

# **JESUS TEACHES US**

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## **1. THE POWER OF PREVENTION Based on Matt. 5:13-16**

A great cholera epidemic sweep through London in the 19th century. John Snow observed that those who pumped water from the Broad Street pump tended to get cholera, but those who took their water from other pumps did not get it. He knew nothing about germs, bacteria, and polluted water, but he removed the handle from the Broad Street pump, and because he did many did not die. He used the logic of prevention. If you stop people from doing what leads to cholera, you will stop cholera, and it worked.

Prevention is one of the great powers of life. Some things cannot be cured, so they have to be prevented. All the kings horses and all the kings men couldn't put Humpty together again. He couldn't be cured, but with a little forethought they could have prevented him from falling in the first place. Just a little sign saying no eggheads on the wall could have done it.

**You cannot cure murder or suicide, but you can prevent them. You cannot make any sin you commit not to be. You can forgive it and even forget it, but the fact is it will leave some scar or blot on life that cannot be eliminated. That is why prevention is even superior to forgiveness. The Proverb that says, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is not in the Bible, but it is as biblical as any Proverb you can utter, for it is one of the primary themes of the Sermon on the Mount. If this greatest sermon of all time were titled it could very well be called, The Power Of Preventative Thinking. Some examples we see are-**

- 1. Christians are to be the salt and light of the world to prevent the world from decaying and being dominated by the forces of darkness.**
- 2. Christians are to prevent violence, murder, and breakdowns in human relationships by learning to deal wisely with anger.**
- 3. Christians are to prevent all of the sorrows of immorality by learning how to deal with lust.**
- 4. Jesus goes on and on trying to help the believer prevent divorce, revenge, hypocrisy, greed, worry, judging, and folly in general.**

**Prevention is where its at in living the effective Christian life. That is why Christians are strong supporters of the prevention movements of even the secular society of our day. Christians are a strong force in the health movement. Good food, good exercise, good rest, and balanced living all prevent unnecessary suffering, and Christians are all for it, and rightly so, for it fits God's ideal for wise living. Christians are all for crime prevention, fire prevention, disease prevention, or the prevention of any form of evil.**

**To prevent a war is far superior to the winning of one. That is why Jesus is primarily concerned with Christians learning to practice preventative thinking and action. The foolish man who built his house on the sand may have built a solid and lovely a home as the wise man. His folly was due to the fact that he did not think ahead to the consequences of the rainy season, and the result is he did not prevent his home from being destroyed. The wise man did prevent this foolish loss by his choice of foundations. The difference between the fool and the wise man is in preventative thinking. Almost every foolish and sinful thing we do that robs us of God's best could have been prevented by obedience to the principles Jesus lays down for us in this marvelous sermon.**

**Jesus is teaching us to be realistic about sin and the weakness of our human nature. You do not wait until your anger is ready to explode and then try to deal with it. You don't wait until lust is at a fever pitch to grapple with it. You think ahead, and you know when the first signs of irritability or temptation arise in you. That is the time to act and gain control of your inner nature before sin gets strong enough to take over.**

**David brought down the giant Goliath, and that was great, but Jesus says there is a better way, and that is to never let the giant grow up. Defeat your sins while they are scrawny weaklings just beginning to develop. Prevent them from ever getting to be giant forces in your life. In other words, get them before they get you. This is done by exercising the power of preventative thinking. It involves being honest about your sinful nature. It is not wise but foolish to hide from yourself, and pretend you are not tempted**

to do evil. Wise is the Christian who says, if I get into such and such a situation I am likely to fall.

The power of prevention is based on being honest with yourself. The Christian who refuses to admit to himself that he could even murder or commit adultery is the Christian most likely to fall. It is the Christian who knows he is capable of such evil who prevents it, because he avoids those circumstances that would lead to a fall. The wise Christian is the aware Christian. He knows his weakness, and he is in touch with his feelings. If he senses he is in a very negative mood, and some old resentments begin to surface in relationship to someone in his life, he will go out of his way to avoid a confrontation with that person, and so prevent his anger from dominating his life.

If he feels strong sexual energy he will recognize it is no time for dropping off papers at his secretaries apartment, or developing any intimate relationship apart from his mate. These same actions on other occasions may be perfectly harmless. It is all a matter of knowing who you are, and what your potential is for being tempted. That is what preventative thinking is all about. Preventative thinking is a balance to the popular theme of our day which is possibility thinking. The possibility thinker is always positive about his potential, and his ability to move ahead, and achieve higher and higher goals. This is a good and biblical way of thinking. We all need it to press on to what God wants us to achieve. The danger is pride. We become so sure of ourselves that we can keep climbing that we forget the reality of our sinful nature. We climb alright, but cease to care that we step on others as we do. We use people and abuse them, and cease to be Christlike in our attitudes and actions.

Christians locked into their possibility thinking become cold and calculating Christian Pharisees. They justify all of their sin as necessary to keep marching toward their goal. They are in a class by themselves, and they say with the Pharisee of old, "I thank God I am not as other men." Christians in this state of mind are capable of doing any evil, and considering it as legitimate. Preventative thinking keeps the possibility thinker in a state of balance. It keeps him honest about his capability for sinful attitudes and actions. It prevents his pride from blinding him to the reality that he is as other men. He can still press on toward his goals, but not at any price. He sees his tendency to use people, and will chose to move slower rather than damage the life of a brother.

Preventative thinking is simply being honest about yourself; about your feelings, motives, desires, and then choosing to so live that you prevent your evil tendencies from determining the path you travel. Preventative thinking is just the other side of possibility thinking. Yes, I can succeed and climb, but it is also possible I can fail and fall, and this negative possibility can spoil the positive, and, therefore, I can only achieve the positive by being aware of the negative, and preventing it from becoming a reality.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is saying that the key to the victorious Christian life is prevention. This sermon has no cross in it; no resurrection, and there is no call to repentance. It is not a doctrinal sermon, nor an evangelistic sermon. It is not a message to the lost. It is a message to the saved, and to those already in the kingdom of God who are part of the family of God by faith in Christ. Jesus is not preaching the Gospel in this

sermon. The Gospel deals with the first step of salvation which is justification. This is an event in which the sinner becomes a child of God by faith. When a lost person prays, "God be merciful to me a sinner. I trust Jesus as my Savior," that person is saved, or justified.

Then comes the second stage of salvation which is not an event, but a process, and it is called sanctification. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. It is the process by which we become more and more Christlike as we become stronger and wiser in overcoming the power of sin. The third stage of salvation is glorification, and it is both an act and a process, for when Jesus comes again we will be transformed to be like him, and then for all eternity be able to advance in holiness as we move closer and closer to the infinite holiness of God. Each of the three Persons of the Trinity are closely associated with one of these stages. It is Jesus and justification; the spirit and sanctification, and God the Father and glorification. We are now in the second stage, and this is the stage of Christian living, and that is what the Sermon on the Mount deals with. Prevention is the name of the game. Sanctification is the outwitting of sin by preventing it from ever happening. To prevent sin is to do the will of God on earth as it is in heaven where all sin is prevented.

God is the great Preventer. Most of us never realize how blessed we are, for the providence of God in history is so often preventative. By this I mean, many of our greatest blessings we never even know about. It is because they are things that never happen. That sounds crazy maybe, but think about it. If your life is a gift you treasure, you only have it because you have been prevented from losing it by disease or accident, even though you have lived in the same environment that has taken the lives of many others.

You have your life, your health, and your resources all because of things that never happen. Because they were prevented from happening. There is not a one of us who was not prevented from serious injury. I have prevented my children and grandchildren from taking terrible falls, and so have you. The life of a parent is a life of prevention. You spend a good portion of your life preventing all kinds of things to save the life of your child. God, as our heavenly Father, has the same task in our lives. Unfortunately, God has the same problem we have as parents. We cannot prevent our children from taking foolish chances, and God cannot prevent us from doing this either. If I want to risk going 90 miles per hour on a gravel road, I have no claim to God's protection, for I have chosen to reject the rules of precaution and prevention.

When we cooperate with God, and seek his providential protection, then we experience the blessings of that which never happens. What a paradox! The blessings of the non-existent. It is the preciousness of what isn't. History is full of this kind of preventative action of God. The history of America is not just a history of what happened, but of what never did happen, and those things which never happened are some of the greatest of our blessings. If you read the history of the Revolutionary War, you will be impressed at how often the British could have won that war had they attacked at the right time. For various reasons they did nothing when the victory was within their grasp. It is these numerous nothings and non-battles that prevented them from winning.

**These things that never happened lead to the preservation of all the freedoms we cherish.**

**For example: The British General Howe, with 15,000 trained troops, reinforced by 5,000 Hessians from Germany had General Washington with his 8,000 men, half of them untrained, trapped in the Northern tip of Brooklyn. Washington was in despair. They were almost out of powder and were out numbered almost 3 to 1. The British had ships in the river to pound them to pieces with their big guns.**

**They waited for the inevitable attack, but it never came. General Howe had craved out a brilliant and flawlessly executed maneuver to trap the Americans. He could have given the signal and the war would have soon been over, but he did nothing. Washington praising God for the miracle planned a daring escape. He was able to deceive the British into thinking they were still trapped, while by laboring all night he was able to get nearly 8,000 men out of that death trap, and across the river to safety. The non-attack of the British enabled Washington to prevent them from winning the war.**

**Remember, it is not just what happens, but what does not happen that makes life victorious. God's providential prevention is a part of every life that is truly blessed. The point is, prevention plays a major role in history and in our lives, and we should all be aware that God wants us to join in the effort to prevent those things that rob us and others of the abundant life.**

**As we meet around the Lord's table again, let us remember the cross is God's ultimate weapon in His plan of prevention. On the cross Jesus accomplished that which prevents Satan from taking the whole human race into the pit of hell with him. It is the cross which prevents evil from being victorious over the good. It is the cross which prevents our sin from having the final word before the judgment seat of God. Thanks to the cross the eternal loss of all that God planned for men has been prevented.**

**Praise God for the power of prevention, and let us commit ourselves to cooperate with God in His plan of prevention. We will either be part of the problem or part of the answer. If we are part of the answer it will be because we prevent what otherwise would be. Is there less sin and less evil in the world because you live in it? That is not likely, for all of us sin, and so all of us contribute to the total amount of sin in the world. But is there less sin in your life because you practice the power of prevention? This is possible, and it is the will of God for all His children. It is possible to prevent most of the damaging sins of life if we give heed to this message of the Master from the Mount. Thank Christ for what He has prevented, and pray for guidance as we learn together how to practice the power of prevention.**

## **2. THE LUMINOUS LIFE Based on Matt. 5:13-16**

**William Sangster, the great British preacher, tells of one of the strangest taxes ever imposed. He asked his father one day why so many of the homes in London had blocked**

up windows. His father explained that back in 1695 every house that had more the 6 windows was taxed for the extra ones. Many people blocked up those extra windows to avoid the tax. Imagine that, the government put a tax on sunshine, and by so doing they shut out the quantity of light in many homes.

