

The Most Excellent Way

*The Christian Solution to Chemical Dependency
“Becoming GOD-Dependent”*

“Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount”

BIBLE STUDY HOMEWORK

“We disclaim originality. Other men have labored, I [we] have but entered into their labors.” —C. I. Scofield

In preparing this Bible study homework,
we included and/or paraphrased some resources
available in PC Study Bible V.4, as follows:

The Bible Exposition Commentary, [Warren Wiersbe, Commentator]

The Life Application Commentary Series,
Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament, and
Pastor Chuck Smith’s commentary.

What better way to become God dependent than to learn about and know God through His Word?

The Bible Study Homework is a resource to help new believers become familiar with Biblical principles that will help them to achieve spiritual change from the inside out.

Note to Meeting Leaders of “The Most Excellent Way” Fellowship/Support Meetings:

- Download the study.
- Print or photocopy each study for each participant.
- After the Bible Study portion of your meeting, read through the study with the group. It is not necessary to answer all the questions — reading them aloud will provide food for thought which the Holy Spirit brings to mind as needed.

May our Lord richly bless you as you study His Word!

The Most Excellent Way

*The Christian Solution to Chemical Dependency
“Becoming GOD-Dependent”*

“Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount” Matthew 5, 6 & 7

BIBLE STUDY HOMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

JESUS TEACHES:

Study 1	• THE BEATITUDES ~ <i>Put On Jesus' Attitudes</i>	5:1-12
Study 2	• ABOUT SALT AND LIGHT ~ <i>Put On Jesus</i>	5:13-16
Study 3	• THE LAW ~ <i>Put On God's Law (Righteousness)</i>	5:17-20
Study 4	• ABOUT ANGER ~ <i>Put On Reconciliation</i>	5:21-26
Study 5	• ABOUT LUST ~ <i>Put On Purity</i>	5:27-30
Study 6	• ABOUT DIVORCE ~ <i>Put On Marital Fidelity</i>	5:31-32
Study 7	• ABOUT MAKING PROMISES ~ <i>Put On Truth Telling</i>	5:33-37
Study 8	• ABOUT RETALIATION ~ <i>Put On Self-Denial</i>	5:38-42
Study 9	• ABOUT LOVE ~ <i>Put On Love</i>	5:43-48
Study 10	• ABOUT GIVING ~ <i>Put On Selflessness</i>	6:1-4
Study 11	• HOW <u>NOT</u> TO PRAY ~ <i>Put Off Carnal Prayer</i>	6:5-8
Study 12	• HOW TO PRAY ~ <i>Put On Reverent Prayer</i>	6:9-15
Study 13	• ABOUT FASTING ~ <i>Put On Spiritual Maturity</i>	6:16-18
Study 14	• ABOUT MONEY ~ <i>Put On Spiritual Investments</i>	6:19-24
Study 15	• ABOUT WORRY ~ <i>Put On Hope & Faith</i>	6:25-32
Study 16	• ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS ~ <i>Put On God & Faithfulness</i>	6:33-34
Study 17	• ABOUT JUDGING OTHERS ~ <i>Put On Forgiveness</i>	7:1-6
Study 18	• ABOUT SPIRITUAL RESOURCES ~ <i>Put On Spiritual Discernment</i>	7:7-11
Study 19	• ABOUT LOVE ~ <i>Put On Godly Character</i>	7:12
Study 20	• THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE ~ <i>Follow Jesus On The Strait & Narrow Road</i>	7:13-14
Study 21	• ABOUT SPIRITUAL FRUIT ~ <i>Put On Obedience</i>	7:15-23
Study 22	• ABOUT LIFE & DEATH ~ <i>Put On True Discipleship: Jesus, the Way, Truth, Life</i>	7:24-29

"Jesus' Sermon on the Mount"

Matthew 5, 6 & 7

Bible Study Homework Introduction

What better way to become God dependent than to learn about and know God through His Word? The Bible Study Homework is a resource to help new believers become familiar with Biblical principles that will help them to achieve spiritual change from the inside out. One psychiatrist (at least) views the Sermon as the answer:

"I believe the following to be true: If you were to take the sum total of all the authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental [health] — if you were to combine them, and refine them, and [remove] all the excess [words] — if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 and 7). And it would be much less by comparison. For nearly two thousand years, the Christian world has been holding in its hands the complete answer... Here rests the blueprint for a successful human life, with optimum mental health and contentment." — James T. Fischer, M.D.

Guide for Meeting Leaders of "The Most Excellent Way" Fellowship/Support Meetings:

- 1) Download the study.
- 2) Photocopy the study for each participant.
- 3) After the Bible Study portion of your meeting, read through the study with your group, considering a few of the questions. It is not necessary to *answer* all the questions — by merely *reading* them, participants will recognize that there are indeed Biblical principles to help them mature in their spiritual walk with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



**"We disclaim originality. Other men have labored,
I [we] have but entered into their labors." —C. I. Scofield**

In preparing this Bible study homework, we included and/or paraphrased some resources available in PC Study Bible V.4, as follows: The Bible Exposition Commentary [Warren Wiersbe, Commentator], The Life Application Commentary Series, Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament; and from Pastor Chuck Smith's Commentary Outline on the New Testament.

Study 1 • “JESUS TEACHES THE BEATITUDES”

MATTHEW 5:3-12 NKJV — Jesus said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you,
and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven,
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”



The Sermon on the Mount is the Great Manifesto of the Kingdom of God. Jesus addressed His sermon to His disciples, not the multitudes. He did not intend to bring a new social gospel, nor did He intend to bring an end to suffering and wars.

Some wrongly say that the Sermon is for the future, that its message concerns the Kingdom Age (that period when Christ returns to rule over the world). But Jesus said that, *“the kingdom of God is among you”* (*Luke 17:21*) — He represents the Kingdom as being among us — meaning that we are living in “the age of grace.” And as we bow to the King’s authority, we become citizens of the heavenly kingdom. *“...Our citizenship is in heaven”* (*Philippians 3:20*).

The Sermon on the Mount declares to us what we ARE through the grace of God working in our lives; and because of what we are, what our relationship to the law (the Ten Commandments) has become.

The Beatitudes list characteristics that make up the Christian character. These characteristics are all interrelated and progressive. The Beatitudes are not “natural” characteristics, and they actually create a sharp distinction between the Christians and non-Christians in the things they admire and the things they seek. We must have a willingness to change our attitudes if we desire “victorious living.”



“THE BEGINNING OF VICTORIOUS LIVING”

Each of the following beatitudes tells how to be “blessed.” Other translations use the words “fortunate” or “happy.” These words don’t promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. Jesus turns the world’s idea of happiness upside down. To Jesus, happiness means hope and joy, independent of outward circumstances. To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, follow Jesus no matter what the cost.

There are at least four ways to understand the Beatitudes:

- (1) They are a code of ethics for the disciples and a standard of conduct for all believers.
- (2) They contrast Kingdom values (eternal values) with worldly values (which are temporary, carnal and temporal).
- (3) They contrast the superficial "faith" of the Pharisees with real faith Christ wants.
- (4) They show how the Old Testament expectations will be fulfilled in the new Kingdom.

These Beatitudes are not multiple choice — pick what you like and leave the rest. They must be taken as a whole. They describe what we should be like as Christ’s followers. These are the attitudes Jesus had, and He wants us to be like Him. To experience victorious living, we must seek and develop these “BE” attitudes. We must learn to BE who we ARE in Christ. We must renew our minds (Romans 12:1-2).

• **FOCUSING**

1. What are some ways people typically try to find happiness or fulfillment in life? _____

2. What person (living or dead) do you respect most? Why? _____

3. Are you ready to look at your life from Jesus' point of view? Why? _____

• **STUDYING GOD’S WORD**

4. What was the setting for this sermon? (5:1) _____

5. Who was Jesus addressing? (5:1-2) _____

Enormous crowds were following Jesus — He was the talk of the town and everyone wanted to see Him. The disciples, who were His closest associates, were certainly tempted to feel important, proud and possessive. But Jesus pulled His disciples aside and warned them about the temptations they would face as His followers. Jesus would tell them not to expect fame and fortune, but rather mourning and persecution. Jesus also assured them that they would be rewarded — but perhaps not in this life. If we don't live by Jesus' words in this sermon, we will find ourselves using God's message to promote our personal interests.

6. According to Jesus, what is the reward for those who are *poor in spirit?* (5:3) _____

The first characteristic of the child of God is a foundation that God can build upon. God will not and cannot build upon the foundations of pride, self will, or our own ambitions. "Poor in spirit" indicates a willingness to surrender prideful self-will to the authority of God, so He might govern our lives. We will not be making demands, because we know we are unworthy and undeserving.

GENESIS 32:10A — "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant."

- **Poverty of spirit is a consciousness of our own sinfulness and spiritual poverty:**

ISAIAH 6:5 -- "Woe to me!" I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'"

JAMES 4:4 — "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

JAMES 4:8 — "Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

JAMES 4:10 — "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up."

7. Why are those who mourn blessed? (5:4) _____

"Mourn" in the Greek is the most intensive kind of mourning. We develop an attitude of repentance for sin. Here "those who mourn" are mourning over their sinful state. Being "poor in spirit" creates a mourning over our own shortcomings and sins. We are comforted as God cleanses us of our unrighteousness and sins:

2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 — "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

- **We are comforted by the hope of the better world that is promised to us:**

ISAIAH 2:4 — "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

- We are comforted by those who have experienced the comfort of the Lord:

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 — “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

8. What is the reward for those who are meek? (5:5) _____

- When we realize the truth about ourselves, our attitude towards others is one of meekness. Meekness is related to lowliness:

MATTHEW 11:29 — Jesus said: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

- Meekness is related to learning the Word of God:

JAMES 1:21 — “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

- We are commanded to seek meekness:

ZEPHANIAH 2:3 — “Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgment; seek righteous, seek meekness: it may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.”

- Another meaning for *meek* is to domesticate a wild animal.

MATTHEW 11:28-30 — “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

- Meekness is having others see the truth about ourselves, and giving honor to others:

PHILIPPIANS 2:3 — “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.”

- Finally, Jesus was meek:

PHILIPPIANS 2:5 — “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”

In reality, a meek person has already inherited the earth because he is a satisfied person. A meek person has learned that happiness does not lie in possessions, people or position, but in a personal relationship with God.

9. What can those who hunger and thirst for righteousness expect? (5:6) _____

The first three Beatitudes were the emptying process. Now we come to seek for an answer to our helplessness. In the Greek this verse notes one of desiring, not just a portion, but ALL of the righteousness of God.

- **Righteousness cannot be achieved in our own strength; it is our standing before God.** God has imputed to us righteousness because we believe in Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 3:21-26—This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.²⁵God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶he did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

- **Righteousness is being right with God and our fellow man.** That is why “The Most Excellent Way” stresses the importance of a Biblical self-examination. When we acknowledge the root of the bitterness and anger that we experience, we are able to leave these self-centered, selfish feelings at the cross, and get on with victorious living.

2 Corinthians 13:5-6— Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?

- **We are not to hunger and thirst after happiness,** but after righteousness. Blessed is the man or woman, not who is righteous, but who hungers and thirsts after righteousness through Bible study. It isn’t necessarily righteousness itself that brings happiness.

When we seek righteousness in accordance with God’s plan for our lives, we will be filled with all spiritual blessings as we “put off” self and “put on” Christ.

10. What does God promise to those who are merciful? (5:7) _____

The Greek word for “mercy” has its root in the Hebrew word meaning “to get inside someone else’s skin.” This means that we are able to totally identify with what another is seeing, thinking, and feeling. God came into the skin of man through Christ to be able to identify with us— what we see, what we think, what we feel. (And He showed us what is acceptable in the human to be admitted into heaven.)

- **God is merciful:**

PSALMS 103:8, 11 — “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. ... For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.”

- **In the Gospels, Jesus places the emphasis on who we ARE, not on what we are doing (Ephesians 1-4). If we ARE what God wants us to BE, we will do what God wants us to DO:**

GALATIANS 2:20 — “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 — “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

- **After being filled, we become the next BE Attitude.** Because we have received the mercy of God through repentance, we are able to be merciful. If we are not merciful, we have not actually received God’s mercy. Those who have received forgiveness are forgiving. The BE Attitudes are like a beacon lights that call us to self-examination. If we are merciful then others will be merciful towards us:

LUKE 6:38 — “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:28, 31 — “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ...If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.”

JUSTICE IS GETTING WHAT YOU DESERVE.

MERCY IS NOT GETTING WHAT YOU DESERVE.

GRACE IS GETTING WHAT YOU DON’T DESERVE.

11. According to this passage, **who will see God?** (5:8) _____
-

The word “pure” in this BE Attitude refers to a purity that is the result of a washing.

- **The heart is the center of one’s being, the throne of the spirit. God is concerned with the inner heart:**

PROVERBS 4:23 — “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

JEREMIAH 17:9-10 — “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”

- **The heart needs to be cleansed:**

PSALM 51:7, 10 — “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ...Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

- **Being *pure in heart* is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Christian has a renewed heart in an unrenewed body:**

MARK 14:38 — [Jesus said:] “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

ROMANS 7:15-25 — I do not understand what I do.

For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good.

¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.
¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.
²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.
²¹ So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.
²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law;
²³ but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.
²⁴ **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?**
²⁵ **Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!** So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

GALATIANS 5:17 — “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

PSALM 103:14 — “... for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.”

- **Seeing God is evidenced in His creation, in the events of history, and in our daily circumstances:**

ROMANS 8:28 — “And we know that in **all things [good and bad]** God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

- **In the future, we will see Him face to face:**

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12 — “Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

12. Why are peacemakers blessed? (5:9) _____

- **Peace is more than a passive existence** (“anything to keep the peace”). Peace is a very positive state of good. A peacemaker is more than one who stops quarrels — a peacemaker brings good into the lives of others. Real peace can never be found in a compromise with evil. There can never be a peaceful coexistence with sin:

1 CORINTHIANS 5:7 — “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”

ISAIAH 57:20 — “But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.”

- **Peacemakers bring others to God.** Our basic problem is that we need to be reconciled unto God. “They will be called sons of God” could be interrupted “they will be CHOSEN as sons of God.” God initiated peace with many. We should have this same desire:

LUKE 2:14 — “Glory to God in highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”

ROMANS 5:1 — “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- **Even within our own lives, God will never make a pact with sin.** We must BE sons and daughters of God, and deal with our own sins as we bring God's peace to others.

13. **What does the future hold for those who are persecuted because of righteousness? (5:10)** _____

The Lord is upfront in telling us that we will suffer and that the world will not react in love and kindness towards His disciples -- read Matthew 10:16-25 and Acts 9:1-16.

- **Within the Kingdom of Heaven, we join the ranks of kingdom citizenship because we have a King who gives purpose to life:**

HEBREWS 12:2 — “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

14. **What unexpected command is given to Christians who are insulted, hassled, and lied about? (5:11 -12)** _____

- **As Christians, because of who we ARE in Christ, we should willingly face persecution in very specific ways:**

- (1) By not retaliating against our persecutors (Matthew 5:44);
- (2) By not holding resentments against our persecutors (Luke 23:34, Acts 7:5-6); and
- (3) By rejoicing in the fact that this proves we are God's children and have a great reward in heaven (Romans 8:7, Acts 5:40-41).

- **Because we ARE God's children our position in His kingdom is secure. We need to remember:**

- (1) Where we are going (II Timothy 4:8);
- (2) The prophets were persecuted (Acts 7:52); and
- (3) Persecution strengthens us:

ROMANS 5:3-5 — “...We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.”

COLOSSIANS 1:16 — “For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on

earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him."

15. What people in history have endured nasty persecution? (5:12) _____

- We can be comforted to know that God's greatest prophets were persecuted (Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus).
- Our persecution may mean we have shown ourselves faithful.
- In the future, God will reward the faithful by allowing them to enter His eternal Kingdom where there is no more persecution.
- Jesus said to rejoice when we're persecuted. Persecution can be good because it:
 - (1) Takes our eyes off early rewards;
 - (2) Strips away superficial believers;
 - (3) Strengthens the faith of those who endure; and
 - (4) Serves as an example to others who follow.

GALATIANS 6:9 — "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

1 PETER 3:17 — "It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

16. How does it pay in the present to walk with God? _____

17. What do you think it means to be poor in spirit? _____

18. What does it mean to be meek? _____

19. How would a person behave who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness? _____

20. What are some examples of showing mercy? _____

21. How does society's list of admirable virtues compare and contrast with these kingdom virtues? _____

22. How (if at all) does the promise of future blessing affect us in the present? _____

23. Which of these promises means the most to you today? Why? _____

24. What is the most common type of persecution that you face? _____

25. What peacemaking responses work well at diffusing hostility? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

26. What realistic steps will you take this week to make you hungrier and thirstier for righteousness? _____

27. What attitudes about your life will you change with the help of the Lord? _____

28. Write a prayer to the Lord acknowledging your decision to develop the attitudes Jesus described, seeking His help. _____



May God richly bless you as you grow spiritually as you study and apply His Word!

Study 2 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT SALT AND LIGHT”

MATTHEW 5:13-16 NIV — Jesus said:

“You ARE the salt of the earth.

But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴You ARE the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.

¹⁵Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men,

that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”



In these verses, Jesus explained to His disciples the true nature of their calling. They would be salt in a dreary world, light in a dark and evil world. But they would do this only because of the One who came as “the Light of the World.” This handful of men brought salt that we can taste and light that we can see even today. We, in turn, must pass “salt” and “light” along to others.

If seasoning has no flavor, it has no value.

If Christians make no effort to affect the world around them, they are of little value to God.

If we are too much like the world, we are worthless.

Christians should not blend in with everyone else.

Instead, we should affect others positively,

just as good seasonings brings out the best flavor in food.

Can you hide a city that is sitting on top of a hill? Its light at night can be seen for miles.

If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing others what Christ is like.

We hide our “light” if we are:

Quiet when we should speak;

Going along with the crowd;

Denying the light;

Letting sin dim our light;

Not explaining our light to others; or

Ignoring the needs of others.

Salt the earth and be a beacon of truth!

"THE KING'S DISCIPLES HAVE A MISSION"

• **FOCUSING**

1. What is your favorite spice? _____

2. What is it about darkness that frightens people? _____

3. Why do people commit crimes and evil acts under cover of darkness? _____

4. What do you think are the top five moral problems our country is facing? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

5. To what valuable substance did Jesus compare His disciples? (5:13) _____

6. What is an essential characteristic of salt? (5:13) _____

7. How did Jesus imply that a Christian's positive influence can wane or disappear? (5:13) _____

8. What happens to salt that loses its flavor? (5:13) _____

In the ancient world, salt was used for flavoring and as a preservative. Instead of being made by evaporation of salt water, the salt came mostly from salt marshes in the area southwest of the Dead Sea. Salt had commercial value, but the impure salt taken from the sea and its environs was susceptible to deterioration that left only useless crystals. Jesus' question "How can its saltiness be restored?" did not expect an answer — for once salt has deteriorated, it cannot be used as a preservative. Jesus warned them against being defiled by impurities. Even today in Israel, people scatter such salt on the flat roofs of their homes to harden the soil and prevent leaks. These roofs are used for children to play and for group gatherings, so the salt is still literally trampled under foot.

As salt preserves and brings out the best flavor of food, so we should affect others positively. If a seasoning has no flavor (has lost its taste), it has no value. Jesus clearly told His disciples (the word "you" is emphatic, meaning "you, My followers") that if they wanted to make a difference in the world, they would have to be different from the world. God would hold them accountable to maintain their "saltiness" (that is, their usefulness). If we are too much like the world, we are useless. Christians should not blend in with everyone else. Jesus tells us, as He told the disciples, that we must be different if we want to make a difference. We dare not allow the world to dilute our effectiveness. If we do, we are of no value to Him.

9. To what did Jesus compare His followers? (5:14) _____

10. How are Believers like light? (5:14) _____

As salt makes a difference in people's food, so light makes a difference in their surroundings. Jesus came as "*the light of all people*" (John 1:4 NRSV) and would later explain, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*" (John 8:12). Christ's disciples must live for Christ, shining like lights in a dark world, showing clearly what Christ is like. Who could hide a city that is sitting on top of a hill? Lanterns glowing from behind its walls send a light at night that can be seen for miles. Because Jesus is the Light of the World, His followers must reflect His light. If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing others what Christ is like.

11. What are improper and proper uses for a lamp? (5:15) _____

12. What use of a lamp teaches us about living? How? (5:15) _____

How absurd it would be to light a lamp and then put it under a bowl (referring to a clay jar that would conceal the light). People light lamps to spread light, enabling them to see what they are doing or where they are going. Thus people place lights on stands in the best location for them to spread their warm glow.

Jesus emphasized that the disciples would continue to reflect the light of their Master: the Light of the World. They could no more hide the His light than a city on a hill can hide. They must not try to conceal their light any more than one would light a lamp and then conceal it under a clay jar. Being Christ's disciples means being distinctive. As Christ's disciples means spreading the light to everyone in the house — that is, everyone with whom we have contact.

13. According to Jesus, how exactly are Christians to be like lamps? (5:16) _____

14. What kind of behavior should other people see Christians exhibiting? (5:16) _____

15. If believers live as they are supposed to live, how will others respond toward God? (5:16) _____

In the same way that a light shines from a lamp stand, as Christ's disciples we must let our light shine before others. The very reason for the existence of that light is to illuminate — helping show people what to do and where to go. How would people see this light? Through the good works of Christ's followers. Jesus made it clear that there would be no mistaking the source of a believer's good works. Others will see and give glory to your Father in heaven. This contrasts with the attitude of the people He will chastise in 6:1, the ones who do good works for their own glory. The believer's light shines not for himself but to reflect the light back to the Father and so direct people to Him.

In an attempt to steer clear of works for gaining righteousness, good works are often neglected in church life today. But clearly the Bible supports the importance of doing good — see:

- Ephesians 2:8-10; 4:12
- 1 Timothy 5:10; 6:18
- 2 Timothy 2:21; 3:17
- Titus 3:1, 8, 14
- James 1:22; 2:14-26; 3:13

Good works are important — not only as a witness to others —but as a continuation of the work Christ began on earth.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

16. What did Jesus mean when He called His followers salt? _____

17. What sort of effect does salt have on food? _____

18. How do salty things affect us? _____

The Most Excellent Way ~ Becoming GOD-Dependent

19. Can a Christian lose his or her saltiness? How? _____

20. What does it mean to "let your light shine"? _____

21. How might a believer hide his or her light? _____

22. What is the effect of bright light in a dark place? _____

23. What does light reveal? _____

24. What specific behaviors mark the life-style of a salty, shining Christian? _____

25. In light of your gifts, abilities, and interests, what specific problem in our world can you counteract as a representative of Christ? _____

• DOING THE WORD

26. What phone calls or letters would you be willing to make or write in order to be salt and light in someone's life? _____

27. To whom in your neighborhood, family, or workplace can you be salt and light everyday? _____

28. How can you be salt and light to the people God has placed in your life? _____

29. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for giving you the privilege to be salt and light in a dark world for the glory of God. _____

*May God richly bless you as you study His Word and share the
Good News about our Savior who makes His people whole!*

Study 3 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT THE LAW”

HEART ATTITUDE: Obedience, Love, Submission, Self-Denial

MATTHEW 5:17-20 NIV — Jesus said:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

¹⁸I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

¹⁹Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”



Certainly after the crowd heard our Lord’s description of the attitudes of those God blesses, they said to themselves, “But we could never attain that kind of character. How can we have this righteousness? Where does it come from?” They wondered how His teaching related to what they had been taught all their lives. What about Moses and the Law?

