

III.MAKE THE LORD FIRST

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, then 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 than 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. The 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 if 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 worshiping 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 your 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 barrows 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 snetches.) 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.