Man does some strange things with God's gift of light. John tells us that the life of Jesus was the light of men. He was the true light that enlightens every man, yet when he came into the world men loved darkness rather than light, and so though he came unto his own, his own received him not, but they shut out the light.

Man in his folly resists the light and rejects it, but John says the light goes on shining in the darkness, and the darkness cannot put it out. The sun does not cease to shine because of the dark clouds that cover it, and Jesus does not stop being the light of the world because of the dark valley of man's fallen nature that covers the world with a blanket of blackness that blocks men from seeing the glory of the Gospel.

Jesus has a plan to penetrate this world's night of ignorance with the light of knowledge. The plan is very simple. It is to advertise. Every Christian is to be a living commercial for the Producer of the program of life. Most everybody watches TV, but absolutely everybody watches the program of life, and this is where the Christian has a chance to shine and be advertising for the Sponsor of history.

The church is the biggest business in the world, and long before Coke and Pepsi, and hamburger businesses ever dreamed of going into all the world, Jesus made his church international. Go into all the world Jesus told His disciples. There is no exception. The Gospel is to be taken to every tribe, tongue, and nation. Christianity is to be universal, and like any big enterprise Jesus knew there had to be a program with advertising of the product. That is why Jesus said to His disciples, and says to all of us we have joined His company of the committed: "You are the light of the world."

If men are to come to God out of the world of darkness, they have to see the light. They have to have before them the evidence that the Gospel is real and valid. They need to see lives that have been touched by Christ, and now radiate the love which He expressed in, coming into the world, caring for the world, and being crucified for the sins of the world.

Jesus saw the power of video long before TV was even a dream. He knew the best advertising was not just audio; just the preaching of the good news. He knew men would want to see the Gospel in motion. Jesus, therefore, launches His world wide campaign by making every believer an advertisement for His kingdom. Your life is to be an audio-visual appeal to the world so that by the power of sound and sight men in darkness might see the light, and turn to God with a spirit of praise.

Without radio, TV, computers, satellites, or any other modern technology, Jesus launched the first truly world wide advertising campaign to bring light to all who are in darkness. The goal of Jesus is the same goal that all of your large businesses have today in their advertising plans. The whole idea of a commercial is to portray people enjoying

the values and benefits of a product so that others desire is to experience those benefits for themselves. I see a miserable sufferer of sinus congestion who is smiling and breathing freely after taking a certain product. Naturally, I want in on that experience as a sinus sufferer, and so I go to get the product, and when it works for me, I praise the maker of this product, and bear testimony to others of what it can do for them. This is the power of advertising, for it enlightens and spreads the word.

Jesus says we are commercials for God. Men see the goodness of our lives, and the benefits of the Christian life, and our good deeds, and they are impressed with the Gospel, and desire to be in on it. What a challenge for every Christian to recognize that they are a key part of the world's most universal business. You and I are into advertising for the Universal Power Company, better known as the kingdom of God. To better understand our job we want to focus on two aspects of light that can enlighten us as lights of the world. A salesman, or actor, or anyone dealing with a product will do a better job if they are sold on the product, and are convinced of the value of it. Let us, therefore, focus on-

## **I. THE NEED FOR LIGHT.**

Johann Wolfgang Goethe was the last of the so-called "Universal men." He was knowledgeable in every major area of human learning. When he laid dying in 1832 he suddenly sat up in bed and cried out, "Light, light, more light!" Then he fell back dead. His last words were a cry for more light. He was one of the most learned of men, yet he longed for more light. The cliché is true that the more you know the more you realize how little you know. All geniuses know that their knowledge is a puddle, and their ignorance is a Pacific. All men who really know cry out for more light. There is a desperate need for answers in a world plagued with problems.

Jesus is saying to his followers that they help meet this need for light. Be part of the answer, and not part of the problem. The world has enough problems, so don't add to them. Reveal instead that there is an answer in Christ who is the source of all light. You reveal this by your own luminous life. That is, by a life that shines and radiates a love for people. The luminous life is the life that advertises the love and goodness of God. It is easy to say, God is love, but people must see it to believe it. Does God care? Does anybody care about all of the desperate needs of this world? These are the questions that come to every mind at sometime or another. The Christian is to be the evidence that the answer is yes, God does care, and He has provided a way to show it. The question all of us need to ask ourselves is, are we convincing evidence to the world that God cares? Are we good advertising, or are we so poor that we add to the darkness?

Jesus says the Christian who is a good ad is the Christian whose life benefits others through good deeds. In other words, the world is not impressed with a Christian vocabulary as much as with their visual display of love and caring. It is so easy to learn to talk of love, but not show it. We can do it in relation to our family and to the world. We see so many commercials where a celebrity says a product is great, but in the back of our minds we wonder, do they really use it themselves, or do they just say these nice things for a fee? We are skeptical and rightly so.

The world looks to the Christian life with the same skepticism. The Christian faith sounds pretty good, but do these people just say all this good stuff to please their Sponsor, who is God; in hopes of a reward, or do they really mean it, and live by the love they so eloquently speak of? Jesus says the world has the right to expect the Christian to reveal the depths of his commitment by good deeds. It is doing good that penetrates the skeptical darkness of the world. As with Sarah Lee, nobody doesn't like doing good. I have read of Mafia leaders who use money they steal from others to do good. Everybody can appreciate good deeds. They may not understand theology, but they can see the difference between doing good deeds and doing harmful deeds.

Even the non-Christian wants to see his children be good and not bad. Everybody can be reached by the message of good deeds. That is a frequency all men can pick up, and that is why the Christian must operate on that frequency if they expect to reach the world. The world is not tuned in to which Bible translation is best; which denomination has the best missionary program; or which Christian college is the best. The world can only judge the value of Christian life by what they see, and if they do not see good deeds, they do not see anything for their needs.

Good works do not save the person who does them, but they are a vital part of saving the world, for they attract the world to Christ who alone can save them by faith. They will seldom come to Christ, however, if they never see the light in Christians. Advertising a car does not get people to travel, but it gets them to buy the car in which they can travel. Advertising a cough medicine does not stop anybody from coughing, but it gets them to buy the cough medicine that can stop coughing. So advertising of the Gospel does not save anybody, but it brings people to Christ where they can be saved. Good deeds are, therefore, a vital part of God's plan to save the world.

Seeing is believing to the world, and so Jesus says to let your light shine so the world can see. You cannot convey the beauty of a flower show over the radio, because beauty is not verbal, it is visual. So you cannot convey the love and goodness of God by the verbal means only. There must be a visible demonstration that men can see. The world cannot grasp the reality of the unseen realm of the spirit. But they have the capacity to see tangible works of good. Not all Christians can speak effectively, but all Christians can be loving, kind, and do good deeds.

Has someone seen Christ in you today?  
Christian, look to your life, I pray;  
There are aching hearts and blighted souls  
Being lost in sin's destructive shoals,  
And perhaps of Christ there only view  
May be what they see of Him in you.  
Will they see enough to bring hope and cheer?  
Look to your light! Does it shine out clear?

Robert Louis Stevenson remembered how, as a boy, he would look out of the window of his home and see that lamp lighter going down the dark street lighting the lamp posts. His nurse called one day as he was doing so, and asked, "What are you doing?" He



responded, "I am watching a man make holes in the darkness." That is the job of all Christians in this world. They are to be lamplighters making holes in life's darkness. People need to see these holes to be aware that life is not all dark. The only way to make people aware of hope is by means of light.

Light gives people a choice. If you had to go into a dark store and pick out a suit or dress, you would not have much of a choice. You might be able to feel the kind of material and the style in which it is made, but there is not much of a choice in the dark. It is light that gives you a meaningful choice. The world needs to see that there is a choice between the life style of darkness and the life style of light. If there is no example of light before them, they really don't have a choice. They live in the dark and follow the ways of darkness. It is only the light that can give them a choice.

In 1944 Switzerland did not want the allied bombers to bomb their territory, and so they marked the boundaries of their land with lights. The pilots could see the boundaries clearly, and they had a choice as to where they let their bombs fall. The world needs to see clearly where the boundaries are between the life that will bring down the judgment of God, and the life that will bring down His blessings and peace. The Christian is to give the world the benefit of this choice by their luminous life, that is, the life that is pleasing to God, and of benefit to man.

The only way the lost can become aware that they are in darkness is by seeing the light. The contrast of their life with the Christian life can make them aware, and can give them the choice they never had without the light. The need for light is the world's greatest need, and the answer of Christ to this need is His disciples. He said to them, "You are the light of the world."

The question is not, does anyone use a certain medium because you use it? Does anyone wash with a certain product because you do? Does anyone go to a certain doctor or dentist because you do? Does anyone drive a certain car because you do? We all become a part of the advertising process for those things we like and enjoy, and which feed our affections. The real question for the Christian is, does anyone praise God and love Jesus because you do? Is anyone sold on the love and goodness of God because they see in you the luminous life?

The need is there, are you part of the answer? The second aspect we want to focus on is-

## II. THE NATURE OF LIGHT.

Light is very complex and paradoxical. Scientists do not understand the nature of light. There's nothing quite like it in the universe. It is both a wave and a particle. It is supposed to be one or the other, but it won't cooperate. It keeps acting like both, and so science must accept light as it is. Light seems quite simple to us as we look at it, but it is very complex. Light has all different degrees of strength. The reason you can have a red light on in a dark room is because the photons coming from red light are so weak they do not set the chemicals in motion. If only red light came from the sun you could look straight at it. In fact, that is about the only time you can look at the sun, when it is large and red, and about to go down. The ultraviolet rays that come from the sun are very

strong, and they can damage your eyes. They are the rays that cause sunburn. Other rays, like x-rays, and gamma-rays are stronger yet.