In the Law of Moses, God certainly revealed His standards for holy living. The Pharisees defended the Law and sought to obey it. But Jesus said that the true righteousness that pleases God must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees — and to the common people, the scribes and Pharisees were the holiest men in the community! If they had not attained righteousness, what hope was there for anybody else?

- **Jesus made it clear that He had come to honor the Law and help God’s people love it, learn it, and live it.**

He would not accept the artificial righteousness of the religious leaders.

Their righteousness was only an external masquerade.

Their religion was a dead ritual, not a loving relationship.

It was artificial; it did not reproduce itself in others in a living way.

It made them proud, not humble; it led to bondage, not liberty.

- **Obedience challenges us to go beyond mere understanding.**
Some of those in the crowd were experts at telling others what to do, but they missed the central point of God's laws themselves. Jesus made it clear, however, that obeying God's law is more important than explaining it. It's much easier to study God's laws and tell others to obey them than to put them into practice. How are you doing at obeying God yourself?
 - **Obedience challenges us to go beyond mere outward conformity.**
The Pharisees were exacting and scrupulous in their attempts to follow their laws. So how could Jesus reasonably call us to a greater righteousness than theirs? The Pharisees' weakness was that they were content to obey the laws outwardly without allowing God to change their hearts (or attitudes). Jesus was saying, therefore, that the quality of our goodness should be greater than that of the Pharisees. They looked pious, but they were far from the kingdom of God. God judges our hearts as well as our deeds, for it is in the heart that our real allegiance lies. Be just as concerned about your attitudes that people don't see as about your actions that are seen by all.
 - **Obedience challenges us to act out of love for God.**
Jesus was saying that his listeners needed a different kind of righteousness altogether (love and obedience), not just a more intense version of the Pharisees' righteousness (legal compliance). Our righteousness must:
 - (1) come from what God does in us, not what we can do by ourselves,
 - (2) be God-centered, not self-centered,
 - (3) be based on reverence for God, not approval from people, and
 - (4) go beyond keeping the law to living by the principles behind the law.
 - **If Jesus did not come to cancel the Law, does that mean all the Old Testament laws still apply to us today?**
Yes! He points out that He was not abandoning or nullifying the law, but *fulfilling* it. Jesus fulfilled the law in His life, for nobody could accuse Him of sin; and He fulfilled it in His death and resurrection. God's people do not obey Him because of outward conformity, but because of an inward life, the power of the Spirit of God. The Jews thought the Old Testament law dealt with "outward actions;" but in God's kingdom, we must beware of sinful inward attitudes. While the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount, it is clear that we cannot practice what Jesus teaches here apart from the Spirit's help:
- ROMANS 8:1-8 NIV**
- Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,
²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.
³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature,
God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.
And so he condemned sin in sinful man,
⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.
⁵Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.
⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;
⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.
⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

How can we ever do anything good when we have such a sinful nature. How can a holy God ever accept anything we do when we have “no good thing” dwelling in us? It would seem that He would have to condemn every thought and deed! But there is “no condemnation” since the indwelling Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ in us) fulfills the righteousness of the Law in us.

The Law cannot condemn us because we are dead to the Law. God cannot condemn us, for the Holy Spirit enables us to “walk in the Spirit” and thereby meet God’s holy demands.

It is a glorious day in the life of the Christian when we realize that God’s children are not under the Law, that God does not expect us to do “good works” in the power of the old nature. When we understand that “there is no condemnation,” then we realize that the indwelling Spirit pleases God and helps us to please Him.

We can chose one of two attitudes (minds):

- (1) We can lean toward the things of the flesh and be a carnal Christian (“carnal” means “of the flesh”) who is at enmity (at war) with God; or
- (2) We can incline toward the things of the Spirit, be a spiritual Christian, and enjoy life and peace. The carnal mind cannot please God — only the Spirit working in and through us can please God.

What a glorious salvation we have! “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage!” warns Paul in Galatians 5:1 NKJV.

- **Our greatest happiness is found in willingly obeying God. What do we do when we don’t feel like obeying?**

God has not left us alone in our struggles to do His will. He wants to come alongside us and be within us to help. God helps us *want* to obey Him and then gives us the power to do what He commands. The secret to a changed life is to submit to God’s control and let Him work. Next time you are tempted, ask God to help you want to do His will.

- **It is God’s will that we become like Christ.**

To be like Christ, we must train ourselves to think like Christ.

To change our desires to be more like Christ’s, we need the power of the indwelling Spirit the influence of faithful Christians, obedience to God’s Word (not just exposure to it), and sacrificial service. Often it is in doing God’s will that we gain the desire for it. **Do what He wants, and trust Him to change your desires.**

PHILIPPIANS 1:18-21 NIV — Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9 NIV — Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 NIV — Dearest friends, you were always so careful to follow my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away you must be even more careful to put into action

God's saving work in your lives, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him.



JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

- **FOCUSING**

1. What is the worst rule or law you've ever been aware of? _____

2. When in your life did you feel closest to God? _____

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

3. What rumor was apparently being spread about Jesus and His view of the Old Testament? (5:17)

4. What did Jesus say was His goal with regard to the Law and the Prophets? (5:17)

Jesus placed His eternal stamp of approval on the law by declaring, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17-19).

Jesus fills to fullness; He completes and transcends the law. The Old Testament law is not rescinded, but now must be reinterpreted and reapplied in light of Jesus. God does not change His mind. He did not send His Son to repeal, abolish, or annul what He had told His people previously. Instead, the Father sent His Son as the fulfillment. Jesus' coming had been part of God's plan from creation (see Genesis 3:15).

Jesus did not come as a rabbi with a brand-new teaching that He had thought up and hoped to convince people was true. Instead, He came as the promised Messiah with a message heard from the beginning of time. He came not to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill the promises in those Scriptures. The meaning for "fulfill" may be explained three ways, and Jesus fulfilled them all:

- (1) to accomplish or obey the Old Testament laws;
- (2) to bring out the full meaning of the law and prophecy, showing how Christ is the fulfillment of all to which they pointed;
- (3) to bring the Old Testament law and promises to their destined end or intended completion.

5. How much of the Law did Jesus say would be fulfilled or accomplished? (5:18) _____

6. According to Jesus, what dramatic event would have to happen before God's Word could be invalidated in even a tiny way? (5:18) _____

Jesus said "I tell you the truth" (also translated, "Truly I say to you," or "Verily, verily") several times in His speaking, signaling that what He said next is of vital importance. In these words Jesus ascribes the highest authority to God's Law. Not only did Jesus fulfill the Law, but until heaven and earth disappear (meaning until the end of the age) the Law will not change. There are two "until" clauses: (1) "until heaven and earth disappear" — the eternal validity of the law is established; (2) "until everything is accomplished" — meaning the total plan of God. After the millennium and after Satan and his rebels are thrown into the lake of fire, then there will be a new heaven and a new earth — there will be no more sin and death, and no more law because all God's children remaining with Him will be 100% righteous.

Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will be set aside or will disappear from the Law book. Jesus upheld the truth of every letter of every word in God's Law. Furthermore, Jesus' statement certifies the absolute authority of every word and letter of Scripture. God's plan will never change. Everything prophesied in God's Law will take place. No promise or prophecy in the Law will remain unfulfilled. Everything will be accomplished.

7. What two things result in one being called least in the kingdom of heaven? (5:19) _____

8. What happens if a person lives a good life and breaks only minor commandments of God? (5:19) _____

9. What warning was given to those who would encourage others to disregard the Word of God? (5:19) _____

10. Who is considered great in the kingdom of heaven? (5:19) _____

11. To what groups of religious leaders did Jesus make reference? (5:20) _____

12. What degree of righteousness is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of heaven? (5:20) _____

Jesus was saying that His listeners needed a different kind of goodness altogether (love and obedience), not just a more intense version of the Pharisees' goodness (legal compliance). Our goodness must:

- (1) come from what God does in us, not what we can do by ourselves,
- (2) be God-centered, not self-centered,
- (3) be based on reverence for God, not approval from people, and
- (4) go beyond keeping the Law to living by the principles behind it.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD OF GOD**

13. Do you believe the words of Scripture are trustworthy? Why or why not? _____

14. Why did Jesus talk about the righteousness of the Pharisees in this context? _____

15. In discussing sin, why did Jesus make a point of saying, "one of the least of these commandments"?

16. What are some ways we occasionally encourage each other to bend or break God's rules? _____

17. What level of reverence and submission do you think most people have toward the Bible? Why?

18. What does it mean to "practice" the commandments of God? _____

19. Has our Lord provided a way for us to practice His commandments? If so, who or what is His provision? _____

20. What are some ways to teach others about the righteousness of God? _____

21. What good can we do to be acceptable to God? _____

22. Why is it difficult for us to practice what we preach? _____

23. What ideals are most difficult for you to uphold? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

24. When and how will you consult the Bible for guidance on how to live? _____

25. What should you do about someone who tends to “drag you down”? _____

26. What command of God will you commit to memory this week? _____

*May God the Lord richly bless you as you
study His Word and practice obedience!*

"JESUS AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS"

Jesus explained His own attitude toward the Law by describing three possible relationships.

1. We can seek to destroy the Law (5:17a).

The Pharisees thought Jesus was seeking to destroy the Law. To begin with, His authority did not come from any of the recognized leaders or schools. Instead of teaching "from authorities" as did the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus taught with authority.

Not only in His authority, but also in His activity, Jesus seemed to defy the Law. He deliberately healed people on the Sabbath Day and paid no attention to the traditions of the Pharisees. Our Lord's associations also seemed contrary to the Law, for He was the friend of publicans and sinners.

Yet, it was the Pharisees who were destroying the Law! By their traditions, they robbed the people of the Word of God, and by their hypocritical lives, they disobeyed the very Law that they claimed to protect. The Pharisees thought they were "conserving" God's Word, when in reality they were "preserving" God's Word: embalming it so that it no longer had life! The Law that the Jews thought would save them merely condemns them; for the Law gives the knowledge of sin. Their rejection of Christ when He came to earth proved that the *inner truth* of the Law had not penetrated their hearts

- What is the *inner truth* of the Law?**

ROMANS 3:19-24 — Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, **through the law we become conscious of sin.** ²¹But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²²This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

2. We can seek (desire) to fulfill the Law (5:17b).

Jesus Christ fulfilled God's Law in every area of His life. He fulfilled it in His birth because He was "made under the Law" (Galatians 4:4), including the prescribed ritual for a Jewish boy performed on Him by His parents.

He certainly fulfilled the Law in His life, for nobody was ever able to accuse Him of sin. While He did not submit to the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees, He always did what God commanded in the Law. The Father was "well pleased" with His Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

Jesus also fulfilled the Law in His teaching. It was this that brought Him into conflict with the religious leaders. When He began His ministry, Jesus found the Living Word of God encrusted with man-made traditions and interpretations. He broke away this thick crust of "religion" and brought the people back to God's Word. Then, He opened the Word to them in a new and living way — they were accustomed to the "letter" of the Law and not the inner "kernel" of life.

But it was in His death and resurrection that Jesus especially fulfilled the Law. He bore the curse of the Law: **GALATIANS 3:13** — Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

He fulfilled the Old Testament types and ceremonies so that they no longer are required of the people of God. He set aside the Old Covenant and brought in the New Covenant.

Jesus did not destroy the Law by fighting it, He destroyed it by fulfilling it! Perhaps an illustration will make this clear. If I have an acorn, I can destroy it in one of two ways. I can put it on a rock and smash it to bits with a hammer. Or, I can plant it in the ground and let it fulfill itself by becoming an oak tree.

- **When Jesus died, He rent (tore) the veil of the temple and opened the way into the holiest:**

HEBREWS 10:19 — Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ...

- **He broke down the wall that separated the Jews and Gentiles:**

EPHESIANS 2:11-13 — Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)— ¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

- **Because the Law was fulfilled in Christ we no longer need temples made with hands or religious rituals:**

ACTS 7:48 — However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men.

COLOSSIANS 2:9-13 — For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, ¹²having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ...

- **How can we fulfill the Law?** By yielding to the Holy Spirit and allowing Him to work in our lives. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience the "righteousness of the law" in daily life. This does not mean we live sinless perfect lives, but it does mean that Christ lives out His life through us by the power of His Spirit.

ROMANS 8:1-4 — Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

GALATIANS 2:20 — I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me

and gave Himself for me.

When we read the Beatitudes, we see the perfect character of Jesus Christ. While Jesus never had to mourn over His sins, since He was sinless, He was still a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). He never had to hunger and thirst after righteousness since He was the holy Son of God, but He did delight in the Father’s will and find His satisfaction in doing it (John 4:34). The only way we can experience the righteousness of the Beatitudes is through the power of Christ.

3. We can seek to do and teach the Law (5:19).

This does not mean we major on the Old Testament and ignore the New! Second Corinthians 3 makes it clear that ours is a ministry of the New Covenant. But there is a proper ministry of the Law (1 Tim 1:9 ff) that is not contrary to the glorious message of God’s grace.

1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11 — We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. ⁹We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers — and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine ¹¹that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which He entrusted to me.

Jesus wants us to know more of the righteousness of God, obey it and share it with others. The moral law of God has not changed — Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament epistles and commanded to believers. (The exception is the Sabbath commandment, which was given as a sign to the Jews.)

We do not obey an external Law because of fear. No, believers today obey an internal Law and live because of love. The Holy Spirit teaches us the Word and enables us to obey. Sin is still sin, and God still punishes sin. In fact, we in this present age are more responsible because we have been taught and given more!



“THE OLD AND THE NEW”

The Ten Commandments are still relevant today. The world desperately needs to see the name and character of God displayed in the lives of Christians who still take His Word seriously. These Commandments, particularly coupled with the teachings of Christ, are still the best guidelines for practical daily living known to man. In fact, it would be helpful for us if we considered Jesus’ teachings and His “commandments.”

1. OT: EXODUS 20:3 — “You shall have no other gods before Me”

Since God’s character forms the basis of the covenant with His people. He demands absolute loyalty. And when the intent of the heart is to put God first, a person’s outward actions will reveal it. Then others will see what God’s character is like through the actions of His people.

NT: MATTHEW 4:10 — Jesus said: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”

Satan offered all the world to Jesus if He would only kneel and worship him. Today Satan offers us

way Jesus did. If you find yourself craving something that the world offers, follow our Lord's example and say, "I will worship the Lord my God, and serve Him only!"

2. **OT: EXODUS 20:4 — "You shall not make for yourself a carved image."**

The second commandment is necessary because people do not always keep the first. The Israelites made a golden calf to worship even as the Lord gave the laws to Moses. And since Israel had so many contacts with people who did worship images, including replicas of their earthly rulers, God gave them this Law.

NT: LUKE 16:13 — Jesus said: "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Today we can allow certain values to become gods to us. Money, fame, work, relationships, programs, and/or pleasure can become gods when we concentrate too much on them for meaning and security. No one sets out with the intention of worshipping these things. But with the amount of time they occupy in our lives, they can grow into gods that ultimately control our thoughts, attitudes and energies. Letting God hold the central place in our lives keeps these things from turning into gods, which is idolatry.

3. **OT: EXODUS 20:7 — "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."**

God's name and His character are inseparable. Using His holy name lightly in a vain, empty manner is insulting and degrading. This could be done by perjuring oneself in a court of law or by cursing. However, this commandment also applies to hypocritical worship, using God's name in meaningless prayer and praise.

ISAIAH 29:13 — The LORD says:

"These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is made up only of rules taught by men."

NT: MATTHEW 5:34-37 — Jesus said:

"But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

Oaths, or vows were common, but Jesus told His followers not to use them--their word alone should be enough. Are you known as a person of your word? Truthfulness seems so rare that we feel we must end our statements with "I promise." If we tell the truth all the time, we will have less pressure to back up our words with an oath or promise.

JAMES 5:12 — Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

4. **OT: EXODUS 20:8 — "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."**

Sabbath means "rest," but God intended for this day to stand for more than an absence of work. It was to be a day of worship as well — a day for setting aside all thoughts of materialistic gain and thinking about Him. God set the pattern by ceasing from His labors after creating the world.

NT: MARK 2:27-28 — Jesus said: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.”

God created the Sabbath for our benefit, not His own. God derives no benefit from having us rest on the Sabbath, but we are restored both physically and spiritually when we take time to rest and focus on God. For the Pharisees, Sabbath laws had become more important than Sabbath rest. Jesus understood that the intent of God’s Law is to promote love for God and others. When we apply a law to other people, we should make sure we understand its purpose and intent so we don’t make harmful or inappropriate judgments.

5. **OT: EXODUS 20:12— “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land.”** God established parents as the authority figures in the family unit. Children often get their first impressions about God from their parents. Parents who walk in the Spirit, honestly desiring to follow the guidelines of the Scriptures, will set better examples for their children. And children who want to please God will respect their parents, regardless of pressure from the world and their peers.

This is the first commandment with a promise attached. To live in peace for generations in the Promised Land, the Israelites would need to respect authority and build strong families. But what does it mean to "honor" parents? Partly, it means speaking well of them and politely to them. It also means acting in a way that shows them courtesy and respect (but not to obey them if the means disobedience to God). Parents have a special place in God’s sight. Even those who find it difficult to get along with their parents are still commanded to honor them.

NT: MATTHEW 10:37— Jesus said: “He that loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Christ calls us to a higher mission than to find comfort and tranquility in this life. Love of family is a law of God, but even this love can be self-serving and used as an excuse not to obey or serve God.

6. **OT: EXODUS 20:13 — “You shall not murder.”**

Commandments six through nine pertain to our relationships with one another. The breakdown of these guidelines has plunged many civilizations into decay. A person who cares about others, beginning with those in the home, does not want to harm them. This law reveals God’s attitude toward people created in His image. No one has the right to take that life from another.

NT: MATTHEW 5:21-22a — Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. ...”

When Jesus said, “But I tell you,” He was not doing away with the Law or adding His own beliefs. Rather, He was giving a fuller understand of why God made that Law in the first place. Jesus taught, “Don’t ever become angry enough to murder, for then you have already committed murder in your heart.” We miss the intent of God’s Word when we read His rules for living without trying to understand why He made them. When do you keep God’s rules but close your eyes to His intent?

7. **OT: EXODUS 20:14 — “You shall not commit adultery.”**

Technically, this commandment refers to being sexually involved with a married person; but it is traditionally used to prohibit all sexual relationships outside of marriage. Again, this commandment

involves a right relationship with God and with others. Adultery is possible only if people are prepared to hurt others, to enjoy themselves at the expense of other people. A right attitude toward keeping God first and not harming others is tied together in these commandments.

NT: MATTHEW 5:28 — Jesus said: “**Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**”

Jesus said that the DESIRE to have sex with someone other than your spouse is mental adultery and thus sin. Jesus emphasized that if the ACT is wrong, then so is the INTENTION. To be faithful to your spouse with your body but not your mind, is to break the trust so vital to a strong marriage. Jesus is not condemning natural interest in the opposite sex or even healthy sexual desire, but the deliberate and repeated filling of one’s mind with fantasies that would be evil if acted out.

8. OT: EXODUS 20:15 — “You shall not steal.”

Stealing involves taking something that does not belong to you. This could be another’s life, marriage partner, or reputation. This law also emphasizes the importance of getting all you possess by lawful means.

JOHN 10:10 — The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Just as Satan is a liar and a murderer, he is also a thief. He turned Judas into a thief (John 12:6) and he would do the same to us if he could. When he tempted Eve, he led her to become a thief, for she took the fruit that was forbidden — and Adam became a thief. The first Adam was a thief and was cast out of Paradise, but the Last Adam, Christ, turned to a thief and said, “Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

NT: EPHESIANS 4:28 — He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

We should work, and not steal, so that we might be able “to give to him that needs.” We could expect Paul to have said, “Let him work that he might take care of himself and not be tempted to steal.” Instead, he lifted human labor to a much higher level. We work that we might be able to help others. If we steal, we hurt others; therefore, we should work that we might be able to help others.

Even honest labor could become a selfish thing, and this Paul seeks to avoid. Of course, it was a fundamental rule in the early church that “*if any would not work, neither should he eat*” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). A lazy Christian robs himself, others, and God. Of course, Paul was not writing to believers who could not work because of handicaps, but to those who would not work.

9. OT: EXODUS 20:16 — “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

The old saying, “A man’s word is as good as his name” is sometimes a joke today. But God’s people ought to cherish their own reputations and that of others. If a person is unwilling to speak ill of another, he is less likely to steal from him or to commit murder.

NT: MATTHEW 12:36 — Jesus said: “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Jesus reminds us that what we say reveals what is in our hearts. What kinds of words come from your mouth? That is an indication of what your heart is really like. And you can't solve your heart problem just by cleaning up your speech. You must allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with new attitudes and motives; then your speech will be cleansed at its source.

- **PSALM 19:14** — May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

10. OT: EXODUS 20:17 — “You shall not covet.”

This tenth commandment is an outgrowth of the first. If a person's heart is fixed on the Lord, he will have the right attitude toward others. Consequently, the desires that rise from his heart will not cause pain or loss to others. The right motive (pleasing God who is first in your life) will result in obeying the other commandments (not hurting others).

To covet is to wish (imagine, fantasize) to have the possessions and/or lifestyles of others. It goes beyond simply admiring someone else's possessions or thinking, "I'd like to have one of those." Coveting includes envy—resenting the fact that others have what you don't. God knows, however, that possessions never make anyone happy for long.

Since God can supply all our needs, true contentment is found only in Him. When you begin to feel covetous, try to determine if a more basic need is standing behind your envy. For example, you may covet someone's success, not because you want to take it away from him, but because you would like to feel as appreciated by others as he is. If this is the case, pray that God will help you deal with your resentment and meet your basic needs.

NT: LUKE 12:15 — Jesus said: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness . . .”

Jesus says that the good life has nothing to do with being wealthy, so beware of covetousness (greedy desire for what we don't have). This is the exact opposite of what society usually says. Advertisers spend millions of dollars to entice us to think that if we buy more and more of their products, we will be happier, more in tune, more comfortable. How do you respond to the constant pressure to buy? Learn to tune out expensive enticements and concentrate on the truly good life—living in a relationship with God and doing His work.



