just as much as anyone else. See Mk 3:20-21 & 31-35.

God can be our God if we believe in Him but, He only becomes our Lord when we obey Him. The choice before us is this: Obey God in all things or not. God will not hold you responsible for doing any part of His will that He has not revealed. Once it is revealed to us we must do it. If we do all He commands we will not be disqualified from entering into His kingdom. Our obedience does not pay for our reward, and it does not earn it. Our reward was earned by Jesus, given by Him to us when He dies for us on the cross, accepted on our part when we put all our hope for salvation on Him, and retained by us as we strive earnestly and honestly to do the whole will of God.

It does not do to do 90, 95, 98 or 99% of God's will. We must do all of it. If we do 99% of God's will are we not saying, "God and I agree 99% of the time. But, where we don't agree I do it my way!" Really we are following our own will 100% and God's will 0%. For the truth is made bare when we and God do not agree. If we do it God's way, that thing which we think we should, or can, do some other way, then we follow God 100%.

78. Obey Jesus. Keep His Commands. You must. Read Mt 7:21-27, Lk 6:49-49, 9:34-35, Jn 8:30-32, 14:21, 15:4-17, Mt 17:1-8

Even when I was no believer at all I knew we were supposed to do what God commanded. If there is a God He is the ultimate authority. I didn't go to Sunday school until I was in second grade and then for only a year. But, previous to that I remember watching something on TV one Sunday (probably) morning. I think it was "The Greatest Story Ever Told" maybe not. Our Black and white TV did not get very good reception. It is amazing at what a young age we learned how to adjust the fine tuner. So the picture was basically a silhouette. This added to the effect of misery. Jesus was hanging on the cross. I remember thinking "Jesus is more important than George Washington".

So it boggles the mind when people who claim Jesus as their savior not only don't do what He commanded, but don't want to know what He said. It is as if there are two Christianities in the world. In the first people worship the Father Son and Holy Spirit as they have revealed themselves to be. These Christians want to be people who know God and who do what He says. They want to read about God and what He said.

In the other Christianity people worship a God who they have made up. This God is supposed to (but does not) give them what they need (want really), never asks them to do more than "love thy neighbor", and will carry them off to heaven someday (not soon). This God has not provided a book that describes Him, us, our relationship, or how we are to please Him. Instead He is as we imagine Him to be because we are always right, rational, objective, and good, and the way He is, His character, and values must make sense and seem right to us.

The truth is that mankind in our natural state are at war with God because He calls us to do right but we have turned our backs to Him as we do as we want (mostly), and what we think is right (mostly). God is patient but He will eventually sweep all who are at war with Him into the lake of fire.

He has provided a way for us as individuals to surrender and make peace with Him. The way is this. We must belong to Jesus. Put simply we can belong to Jesus if we love, trust, and obey Him. Because we belong to Him God has given Him all authority over us. Hence the Father said, "This is my Son listen to Him."

If we trust Him and do everything Jesus commands us we will belong to Him and live. But because we can't, we will belong to Him if we trust Him, resolve to do everything He says, do most of what He has said, and repent of everything we did instead of doing what He said and keep trying.

Beyond this Jesus said that if you obey Him you will know the truth. And that the truth will set you free.

If you obey Him you love Him. And the Father and He would love you. And they will show themselves to you.

If you obey Jesus you will remain in His love, you will bear much fruit that will last, you will ask God for things in Jesus name and you will receive them, your joy will be complete, you will be Jesus friend, you will love your brothers in sisters in Jesus.

Why all these good things for those who obey Jesus. How seriously do you take someone who does not take you seriously? Why would we think that Jesus would do awesome things for us while at the same time we ignore what He said? Does it not make more sense that He ignore us if we ignore Him.

I think we expect God to love us and do everything we need (want) while at the same time we can ignore doing what He said. Where does this come from?

I have met the occasional person who was raised to not expect to have to be responsible. They were

over indulged as children. They received everything they needed (wanted) but were not expected to actually do anything for anyone else. Rather than expect consequences for their actions they were raised to think that their family would shield them or negate any of the consequences for their actions. Now they are adults and expect that the rest of the world will be like mom and dad. The world will ask them to do things but they expect that they will never have to do these things. They go to school and wonder why they don't get a passing grade even though they have not studied or done the work. When they borrow money for things and don't make the payments they don't understand why their things get repossessed or their house foreclosed. They get married but don't understand why their spouse leaves them when they continue to live as if they were single. They get a job but don't understand why they got fired for not working or not being responsible. They were raised to fail. Now they are "Christian" and don't understand why their lives are not any better after ignoring what Jesus commanded them to do.

Jesus is like a fireman on the tall ladder lifted up to a high window in a burning building. He is calling to the people in the room to come to Him so He can save them. But to save them they have to come to Him at the window. But the people in the room won't move. They won't come to the window to be saved by them. They won't do what He is telling them to do. They wonder why there is smoke in the room. They wonder why the firemen haven't saved them. They expect to be saved even though they won't do anything to save themselves. This is what many perhaps most people who call themselves Christian are like.

79. Law of Moses See Mt 5:17-20.

Jesus relationship to the law is not simple. The Pharisees gave as the reason why they opposed Jesus the fact that He broke the Law.

First of all, the Law that God gave to Moses is called the Law of Moses, or The Law. It was not the laws of Moses. It was the laws of God. The various laws could be broken down into categories but it is important to note that there are no categories mentioned in the Law. Certain categories of the laws are mentioned in the New Testament. What follows is my way of understanding it. You can come up with your own system.

At the heart of the Law was the moral code. This would be the Ten Commandments and the two greatest commands: Love the Lord and love your neighbor. These speak to the basic ideas of right and wrong. The exception to this might be the Sabbath law.

There were the laws relating to the Sabbath. These would relate to "Remember the seventh day and keep it holy. You shall do no work."

There is the liturgical law. This was the way in which God was to be worshiped. These could be related to "Thou shalt not make any graven image." I would include in these all the commandments regarding the construction of the temple, all the various sacrifices, the offerings, the festivals, the priesthood, tithes, first fruits, vows to the Lord etc. These could be related to "Do not take the Lord's name in vain."

There are the cleanliness laws. These are all about what makes a person unclean and how they get clean again. It also includes what unclean people can not do. These are related to the dietary laws. These are about what you can and can't eat.

There are the family laws. These govern who you can marry, adultery, divorce, slaves, and sexual conduct. These could be related to "Honor your mother and father." and "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

There are the property laws. These cover inheritance, theft, finding lost property, redemptions, forgiveness of debts, etc. These could be related to "Thou shalt not steal."

There are the laws regarding legal cases, judges, witnesses, how to determine guilt. I suppose these could be placed with "Thou shalt not give false testimony."

There are laws regarding the monarchy.

There are laws regarding prophets.

There were laws regarding war.

There are miscellaneous laws dealing with parapets, mildew, clothing, leprosy, etc.

The fact is that Jesus upholds most laws, lays one or two aside, and is silent about many miscellaneous laws. Certainly he sets aside the dietary laws and laws regarding uncleanness. He has no use for the temple tax.

Regarding the Sabbath, it does not seem that He disregarded it so much as He did not agree with the application of it that the scribes and Pharisees upheld. Yet He claimed that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was for man's benefit. This last perhaps means that when the Sabbath law works to someone's loss we are not applying it right.

Clearly He upholds "Love the Lord...", "Love your neighbor...", "Have no other Gods...", "Honor your parents...", "Do not kill...steal...commit adultery", "Do not give false testimony", "Do not take the Lord's name in vain".

He says nothing about or "You shall not covet." directly. But if we love the Lord and love our neighbor we will not covet. For to covet is to think "The Lord has not provided enough for me."

The miscellaneous laws and those dealing with prophets and kings receive no comment except that Jesus acknowledges that there are prophets. He refers to Herod Antipas, who was King of Galilee, as "that fox" which would probably be translated with the proper flavor as "that jackal"

Regarding the liturgical law He is silent except when He says "When you are bringing your offering..." But on the other hand He quotes, "I desire mercy not sacrifice" He affirms making the offering for the cleansing of leprosy. He observed the festivals.

So are we to make sacrifices in the temple? There is no longer a temple so how can we?

After Jesus affirms most laws and is silent about so many that really don't come up that much, the fact that he lay aside the cleanness laws is perplexing. He says that it is what we do and say that makes us unclean not what we touch and eat. See Mt 15:1-20

If we look now at the passage in Matthew we see that we should obey and teach the Law on the one hand. But, Jesus fulfills the Law. How does Jesus fulfill the law? And what does that mean?

The Law contained the books we call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These contain all the commands but also history and God's words on things other than His

commands. Of particular interest now are the promises, blessings and curses of God. These last three work simplistically like this: God promises that if His people do what He commands they will be blessed. If not, they will be cursed. It is in this way that Jesus fulfills the Law.

Jesus was sinless. See Jn 8:46. Therefore He earned the blessings. Jesus was treated shamelessly and crucified, and God abandoned Him on the cross. In this way Jesus took on Himself the curses. The curses in the Law go on for pages. Not all of those curses were laid on Jesus. The examples that come to mind are: Egyptian boils, defeat in battle, having someone carry off His betrothed. The Law does say "Cursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree." So clearly Jesus was cursed. See Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 1:5, Philippians 1:29 & 3:10, Colossians 1:24, and 1 Peter 4:3. Just as we share in His blessings we also share in His sufferings. Perhaps in some of us Jesus receives the curse of Egyptian

boils etc. so that He may suffer all the curses. About this I am not certain.

If Jesus earned the blessings and received the curses then anyone who belongs to His House can share in the blessings. Their sins have already been punished through the curses he took. Christianity is all about belonging to Jesus so that all our sins have already been punished in Him and in Him we have earned all the blessings.

Back to our passage, if we can remember what it was. We are to practice and teach the Law of Moses except for the laws of cleanness and the dietary laws.

As one who teaches I need to know from God: should we rest on Saturday not Sunday (it is the seventh day, Sunday is the first)? Shall we tear down walls that have mildew that keeps coming back? Should we not wear clothing woven with two kinds of fiber (a big challenge, or just not linen and wool, an easier challenge)? see Lev 19:19? Should all our flat roofs have a high parapet? Should we not breed mules? Should we not plant a field with two different kinds of seed? Should we not trim our beards, or tattoo ourselves?

This one is fantastic. See Mark 12:19

"...if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother." What if the surviving brother is already married? In this case polygamy is required!

Jesus had the opportunity to set aside this law when the Sadducees spoke of it ,but He did not. So I assume He intends that we practice it. What makes it fantastic is that in Moses' day they practiced polygamy. In Jesus day it was rare due to Hellenistic influences.

If all we had were the words of Jesus then I think the answers to all these is yes. We should obey these commands. But as Christianity spread throughout the Greek and Roman world the question arose," Do gentile Christians need to obey the law of Moses?" The question was resolved using logic and not the words of Jesus. The short answer is no. The Jews could not keep the whole law why ask the gentiles to try and fail.

So Christianity has moved further and further from the Law.

So what shall we do? Most of us are not Jewish but gentile believers. The writings of Paul and the decision of the council at Jerusalem agree that the gentile believers need not practice the law of Moses. If we follow these words are we departing from Jesus commands? Was Jesus talking to us or to just the Jews? I think Jesus assumed His hearers were Jews. He taught the Jews. He traveled about their homeland. When He left Jewish territory it seems that His purpose was to retreat with His disciples for rest and dialogue, except when He crossed Samaria to travel from Galilee to Judea. In fact Jn chapter 4 seems to record the longest conversation Jesus has with a gentile. After Jesus convinces the Samaritan woman that she couldn't trifle with Him. She brings up what was probably the major contention between the Jews and Samaritans, where they were to worship. The law stated that they were to worship at the place God would choose, but that place was not named. Because the worship was to be done at the tabernacle, wherever it was was to be the place. But here was a temple but no tabernacle . The temple succeeded the tabernacle. The ark of the covenant was taken, by David, to Jerusalem where the temple would be built. But the tabernacle itself seems to disappear after the time of Solomon. But before that it stood at Gibeon not in Jerusalem.

I suppose this was Jesus' chance to say, "You must worship in Jerusalem in accordance with the Law of Moses for that is the place the Lord has chosen." But He said." The time is coming when you will worship the Father not in Jerusalem or on this mountain." I'm thinking Jesus did not affirm strict adherence of the Law of Moses to the Samaritans and neither did He to us, the gentile believers.

So I think the last word rests with the council at Jerusalem (see Acts 15). We gentile believers need not follow the entire Law of Moses. At the same time Jesus did affirm certain commands of the Law.

I think that these we are to follow.

Also read Romans 10:4, 13;8 1 Cor 9:20, Galatians 3:19-27, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, and James 2:8-13

80.Flee to the mountains. Read Mt 24:1-44, Mk 13:1-33 and Lk 21:5-36

There is a lot in these lengthy passages. There is direction as to how we should live our lives at all times. We should be ready. By far this is the most useful. But besides this there is information and direction regarding the end times.

We should watch that we are not deceived into thinking that Jesus has come when He has not. We should not be alarmed at wars. We should stand firm with Jesus affirming Him to all people. We should help preach the gospel to all nations. We should pray for our physical well being, that we are delivered. We should recognize that certain heavenly signs will immediately precede Jesus return.

Knowing something about the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. I have to wonder if Jesus intended His followers to be warned to flee the city and not go back, intending them to survive the war. During the siege the Romans allowed Jews to enter the city unmolested so that they could celebrate the Passover there. Thereafter the Romans did not let them or anyone else out, intending that the visitors should help consume the food and water in the city and starve it into surrender quicker. The Romans surrounded the City with a wall so as to let no one out alive. Apparently tens of thousands attempting to flee were captured and crucified. Eventually the city defenses were overcome by assault. The temple and the city were destroyed by fire and the inhabitants massacred. Had the Christians been in the city they would have perished with the rest.

Now knowing this history read these verses again. Mt 24:1-2, 15-20, 34, Mk 13:1-2, 14-18, 30, Lk 21:5-6, 20-24, 32. In particular look at Lk 21:20-21. I think Jesus was warning his people unequivocally to flee from Jerusalem and not go back. Some historical sources seem to suggest that Christians during the Jewish revolt interpreted the passage that way and left Jerusalem and moved to a Town called Pella across the Jordan River in the province of Perea.