The point is, light is complex and full of variety, and this has important implications for both science and the Christian life. God made light visible, and He also made His children visible. We are not all alike just as light rays are not all alike. This is important to grasp because we can lose our sense of self-esteem and feel guilty if we try to be something we are not, and strive to shine the same as another Christian we admire. The study of light leads us to the same conclusion as the study of gifts. God loves variety, and each of His children need to discover their gifts accordingly, and not try to conform to gifts they do not have. They also should not try to force others to conform to theirs.

As lights of the world Christians will differ. Some will radiate with such strength they will produce warmth as well as light. Others will be more subdued and not have that kind of impact. There will be variety even in the same life. The radiant Christian will sometimes not shine very brightly. They will be tired and run down, even as Jesus was. And they may be angry even as Jesus was. Jesus, as the light of the world with a capital L could become angry and create a storm in the temple as He expressed judgment on the injustice of man. Even Jesus did not radiate love 100% of the time. Love was behind His anger, but it was not love for those doing what was unjust.

The reason I point this out is so we can keep balance as we look at the ideals of this great sermon. If we strive to live on a level of absolute radiance, we will only fail, and end in a state of despair. This is not the goal of Jesus in this sermon. The goal of the Christian is the same as the goal of the scientist. Keep working with light, and learn of its nature, and develop it for higher ends. Science has done marvels with light in recent years. They have learned how to use the power of light that has always been there, and this is the challenge for the Christian to understand light so as to use its power more effectively. In the realm of science man has discovered the laser beam. It is simply light developed to a higher power.

Ordinary light comes off the light bulbs with all the different wave links mixed together. It is just a mass of variety all mixed up. Laser light is different. There is no mixture. It is light waves all on the same frequency. It is pure light not mixed up with all the others in degrees and colors. It's oneness is the source of its power. It is concentrated light. Regular light goes off in all directions, but laser light all goes the same direction. Regular light is more like a mob, but laser light is like a column of soldiers marching with precision. It sticks together, and with the power and unity it strikes its object. Because of the oneness and unity of the laser beam it can be focused with such precision that man has been able use it to heat a cup of coffee a 1000 miles away.

There are many marvelous things men can do with this form of light in medicine, industry, and in the military. The so-called death-ray is a reality. The point is, what is true in the natural realm is also true in the realm of the spirit. Jesus said that He is the light of the world. Then He tells His disciples that they are the light of the world. Does this mean Christians are equal to Christ? Not at all. No more than general light is equal

to laser light. Jesus is pure light. He is one and consistent, and thus, powerful light. God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. In us there is still the shadow, if not the night. We are visible and inconsistent, and thus, we cannot penetrate as the light of Jesus does. The Lord is the laser, and we are the regular light. But regular light is all that is necessary for the primary task of the Christian in the world. All regular light needs to do is help people see the Laser in Christ.

Jesus is the light people must come to for laser power. He alone can cut out the sin of their lives. He alone can heal their blindness. He alone can penetrate to their innermost soul and bring healing. Our task is to help the world see what Jesus can do. Advertising does not do the job of the product. It just points to the product. Christians are not the saving and healing light. They are the light that points the world to Him. Jesus does not say that when the world sees your good works they will praise you and honor you. They will praise God and glorify Him, for if you do your job right, the glory will go to Him. Your light is to point to Him, and not yourself. You are not the answer to the world's darkness, but Jesus is, and only as you point men to Him are you part of the answer.

The light from a lighthouse does not save the drowning sailors. That light just shows the way to go to be saved. If they do not get to land they will drown in spite of the light. So the Christian cannot save the lost sinner. He can only point to the one who can. The poet wrote,

The world is in a crisis today.  
The powers of hell are set in stern array.  
Men are blind and cannot find the way.  
Christ, our Lord, will help us in our plight.  
Christ, for the Crisis! He is the Source of Light.

You and I are like Andrew coming to Peter his brother, and saying, "We have found the Messiah. Come and see." We point to Jesus, but the only reason they have to listen to us is because we reflect His light and enable them to see there is power in Him. There is a lot to complain about in the world, for the power of darkness is great, but let's remember the only reason there is need for light is because of the darkness. If the world was not a rotten place, there would be no need for Christians to be the salt of the earth. If the world was not a place of darkness, there would be no need for Christians to be the light of the world. So the point is, don't wine, but shine.

His lamps are we  
To shine where He shall say;  
And lamps are not for sunny rooms,  
Nor for the light of day,  
But for dark places of the earth,  
Where shame and wrong and crime have birth;  
Or for the murky twilight gray,  
Where wondering sheep have gone astray;  
Or where the light of faith grows dim,  
And souls are groping after Him;

And as sometimes a flame we find,  
Clear shining through the night-  
So bright we do not see the lamp,  
But only see the light,  
So we may shine-His light the flame,  
That men may glorify His name.      Author unknown.

You are the light of the world. The question we all have to ask ourselves is, are we hidden light, or are we helping light? Does anyone in the world love Christ and praise God because of our life?

### **3. THE LAW AND THE LORD Based on Matt. 5:17-20**

Misunderstanding is a part of life, and much of the laughter of life is due to it. One little guy surprised his whole family one evening at the supper table by asking which virgin was Jesus' mother? Was it the Mary virgin, or the King James Virgin? He had misunderstood one word and was confused. Much humor is based on misunderstanding another's meaning. The judge, for example, asked the accused: "Have you ever been up before me?" The accused responded, "I don't know judge. When do you usually get up?"

If misunderstanding is limited to jokes, it would be an enjoyable aspect of life. Unfortunately, it is not limited to jokes. Even when it leads to something funny it can be terribly embarrassing for the one who misunderstands. Like the newly elected secretary of the youth group, who was told it was her duty to keep a record of the minutes of the meetings. The next time they met she announced the last meeting had been 20 minutes and 36 seconds. She had misunderstood the meaning of minutes.

This is a major problem in communication, because words can have more than one meaning. It is so easy to take words literally that are not meant that way. A mother asked her little boy if he thanked the neighbor lady for the party. "I was going to," he said, "But when the little girl ahead of me did, the lady said not to mention it. So I didn't." He took her words literally. One of the major problems of marriage is mates who do not grasp what the other is really saying. One of the major problems of any organization is communication breakdown that leads to misunderstanding. During World War I American soldiers whistled when the French Premiere came on the screen. The French soldiers rushed at them in anger, but before they came to blows, someone was able to explain the American behavior. To whistle in our culture was to express approval, but to the French it expressed disapproval. It was all a matter of misunderstanding.

One of the major problems that Jesus had in living the life of a man was in being

**misunderstood. His own disciples did not understand He was going through agony in His final hours, and they slept while He wept in Gethsemane. They did not grasp much of what He tried to teach them, and in their misunderstanding they even tried to stop Him from going to the cross. The Pharisees misunderstood Him completely. They thought He was a law breaker, and one who was defying the God of Israel. They did not see His love and compassion for the sinner as good news. They saw His association with sinners, and His violation of the Sabbath by healing them, as the action of a rebel rather than a redeemer. They totally misunderstood Jesus and His mission.**

**Amiel in his journal says it was one of the greatest wounds men inflicted upon Jesus. He was the great misunderstood, and the least comprehended. Jesus says to His disciples, "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees," and they debate about bread. He says, "I have meat to eat ye know not of," and again they wonder where He got bread. "Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up," He said, and the leaders of Israel wondered how He could build what took decades to construct in only 3 days. On and on it goes, and even the intelligent leader Nicodemus asked, "How can I go back into my mother's womb and be born again?"**

**Everybody kept misunderstanding Jesus, and taking His word so literally they came to strange conclusions. This is still a major problem today, and it will be one of the struggles we face in going through the Sermon on the Mount. We will have to spend a great deal of time and effort in explaining what Jesus did not mean. So many take the words of Jesus in a literal sense that leads to deep misunderstanding, and some have even cut off their hands to try and prevent sinning. It bothered me as I studied this sermon, that so much of what Jesus says has to be explained again and again to prevent wrong conceptions. But as I focused on verse 17, I realized this was the very thing Jesus had to do Himself in giving the sermon.**

**"Think not I have come to destroy the law," Jesus said. In so saying, He acknowledges that He knows He has already been misunderstood, or that He will be. He is trying to clarify His position and avoid misunderstanding. I realize that if Jesus had to do this, then it is just an inevitable part of life, and the process of communication. There is no way to be effective in communicating if you do not remain constantly aware of the reality of misunderstanding. Rudyard Kipling said, "We are like islands and we shout to each other across seas of misunderstanding."**

**Not understood. How many breasts are aching  
For lack of sympathy. Ah, day by day,  
How many cheerless, lonely hearts are breaking,  
How many noble spirits pass away-not understood.**

**O God! That men would see a little clearer,  
Or judge less harshly when they cannot see!  
O God! That men would draw a little nearer  
To one another! They'd be nearer Thee,  
And understood.**

**It is one of life's biggest battles to be understood, and one of life's greatest virtues is to be one who strives to understand. Misunderstanding, and being misunderstood, is one of life's greatest trials, and Jesus experienced it to its depths. In our text we are focusing on one of His attempts to overcome misunderstanding.**

**"Think not," he says, and some go no further than this, and think they obey because they think not. What Jesus is saying is, do not jump to conclusions and end up with a false impression of my goals. Jesus knew that His opposition to the leaders of Israel, and His violation of their interpretation of the law, would cause many to assume He was anti-law, and that His goal would be to overthrow the old and begin a whole new system. This is how the Pharisees saw Jesus. He was a threat to Judaism, and a rebel who sought to overthrow the law of Moses. In fact, Jesus wanted just the reverse. He wanted to restore Judaism from its flat and tasteless state to what God intended it to be. He was the salt to bring out the fullness of its flavor, and bring it to its full potential, and fulfill it.**

**Let us learn from this conflict of Jesus and the Pharisees never to judge a person's motives on the basis of what seems, or on the testimony of their enemies. The only way you can avoid misunderstanding and bad judgments is to listen to the clear statements of the person in question. It is not what you think, or what the critics think, but what does the person say himself. Jesus gives us His own clear statement on a major issue of conflict, and He doubles the certainty of our not misunderstanding Him by dispelling a negative, and declaring a positive in verse 17.**