“JESUS’ SUMMATION OF THE LAW”

MATTHEW 22:36-40

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind.’

³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

[Selah!]

Study 4 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT ANGER & RESOLVING CONFLICT

HEART ATTITUDE: Obedience, Self-Control, Peacemaker

MATTHEW 5:21-22 NIV — Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago,
‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’
²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.
Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin.
But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

MATTHEW 5:23-26 NIV — Jesus said:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother has something against you,
²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar.
First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.
²⁵Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court.
Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge,
and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.
²⁶I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”



Jesus did not say that anger *leads* to murder — He said that anger *IS* murder. Anger is such a foolish thing. It makes us destroyers instead of builders. It robs us of freedom and makes us prisoners. To hate someone is to commit murder in our hearts:

1 JOHN 3:14-15 — We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Killing is a terrible sin, but anger is a great sin too because it also violates God’s command to love. Anger in this case refers to a seething, brooding bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control, leading to violence, emotional hurt, increased mental stress, and spiritual damage. Anger keeps us from developing a spirit pleasing to God.

Have you ever been proud that you didn’t strike out and say what was really on your mind? Self-control is good, but Christ wants us to practice *thought*-control as well. Jesus said we will be held accountable even for our attitudes. We miss the intent of God’s Word when we read His rules for living

without trying to understand why He made them.

When do you keep God's rules, but close your eyes to His intent?

There is a holy anger against sin (Ephesians 4:26), but Jesus talked about an unholy anger against people. The word He used in Matthew 5:22 means "a settled anger, malice that is nursed inwardly."

Obviously, sinful feelings are not excuses for sinful deeds. Sinful anger robs us of fellowship with God as well as with our brothers, but it does not put us into jail as murderers. However, more than one person has become a murderer because he failed to control sinful anger.

"MURDER VERSUS SELF-CONTROL AND RECONCILIATION"

- **FOCUSING ON THE WORD**

1. When do you tend to get angry? _____

2. Why do people murder each other over trivial things -- a parking space, a cigarette lighter, a crude remark, a traffic problem? _____

3. How do you express your anger? _____

- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

4. What age-old prohibition was Jesus addressing this context? (5:21) _____

5. What was the penalty for violators of the law? (5:21) _____

6. How did Jesus explain the meaning of the law against murder? (5:21) _____

It's not the words that put us in jeopardy of hellfire. We could think of a lot worse names than "you fool" to call people. It's the attitude. By calling someone a fool, we write that person off as worthless, a zero, nothing, nobody. And what is the problem with that? That worthless nobody (in our judgment) is someone made in the image of God. If God's image is a fool, doesn't that make God a fool too? Next time we're ready to write someone off, we need to

think about whom we're really talking about.

7. According to Jesus, what kind of name-calling made one answerable to the Sanhedrin? (5:22)
-
-

8. What kind of angry name-calling puts one in eternal danger? (5:22)
-

When Jesus said, "But I tell you" He was not doing away with the Law or adding His own beliefs. Rather, He was giving a fuller understanding of why God made that Law in the first place. When Moses said, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13, KJV), Jesus taught, "Don't even become angry enough to murder, for then you have already committed murder in your heart." The Pharisees read this law and, not having murdered anyone, felt righteous. Yet they were angry enough with Jesus that they would soon plot His murder (though they would not do the dirty work themselves).

Jesus put anger and murder in the same category. He saw a direct connection that we usually deny. In this and other relational matters, like adultery, Jesus taught that intention is a significant part of wrongdoing. Anger leads quickly to a whole range of emotions and actions. When anger is not righteous , it becomes destructive.

EPHESIANS 4:26-27— "In your anger do not sin:" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

JAMES 1:19-20 — My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Anger tends to be like a gushing spring that quickly floods its surroundings unless it has a clear channel through which to flow. Anger can destroy its host as well as anything or anyone against which it is directed. Anger may require the following controls:

- Confrontation — expressing anger in appropriate ways
- Contemplation — examining why we are angry
- Confession — asking God and others for help in dealing with our anger
- Condemnation — revising inappropriate expectations that lead to anger

Based on Jesus' warning, we cannot assume that anger will go away by itself. It must be directed, controlled, and resolved.

9. How did Jesus describe hell? (5:23)
-
-

Hell (Gehenna) is the place of "fire that shall never be quenched" (Mark 9:43,45,47-48 NKJV), prepared for the devil, his angels, and all those who do not know Christ (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:9-10). This is the final and eternal state of the wicked after the resurrection and

the Last Judgment.

10. What sort of realization did Jesus say should interrupt our worship? (5:23) _____
-
-

The Old Testament prophets repeatedly told the people that “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22). Love for God and for fellow believers is more important than gifts brought to the altar (Isaiah 1:11; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). Jesus said that even such a solemn occasion as worship in the inner courts of the temple should be interrupted in order to bring reconciliation among believers.

11. If you become aware of a relationship problem, how quickly should you act? (5:24) _____
-
-

12. What should be your goal in strained or shattered relationships? (5:24) _____
-

Sinful anger must be faced honestly and must be confessed to God as sin. We must go to our brother and get the matter settled, and we must do it quickly. The longer we wait, the worse the bondage becomes! We put ourselves into a terrible prison when we refuse to be reconciled. (See Matthew 18:15-20 — page 7.) The person who refuses to forgive his brother destroys the very bridge over which he himself must walk.

Broken relationships can hinder our relationship with God. If we have a problem or grievance with a family member or friend, we should resolve the problem as soon as possible. We are hypocrites if we claim to love God while we hate others. Our attitudes toward others reflect our relationship with God.

1 JOHN 4:20 — “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”

Bring your worries to God in prayer. In relationships where nothing looks hopeful, where every contact digs the hole deeper, try prayer. Pray for reconciliation daily — for the other person’s happiness, peace, and immediate needs. Time is a healer and miracles can happen — especially when God is at work bringing people together.

13. When is it best to settle disputes? (5:25) _____
-

14. Where is it best to settle disputes? (5:25) _____
-

15. What bad consequences can occur if a dispute escalates into a full-blown court battle? (5:25-26) _____
-

In Jesus' day, someone who couldn't pay a debt was thrown into prison until the debt was paid. Unless someone came to pay the debt for the prisoner, he would probably die there. It is practical advice to resolve our differences with our enemies before their anger causes more trouble.

You may not get into a disagreement that takes you to court, but even small conflicts mend more easily if you try to make peace right away. With an eternal perspective, these verses advise us to get things right with our fellow man before we have to stand before Jesus — when it will be too late.

1 JOHN 3:14-15 — We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

16. Why did Jesus zero in on the emotions behind our violent actions? _____

17. What modern-day equivalents to "Raca" do we level at others? _____

18. What attitudes and emotions tend to lead to name-calling? _____

19. Which of our Christian activities would closely relate to offering gifts at the altar? _____

20. According to Jesus, how do problems in your relationships with others affect your relationship with God? _____

21. Why is it necessary to get things right with people before you go to worship the Lord? _____

22. Why is it preferable for Christians to quietly resolve their differences rather than battle over them publicly? _____

23. How might Christians be encouraged to reconcile with each other before coming to a Communion service? _____

• **DOING GOD'S WORD**

24. What relationship conflict(s) do you need to straighten out today? _____

25. How can you help yourself remember this week to keep your anger under control? _____

26. What expectations do you have of others that create anger in you when they are not met? _____

27. Write a prayer to your Lord asking Him to reveal those people in your life with whom you need to make an effort to reconcile with. _____

❧
OVERCOMING ANGER BY RESOLVING CONFLICTS

MATTHEW 18:15-20

Jesus said: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Jesus' advice for keeping peace in your relationships:

- Don't ignore conflict; address it.
- Don't exaggerate conflict; solve it with the least possible publicity and public scrutiny.
- Don't abandon conflict; pursue it to resolution.
- Don't fence yourself in by conflict; taking two or three witnesses requires that you also are open to reproof and correction.
- Don't recycle conflict; once resolved, let it go and get back to your life.

These are Jesus' guidelines for dealing with those who sin against us. These guidelines were meant for Christians (not unbelievers) and for discipline and conflict resolution in the context of the church, not in the community at large. These steps are designed to reconcile those who disagree so that church members can live in harmony.

When someone wrongs us, we often do the opposite of what Jesus recommends. We turn away in anger, hatred or resentment, seek revenge, or engage in gossip. By contrast, we should go to that person first, as difficult as that may be. Then we should forgive that person as often as he or she needs it. This restores relationships.

Jesus explained that the person who has been offended must first go and point out the fault when the two of them are alone. A personal confrontation, carried out in love, will allow the sinning member the opportunity to correct himself or herself. However, the person doing the confronting ought to be very certain of his or her accusation, and that he or she is doing this out of true humility with a view to restoration of the other:

GALATIANS 6:3-5 — For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

This call to confrontation is not a license for a frontal attack on every person who hurts or slights us. Many misunderstandings and hurt feelings can be solved at this stage. This saves church leaders from getting involved in everyone's personal concerns. Personal confrontation also keeps believers from gossiping with one another. Instead, we are to be mature enough to go directly to the source and deal with the problem at that level.

HONESTY AND HUMILITY

We don't always practice humility. There are times when, deliberately or unconsciously, we offend others and hurt them. Even the Old Testament Law recognized "sins of ignorance" (Numbers 15:22), and David prayed to be delivered from "secret faults" (Psalm 19:12), meaning "faults that are even hidden from my own eyes."

Again, keep the matter private. Approach the person who sinned and speak with him alone. It is possible that he does not even realize what he has done. Or, even if he did it deliberately, your own attitude of submission and love will help turn him to repent and apologize. Above all else, go to him with the idea of winning your brother not winning an argument. It is possible to win the argument and lose your brother.

We must have a spirit of meekness and gentleness when we seek to restore a brother or sister. We must not go about condemning the offender, or spreading gossip. We must lovingly seek to help him in the same way we would want him to help us if the situation were reversed.

GALATIANS 6:1 — Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual RESTORE such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

NOTE: The word RESTORE is a Greek medical word that means "to set a broken bone." Think of the patience and tenderness that requires!

If the "offender" refuses to make things right, then we may feel free to share the burden with one or two dependable believers. We should share the facts as we see them and ask the brethren for their prayerful counsel. After all, it may be that we are wrong. If the brethren feel the cause is right then together we can go to the offender and try once again to win him. Not only can these men assist in prayer and persuasion, but they can be witnesses to the church of the truth of the conversation (Deuteronomy 19:15; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

When sin is not dealt with honestly, it always spreads. What was once a matter between two people has now grown to involve four or five people. No wonder Jesus and Paul both compared sin to leaven (yeast), because leaven spreads.

Remember, our goal is not the winning of a case but the winning of a brother. The word GAINED in Matt 18:15 is used in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 to refer to winning the lost; but it is also important to win the saved. What started as a private problem between two people is now out in the open for the whole church to see.

Church discipline is a neglected ministry these days, yet it is taught here and in the epistles (see 1 Corinthians 5:2; Thessalonians 3:6-16; 2 Timothy 2:23-26; Titus 3:10). Just as children in the home need discipline, so God's children in the church need discipline. If by the time the matter comes to the whole church, the offender has not yet changed his mind and repented, then he must be disciplined. He cannot be treated as a spiritual brother, for he has forfeited that position. He can only be treated as one outside the church, not hated, but not held in close fellowship.

80

*May God richly bless you as you study and obey His Word,
exercise self-control, and seek to be a peacemaker
with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit
for the Glory of God.*

Study 5 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT LUST”

HEART ATTITUDE: Obedience, Purity of Heart, Self-Denial

MATTHEW 5:27-28 NIV — Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’

**“But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”**

MATTHEW 5:29-30 NIV — Jesus said:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and through it away.

**It is better for you to lose one part of your body
than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.**

“And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

**It is better for you to lose one part of your body
than for your whole body to go into hell.”**



Jesus affirmed God’s law of purity, and then explained that the intent of this law was to reveal the sanctity of sex and the sinfulness of the human heart. God *created* sex, and God *protects* sex. He has the authority to regulate it and to punish those who rebel against His laws. He does not regulate sex because He wants to rob us, but rather, because He wants to bless us.

Sexual impurity begins in the desires of the heart. Again, Jesus is not saying that lustful desires are identical to lustful deeds, and therefore a person might just as well go ahead and commit adultery. The desire and the deed are not identical, but, spiritually speaking, they are equivalent. The “look” that Jesus mentioned was not a casual glance, but a constant stare with the purpose of lusting. It is possible for a man to glance at a beautiful woman and know that she is beautiful, but not lust after her. The man Jesus described looked at the woman for the purpose of feeding his inner sensual appetites as a substitute for the act. It was not accidental — it was planned.

In His teaching about lust, Jesus literally got to the heart of the matter by explaining that sin begins in the heart. He used strong language to describe how His followers must rid themselves of sin. While we cannot be sinless until we finally are with Christ, we must keep a watch on our thoughts, motives, and temptations in the meantime. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of lustful, destructive thoughts, we need to “cut it out and throw it away.”

Some think if lustful thoughts are sin, why shouldn’t we just go ahead and do the lustful actions too?

Acting out sinful desires is harmful in several ways:

- (1) It causes people to excuse sin rather than eliminate it;
- (2) It destroys marriages;
- (3) It is deliberate rebellion against God's Word; and
- (4) It always hurts someone else in addition to the sinner.

Left unchecked, wrong desires result in wrong actions and turn people away from God.

"MARRIAGE IS SACRED IN THE KINGDOM"

- **FOCUSING ON THE WORD**

1. How is marriage commonly portrayed in the media? _____

2. What evidence have you seen that sexual standards have declined over the last twenty years?

3. What are some danger signs that a marriage is in trouble?

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. What commandment was Jesus interpreting? (5:27) _____

The Old Testament law said that it is wrong for a person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse (Exodus 20:14). But Jesus said that the DESIRE to have sex with someone other than your spouse is mental adultery — it is sin. Jesus emphasized that if the ACT is wrong, then so is the INTENTION. To be faithful to your spouse with your body, but not your mind, is to break the trust so vital to a strong marriage. Jesus is not condemning natural interest in the opposite sex or even healthy, marital sexual desire, but the deliberate and repeated filling of one's mind with fantasies that would be evil if acted out.

5. How did Jesus explain the meaning of adultery? (5:28) _____

6. How does adultery begin? (5:28) _____

7. When does looking at someone become inappropriate? (5:28) _____

Jesus is not saying that lustful *desires* are identical to lustful *deeds*, and therefore a person might just as well go ahead and commit adultery. The desire and the deed are not identical, but, spiritually speaking, they are equivalent. The “look” that Jesus mentioned was not a casual glance, but a constant stare with the purpose of lust. It is possible for a man to glance at a beautiful woman and know that she is beautiful, but not lust after her. The man Jesus described looked at the woman for the purpose of feeding his inner sensual appetites as a substitute for the act. It was not accidental; it was planned.

8. What did Jesus suggest we do with a sinning eye? Why? (5:29) _____

9. Why did Jesus make this radical statement about eyes? (5:29) _____

10. Where does sin ultimately lead if it is not dealt with? (5:29-30) _____

11. What did Jesus recommend for a sinning hand? Why? (5:30) _____

12. What was the reasoning behind this graphic comment about hands? (5:30) _____

When Jesus said to get rid of your hand or your eye, He was speaking figuratively. He didn't mean literally to pluck out your eye — even a blind person can lust. But if that were the only choice, it would be better to go into heaven with one eye or hand than to go to hell with two. We sometimes tolerate sins in our lives that, unchecked, could eventually destroy us. It is better to experience the pain of removal (getting rid of the bad habit or something we treasure, for instance) than to allow the sin to bring judgment and condemnation. Examine your life for anything that causes you to sin, and take every necessary action to remove it.

MATTHEW 18:8-9 — Jesus said: “If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”

How do we get victory? By purifying the desires of the heart (appetite leads to action) and disciplining the actions of the body. Obviously, our Lord is not talking about literal surgery; for this would not solve the problem in the heart. The eye and the hand are usually the two “culprits” when it comes to sexual sins, so they must be disciplined. **Jesus said, “Deal immediately and decisively with sin! Don’t taper off — cut off!”**

Spiritual surgery is more important than physical surgery, for the sins of the body can lead to eternal judgment. Consider:

COLOSSIANS 3:5-6 — Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

ROMANS 6:13-14 — Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

ROMANS 12:1-2 — Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will.

ROMANS 13:12-14 — The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

13. How important are moral choices? (5:30) _____

“Private sins” have a fatal attraction by appearing to be internal, hidden, secret. Jesus declared that lustful looks are sin. God is not bound by our privacy rights — our thoughts and emotions are as visible to Him as our actions. From the divine perspective, they are actions. This, in part, explains their sinfulness. Lust also creates an offense before God by misusing one of His most powerful gifts — the capacity to reflect, think, reason. That part of us most able to consider and appreciate our Creator, His Word, and His world, becomes increasingly toxic as we use it to consider sin. Unlike an offending eye or hand, a sinful mind cannot be removed — but by the power of God’s Holy Spirit it can be *renewed*. Don’t give in to lustful desires.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

14. Why is adultery common in our society? _____

15. Why are people willing to commit adultery? _____

16. Why are people willing to harbor lust in their hearts? _____

17. What are the devastating effects of adultery? _____

18. What does it mean to gouge out a habit of lust, and to cut off a sinful practice? _____

19. How does pornography feed the problem of adultery? _____

20. What is wrong with this argument, "It's OK to look as long as you don't touch?" _____

21. How do you respond to the popular claim that sexual fantasies are healthy and should be encouraged? _____

22. What would you say to a friend in a bad marriage who is contemplating an affair? _____

23. What does it mean to dress modestly? _____

24. What changes do you need to make in your reading and viewing habits to avoid lustful temptations? _____

-

25. How does “abstinence” equate with “put off?” _____

CONSIDER:

EPHESIANS 4:22-24 — You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to **put on the new self**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

THE PUT-OFFs: GALATIANS 5:19-26 — The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

THE PUT-ONs: GALATIANS 5:19-26 — But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

• **DOING THE WORD**

26. What three steps will you take to “put off” (abstain from) lustful desires?

- _____
- _____
- _____

27. In what situations is it important for you to dress modestly? Why?

28. What “lust triggers” will you destroy or avoid from now on?

The Most Excellent Way ~ Becoming GOD-Dependent

29. Do you believe it is important to abstain from lustful thoughts and acts? Why or why not? _____

30. Write a prayer to the Lord asking Him to illuminate the carnal habits you want to "put off," and to help you "put on" His righteousness. _____



May God richly bless you as purify your mind and heart as you study His Word!

Study 6 • "JESUS TEACHES ABOUT MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE "

HEART ATTITUDE: Love, Commitment, Faithfulness

MATTHEW 5:31-32 NIV — Jesus said:

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery."

◆ ◆ ◆

MATTHEW 19:3-12 NIV

Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked,

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴"Haven't you read," He replied,

"that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female,"

⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh' ?

⁶So they are no longer two, but one.

Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

¹⁰The disciples said to Him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."



Jesus did not discuss marriage in His Sermon on the Mount — that came later in His ministry as recorded in Matthew 19. This study will address both marriage and divorce from our Lord's perspective.

Instead of going back to Deuteronomy to begin His teaching on marriage, Jesus went back to Genesis. What God did when He established the first marriage teaches us positively what He had in mind for a man and a woman. If we build a marriage after God's ideal pattern, we will not have to worry about divorce laws.

THE REASONS FOR MARRIAGE:

- **The only thing that was not “good” about Creation was the fact that the man was alone** (Genesis 2:18). The woman was created to meet this need. Adam could not find fellowship with the animals. He needed a companion who was equal to him and with whom he could find fulfillment. God's answer to this need was Eve.
- **Marriage makes the continuation of the human race possible.** “Be fruitful, and multiply” was God's mandate to the first married couple (Genesis 1:28). From the beginning it was God's command that sex be practiced in the commitment of marriage. Outside of marriage, sex becomes a destructive force — within the loving commitment of marriage, sex can be creative and constructive.
- **Marriage is one way to avoid sexual sins.** Of course, a person should not marry simply to legalize lust! If a person is lustful outside of marriage, he or she will no doubt be lustful after marriage. A man and a woman should not think that getting married will solve all of their personal problems with lust. But marriage is God's appointed way for a man and a woman to share the physical pleasure and intimacy of sex.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-6 — Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. ²But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. ³The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶I say this as a concession, not as a command.

- **Paul used marriage as an illustration of the intimate relationship between Christ and the Church:**

EPHESIANS 5:22, 23, 25 — Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. ...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ...

Just as Eve was taken from the side of Adam (Genesis 2:21), so the church was born from the suffering and death of Christ on the cross. Christ loves His Church, nourishes it with His Word, cleanses it, and cares for it. Christ's relationship to His church is the example for husbands to follow.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARRIAGE:

By going back to the original marriage in the Garden of Eden (Edenic Law), Jesus reminded His listeners of the true characteristics of marriage. If we remember these characteristics, we will better know how to build a happy and enduring marriage, or perhaps, restore and revitalized our marriage.

- **It is a divinely appointed union.** God established marriage, and therefore only God can control its character and laws. No court of law can change what God has established.
- **It is a physical union.** The man and woman become “one flesh.” While it is important that a husband and wife be of one mind and heart, the basic union in marriage is physical. If a man and woman became “one spirit” in marriage, then death would not dissolve the marriage; for the spirit never dies. Even if a man and woman disagree, are “incompatible,” and cannot get along, they are still married; for the union is a physical one.
- **It is a permanent union.** God’s original design was that *one* man and *one* woman spend *one* life together. God’s original Law knows nothing of “trial marriages.” God’s Law requires that the husband and wife enter into marriage without reservations.
- **It is a union between one man and one woman.** God did not create two men and one woman, two women and one man, two men, or two women. “Group marriages,” “gay marriages,” and other variations are contrary to the will of God, no matter what some psychologists, judges and governments may say.

Jesus did not alter the original Edenic Law of marriage, nor did He annul the seventh commandment. What He taught was based solidly on God’s creation and God’s moral law.



“MARRIAGE IN THE KINGDOM MEANS COMMITMENT”

- **FOCUSING**

1. Whose marriage do you most admire? Why? _____

2. What ingredients make for a happy marriage? _____

3. What factors tend to undermine a marriage and make a couple more susceptible to divorce? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. Who approached Jesus with the motive of testing Him? (19:3) _____

5. What trick question did the Pharisees ask Jesus? (19:3) _____

The debate focused on Moses' words about divorce recorded in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house. ..."