If all this is true then this command had a particular purpose which was fulfilled in 70 A.D. Even so it will serve to remind us that God knows what will happen and His will will be done.

X. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

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81. The Second Greatest Commandment

X. Love your neighbor as yourself. Read Mt 7:12, Mt 22:39, Mk 12:28-34, Lk 10:25-28

All three gospels have the words "Love your neighbor as yourself". The gospel writers probably were impressed having heard that these two commandments are the greatest. It is also important to know that this command comes from the law of Moses,

NIV Leviticus 19:17-19

17 "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Who is my neighbor? And what means love your neighbor as yourself?

Now read Lk 10:29-37.

We all have a small circle of people we might great sacrifices for, parents, children spouse, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, a long term friend. I know few who will, for people outside that circle, make sacrifices, not help or be charitable towards, but give the kind of help that costs something tangible. And of course there are people who will not make sacrifices even for those in that circle.

Somebody wrote a book titled "The Selfish Gene". The premise of the book is that no one really sacrifices for another. What really happens is that we sacrifice for people who carry some of our genes. Your parents siblings and children carry about half of your genes. Your grandparents, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles all carry about a quarter of your genes. Strangers of course carry none and neither does your spouse.

The selfish gene theory does not explain why some people do make sacrifices for people who do not carry their genes, particularly spouses. It also does not explain why some people will do nothing for some people they are related to. But we tend to have strong relationships and attachments to our spouses. Sometimes we have very poor relationships with those we are related to due to conflicts. But there is something to this theory or why else the proverb "Blood is thicker than water"?

The point is that if we can whittle down the concept of neighbor small enough we can care for these people for relational reasons. We might be willing to think, "I will look out for the family." And once in a lifetime we might have enough compassion to help a stranger. But, there is no end to the number of strangers, and no end to the help they need. So we have every reason to minimize the number of our neighbors.

But Jesus tells us in the parable of the good Samaritan that even people we are in conflict with are our neighbors. In fact Jesus laid a trap for the teacher of the law by letting him answer the question "Who was a better neighbor?" with "The one who had mercy." To this Jesus adds "Go do the same."

So then, are we to impoverish ourselves and work ourselves to death to provide for all the needy people there are? If you have no spouse and children you could. I have never seen it happen. If you want to be perfectly righteous go and do this. You can not find any justification in the words of Jesus for not doing exactly that.

God will most likely not let you. God will not likely let you die serving others for two good reasons. First, if you love others as you love yourself it follows that you should love yourself as you love others. Will you really starve while feeding others? Will you die of exposure after sheltering others. I think even the very needy will share with you what they have.

Second, I believe God only lets the worthy ones die for Him. In fact I think God will only let the worthy ones serve Him in any fashion. God needs no one's help. He can do anything, and do it alone. If you are still living in sin you are not worthy of Him Why should He vindicate your choice to live in sin by letting you die for Him? But, if you turn away from sin and die for Him by living a lifetime for Him He might let you actually die for Him.

As I write this I think of Mother Teresa. She died for God, not by being a martyr, a victim of persecution, but by putting her self to death by living her life, all of it, for God.

Honestly, I struggle with this command. I don't think I am doing it right. This is where I am with it. I am married with children. In accordance with the scriptures and soberly judging myself, I could not stay single without being greatly tempted. With marriage comes children. I don't believe that it is a sin to use birth control, but the scriptures lead me to believe that the woman so gifted with children is to make the raising of them the priority in her life. Some may disagree. I'm over it.

Having a spouse and children I must provide for them. This is where it gets tricky. What level of provision am I to provide? You can argue that the teaching of Jesus precludes us looking down on anyone as being less than we are. I should probably illustrate this but not now. If so then what justification do I have for giving my family more, much more than some other family? And there are families with no more than the clothes they wear and no assurance that they will eat anything at all tomorrow. I have spent more than a hundred dollars dining out with my family and my parents. How can I do this knowing that people somewhere will starve to death today? This used to bother me more than it does today. After a few decades you stop thinking about it.

On the other hand must my wife and children live at a bare survival level when they are surrounded by people having ever so much more than that? In the eyes of the unbelievers I would be insane to do so making Jesus unattractive. But, this is not real important. In the eyes of most other believers I would be insane to do so making them think I have psychological issues. What most believers think is not real important neither. In the eyes of people really trying to follow Jesus this would be insane, or is it?

I hope every Christian makes the acquaintance of one family who are clearly going without in order to serve the Lord as they have been called. It is not by self denial however, it is by inadequate pay. There are people in the ministry who themselves, their spouses and children: wear handed down clothes or clothes others give them, eat mostly carbohydrates instead of meat, never eat out, drive old marginal cars, have no health insurance, do not get the best health care, have no dental care, live in cramped drafty housing in a neighborhood O would move out of, and on and on it goes.

These people shame me. If they can do without why must I have. I'll guess that most of the children raised by these people will be close to God, love and respect their parents. What they will not have is any respect for the so called Christians who came to church many Sundays, provided themselves and their children with everything that their neighbors or the kids at school have, and knowing that the minister's family went without some or most of these things, did not share. God have mercy on us sinners.

What troubles me the most are remarks like this: "well they are used to going without", or "He should have done something else for a living." They would be used to it if they were not seeing the material things that people around them have, the clothes the family wears and the cars they travel in. If God has called someone to serve would you really want him to refuse to go into ministry?

I think God would have us make the close acquaintance of His servants who are going without so that two things might happen to us: that we might be moved by compassion to provide for others some of what we think we need, and to have our minds and hearts changed with regard to what we think we need.

82. Be careful what you do with your anger. See Mt 5:21-22

“Raca” is a word of contempt. It is derived from a root meaning “to spit.” It is derived from the Chaldee word reka, which means, worthless. I think a contemporary translation might be “idiot”. What is translated as “You fool!” might better be translated as “you jerk” or a stronger term not repeatable here. The idiot is ignorant. The jerk is callous and evil.

Jesus would have us know that hatred, name calling and murder are all in the same continuum. They are just different degrees of the same thing not different things. When you hate someone you want them to be injured. When you murder someone you both want and carry out the injury to them. If the only difference between your hatred and murder is lack of the means or fear of punishment then it is not your righteousness that prevents you murdering someone. Something external keeps you from murdering someone you hate. If that external restraint were to be removed you might very well murder them. If it your will to murder someone you are well down the path to murdering them.

Regarding anger Jesus tells us that our anger will make us subject to judgment. Judgment is different from guilt. The question is what did we do while we were angry? I can't believe that Jesus condemns all anger for God the Father is reported as being angry many places in the scriptures. See Leviticus 10:6, Numbers 11:10, 22:22, 32:14, Deuteronomy 1:34 and who knows how many other places. Of course what is right for the Father may not be right for us. He does have authority to bring to life and to kill. We do not. Did Jesus ever get angry? See Mk 3:5. Jesus was angry. See Mt 15:3-9 and 23:13-35 It would seem Jesus was angry. So anger in itself is not sin for Jesus was free of sin.

What we might do in our anger may be sin. See Ephesians 4:26 In your anger do not sin. not let the sun go down while you are still angry. If because we are angry we hate someone, or say injurious things to them or about them, or if we are in fact violent we have gone from anger to sin. We need to remember to control ourselves when we are angry so that we do not sin.

Some people have quite the temper and may react to certain events in great anger before they have time to consider their actions. I have done this. But usually I have time to consider my choices. If a severe temper is your burden ask God to help you control your thoughts, tongue and actions when you are angry. Learn to count to ten before reacting to your anger.

Anger is also a way by which evil spirits torment us. I remember a time when I felt little emotion. I was neither happy or sad, and generally emotionless. The exception was anger. Rage was lurking just below the level on consciousness in me. I could get incredible angry in no time. This did not make sense. So I thought, and I don't know why, that if it does not make sense there may be spiritual warfare going on. I may be under attack. So I started rebuking the demons around me. With time the ever lurking rage subsided.

The way I rebuked demons was this: I would say this out loud but quietly, “If anyone is following me around who is not from Jesus, I rebuke you in His name. Depart from this world and never come back.” Those who belong to Jesus do have the authority to rebuke demons. We only have that power because we belong to Jesus. So I rebuke them in His name, that is with His reputation and authority. Believing I have the demons on the run with these words I send them far away. Jesus sent a legion of demons into a herd of pigs. I don't know why he did this. I send them right out of the world. Having sent them out, order them not to return. Why should they be allowed to return to torment me or

someone else?

Another facet of the anger problem is bitterness. Bitterness is related to hatred and anger. In bitterness we feel that we have been subjected to an injustice. We want vindication and vengeance. If we brood on the injustice we suffered we will become bitter. The bitterness will run our life. Hatred and anger will be near us and love and forgiveness will be far away. We have all suffered injustice. We also need to remember that we have created injustice ourselves. If all the unjust are to be punished we must remember that that includes us. If we want to be forgiven rather than be punished then we must grant that to others as well. So Jesus says to you, "How severely shall I punish injustice?" Not being stupid we respond, "Lord, please punish not but have mercy and forgive."

When we recite the Lord's prayer we are asking God to forgive us as much as we forgive others. If we are not forgiving we are cursing ourselves every time we pray that.

83. Don't Offend People More than Necessary. Read Mt 17:9-13, Mt 15:10-14, Mt 21:14-17.

The truth will offend people. Even innocent people are in error. When the truth is revealed they see it as contradicted what they now to be true. This will offend them. Yet we must always be revealing the truth. Today a lot of people are offended by what the Bible says about homosexual sex. When you share what God has said many people will see you as mean spirited, bigoted, and a homophobe.

Our hope is not that we hide the truth so as to not offend people. We hope that the Holy Spirit will speak to their hearts. They will sense inside themselves that this new truth being revealed is the truth. With time they will come around. We need to be patient.

There are many things that are not as heavy as the truth. WE have opinions, prejudices, affinities and aversions. These things are a matter of individual preference many times. They are not important. Don't offend people with these. Be careful what you do and say. Perhaps God is planning to use you to draw a certain person to Himself. If you offend this person over something inconsequential you are obstructing the will of God. We will be an obstacle plenty of times. But when we have a choice let us not offend people.

Sometimes we will have to make a small sacrifice to not offend people. Make it. Sometimes we will need to make a significant sacrifice to not offend people. In Mt 17 Jesus is asked to pay the Temple tax. It was two denarii, equivalent to two days wages. A man could feed his family for two or more days with such money. Jesus perhaps thought of the poor to which the money could be given. He found a way to satisfy all propriety while not making someone else go hungry. We might be able to do the same or perhaps not. Ask God what to do.

84. Lend to those who want to borrow from you. Give to those who want a gift from you. Read Lk 6:30-31, Mt 5:42.

I have thought that Lk 6: 31 interprets Lk 6:30, but that might be wishful thinking. Certainly there is nothing that weakens the words in Mt.

If any of Jesus words are crazy these are them. In America there are a lot of people who learn that they can have everything you have just by asking for it, they will take it all. They may think you are insane. They may think that they were lucky to find such a fool.

I have met people that if they learn they can tell a clever lie everyday and get money from you they will tell you a lie everyday and maybe more than one.

There are three things that keep this from happening. The first is God Himself. They can't take everything you have if He stops them. How might He stop them? Who knows. For Him it would be easy. When will He stop them? Who knows.

Second, if we are to live by this rule then we have apply it to everyone including our spouses, children and parents. If say my wife asks me to give her everything I have then I would have to do that also. Unless Jesus sees our spouses and children as our subordinates and of not account, which He seems nowhere to do, then this applies also to them. Clearly He says we should give help to our parents. See Mk 7:10-13.

Third, we just don't do it. WE say "Jesus, this is crazy, or else you meant something else." We must not tell God that we are not going to do what He says.

Now let's put the shoe on the other foot. Suppose we have lost our jobs, and spouse,, children and I are homeless. WE have run through all our money and all the help our friend, and relatives are ever going to give us. It is a cold winter's night and your wife and you are concerned that at least one of your children will not survive out of doors. You approach a true follower of Jesus and ask them to help you out. You tell them the truth about your situation. Now how would you want them to interpret these verses?

Would you be satisfied if they said, "That command is crazy. People will clean me out if I give to everyone who asks."

You say "I won't take everything you have. I just want to get my wife and kids in doors tonight"

They say "My wife asked me to give her everything I have so I consider everything to be hers, so I have nothing to give you."

You say, "Can you call your wife and ask her to help me?"

They say "I'm a follower of Jesus, but this command is crazy and I just don't do it."

You say "Is it really crazy to help me get my family indoors tonight? If Jesus were standing here asking you to help us out, somehow, would you tell him no?"

So how would you interpret these verses now? You would want that follower of Jesus to make a sacrifice so that your family can survive one more day.

I think you will agree with me that to those who ask us we should give what they need to survive one more day and maybe even more. Jesus gave His life for us.

Maybe on cold nights I could call our local shelter and tell them to ask some of their clients (for whom it would be appropriate and safe) to stay the night with my family so that the shelter would have room for others. I won't know until I ask.

85.Let people take advantage of you. See Mt 5:38-41, Lk 6:29.

How often we have heard these words of Jesus "turn the other cheek". A little background might be in order. The law of the Roman empire was that is a soldier of Rome asked any civilian to carry a burden for them they were required to carry it for one mile. They picked Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross. He had to do it. It was the law. Jesus said to carry it two miles.

I am not any kind of expert on clothing in first century Palestine. I assume that men wore some kind of loincloth because Jeremiah refers to one. In this passage Jesus refers to the tunic and the cloak. The cloak would double as the family blanket. According to the law of Moses the cloak, if given as a pledge, had to be returned by night fall.

Jesus starts in Mt with the law of Moses that calls for punishment to be equivalent to crime. God can do this to. If He punished us fairly for our sins where would we be. Oh and add this: He gets to decide what is fair. Remember He is light. In Him there is no darkness at all. At the very least He would have to cast us away from Him forever and in such a fashion that we could never sin again. More likely,

because He made us and made us capable of sin, He may require a real punishment fitting for those who rebelled against His authority. That would be the lake of fire.

But God does not do this if, and only if, we belong to Jesus. If we belong to Jesus we need to do what He said and imitate what He did. Jesus lets people take advantage of Him. WE sinned. HE suffered on the cross for it. In His justice we should let others take advantage of us.

