

XI. BE JUST, MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL. Read Mt 23:23

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 there. 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 so 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 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 field 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 any-way 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.