#### **I. A NEGATIVE DISPELLED.**

**Only twice did Jesus use these words to try and dispel misconceptions. Here and in Matt. 10:35 where He says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth, I have come not to bring peace but a sword." Jesus was so loving, and such a peacemaker that people could easily jump to the conclusion that following Him would lead to a life free from all conflict. Unfortunately, Jesus had to drive this misconception from people's minds, or they would not be prepared for the shock of conflict and persecution that was ahead for those who followed Him.**

**One of the major tasks of Christian teaching is to set the record straight, and scatter the misconceptions that people have about God and Christ, and the Christian life. Will Rogers was right, all of us are ignorant just in different subjects. All of us have misconceptions and misunderstandings that need to be dispelled by clearer light. Christian education is the process of pushing back the darkness of misunderstanding with the light of true conception. One of the biggest issues of Christian history is the one Jesus deals with in this verse. It is the issue of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament, or to Christianity. This is a complex issue that has led to much misunderstanding through history.**

**Jesus first makes it clear that the negative idea that He came to destroy the law and the prophets is to be cast to the wind. It is false view of His mission, and is not to be a part of Christian thinking. Jesus abolishes the idea that He has come to abolish the law. Jesus does not come to build a kingdom from scratch. He builds on what has been the**

**plan of God in history. There is clear continuity of the old and the new. Jesus is no superficial revolutionary who assumes all values start today, and so the past can be rejected. There are always permanent values of the past, and no future can be bright without preserving these values.**

**The idea that Jesus came to overthrow the law is based on a misunderstanding of His opposition to the leaders of Israel. Jesus was opposed to their perversion of the law, and not the God ordained purpose of the law. They made the Sabbath a curse rather than a blessing. Jesus violated their conception of the law, but not its purpose. The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath, and so Jesus used the Sabbath to heal, help, lift, and minister to people's needs. The Pharisees hated Him for this. They considered Him a law breaker, for their legalistic minds saw the rules and regulations as of more value than the people. Jesus came to destroy this perversion of values.**

**There is a valuable lesson in this for us all. It is possible to be against what you are for when what you are for is being abused. It is possible for a Christian to oppose his church or denomination and be in the will of God if the reason is, not to hurt the cause, but to overcome abuse. The Christian can be opposed to his government, and not be opposed to democracy, or to any of the principles for which the nation stands, but because he is opposed to the perversion of those principles. Prophets were opposed to Judaism because it was going astray.**

**What this means is that being opposed to something does not mean you are the enemy. The fact is, you may be the best friend of what you oppose because you are the one most concerned about its purity of purpose. So it was with Jesus. He was opposed to Judaism, not because He was antisemitic, but because He was anti-pollution and perversion. He wanted to see Judaism cleansed of its man made burdens, and lifted to the level where it was meant to be, as a light to all the world, that through the seed of Abraham all the families of the earth would be blest. Jesus did not destroy Judaism or the law. He fulfilled them and accomplished the purpose for their being in God's plan.**

**Get the idea out of your head that He came to destroy or downgrade the law and render it obsolete. It is true that the New Testament is superior and holds first place in the Christian heart, but it is folly to despise the foundation because you enjoy the walls and ceiling better. It is foolish to despise the baby because you admire the mature man, or reject the sapling because you prefer the fruit bearing tree. The Old Testament was God's best for the time, and just because Jesus has come to be God's final word, and finished work, does not mean we should have any negative attitudes toward the bud from which the full flower has opened to our view.**

**If you cut a flower from its root, you will have a flower that soon wilts. Christianity grows out of the roots of the Old Testament. Those root principles that God gave His Old Testament people are not passing but permanent truths. Jesus did not come to eliminate them, but to incorporate them into the Christian system. That is why it is called the Judeo-Christian tradition; the Judeo-Christian ethics, the Judeo-Christian morality. Judaism and Christianity have so much in common because they both build on the revelation of God in the Old Testament. Those who reject the Old Testament reject**

the mind of Christ, for He came not to destroy the Old Testament, but to fulfill it, and preserve all of its permanent values.

The meaning of the whole is greater than the meaning of any part. The Old Testament gives us insight into the whole sacrificial system, and the New Testament sees it fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ. The covenant with Noah is not abolished by the New Covenant in Christ. God put the bow in the clouds that we might ever remember that God's method of dealing with sin will never again be all out destruction of the world. The covenant with Abraham, that through his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, is not abolished, but fulfilled. The covenant with Moses was, obey and do the will of God, and you will inherit the promises of God. The specifics have changed, but the principles are the same in the New Covenant. God always expects obedience from His children as a prerequisite for His blessing. So the idea of rejecting the Old Testament is absurd. It is like picturing the Godhead as divided rather than one. Robert Capon illustrates the folly of this picture.

God the Father plays the first half of the game all by himself. The Son and Holy Spirit are on the sidelines from the dawn of creation to the end of the Old Testament. Then in the fullness of time God the Father puts himself on the heavenly bench, and sends in the Son for the third quarter. By the end of that quarter He feels he has a good enough lead to risk using the rookies, and so He sends in the Holy Spirit and the Church to finish the game. This compartmentalizing conception of God's working in history causes us to lose the sense of oneness in the Godhead, and the awareness that all three Persons of the Godhead have been working together from creation. Each is highlighted, to be sure, for their special role, but there is a unity and continuity in all they do. For Jesus to abolish the Old Testament would be for Him to write off His own work, for the law and the prophets were as much His doing as that of the Father. The Old Testament covenants are not promises from some other deity. They are His promises, and He intends to keep them. The New Testament is just the completing of all He has been doing all along. Next we look at-

## II. A POSITIVE DECLARED.

Jesus says, "I did not come to destroy or abolish the law and prophets, but to fulfill them." Progress does not mean abandonment of the old. Progress uses the old to climb higher. When you go from high school to college they do not tell you to abandon all you learned in high school. They build on it. College may be a radical change from high school, but it is not opposed to high school. Jesus is not saying He did not come to make radical change, for He did, but none of the changes are a forsaking of the old, but rather, a fulfilling of the old.

There can be change, and yet stability when the change has continuity with what has been. A river is constantly changing, and yet it is always the same river. The ancient philosopher was right when he said, you can't step into the same river twice, for the water is ever flowing, and so the second time you are really stepping into new water you never touched before. It is ever new, and yet always the same because it maintains its identity. So it is with us. We have all new molecules from what we had 7 years ago, but we are still



the same. That is what Jesus did with the law and prophets. He did not say He will leave them as they are to be always what they have been. He changes them, but the changes do not destroy or abolish, but bring forth the fullness of the potential of the Old Testament principles.

Jesus says, nothing of value that God intended to convey to man in the Old Testament will be lost in the New Testament. It will, in fact, be made more clear and available than it was in the Old Testament. Just as college will hopefully make what we learned in high school more clear and more applicable, so Christians will do for the Old Testament. Jesus puts His full stamp of approval on the Old Testament as the Word of God, and that is why the Christian Bible includes the Bible of Judaism. It did not cease to be God's Word when God gave His full and final word in His Son. It is still a vital part of God's revelation to man. "The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed." You need both to have the root and fruit.

Christianity is an Old Testament and New Testament faith, and without this combination you do not have what Jesus came to give. Any theology that focuses on the one to the neglect of the other becomes a perversion. We can't get into this now, but if you examine the cults in detail you will discover that they all have something in common. They take either the Old or the New Testament and build their doctrine on one or the other. If you take the Old Testament without the New, you build on what is just a partial view of God's light. If you take the New without the Old, you build without a foundation. Jesus made the Old a permanent treasure for God's people by these positive words. His mission was not destructive but constructive. He did not come to abolish Judaism, but to fulfill it.

The purpose of Jesus was always to be positive and not negative. God is not willing that any shall perish, but all come to repentance, and, therefore, all that He does in history is for the positive purpose of making progress toward that goal. Judgment must fall, but that is never the goal. That is the consequence of man's not cooperating with God in reaching the goal. Jesus is the perfect combination of the conservative and progressive. He preserves all that is good of the past, but is ever pressing on and improving it for the benefit of the future. The stairway Jesus climbs is always up from good, to better, to the best. The Old Testament kingdom was good, the New Testament kingdom is better, the eternal kingdom is best.

As we go on to study the Sermon on the Mount, we will hear Jesus say, "You have heard it said of old, but now I say this." He changes the old way of seeing things, and this sounds like He is abolishing the old, but not so, He is improving the old. The old Ford Model A was never abolished even though you seldom to never see one. Nobody destroyed it, but they did improve it, and kept changing it until there is no comparison of the old and the new. Yet, the new has direct continuity with the old. In this Sermon on the Mount we see Jesus making changes in the Old Testament law, but change does not mean to abolish, or make of none effect. Change can mean to add to, to improve, and to bring out the best in. This is what Jesus does with the Old Testament law. He lifts it to a level where it will be compatible with grace, and be a tool for prevention rather than punishment.