Sometimes we have disputes with people. In these disputes both people might honestly and rightly believe themselves to be in the right and due some kind of judgment. Suppose one is a follower of Jesus and the other not. Suppose the one not being a follower of Jesus, and having not received justice from us, decides that Jesus has not made us honest. Having not made us into honest people he never accepts the gospel and is ultimately lost. Wouldn't it be better for us to have given him the justice he honestly thought he should get and maybe a little more? Now, we don't know that it will workout that way, but we also don't know that it won't. But for Jesus name, reputation and honor it would be better to grant others fair justice, even if it does not seem fair to us, so that they go away thinking that Jesus really does change people. But of course, if in fact He is really powerless to change us, we won't.

XI. BE JUST, MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL. Read Mt 23:23

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This verse falls in the midst of a long passage where Jesus condemns the practices of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. The message of the verse is that they have neglected being just, merciful, and faithful. The principal for us is that we are to be just, merciful, and faithful.

86. Be Merciful. Read Lk 16:19-31

This man used his wealth to enjoy himself. He is not condemned for that. We are not told why he was condemned except that if his brothers were to heed Moses and the Prophets they will not be condemned. Moses and the Prophets contain all that God commands. Perhaps the man is condemned because he disobeyed the law of God.

It is noteworthy that the poor lame beggar Lazarus is laid at the rich man's door. We are told he longs to eat what falls from the rich man's table. Because he longs to eat we must assume he never ate it, meaning that the rich man never gave him anything. Yet Lazarus is there continually for some reason. I'll guess that the guests of the rich man gave Lazarus something.

So the rich man had a daily opportunity to love his neighbor yet he didn't do it even with the example that his invited guests obviously must have made for him. He is guilty of a lack of compassion in the extreme. He is merciless. For this he is thrown into eternal agony.

87. Be Merciful. Read Mt 7:1-5, Mt 23:23 Lk 6:36-38

Mercy is the opposite of justice so we need to understand why we are to practice both. Justice is getting what you deserve. Mercy is getting better than what you deserve. We are to see that others receive justice. It is we who are to be merciful to them. The best example is helping someone in a situation where the choices they have made have put them. They did wrong and are suffering the consequences for it. They deserve what they are getting. We are to help them.

There are many cases where people blame everyone else but themselves for their situation. We need to help them with their consequences in a way that does not nullify their responsibility or allow them not to learn a lesson that must be learned.

There are other cases where people really have changed in their attitude and accept responsibility for their choices. We certainly must help them. This is mercy. We must do it because when we finally repented of our sins God forgave us for all of them and expected us, there on, to endure absolutely none of the just punishment for them. We must be merciful to others because God was merciful to us. God's justice demands it.

In the passage from Luke Jesus mentions three facets of mercy. First, do not judge. I am convinced that both in 1 Corinthians 5 and Mt 18:15-20 we are told to judge, but only to judge those claiming to be followers of Jesus. The passage at hand puritans to the lost who we should not judge. God will bring the entire race of mankind to judgment and Jesus will be the judge. For those who belong to Jesus His suffering on the cross will pay for their sin. For the rest there will be judgment, condemnation and punishment in plenty. WE do not need to add anything to it. We need to remember that God made all people therefore only God can judge them. They must be judged in accordance with His will not ours. I mean this: Having made something only the maker can judge whether it fulfills His desires.

Remember also that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He desires that all men be saved. See Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11, and 1 Timothy 2:4. Perhaps they can yet be saved. Our judging them will not help them to be saved but will be an obstacle to them. The best way to be merciful is to want them

to live.

There must be a judgment Jesus will judge. People will be thrown in to hell. This is just. The fact that we have a hard time accepting that terrible eternal punishment is the just penalty for an earthly life in rebellion against God, the truth, and righteousness; only proves how warped our sense of righteousness and justice is. God loves these people. He does not want to punish them in this way. He must punish them in this way. His justice demands it. We don't have to punish anyone. WE can be merciful all the time. WE can be merciful to people God will no longer be merciful to. In us God can be merciful when His righteous judgment demands that He not be.

Second, forgive. From God's perspective there is one plain and simple reason to forgive. He forgave you, and this at the price of the life of His son. Having received such grace, mercy and forgiveness we must forgive others. There are two possibilities. Either these people we refuse to forgive are lost. There is nothing more to be added to the punishment they will receive for having done wrong against God who made them. Or, these people are saved. Picture being in heaven for all eternity with someone you refuse to forgive. It wouldn't be heaven for you, them or anyone else. One of you does not belong there. If you refuse to forgive, it is you. Oh and there is no third possibility, that of God decides to save them but you don't forgive them so He changes His mind. I don't think that ever happens.

Third, give. Maybe your charity will help someone to believe that God might love them. It has happened many times.

God has given you everything you have. None of it is really yours. How can it be that you do not share. You follow Jesus. Good! Follow Him in this, He gave away everything.

If you refuse to be giving how can God give to you all He wants to. It would be an injustice.

Do what you can to love them. God made them to be good. Despite what they do they are still good. God is Father to us all and there is a family resemblance between Him and all of us. If you look hard enough you will see something good in anyone. Praise and thank God for what you can find. Perhaps God will let you see more of it. Very few of the people, thought of as jerks, by many or just one, get up in the morning and think "I am going to try to be a big jerk today".

If you have more than one child, how do you feel when they fight and hate each other. It is horrendous. What issue between them could be so big as to cause them to fight and hate so? And so God sees us. Can't we transcend the little and even big injuries we suffer and see the situation from the perspective of eternity. We are all family.

88. Love those who hate you. See Mt 5:43-48

Be Merciful even to those you *think* doing wrong. Read Lk 9:51-56 Mt 9:12-13

Perhaps James and John wanted to exercise some power. Perhaps they wanted to uphold Jesus honor. I'm guessing they were somewhat heady having been out preaching and healing two by two, learning that Jesus was the Messiah, having seen Moses and Elijah and Jesus transfigured. They got carried away.

Jesus did not want to destroy the Samaritans. HE did not come to judge the world (our to destroy) but to save it. God is just. The time for justice, judgment, condemnation and punishment is coming. Clearly God is in no hurry to bring this about. His mercy is expressed in His patience. We should do the same. Where would our unsaved loved ones be if God was to bring judgment upon the Earth now?

The King James adds " Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

My guess is that the King James was written with the best manuscripts they had but perhaps not the oldest. That these words were added after the Gospel of Luke was written and not by Luke. It seems unlikely that additional information was transmitted through the apostles to a later time and then written into the gospel perhaps a century later. SO I would not based any theology on verses in the King James not found in later translations based on better and better verified manuscripts.

But in this case these words are so like what Jesus says elsewhere (see Mt 16:22-23 and Jn 12:47) that It is easy to believe He said it or would have said it.

Sometimes I think that the copyists added to one gospel what they read in another thinking that the other has recorded the very same conversation and that a previous copyist has left something out.

89.Be merciful and reveal the truth so that others can be saved. Read Mk 4:10-25.

I find this confusing but there may be one explanation that makes sense. Here is the confusion: Jesus tells his disciples that He does not reveal the secrets of the kingdom to those on the outside because they might repent and be forgiven. Yet God wants all to repent and be saved. Then He tells the disciples that what ever is hidden is to be disclosed.

God wants to be merciful, but He must be just. His justice requires that for those who have refused to seek, hear, accept, and practice the truth again and again, the truth will hidden. God has hidden the truth from those who do not want it. Now if they try to change they will find it difficult. That is His justice. They get what they deserve.

God reveals His truth to His people who have accepted it. But even so, He reveals more to those who practice the truth they have. But to those not practicing it even the little they have will be taken away. This includes us.

Many Christians are so into themselves, their lives, past, sufferings, pleasures, ambitions etc, that they really don't want to hear what God is telling them. If they did they would be responsible for it. People like that need to consider whether they are really saved at all!

I tried to write down what I knew about God apart from His relationships with us, His Son, His creation etc. What did I know about God all by Himself, as if it were before there was anything else. I knew He was righteous. I was somewhat frustrated by this, that I didn't know more about Him.

Then God told me He would reveal Himself to me. Well that is a pretty awesome thing. But perhaps it would not be so remarkable if more people actually wanted to know all about Him. Not because the knowledge of God is power, but because They love God and want to know all about Him. When you really love someone you want to know all about them. Knowledge of this sort is intimacy.

So far so good. God reveals Himself and the truth, to those who want to know Him, but hides it from those who do not. That is His justice. But then He tells us to reveal what is hidden.

I think God must be just but has left the door open for us to be merciful. How can we be merciful in a situation when God is not. Who is more merciful than God? Ironically we must be merciful because justice requires it.

We are the beneficiaries of mercy. Without God's mercy we are lost. Having received mercy we must give mercy. This is justice. The people around us do not owe us anything. God made them. They owe God everything, but us nothing. There is no justice that allows us to put any obstacle between them and salvation. So we must be merciful in the same situation where God is not particularly merciful.

So we are the mercy of God. In His justice God will not reveal the truth to those who have not, in the past, wanted it. So He has sent us, who must be merciful in all cases, for having received great mercy we must in all justice be merciful.

90. Pray for workers so that more people might be saved. Read Mt 9:35-38, Jn 4:31-38.

I have often wondered whether the fields really are white for the harvest. I think this because there seems to be so little response to the gospel, in my experience, so little tolerance to even hear the gospel. Where I work it is a rare day that anyone wants to talk about anything spiritual. Yet at the handful of times when someone did, over 17 years, they came from the other end of the building to talk to me. So it is not as if no one knows I am a Christian. Perhaps the fields are white somewhere just not where I work.

Yet I sense there is great emptiness in the hearts of many people. The rise of the interest in psychics and witchcraft etc. is disturbing in a sense but it represents the clearest indication that people are moving away from materialism. In the past Christianity made great gains among the pagans. So the fields may well be ripe for the harvest around younger people.

So if there are many people searching for something spiritual why don't they flock to Jesus and His people. I think the problem is the perception that many people have of Christians. On the one hand the enemies of Jesus will malign His people with lies about the evil they do. On the other hand many identify themselves as Christians by association or church attendance if not by word who do not have any serious intention of following Jesus.

I, for one, dislike using the word Christian. It once meant "little Christ". Now it means anyone or anyway of thinking that is more closely aligned to traditional church-going America than the alternatives. The alternatives are Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, the various eastern philosophies, the various kinds of contemporary spiritism. But if you go to something that looks or sounds like it might be a church and you don't make a point of identifying yourself as something not Christian people may well assume that you are some kind of Christian. The problem with this is that many of these quasi-Christians do not follow Jesus at all and bring disgrace to His name to everyone who witnesses their unholy activities and who thinks that these people consider themselves Christians.

So I want to be identified with Jesus. "Follower of Jesus", "disciple of Jesus", even "Jesus freak", or "Jesus fanatic" are preferable to me than being called a Christian. I make an effort to follow His way and teaching in private and public. I hope that I bring Him some glory. I hope that no one looks at me and thinks, "Well, judging by this guy there is nothing to Jesus."

A man who trains people in evangelism and discipleship once said. "If you are not going to live like a Christian don't tell people you are one." But it is way too late. For centuries people have called themselves Christians or somehow became identified with Him without living in accordance with His words. And so people considering whether Jesus might be the way the truth, the truth and the life consider the behavior of His people and decide not. So the fields are white but the witness of the "Christians" is a downpour.

What can we make out of Jesus' words? There were few real Christians then and no phony ones. Now there are a few real Christians and many phony ones. I think Jesus was saying that we should

pray that the Father will send workers because it requires the choice of God to draw anyone to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit working through a person chosen by God to carry the gospel. This has not changed. Perhaps by our prayers for mercy on the part of God upon the lost He will draw them to salvation and send the gospel to them. So this we should do.

At the same time we need to remember that the prayers of a righteous man accomplishes much. See James 5:16-18. If we are following Jesus as best we can perhaps God will decide that answering our prayers for mercy upon other people is the right thing to do.

But, I can't help but wonder, not know, whether some more people could be saved if the Christians

were not phony but real. I can't decide for anyone else, but I can choose to be as real as possible by following Jesus as closely as possible. Certainly by following Jesus as closely as possible my prayers for the salvation of others will be more carefully considered by God.

91.Be Faithful. Read Mt 23:23

Faithfulness is rather simple. You have said that you will do something. You must do it. How much more so then if you have said to God that you will do something. If you may have failed at this ask God to remind you of what you have said you will do. And then to help you do it. We would think God unjust to say He will do something and then not to do it. So we are unjust also when we are not faithful. If we give a task to someone trusting that they will do it, having agreed that they would, we would be disappointed to find later that they have not done it. So also is God and everyone else. You have said that you will do something. You must do it.

There is another kind of faithfulness in that the request and the assent to it are unspoken. You should be able to assume that a close friend will make some small effort to help you in a great issue even without your asking or their agreeing to do it. You assume that a good friend is looking out for your best interest. No that they should put forth a great sacrificial effort greater than the issue is worth, but that you can count on them for a helping hand. In this many people find that their best friends are not their best friends.

Now you might not know who looks at you as a friend. Possibly people that you do not consider close see you as their friend because they are closer to you than anyone else. Popular people take for granted that they will be accepted and liked. Unpopular people think it precious that someone accepts them. Consider how important you are to each of the people around you. If you figure out that some consider you a good or close friend then make an effort to be faithful to them even if their relationship is not that valuable to you. I think many people turn out to be faithless not so much as because they were careless with other people but that they were oblivious to the value some other people put on them.

XI.A.CARE

92.Care for Children, Read Mt 18:5

The best way to understand the concept of the "name" is to think of it as the character or reputation or knowledge of a person. To say "I welcome you in the name of Jesus." Is to say, "Knowing what I know of Jesus I welcome you as He would."

To say "hallowed be thy name." Is to say, "May people know you as being holy." or "may people consider you holy as your character rightly deserves."

To welcome a little child in the name of Jesus must mean to provide hospitality and care and help to a child because that is what Jesus wants us to do. Furthermore Jesus identifies with the children. He rejoices when they are cared and provided for. He is saddened when they are not.

Give and Care Read Mt 25:31-46, Also read Lk 14:12-14

At the first look I can read this passage and think good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. But it does not say that.