The Pharisees asked the question to test Jesus. Perhaps they hoped that He might have very lax views about divorce and would deprecate the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, or that He would condemn divorce and lose some of His popular following. If Jesus were to support divorce, He would be upholding the Pharisees' procedures — they doubted that Jesus would do that. If Jesus were to choose sides in the controversy, some members of the crowd would dislike His position, for some may have used the law to their advantage to divorce their wives. Or, if He were to speak against divorce altogether, He would appear to be speaking against Moses' Law (which allowed divorce). The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus. They were serving their own desires, not seeking to know His view of God's will based on God's Word.

6. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' question? (19:4-6) _____

7. What did Jesus quote? Why? (19:4-5) _____

8. What did Jesus say is God's ideal for marriage? (19:6) _____

Jesus' answer began with the words "haven't you read," implying that they had not understood their own Scriptures. The Pharisees quoted Moses' writings in Deuteronomy — Jesus also quoted from Moses' writings (Genesis 1:27; 2:24) — He went back to the beginning. Jesus focused on God's ideal in creating male and female. The Hebrew words for "male" and "female" reveal that the two had been created complementary to each other. The wife is not property to be disposed of but a person created in God's image.

The Pharisees regarded divorce as a legal issue rather than a spiritual one — marriage and divorce were merely transactions similar to buying and selling land (with women being treated as property). But Jesus condemned this attitude, clarifying God's original intention — that marriage brings unity that no one should separate.

9. What follow-up question did Jesus' enemies ask? (19:7) _____

10. How did Jesus respond to the second question about divorce? (19:8) _____

In Moses' time, as well as in Jesus' day, the practice of marriage fell far short of God's intention. Jesus said that Moses allowed divorce only because the people were so hard-hearted — in other words, they were insensitive to God's will for marriage. "Hard-heartedness" refers to a stubborn, willful attitude. Many refused to follow through with their marriages as God had intended, so God allowed divorce as a concession to their sinfulness. Divorce was not approved, but it was preferred to open adultery.

How many Christians have become "hardhearted" about marriage? Current statistics report that fifty percent of "Christian" marriages end in divorce.

11. Jesus allowed for divorce under what condition? (5:32; 19:9) _____

Jesus said that divorce is not permissible except for unfaithfulness. This does not mean that divorce should automatically occur when a spouse commits adultery. The word translated "unfaithfulness" implies a sexually immoral lifestyle, not a confessed and repented act of adultery. Those who discover that their spouse has been unfaithful should first make every effort to forgive, reconcile, and restore their relationship. We should always look for reasons to restore the marriage relationship rather than for excuses to leave it. We must not think that because we are "under grace" we can flaunt God's Law and get away with it.

HEBREWS 13:4 — Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit inspired writers of the New Testament affirm the authority of "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). The word "fornication" covers many kinds of sexual sins (see Mark 7:21; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 6:13) — "adultery" involves only married people. When a married person has intercourse with someone other than his or her mate, that is adultery. God has declared that it is wrong and it is sin. This commandment affirms the sanctity of sex. God created it, God protects it and God punishes when His law is violated.

Jesus went much deeper in His discussion of adultery. He showed that this can be a sin of the heart as well as a sin of the body. It is not enough simply to control the body, we must also control the inner thoughts and desires. To look at a woman for the purpose of lust after her is to commit adultery in the heart. This does not mean that we cannot admire a beautiful person or picture; for it is possible to do that and not sin. It is when we look with the intention of satisfying lustful desires, that we commit adultery in the heart.

Jesus did not teach that the offended mate must get a divorce. The Christian approach to the problem is forgiveness, patient healing, and a restoration of a broken relationship.

12. In what way does a person who divorces a partner "cause" the other to commit adultery? _____
-
-

ROMANS 7:3 — Paul wrote: "So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man."

I CORINTHIANS 7:10-11 — Paul the Apostle wrote: "To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife."

The nagging question for Christians remains: May a divorced person, who truly repents of a sinful past and commits his or her life to God, remarry? We long for a simple, direct answer to the question, but we have only the Scriptures as an answer. We have Jesus' high view of marriage and low view of divorce recorded in the Gospels. Jesus proclaimed new life — full forgiveness and restoration -- to all who would come to God in repentance and faith. Spiritual discernment is essential here, but the Gospel — God's promise of wholeness and full healing — includes the sacred bond of marriage.

13. What did the disciples think about Jesus' view of marriage and divorce? (19:10) _____
-
-

14. What did Jesus teach about those who never marry? (19:11-12) _____
-
-

The disciples' response to Christ's teaching showed that they disagreed with Him. But Jesus did not want them to consider divorce as an "out" because then they would not have a serious attitude toward marriage. Jesus made it clear that each man (and woman) must consider God's will concerning marriage. Many Christians are single, chaste, and happy. Marriage is not a prerequisite for a fulfilled life. The question raised here is whether diligent Christians should choose singleness as a way of better serving Christ.



The union of husband and wife merges two persons in such a way that little can affect one without also affecting the other. "Oneness" in marriage does not mean that a person loses his or her personality in the personality of the other. Instead, it means caring for the spouse as oneself, learning to anticipate his or her needs, and helping the other person become all he or she can be.

- Are you experiencing oneness in your marriage?
 - Are you caring for your spouse as you should?
 - What can you do to work toward God's perfect plan of oneness with your spouse?
-

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

15. What are the most devastating consequences of divorce? _____

16. What is the ideal even if a marriage is stained by adultery? _____

17. In what ways is singleness a great advantage? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

18. Are your actions today helping your marriage grow stronger, or are you tearing it apart? Explain:

19. Beginning today, what habits will you develop that will make you a better marriage partner? _____

20. Do you teach your children about the sanctity and sacredness of the marriage relationship? _____

21. If you are single, what specific service will you render to God in the coming year because of the freedom your singleness permits? _____



*May the Lord richly bless you as you follow God's plan for marriage,
and encourage others to do likewise.*

Study 7 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT MAKING PROMISES”

HEART ATTITUDE: Truthful, Trustworthy, Accountable

MATTHEW 5:33-36 NIV — Jesus said:

“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago,
‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’
³⁴But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;
³⁵Or by the earth, for it is His footstool;
or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.
³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.
³⁷Simply let your ‘Yes’ be Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’;
anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”



Each time Jesus used the pattern “You have heard it was said . . . but I say to you,” He was presenting a traditional standard upon which to base a higher standard. Rather than let people off the hook, He set the hook deeper. Jesus spoke about oaths in order to point out that they were not the main problem -- the lack of integrity is the problem. Oaths are no substitute for personal integrity. A liar’s vow expresses a worthless promise. But when a person of integrity says *yes* or *no*, that person’s simple word can be trusted. Jesus is telling His followers to make integrity their standard.

Why did Jesus emphasize the importance of telling the truth? People were breaking promises and using sacred language casually and carelessly. The Bible condemns making vows or taking oaths casually, giving your word knowing you won’t keep it, or swearing falsely in God’s name:

EXODUS 20:7 — “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name.”

NUMBERS 30:1-2 — “This is what the LORD commands: When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.

DEUTERONOMY 5:11 — “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name.”

DEUTERONOMY 23:21b-23 — “If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. ²²But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. ²³Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth.”

We live in an sinful society among people with unclean lips, where swearing on the Bible in a court of law is practiced in order to elicit the truth, and hold the defendants, plaintiffs and witnesses accountable for their words. From the Scriptures above, we can deduce that God is also holding those who swear "so help me God" accountable.

How many times did Jesus say "I tell you the truth" in the four Gospels? In the NIV translation we counted seventy-nine times (there may be more, but not less). Followers of Jesus are truthful — at least we should be. For people to believe our witness for Jesus Christ, they must be able to trust us and our words.

Jesus taught that our conversation should be so honest, and our character so true, that we would not need "crutches" to get people to believe us. Words depend on character, and oaths cannot compensate for a poor character. The more words we use to convince others, the more suspicious they will be.

PROVERBS 10:19-20 — When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value.

We've seen that Jesus continually focuses on heart attitudes in this Sermon.

MATTHEW 15:18-19 — Jesus said: "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' ¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."

The oaths, vows, and promises we make define our character. God sees and knows our hearts, and He hears everything we say. How many times have you said or heard said, "God as my witness...?" God is our witness, therefore ...

PSALM 19:14 — May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.



"TRUTH IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

- **FOCUSING**

1. Are there people in our society who you distrust because of their occupations? Who are they?

2. Who do you trust? Why?

3. How do you determine if someone is telling the truth?

4. What is your standard for truth? Why? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

5. What Old Testament teaching did Jesus bring up? (5:33) _____

6. What oaths did Jesus' audience consider especially important to keep? (5:33) _____

In Jesus' day, people commonly made oaths, or vows. Although God's law took these vows very seriously, many of the religious leaders had invented legal maneuvers to get around keeping their oaths. Using oaths to affirm that what is said is true is sin. The Pharisees used all kinds of tricks to sidestep the truth, and oaths were among them. They would avoid using the holy name of God, but they would come close by using the city of Jerusalem, heaven, earth, or some part of the body.

7. How did Jesus update the ancient proverb about oaths? (5:34) _____

Jesus is telling us to not use oaths — our word alone should be enough.

JAMES 5:12 — Above all, my brothers, do not swear — not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

8. What exceptions did Jesus permit in vow making? (5:34) _____

9. Why was it inappropriate to swear by heaven? (5:34) _____

10. Why was it inappropriate to swear by earth? (5:35) _____

11. According to Jesus, why shouldn't we swear by Jerusalem? (5:35) _____

12. Why not swear by one's own head? (5:36) _____

The religious leaders had designed an elaborate system indicating how binding an oath was depending on how the oath had been made. Such a system was a contradiction in terms (an oath by definition is binding), and it made light of God's Law. The leaders said that if they swore by heaven or by the earth or by Jerusalem, they could get out of their oath without penalty because they did not make the vow in God's name.

Jesus explained that an oath is an oath. A promise is binding before God, no matter what words are used. It would be ridiculous for us to say that we didn't really invoke God's name on the oath. Heaven is God's throne, the earth is His footstool, and Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Even the hairs on our heads belong to God — He even knows the number of hairs on each of our heads. What an amazing God He is!

Jesus was not condemning the use of oaths in a court of law, but the kind of statements that added an "I promise" or "Honest!" Christ's followers do not need to say that.

13. How should believers respond to questions? (5:37) _____

14. What's wrong with swearing oaths? (5:37) _____

The phrase "from the evil one" is also translated "from evil," revealing the sinful one's need to back up words with a vow. People need oaths only when telling lies is a possibility. Believers, however, know that they are accountable to God for every word they speak, so they will speak truthfully and do what they promise. Keeping promises builds trust and makes committed human relationships possible.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

15. Does swearing on a Bible guarantee that a legal witness will tell the truth? Why or why not? _____

16. Why do we swear? _____

17. In what situations do people typically swear? _____

18. What are some ways that our society takes the name of God lightly or frivolously? _____

19. What statements of assurance ("Trust me," "Would I lie to you?" "I really mean it this time," etc.) do you hear most often? _____

20. How does lying in the name of God affect the reputation of God? _____

21. How should we respond when people try to get us to make promises or extra assurances? _____

22. What does it mean when others don't take you at your word? _____

23. Do you have a set of standards for your spouse, children, friends that you yourself do not adhere to? _____

24. Do people always know where they stand with you? _____

25. Do you justify not following through with commitments? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

Are you the kind of person who worries over whether people like you, or worries over whether God likes you? If so, this is your first lesson in godly assertiveness training. As a child of God, you need to learn how to say *yes* and mean it, and how to say *no* and stick to it. Try this. Next time someone asks you to do something you can't do, resist the urge to launch into a long explanation of why you can't — just say, "I'm sorry, but *no*." Wow! Does that feel good? Soon, you will begin believing in your own *yes* and *no* as genuine reflections of your intentions. And remember, the Holy Spirit will guide you in truth — surrender to Him!

26. What steps will you take to become known as a person who can be trusted? _____

27. What unfulfilled promise have you made that you need to carry out today? _____

28. Write a "thank you" note to the Lord regarding the promises He has made to you.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:19-20 — For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Study 8 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT RETALIATION”

HEART ATTITUDE: Humility, Merciful, Forgiving, Obedient

MATTHEW 5:38-42 NIV — Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’

39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic,

let him have your cloak as well.

41 If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

42 Give to the one who asks you,

and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”



The Old Testament law was a fair one — it limited vengeance. It kept people from forcing the offender to pay a greater price than the offense deserved. God’s purpose was mercy — not a guide for personal revenge. The laws were given to judges and said in effect, “Make the punishment fit the crime.” These laws were given to LIMIT vengeance and help the court mete out punishment that was neither too strict nor too lenient.

EXODUS 21:23-25 — “But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

LEVITICUS 24:19-20 — “If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.”

Some people, however, were using these instructions to justify their vendettas against others. People still try to excuse their acts of revenge with the attitude: “I am only doing to him what he did to me.”

Jesus replaced a law with an attitude: be willing to suffer loss yourself rather than cause another to suffer. Of course, He applied this to personal insults, not to groups or nations. The person who retaliates only makes himself and the offender feel worse — and the result is continued resentment and not peace. Far from settling offenses, revenge escalates them. This is because our human nature doesn’t just get mad and we don’t just get even — we get “just-a-little-more-than-even.”

In the face of this human dilemma, Jesus proposed a better way — the radical response of love. His standard was not an attack on the necessity for justice. Rather, Jesus was presenting a practical, rational, and holy way to deal with personal conflict and offense.

When people hurt us, often our first reaction is to get even. Instead, Jesus said we should do good to those who wrong us! Instead of keeping score, we should love and forgive. This is not *natural* — it is

supernatural. Only God can give us the strength to love as He does. Jesus used extreme examples to make a point about the attitudes of His followers.



"PERSONAL RIGHTS IN THE KINGDOM"

- **FOCUSING**

1. Why are movies about vengeance or vigilante justice so popular? _____

2. What is appealing about revenge? _____

3. How do "personal rights" apply to retaliation? _____

4. What is the basic emotion at the core of "getting even." _____

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

5. What did the Old Testament law require if a person put out someone else's eye, knocked out someone's tooth, etc.? (5:38) _____

6. How did Jesus say we should respond to people who do us evil? (5:39) _____

7. What should we do to protect our rights and possessions? (5:39) _____

8. What should be the Christian's response to physical violence? (5:39) _____

Not only did Jesus command against getting back at someone physically, but he commanded against "getting back" by any other means as well. Jesus focused on the attitudes of His

followers when dealing with evil individuals. The world advocates getting even, looking out for oneself, and protecting one's "personal rights." Jesus' followers, however, are to hold loosely to their "personal rights," preferring to give up those rights for the sake of bearing witness to the Gospel and the Kingdom. Being willing to set aside one's personal rights does not mean that we have to sit passively while evil goes unhindered — see how Paul dealt with this matter in Acts 16:37; 22:25; 25:8-12.

A "strike on the right cheek" was literally a blow from the back of someone's hand — an act that shows contempt. According to Jewish law, the one who slapped another faced punishment and a heavy fine. Thus, the law was on the side of the victim, and the victim would have every right to take this offense to court. However, Jesus said not to take the legal channels, but to offer the other cheek for a slap as well. Jesus does not ask His followers to do what He would never do — He received such treatment and did as He had commanded:

MATTHEW 26:67 — Then they spit in His face and struck Him with their fists.

ISAIAH 50:6-7 NKJV — "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. ⁷"For the Lord GOD will help Me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set My face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.

1 PETER 2:23-24 — When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.

Jesus wanted His followers to have an unselfish attitude that willingly follows the way of the Cross instead of the way of personal rights. We should entrust ourselves to God who will one day set all things right.

HEBREWS 10:30a NKJV — For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

9. What should you do if someone sues you? (5:40) _____

PROVERBS 24:28-29 — "Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, or use your lips to deceive. Do not say, 'I'll do to him as he has done to me; I'll pay that man back for what he did.'"

Under God's law, no one could take a person's cloak. "If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to Me, I will listen, for I am compassionate" (Exodus 22:26-27 NRSV). The cloak was a most valuable possession. Making clothing was difficult and time-consuming. As a result, cloaks were expensive, and most people owned only one. A cloak could be used as a blanket, a sack to carry things in, a pad to sit on, a pledge for a debt, and, of course, clothing.

In verse 5:40, the property is a tunic, an inner garment worn next to the skin. Jesus said to let the person have your cloak as well. Again Jesus focused on the attitude expected of His followers.

We should hold their possessions very loosely.

10. What should a person do if someone forces him or her to "go one mile"? (5:41) _____
-
-

The Roman soldiers could force citizens to carry their loads one mile (one thousand paces). The Jews hated this law because it forced them to show their subjection to Rome. Yet Jesus said to take the load and willingly go two miles. Jesus called for a serving attitude. Jesus' words probably shocked His hearers. Most of the Jews, expecting a military Messiah, would never have expected to hear Jesus issue a command of non-retaliation and cooperation with the hated Roman Empire. By these words, Jesus was revealing that His followers belong to another kingdom. They need not attempt to fight against Rome, which could only end in defeat. Instead, they should work on behalf of God's kingdom. If doing so meant walking an extra mile carrying a Roman soldier's load, then that was what they should do.

To many Jews of Jesus' day, His statements were offensive. Any messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their enemies, whom they hated. But Jesus commanded a new, radical response to injustice: instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, it is more important to GIVE justice and mercy than to receive it.

11. How should followers of Christ deal with those who ask them for things? (5:42) _____
-

As Jesus' followers, we should have a generous spirit. We loosely hold on to our personal rights and possessions, so we can freely give when the need arises and won't turn away from the one who wants to borrow. While we should not blindly give away our possessions (see Proverbs 11:15; 17:18; 22:26), Jesus illustrated the heart attitude that He expected of His followers. We must willingly put others' needs before our own and others' rights before our own.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

12. What are the drawbacks to an "eye for eye" mentality? _____
-
-

13. Where do we draw the line between our rights and our responsibility to be forgiving and patient? _____
-
-

14. What is the rationale behind Jesus' idea that love overcomes evil? _____
-
-

15. How can doing good change a bad situation? _____

16. What do you think would happen if Christians followed these principles to the letter? _____

17. What items would you find difficult to loan out or give away? _____

18. In what ways have you been seeking vengeance or an opportunity to pay someone back for a wrong done to you? _____

19. What grudge or personal vendetta do you need to lay aside? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

20. In what situation will you purpose to go the extra mile? _____

21. What act of kindness or reconciliation will you perform this week to help “bury the hatchet”? _____

22. Write a prayer to the Lord asking His Spirit to help you let go of any vengeful thoughts or feelings you may have. Be specific. _____

May God richly bless you as you do His Word!

Study 9 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT LOVE”

HEART ATTITUDE: Pure in Heart, Merciful, Loving

MATTHEW 5:43-48 NIV — Jesus said:

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

That you may be sons of your Father in heaven.

He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good,

⁴⁵ and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

⁴⁶ Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others?

Do not even pagans do that?”

⁴⁸ “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

LEVITICUS 19:17-19 — GOD said:

“Do not hate your brother in your heart.

Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

¹⁸ Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people,
but love your neighbor as yourself. I AM the LORD.

¹⁹ Keep My decrees.”



“LOVE: THE KINGDOM LAW”

By calling us to non-retaliation in Study 8, Jesus keeps us from taking the law into our own hands. By loving and praying for our enemies, we can overcome evil with good. The Pharisees interrupted God's law as teaching that they should love only those who love in return.

LEVITICUS 19:18 — “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

The Pharisees interpreted Psalm 139:19-22 and 140:9-11 as meaning that they should hate their enemies. But Jesus says we are to love our enemies. If you love your enemies and treat them well, you will truly show that Jesus is Lord of your life. This is possible only for those who give themselves fully to God, because only He can deliver people from natural selfishness. We must trust the Holy Spirit to help us SHOW love to those for whom we may not FEEL love.

PROVERBS 25:21-22 — If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

80

• **FOCUSING ON THE WORD**

1. Are there people in your life who you consider to be your enemies? Who are they? Your mate? Your parent? Employer? Old friend? Ex-spouse? Explain: _____

2. What underlying emotions and attitudes create cliques or cause divisions between groups of people? _____

3. What character quality more than any other says to the world, "I am a Christian!" _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. What Old Testament rule of life did Jesus challenge here? (5:43) _____

5. How did Jesus say we ought to treat our enemies? (5:44) _____

6. What did Jesus say we ought to do for those who persecute us? (5:44) _____

Jesus defined our enemies as those who curse us, hate us, and exploit us selfishly. Since Christian love is an act of the will, and not simply an emotion, He has the right to command us to love our enemies. After all, He loved us when we were His enemies (Romans 5:10). We may show this love by blessing those who curse us, doing good to them, and praying for them. When we pray for our enemies, we find it easier to love them. It takes the "poison" out of our attitudes.

The Pharisees interpreted Leviticus 19:18 (page 1) as teaching that they should love only those who love in return, "neighbor" referring to someone of the same nationality and faith. While no Bible verse explicitly says hate your enemy, the Pharisees may have reinterpreted some of the Old Testament passages about hatred for God's enemies, for example:

PSALMS 139:19-20 — If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! ²⁰They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. ²¹Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? ²²I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

PSALMS 140:9-11 — ⁹Let the heads of those who surround me be covered with the trouble their lips have caused. ¹⁰Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise. ¹¹Let slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down men of violence.

Nowhere did the Law teach hatred for one's enemies. Exodus 23:4-5 indicates just the opposite: "If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it."

Jesus explained that His followers would do the true intent of God's law by loving their enemies as well as their neighbors. When a Pharisee asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor" (Luke 10:29), Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable, Jesus explained that His followers must show love to all kinds of people — no matter what faith, nationality, or personality — enemies included. If you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, you truly show that Jesus is Lord of your life.

Jesus explained to His disciples that they must live by a higher standard than what the world expects — a standard that is impossible to reach on mere human strength alone. People who have experienced God's love understand what it means to be loved undeservedly. Only with the help of God's Spirit can his people love and pray for those who seek to do them harm:

ROMANS 12:14-21 — Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

7. Why did Jesus suggest modifying this universally accepted law? (5:45) _____

8. How does God treat evil and good people in the same way? (5:45) _____

9. How does God treat righteous and unrighteous people equally? (5:45) _____

Our Father in heaven shows undiscriminating love to all people, allowing the sun to rise and rain to fall on both the evil and the good, the righteous and the unrighteous. Therefore, His children (those who believe in Jesus Christ) must reflect His character and show undiscriminating love for both friends and enemies. This verse refers to physical blessings on earth, not spiritual blessings. Obviously God's children will receive far more in the future. In the meantime, God's love reaches out to all people. God's people must do the same.