**With Jesus love became the fulfilling of the law. The law in the hands of the Pharisees was a tool of legalistic pride. Their main purpose was to punish violations of the law. This gave them a sense of pride and self-righteousness because they did not violate the law. The main motive toward the sinner was to make them pay. Jesus says that the law is good in spite of their sadistic application of it, for law is vital to all order and freedom. However, with Jesus the primary purpose of the law is not to punish and make the sinner pay, but to help the sinner escape the need to pay.**

**Love's motive is to help people understand the intention of the law, and that it is designed to be a warning of where we are weak. It points out where we are most likely to fall in order to prepare us so we can take evasive action to prevent the fall. The goal of love is deliverance, and not damnation. The Pharisees gloried in imposing the penalty of the law. Jesus gloried in preventing the penalty. The Pharisees wanted to pounce on the man who got angry and killed his neighbor. Jesus instructs the man on how to avoid the murder by controlling it at the point of anger, and so preventing the need for judgment.**

**Love fulfills the law because it helps to achieve the primary purpose of the law which is, not to punish, but to prevent. Love is into prevention, rescue, deliverance, and escape. These are all forms of salvation, and that is what Jesus came to do. He came to save men by His death on the cross, but He also came to teach us how to prevent sin from dominating our lives in this Sermon on the Mount. He fulfills the law in His own life, and teaches us how to fulfill it in ours. The choice for the Christian is not the law or the Lord, but the law and the Lord.**

**Wilhelm Vischer says, for the Christian to abandon the Old Testament is to abandon the Christian faith, for we can only know what it means to be the Christ, or the Messiah, by the Old Testament. He writes, "The two main words of the Christian confession "Jesus is the Christ" ...correspond to the two parts of the Holy Scriptures: The New and the Old Testament. The Old Testament tells us what Christ is; the New, who He is."**

**Christ was the event toward which the whole history of the Old Testament moved. Without the Old Testament we cannot know what it was that He fulfilled, and, therefore, the Old Testament is a vital part of the Christian faith. To ignore it is to cease to be Christian, for a Savior not seen as a fulfiller of the Old Testament promise and hope is not the New Testament Savior.**

## **4. THE TRIVIAL AND THE TREMENDOUS Based on Matt. 5:18-19**

**On April 18, 1906 San Francisco went through the worst catastrophe of California history. An earthquake devastated the city, and a fire broke out that left that once thriving metropolis a heap of smoldering ruins. The cost in lives and property was beyond calculation. Yet, in the midst of all this destruction and death people were**

preoccupied with the trivia of life. A mortician sat on the front steps of his office and polished coffin handles, like Nero fiddling while Rome burned. You want to get angry at this man for giving himself to trifles in the midst of such a major disaster, but the question is, if the handles needed polishing, why not do it? It is a trivial task, but coffins would be needed, and people would demand that they be clean and shiny. The trivial cannot be evaded or avoided, for it is a perpetual part of life.

It is a crazy world where you cannot get life set up like a furniture store. All of the chairs in one place, and all of the beds in another, and the lamps and dressers in still another. And all the nuts and bolts and plastic and packing materials are isolated out of sight so as not to detract from the beauty. In life all of this stuff is mixed together with the trivial and the tremendous in the same room. No matter what tragedies people go through, they still have to pay the light bill, dust the end tables, put twisties back on the bread, and dozens of other trivial duties to maintain order. The trivial is inseparable from the tremendous in every day life. We sometimes feel guilty about it if we go on doing trivial things when there is a tremendous crisis going on. You are not always involved in what is a major issue, but you are always involved in what is minor, and so the trivial is a perpetual part of all of our lives. You get rest from the tremendous, but the trivial is ever with you. Gamaliel Bradford wrote-

I think about God, yet I talk of small matters.  
Now isn't it odd how my idle tongue chatters,  
Of quarrelsome neighbors,  
Fine weather and rain,  
Indifferent labors,  
Indifferent pain.  
Some trivial style,  
Fashion shifts with a nod  
And yet all the while  
I am thinking of God.

What Jesus is saying to us in this paragraph is that we must take the trivial seriously, for how we deal with a value, even the least of God's commands, will determine our status in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, the trivial can be tremendous. Jesus goes so far as to say, not a jot or tittle is insignificant. Not the smallest letter, or the least stroke of the pen is really trivial. In our system, not the dotting of an i, or the crossing of a t, is so trivial that God will neglect it, or ignore it in His plan. Every detail of value, however trivial, will be fulfilled, therefore, nothing of God's law and revelation is so trivial that we can ignore it without loss. The silly poet wrote-

One day I sat upon a chair,  
Of course the bottom wasn't there;  
Nor legs, nor back, but I just sat,  
Ignoring little things like that.

But little though they be, you cannot ignore them and prevent a fall, and so it is with the least of God's laws.

Jesus says, if you want to be a nobody in the kingdom, just ignore the trivial, and violate its purpose, and teach others the same, and you've got it. But if you want to be somebody in the kingdom, you have got to see the trivial can be tremendous. One of the major problems of Christians all through history is the promoting of their own gifts and activities to the detriment of others. The hand says to the foot, I have no need of you. The Christian in evangelism says, the Christian in social service is wasting his time. What good is a cup of cold water if a man is going to hell? The social service Christian says, what good is the Gospel to a man who is starving and thirsty? Christians fight each other saying, I am the greatest. Jesus says, not so, for they are both least in the kingdom if they teach that the least commandment is unimportant. The greatest are those who know obedience to all of God's will is important, and they teach and do it, for the trivial cup of cold water, and the tremendous message of the cross are both part of God's plan.

We get an insight here into the way God works. God is into the big, for He created the whole vast universe, but the fact is, He built all the bigness of creation out of the small. The whole of everything is built upon the trivial. The trivial little atom which is so small and insignificant in itself, that I can rub millions of them off my hands and not see any difference, are the basis for all that is tremendous. The poet wrote-

Little drops of water, little grains of sand,  
Make the mighty ocean, and the pleasant land.

Time has many aspects to it, and goes from seconds to minutes; to hours; to days; to weeks; to months; to years; to decades; to generations; to centuries; to millenniums; to eons. But if you really want to see when time is important, watch the Olympics where victory and defeat depend on 1,000's of a second. All that makes it such tremendous competition is in those trivial moments of time. In daily life we do not waste years, months and weeks, but we waste minutes and hours, and here is where the real battle with time is. It is not on the upper level, but on the lower level of the trivial, and how we do on this level can make a tremendous difference in life. The same is true with money. We don't waste millions and thousands, but we do waste pennies to dollars, and what we do with the trivial always makes a tremendous difference.

God builds your life into what is tremendous by what, in itself, is trivial. The seemingly insignificant events in life are the stepping stones to what is significant. Some boys brought an injured shepherd dog to Florence Nightingale. She agreed to help heal the dog, and as she ministered to it she became infatuated with the idea of ministering to suffering humanity. Her compassion for a dog led her to become the Angel of the Crimean War, and mother of modern nursing. The trivial led to the tremendous. This is the way God has worked in millions of lives.

Most of us would agree, it is a rather trivial choice as to which pair of socks you wear. President James Garfield had his whole life changed by his choice of socks. The day he was to leave home for a long trip he injured his foot chopping wood. The blue dye in the home-made sock he wore poisoned the wound, and he had to cancel his trip. While he was home recovering, a revival broke out in his community, and he was converted. He wrote, "New desires and new purposes then took possession of me, and I was determined to seek

**an education that I might live more usefully for Christ." His choice of socks led to his choosing the Savior. The trivial led to the tremendous.**

**One of the lessons Jesus most often sought to teach us is the lesson on the largeness of the little; the significance of the small; the mightiness of the minute, and the tremendousness of the trivial. Michaelangelo labored on detail, and someone asked him why he would bother with details that no one would notice. He replied, "Trifles make for perfection, and perfection is no trifle." Jesus said that those who are faithful in a very little are faithful also in much. If you give a money manager \$500.00, and he loses some of it, you will not trust him with \$5,000.00. If he does well with a little, then you will trust him with a lot.**

**One sheep is a trivial percentage of a flock, but when that one is lost, it becomes a major issue, and the 99 are left in order to focus on finding the one. The trivial becomes the priority. The trivial mite of the widow was like the pennies of the little child in the Sunday School offering. Truly trivial in the over all budget of the church, but Jesus exalted her gift to the level of the greatest gift of all, because it represented her all. Others gave far more, but it was far from their all. Because it was her all, her trivial became tremendous. People often think if they are not gifted it is okay to do nothing, not realizing that if they give what little they have it can lead to tremendous reward. The one talent man missed the whole point of Jesus, and he did not use his one trivial talent wisely. He buried it, for it was nothing compared to the others. He neglected his trivial, and lost the tremendous reward that could have been his by being faithful with his little. Jesus said, "As ye did it unto the least of these my brethren you did it unto me." The slightest expression of love can be a tremendous act of love. Even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unrewarded.**

**In this Sermon on the Mount Jesus is concerned with prevention, and the key to prevention is in awareness of the value of the trivial. Most all tragedies could be prevented by attention to the trivial. People make their biggest mistakes by thinking that their righteousness is established on the major issues of life. If they do not murder and commit adultery, and some other super sin, they are really on top of things. Jesus says, not so! He looks at the track record on the level of the trivial. You can keep all of the major laws of God, and still live a life that has no love for people. You do not respect them, or trust them as persons made in the image of God. You degrade their personality by your language. You call them names, curse them, and treat them like things. You evaluate people's value by whether they are on your side, your race, your church, your school, etc., rather than their value to God.**

**The whole point of Jesus is, if Christians are to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world, they have to break out of the mold of the Pharisees, and start recognizing that the law is fulfilled in love, and love is not just lifting up lofty ideals, but in little daily acts of lifting people, because you care about them as persons, and that care is expressed in the language you use, and in the attitudes you have toward them. We all fail most right here at the point of not recognizing that the trivial is tremendous. Like the Pharisees, we are proud if we get through a day and have not murdered, raped, or robbed someone, with no thought of whether or not we said a kind word to encourage, or went out of our**

way to do some trivial act to let others know we care about them as persons.

We think the great in the kingdom are those doing the wonders of world wide impact. But the fact is, if they are great, it is not because of these things, but because they light a candle in someone's darkness, and sprinkle a few grains of salt on someone's tasteless day. It is the trail of trivial kindnesses that make a person great in the kingdom of God, and that trail is open to all of us to travel daily. Jesus is saying, if you want to be in the major leagues of righteousness, don't focus on the big stuff, but on the little stuff. Alexander Maclaren, the great English preacher, wrote, "It is the very spirit of Christianity that the biggest thing is to regulate the smallest duties of life. Men's lives are made up of two or three big things, and a multitude of little ones, and the greater rule the lesser, and, my friends, unless we have got a religion and a morality that can and will keep the trifles of our lives right there will be nothing right."

Jesus goes on in this great sermon to make clear that all big sins start small. Murder starts with anger and resentment, and name calling. Adultery starts with lustful looks. To prevent the big sins of life you need to deal with the trivial, and keep them under control. Benjamin Franklin wrote, "For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the rider was lost." A man's life was lost because of neglect of a tiny nail. Neglect of the trivial in any area of life can lead to tremendous loss.