So I think good people who do good things go to heaven. Bad people who do bad things go to hell. But we all do bad things.

Then I remember "justification by grace through faith". When I put my faith in Jesus to save me, God no longer sees my evil deeds. Instead He sees Jesus righteous deeds. A good thing too.

Later I read Luke ch 6 (v46 - 49) and read that I must do what Jesus said. Those guys who say "Lord. Lord" seem to have faith. See Mt 7:21-28. They prophesy, work miracles, cast out demons. Yet Jesus

casts them out. So I begin to figure out that faith without obedience will not save me. See James ch 2.

This salvation by faith versus obedience antithesis is perplexing, but when I keep finding passages that say I need faith, and others saying I need to obey, I begin to understand how it all connects. My salvation comes from God's grace and mercy which sent Jesus to save us, Jesus righteousness that earned Him the reward that the law promised, Jesus obedient sacrifice, which offers to confer His reward on sinners, our faith and repentance which allows us sinners to be included in Jesus' reward, and our following Jesus in obedience which allows us to remain in Jesus reward. Not perfect never failing righteous obedience, for we will always have some sin. But, when we sin we always repent, turning away from sin and towards Jesus' righteousness.

I need to follow Jesus, to be righteous, to obey, to remain in His love. Now this passage tells me to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, hospitality to the stranger, clothes to those needing them, care for the sick, and comfort to those in prison. Should I make certain to do all these things or risk condemnation?

But when I take this passage literally, logically and technically the righteous do all of these things and the cursed do none of them. What happens to those who do some of these things and not others?

I see that this is a packaged deal. The righteous do many of these things, some times, or usually, or continually. The righteous are of a mind set to do these things. The cursed do few of these things, infrequently, rarely, perhaps once, or never. These things have no value to them.

But there is more. Jesus said that what we did to the least of these we did for Him. Who are the least of these? I thought it meant the least esteemed of the righteous. Now I see it differently. What the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, those needing clothes, the sick, and those in prison have in common is that they are in immediate and vital need. Not the need we think we have when we say "I need some new clothes." The need we have when we think, "I'm freezing. I need to get in out of the cold."

One more thing, Jesus is going out of His way when He says "... you did for me." Jesus has identified Himself with those in real need. Who is there with us when we are alone out in the cold, when we are thrown in a cell in a foreign land, when we are in pain in an emergency room bed? Jesus of course. Jesus is so there. So there that when we hurt He hurts. Jesus is waiting in the ER with someone in pain. It is as if He were the parent of a small child there in pain. He is holding their hand. His only care and thought is that they be helped. Finally you come in and give that child what they need. Jesus is relieved just as much as the child is. It is as if the help you gave you gave directly to Him. To Jesus it is as if we did for Him when we did for those in need. Jesus identifies with those in need.

I don't write the above to jerk your emotions so that you will do what I think is right. I am trying to have you feel the emotions Jesus feels when people are in real need.

So what are we to do? Let's identify with the needy, put ourselves in their shoes, and do for them what we would want someone to do for us. But how can we do this if we live up town or way out in the suburbs? We live where the needy don't live. We send our kids to schools where they won't meet the needy and we won't meet their parents. Above all we go to a church where the needy won't have the clothes to fit in, or drive the cars that fit in, or speak the vocabulary to fit in, or have the hair and make up to fit in. Before we can take up the question of how we will seek out opportunities to associate with people in need we need to stop making life choices that isolate us from the needy and stop avoiding the opportunities we already have.

We also need to stop avoiding whatever empathy we might have for people in need, people needing mercy, by reciting to ourselves why we would never find ourselves in that circumstance. "If it is impossible that I could ever have found myself in your circumstances, then I can ignore you and your needs". What I am doing is convincing myself that people in need and I belong to different species. In a

book titled "Catch 22" one of the characters, an air force officer, is shocked at the suggestion that officers and enlisted pray to the same God. This sounds silly. If so, good. We need to stop avoiding and ignoring the needy. Because, we are not so different for we all have the same God.

93. Don't Prevent Others From Coming to God, Read Mt 23:13-15

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of a collection of sins and vices. In reading what He said to them we can learn what Jesus hates. Knowing what He hates we can work to avoid doing it. Jesus said that if our righteousness did not surpass that of the Pharisees we would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

In v 13 Jesus accuses the Pharisees of preventing people from entering the Kingdom of heaven. How do they do this. I think it was that every time God began a movement to bring the people back to Him the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law resisted it. The best example is John the Baptist. Clearly God sent him but the Pharisees refused to believe he was from God. They accused him of various things in their attempt to discredit him. Why did they do this? John said they had to repent. They were unwilling to admit they had anything to repent of. They might have brooded in silence but they wanted the people to look to them as examples of holiness so John was a problem and a large problem as the people flocked to him.

So what is here for us? First do not resist God's plan for others and do not resist His plan for you.

Sometimes God's messengers seem crazy to us. The crazier they seem the farther from God we really are. Sometimes we are made most angry not by the people who say the most outrageously untrue things but by the people who say what is close to the truth. They push our buttons because we have buttons ready to be pushed. We have a tendency to find a comfortable life style where we feel we are living in God's will as we understand it (or as we have rationalized it) while at the same time we enjoy many of life's pleasures. In America this takes the form of materialism. We will give as little to the Lord as we can be comfortable with, and spend all the rest on ourselves. We are aware that there are countless people going without the bare necessities of life, while we acquire everything we can we certainly don't let it show.

Second don't do anything that dampen the enthusiasm of new believers and others trying to fulfill God's will. Why are new believers so annoying. They can be like John the Baptist. They have not yet rationalized being God's people (minimally) while pursuing the good life (mostly). You will dampen their spiritual enthusiasm plenty by silently not doing anything they suggest.

Third, consider this. If you already knew what was true, believed what you knew and restructured your life to be in alignment with what you believed, God would not have to send you messengers to tell you the truth, challenge you to believe, and exhort you to change your life to suit it.

You are not yet doing all of God's will for you. He sends you people to keep you on the path towards holiness. It is inevitable that the messages meant for you will challenge you.

In v 15 Jesus accuses the Pharisees of making a great effort to win a convert to Judaism, only to teach him their hypocritical ways.

Where is v 14? I assume the earliest and most reliable manuscripts don't have it. Thus the creators of the NIV and other translations left them out as being added by an editor sometime after the original author wrote it.

94. Don't hinder people from coming to Jesus by believing that they can't. Read Lk 19:1-10

Jesus actively pursues Zacchaeus. Now Zacchaeus had an interest in Jesus. I would guess that he wondered if Jesus could save him, would save him. Perhaps he had heard of Mathew, who had been a tax collector. Maybe he knew him. Maybe Mathew had told him about Jesus. I see two lessons in this.

Jesus may want us to reach out to a "sinner". Perhaps Jesus knows that this individual is seeking and He wants you to extend yourself. It is useless to think that someone else might do it better. Jesus is asking you! It is foolish to think you are too busy with more important stuff. Jesus made a big effort to save you. You would be unjust if you did not make the effort Jesus is asking you to.

The other point is that we must not be a stumbling block to seekers by cynically assuming that God can't or won't save them. If you are so certain it is impossible for a certain one to be saved, then stand aside and see if God works a miracle.

95. Don't be the Downfall of Others, Read Mt 18:6-7,10, Lk 17:1-3

To tempt another person into sin is to put them on the road to hell. It is like murdering them yourself. If God demands an accounting from us of the blood of others, how much more so the soul of others. God can and will raise all the dead to life. But, He will not raise anyone from the fire of hell.

To inadvertently lead some child into sin is like inadvertently backing over them with the car.

Be very careful what you do and say to or even around other people particularly the young ones who are not yet set in their ways. Act and speak so as to draw people to God and build them up in relationship with God. Be careful not to complain or give vent to inner bitterness. Do nothing to drive a wedge between people and God. Do not mislead people regarding God. Portray Him and describe Him as He has revealed Himself to be.

God made the world just as it should be. He made the nature of people just as they should be. It would have been wrong for God to assume we would sin and fall away. When we sin, not only do we do wrong and put a barrier between us and God, but we are not equipped by nature to deal with sin in a constructive way. Sin screws us up. It is like putting sugar in a gas tank. It screws up the engine and there is nothing the engine can do about it.

Why is it that when we are subjected to a good deed done by others for our benefit we are somewhat uplifted, but we are unlikely to go out and do a better thing for someone else. But, when someone sins against us we inevitably sin ourselves and quite likely sin worse than the sin we were subjected to. That is our natural response to sin. We react in fear, pride, anger and hatred. We like to make innocent people around us more miserable as we are.

Collectively we have chosen to live apart from God. God knows that this choice will be the downfall of many innocents, but this is what we have chosen as a race. Even so God is watching out over the little ones. They have not hardened their hearts against Him, and He for His part keeps His eye on them. Therefore we need to be careful how we treat them.

We lie in a fallen world. Sin abounds and multiplies. Virtue does not abound and does not multiply as sin does. So it is inevitable that there will be plenty to cause people to sin. But make certain we are not one of those things.

96. Encourage Others to Repent.. Read Mt 18:15-20

This is a four step process as to how to encourage someone who has sinned to repent. And what to do if they don't. This teaching is so alien to what happens in our churches it needs to be picked apart.

The subject is your brother. This means a brother Christian. None of this applies to the non-believers. "If your brother sins against you" means that a fellow Christian has wronged you. What if I know he has sinned but not against me? We must get to that later.

Nowhere in the scriptures is authority given to talk about the someone behind their back.

Before you talk to anyone else talk to him. Tell him what he has done and why it is wrong. Naturally there are two negative responses to this. The first is that he agrees that he did this but that it is not a sin.

People in our churches do not know what is right and wrong because they do not study God's word, applying it to their lives. The people that does not understand will perish (see Hosea 4:6,14). This is a good time to be gracious. If I have sinned out of ignorance I will be embarrassed and feel ignorant. If I punish myself I will need encouragement.

Possibly he will argue that despite what the scriptures say this is not a sin. Certainly we need to know the scriptures before we correct anyone, but ignorance will not excuse us. God will ask us "Why didn't you correct him?" We answer "We didn't know it was wrong." "Why don't you know it was wrong? It is in the scriptures." He will say. We will answer "We didn't now it was in the scriptures." He will say "You didn't read my scriptures. If you read you didn't seek my help to understand them. If you understood you refused to believe them. If you believed them you refused to apply them to yourself." Or we will say "We don't know how to do this." And He will answer "What help did you seek from me or my leaders in learning how to do this?" We might answer "We didn't want to get involved." or "We didn't want to be judgmental" And He will answer "Didn't you read in Ezekiel. That if I tell you to warn a man and you do not, he will die for his sin and I will hold you accountable for his death?" See Ezekiel 3:17-19.

At this point you should find someone knowledgeable in the scriptures to meet with the two of you. I don't think you should tell the second person that the subject has done this just discuss the issue in hypothetical terms. If the subject agrees that your interpretation is right then later approach him alone and start over.

Perhaps he will agree it is a sin but that he did not do it. At this point the best you can do is try to convince him that he did in fact do this thing. If you are not the only who knows that he did this thing you get the other witness or two witnesses and move on to step two.

At step two you together with one or two others talk to the subject and try to convince him to repent.

Again this needs to be done in gentleness and love.

Jesus says that if two or three agree that the subject is guilty of this sin and he refuses to repent he stands convicted. This is consistent with the law of Moses.

Step three is that the entire church community of Jesus disciples are to be told. This does not include people in the church who are not following Jesus. Jesus assumes that some of the church people will try to convince the subject to repent. If he refuses to repent the church moves on to step four.

In step four he is to be alienated. Obviously the church can not alienate someone if they are not told, which is another purpose for step three. How is alienation loving. Firstly the subject will not be deluded into thinking this is not important. Perhaps this will move him to repent in a way that gentle persuasion does not. This will save his life. No where in scripture is it written that there we are allowed one sin we have not repented of. If we believe the scriptures that sin kills We are ready to practice tough love in an attempt to save someone.

Secondly, suppose they did not alienate him. Suppose he sins in a public fashion. Suppose some unbeliever or, more importantly, a new believer sees the subject sinning and also see him being an active and welcomed member of the church. He might assume that the behavior is OK. New Believers do not have a lot of confidence and tend to look up to anyone who has been at the church longer. They also are not good at discriminating the good from the bad. When we alienate unrepentant sinners we are expressing love by protecting new believers.

It is good to remember that Jesus Himself did not treat pagans, sinners or tax collectors as if they were pagans, sinners or tax collectors. Neither is He saying treat an unrepentant sinner in the church the way I treat pagans, sinners or tax collectors. He is saying treat an unrepentant sinner in the church the way

first century Jews treated pagans, sinners or tax collectors before Jesus came along and started showing compassion to them.

In verse 18 Jesus is saying that the church on Earth has authority that will be heeded in heaven. If the church throws an unrepentant sinner out of the church. Jesus considers that one thrown out of His kingdom. Jesus stands behind His church. This does not mean that if the church does not have the facts right or if the church is wayward itself, that Jesus will consider bound in heaven what they have decided on Earth. That would be unjust.

But, it does mean that an unrepentant sinner can't just leave the church and join another and pretend he's OK by just hiding his sin. I don't mean hiding a past sin. I mean continuing to sin and hiding that. I believe Jesus will not hold guiltless he who hides his sinning by distancing himself from those who know about it. Especially after His servants have warned the man.

When we are "confronted" by other Christians saying we have sinned. Our first reaction is going to be anger. "Who do they think they are?", "So who's perfect", "Everyone does it", "This is not very loving", "I'll just take myself and my family and the \$10 I put in the plate every week somewhere else", "I don't need them". When we are going through all this nonsense we need to remember that one way or another Jesus has sent people to bring us an invitation to repentance. If Jesus is really our Lord we should have enough reason to humbly accept correction from anyone, even people we don't look up to, even people we think we are holier than, even people who are not believers. For Jesus can speak to us through inanimate objects if He so chooses. Unless we know the scriptures so well that we know that this correction we are receiving could not be from God we need to humbly consider that it might be.

97. Do not swear by anything and Don't Cheat People Read Mt 5:33-37

In this passage Jesus says do not swear an oath. In fact the desire to swear an oath comes from the evil one. Why is this? Most times when someone swears that they will do something for me later in return for what I am doing for them now, they have the least intention of doing it. Otherwise they would offer more than just words to certify the agreement. They do not intend to keep their promise so they make their promise more credible by swearing by something.