10. What type of people did Jesus cite as loving those who love them? (5:46) _____

11. What does God think of us when we love those who love us? (5:46) _____

12. Why is friendliness to friends and relatives not considered exceptional behavior? (5:47) _____

13. What kinds of people are mentioned as greeting only their brothers? (5:47)

Jesus has been explaining the much higher standards that are expected of His followers, standards higher than those the world or even their religion accepted. "Why the command to love enemies?" someone might ask (5:44). Jesus would answer, "Because that will mark My followers as different, with hearts and minds turned over to God alone, Who can help them do just that." Anybody can love those who love them — that comes naturally, even for tax collectors (who were among the most hated people among the Jews of Jesus' day). In the same way, if we who follow Jesus greet only our fellow believers, we are no different from the Gentiles (those who do not believe in the one true God and His Son). If we are truly disciples who live for Christ and are radically different from the world, we will receive our reward.

14. What exceptional standard did Christ give us? (5:48) _____

15. Who has set an example for us? How? (5:48) _____

COLOSSIANS 1:28 — We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

The word translated "perfect" can also be translated "mature" or "full-grown" — Ephesians 4:13: "... until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

As Jesus' followers, we can be perfect if our behavior is appropriate for our maturity level — perfect, yet with much room to grow. Considering all that Jesus has said in Matthew 5, the perfection Jesus requires of His followers does not include strict and flawless obedience to minute laws. It calls instead for an understanding of how the law pointed to the heavenly Father Who is Himself perfect. The law itself is not the standard of perfection — God is. Those who love God and desire to follow Him will keep His law as He requires. But we don't do this in our own strength or to put ourselves above others. We do this not because we are already perfect, but because we are striving to be perfect, to reflect our Father's character.

How can we strive to be perfect?

- **IN CHARACTER:** In this life we cannot be flawless, but we can surrender ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become as much like Christ as possible — demonstrating moral perfection and sinless behavior.

1 PETER 1:15 — But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

- **IN HOLINESS:** Like the Pharisees, we are to separate ourselves from the world's sinful values. But unlike the Pharisees, we want to be devoted to God's desires rather than our own, and carry His love and mercy into the world.
- **IN MATURITY:** We cannot achieve Christ-like character and holy living on our own and all at once, but we must grow toward wholeness. Just as we expect different behavior from a baby, a child, a teenager, and an adult, so God expects different behavior from us — depending upon our stage of spiritual development. As we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and as we study and learn the Word of God, we become more and more mature IF we practice what we learn.
- **IN LOVE:** We can seek to love others as completely as God loves us. We can be perfect if our behavior is appropriate for our maturity level—perfect, yet with room to grow. Our tendency to sin must never prevent us from striving to be more like Christ. Christ calls all of His disciples to excel, to rise above mediocrity and to mature in every area, becoming like Him. Those who strive to become perfect will one day be perfect even as He is perfect. The Father loves His enemies and seeks to make them His children, and we should assist Him!

Jesus made His point with the piercing demand for perfection to eliminate any previous standards of righteousness people may have had. His standards should humble us, exposing our bankruptcy apart from God's grace. People often say, "No one is perfect" as an excuse for self-justification: "No one is perfect, and God must know I'm doing the best I can." In reality, none of us are perfect, and none of us do the best we can either — as long as we justify our own feeble efforts at righteousness, we will never recognize our desperate need for the Savior. Apart from Him, we can do nothing to please God!

SUMMARY: Jesus gave several reasons to "love your enemies."

- **It is a mark of maturity**, proving that we are sons of the Father, and not just little children.
- **It is Godlike.** The Father shares His good things with those who oppose Him. Verse 5:45

suggests that love “creates a climate” of blessings that makes it easy to win our enemies and make them our friends. Love is like the sunshine and rain that the Father sends so graciously.

- **It is a testimony to others.** “What are you doing more than others?” is a good question. God expects us to live on a much higher plane than the lost people of the world who return good for good and evil for evil. As Christians, we must return good for evil as an investment of love.

Our tendency to sin must never keep us from striving to be more like Christ. Obedience is the key to discipleship. The message of the Sermon on the Mount is that Christ calls all of His disciples to excel, to rise above mediocrity, and to mature in every area, becoming like Him. Christ’s demands cannot be met by those who attempt to do so on their own strength -- only through the Holy Spirit. Those who strive to become like Christ will ultimately experience sinless perfection, even as Christ is perfect.

I JOHN 3:2-3 — Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

16. If our holy God is able to exhibit grace and mercy to everyone, why is it difficult for us to be like Him? _____

17. What does it mean for us to be perfect? _____

18. How is it possible for us to love our enemies? _____

19. What would have to happen in your heart in order for you to be able to pray for an enemy? _____

20. What might praying for your enemy change? _____

• **DOING GOD’S WORD**

21. In what ways does a loving spirit demonstrate that we are God’s people? _____

The Most Excellent Way ~ Becoming GOD-Dependent

22. What are some specific ways you will show love to someone whom you dislike? Be specific: _____

23. For which of your “enemies” will you pray every day this week? _____

24. Have you been thinking and behaving as though your spouse or someone in your immediate family is your "enemy"? _____

If yes, explain how you will now demonstrate love toward him/ her/ them: _____

25. In a written prayer, ask the Lord to help you be committed to obedience to Him and His Word as He perfects you into the image of Jesus Christ. _____



May God richly bless you as you study His word and seek “perfection” in Christ!

Study 10 • "JESUS TEACHES ABOUT GIVING"

HEART ATTITUDE: Mercy, Compassion, Humility, Obedience, Thankfulness

MATTHEW 6:1-4 NIV — Jesus said:

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them.
If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.
²So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets,
as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men.
I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
³But when you give to the needy,
do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,
So that your giving may be in secret.
⁴Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

MARK 12:41-44 NIV — Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.

⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins,
worth only a fraction of a penny.
⁴³Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth,
this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.
⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty,
put in everything — all she had to live on."



The Israelites was commanded to be generous to the poor and needy:

DEUTERONOMY 15:11 — "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land."

Blessings were promised to those who were generous in aiding the poor:

PROVERBS 14:21 — He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

PROVERBS 19:17 — He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward him for what he has done.

Eventually, the Pharisees used almsgiving to gain favor with God and attention from men, both of which were wrong motives. No amount of giving can purchase salvation; for salvation is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). And to live for the praise of men is a foolish thing because the glory of man does not last (1 Peter 1:24). It is the glory and praise of God that really counts!

Our sinful nature is so subtle that it can defile even a good thing like sharing with the poor. If our motive is to get the praise of men, then like the Pharisees, we will call attention to what we are doing. But if our motive is to serve God in love and to please Him, then we will give our gifts without calling attention to them. As a result, we will grow spiritually — God will be glorified, and others will be helped. But if we give with the wrong motive, we rob ourselves of blessing and reward and rob God of glory, even though the money we share might help a needy person.

Does this mean that it is wrong to give openly? Must all giving be anonymous? Not necessarily, for everyone in the early church knew that Barnabas had given the income from the sale of his land (Acts 4:34-37). When the church members laid their money at the Apostles' feet, it was not done in secret. The difference, of course, was in the motive and manner in which it was done. A contrast is Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), who tried to use their gift to make people think they were more spiritual than they really were.

- **Jesus taught His disciples another lesson about giving in Mark 12:41-44.** He and the disciples were at the Temple during the time of Passover. A lot of money came into the Temple treasury during Passover — the increased crowds meant increased money amounts in the coffers. Whether or not they made a show of how much they tossed into the offering boxes, Jesus knew that the rich people came and threw in large amounts of money.

MARK 12:41-44 NKJV — Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. ⁴²Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

In contrast to the loud clattering of the rich people's offerings, a poor widow came with a freewill offering for the temple (that is, she was not paying a required tax, but rather giving a gift). As a widow, she had few resources for making money. If a widow in New Testament times had no sons, no protector, and remained unmarried, she was often destitute. Since there was no social security or public aid for widows, a widow would often be without financial support.

Jesus seized the opportunity to teach His disciples an important lesson in giving. His words, "I tell you the truth," I tell you once again introduced a statement of solemn importance. In Jesus' eyes, the poor widow had put in more than all the others, even more than the rich people who had contributed large amounts to the treasury. Though her gift was by far the smallest in

monetary value, it was the greatest in sacrifice. The value of a gift is not determined by its amount, but by the spirit in which it is given. A gift given grudgingly or for recognition loses its value. When you give, remember that gifts of any size are pleasing to God when they are given out of gratitude and a spirit of generosity.



"GIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

- **FOCUSING ON THE WORD**

1. What would you do if you discovered that a long-lost relative had left you a million dollars? _____

2. Who are the needy people in our world? _____

3. What is your favorite charity? _____

4. What do you think when a wealthy individual gives a large sum of money with the stipulation that a building be named after him or her? _____

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

5. What kind of acts was Jesus discussing? (6:1) _____

6. What specific motives did Jesus warn against? (6:1) _____

7. What happens to the person who operates with impure motives? (6:1) _____

8. Who can judge whether a person's actions are pure? (6:1) _____

9. How did some individuals in Jesus' day publicize their generosity? (6:2) _____

10. What name did Jesus give to insincere individuals? Why? (6:2) _____

11. Where did people advertise their "acts of righteousness"? (6:2) _____

12. What deep-seated desire prompted some people to give? (6:2) _____

13. What future reward can showy givers expect? (6:2) _____

"Hypocrite" means a person who does good acts for appearances only — not with compassion or other good motives. His actions may be good, but his motives are hollow. These empty acts are his only reward, while God will reward those who are sincere in their faith.

14. What style of giving did Jesus command us to adopt? (6:3-4) _____

When Jesus says not to tell your left hand what your right hand is doing, He is teaching that our motives for giving to God and to others must be pure. It is easy to give with mixed motives, to do something for someone if it will benefit us in return. But believers should avoid all scheming and give for the sake of giving and as a response to God's love. Why do YOU give?

15. Who notices when we give according to Jesus' guidelines? (6:4) _____

16. What happens to those who give as Jesus told us to give? (6:4) _____

It's easy to do what is right for recognition and praise. To be sure our motives are not selfish, we should do our good deeds quietly or in secret, with no thought of reward. Our giving should not be self-centered, but God-centered — done not to make us look good, but to make God look good. **The reward God promises is not material, and it is never given to those who seek it.** Doing something only for ourselves is not a loving sacrifice. With your next good deed, ask: "Would I still do this if no one would ever know I did it?"

2 CORINTHIANS 9:9 — As it is written: “He has scattered abroad His gifts to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.”

MATTHEW 23:11-12 — The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

17. What motivates people to give money to churches or Christian ministries? _____

18. Why are many people more apt to give money to an organization than to a needy individual? _____

19. Why do most Christian organizations have their highest income at the end of the year? _____

20. How much are your giving habits affected by the knowledge that charitable contributions are tax-deductible? _____

21. What are some specific ways Christians could be more secretive in their giving? _____

22. What is difficult about giving secretly? _____

23. Why is it difficult for us to do a good deed and keep quiet about it? _____

24. Are the “needy” always in need of money or food or clothing? Why or why not? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

25. What anonymous gift will you give this week? _____

26. What steps could you take to ensure that your giving is not done for show? _____

27. How will you show your gratitude to God for all His blessings? _____

28. What deeds did Jesus do for you because He loves you? _____



May God richly bless you as you give unselfishly to those in need and bless Him!

Study 11 • "JESUS TEACHES HOW NOT TO PRAY"

HEART ATTITUDE: Humility

MATTHEW 6:5-8 NIV — Jesus said:

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,
for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and
on the street corners to be seen by men.

I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

⁶But when you pray, go into your room,
close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.

Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans,
for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."



Many people think that the purpose of prayer is to get our will done and to persuade God to give us what we want. The true purpose of prayer is to get God's will done when we ask according to His will.

I JOHN 5:14 — This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

"KINGDOM COMMUNICATION WITH THE KING"

- **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. What images or thoughts spring to mind when you hear the word "prayer"? _____

2. How important is prayer in your personal life? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

3. What or who is a hypocrite? (6:5) _____
-

The hypocrite is a double person — natural and artificial. The natural he keeps to himself, and the other he puts on, as he does his clothes, to make his appearance before men. Hypocrites have been divided into four classes:

- (1) **WORLDLY hypocrite*** — A person who makes a profession of faith and pretends to be religious, merely with worldly perspectives and considerations:

MATTHEW 23:5 — Jesus said: “Everything they do is done for men to see...”

- (2) **LEGAL hypocrite*** — A person who changes on the outside in order to merit heaven, while at the same time having no real love for God:

ROMANS 10:3 — Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

- (3) **EVANGELICAL hypocrite*** — A person who has a bare conviction of sin, who rejoices in the fact that Christ died for him, and yet has no desire to live a holy life

MATTHEW 13:20-21 — Jesus said: “The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.”

- (4) **ENTHUSIASTIC hypocrite*** — A person who has an imaginary view of his sins and of Christ and talks of remarkable impulses and high feelings, etc., while living in sinful practices.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:14 — And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

*Resource: The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, published by Moody Press.

4. What type of reward will religious showmanship bring? (6:5) _____
-
-

Some people, especially the religious leaders, wanted the people to think they were very holy, and public prayer was one way to get attention. Jesus saw through their self-righteous acts. He called these men hypocrites for praying not to God, but to an audience of people who revered them for their apparent holiness. To pray only where others will notice you indicates that your real intention is to please people, not God. For these hypocrites, the praise of people will be their only reward.

Jesus drew attention to the motives behind actions. The point really wasn't a choice between public and private prayer, but between heartfelt and hypocritical prayer. We must learn to pray in private so that we might eventually lead others in effective prayer in public. When asked to pray in public, focus on addressing God, not on how you're coming across to others.

Jesus did not condemn public prayer. Such prayer was vitally important to the early church, as

it is to churches today. Corporate prayer has powerful results. Jesus' point, however, was that people who prayed more in public than in private should consider their motives.

5. How did Jesus command His followers to pray? (6:6) _____

6. What insight or fact about prayer is revealed about God? (6:6) _____

7. Where did Jesus suggest we talk to God? (6:6) _____

It is important that we also find a quiet place so we will not be distracted from listening to God. When we shut the door on the noise outside, and we shut ourselves in with God. We do not have to pray with closed eyes, folded hands, or kneeling down. Prayer is not a position of the body, but rather a position of the heart. Private prayer allows us to pour out our hearts to God, express our true feelings, and listen in the quietness for God's answer.

8. What type of reward will humility in prayer bring? (6:6) _____

9. What did Jesus have to say about repetitive or long, windy prayers? (6:7) _____

Repeating the same words over and over (babbling) like a magic incantation is no way to insure that God will hear them. It's not wrong to go to God in prayer many times with the same requests — Jesus encourages persistent prayer. But He condemns the shallow repetition of words that are not offered with a sincere heart. We can never pray too much if our prayers are honest and sincere.

We need to avoid repeating phrases or words, because it allows our minds to wander during prayer. God wants our full attention when we talk with Him. We do not need to use a certain tone of voice for prayer, nor do we need to use formal King James English. A normal conversational tone and plain language are more than adequate. Speaking aloud, though not loudly, helps us to keep our minds focused on what we are saying, and helps us to verbalize our feelings.

10. Why should we pray if the Father already knows what we need? _____

It is a privilege to talk to the one living and true God who knows what we need even before we ask! Because of Jesus' finished work on the cross, we believers have immediate access to God. When we pray — talk to our Father in Heaven — we enter into His throne room and we are comforted because we know we are His children and we can trust Him. Each time we pray, we deepen our intimate relationship with God.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

11. What common or overused phrases do you hear frequently repeated in people's prayers? _____

12. If God knows what we need before we ask, why should we pray? _____

13. Who teaches us to pray if we ask Him (Luke 12:12)? _____

13. If Jesus commands us to pray in secret, what is the value of public prayer? _____

14. Why do many Christians feel uncomfortable praying out loud? _____

15. When you pray in front of a group, how can you concentrate fully on what you are saying to God rather than how your prayers sound to others? _____

• **DOING GOD'S WORD**

16. What changes do you need to make in your prayer life? _____

17. Where is your secret place to spend time talking with God? _____



May God richly bless you as you pray in accordance to His Word!

Study 12 • “JESUS TEACHES HOW TO PRAY”

HEART ATTITUDE: Humility, Gratitude, Faith, Forgiveness

LUKE 11:1 NKJV — Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John [the Baptist] also taught his disciples.”

MATTHEW 6:9-15 NKJV — Jesus said:

“In this manner, therefore, pray:

‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread.

¹²And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

¹⁴“For if you forgive men their trespasses,

your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their trespasses,

neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”



This prayer is known familiarly as “The Lord’s Prayer,” but “The Disciples’ Prayer” would be a more accurate title. Jesus did not give this prayer to us to be memorized and recited a given number of times. In fact, He gave this prayer to keep us from using vain repetitions. Jesus did not say, “Pray in these words.” He said, “In this MANNER pray”; that is, “Use this prayer as a pattern (form of prayer), not as a substitute.”

The purpose of prayer is to glorify God’s name, and to ask for help to accomplish His will on earth. This prayer begins with Gods interests, not ours: God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will. We have no right to ask God for anything that will dishonor His name, delay His kingdom, or disturb His will on earth.

- **This prayer begins with “OUR Father.”** When we pray, we must remember that we are part of God’s worldwide family of believers. We have no right to ask for ourselves anything that would harm another member of His family. If we are praying in the will of God, the answer will be a blessing to all of God’s people in one way or another.

- **If we put God's concerns first, then we can bring our own needs.** God is concerned about our needs and knows them even before we mention them (Matthew 6:8). If this is the case, then why pray? Because prayer is the God appointed way to have these needs met:

JAMES 4:1-3 NIV — What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

- **Prayer prepares us for the proper use of the answer.** If we know our need, and if we voice it to God, trusting Him for His provision, then we will make better use of the answer than if God forced it on us without our asking.
- **It is right to pray for daily physical needs, for forgiveness, and for guidance and protection from evil.** "Do not lead us into temptation" does not mean that God tempts His children (James 1:13-17). In this request we are asking God to guide us so that we will not get out of His will and get involved in a situation of temptation (1 John 5:18).

JAMES 1:13-15 — When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

1 JOHN 5:18 — We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.

- When we pray, we must have a forgiving spirit toward others (vv. 14-15). In this "appendix" to the prayer, Jesus expanded "as we forgive our debtors." He later repeated this lesson to His disciples (Mark 11:19-26). He was not teaching that believers earned God's forgiveness by forgiving others; for this would be contrary to God's free grace and mercy. However, if we have truly experienced God's forgiveness, then we will have a readiness to forgive others:

EPHESIANS 4:32 — Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

COLOSSIANS 3:13 — Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

- True prayer is a "family affair." If the members of the family are not getting along with one another, how can they claim to have a right relationship with the Father? The emphasis in 1 John 4 is that we show our love for God by loving our brothers. When we forgive each other, we are not earning the right to prayer, for the privilege of prayer is a part of our sonship. Forgiveness is an ingredient of fellowship: If we are not in fellowship with God, we cannot pray effectively. But fellowship with our brother helps to determine my fellowship with God.

1 JOHN 4:20-21 — If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

ROMANS 8:15-16 — For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

- Since prayer involves glorifying God’s name and helping to accomplish God’s will on earth, we must not harbor sin in our hearts when we pray. If God answered the prayers of a believer who had an unforgiving spirit, He would dishonor His own name. How could God work through such a person to get His will done on earth? If God gave him his requests, He would be encouraging sin!

The important thing about prayer is not simply getting an answer, but being the kind of person whom God can trust with an answer.



“THE DISCIPLES’ PRAYER”

- **FOCUSING ON GOD’S WORD**

1. Where have you heard “The Lord’s Prayer”? _____

2. How often do you think people *say* “The Lord’s Prayer” rather than sincerely *pray* the words? _____

3. What are some other “prayers” that are popular with unbelievers, as well as believers? _____

- **STUDYING GOD’S WORD**

3. To whom did Jesus tell us to pray? (6:9) _____

The phrase “Our Father in heaven” indicates that God is not only majestic and holy, but also personal and loving. This is a statement of praise and commitment to honor God’s holy name. We can honor God’s name by being careful to use it respectfully. If we use God’s name lightly, we aren’t remembering His holiness.

4. What should be your attitude toward God? (6:9) _____
-

5. What should be your attitude toward God’s will? (6:10) _____
-

The phrase “Your kingdom come” is a reference to God’s spiritual reign. God’s kingdom was announced in His covenant with Abraham (Luke 13:28), is present in Christ’s reign in believers’ hearts (Luke 17:21), and will be complete when all evil is destroyed and God establishes the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1).

We are not resigning ourselves to fate, but praying that God’s perfect purpose will be accomplished in this world as well as the next.

7. What should be your attitude toward life’s necessities? (6:11) _____
-
-

When we pray for “our daily bread,” we are acknowledging that God is our Sustainer and Provider. It is a misconception to think that we provide for our needs ourselves. We must trust God DAILY to provide what HE knows we need.

8. What should be your attitude toward those who have wronged you? (6:12) _____
-
-

9. What should be your attitude toward temptation? (6:13) _____
-
-

Jesus is not implying that God leads us into temptation. He is simply asking for deliverance from Satan and his deceit. All Christians struggle with temptation. Sometimes it is so subtle that we don’t even realize what is happening to us. God has promised that He won’t allow us to be tempted beyond our endurance.

I CORINTHIANS 10:13 — No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

HEBREWS 4:15-16 — For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have One [Jesus Christ] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.¹⁶Let us then approach the throne of grace with

confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Satan's temptations focus on three crucial areas: (1) physical desires, (2) possessions and power, and (3) pride. But we have a High Priest who knows firsthand what we are experiencing, and He is willing and able to help us in our struggles. When you are tempted, turn to Him for strength.

10. Why is it crucial for you to forgive those who wrong you? (6:14-15) _____

Jesus gives a startling warning about forgiveness: if we refuse to forgive others, God will also refuse to forgive us. Why? Because when we don't forgive others, we are denying our common ground as sinners in need of God's forgiveness. God's forgiveness of sin is not the direct result of our forgiving others, but it is based upon our realizing what forgiveness means.

It is easy to ask God for forgiveness, but difficult to grant it to others. Whenever we ask God to forgive us for sin, we should also ask ourselves, "Have I forgiven the people who have wronged me?"

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

11. What sins or offenses by others do you find especially difficult to forgive? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

12. Has this study helped you appreciate "The Disciples' Prayer" more? How? _____

13. Write a prayer using the model Jesus gave His disciples: _____

Continue on the back...



May God richly bless you as you seek His Will through prayer!

Study 13 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT FASTING”

MATTHEW 6:16-18 NIV — Jesus said:

“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do,
for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.
I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.
¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,
¹⁸So that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting,
but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father,
who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”



Fasting presents a physical example of the painstaking aspects of spiritual growth.

The only fast that God actually required of the Jewish people was on the annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27). (To better understand the purpose of fasting, read Isaiah 58.) The Pharisees fasted each Monday and Thursday (Luke 18:12), and did so in such a way that people knew they were fasting. Their purpose, of course, was to win the praise of men. As a result, the Pharisees lost God’s blessing.