Let's not assume that Jesus is saying, there is no such thing as the insignificant. The littleness and pickiness of the legalistic Pharisees was one of His biggest complaints. It is possible to major on minors, and get so tangled up in the trivial you never get to the tremendous. In Matt. 23:23-24, Jesus blasts the Pharisees for this very thing. "You hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices, mint, dill, and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." Here is the perversion of what Jesus is teaching. If the trivial is tremendous, then let us devote our lives to the trivial. Such was the logic of the Pharisees, and it led to a petty pain of a religion, rather than to the great faith God intended for the world.

The Jews got into hot debates over trivial things. The law said a man who was murdered on the highway was to have a sacrifice offered for him by the priest in the nearest town. The issue was, where do you start the measuring to see which town he is closest too? Rabbi Eliezer said, from the navel, and Rabbi Akiba said, from the nose. It is true that trifles often have to be cared for, but when men devote their energies to these trifles, they lose sight of what is important. It is possible for any of us to get caught up in trifles that are just that and no more. Queen Victoria once said, "As I get older I cannot understand the world. I cannot comprehend its littleness. When I look at its frivolities and littlenesses, it seems to me as if people were all a little mad."

The church has often gotten caught up in legalistic littleness that has nothing to do with the least commands of God. Charles Goff tells of a church that split over which street the new entrance to the church would face. After the damage was done, the

entrance was put on the corner where people could go either way, and the problem was solved. When people blow a minor matter all out of proportion, as if the universe and God's plan depended on their perspective, they have the mind of the Pharisee, and not the mind of Christ.

You can make a mountain out of a molehill, and be guilty of the sin of specializing in the secondary. It can be a tremendous part of your life to give a cup of cold water to the thirsty, but if you devote your life to giving cold water, and start criticizing other Christians because they do not do it, you become a pain in the neck of the body of Christ. You are trying to make the trivial tremendous by your own power, and this leads to folly. It is blowing the issue out of proportion. It is like the essay on the value of pins. The author concluded that pins save millions of lives every year by not being swallowed. All of us are here today because we did not swallow pins this week. It can be made to sound like the issue of the century, for all of history is affected by whether or not people swallow pins. It is true, but also truly trivial, for swallowing pins is not a temptation for the vast majority of people. The point is, it is easy to get caught up in what sounds significant, but which is really trivial. There is plenty of this, making tragedies of trifles, shooting butterflies with rifles.

As the light of the world, it is the Christians job to help the world see the difference between the truly trivial, and the trivial that can be tremendous. That which is really trivial is that which does not fulfill anything in God's will for the benefit of man. On the other hand, that which is least in fulfilling God's will is the trivial that can be tremendous. Our prayer needs to be-

O light eternal fall  
Into this world of time,  
That all things small  
May small abide,  
And all things great,  
Be magnified.

Do not make your life frustrating by trying to do great things for God. Just do the trivial things that He wants you to do in your daily life, and you will be doing the trivial that leads to the tremendous.

## **5. LEGALISM VERSUS LOVE Based on Matt. 5:20**

We live in a world where competition is a master motive. When the news reach Russia in 1945 that the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Stalin ordered secret scientists to find a way to catch up to the U.S. Andrei Sakharov was only 24 years old then, but his brilliant mind was fired by the challenge of the competition. So much so that he helped Russia leap frog ahead by developing the hydrogen bomb months before

the United States.

Then when Russia surprised the world with Sputnik, and beat the U. S. into space, American scientists reacted with such a competitive spirit that they quickly thrust the U. S. into the lead, and on to be the first to reach the moon. Is it really love, or is it competition that makes the world go round? One of the reasons we look to the Olympics with anticipation is because man is a competitive creature. Will Durant in *The Lessons of History* writes, "So the first biological lesson of history is that life is competitive." Even cooperation, he goes on to say, is a tool of competition. We cooperate with our group, be it family, club, church, nation, or race, in order to strengthen our group in its competition with others. It is human nature to want their group to be the best. Everybody enjoys the opportunity of saying, we are number one, top dog, high man on the totem, king of the hill, and champions.

I have been in enough church league sports to know that one of the things that being saved doesn't change is the competitive spirit. Christians love competition as much as anyone, and they love to come out on top as often as they can. Some of the largest Sunday Schools in our country got that way by well organized contests where the competitive spirit was used to motivate people to come and bring others. Christians are challenged by competition. They love to win and set records. They love to win prizes, and gain honor and status. All of this carries some risk, of course, for one can get so caught up in competition that winning is everything, and other values are lost.

The story is told of three churches that sat on three of the four corners at one intersection. It was a hot Sunday morning, and the windows were open in each church. The Methodist began their service by singing *Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?* The Presbyterians then began to sing *No Not One, No Not One*. Finally, the Baptist began with *O That Will Be Glory For Me*. It is like the Pastor of a small church which was not growing. He thanked God that none of the other churches were growing either. The competitive spirit can be dangerous and divisive as well as delightful.

Dr. Milburn describes how people use to act in the days of river travel. "If another boat came in sight, you find yourself becoming anxious that she shall not pass you. If she gains upon your craft, all your fears about the danger of racing are laid aside. And with your fellow passengers, male and female, you are urging the captain to do his best....Side by side the boats go thundering along, and so completely has the thought of winning taken possession of you, that you would almost as soon be blown up as beaten." This is the same competitive spirit that leads so many youth to be killed or injured in racing. Competition can become so strong that it drives out all fear of danger, and this can be good or bad depending on the situation.

The fact is, there is no escape from competition. You might just as well try to eliminate the trivial from life as to try and eliminate competition. Jesus, in this great sermon to His followers, uses the language of competition. He begins this sermon with the beatitudes which are promises of prizes. Christian life can be tough, but it is worth it, for there will be great rewards for those who take the risks and endure the rigors of it. Then Jesus, like a coach before a big game, gives His team a pep talk to motivate them to



do their best. "There is a job to do, and you have got to do it. The salt has got to be active, and the light has to shine. The opponents are tough, and Jesus says, you can't afford fumbles and penalties. Don't neglect the least of the rules of the game. Go out there and be great." Then in verse 20 He sets the standard for His team. He says, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Paraphrased, He is saying, "Unless you guys play better than your opponents you won't make it to the Super Bowl."

Now you may not like the football analogy, but choose your own sport or arena of competition to illustrate what Jesus is saying. You can't escape it. He is using competitive language like least, great, and exceed. Jesus is saying that He wants His followers to be winners, and that means being better than the religious leaders of Israel. That is competition, and the whole thrust of this chapter is competition. Jesus says, here is the old standard, but you are to do better than that. The Christian is to set new records, and leave the Old Testament saints in the dust when it comes to fulfilling the law.

The Old Testament saints loved their neighbors, but you are to go one better, and love your enemies. The challenge of Jesus to Judaism is matched by another challenge by the Gentile world at the close of this chapter. Jesus says, if you love those who love you, that is no better than what tax collectors can do, and even Gentiles can't compete on that low level of love. Jesus says, the Christian is to do more, and rise above Judaism and the natural religions of the world. It is, an anything you can do I can do better challenge, that the Christian is to rise to.

Now its not too much of a threat to Christians to compete with tax collectors and pagans. It seems like this is a fairly easy challenge, but when Jesus says we are to exceed the Pharisees, and be better than them, and the Scribes, in righteousness, it is a scary challenge, because they are real pros and formidable foes. The more you know of these guys the Christian team has to beat, the more you realize the story of David and Goliath is a never ending conflict. Jesus is asking amateurs to be superior to the pros, and this sounds like more than any coach ought to expect. Competition can be demoralizing when the non-gifted are pitted against the gifted. Most Christian would feel inadequate compared with the Scribes and Pharisees.

One of Rossini's pupils composed a funeral march commemorating the death of Ludwig von Beethoven. He took it to his master who listened attentively to the uninspired work played falteringly by the amateur. He said, "The circumstances would have been more favorable if you had died, and Beethoven had composed the march." The amateur can't be expected to compete with the pro. Yet, Jesus does not just expect Christian to be in the race with the Scribes and Pharisees, He expects Christians to beat them. In fact, He says you don't even qualify to enter the race unless you can beat them. This is a very discouraging demand if we think Jesus is saying that we have to beat them at their own game. This would be like expecting David to beat Goliath in Saul's armor. It wouldn't work. There is no way Christians could be more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees on the level of what they called righteousness. They obeyed more rules in a day than most Christians would in a year.

When Jesus says we must exceed them He is talking about a totally different quality of righteousness where even the amateur can surpass the pro. It is not only possible, it is easy when we understand the difference between their righteousness and Christian righteousness. Not understanding this distinction could lead you to feel like the two cows standing in the field when a milk truck came down the road. On the side of the truck it said, MILK-PASTURIZED AND HOMOGENIZED. The one cow looked at the other and said, "It's not use, we just can't compete with them trucks."

We know there is a radical distinction between the cows and the truck. One is a creator of milk, and the other is only a carrier. So it is with the righteousness that the Christian is to produce that exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Christian righteousness is to fulfill the law, and, thus, the purpose of the creator of the law. The competition does not do that. They are only carriers of the law and tradition. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Nothing gives one a more spuriously good conscience than keeping rules, even if there has been a total absence of all real charity and faith." To better grasp this distinction we need to study the contrast between the two kinds of righteousness. We need to grasp the strategy of our opponents if we expect to counter it with a superior strategy. So let's examine first-

## **I. THE OPPOSITION GAME PLAN.**

Their strategy is really quite simple. It is the oldest and most popular strategy of history. It is the religion of the rule book, also known as legalism. All you have to do to be righteous is to keep the rules. If you don't break any rules you can't suffer any penalties, and so you are bound to be a winner. This is appealing to human nature. It leads to a sense of security. You know where you are at, and you are in control of your own destiny it seems, and once you get into the rut, life is predictable and carefree. Legalism may get technical, but it is always cut and dried. You always know what is right, for everything is regulated by the rules. You don't have to bother with all the complexity of motives, for all that matters are deeds.

If you don't kill, that is all that matters. The fact that you are full of hatred and resentment toward another is no issue, for as long as you keep the law by not killing you are righteous. No matter how corrupt you are in your inner life, as long as you do not externally violate the rules you are alright. Legalistic righteousness is all a matter of external conduct. It has nothing to do with the inner life. This makes religion easy, for it means you don't have to be like God at all. You can harbor all kinds of negative attitudes of prejudice, envy, and bitterness of all sorts, and yet be a religious leader. All you have to do is keep the rules.