Jesus says do not swear an oath. But, when you say "yes" your "yes" must be truth, and when you say "no" your "no" must be truth. God will hold you accountable for being faithful and keeping your word even without an oath.

98. Don't Cheat people. Read Mk 11:15-19, Mt 21:12-13, Lk 19:45-46, 20:46-47 Jn 2:14-17

Chronologically the passage from John happens early in Jesus ministry. He had only worked one miracle. The passage from Mark is at the end of Jesus ministry. It is the day after Palm Sunday.

In John's passage Jesus says "Get these out of here. How dare you turn my Father's house into a market". He drove out the sheep and cattle, overturned the tables of the money changers, and told the sellers of the doves to take them out.

They were selling the proper coinage to pilgrims for offerings in the temple, Roman and other coins could not be used because they had the images of men on them and were considered idolatrous. The exchange rates were rather high by our standards. The sheep, cattle, and doves were for the sacrifices the pilgrims were to make.

All this needed to be done. Pilgrims from afar would have to buy everything they needed to do what the law of Moses required. But, it didn't have to be done in the temple. Doing it in the temple was convenient for the pilgrims and a competitive edge for the sellers. But, convenience is not valued in the

law of Moses, whereas holiness is.

The concept of holiness comes from setting apart something for special dedicated use for or unto God. You could not offer God just anything, in any way or at anytime. The law regarding animal sacrifices required that the animal be without blemish. The concept here is don't give to God what is not good. I suppose many if not most animals would be considered without blemish.

Any good animal could be dedicated, that is set aside for God. But once an animal was dedicated it could not be used for any other purpose. No exchange could be made. It was already set aside for God and can not be taken back. This was the issue with the temple. The temple was set aside for God, His sacrifices, and worship. Sacrifices were to be offered nowhere else. Only God's priests could offer them and only if they met certain requirements. The temple was about God and was to be about nothing else. Buying and selling even so that sacrifices could be made to God was not about God. It was about buying and selling. You can't take something set aside for god, the temple, and use it for anything else, buying and selling.

Followers of Jesus would do well to internalize the reality of God's holiness. He is God. He is great and righteous in all He does. Don't treat Him in any respect like He is less than the greatest thing there is. Most things are good enough for anything, but only what is right is good enough for God and it is not to be shared with any other purpose.

In Mark's passage we see a new twist on this. Jesus stops people from carrying things through the temple. This is the concept of holiness again. The temple is for God. It is not a short cut between points A and B.

Jesus accuses the sellers of being thieves. I can only suppose that they sold what was not so good and called it good or they sold it for more than it was worth, perhaps claiming that it was certified to be good enough for God, or both. They were cheating people by misrepresenting the facts. This is fraudulent. Actively hiding the truth so as to deceive so as to make sales is fraudulent and wrong. It is no better than thievery "Caveat Emptor" is Latin not Hebrew. The buyer should beware lest he get cheated, The seller beware lest he be thrown into hell for cheating people.

When you sell a house these days you are required to disclose the faults with the house. If you don't you break the law and risk being sued. When you sell a car for a certain price you are legally bound to warranty the car for a certain amount of time. The more money the more time. If the car breaks down within that time frame the buyer can bring it back and get his money. When I sell a car I write down everything that is wrong with it I know. It seems right to me.

It is bad enough that the sellers are cheats. What is far worse is that they are cheats in God's house. This makes it difficult to. Imagine you have a teenage child. You have told the child not to use the car without asking. So one day while you are not home the child uses the car behind your back. On another occasion the child picks up the car keys which are sitting right next to you, goes out starts the car and drives away while you watch. On which occasion does the child show more disrespect.

When the tabernacle was first constructed at God's command and under the direction of Moses, two of the sons of Aaron, who was Moses brother and the first high priest, filled and lit their censers and offered incense to God that He had not commanded nor had He allowed for. God struck them dead on the spot. They had shown disrespect for God in the tabernacle on the very day it was dedicated. God could not let this affront in His very face go unpunished. See Lev ch 10.

Interesting also is that in a similar event the censers of the 250 men that God burned up had to be used in the temple for they were dedicated to God and became holy. see Num 16.

99.Do Not Give False Testimony. Read Mt 23:16-22

In this passage Jesus is talking about the taking of oaths. In our time a person is bound to an agreement if they sign it. In Jesus culture people would swear an oath. I don't know if they did this before witnesses or not. I think so. This survives in our time in the oath that witnesses used to take when they took the witness stand. " Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth?" They would put their hand in the Bible and finish with, "so help me God." The idea was that if you lied not only were you subject to the charge of perjury, which is a crime punishable by fines, jail time, or in recent history impeachment, but you were also subject to the judgment of God. If you don't tell the truth God will punish you.

The Pharisees were defrauding and cheating people by finding ways to invalidate their oaths. They would say that because one of them had sworn by the altar but not by the gift on the altar he was not bound to fulfill his vow to the other party of the agreement.

Well, why not swear by God Himself? The problem here was that no one wanted to use the name of God and risk sinning by taking His name in vain. Matthew himself does this. Thirty-two times in his gospel he uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven." Four times he uses the phrase "kingdom of God."

Jesus points out that if you swear by the temple, the gold on it, the altar, the gift on it, or heaven you are in fact swearing by God Himself and you are bound by your oath.

100. Don't commit adultery, don't want or think about what is sinful. Read Mt 5:27-28.

What does it mean to look at a woman lustfully? It means to look at a woman and want to have sex with her. For many a man to look at any one of a rather surprisingly large fraction of the adult female population, is discover that he wants to have sex with her. What is such a man to do. There must always be a right choice in every situation. In this situation the right choice is to stop looking at her. But the man will say, "I still want to have sex with her." True enough, but the desire is now more theoretical than sensible. If the man is honest he will agree that his desire for that woman is greatly decreased now that he is no longer looking at her. Now he has a great desire to look at her again. This desire to look largely replaces the desire to have. TO look is not sinful. Therefore to have the desire to look is not sinful. But looking will lead to the desire to have which is sinful so he must not look. The desire to look is OK.

But the man might walk away continuing to think about having that woman. Thinking about what is sinful is sinful so he must not think about having her. He will say, "But I will want to think about having her." True enough but instead think about something else. TO want to think about her is not sin. Thinking about her in an unholy way is sin.

It is nearly impossible to not think something unless we have something else to think about instead. Having things and people to pray about, having things to thank and praise God about is good and useful. Think about God and the things of God instead of about that woman. Having hobbies and interests that are permitted and which are interesting is also good. These are useful when the temptation is particularly strong.

This mental discipline may be hard at first but with time a practice it gets easier. It is called conditioning. Through repetition we can learn to do anything. SO we need to repetitively do what is right. From this doing right will be our first inclination.

So from the top: if the man sees a woman, and discovers, notices, observes that he wants her, he must stop looking at her. If he then finds he is thinking about her in an unholy way he must stop thinking about her by thinking about something else by praying etc.

This makes watching commercial television and many films almost impossible to watch. I have found that after an hour of TV I'm completely preoccupied with sex. Most shows and many commercials

exploit the attractiveness of woman to get attention and increase viewer-ship. So don't watch it. If you have time to watch TV but claim you have no time to read the Bible or pray then you lie. If you can't stop watching TV then TV is your God.

Some of us work with attractive women. What are we to do? Don't look at them. Pay no attention to them unless you have to. When you have to talk to them focus on what they are saying not how they look. Women actually like that, for the most part. As much as it is up to you arrange your work station so that they are not in view.

All this is about lust in the formal sense, but it applies to all those things we desire but must not have or must not have too much of such as food, drink, clothes, stuff, fun, thrills, whatever. WE control our desires rather than having them control us. WE control our desires by thinking about other things.

If this sounds too drastic Read Mt 5:29-30. Clearly Jesus expects us to take drastic steps to avoid sin. I doubt the eye and hand represent a euphemism for emasculation. I'm not sure that that drastic step cures the victim of lust immediately, completely and permanently. The eye represents our desires. The most powerful desires are triggered by what we see. The hand represents our actions. Most sins are executed with the hands.

101. Do not Divorce. Read Mt 19:3-9, Mk 10:2-12, Mt 5:31-32, Lk 16:18.

Knowing what we know about ourselves and others it seems incredible that Jesus expects us to keep a marriage relationship healthy for decades. Even among Christians the divorce rate is high, just as high.

Jesus calls this state of affairs having hearts that are hard. Now a hardened heart in the scriptures is used to describe someone who will not repent and submit to the Lord's will. So apparently if we submit to the Lord's will our marriages will work.

Many marriages appear on the outside to be a battle of will. Each partner struggling to control the other at least on the issues important to themselves. This is paralleled in their relationships with God. It seems incredible that people will try to be in the driver's seat in their relationship with God. Who does this? Anyone who thinks, "I'll do what God wants after He does what I want."

At some point we must choose whether we will try to satisfy the self and contend with the Lord or try to satisfy the Lord and contend with the self. When we satisfy the self our lives slowly slide down hill because every desire of the flesh, if undisciplined, will wound our spirit. Whatever it is from heroin to watching TV if we turn to it to solve, cover up, escape from or even take a break from the problem issues in our lives we will do so more and more. WE will do it when we need to be doing something else. WE go with the flow. WE take the path of least resistance. That path runs downhill. When we satisfy the Lord our lives slowly improve because the Lord loves us and provides what we need to thrive. He disciplines us to make us stronger. HE teaches us to make us wiser.

When we take up the struggle to satisfy the Lord and contend with the self we find it such a great struggle that satisfying the spouse can seem much less demanding if the spouse is also trying to follow the Lord.

But what if the spouse is not following the Lord at all? Sometimes there is a intense battle between the spouse and the Lord. When one spouse is running the other they will resist the Lord taking over. But there is only one throne in a person's life and it is sized to fit God. God is so powerful He will bend the dominant spouse to His will for the benefit of the other (the one trying to follow Him) without the dominant spouse knowing it. It is so amusing. But as per usual things get harder before they get easier.

My marriage is more like the first sort. The struggle to contend with the self so as to satisfy the Lord is much more difficult than satisfying the spouse. And her struggle to satisfy the Lord much harder than to

satisfy me.

The Lord requires His people to do right in their relationships with others. How much more so with their spouses. If two Christian people with the Lord's omnipresent help can't make the relationship work there is something severely wrong with at least one of them. By this I mean one of them is following something, but it is not the Lord. Previously we examined the various things that substitute for God in people's lives. If you can not say no to something, it is your god. Someone will say, "But, I have really big problems." Sometimes problems are really big but the Lord is a really big God. What we sometimes fail to realize is that our problems have become god to us. We let them run our lives. We never deny the over-lordship of our problems. If we can't say no to something it is our god no matter what it is even a problem. St. Paul writes about the case where one of the spouses is not a believer. See First Corinthians 7.

In our struggle to make our marriage work a lot about ourselves will be revealed. Some of these things the Lord will require to be changed. The struggle to make the marriage work may be the Lord's plan to make our lives right.

The Lord does not view marriage the way contemporary American culture does. Usually when considering the traditional Christian view of marriage people refer to the writings of St Paul. See Ephesians 5:21-33. Simplistically husbands are to sacrifice themselves for their wives, and wives are to submit to their husbands. In reality a Christian couple works together. They view things from their perspective. By "their" I mean the five of them: man, wife, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As two people move closer to God they move closer to each other. Even so if only one can get what they need it is to be the wife. If only one can get what they want it is to be the wife. If there is only one choice that can be taken out of two it is to be the husband's.

Jesus does not explicitly affirm St. Paul's assertion (which would have been written at least 20 years after Jesus' work on Earth). Jewish culture at the time was patriarchal. The readings from Mt and Lk reflect this. They describe the man divorcing his wife or marrying a woman. The symmetry of this description must not be assumed. The man was in charge. The passage in Mk contradicts this. In any case there were a lot of things in the contemporary culture that Jesus did not condemn. He condemned sin. He condemned things that endanger our souls. Other things He probably disapproved of but avoiding sin and gaining salvation are higher priorities for Him. In conclusion Jesus is silent as to whether or not wives were to submit to their husbands.

One last point. See Jn 19:26-27. Jesus, on the cross, put His mother in the care of John His young disciple. Remarkably Jesus had three brothers. See Mt 13: 55-56. Clearly He believed that His mother needed to be in the care of a Christian man. Was this a concession to culture or spiritual reality. Certainly overlooking His non-believing brothers was a recognition of spiritual reality not culture. There is not much I can do but I try to look out for the welfare of Christian women on their own./ I think Christian men are to do this. Perhaps the most I can do is get out of the way when God is using my wife to look out for them.

XI.B.JUSTICE

102.Be Just. Read Mt 23:23

To be just means to help others get what good things they deserve as well as doing what God considers just. If we know that someone has been met with an injustice we should help them to get justice. This applies to a lot of situations from government benefits to speaking up when we hear lies or just plain gossip being told about someone.

God's sense of justice goes beyond what most people imagine. If you can see the justice in Gen 9:2-4.

Why now, after they come out of the ark are the animals given to man as food? God' sense of justice is so strong that it applies even to animals! You can see it again in Dt 25:4 Why should you not muzzle an ox while it is tramping out the grain. You see it in "Honor your father and mother." God considers it unjust to diminish anything by which He blesses you. In accordance with God's sense of justice should you complain about your employer?

In particular God wants us to forgive others the sins they did to us. This is because we expect, hope and have asked Him to forgive us. His justice will condemn us if we continue to condemn others. Do everything you can to forgive others, including asking God to help you. For scripture is clear that if you do not forgive, and this from the heart, you will not be forgiven. It is better for you to ask God to bless in every way, and mean it, those who have hurt you than to be thrown into hell.

103.Be just to God, Read Lk 20:9-20.

In this parable the vineyard owner is God, The farmers are the people of Israel. The messengers are the prophets. The owner's son is Jesus. The vineyard is the land of Israel, which God gave to the nation of Israel. The work the owner did preparing the vineyard are all the blessings of God. The time of justice will be either the end of the age; or else the end of Israel as a nation which occurred after the unsuccessful revolt of 66-73 A.D. and the last revolt, also unsuccessful, of 132 to 135 A.D.