It is not wrong to fast, if we do it in the right way and with the right motive. Jesus fasted (Matthew 4:3); so did the members of the early church (Acts 13:2). Fasting helps to discipline the appetites of the body (Luke 21:34) and keep our spiritual priorities straight. But fasting must never become an opportunity for temptation (1 Corinthians 7:7). Simply to deprive ourselves of a natural benefit (such as food or sleep) is not of itself fasting. We must devote ourselves to God and worship Him. Unless there is the devotion of the heart (see Zechariah 7) there is no lasting spiritual benefit.

As with giving and praying, true fasting must be done in secret — it is between the believer and God. To outwardly change our countenance in order to appear glum and pious, would destroy the very purpose of the fast. Our Lord gave us a basic principle of spiritual living: Nothing that is truly spiritual will violate that which God has given us in nature. God does usually not tear down one good thing in order to build up another. If we have to look miserable to be considered spiritual, then there is something wrong with our views of spirituality.

Remember that hypocrisy robs us of reality in Christian living. We substitute reputation for character, mere words for true prayer, money for the devotion of the heart. No wonder Jesus compared the Pharisees to dirty cups and filthy tombs:

MATTHEW 23:25-28 — Jesus said:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. ²⁷Woe to you, teachers of

the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.²⁸In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

But hypocrisy not only robs us of character, it also robs us of spiritual rewards. Instead of the eternal approval of God, we receive the shallow praise of men. We pray, but there are no answers. We fast, but the inner man shows no improvement — the spiritual life remains hollow and lifeless. We miss the blessing of God here and now, and also lose the rewards from God when Christ returns.

Hypocrisy also robs us of spiritual influence. The Pharisees were a negative influence; whatever they touched was defiled and destroyed. The people who admired them and obeyed the Pharisees' words thought they themselves were being helped, when in reality they were being hurt.

The first step toward overcoming hypocrisy is to be honest with God in our secret life. We must never pray anything that we do not mean from the heart; otherwise, our prayers are simply empty words. Our motive must be to please God alone, no matter what men may say or do. We must cultivate the heart in the secret place. When reputation becomes more important than character, we have become hypocrites. It has well been said,

"The most important part of a Christian's life is the part that only God sees."



"IDEAL FASTING IN THE KINGDOM"

- **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. What is your all-time favorite meal? _____

2. What is the hungriest you have ever been in your life? _____

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

3. What mood did certain individuals in Jesus' day assume when they fasted? (6:16) _____

4. What facial expressions did some people wear? Why? (6:16) _____

5. Why did some people take on gloomy expressions when they fasted? (6:16) _____

6. What harsh name did Jesus give to people who made a public show of their fasting? Why? (6:16)

7. According to Jesus, what rewards await people who show off their fasting? (6:16) _____

8. What repeated phrase in this passage suggests that fasting is not an option? (6:16-17) _____

9. How should a person conceal the fact of his or her fasting? (6:17) _____

10. Who should know about an individual's fasts? Why? (6:18) _____

11. Who alone can see what people do in secret? How? (6:18) _____

12. Why should believers be secretive about fasting? (6:18) _____

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

13. How do God's rewards differ from the recognition we receive from others? _____

14. What are some good reasons for fasting? _____

15. What spiritual benefits might we receive from fasting? _____

16. Why is it tempting to show others that you are fasting? _____

17. What is the advantage of keeping your spiritual disciplines secret? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

18. For what need in your own life or in the life of a loved one would you be willing to skip a meal in order to devote yourself to prayer? _____

19. What sacrifice would you be willing to make to spend even one day alone with the Lord? _____

20. What steps can you take to devote your spiritual disciplines to God alone? _____



May God richly bless you as you study and grow in His Word!

Study 14 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT MONEY”

HEART ATTITUDE: Content, Grateful, Humble, Obedient, Generous, Patient, Hopeful, Trust

MATTHEW 6:19-24 NIV — Jesus said:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where moth and rust do not destroy,
and where thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body.

²² If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ No one can serve two masters.

Either he will hate the one and love the other,
or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and Money.”



Jesus contrasted heavenly values with earthly values when He explained that our first loyalty should be those things that do not fade, cannot be stolen or used up, and never wear out. We should not be fascinated with our possessions lest THEY possess US. This means we may have to do some cutting back if our possessions are becoming too important to us. Jesus is calling for a decision that allows us to live contentedly with whatever we have because we have chosen what is eternally lasting.

The section about money focuses on true discipleship and how wealth is often the most common distraction from such discipleship. Jesus demands undivided commitment — no divided loyalties, no part-time disciples. Our attitude toward money is often the pulse of the heart of our discipleship.

This Scripture passage can divided into three spiritual topics:

- Greed versus Heavenly Investment — 6:19-21
- Selfishness versus Spiritual Vision — 6:22-23
- Divided Heart versus Undivided Service — 6:24

• **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. If you were stranded on a desert island and could have only three possessions with you, what would you choose and why? _____

2. What valuable possessions do you have that cannot be replaced? _____

3. What are some things you'd never give up, no matter how much money you were offered for them? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. Where did Jesus urge His followers not to "store up treasures"? Why? (6:19) _____

5. Why did Jesus discourage stockpiling things? (6:19) _____

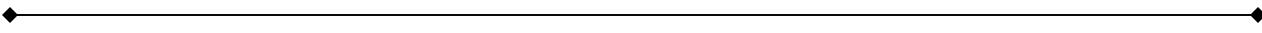
6. What can happen to a person's material possessions? (6:19) _____

The "treasure" Jesus refers to is not necessarily money. An earthly treasure can be a career, possessions, power, relationships — anything that interferes with putting God first in our lives.

PROVERBS 23:4 — Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint.

7. Where did Jesus encourage us to invest our wealth? Why? (6:20) _____

Jesus wants us to realize that material things have temporary value, while spiritual things are of eternal value. Therefore, we should esteem spiritual things above everything else. Laying up treasures in heaven is accomplished by commitment to all acts of obedience.



8. Why is heaven a better place to “bank” than earth? (6:20) _____

MATTHEW 19:21 — Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Should all believers sell everything they own? No. We are responsible to work for our own needs and the needs of our families so as not to be a burden on others. We should, however, be willing to give up anything if God asks us to do so. This kind of attitude allows nothing to come between us and God, and keeps us from using our God-given wealth selfishly. If you are comforted by the fact that Christ did not tell all his followers to sell all their possessions, then you may be too attached to what you have.

9. What does the location of our treasure say about us? (6:21) _____

If money, or the material possessions we accumulate, are the goal, we are quickly trapped and cut off from both God and the needy. The key to using money wisely is to see how much we can use for God’s purposes, not how much we can accumulate for ourselves. Does God’s love touch your wallet? Does your money free you to help others? If so, you are storing up lasting treasures in heaven. If your financial goals and possessions hinder you from giving, loving others, or serving, then sell or give away what you must to bring your life into an eternal perspective.

10. What is described as the “lamp of the body”? How is this so? (6:22) _____

11. What is the result of “good eyes”? (6:22) _____

12. When will people’s lives be full of darkness? (6:23) _____

Jesus described the “spiritual vision” His disciples should have. Proper spiritual vision requires us to see clearly what God wants us to do, and to see the world from His point of view. Through the eyes the body receives light, allowing it to move. In the Old Testament, the “eye” denoted the direction of a person’s life.

“Good” eyes focus on God. They are generous to others and convey the single focus of a true disciple. They receive and fill the body with God’s light so that we can serve Him wholeheartedly. “Bad” eyes represent materialism, greed and covetousness. Those with “bad” eyes

may see the light, but they have allowed self-serving desires, interests and goals to block their vision. Those with "bad eyes" think they have light; in reality, they are in spiritual darkness. "Bad" means "evil, stingy, grudging, greedy." We should examine ourselves to determine whether we are generous or stingy, not only with material things, but also our attitudes. If we are generous, then we are filled with light. If we are stingy, then we are filled with darkness.

This could mean a sort of "double vision" — trying to focus on God and earthly possessions at the same time. It will lead to gloom in life and darkness in eternity. How great is that darkness for those who see the light, but are not focused on God. Materialism destroys the whole self. In these words, Jesus was calling His followers to undivided loyalty — eyes fixed and focused on Him.

13. What did Jesus say about serving two masters? (6:24) _____

14. Why did Jesus say we cannot serve two masters? (6:24) _____

15. What two masters did Jesus mention in this context? Why? (6:24) _____

Jesus explained that no one can serve, or be a slave to, two masters. A slave could belong to two partners, but not to two separate individuals because his or her loyalty would be divided. While slaves have their earthly master chosen for them — from a spiritual perspective, all people must choose whom they will serve. They can choose to serve themselves — to pursue wealth and selfish pleasures -- or they can choose to serve God. Either we store our treasures with God (6:20-21), we focus our "eyes" on Him (6:22-23), and we serve Him alone — or else we do not serve Him at all. There can be no part-time loyalty. Jesus wants total devotion.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

16. How have you felt whenever you have lost a valued possession? _____

17. How can you store up treasures in heaven? _____

18. How can you determine where your treasure is (and thus where your heart is)? _____

19. What sort of things do you think about most? _____

20. Where does your mind naturally gravitate to in those moments just before you go to bed? _____

21. How clear is your spiritual vision right now? _____

22. What masters most often fight for your allegiance? _____

23. In what ways do you serve money? _____

24. In what ways can you master your money? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

25. How will you begin making investments in eternity today? _____

26. What earthly investments will you give up? _____



May God richly bless you as you continue to store up treasures in Heaven!

Study 15 • "JESUS TEACHES ABOUT WORRY"

HEART ATTITUDE: Hope, Trust, Faith

MATTHEW 6:25-32 NIV — Jesus said:

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.
Is not life more important than food,
and the body more important than clothes?

²⁶Look at the birds of the air;
they do not sow or reap or store away in barns,
and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not much more valuable than they?

²⁷Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸And why do you worry about clothes?
See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

²⁹Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor
was dressed like one of these.

³⁰If that is how God clothes the grass of the field,
which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire,
will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or
'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

³²For the pagans run after all these things,
and your heavenly Father knows that you need them."



SEVEN REASONS NOT TO WORRY

1. 6:25 — The same God who created life in you can be trusted with the details of your life.
2. 6:26 — Worrying about the future hampers your efforts for today.
3. 6:27 — Worrying is more harmful than helpful.
4. 6:28-30 — God does not ignore those who depend on Him.
5. 6:31-32 — Worry shows a lack of faith in and understanding of God.
6. 6:33 — There are real challenges God wants us to pursue, and worrying keeps us from them.
7. 6:34 — Living one day at a time keeps us from being consumed with worry.

Because of the ill effects of worry, Jesus tells us “do not worry” about those needs that God promises to supply. Worry may:

- damage your health,
- cause the object of your worry to consume your thoughts,
- disrupt your productivity,
- negatively affect the way you treat others, and
- reduce your ability to trust in God.

How many ill effects of worry are you experiencing?

What is the difference between worry and genuine concern? Worry immobilizes, but concern moves you to action. Worry presents us with the dual temptation to distrust God and to substitute fear for practical action. Worry means paying attention to what we cannot change instead of putting our energies to work in effective ways. Jesus made it clear that worry takes away from life rather than adding anything to it. We can counteract worry by doing what we can and trusting where we can't. When we work for God and wait on His timing, we won't have time to worry. When we seek first to honor God as King and conform our lives to His righteousness, worry will not consume us.



“THERE'S NO FEAR AND ANXIETY IN THE KINGDOM”

• **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. What are your top three worries? _____

2. What causes you to feel anxious? _____

3. What valuable possessions do you have that cannot be replaced? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. What three worries did Jesus discourage among His followers? Why? (6:25) _____

The command “do not worry” does not imply complete lack of concern, nor does it call people to be unwilling to work and supply their own needs. Instead, Jesus was continuing to highlight kingdom priorities — the attitude toward life that His disciples should exemplify. They need not be overly concerned about food or clothing because they know that God will care for them. Worrying about food and clothing should never take priority over serving God. Food and clothes are less important than the life and body that they supply. Because God sustains our lives and gives us our bodies, we can trust Him to provide *everything* He knows we need.

When we worry over lack of food or inadequate clothing, we immobilize ourselves and focus on the worry. We refuse to trust that God can supply these most basic needs. Worry immobile -izes us, but trust in God moves us to action. We work for our money to supply food and clothing, but we must always remember that these ultimately come from God’s hands. When the need arises, we need not worry, for we know that our God will supply.

5. Why is food a trivial matter? (6:26) _____

6. According to Jesus, how do clothes stack up as a subject of great concern? (6:26) _____

7. What creatures did Jesus use to illustrate God’s reliability as a provider? Why? (6:26) _____

8. Why are God’s creatures consistently “fed and clothed”? (6:26) _____

9. Why should we take great comfort from the way the animal and plant kingdoms operate? (6:26) _____

Perhaps as He spoke these words, Jesus gestured to several birds passing overhead. The birds need food, and the heavenly Father knows it. The birds are dependent upon God’s daily provision because they cannot grow, prepare, or store their food. They work — they hunt for it and then bring it back to their families — but they don’t worry. If God cares for the birds, making sure that the natural order of His creation supplies food for them, how much more will He care for a hungry human being?

Jesus was teaching total dependence upon God as opposed to humanity’s self-sufficiency. How much more should His followers, who know Him personally, trust that He will provide their needs? Jesus was not prohibiting His followers from sowing, reaping, and gathering food (that is, working for it); but He was prohibiting worry about having enough food. All that we have ultimately comes from God’s hand. Whether we have much or little, we must remember that God provides for our needs.

10. What benefits does worry bring? (6:27) _____

11. What fact from nature did Jesus use to illustrate the folly of worrying over clothes? (6:28) _____

12. How did Solomon's wardrobe measure up to the beauty of nature? (6:29) _____

13. What comfort can followers of Christ find in the beauty of nature? (6:30) _____

Sitting on the grassy hillside, Jesus may have gestured to the lilies of the field, maybe referring to the bountiful flowers in Israel. As in 6:26, Jesus was not condoning laziness while waiting for God to supply. Instead, He wanted His disciples to place their lives and needs in God's hands, refusing to worry over basic needs. To worry about clothing is to show little faith in God's ability to supply. If His creation feeds the birds (6:26) and clothes the earth with beauty and color so rich that even King Solomon's glorious garments could not match it, will He not much more clothe you? God "clothes" the earth with the flowers and grass of the field, neither of which endures for long.

14. Who is consumed by concern over food, water, and clothing? (6:32) _____

Do not spend energy fretting over what you will eat, drink, or wear. Worry has no place in the lives of Jesus' disciples; it is the Gentiles (unbelievers) who seek after, fret over, and worry about such things. They have no sense of God's care for them, no reason to focus their energies elsewhere. Jesus' followers, however, have kingdom priorities, a favored relationship with the King, and a promise that our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things.

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD**

15. Why do some of us worry about clothes more than others? _____

16. How do you think God feels about our society's preoccupation with food? _____

17. If God is really in control of the universe, why do we worry so much about so many things? _____

18. How do you think worry is affecting you emotionally, physically, and spiritually? _____

19. How would you answer someone who interprets this passage to mean that God promises to give His children everything their hearts desire? _____

20. In light of this passage, what would be some good principles on food and clothing for us to follow? _____

21. What is the difference between planning for the future and worrying about the future? _____

22. What worries do you struggle to keep under control? _____

23. What will help you entrust your concerns to God? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

24. What worry will you entrust to God today? _____

25. What steps will you take to change your priorities from worldly concerns to kingdom concerns? _____



May God richly bless you as you trust Him and His Word!

Study 16 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS”

HEART ATTITUDE: Purity, Obedience, Faith, Hope, Trust

MATTHEW 6:33-34 NIV — Jesus said:

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well.
³⁴Therefore do not worry about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will worry about itself.
Each day has enough trouble of its own.”



What is RIGHTEOUSNESS?

The word righteousness comes from a root word that means “straightness.” Righteousness is holy and upright living in accordance with God’s standard — conformity to the authoritative standard of God. Righteousness is a moral concept. God’s character is the definition and source of all righteousness. Therefore, man’s righteousness is defined in terms of God’s.

DEUTEUROMONY 32:4 — He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.

ROMANS 9:14-15 — What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

The system of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament and the Cross of Jesus in the New Testament show man’s need for righteousness. Sin is disobedience to the terms that define man’s relationship with God and with other people. Since the FALL in the Garden of Eden, man is inherently unrighteous. As the prophet Isaiah said, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away” (Isaiah 64:6). Man cannot be righteous in the sight of God on his own merits. Therefore, man must have God’s righteousness imputed, or transferred, to him.

The cross of Jesus is a public demonstration of God’s righteousness. God accounts or transfers the righteousness of Christ to those who trust in Him. We do not become righteous because of our inherent goodness — God sees us as righteous because of our identification by faith with His Son.

ROMANS 4:4-8 — Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

GALATIANS 3:6 — Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9 — But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.
⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Living in the kingdom means abandoning our very lives to the Father’s care so we can concentrate on seeking Him. How can we find the courage to abandon our lives to God’s care? His power orders every detail of this life in which we live — knowing His power and knowing His love for us, His children, we abandon ourselves to His loving care. We give Him our worries, He gives us His peace.

To “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness” means to:

- Turn to Him first for help;
- Fill your thoughts with His desires;
- Take His character for your pattern; and
- Obey Him in everything.

What is really important to you? People, objects, goals, and other desires all compete for priority. Any of these can quickly bump God out of first place if we don’t actively choose to give Him first place in EVERY area of life.

Planning for tomorrow is time well spent — worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Sometimes it’s difficult to tell the difference. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps and schedules, and trusting in God’s guidance. When done well, planning can help alleviate worry. The worrier, by contrast is consumed by fear and finds it difficult to trust God. The worrier lets his plans interfere with his relationship with God. Don’t let worries about tomorrow affect your relationship with God today.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 — Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:19 — And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

"THE PRINCIPLE OF KINGDOM LIVING"

• **FOCUSING**

1. How do expectations affect your life? _____

2. What do you worry about most often? _____

3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the highest), how far can you trust God? Why? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. Do a short "word study" on the following words:

a) Contentment — _____

b) Creation — _____

c) Faithfulness — _____

d) Future — _____

e) God — _____

f) Materialism — _____

g) Needs — _____

h) Peace — _____

The Most Excellent Way ~ Becoming GOD-Dependent

- i) Prayer —

 - j) Trust —

 - k) Worry —

5. What priorities should you have in life? (6:33) _____

6. What is the "right perspective" on life? Why? (6:33) _____

7. What are "all these things." (6:33) _____

8. What does God do for His children when they keep the right perspective, refuse to worry, and trust Him? (6:34) _____

- **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**
9. When was the last time you solved a problem with worry? _____

10. What are the signs that you are worrying too much? _____

11. What "trouble" did you have yesterday that you still have today? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

12. How will you “seek” His kingdom? _____

13. How will you “seek” His righteousness? _____

14. How will you “seek” an eternal perspective on life? _____

15. What attitude will you begin to cultivate? Explain: _____

16. Write a “thank you” note to the Lord for His righteousness that has been given to you:



May God richly bless you as you live for Him!

Study 17 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT JUDGING OTHERS”

HEART ATTITUDE: Discerning, Forgiving, Loving

MATTHEW 7:1-6 NIV — Jesus said:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.

²For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged,
and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

³Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye
and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

⁴How can you say to your brother,
‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’
when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye,
and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

⁶“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.

If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”



The word “judge” (Greek, *krino*) can mean evaluate or analyze. It also refers to private, judgmental attitudes that tear down others in order to build up oneself. The command “do not judge” does not refer to judging in a court of law, nor is it a blanket statement against critical thinking.

Believers should be discerning and make certain judgments. For example, Jesus said to expose false teachers (7:15-23), and to admonish others in order to help them (18:15). But followers of Christ should not be critical or condemning in their attitudes toward others. A judgmental, critical spirit differs radically from love.

Believers’ special position with Christ does not give us license to take God’s place as judge. When we judge in that manner, we will be judged likewise by God. As God will have mercy on the merciful (5:7) and forgive those who forgive (6:14-15), He will condemn those who condemn:

ROMANS 2:1 — You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Jesus tells us to examine our own motives and conduct instead of judging others. The traits that bother us in others are often the habits we dislike about ourselves. Our unbroken bad habits and behavior

patterns are the very ones we most want to change in others. Do you find it easy to magnify others' faults while ignoring your own? If you are ready to criticize someone — and hold bitterness in your heart — check to see if you deserve the same criticism. Judge yourself first, and then lovingly forgive and help your neighbor.

"Judge not, that you be not judged" (NJKV) may be the most-often-misquoted text from the Bible. People frequently apply it as if it were a flat commandment against all moral judgment. In fact, people use it to judge what they consider a judgmental attitude on the part of another. Jesus, however, gave these words as one negative application of the Golden Rule — we should not treat others as we do not want to be treated. We should seek to measure ourselves and others by the same standards.



"LOVE VERSUS FAULT-FINDING & CRITICIZING"

- **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. What are your pet peeves (at work, home or in your community)? _____

2. What kinds of things do people criticize you for most commonly?

3. How do you tend to respond when someone calls you on the carpet or corrects you?

4. What would your friends say is your biggest fault?

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

5. What happens to those who are judgmental or critical? (7:1)

Jesus' statement "do not judge" is against the kind of hypercritical, judgmental attitude that tears others down in order to build oneself up. It is not a blanket statement against all critical thinking, but a call to be "discerning" rather than negative.

I CORINTHIANS 4:3-5 — I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

6. In what way will we be judged? (7:2) _____

7. By what measure will we be judged? (7:2) _____

8. What kind of faults do we notice in others? (7:3) _____

9. How did Jesus illustrate the foolishness of the way we find fault with others? (7:3) _____

10. What figure of speech did Jesus use to illustrate how blind we are to the shortcomings in our own lives? (7:4) _____

11. What did Jesus call those who ignore their own imperfections and focus on the flaws of others? Why? (7:5) _____

12. When is it good to confront others with their faults? (7:5) _____

13. Why is it necessary to deal with one's own sins first? (7:5) _____

Jesus revealed incredible understanding of human nature. How easy it is for us to overlook our own sins yet easily spot sin in others. How true that the sin we most clearly see in others is also present in us. Believers should first deal with their own sins, but they also must correct and guide erring brothers and sisters.

James wrote: "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

It would be ludicrous and hypocritical, however, for a believer to attempt to help a brother or sister with a "speck" while carrying around a "plank or log." That believer would be guilty of criticizing another without personally applying the same critical standards. While the person with the "speck" may certainly need help, that help must come from one who can see clearly to take out that speck. Paul wrote to the Galatians, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (vs 6:1). Only those who are spiritually mature can discern when and how to confront sin in others.