The beauty of it to human nature is that you don't have to change the inner man. All you have to do is conform to external conduct that is in harmony with the rule book. This is religion made easy, and it has been popular all through history. Christianity has had plenty of this as well. The most evil of men can be religious leaders with this strategy. You can be a leader in the Mafia, and still be a good Catholic at the same time. You can be a corrupt politician and still be a good Baptist in good standing at the same time. All that matters is that you obey the rules of the game in public. What you do when

**you are not playing at religion is your own business. Then you can do what your real inner nature compels you to do. As long as you keep the rules when you are being religious you are acceptable. No sinner could ask for a better religion than one of legalistic righteousness.**

**You don't have to care about God, people, or anything but yourself. You can have your cake and eat it too. The Scribes and the Pharisees were the worst hypocrites that ever lived, but they were also the world's champion ruler keepers. What other strategy but legalism could make this possible. It is perfect for people who want to be super religious, but who don't want to be bothered with God's will and purpose in history.**

**Jesus came to blast the ship of legalism out of the water, but it persists in staying afloat, and competing for men's loyalty. The spirit of legalism has been a part of Christian history. People are led to believe they are super Christians because they keep all kinds of rules. They may be obnoxious people full of bitterness and prejudice, and with little or no love, but they are champion rule keepers, and so are convinced that this is what Christianity is all about. The problem with legalism is it locks one into a narrow rut, and it can feel so comfortable that one cannot change and get out of the rut.**

**Jewish Christians who were raised up under legalism had a hard time adjusting to their liberty in Christ. They had a tendency to slip back into the security of legalism. The Pharisees were so locked in that they could not see the value of what Jesus was doing in healing on the Sabbath. Jesus put the value of the person above the law, and they refused to change, but would stick to their game plan no matter what. It didn't matter who got hurt, even if it was God Himself, for they would stick to their game plan. Jesus does not expect us to compete on that level and be better legalists than they were. He has a totally different game plan which we want to look at.**

## **II. THE WINNING GAME PLAN.**

**In contrast to the righteousness based on legalism, Jesus promotes a righteousness based on love. It is better than the rule book religion, not because it forsakes the rules, but because it fulfills the rules. Legalism stops short of God's value system, and it makes precepts the highest value. Love goes beyond this to make persons the highest value. The legalist says that the law must be obeyed regardless of who gets hurt. What really matters is the law and not people. You do what has to be done, and if people have to suffer its worth it, because this is the only way to win.**

**William Faulkner said, "If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies." This is the value system of the legalist. The Scribes and Pharisees did not care about old ladies, or sick ladies, or anybody. Jesus healed a number of them on the Sabbath, and they hated Him for it. It was great for the people healed, and there was much rejoicing, but Jesus was not following the rule book. Jesus loved people, and they loved the rule book. This is the main distinction between their righteousness and the winning righteousness Jesus expects Christians to have. This is what exceeds their righteousness, for it is based on a superior value system.**

**Jesus did not come to abolish the rule book, but to fulfill it, and by that He meant that He came to rescue it from the ridiculous absurdity to which the Scribes and Pharisees had reduced it. Jesus came to restore the law to the level of love where its original intent could be accomplished by aiding people to love God and their neighbor more effectively. The law is not fulfilled just because you don't kill a man. It is only fulfilled when you love and respect him as one made in the image of God, and as one who is loved of God the same as you are. Fulfilling the law and love are one and the same.**

**What this means is, God is not a legalistic person who sits in heaven with a celestial calculator keeping track of how many times a law is obeyed. God does not get his kicks out of statistics saying this is a good day for commandment number 6, for two billion people kept this one today, but number 4 is down, for only 480 million kept that one. God is not infatuated with the law. God so loved the world means that He loves the people of the world. The purpose of the law is for man's benefit, and not for God's statistical tables. What matters to God is that man's evil nature be controlled, and that he be restored to the image of God where love is the dominate motive in his life.**

**The righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness of Christ, which we partake of when we surrender to Christ as Lord. When Jesus comes in, self-righteousness goes out, and that is what conversion is all about. You cannot be a Christian and enter the kingdom of heaven with a law dominated righteousness. The only kind of righteousness acceptable in the kingdom of God is the righteousness of Christ, which is love righteousness. This means that what is right is what is loving and best for persons.**

**How is this better than legalistic righteousness? Just look at the life of Jesus. He is the model of His message. When He encountered a need He let love, and not the law, determine His response. The law said do not work on the Sabbath, but when Jesus saw a need crying out for action, He responded in love and compassion, and He healed on the Sabbath. He was hated by the ruler keepers, for they said that keeping the rules is more important than helping the people. Love says just the opposite. You help the people, and let the law wait.**

**But isn't this anti-law? Does it not set a dangerous precedent? Not at all. Love is not thoughtless. Love asks, what is the purpose of the law? The answer is, that man might be benefited. God's intention in giving the Sabbath is that man might not be a slave to materialism. God demanded that men leave their labor and learn to rest and relax. They are to develop the higher values of life in the mental and spiritual realm. God's whole motive in the law was to lift people to a higher spiritual level. This being the case, love does not violate the law by doing anything that lifts and blesses man, for that is its very purpose. The letter of the law may be broken, but it is broken for the sake of fulfilling its intent. If that is the case, then let it be broken, for the goal is not to keep a law, but to be a blessing to people.**

**Those who follow legalistic righteousness are bound by the law, for the law is the absolute. Those who follow loving righteousness are free to make decisions about the law, for the law is not the absolute, but persons are. There is flexibility in love to chose**

that which is best for the persons. Jesus says that this is the winning game plan. This is the value system that makes the Christian superior to the best of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus goes on in this sermon to give specific ways in which loving righteousness is superior to the legalistic righteousness. We will be looking at these in coming weeks. For now, let me share with you some examples of how we need to struggle to follow the winning game plan, and avoid the losing one of legalistic righteousness.

When I became a Pastor in rural South Dakota one of the first things I observed was that farmers do not obey the law the same way as city people do. Stop signs in the country do not possess the same authority that they do in the city. I was shocked as I watched Christian farmers go through stop signs like they were not there. They gave them about as little thought as they gave to their guardian angel. I was a law abiding citizen, however, and legalistically stopped at every stop sign. I even stopped at the one a mile from the church where you could see if anyone was coming for at least half a mile in either direction. I must admit I felt sort of strange stopping when I knew there was no one in sight, but the law is the law. When it came to stop signs I was a confirmed legalist.

I have to confess I felt somewhat superior to those Christians who felt free to not stop. It took time for me to see from their perspective. I never did feel free to ignore a stop sign, but I did learn to slow down and proceed with caution without stopping. Did those Christians make me a law breaker by their influence? No they didn't. They just help me see on a trivial level how easy it is to be legalistic. The purpose of the stop sign in the country is to prevent accidents by giving one roadway the right of way over another. Naturally, if a car is coming, everyone stops to let them have that right of way. That is the law. But if nobody is coming you can safely ignore the stop sign, and the law is still fulfilled.

This may sound like rationalizing and situation ethics, and that is exactly what it is, for that is what makes Christian ethics different from legalistic ethics. It is the freedom to think and act in a loving way depending on the changing situations. The city drivers have found a way to break the old law too so as to be more loving to drivers. The rule for many years was always to stop for red, and do not go until it is green. But then the law was changed so that it all depended on the situation. If you were at a red light waiting to turn right you could now proceed through the red light if there was no on coming traffic. People had to go through a lot of guilt feelings to get over going through a red light. I was already prepared by having learned to go through stop signs in the country.

This change in the law was anti-legalistic, and in favor of love, for it permits greater freedom of choice, and prevents unnecessary waste of time that serves no useful purpose. People do abuse this freedom, and there are risks that go with it as in all freedom, but unless studies show that the risks outweigh the value, this freedom to go through red lights under certain conditions will remain a part of our lives. The purpose of lights and stop signs is not to get people stopped who desire to get somewhere. The purpose is to protect and keep people moving toward their goal as safe and fast as possible. Since that is the purpose, you can then fulfill the purpose of the light by violating its basic meaning which is to stop. That is what red has always meant in a traffic light. But now we violate that meaning and break it, but do so in order to fulfill the purpose of it.

**This should help us see what Jesus was doing with the Old Testament law. He was fine tuning it, and making it more useful to the end for which it was given, which was to lift man to a higher level of love for God and man. All of God's rules are for man's good, and they are to be for man's blessings and not to be burdens. Jesus calls us to rise above mere legalism, and to get in on the purpose of God which is to love and to lift.**

**Paul was once locked into legalistic righteousness. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Jesus set Paul free from that prison, and Paul became a great champion of the loving righteousness of Christ. He went on to save Christianity from the Judaisers. Had the Judaisers won the battle Christianity would have been a mere rerun of Judaism. They said every Christian must be circumcised according to the law of Moses, and they tried to coerce the Gentiles to conform to this conviction. Paul fought hard against this legalism, and he won the battle, and set Christians free from bondage to the law, which was no longer relevant to those who were made righteous in Christ.**

**We are in a world of great religious competition. We will all tend to follow one of these two strategies: The legalistic or the loving, the rule book power, or relationship power. Tom Garrett and his family were held prisoners by two prison escapees for 24 hours. A few days later he went to pick up his unemployment check and he was denied. The law clearly states an unemployed worker must be available for work every day of a normal work week. He was not available the day he was held captive and so did not qualify. This is the folly of legalism which sees the law as the ultimate rather than persons. If you want to be a winner, keep checking your Christian life to see which strategy you follow. The petition in the Lord's Prayer, thy kingdom come, is only answered in the lives of Christians who choose love over legalism. The dynamics of the distinction between the two kinds of righteousness is seen in the effects on the world of people they touch. One drags people down, and is a burden that makes life hard. The other gives life a lift, and adds beauty to life. Is it legalism or love that motivates your life?**

## **6. RESPECT VERSUS CONTEMPT Based on Matt. 5:21-26**

**Alexander the Great conquered the world, but anger conquered him, and turned him into a murderer. Like so many of the murders of history, it was not intended or designed. It happened because men do not understand that anger is the beginning of murder. Clitus, his best friend, was teasing Alexander at a banquet. Both of them were filling up with wine, and they began to lose control. Clitus became quite nasty in his remarks, and Alexander lost his temper, and he hit him with his fist. His officers restrained him, and led him out of the banquet hall. Clitus, in anger, followed and continued to taunt Alexander. Quick as a flash, Alexander snatched a spear from one of his guards and hurled it at his friend, and killed him.**

Remorse followed his fury, and he drew out the spear, and would have fallen on it in grief had his officers not prevented it. Clitus had been his friend from childhood. He did not want him dead. All that night and for several days Alexander lay in remorse piteously calling for Clitus. It was an awful price to pay to indulge in anger.