So the parable tells the story of the nation of Israel from the conquest of Canaan during the leadership of Joshua to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. God enables the people of Israel to conquer Canaan in Joshua's day. It is a land of milk and honey. After that

generation passed on the nation enters into cycles of disobedience to God and repentance under the judges. Later the nation is ruled by kings, some good, mostly bad. The people with their kings are sometimes good and mostly bad. It is during this time that God sends the prophets to remind the people that they belong to God and must obey His law. Most of the prophets are persecuted. Finally God sends Jesus. The people generally do not receive Him and out of jealousy and conviction plot his death by the Romans. God sends His retribution by the Romans and the Jews are driven from Jerusalem. His new nation is the nation of the Christians, those who follow His son Jesus.

So what is in this for us? If God did not spare the people of the promise when they disobeyed Him and refused to repent why would He spare us. Let us continue to do what is right lest we are cast away from Him. See Romans chapters 9 through 11. See Hebrews chapters 2 through 4 and 6.

XI.C.FORGIVE

104.The repentant are precious, Forgive the repentant, Read Mt 18:10-14.

As with any parable we need to assign the roles. So who is the shepherd? Verse 14 clearly explains that. The shepherd is God. The sheep that wanders away must be the little one in v 14. Wandering away from the shepherd is easily the equivalent of wandering away from God. Wandering away from God is accomplished by either disrespecting Him or disobeying Him, which is the same as sin. So the sheep that wandered away must be a sinner or one rebelling against God or both. Then the ninety-nine sheep must be people who are not sinners or rebelling against God.

But Jesus calls the sinner a little one. Are we to think that God makes an effort to bring young sinners back to Him? Or possibly, that we should think of all sinners as children, and thus worthy of some compassion. It's ludicrous to think of anyone as a young innocent sinner. It is a contradiction. To think this possible reveals a misunderstanding of sin. Sin is when we disappoint God's will for us, and I believe it is His revealed will.

It is both I think. Young people can more easily change. I have heard it said that eighty percent of all believers came to believe before age twenty. In contrast the odds of anyone over age eighty repenting

and turning to Jesus is a million to one against (but nothing is impossible for God). It is not that God does not extend Himself for the benefit of older people. It is that He has already done so and done so many times. If a person consistently makes an effort to get away from God they will have their wish, (but nothing is impossible for God).

At the same time God would have us think of repentant sinners as children and grant them a large share of grace. I can think of nothing uglier than a person who refuses to forgive someone because they think that person can never change. When in fact they are changing and God is changing them

and has forgiven them. We should be just as quick as God to believe someone can repent. Being ignorant we can assume their condition is better than it really is.

In verse 13 the shepherd is jubilant to have his one sheep back. If I were a shepherd I suppose having one sheep wander off is better than having the ninety-nine wander off. At the same time I would be anxious about leaving the ninety-nine unattended. Something might happen to them. Perhaps the wandering sheep will turn up on his own.

This is where this parable is instructive. God has no fear for the righteous that did not fall into sin. No one can separate them from Him. God knows that a sinner does not and can not just wander back to God. God must make an effort to lead them back. And that effort is not assured of success. Because sin is death. You can not escape from sin on your own effort any more than you can perform major surgery on yourself. And because sin is death when a sinner repents they have crossed over from death to life.

We would do well to be very excited when a sinner repents. If you had a small child and by some misadventure your child got into the pool enclosure without your knowledge, and you were looking for the child for several minutes without success only to find it in the bottom of the pool. And you jumping into the pool pull the child's lifeless body from the pool and using CPR you try to revive the child only to discover the child is cold and pale with no pulse at all. And then after a couple of hopeless minutes of performing CPR you are convinced the child is gone forever. Suddenly the child coughs up a lot of water and begins breathing again. Now how excited are you to have your child who was certainly dead back again? That is the excitement God has to have one of His children cross over from death to life. May we have the love and compassion in ourselves both for a repentant sinner and for God Himself to share in His excitement.

105. Forgive the repentant, Read Lk 15:11-32, 17:4, Mt 20:1-16

This passage is usually taken to describe the depth of God's love, grace and forgiveness. But when we consider the passages that precede it and the last point that it makes we must conclude the reason Jesus told it was to convince the righteous to forgive the repentant. The love and forgiveness of the father is extreme, but Jesus goes to all the effort to describe this grace to show it in contrast with the cold hearted unforgiveness of the brother. Jesus is trying to shame us into forgiving those who repent. After all against whom did they sin? God. All sins are against God. No matter what anyone has ever done to us they will never have to answer to us for it. They will answer to God for it. Jesus is the judge. It was God who made them so only God has the right to judge them. If God is the only one against whom sin is committed, really, and certainly the only judge, and if His grace and forgiveness is extreme are we not ashamed when we do not forgive? We who are not the judge. We who may not even be the victim.

Soften your hearts. We should be the one's who are first to forgive even before God. Even if we are victims do we not want all our sins forgiven without question? If we want all our sins forgiven without question then we need to forgive all the sins of all others. We need to be asking God to be merciful and forgiving on them. God should never have to ask us to forgive. We should have already forgiven everyone for everything.

106. Forgive or die. Read Mt 18:21-35.

Peter is not speaking of his familial brother Andrew. He is speaking of all fellow followers of Jesus. He seems to think it a stretch to forgive a person seven times. Seven is the Hebrew number of completion. As if to say if I forgive my brother seven times I have completed forgiving him. I am done forgiving him. But if we forgive our brother completely we are not keeping count of how many times we have forgiven.

In marriage counseling a woman is describing to the counselor misdeeds of her husband from years past. Her husband said, "I thought you were going to forget about all that." She replied, "Yes, but I think that you have forgotten that I have forgotten."

If we forgive like God we do not ever bring it to mind. And so how can we keep score? Jesus replies with a large number and in another gospel the number is even greater. These numbers are too absurdly large to think we would count up all those times we have forgiven someone with the purpose of not forgiving them anymore.

Jesus then tells a parable. In the parable the king is Jesus who on the day of judgment will ask us to account for all we have done. The servant is any and every believer having sinned against the Lord and His righteous law countless times. Yes even countless for ten thousand talents is three hundred seventy-five *tons* of silver today worth about two hundred million dollars. The believer begs for time to repay which is absurd because if you owed someone that kind of money how could you ever repay? Jesus is not moved by the man's appeal for time to repay but his appeal for mercy. Jesus forgives the believer the entire debt for He knows there can be no repayment ever. Asking the believer to somehow earn his salvation through his own righteousness is no mercy at all for the believer can not do it.

If God was not righteous but was neutral we might imagine that a quantity of righteous deeds might pay for an equal quantity of evil deeds. But God is not neutral. His standard is righteousness. Anything less than righteous is a debt that can not be repaid because there is not such thing as super-righteousness. If there was a super-righteousness, which was more righteous than righteousness and above and superior to God's standard of righteousness, we might think that some quantity of it would repay the debt caused by our evil deeds. But there is no such thing and we can not repay the debt created by just one evil deed.

If we could repay we could appeal to God's justice claiming "we have repaid our debt." But not being able to offer anything as repayment we appeal to His mercy, "Forgive our debt."

Jesus was completely righteous and had no debt of His own. But, even Jesus could not do deeds of super-righteousness with which He could pay our debt. Instead He exchanged His just reward of blessing for our just reward of punishment. It is as if Jesus has said to His Father, "Don't reward me, reward those who belong to me. And don't punish those who belong to me, punish me." And so every person who ever lived must either belong to Jesus or be punished for their evil deeds. So great is God's mercy that He sent Jesus to save us. But, so great is God's justice that Jesus had to die for us. So we need to belong to Jesus.

In the parable the servant who is any and every follower of Jesus after receiving from Jesus mercy in the form of forgiveness, refuses to forgive another follower of Jesus for the sins this other one did against the servant. This debt of sin is described as a hundred denarii. Think of a denarius as an old fashioned dime when dimes were made of pure silver. This hundred dimes of silver is today worth about one hundred eighty dollars. This amount is repayable on the one hand, but compared to the debt owed by the first servant of his master it is as nothing at all.

The servant representing any and every follower of Jesus refuses to forgive the other followers of

Jesus the sins committed by them against him. At this point the injustice of refusing to forgive a little when having been forgiven so much incites Jesus sense of justice. Whereupon Jesus' justice overwhelms Jesus' mercy and Jesus throws any and every follower of His who will not forgive another follower of Jesus into hell.

In the parable the first servant was facing having everything including his family sold to pay part of the debt and he thrown into prison. But, in the end he faces not being thrown into prison only, but being tortured by the jailers. His unforgiveness has earned him a more terrible punishment than his original astronomical debt.

Jesus says to us that if we do not forgive a brother from the heart, we also face a punishment worse than the punishment we earned in a lifetime of sinfulness.

Perhaps you have suffered a lot because of the sins of another or of others, but consider these things: Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die. Whatever they did to you will not be as terrible as what you will suffer if you do not forgive. Don't split hairs over whether a person is a brother or not. What if you refuse to forgive someone thinking them not a brother, but it turns out you are wrong. Rather than refusing to forgive an unbeliever, instead pray that they will become a believer.

Don't pray for them in order to heap hot coals on their head. pray for their salvation and blessing. What God has to do to bring some people to repentance and salvation will seem like great punishment anyway. It occurs to me that praying, focusing on someone's salvation and blessing and nothing negative at all will satisfy Jesus requirement to forgive from the heart.

Here is how you can know if you have forgiven someone from your heart. At some point you will here of something that has happened good or bad to that person. If your instantaneous (knee jerk) response to hearing that they received something good is disappointment, or if your response to hearing that they received something bad is satisfaction. You have not forgiven them. In fact you hate them. Time will tell. Watch and see and take notice. If you fail this test repent and ask God to help you to forgive.

If you have not forgiven someone as you know you should then ask Jesus to help you do it. Jesus has put a hint in his prayer that we should do this all the time.

Also see Mk 11:25. anything and anyone must mean everyone Forgive everyone. There is no mention of whether they are repentant Just forgive them. You might as well. No matter what terrible thing they did to you, God will punish enough.

Check out this forgiveness passage

Lk 23:33-34. If one so innocent can forgive those so guilty, maybe we, being guilty can also.

107.Do What You tell Others to Do.

Avoid Hypocrisy: Read Luke 12:1-3, Mt 23:1-3,24-39

The basis of hypocrisy is deception. Deception is actively leading someone to believe a lie. The hypocrite wants people to believe he is righteous. He does this so as to reap the benefits of being perceived as righteous which are being trusted, well spoken of, having more opportunities. But, in reality he is not righteous. He is unrighteous so as to receive the benefits of unrighteousness, which are: pursuing his self interest, ignoring justice, taking advantage of the weak, leading people of diverse, perhaps contradictory, interests and values to think well of him.

God desires worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. Hypocrisy is the opposite of the truth. God does not want the worship of those who lie. They do not belong to Him. He will not take them home to be with Him. And yet He can make use of them. He can use them for His ends. Such use is

dreadful and will not help them at all.

108. Some Hypocrisies to Avoid: Read Mt 23:1-39, Lk 11:42-54

Jesus accuses the Pharisees of a collection of sins and vices. In reading what He said to them we can learn what Jesus hates. Knowing what He hates we can work to avoid doing it. Jesus said that if our righteousness did not surpass that of the Pharisees we would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus affirms that the Pharisees and teachers of the law had the authority of Moses. As such the people needed to obey what these leaders told them, but to not do what they do because their teachings and their behavior were inconsistent.

We need to consider whether we do what we teach. We need to consider whether we do what we affirm as right whether we teach it or not. We depend on Jesus to save us but do we obey what He commanded us. As a teacher I have tried to teach what I thought was revealed to me through the scriptures without stopping to consider whether I am in fact living consistent with what I teach. I don't want to be tempted to dilute or weaken the word of God so as to not convict myself. After I have taught it then I consider, or God has me consider whether I am living consistent with what I taught. I try to be honest and accept the fact that I am not and then resolve to change with God's help.

How hard the Pharisees worked to obey God's word would seem to be reflected in their failure to do it.

It seems that God would have us obey His truth even if it is borne to us by people who do not live it or in fact may not even be His people. God can speak through the mouths of godless people. He can do anything. If we know the scriptures and if we are attuned to God's voice we will know in our hearts that the truth has been spoken ignoring the means. We must resist the powerful temptation to discredit the word of God by discrediting the messengers He has chosen to deliver it. Jesus said "The sheep know the shepherd's voice and will not follow a stranger." That voice can come out of the most unlikely mouths.

God also seems to be saying that He has put us under the authority of some people and that He is the one who expects us to obey that authority.

There is a wickedness in America with regards to authority in the church that works like this: A believer or perhaps a worker or even a leader (and specifically not a person who has never confessed Jesus as their savior) in a church sins or expresses an ungodly attitude. In fact the more a person does and says in the church the faster these things come to light. The leadership of the church or perhaps believers of no particular authority try to reason with the individual in accordance with Jesus' word. Eventually the church leadership becomes involved in either case. The individual denies any wrong doing and rather than repenting, leaves the church. They go to another church where they say nothing of the matter, as if to say, "Well, if you don't like what I do I will go somewhere else." And not risk hearing that the other church doesn't like it either by keeping it a secret.

The problem is this. It is quite possible that God is the one who considers wrong the actions of the individual. God has sent these other people to reason with the individual and lead them to repent. When the individual leaves the church he is no longer the problem of that church. But, when you ignore the message you do not offend the messenger so much as the one who sent the messenger. In the eyes of God you have crossed over into rebellion. You are refusing to listen to Him. And, He has authority over all the churches. Leaving the church because they have told you the truth is stepping on to the broad and easy road that leads to destruction.

XII. SERVE

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109. Make Disciples Read Mt 28:18-20, Mk 16:15-20, Lk 24:46-48, Jn 20:21-23 And Acts 1:8

If Jesus said all these things at once He might have said "I am sending you to be my witnesses, to preach repentance and the good news of the forgiveness of sins, and to make disciples everywhere, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

We studied how we must testify as witnesses to what God has done.

We studied repentance

We studied how Jesus takes away the sins of those who belong to Him and what we must do to belong to Him.