14. What are we not to do with sacred things? Why? (7:6) _____

15. What may happen if we disregard Jesus' warning? (7:6) _____

"What is sacred" refers to the meat the priest takes off the altar; "pearls" typify Bible truths, the "precious promises" of the Word. The Gospel is to be preached in all the world, but we must not carelessly preach the deeper truths — the "family jewels" — lest we cheapen them.

Why did Jesus instruct the disciples about not throwing sacred things to dogs and pearls to pigs at this point in His Sermon when He is giving a lesson about judging? This command balances the one previously given. We are not to judge others, but we must also be careful how we distribute holy things.

As God's people, we are privileged to handle the sacred things of the Lord. He has entrusted to us the precious truths of the Word of God, and we must regard them carefully.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7 — But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

When we seek to help another believer turn back to the right way, we first must be certain we are walking the right way ourselves. While it is true that we must carry the Gospel "to every creature" (Mark 16:15) — and this Sermon contains the deeper truths of the Gospel of Christ — it is also true that we must not cheapen the Gospel by acting without discernment. Jesus refused to talk to Herod (Luke 23:9), and Paul refused to argue with people who resisted the Word (Acts 13:44-49).

If we have successfully removed the plank from our own eye, we may then minister to the one with the speck. But what if that person will not listen, especially if we are ministering with the Word of God? We stop — we do not argue! We pray for them! We trust the Lord to turn them

around! And we show them the love of God by how we treat them.

The “dogs and pigs (swine)” are professors of the faith who have never really been saved:

2 PETER 2:19-22 — They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. ²⁰If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²²Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

This does not mean we should stop giving God’s Word to unbelievers, but that we should be wise and discerning in what we teach to whom so we will not be wasting our time.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD’S WORD**

16. When, if ever, should you criticize or judge someone else? _____

17. What sacred or valuable things should you withhold from people who have no concern for God? _____

18. Why is it that the traits of others that irritate us most are often the very faults that are present in our own lives? _____

19. What happened the last time you criticized someone else or judged another’s actions? _____

20. What causes us to become critical, judgmental people? _____

21. How can we become more merciful and non-judgmental? _____

22. How can you not judge unfairly or according to prejudice? _____

23. How can you judge a person's actions without demeaning the person? _____

24. What faults block your spiritual vision? _____

• **DOING GOD'S WORD**

25. How will you begin to get into the habit of examining your own life before you start criticizing others? _____

26. What fault of your own will you focus attention on? _____

27. Is there someone who you seem to constantly judge? Why? _____

28. Write a prayer to God asking Him to help you have a discerning spirit in order to stop judging others? _____



*May the Lord richly bless you as you
examine yourself before ministering to others!*

Study 18 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL RESOURCES”

HEART ATTITUDE: Faith, Hope, Trust, Persistence, Purity

MATTHEW 7:7-11 NIV — Jesus said:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.

⁸For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds;
and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

⁹Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

¹¹If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!”



How do we ask, seek and knock? Through prayer!

Why does Christ include this exhortation on prayer at this point in the sermon? Because it is so difficult for us, in our own power and wisdom, to obey the commands He has given.

Beginning in Chapter 5, the Sermon on the Mount has explained to Jesus' followers the lifestyle and life attitudes that He expects from us. We may believe the demands are impossible. Jesus gives the answer to any doubts — ask, seek, knock. The ability to live for God is only a prayer away. The verbs are in the present tense, indicating continuous activity. Jesus' followers can keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking, indicating the importance of persistent, consistent prayer in their lives. Only through prayer can we stay in contact with God, know what He wants us to do, and then have the strength to do God's will in all areas of life. God will answer us if we persistently ask, seek, and knock. As God's children, we may expect God, our heavenly Father, to care for us and meet our needs.

God had told the prophet Jeremiah, “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). The three words (ask, seek, knock) combine to emphasize the truth that those who bring their needs to God can trust that they will be satisfied. All three are metaphors for praying. Sometimes God does not answer our prayers immediately; sometimes we must keep on knocking, and wait for God's answer. However, if we continue to trust God through prayer, Jesus promised that we will receive, find, and have an open door.

"THE AVAILABILITY OF KINGDOM RESOURCES"

Jesus tells us to persist in pursuing God. People often give up after a few halfhearted efforts and conclude that God cannot be found. But knowing God takes faith, focus, and follow-through, and Jesus assures us that our efforts will be rewarded. Don't give up in your efforts to seek God. Continue to ask Him for more knowledge, patience, wisdom, love, and understanding. He will give them to you.

• **FOCUSING**

1. What sort of letters did you write to Santa Claus as a kid? _____

2. What is the difference between temporal needs and spiritual needs? _____

3. What is your image of God? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. What did Jesus say will happen if we bring our requests to Him? (7:7) _____

5. What happens when we seek in Christ's name? (7:7) _____

6. According to Jesus, what is the result for those who "knock" on God's door? (7:7) _____

MATTHEW 21:22 — Jesus said: "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

MARK 11:24 — Jesus said: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

LUKE 11:9-13 — Jesus said: “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

JOHN 14:13-14 — Jesus said: “And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask Me for anything in My name, and I will do it.”

JOHN 15:7 — Jesus said: “If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”

JAMES 1:5-6 — If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

I JOHN 3:21-22 — Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him.

I JOHN 5:14-15 — This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.

7. From the Scriptures above, list the “spiritual conditions” for asking, seeking and knocking: _____
-
-
-
-
-
-

We must not take Jesus’ words as a blank check to have our every whim and desire met — prayer is not a magical way to obtain whatever we want. Jesus has already explained some conditions on this promise: His followers are to show mercy and forgiveness to others (5:7; 6:12), avoid praying in order to get attention (6:5-6), and be willing to persevere in prayer. Our requests must be in harmony with God’s will (“your will be done,” 6:10), accepting His will above our desires.

Kingdom living is living in God’s spiritual realm. If we ask, seek and knock persistently to receive God’s spiritual blessings, our temporal needs will be met as well.

1 PETER 2:2-3 — Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

8. How do loving parents respond to a child's request for bread? (7:9) _____

9. How do loving parents respond to a child's request for fish? (7:10) _____

The child in Jesus' example asked his father for bread and fish — good and necessary items. If the child had asked for a poisonous snake, would the wise father have granted his request? Sometimes God knows we are praying for "snakes" and does not give us what we ask for, even though we persist in our prayers. As we learn to know God better as a loving Father, we learn to ask for what is good for us.

God is not selfish, begrudging, or stingy — His followers don't have to beg or grovel when they come with their requests. He is a loving Father who understands, cares, comforts, and willingly gives good things to those who ask him. "Good things" could refer to the Holy Spirit but does not exclude material provision. If we humans can be kind, imagine how kind God can be. He created kindness!

10. What is true about the character of even the best human parent? (7:11) _____

11. How can we be encouraged by the sight of godless parents doing good things for their children? (7:11) _____

Jesus used the expression "though you are evil" to contrast sinful and fallible human beings with the holy and perfect God.

12. What is the likelihood of God giving His praying children what they need? Why or why not? (7:11)

13. What do you tend to pray about most of the time?

• **UNDERSTANDING**

14. For what are you reluctant to pray? _____

15. How do you react when your child comes to you with a legitimate need? _____

16. What motivates you to want to provide for your children? _____

17. In spite of their imperfection, how would you rate your parents as providers? _____

18. If earthly parents generally attempt to care for their children, what can you conclude about God? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

18. What request will you bring to God every day this week? _____

19. What are your most immediate spiritual needs that you will seek from God? _____

20. Write your prayer: _____



May God richly bless you with all spiritual resources as you ask, seek and knock in accordance with His will and Word!

Study 19 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT THE GOLDEN RULE”

HEART ATTITUDE: Love and Obedience

MATTHEW 7:12 NIV — Jesus said:

**“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”**

This is the so-called “Golden Rule.” It is one of the most misunderstood statements in the Bible. This statement is not the sum total of Christian truth, nor is it God’s plan of redemption. We should no more build our theology on the Golden Rule than we should build our astronomy on “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.”

This great truth is a principle that ought to govern our attitudes toward others. It only applies to believers, and it must be practiced in every area of life. The person who practices the Golden Rule refuses to say or do anything that would harm himself or others. If our judging of others is not governed by this principle, we will become proud and critical, and our own spiritual character will degenerate.

Practicing the Golden Rule releases the love of God in our lives and enables us to help others, even those who want to hurt us.

But remember that practicing the Golden Rule means paying a price. If we want God’s best for ourselves and others, but others resist God’s will, then they *will* oppose us. We are salt, and salt stings the open wound. We are light, and light exposes dirt.

Many religions teach a negative version of this statement. Confucius said, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” The well-known Rabbi Hillel, when challenged to teach the entire Law while standing on one foot, said, “Whatever angers you when you suffer it at the hands of others, do not do it to others, this is the whole law.” By stating this positively, Jesus made the statement even more significant. It may be easy to refrain from harming others, but it is much more difficult to take the initiative in doing something good for them.

A person may be able to keep the negative form of the law by avoiding sin, but to keep the positive form requires action. This is the key to the radical discipleship that Jesus wants. The Golden Rule is the foundation of *active* goodness and mercy — the kind of love God shows to us every day. The word “so” links Jesus’ words “do to others what you would have them do to you” with the teachings presented thus far in the Sermon on the Mount. Not only does this Rule describe briefly the behavior expected of Jesus’ followers, it also sums up the Law and the Prophets, as Rabbi Hillel said. When we follow the Golden Rule, we keep the rest of God’s commands.



Now let’s look at the “greatest commandment” ...

Matthew 22:37-40 — Jesus replied:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your mind.”

³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Toward the end of His ministry, our Lord gave us the GREATEST COMMANDMENT. He quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” — but Jesus added “with all your mind.”

Jesus’ purpose was to show that a person’s total being must be involved in loving God. Nothing must be held back because God holds nothing back. Much of the New Testament focuses on Jesus’ addition (with all your mind) by strongly emphasizing the renewing of the mind. Much of modern-day teaching attempts to bypass the mind. Yet the mind is vital, and we need to take every thought captive for Christ.

ROMANS 12:1-2 — Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will.

EPHESIANS 4:22-24 — You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5 — We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

WHOLE LOVE — Jesus used *heart*, *soul* and *mind* to express the dimensions of our love for God. The terms should be taken together to mean, “Love God with your whole being.” In life they cannot be completely isolated (such as, “I will love God today with all my heart while my soul and mind are otherwise occupied”). Heart, soul, and mind function in harmony in our love for God.

Let’s take each of these components and meditate on how to express your love.

- **HEART** refers primarily to our emotional response. When we think about love, we usually stop with emotions. The helpful roles of SOUL and MIND become clear when our emotions (or heart) fail us. What do we do with the command to love God or others if we don’t feel like it?
- **SOUL** includes the willful, decision-making part of us. Loving God with our SOUL covers those times when we love God apart from our feelings, such as when we truly forgive another while part of us feels like exacting revenge on that person.

- MIND refers to an active component of our love for God. In a world where faith is often described as characteristic of people who don't think, Jesus' words point to the importance of engaging our MIND as a central aspect of what we believe. Of course, loving God with our MIND covers much more than the practice of thinking about God. If we place our MIND into service for God, it will enjoy its greatest usefulness. Identify what area of your whole love for God needs special attention, and make it a point to involve that part of yourself in loving God.

The word for LOVE is *AGAPAO*, totally unselfish love — a love which we are incapable of giving without the help of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit helps us love Him as we ought. God wants our warmhearted love and devotion, not just our obedience. Our HEART is the center of our desires and affections, our SOUL is our "being" and uniqueness, and our MIND is the center of our intellect.

To love God in this way is to fulfill completely all the commandments regarding our relationship with Him. And to love others as we love ourselves is to fulfill "The Golden Rule."



"LOVE – THE LAW OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

The commandments, "Do no commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

- **FOCUSING ON THE WORD OF GOD**

1. If you could make up one rule that everyone in the world had to live by, what would it be and why?

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

2. How are followers of Jesus Christ to treat others? _____

3. In what specific situations are we to follow the Golden Rule? _____

4. Why is the command to treat others as you want to be treated so significant? _____

LUKE 6:31 — Jesus said: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

ROMANS 13:8-10 — Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

GALATIANS 5:14 — The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

• **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD OF GOD**

5. When is it hardest for you to treat others with love, kindness and respect? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

6. How will you implement the Golden Rule and the Greatest Commandment in your relationships?

• Your spouse? _____

• Your children? _____

• Your parents? _____

• Your fellow Christians? _____

The Most Excellent Way ~ Becoming GOD-Dependent

४

May God richly bless you as you demonstrate His love toward others!

Study 20 • “JESUS TEACHES THE WAY TO HEAVEN”

HEART ATTITUDE: Humility, Perseverence, Obedience, Trust, Hope, Faith

MATTHEW 7:13-14 NIV — Jesus said:

“Enter through the narrow gate.

For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction,
and many enter through it.

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life,
and only a few find it.”

Jesus is telling His disciples that there are only two destinations for mankind — eternal life or eternal death. The gateway to eternal life is called “narrow.” This does not mean it is difficult to become a Christian —it means there is only ONE way to live eternally with God. Only a few decide to enter through the narrow gate and follow the narrow road that is Life in Christ. Why? It is costly!

We can walk on the broad way and keep our “baggage” of sin and worldliness. But if we enter through the narrow gate, we must give up those things.

Here is the test: Did your profession of faith in Christ cost you anything? If not, then it was not a true profession. Many people who “trust” Jesus Christ never leave the broad road with its appetites and associations. They have an easy Christianity that makes no demands on them. We cannot walk on two roads, in two different directions, at the same time. Which way will you go?

Believing in Jesus is the only way to heaven, because He alone died for our sins and made us right before God. Living His way may not be popular, but it is true and right. Thank God there IS A way!

- **JOHN 14:6 —** Jesus answered, “I AM the WAY and the TRUTH and the LIFE. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

As the WAY, Jesus is our path to the Father — the “way” of Life.

As the TRUTH, He is the reality of all God’s promises — the “Word” of Life.

As the LIFE, He joins His divine life to ours — He is imputed to us and within us — both now and eternally.

- **LUKE 13:23-28 NKJV —** Then one said to Him, “Lord, are there few who are saved?”

And He said to them,²⁴“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

²⁵When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, “Lord, Lord, open for us,” and He will answer and say to you, “I do not know you, where you are from,”

²⁶then you will begin to say, “We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.”

²⁷But He will say, “I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.”

Being a Christian requires more concentrated effort than most people are willing to put forth. Obviously we cannot save ourselves — there is no way we can work ourselves into God's favor. The work we must do is earnestly desiring to know Jesus and diligently striving to follow Him whatever the cost. We dare not put off making this decision, because the door will not stay open forever.

The Kingdom of God will not necessarily be populated with the people we expect to find there. Some perfectly respectable religious leaders who knew Jesus will not be there, because secretly they were morally corrupt. Jesus explained that although many people know something about God, only a few have acknowledged their sins and accepted His forgiveness. Just listening to Jesus' words or admiring His miracles are not enough — it is vital to turn from sin and trust in God to save us.

This gate leading to life is narrow not because it is difficult to become a Christian but because there is only one way and only a few decide to walk that road. The road is hard because true discipleship calls for sacrificing self and becoming obedient to the Word of God.

Sometimes Christians receive harsh treatment from people who don't understand or are plainly hostile.

Sometimes Christians give up a lot in order to follow Christ.

Sometimes Christians are called to endure terrible pain, even death.

But through it all we have God's promise: Jesus is with us, minute by minute, hour by hour, hand in hand.

That is the secret of a Christian's strength.

PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV — I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me .



• **FOCUSING ON THE WORD OF GOD**

1. Why are most people apt to believe in heaven, but quick to dismiss the reality of hell? _____

2. If you were setting the standards for who gets into heaven, what requirements would you establish?

3. Do you believe there are spiritual absolutes such as good and evil, truth and lies, wide and narrow? Why or why not? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. What command did Jesus give His followers in this passage? _____

5. What exactly are we called to enter? Why? _____

6. How did Jesus describe the gate to the kingdom of God? Why? _____

7. In what way did Jesus describe the gate that leads to destruction? _____

8. What was said about the road that leads to destruction? _____

9. How many people are said to travel the path to destruction? _____

10. What kind of gate leads to life? _____

11. The small gate is the entrance to what kind of road? _____

12. Where does the narrow road lead? _____

13. How many people find and follow the narrow road? Why? _____

• UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD

14. What is encouraging about Christ's words? _____

15. What broad roads did you travel before you met Christ? _____

16. How did you find Christ? _____

17. What was your entry through the narrow gate like? _____

18. What wide gates and broad roads are some of your acquaintances following? _____

19. How should we fit or not fit into the world? _____

20. How might you respond to the charge that Christians are narrow-minded and arrogant? _____

21. In what sense is it narrow-minded to believe in Christ? _____

22. Why do many people prefer the broad way that leads to destruction? _____

23. Why is it difficult to stay on the narrow road? _____

• DOING GOD'S WORD

24. What will you do this week to point someone toward the narrow gate? _____

25. How will you show God your appreciation for His mercy and grace in leading you to the path of eternal life? _____

26. What actions will you take to help you stay on the narrow path? _____

27. How will you apply the “narrow and wide” principle to other areas of spiritual growth in your life?

“JESUS — THE GATE OF LIFE”

JOHN 10:1-18 NKJV — Jesus said:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door (“gate”, NIV) but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

²But he who enters

s by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

³To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

⁴And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

⁵Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

⁶Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

⁷Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I AM the door of the sheep.

⁸All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

⁹I AM the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.

¹⁰The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

¹¹I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

¹²But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.

¹³The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.

¹⁴I AM the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and AM known by My own.

¹⁵As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.

¹⁶And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

¹⁷Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

¹⁸No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself.

I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.

This command I have received from My Father.”

What is a sheepfold? In Jesus' time, it was a very simple structure — a stone wall, corral-like structure with a single opening. The shepherds in the village would drive their sheep into the fold at nightfall and a shepherd (or porter) would stand guard. In the morning each shepherd would call his own sheep — the sheep would recognize their shepherd's voice and come out of the fold. The shepherd slept at the opening of the fold and actually became "the door." Nothing could enter or leave the fold without passing over the shepherd. Jesus explained that the true shepherd comes through the door (v. 1), he calls his sheep by name and they recognize him (v. 3), then they follow the shepherd who stays with them (vv. 4-5).

- **THE DOOR** (vv. 7-10).

Jesus Christ is the door, and as such He leads the sheep "in and out." Theologian Arthur Pink points out that there are really three doors spoken of in this chapter, and we must distinguish them if we are to get the full meaning of this explanation:

- (1) **"THE DOOR INTO THE SHEEPFOLD"** (v. 1)

The sheepfold here is not heaven but the nation of Israel (read Psalm 100). Christ came to Israel through the way appointed in Scripture; the porter (John the Baptist) opened the door for Him.

- (2) **"THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP"** (v. 7)

This is the door that leads people out of their present fold; in this case, Judaism. Christ opened the way for multitudes to leave the old religious system and find new life.

- (3) **THE DOOR OF SALVATION** (v. 9)

The sheep using this door go in and out, which speaks of liberty; they have eternal life; they enjoy the pastures of God's Word. Satan, through his false teachers (thieves and robbers), wants to steal, kill and destroy the sheep. Christ gives abundant life and cares for His sheep.

- **THE SHEPHERD** (vv. 11-15)

There is a contrast here between the Pharisees (hirelings) who had no concern for the sheep, and Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.

- (1) **Christ, the Good Shepherd**, gives His life on the cross (read Psalm 22) — The hirelings flee and protect themselves when the enemies come; but Christ willingly gives up His life for the sheep. (In the Old Testament the sheep died — were sacrificed — as a foreshadow of Jesus' death and sacrifice for the sins of the world.)

- (2) **Christ, the Great Shepherd**, cares for His sheep (Hebrews 13:20 and Psalm 23).

- (3) **Christ, the Chief Shepherd**, will come again in glory for His sheep (Psalm 24).

1 PETER 5:3-4 — And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

- **THE FLOCK** (vv. 16-18)

The "other sheep" are the Gentiles, who were not in the Jewish fold. Jesus must bring them, and He will do it through His voice, His Word. This happened when Peter went to the Gentiles

" and there shall be one flock [the church] and one Shepherd [Christ]." The church is made up of Jews and Gentiles who trust Christ, and there is one body, one flock, one common spiritual life (see Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:1-13).

EPHESIANS 4:1-6 — As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.



- **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. What person or group did you and your friends “follow” when you were a teenager? _____

 2. Who is smarter? Sheep or people? Explain:

• STUDYING GOD'S WORD

3. Who did Jesus say was a thief and a robber? (10:1) _____

 4. What kind of relationship do sheep have with their shepherd? (10:2-4).

 5. Why won't sheep follow a stranger? (10:5) _____

 6. What effect did Jesus' words have on His audience? (10:6) _____

 7. What did Jesus say He was? (10:7) _____

 8. To whom did Jesus say the sheep did not listen? (10:8) _____

9. What did Jesus say would be the result of entering through Him? (10:9) _____

10. How did Jesus contrast His coming with the coming of a thief? (10:10) _____

11. Who did Jesus claim to be? (10:11) _____

12. Why did Jesus say the hired hand would abandon his sheep? (10:12-13) _____

13. What type of relationship did Jesus say He had with His sheep? (10:14) _____

14. What did Jesus say He did for His sheep? (10:15) _____

15. What did Jesus say He had? (10:16) _____

16. Why did Jesus say the Father loved Him? (10:17-18) _____

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

17. In what way is Jesus like a gate? _____

18. In what way is Jesus your shepherd? _____

19. What tempts people to follow a stranger? Why? _____

• **DOING THE WORD**

20. How will you develop a more intimate relationship with Jesus this week? _____

28. How will you be more attentive to the voice of Jesus? _____

May God richly bless you as you follow Jesus on His narrow road!

Study 21 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT SPIRITUAL FRUIT”

HEART ATTITUDE: Obedient, Responsible, Discerning

MATTHEW 7:15-20 NIV — Jesus said:

“Watch out for false prophets.

They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them.

Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?

¹⁷Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

MATTHEW 7:21-23 NIV — Jesus said:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’

²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’”



Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are lessons about SPIRITUAL LIFE. We’ve come to realize that without Christ in our lives — without His Holy Spirit — it would be impossible to develop the spiritual character and lifestyles He demands of His followers. New life in Christ is difficult for many reasons — “dying to self” may be the most difficult.

Many of us entered “The Most Excellent Way” by way of Alcoholics Anonymous or other recovery programs. We had received and applied the twelve-step indoctrination, and we became clean and sober — we learned to follow the program and were able to abstain from using and abusing alcohol and drugs. But it just wasn’t enough! Why? Recovery programs focus on the flesh — outward change. The problem of sin is not dealt with. In fact, “working” a “recovery” program is simply exchanging one self-centered behavior for another. The focus is self-help and self-improvement on the outside to “recover” the old life we lost because of our addictions, or to achieve the better life we fantasize about. The problem is that our hopes and dreams, when sought through “recovery,” are never realized — we need the Word of God and His promises. The primary focus we place on earthbound activities and relationships blinds us to following through with our life or death vertical relationship with God. We may replace God’s way to heaven and eternal life with Him with man’s way.

If we find ourselves defending a program because we’ve been deceived into believing it is based on Holy Scriptures, we are defending the devil. If we find ourselves justifying man’s way “because it works,” we are saying God’s ways are not good enough or powerful enough. If we find ourselves justifying our “recovery” focus and practices,

we are saying we reject God's way of transforming us into the image of Christ. We can pretend we are Christians by calling Jesus our "higher power" or "the highest power" — but how dare we include Jesus in the company of false, impotent gods of our own imaginations.

False prophets were common in Old Testament times. They prophesied only what the king and the people wanted to hear, claiming it was God's message. False teachers are just as common today. **Jesus says to beware of those whose words sound religious but who are motivated by money, fame, or power — *natural* man pursuits. You can tell who they are because in their teaching they minimize Christ and glorify themselves and unbiblical philosophies. It's not too difficult to discern false doctrines and teachings that contradict Scripture if we know the Scriptures.** Oftentimes, it is not what *is* said, but what *is not* said — or not said enough. We all need to be reminded that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and to defeat the devil and death. We need to be reminded of the terrible cross and His glorious resurrection. Our only hope for eternal life is to follow Jesus and obey His commands to Jesus — to "love Him because He first loved us."

It is important to know what God's Word says, but it is much more important to obey it. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. We must ask ourselves: Did my decision for Christ change my life?

False prophets who teach false doctrine (*man's* doctrine) can produce only a false righteousness. Their fruit (the results of their ministry) is false and cannot last. The prophets themselves are false; the closer we get to them, the more we see the falsity of their lives and doctrines. They magnify their philosophies, not Jesus Christ; and their purpose is to exploit people, not to edify them. The person who believes false doctrine, or who follows a false prophet, will never experience a changed life. Unfortunately, some people do not realize this until it is too late (i.e., Jim Jones of Guyana).

Many people mistakenly believe that it is enough to know the Lord. Knowing Him or believing the right things about Him are not enough. We must have a "born-again" relationship with Jesus if we are to be victorious over our sin nature. *Our holy God initiated our transformation from sinner to saint and it cost Him dearly. We must accept His finished work on the cross on our behalf, and praise Him that we have been "recovered" once and for all. The sanctification process we enter into involves putting off "natural" ways of thinking and behaving, and putting on God's "supernatural, spiritual" ways as given in the Scriptures. Man's way is self-sanctification — we do not please God when we seek change in our lives through works of the flesh.*

As we read in the Gospels about the many times Jesus healed the sick, blind, demon-possessed, crippled, and brought back to life some who were dead, we do not read about them entering into physical therapy, occupational therapy, psychological counseling, etc., to continue a "recovery" process. No! Jesus "healed" them physically once and for all! Completely! We also read about those Jesus encountered who were in bondage to a sinful lifestyle who He forgave, and admonished, "Go, and sin no more!" Did all who Jesus touched with His healing power follow Him and become His disciples? We read that some did — some may not have.

When Jesus pronounced "woes" on the scribes and Pharisees, He was accusing them of leading the people astray with their own interpretation of Scripture, and for adding hundreds of rules and regulations to the Law for the people to follow. Today, if we mix man's ways with the Scriptures, are we any better than those Jesus accused?

ISAIAH 53:4-6 NKJV — Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his

own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

JEREMIAH 23:1; 50:6 — “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. ... “My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.”

“False prophets” does not *only* mean false preachers who proclaim a false gospel, but also those who profess faith in Christ whose inward nature has not changed — they merely wear the outward disguise of a sheep. They call Christ “Lord” and even do religious deeds, but they have not been saved!

How do we detect these false believers? “You will know them by their fruits.” Professing Christians may be involved in church activities and may believe themselves to be saved, but if they are honestly born again, they will reveal these fruits in daily life.

What fruits does Christ seek? He seeks:

- **The Fruit of the Spirit**, or Christian character as described in the Beatitudes and:
GALATIANS 5:22-25 — But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.
- **The Fruit of the lips**, testimony and praise to God:
HEBREWS 13:15-16 — Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
- **Holy Living:**
ROMANS 6:21— But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.
- **Good Works:**
COLOSSIANS 1:9-14 — And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. ¹³For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (*Man's way can't compare with God's way.*)
- **Lost souls won to Christ:**
ROMANS 1:13 — I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

MATTHEW 28:19-20 — Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The “counterfeit” believers are surprised at the judgment (v. 22)! It is possible to fool ourselves! Satan blinds the mind and deceives people into thinking they are saved.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6 — And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.
The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.



When Christ returns, millions of professing Christians will be surprised to find out they were never saved at all! May none of us be in their company! “...That day” is the final day of reckoning when God will settle all accounts, judging sin and rewarding faith.

LUKE 6:46 — Jesus asked: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

JAMES 1:22 — Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

ACTS 19:13-15 — Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. [One day] the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?”

These men were calling upon the Name without knowing the Person. The power to change people is in the person of Jesus Christ. It cannot be tapped by reciting His name like a magic charm. He works His power only through those He chooses.

2 TIMOTHY 2:19 — Nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”

False teachers are still spouting lies — some distort the truth; some dilute it; and some simply delete it by saying it no longer applies. But no matter how many people follow the liars, God’s truth never changes, is never shaken, and will never fade. When we know and believe God’s truth, He will never forsake us.

Jesus exposed those people who sounded religious but had no personal relationship with Him. At “that day” (the Day of Judgment), only our relationship with Christ — our acceptance of Him as Savior and our obedience to Him — will matter. Many people think that if they are “good” and sound religious, they will be rewarded with eternal life. In reality, faith in Christ is what will count at the judgment — when it will be decided if we spend eternity with God or separated from Him!



"THE TREE AND ITS FRUIT"

The two trees show that true faith in Christ changes the life and produces fruit for God's glory — not our glory and any man's glory. Everything in nature reproduces after its kind, and this is also true in the spiritual realm. Good fruit comes from a good tree, but bad fruit comes from a bad tree. The tree that produces rotten fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Again, Jesus said: "...By their fruits you will recognize them."

- **FOCUSING ON THE WORD OF GOD**

1. Who produces the fruit of your spiritual garden? _____

2. What kind of inner alarm (if any) alerts you to the fact that a person is a phony? _____

3. What is your favorite fruit? _____

- **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

4. Against whom did Jesus warn us? Why? (7:15) _____

5. What do false prophets look like on the outside? (7:15) _____

6. What are false prophets like inwardly? (7:15) _____

The wolf is the terror of sheep but usually flees from the shepherd. Wolves seem particularly cruel because they seek out the weak, vulnerable, old and defenseless as victims.

MATTHEW 10:16 — Jesus said: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves."

7. How did Christ say we could recognize false prophets? (7:16, 20)

8. What does nature reveal about a tree and its fruit? (7:16)

"Fruit" is a Jewish metaphor for both character and conduct. Jesus' followers would be able to discern false prophets by looking at their lives and conduct. In the Old Testament there were tests for a true prophet. The Jews were taught to reject a prophet who contradicted previous revelations from God or whose message failed to come true (Deuteronomy 18:14-22). Jesus may have included the Pharisees among the false teachers because they trusted God's truth to satisfy their own interests. But His warning was against false prophets of any kind.

Fruit is good or bad depending on the health of the tree. Healthy trees bear good fruit, and unhealthy trees bear bad fruit. It cannot be any other way. Jesus' followers would be able to discern false teachers because in their teaching they MINIMIZE Christ and glorify themselves, their programs and man's philosophies. Their fruit would be bad, revealing a bad character. False prophets do not speak the truth — God's true prophets do not speak falsely.

9. What kind of fruit do good trees bear? Why? (7:17-18) _____

10. What type of produce grows on bad trees? Why? (7:17-18) _____

11. What happens to trees that fail to produce good fruit? (7:18) _____

Claims are easier to make or fake than results. Even Jesus' claims would have been ludicrous or insane if He hadn't backed them up with results. He understood the relationship between claim and proof. And He pointed out that the principle applies universally: You can tell a lot about a tree from its fruit! Jesus warned that prophets and teachers are like trees: Examine them and their "fruit" closely. Bad characters frequently attempt to pass as believers. But no matter how well a false prophet might cover his tracks for a while, eventually his "fruit" will make him known — if not on earth, then at the judgment.

The picture of the final judgment of false prophets (7:19) repeats a similar statement made by John the Baptist: "*Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*" (3:10 NRSV). A person's mere profession of faith will be meaningless at the final judgment. Any who claim His name but do not bear good fruit will be like worthless trees, cut down and thrown into the fire. In fact, some will have professed faith, only to face judgment in the end.

12. Who will enter the kingdom of heaven? (7:21) _____

Some self-professed athletes can "talk" a great game, but that tells us nothing about their athletic skills. And not everyone who talks about heaven belongs to God's Kingdom. Jesus is more concerned about our WALK than our TALK. He wants us to DO right, not just SAY the right words. We will withstand the storms and trials of life only if we do what is right instead

of just talking about it. What we do cannot be separated from what we believe.

I JOHN 4:1 — Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Because our "fruit" reveals who they really are (7:20), then it follows that simply calling Jesus "Lord" is not enough. It is not wrong to call Jesus "Lord" — Jesus was distinguishing between lip service and real discipleship. It is much easier to PROFESS Christianity than to POSSESS it.

Those who will enter the kingdom of heaven are only those who do the will of my Father in heaven. To do God's will implies a relationship with God -- the ability to communicate with him, know his will, and then be able to perform it. Such "fruit" reveals one who will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is not impressed by thoughtless and heartless piety. Superficial religion might satisfy the casual observer, but Jesus demands obedience from the inside out. Saying "Lord, Lord" without really obeying Christ simply breaks the third commandment:

EXODUS 20:7 NKJV — "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

Many are tempted toward pretense and dishonesty. A shell of spirituality may preserve our reputation with others, but it undermines real growth. We are deluded if we think that God might be fooled by fake holiness. God desires "truth in the inner parts" (Psalm 51:6). What does God find under the surface of your life? Do your actions live up to your words?

13. How will some people try to talk their way into heaven? (7:22) _____

14. What credentials or accomplishments will some people claim? (7:22) _____

15. How will Jesus respond to these impostors? (7:23) _____

16. What is necessary for entry into heaven? (7:23) _____

Jesus exposed those people who sounded religious and did religious deeds but had no personal relationship with Him. They were masquerading as disciples — not sincere followers who had come to Him for salvation. These people knew in their hearts that they were false.

False prophets will even be able to prophesy (referring not just to telling the future, but to teaching), drive out demons, and perform many miracles. Jesus warned that "false Christs and

false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect — if that were possible" (Mark 13:22). Paul warned against counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Claims to great power, invoking the name of Christ ("in Your name", see Mark 9:38; Acts 19:13-20), and powerful deeds will be no guarantee for heaven.

Jesus will send away those who do not know Him personally. They may have done impressive deeds, but they are evildoers. Jesus will say, "I never knew you. Away from me" (see Psalm 6:8). In other words, "I never had a personal relationship with you, and I never went with you to do these deeds you claim. You can have no part in My kingdom."

On that day (the day of judgment), only a person's relationship with Christ — ACCEPTANCE of Him as Savior and OBEDIENCE to Him — will matter. "That day" is the final day of reckoning when God will settle all accounts, judging sin and rewarding faith. Notice that Jesus placed Himself as Judge — "many will say to Me." Many people think that if they are good people and say religious things, God will have to reward them with eternal life. In reality, faith in Christ is what will count at the judgment.

• **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD**

17. Why do we continue to sin if we have Christ in our heart and the Holy Spirit in our lives? _____

18. What does this passage tell us about the importance of doing good works? _____

19. How do good works and salvation fit together? _____

20. How can people be "religious" yet not follow Christ? _____

21. What kind of good works have you been producing lately? _____

22. What evidence in your life points to your relationship with Jesus? _____

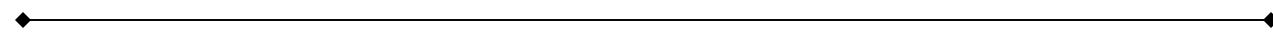
• **DOING GOD'S WORD**

23. What spiritual disciplines will you use to cultivate your soul? _____

24. Are there philosophies of men you have been believing and following that you will now "put off"? Explain: _____



*May God richly bless you as you seek to live your life with the goal to hear Him say:
"Well done, good and faithful servant!"*



Study 22 • “JESUS TEACHES ABOUT LIFE AND DEATH”

HEART ATTITUDE: Faith, Obedience, Perseverance

MATTHEW 7:24-29 NIV — Jesus finished His Sermon saying:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

**²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose,
and the winds blew and beat against that house;
yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.**

²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

**²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose,
and the winds blew and beat against that house,
and it fell with a great crash.”**

²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching,

²⁹Because He taught as one Who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.



The choices we make about how we will respond to Jesus and His Word are life and death choices. We may “feel” more comfortable with the philosophies of the world, doctrines of men, and our “natural” inclinations, but Christ’s Sermon presents us with different, *spiritual* values that demand a response.

From picturing two ways and two trees, our Lord closed His Sermon on the Mount by picturing two builders and their houses. The two ways illustrate the start of the life of faith. The two trees illustrate the growth and results of the life of faith here and now, and the two houses illustrate the end of this life of faith, when God will call everything into judgment.

There are false prophets at the gate that leads to the broad way, making it easy for people to enter. But at the end of the way, there is destruction. The final test is not what we think of ourselves, or what others may think. The final test is: What will God say?

Many Christians follow Christ’s commands to honor Him and to mature in His image and likeness, with the hope and promise of eternal life with Him and our Heavenly Father. But how many of us follow Christ with an eye on the judgment to come? Believers who believe that Jesus will come for His Church before the tribulation may be motivated to live for Christ so they will not be “left behind.”

How can we prepare for this judgment? By doing God’s will. Obedience to His will is the test of true faith in Christ. The test is not words, not saying “Lord, Lord,” while not obeying His commands. How

easy it is to learn a religious vocabulary, and even memorize Bible verses and praise songs, and yet not obey God's will. When we are truly *born again*, we have the Spirit of God living within (Romans 8:9); and the Spirit enables us to know and do the Father's will. God's love in our hearts (Romans 5:5) motivates us to obey God and serve others.

Words are not a substitute for obedience, and neither are religious works. Preaching, casting out demons, and performing miracles can be divinely inspired, but they give no assurance of salvation. It is likely that even Judas participated in some or all of these activities, and yet he was not a true believer. In the last days, Satan will use "lying wonders" to deceive people:

2 THESALONIANS 2:7-17 — For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

⁸And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming.

⁹The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders,

¹⁰and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

¹¹For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie

¹²and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

¹³But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

¹⁴He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

¹⁶May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

We are to hear God's words and do them (see James 1:22-25). We must not stop with only hearing (or studying) His words. Our hearing must result in doing. This is what it means to build on the rock foundation. The foundation in this passage is obedience to God's Word — obedience that is an evidence of true faith: "James 2:14 — What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?"

The two men in this story had much in common. Both had desires to build a house. Both built houses that looked good and sturdy. But when the judgment came (the storm), one of the houses collapsed. What was the difference? Not the mere external looks, to be sure. The difference was in the foundation. The successful builder "dug deep" (Luke 6:48) and set his house on a solid foundation.

A false profession will last until judgment comes. Sometimes this judgment is in the form of the trials of life. Like the person who received the seed of God's Word into a shallow heart (Matthew 13:4-9), the commitment fails when the testing comes. Many people have professed faith in Christ, only to deny their faith when life becomes spiritually costly and difficult.

But the judgment illustrated here probably refers to the final judgment before God. We must not read into this parable all the doctrine that we are taught in the Epistles; for the Lord was illustrating one main point: our profession of faith will ultimately be tested before God. Those who have trusted Christ, and have proved their faith by their obedience will have nothing to fear. Their house is founded on the Rock, and it will stand. But those who have professed to trust Christ, yet who have not obeyed God's will, will be condemned.

How shall we test our profession of faith? By popularity? No, for there are many on the broad road to destruction. And there are many who are depending on words, saying "Lord, Lord" — but this is no assurance of salvation. Even religious activities in a church organization are no assurance. How then shall we judge ourselves and others who profess Christ as Savior?

The two ways tell us to examine the cost of our profession. Have we paid a price to profess faith in Christ? The two trees tell us to investigate whether our lives have really changed. Are there godly fruits from our lives? And the two houses remind us that true faith in Christ will last, not only in the storms of life, but also in the final judgment.

The hearers were astonished at this sermon. Why? Because Jesus spoke *with* divine authority. The scribes and Pharisees spoke "*from* authorities," always quoting the various rabbis and experts of the Law. Jesus needed no human teacher to add authority to His words — He spoke as the Son of God. We cannot lightly dismiss this Sermon, for it is God who gave it to us! We must either bow before Him and submit to His authority, or we will be condemned. (Romans 8:1 — Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ...)

What Jesus taught and what He did are tied inseparably to who He is. Jesus is fully human and fully God. Although Jesus took upon Himself full humanity and lived as a man, He never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the source of eternal life. This is the truth about Jesus and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot or do not believe this basic truth, we will not have enough faith to trust our eternal destiny to Him. If we cannot or do not believe the words of Jesus, what is our hope?



"THE TWO HOUSES: CHOOSE LIFE OR DEATH"

- **FOCUSING ON GOD'S WORD**

1. What is the secret to building great sand castles? _____

2. What is it like to ride out a violent thunderstorm, hurricane, or tornado? _____

3. How do you feel when you offer sound advice and it is rejected? _____

4. When you were a child, which of "The Three Little Pigs" did you want to be? Why? _____

• **STUDYING GOD'S WORD**

5. Who did Jesus say is wise? Why? (7:24) _____

To build "on a rock" means to be a hearing, responding disciple — not a phony, superficial one. Practicing obedience becomes the solid foundation to weather the storms of life.

6. Besides hearing the words of Christ, what else must a person do in order to be considered wise? (7:24) _____

7. What sets fools apart from wise people? (7:24, 26) _____

Jesus' true followers not only hear His words, but they act on His words, allowing His message to make a difference in their lives. The key to this parable (as with all parables) is the central message, not the peripheral details. In this teaching, Jesus explained that His true followers, by acting on His words, are like a wise man who built his house on rock. The one who builds "on rock" is a HEARING, RESPONDING DISCIPLE, not a phony, superficial one. The apostle James would later write:

JAMES 1:22-25 — Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

8. What strong forces of nature pounded on the wise person's house? What happened to the house? (7:25) _____

Practicing obedience builds on the solid foundation of Jesus' words to weather the storms of life. Jesus pictured Palestine's climate in these words. While there were few rainfalls all year, during the rainy season, heavy rains with excessive flooding could wash away poorly grounded homes. But those houses with their foundations on solid rock would be unaffected by the rising waters and beating winds. When the "storms of life" come, only the one who

builds his or her life on the foundation of Jesus Christ will not fall.

9. What kind of people did Jesus talk about in contrast to the wise person? (7:26) _____
-

10. What individuals are like a man who builds a house on sand? (7:26) _____
-

11. According to Jesus, foolish living is like building a house on what kind of foundation? (7:26) _____
-

Like a house of cards, the fool's life crumbles. Most people do not deliberately seek to build upon a false or inferior foundation; instead, they just don't think about their life's purpose. Many people are headed for destruction, not out of stubbornness but out of thoughtlessness. Part of our responsibility as believers is to help others stop and think about where their lives are headed and to point out the consequences of ignoring Christ's message.

When you meet someone close to a decision to follow Jesus, give a word of encouragement. Offer to help, to pray, to be there with your friend. Everyone feels a certain resistance to spiritual change, and your simple word may help overcome it.

While both the wise man and the foolish man built houses, and while those houses may have even looked identical, only one house would stand the test. Only the man who hears and does God's word will receive God's reward. The house built on sand will collapse. This time when the storms came, the person turned away, life crumbled, and the end was a great crash — FINAL JUDGMENT, DESTRUCTION (7:13-14), SEPARATION FROM GOD (7:22-23).

As character is revealed by fruit (7:20), so faith is revealed by storms. The wise person, seeking to act upon God's Word, builds to withstand anything. It will be the foundation, not the house, that will determine what happens on the Day of Judgment.

What action did Jesus expect as a result of His words? What "building" did He expect to happen? RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP — people whose lives revealed the characteristics that He had been describing in this Sermon (beginning at 5:1).

People today accept the concept of individual autonomy. Truth has been relegated to "whatever is true for you is true." Because the possibility of absolute truth has been widely rejected, people now depend on "personal truth." But we can't make up for the loss of absolute truth by creating our own truth. We are simply wrong too often.

Jesus concluded His sermon with a challenge about foundations. Those who heard Him were impressed by His authority. But amazement doesn't equal acceptance or submission. People who agree in theory that a house should be built on a solid foundation may still go out and construct their lives on a swamp. Part of sharing the gospel with someone involves helping them really look at the foundation of their lives. We must also be able to demonstrate our own foundation. People need to hear and see that we have made Jesus' teaching the basis of our lives.

12. How did the crowd respond to Jesus' teaching? (7:28) _____

13. Why did the crowd react with amazement to Jesus' teaching? (7:29) _____

The Greek word translated "astounded" is a strong word — it could also be translated "astonished" or "amazed." Jesus completely amazed the crowds by His teaching. The Jewish teachers (the scribes) often quoted from well-known rabbis in order to give their words more authority. But Jesus didn't have that need. Because Jesus is the Son of God, He knew exactly what the Scriptures said and meant. He was the ultimate authority. He didn't need to quote anyone because He was the original Word (John 1:1). The people had never heard such teaching. Jesus created the urgency and alarm that a real prophet would cause, not the discussion and arguments of scribal tradition. He confronted the people with the claims of God on their lives.

IN CONCLUSION

We must read the Sermon on the Mount with its final application in mind. These words of Jesus set before us two choices described in Matthew 7:24-27. The "wise and foolish builders" share two traits in common: Each were builders and each had "heard" Jesus' instructions. What matters, Jesus declared, is not familiarity with His teaching, but putting it into practice. Which is your greater reason for studying what Jesus taught: to increase your knowledge or to improve your obedience?

• UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD

14. Why is it difficult to apply God's truth to our lives? _____

15. How does obedience to God bring security to our lives? _____

16. How can you build your life on Christ? _____

17. What are some sandy foundations you have based your life on? _____

18. How do you feel when you see friends or family members ignoring God and making bad choices?

• **DOING GOD'S WORD**

19. Which commands of Jesus will you begin obeying today? _____

20. What will you do today to encourage someone to listen to and obey the voice of Jesus? _____

80

May God richly bless you as you continue to build your life on His Word: Jesus!