We only touched on the subject of making disciples. So what is discipleship? It is the process by which a completely depraved sinner becomes like Jesus. That is a lot to accomplish and so it involves many things. It therefore follows that it involves many people.

Discipleship begins with salvation. A sinner hears the gospel. They confess, repent and turn away from their sinning. They ask Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. They take Him as their savior and as their lord. It is the resolution of their heart to stop sinning and to begin doing everything that Jesus desires of them. The part that a Christian plays in this process of salvation of another sinner is that of the evangelist. The evangelist tells the sinner what they must do to be saved. The evangelist helps them find salvation, begin a relationship with Jesus and puts them on the path to holiness. This salvation process may take years or it may take minutes. The rest of the journey to holiness is also discipleship. It will take the rest of their lives. WE might call this the discipling of believers.

The new believer needs to take responsibility for their discipleship. They need to be resolved to go forward learning and changing and growing their own personal relationship with Jesus. Those that want to grow quickly. Those who do not want to make an effort don't seem to grow at all. Are they really saved? If they take Jesus as savior only and not lord then I think not. For if Jesus was really their lord they would want to learn what He desires and to do it.

The believers around the new believer need to take responsibility for the new believer's discipleship also. In particular the new believer needs someone to shepherd them. The shepherd makes certain the believer is not forgotten, does not fall through the cracks. They check up on them and ask how it is going. The shepherd cares for the believer and prays for the believer. The shepherd does some teaching but more than this he helps the believer apply the truth to his life. The shepherd holds the believer accountable and asks him tough questions. We call the person doing this work the pastor which basically means "shepherd".

Now this pastor must not be confused with the person in the church that holds the title of Pastor, Senior Pastor, Assistant Pastor etc. Not all people holding this title are pastors at all. The true pastor is someone chosen by God and gifted by God to do this very important work. They care certainly, but more than caring they have a vision as to how this work is to be done in the case of every person they shepherd. I think this vision is a part of the spiritual gift that pastoring is.

Another aspect of discipleship is that every disciple of Jesus has their own unique relationship with Him. Relationships are a matter of the heart and two way communication is vital. When we read the scriptures Jesus speaks to us. WE need to have faith that Jesus will speak to us through the scriptures,

and while we are reading them. WE should be reading everyday, inviting the Holy Spirit to talk to us and explain the scriptures to us.

If we have a hard time understanding, as everyone does, and need someone to explain it to us we will be in bible study. Every disciple of Jesus should be in a bible study on a weekly basis. This is another instance of where other people have a big impact on our discipleship. These would be the teachers, but also the other people in the class. To me a bible study allows for others besides the teacher to speak. Otherwise it is a lecture. Hopefully your teacher will allow you to ask questions during or after class about what you are reading other than the topic of the class. Everyone needs someone they can take their bible questions to to get help. If you are so knowledgeable that you don't learn anything in a bible study then lead a bible study or help in a bible study for you are probably gifted to do this.

Jesus may also speak to us through other people or directly to us. This may depend on us. I don't think Jesus speaks to people who are not in His word. It works like this. Jesus will rarely speak to someone who does not really want to hear from Him. If we want to hear from Him then we take seriously what He said and we will be studying what He said. If you worship a Jesus that is different from the Jesus in the scriptures, you are not worshiping Jesus.

WE speak to Jesus when we pray. In this case by prayer I mean not just asking Him for things but more than just thinking about Him. WE are consciously aware that He knows what we are thinking as we talk to Him and ask Him questions and tell Him what we think. WE need to spend some time with Him everyday in this way.

When we truly worship Jesus we are talking to Him and He to us through the scriptures, hymns, lessons etc. But if we only show up for church in the body, our mind being elsewhere and not on Him, we are not talking to Him. Every believer needs to worship the Lord weekly and be in His presence as they do this.

We studied the concept of serving. Service is a part of discipleship. We learn to serve. We learn how to serve and how to serve in specific ways. We will learn what our gifts are, and in so doing, learn what work the Lord wants us to do. Even though gifted we will need training in the use of our gifts

This is training that makes sense to me. If I am training you I tell you what you are to do. I tell you why you are to do it that way. I do it while you watch. I answer your questions. I let you do part or all of it while I watch. WE talk about the experience. You do it without my watching. But I don't forget about you. WE continue to talk and sometimes I watch you work. After you are doing the job satisfactorily we begin to talk about how you would train someone else. For you don't know a thing until you can explain it a few different ways to someone else. And I have not properly trained you if you can't train someone else. Some service can not be done while someone watches. In that case there has to be a lot more talking and openness.

110.Go Read Mt 28:16-20

Is this my job? What if I am not a teacher? The problem is that the teachers can't do this job neither. This calls for a team of people.

Here is the problem: Jesus did not command us, "teaching them what my commandments are", or "teaching them to understand my commandments", or "teaching them how to apply my commandments to their lives", or "teaching them that they should obey my commandments", or "teaching them how to obey my commandments", or "teaching them to obey some of what I commanded".

We are to be teaching them **TO** everything Jesus commanded. This includes all of the above and more besides.

The teachers can teach the disciples that they should obey and why, what the commandments are, help

the disciples understand them, help them apply them in a general sense, and perhaps teach them how they can obey. The typical teacher will have some struggles understanding and helping others to learn the principles and how to apply them. But teachers can always learn from other teachers. And we who teach, when it seems so difficult to figure out how to do it, need to remember that Jesus said, "I am with you to the end of the age." We are not alone when we teach. WE need to have faith and believe that Jesus is with us. We need to learn to recognize His voice when He speaks up in a class or Bible study or small group. We need to learn that He can speak through anyone's mouth. But teaching them **TO** is really difficult.

The teachers can't do this really. This requires conviction. If a Jesus follower is being disciplined, if he has accountability relationships, if someone is working to pastor and shepherd him (the same thing really): there will be opportunities for these disciplers to teach him **TO** obey. But all the disciples of Jesus have occasional opportunities to encourage the Christians around them to know and practice what Jesus commanded by word, and particularly by example.

It is very thought provoking to hear the testimony of someone who has been convicted to obey something. They have wrestled to understand it and apply it, they have questioned whether they must, and God has spoken to them and convicted them that they, in fact, must do this next. And here I sit having never given a serious thought to obeying this command. God has told them to do this and I am clueless. It is pretty humbling. God has not brought me to this point yet. He working to teach me to obey Him or believe Him in some yet more basic principle. I walk away thinking these people are crazy or else they are holier than I am. If they are focused on the very words of Jesus, crazy is not probable. In a healthy church family, people do share their spiritual struggles with others and the whole body can learn from their example.

Ultimately it is the work of the Holy Spirit to speak to a disciple's heart and convict them of what they need to begin to do. For our part we need to be praying for those we disciple, that the Holy Spirit will do just that in them.

For those who teach or not, we need to consider whether we have any concern for the spiritual well being and growth of our brothers and sisters in Jesus. And do we want them to be concerned for ours. Or do we think as Cain said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" My we remember what Jesus said of His family, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my sister and brother and mother." When we obey what Jesus commanded we are His family.

Compared to "...teaching them to obey..." "...baptizing them..." is relatively easy. People having been ordained by one denomination or another receive some training in this, I imagine. Usually some one of them will be available to baptize a new believer. But, if for some reason they are not...

It would be a shame that we were not obedient to God's command because we were taught that only clergy can do this. The clergy, denomination, the congregation, the universal church can not save you. Only Jesus can. Do what He commands and forsake all others, including the Christians, if you must.

John Wesley struggled with this issue. As an ordained priest of the Church of England he was authorized to baptize. But besides baptism the thousands being saved needed pastors and teachers, and people who themselves could baptize others. Otherwise only the few ordained clergy in the revival could baptize. Perhaps many would not be baptized because there were so few clergy.

Eventually, in America first Wesley had to concede that they would have to appoint their own bishops so that they could ordain clergy so that the masses everywhere could be baptized.

Certainly we should be reluctant. But if there is no other way then we the followers of Jesus need baptize others.

111. Serve, Read Mk 10:35-45, Mt 20:20-28, Mk 9:33-37, Lk 9:46-48

These passages are nearly identical. I am of the opinion that Mark was written first. Then came Mathew. Mathew has a lot of Mark in identical or at least similar words and details. I think Mark was written before Mathew because why would anyone write less than what was written before. In that case nothing has been added.

Luke clearly says that others have written before him but that he wanted to make an orderly account. What was so disorderly about Mark and Mathew? It is this: Mathew does not follow Mark's chronology. Having read both one might ask, "which way did it happen?" I think Luke discovered that Mark was more faithful to the actual order of events. Luke's gospel follows the same chronology as does Mark.

Luke also adds a lot of information missing from Mathew and from Mark. At the same time Luke abbreviates some things like the beatitudes and the Lord's prayer, why? I assume that either the people Luke interviewed did not recollect all the detail that Mathew has or that Luke calculates that why repeat to the same detail what has been written before. I suspect the former is the case. Repeating part of something seems inferior to repeating all of it or none.

I can remember children trying this trick "Would you do something for me?" If you say yes they consider you bound to do whatever it is. Jesus is not taken in. Jesus will not decide whether He will do this thing until He knows what it is. Some Christians believe that if you have enough faith you can ask for anything and it will be done. And not without reason. Scripture does say that. See Mt 7:7, 21:22. But here Jesus does not grant what has been asked. Why not? Because it is not in God's will to do this thing. I have to conclude that all the faith and belief possible will not force God to do what He has decided not to. God is sovereign. He is the only one anywhere who can not be made to do anything He has chosen not to do.

Jesus asks the brothers if they can suffer what He must suffer. But even after this Jesus says that what they ask will go to those for whom the Father has prepared them. It is as if Jesus does not decide who sits next to Him in His kingdom. His Father does. To me the scriptures are clear that Jesus submits to the Father's authority. All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to Jesus. See Mt 28:18. But Jesus in many places seems to indicate the Father has supreme authority. See Mt 10:32, 11:27, 12:50, 13:43, 16:27, 23:9, 26:29, 28:19, Jn 3:35, 6:27, 6:37, 6:44, 8:26, 8:28, 8:54, 14:13, 15:15, 17:1-2, 20:17.

In other places Jesus more clearly submits to the Father's authority. See Mt 10:32, 26:39, 24:36, Lk 22:29, Jn 5:19, 8:28, 8:49, 10:18, 10:25, 10:29, 10:36-37, 11:41, 12:27, 12:49-50, 14:16, 14:28, 14:31, 15:10. It has been said that Jesus is subordinate to the Father only when He lived as a man on Earth. But, this passage seems to indicate that the father's supreme authority extends to heaven. The simple fact is Jesus calls His Father "Father" Knowing what we know of the culture fathers are the authority.

All this is beside the point. This passage is about being a servant. It is a paradox. The greatest follower of Jesus is the greatest servant of others. This turns the concept of greatness on its head. We would expect to treat someone who is great as if they were great. We would treat them great.

The reason it turns our way of thinking on its head is that it reverses the cause and effect of servant-hood and greatness. Our culture thinks that a person of greatness should be served. Jesus is saying being a servant to others is what makes someone great. Servant-hood confers greatness.

Here's a challenge. Do we look up to people who are servants of others more than we look up to other people who are powerful, charismatic, wealthy, have a successful career or family life, etc. Why not?

At some point we learn that some things we do well because God has given us a talent of a spiritual

gift. It is true that some people make more of their potential than others. And of course this takes work. But, being a servant is not a matter of talent or giftedness at all. It is all about love and humility. It is all about the relative value you put on others versus yourself. It is about values not gifting.

Ultimately we need to humble ourselves before God who gave us everything we have. Furthermore, God sees all humanity as brothers and sisters. He must be disappointed when we look down on each other. He has given some gifts to one person and other gifts to another. The idea of one person looking down on another because they have one set of gifts and not another must seem strange and disappointing to God who decided what gifts each one received. Judging someone based on their talents and gifts, including how industrious they are, is judging God who gave them their gifts.

Servant-hood requires us to put someone else's interest before our own. It is self sacrificing. This requires humility and effort. Jesus was perfect but He put my interest before His when He submitted to dying on the cross for me. His prayers in the garden indicate that it was a great sacrifice in His view. He was afraid, but He went through with it because it was God's will.

112. Serve. Don't focus on greatness. Read Jn 13:1-17

Human nature being what it is Jesus knew He would have to convey His message in unmistakable fashion. Nothing is more powerful than a personnel object lesson. Jesus the Son of God washes the disciples feet. This was the work of a slave.

Jesus had said the greatest would be a servant of the others. The Son of God Himself washed His people's feet. There are two perspectives on this and they are both useful.

If you want to be great wash the feet of others. Clean up their messes, figuratively and literally. But we are not talking about doing this once. We are talking about doing this all the time. The job of the great is to wash feet. Being great means taking on the job of washing feet. If this is not what you want to do but you want to be thought of as great, give up. You do not have greatness in you. You have pride. For greatness is humility. If you are thinking you want to be great so as to get recognition, you have pride. Give up. You do not have greatness in you. You will practice enough humility to get recognition. Then you will stop being humble. Greatness is not a means to an end. Greatness is the result of love and humility. Seeing the welfare, interests and comfort of others as equal to your own. And on occasion, more important than your own so as to convey love.

The other perspective is this: greatness is about recognizing others. When you consider your family, coworkers, acquaintances, and particularly your church family, who serves? The one who serves the most is the greatest. That is the one to take as an example. Take more seriously the opinion of the one who serves. Consider less the one who does not serve. Never consider the greatness of yourself. Assume you have none. Consider the greatness of others.

113. Make a big impact and how to do it. Read Mt 5:13-16, also Mk 9:50, Lk 14:34-35.

I have heard it said that in ancient times they flavored food with something that was like salt but not sodium chloride. This is a good thing because I can't think of a way in which sodium chloride can lose its taste. Apparently this salt substitute could lose its saltiness at which point it was useless.

To this Matthew passage we could add Mt 13:31-33.

What does salt, a lamp, the mustard seed, yeast, and a city on a hill, have in common. This reminds me of those aptitude tests. OK time is up! The answer could also be this. All these things are noticed: salt in your food, a city on a hill although far away, yeast in the dough, a mustard plant in the garden, a lamp on the stand. Another possibility is that they are small but produce big impact big impact. This is questionable in the case of the city.

Who was Jesus talking to? His disciples. See v 1. He wants His disciples to be noticed. He wants them to produce a big impact.

The last verse of Mark speaks of how Jesus confirmed the words of His disciples with signs. Why do this? So that they would be believed. So that many people all over the Earth might believe and join His kingdom.

So what are we to do with this? We are to have a big impact. How are we to accomplish this? By using our spiritual gifts.

Three thousand became believers in a single day after the demonstration of two spiritual . The first was speaking in tongues, the second preaching. The one confirmed the other. Neither by itself would have done this.

Most Christians are ignorant about spiritual gifts. Paul starts 1 Corinthians 12 with these words: "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." Neither do I. Read all of this chapter, Romans ch 12 and Ephesians ch 4. This is a start.

Consider Paul's analogy of the body. When the many parts, organs, structures, systems in the body work and work together the body is healthy and can get something accomplished. No single organ in the body can accomplish anything from mowing the lawn to doing the taxes.

If your church makes an effort to understand the various gifts and what they are supposed to do, as well as identifying what gifts each person has, and if all the people in the church begin to use all their gifts in unity of purpose, your church will accomplish the work Jesus has for it to do.

Consider a football team. Clearly the various players have different gifts. The wide receiver is fast. The line man is hard hitting. The quality of the various talents the players have is important, but not as important as their determination to work together. The greatest receiver in the world is useless if he refuses to get off the bench and into the game. He is also nearly useless, useless, or even a liability if he insists on running a certain play while the rest of the team. He won't be useless but will certainly be a waste of talent if he insists on playing as a lineman. Worse yet, his being a lineman may keep a much better lineman out of the game.

If your church were a football team how well would it score points?

114. Serve, using what God has given you. Read Mt 25:14-30, Lk 19:11-27

In Lk 19 we have a very similar parable but Mt makes a point that Lk does not. What happens to the servant who did not use what he had as his master had commanded?

What do the things in the parable represent? The man who journeyed has the authority. He must be God. The servants belong to the man. They must be God's people. The reckoning must represent the last judgment when both rewards and punishment are handed out. Therefore the journey represents a great span of time from when we came to belong to Jesus until He returns. A talent is a unit of weight used to measure large amounts of money. The talent was used to measure silver. A talent was 75 pounds of silver. Think of a talent as about \$ 10,000. Therefore what must the talents represent?

What has God given us from the time we belonged to Him? Ultimately God is the source of everything we are and have. When we first came to belong to Jesus He gave us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brought us spiritual fruit and spiritual gifts. Jesus does not talk of these things as such. Read Galatians 5:13-26. The fruit of the Spirit are Christian virtues, expressions of love. Will Jesus ask us how we used the fruit of the Spirit, the virtues that the Spirit brought us. How does one use a virtue? One man does what He can to love everyone and expresses love through righteous and virtuous behavior. Another man refuses to do these things. Which man has put the fruit of the Spirit to work? Obviously the first. We use the

fruit of the Spirit when our behavior, words, thought, and attitudes that reflect the Christian virtues.

Read First Corinthians ch 12. Paul does not want you to be ignorant about spiritual gifts. In verses 4 through 7 we have some synonyms for spiritual gifts. These are service, working, and manifestations of the Spirit. In verses 8 through 10 Paul lists several of the spiritual gifts. These are messages of wisdom, messages of knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues. In verse 28 he provides another list: apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Read Romans 12. Here is another list of gifts: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, leadership, and mercy.

Read Ephesians 4. Here is another list of gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

The faithful servants in the parable put to work the money the master gave them. We need to put to work the gifts the Master gave us. That means work for us. First we must identify what gifts we have. The most speedy method is to do a spiritual gifts self evaluation. These are questionnaires that help us figure this out. Perhaps they can help us figure out what our gifts are. Online I found these web sites:

[Http://old.ewhohope.org/spiritualgifts/evaluation.php](http://old.ewhohope.org/spiritualgifts/evaluation.php)

[Http://mealgroups.dalldorf.com/gifts/](http://mealgroups.dalldorf.com/gifts/)

[Http://www.communitycc.com/resources/sp_gifts.shtml](http://www.communitycc.com/resources/sp_gifts.shtml)

[Http://www.scofield.org/images/stories/pdf_documents/spiritual_gifts_evaluation.pdf](http://www.scofield.org/images/stories/pdf_documents/spiritual_gifts_evaluation.pdf)

[Http://www.intimacywithgod.com/gifts.pdf](http://www.intimacywithgod.com/gifts.pdf)

I have not done any of these. At a glance they looked legitimate.

Ultimately the people of Jesus around us amongst whom we have served know how we are gifted. From their perspective it seems that God has served them through us in specific ways. These specific ways are our spiritual gifts. If we served a lot in many ways without consideration for possible failure and if people spoke up whenever they felt served, perhaps we would never need the evaluation questionnaires, but that is not the case.

The way we use the spiritual gifts is somewhat more straight forward. The gift of teaching is used by teaching the things of God. We prepare by reading and studying the words of God as well as learning effective ways to communicate to different kinds of people with different learning styles.

Just as we view people in business, entrepreneurs, brokers, salesman etc as people who work hard, not physically but mentally, people who are always looking for new ideas, people who are opportunistic and above all motivated. We also must be motivated to build the kingdom of God by always looking for opportunities to do what we can, particularly using our gifts. The first step in using our gifts is having a heart thankful for what God through Jesus has done for us. So thankful and loving that we want everyone to receive what we have. Wanting for others to have this so much that we are motivated to do whatever we must to see them get it. Motivated enough so that we want to know what Jesus wants us to do. What Jesus wants us to do is use the gifts He gave us. As we prove faithful in using what we are given He gives us more to use that we might achieve more building His kingdom in the hearts of people.

Does God expect us to use everything He gave us? Yes. But He will ask us specifically if we used the powerful things He gave us. For the spiritual gifts are power. They are the power of God set aside to be unleashed when we do the work He gave us. What is the work He gave us? The work is the areas of service related to the gifts we have received. The gifts are our work. The work is our gifts.

If we don't prepare and use our gifts we must not care what Jesus wants us to do. Jesus will take away the gifts and the work He had for us and give it to someone faithful. If we don't care about using our gifts we are not thankful, loving, repentant or obedient. If we are not obedient and repentant we don't belong to Jesus. If we don't belong to Him we will be condemned. Like the wicked, lazy and worthless servant in the parable.

115. Be Smart as You Serve. Read Lk 9:1-6, 10:1-12, 16-20, Mt 10:5-16, Mk 6:7-11

Jesus gives general and specific instructions. First the general instruction, be shrewd and be innocent. Be innocent might mean be sinless before the people. This is good for two reasons. People will have reason enough to cause trouble for you in as much as they are in rebellion against God. Don't give them an additional reason to dislike you or the means to accuse you. Be perfect. It is hardest to be righteous with family members or coworkers. These people see you when you have to satisfy multiple demands and priorities. They see you when you are squeezed. But with these strangers before whom Jesus was sending the apostles there are few demands. They should be able to be near perfect if they watch themselves.

Secondly, right or wrong, the message will be judged by the character of the messenger. It is hard enough to find salvation. Don't make it harder by being more of an obstacle than is inevitable.

Be shrewd means be smart. Be street wise. Don't let yourselves be abused or discredited. And don't let the message be discredited. Think things through. Pay attention to the situation and what is happening. Scrutinize the people amongst whom you are working. Don't be anyone's fool. Paul comes to mind as one who lived this advice as well as demonstrating it in his messages. See 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

"I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." By all means, being smart, being righteous, save some.

Take no purse or bag, or spare sandals. If you have nothing to take thieves will leave you alone. Greet no one on the road. I think this is to avoid being abused by those who reject the truth. Share the truth in a Town where you have the protection of the Law against violence. Also you have work to do so get to where you are sent. You are on a mission so there is no time for chat.

Bless the house where you are invited to stay. They are doing you and the gospel a service. Don't worry whether they deserve it or not. God is the judge. Don't scrutinize the food or drink. Just eat and drink it. You are not there to judge the food. Don't pay for what they put before you for you are doing them a service also. Don't move from house to house otherwise the speculations about why you moved will distract and detract from your message. You are not there to judge the households.

Heal the sick. This is God's mercy and God's confirmation that you bear the truth. Tell them that the Kingdom of God is near. Perhaps someone will ask about how to enter the kingdom.

I wish that many of us had the gift of healing. This plus the other demonstrative gifts confirm that we have the truth and that our message is approved by God. It does not mean we are perfect or good or even saved.

To sum it all up. You are there to do the work of God. Do it the best you can using all your resources and sense. Do everything to support the message and nothing to detract from it.

116. If persecuted flee. See Mt 10:23, Lk 21:20-21, Mk 13:14-20.

God may want you to stand your ground and die as a witness. Perhaps He wants you to flee and spread the Gospel elsewhere. Do whatever He tells you. Don't assume you must stay and die or that you must flee. After Stephen was killed there was a persecution, see Acts 8:1-4. Scripture does not judge those who stayed or those who fled.

Perhaps God can achieve more through one martyr than through a bunch. It would be easier to die as group. One person could give in to the temptation to disown Jesus and live. Perhaps no believer would ever know. God may choose just a few to be martyrs and for the others to flee.

117. Serve When Called. Read Lk 5:1-11

The call of the first disciples is important in all the gospels. John has a different bunch as being called first and in a different way and to a different calling. He records the calling of the first disciples whereas the other gospels are really recording the call of the first apostles.

Luke gives us the most detail. Here Jesus performs a miracle and the people are duly impressed. Peter takes it to the next level and realizes that Jesus must be from God in some way. He then continues on to thought, and not a new thought, that he is not that good. In fact he would have Jesus depart. I don't think that Peter thought that he would contaminate Jesus somehow. I think he was conscious of being evil in the presence of God. This is not a good place to be and needs to be fixed fast. the best description of evil confronted by God is Mt 28:1-4. the guards were terrorized and yet had nothing to fear from God, yet. Jesus reassures Peter and calls Him to His service. For God had chosen these men to serve God and all of humanity by doing the work that He gave them. As time would prove they were not perfect but they did the job. It is not our perfection that makes us usable. Nor is it our talents and gifts. It is our availability and our willingness to humbly submit, make sacrifices, and endure hardships. God can provide the perfection the gifts and talents, only we can provide the willingness.

I know a few Christians who want to do God's work. God reveals to most of them what His work is. Many times it is related to the gifts that they have learned, Through other people, that they have. I know other Christians who say they want to do God's work but these seem to be fleeting sentiments. Usually they are wrapped up in their problems, ambitions, and desires. Too wrapped up, to be consistently willing to work. Most Christians I know seem to have no expressed or real interest in doing God's work. Some are also wrapped up in their problems, ambitions, and desires. Others seem to have this attitude of the worthless servant in the parable of the pounds. they consider God harsh and unfair and do not want to serve Him they do not really submit to Him, His will, or His righteousness. At some point He disappointed them by not doing as they thought He should have, so they will not serve Him It is strange to think that There are many people in the churches who do the occasional good deed, never affirm the scriptures, and hold a deep seated resentment against God. Yet they are there regularly in His church. I wonder why. Perhaps He has not yet let go of them.

Suppose you really were righteous in all you did and of course God is righteous in all He did, but you and He don't agree on what righteousness is. What reasons might There be to abandon your own righteousness and submit to His. First, He made the world and made you. that gives Him an authority that you do not have. that is authority over you, but also the world and particularly other people. What good does it do these other people to pursue a righteousness of yours when it is not to you but to Him they will have to give an account. Second, He will judge. If you have any sense of self preservation you would do well to submit. Also if you have any love for other people, and you must if you are in fact righteous, you will see that they will be better off submitting to His will rather than yours. Third, He knows everything and is all powerful. This means He has the power and knowledge to see that His righteousness is executed throughout all creation. Fourth, He has been doing what is right allot longer and will continue doing so after you are gone. If you really were righteous these reasons would compel you to be on His side, and not expect Him to be on yours.

But I don't think that it is a sense of self righteousness that keeps people from submitting to God so much as a desire to be free of anyone's authority. the devil himself thinks himself righteous and clearly will not submit to God's authority. When we are this way we are like him.

Must we give up our desires and ambitions to answer God's call and do His work? Well yes, Look at

what Jesus gave up for you. Fair is fair. To be saved you must belong to Him belonging to Him you must do as He did.

What about my problems? Let Him take away your problems by giving your problems to Him Stop fighting, rehearsing, recalling, reacting to your problems. Just give them to Him and do everything He tells you to.

The most intense joy I have experienced in this life is when I am doing God's work and His will and with His power working through me, and when I can see the effect it has. Don't miss out on this.

Understand how the world will receive you and be careful. Read See Mt 10:16-33 and Lk 12:8-12

The passage in Mt follows after the instructions Jesus gives to the Twelve when He sent them out. I think these instructions in ch 10 are about two different missions. The first is the mission of the Twelve when Jesus sent them out. The second is the great commission when Jesus sent them out after the resurrection. The persecution described does not happen during the first mission. But later things change. See Lk 22:35-38. It is during the great commission that these things will take place. And this is the time in which we live so they apply to us.

Be shrewd and be innocent. This we discussed before. Much of this is warning of what will happen. So we need to be careful but we also need to be mentally and emotionally prepared. We must not be surprised.

The practical advice in the passage begins with the advice not to prepare your words. The Holy Spirit intends to speak through you. First of all we need to be prepared to have the Holy Spirit speak through us. For those with the speaking type of spiritual gifts we will have already experienced This. For others it will be like this: you will have a thought of The truth and will start speaking. You will not be conscious of choosing your words, and you will wonder where these words come from. They come from the Holy Spirit. Let them come and let them out.

Second you will be persecuted for what God is saying through you. I heard the story of a Christian missionary in Africa who was beaten. While this was taking place Jesus said to her "It is me they are beating". So prepare yourself to be beaten or worse for Jesus. Belonging to Jesus is a package deal. We share in His glory in His kingdom. We may have to share in His suffering here. He suffered for us. We can suffer for Him It will not seem a small thing to us at the time. Neither will it to Jesus. See Mk 16:19 and Acts 7:56. How can it be that Jesus sits at the right hand of God yet stands . He sits at the right hand of God. He stood to honor Stephen who was about to suffer and die for Him May we do as well as Stephen did.