Anger is no tame pet you can let roam free. It is a wild beast, and it is a killer. Most murders happen within families because this is where anger is permitted to roam freely. People kill their friends and relatives, not because they want to, but because they underestimate the danger of anger. People think that because their anger is over in a minute or so, they are in control, but that is all it takes to throw a spear, or pull a trigger.

This is why Jesus tells us that thou shalt not murder is not enough. It is a good law, for it is a law of God, but He came to refine the law and improve it, and make it more effective. Therefore, He says that the way to prevent murder is to recognize where it begins, and to deal with the seed which is anger. The rest of this Sermon on the Mount is an elaboration of how Christian righteousness is to exceed the legalistic righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. From the emphasis of Jesus on bad human relations we can assume that Jesus is saying to us, God considers man's inhumanity to man as one of the world's greatest problems.

We like to think, like the Pharisee, that if we get right with God, and worship Him properly with all the right rituals, it doesn't much matter how we relate to people. It is at this very point that religion can be the greatest enemy of Christ and true godliness. Christians are not immune to this perversion anymore than were the Pharisees. They actually got so caught up in their legalistic religion that they developed a contempt for man. Man in his sinful nature was forever violating the law of God, and so they hated and despised man, and they lost the whole purpose of God in trying to save man. Anger, hostility, and contempt dominated their feelings, in contrast to the love for man that Jesus brought into the world to fulfill the law.

I had an experience as a teenager that came back to me as I studied these verses. It revealed to me how we can be tempted to follow the same path as the Pharisees. I was working at a theater, and was outside putting up plastic letters announcing the next attraction. The theater was right next to the sports bowl which was a hang out for youth. The police stopped and grabbed a couple of guys and put them up against the store front and frisked them. One got smart and got a slap across the head. I was an innocent bystander, but I got angry at what I saw. I made some smart remark. One of the cops came over and grabbed me by the arm, twisted it behind me, and marched me to his car. All I remember is that I started shouting, "I am a Christian!" It must have made quite an impression because he let me go. As I look back on it I can see that my thinking was that because I was a Christian he had no right to touch me for my bad attitude. I was right with God, and, therefore, my anger at men was not to be an issue. All that mattered is that I loved God.

This kind of thinking is what makes religion so hateful to people with a humanitarian heart. Religious people often try to combine love of God with hate of man, and are really

convinced it can be a workable plan. Love God with all your heart, and hate your neighbor. This kind of religion has been the curse of human history, and will be until the end of time. Jesus in this Sermon attacks this kind of religion, and declares it unfit for the kingdom of God. It sounds good because it magnifies God and obedience to His law, but it is really evil because it forsakes the purpose of God, which is to save man, and not condemn him. God is not content with you for not killing men. He is not satisfied until you love men as He does, and want to see them saved.

Jesus deals with human relationships as the key to being truly righteous. According to this Sermon on the Mount man's biggest problem is not, how can I worship God properly, but how can I love my neighbor properly? The first issue that we are focusing on is really basic to our developing a Christian value system in our thinking about man. The overall issue here goes far beyond the law, and whether or not we ever murder anyone. The issue is respect versus contempt. One or the other of these attitudes will dominate our life, and which one it is will determine whether or not we are capable of being salt and light.

The point is, you do not have to be Christlike to obey rules. The Pharisees proved this. They did not murder, commit adultery, and all kinds of negative things. They kept the law, but they did not love and respect people. The goal of God is not to get people to conform to rules like a scientist training mice in a lab. The goal is to get people to relate to others in love, and be channels of His Spirit in the world. This means that not murdering people is just not enough to fulfill the law and the purpose of God. His purpose can only be fulfilled when you develop an attitude of respect and love for persons. If you kept everyone of God's laws, but did not love people, you would not have a righteousness fit for the kingdom of God.

In order to achieve this noble goal you have to identify and destroy three enemies that will block your path, and they are anger, hatred, and contempt. All three of these negatives seem so much alike that they are obviously in the same family, but Jesus implies that each brother is meaner than the other, and so they are dealt with as representing different degrees of evil and judgment. We have heard of the James brothers and the Dolton brothers, but here are the hostility brothers who, once they take over the town of your life, make you a murderer. Even if you don't kill anyone, Jesus says you violate the whole purpose of God in giving the law, and so for all practical purposes, as far as the kingdom of God goes, you are in the same category with the murderer. Like a sheriff out to protect the town from this trio of cut throats, we need to examine their profile and learn to identify them so we can run them out of town before they can set up shop in our territory. We can imagine three wanted posters in the post office with three ugly pictures of these enemies of the soul, and descriptions of their dastardly deeds.

The first ugly mug is-

#### **I. AWFUL ANGER.**

He is just as deadly as his two brothers, Hideous Hatred and Callous Contempt, but he



has some redeeming values. We can't deal with the values here because Jesus is looking only at the negative of anger in this context. It is hostility toward another, not because they are terrible and worthy of wrath, but because you are in a rotten mood, and evil thoughts control your emotions. The best we can say for anger here is that it is the mildest form of murder in the heart, and, therefore, receives the least judgment. It is mild murder in the sense that it leaves the other person alive, but it still makes you a murderer at heart.

Anger toward another is a beginning sign that you are on the borderline of homicide. When you spot anger creeping into your town you know trouble is brewing, and its time to take action before things come to a boil. Anger is an enemy of the kingdom of God because as long as anger controls the heart the heart cannot fulfill the purpose of God, which is to be a channel of love. When you are angry with a person you are not open to the spirit of God, and so the chances of you being a channel of love and respect are very slim. More than likely you will subtract from others self-esteem, and degrade their dignity, and reduce the respect they have a right to receive as persons made in the image of God.

Anger blinds us to values, and that is why it is a killer. Alexander killed his best friend because anger covered over all the good he knew of his friend, and it made the present evil of his nature so blown out of proportion that was all he could see. Anger makes murder so easy because by the time it is boiling all that is visible to the angry man or woman is a picture of evil that ought to be mashed. It is the elder brother wishing that little louse of a brother of his would have been killed in the far country, and gotten what he deserved. This was the attitude of the Pharisees toward the sinners Jesus was saving. The people who broke the laws that they were so laboriously keeping were being saved, and being invited to banquets where they were happy, and they were being set free from their bondage by Christ's forgiveness.

The Pharisees were angry at the love and mercy of Christ, for it seemed so wrong to them, and so they murdered Jesus, convinced that they were doing what was right. Anger can so distort one's perspective that they can do the greatest evils and feel they serve God in doing so. Paul was convinced his anger was good and righteous as he went from town to town killing and imprisoning Christians. Jonah was even convinced he had a right to be angry at God, for God promised to destroy the Ninevites, and then, just because they repented, God showed mercy and ruined the whole thing. Had he the power he would have murdered the whole city and felt more righteous than God.

James and John, the sons of thunder, would have murdered the people of Samaria by calling down fire from heaven, but Jesus rebuked them and prevented such folly. Peter almost murdered Malchus with the sword, but Jesus prevented that and healed the ear that was cut off. The point is, anger is so close to being a force for good that it is hard to recognize when it is being a force for evil. The result is, it is a very subtle enemy of the soul, and can have us serving the kingdom of darkness before we even realize we have been deceived.

This means that when dealing with anger you can't afford to shoot first and ask

questions later. It might turn out to be justifiable homicide, but Jesus warns that the chances are more likely it will be murder. Anger has its place, and can be a valid virtue, but Jesus says, look at the company it keeps. If it hangs around with hatred and contempt, you can be sure your anger is an outlaw, and it will lead you out of the will of God.

So what do I do if I put my anger in the lineup and discover it really is the criminal type? Jesus says, if that is the case, you make choices that rid you of the varmint. You run him out of town. In verses 23-24 Jesus gives an example of the choice you make. If you have a bad relationship with a brother, you don't let it burn and boil while you devote yourself to the higher values of life, like worship of God, and offering of gifts. This sounds very spiritual, but it is escapism. You are trying to use God to run from God. The most pleasing thing you can do for God is to forget your worship for a while, and go and deal with your anger on the human level. Be reconciled with your brother. Get the anger out of your system whatever it takes, be it apology, restitution, crying, or whatever helps you get rid of it before it does damage.

Jesus is saying, awful anger can only ruin your life to the degree that you let him. He is a tough hombre, to be sure, but Jesus says every man has in the city of his soul a sheriff that can control this outlaw, and that is the will. We like to pretend that we are at the mercy of our anger because that lets us off the hook. I just blew up, and I can't help it. How can we blame anybody for what they can't help? It 's like blaming them for having blue eyes or brown hair. It sounds like a good defense, but the judge don't buy it.

Jesus says if you let anger take over, you are subject to the same judgment as the murderer. If you come to the point that you are at the mercy of anger and cannot control it, it is because you chose to invite it into your life. You let this outlaw set up his saloon and gambling casino. You permit him to grow and become a major influence in the community of your soul, and then when a showdown comes you blame awful anger for the bloodshed. Jesus says, not so. You will be held accountable for letting this criminal element take over.

It is the choices we make all along that determine whether we follow the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness, and not just what we do in a crisis. You are not a good guy right up to the point when you pull the trigger. That is the folly of legalism, for it says, as long as you haven't murdered anyone you are still on God's side. In reality, you have permitted awful anger to gain such power that you are like a sheriff who protects an outlaw element rather than the citizens. You are already on the side of darkness whether you ever pull the trigger or not. It is not just murder that is evil. It is all that leads up to murder that is evil, and so even if you never get there, you are still on the road that leads there, and so you are traveling in the kingdom of darkness.

Legalism only looks at the destination, but love looks at the journey, and recognizes all sin goes through a process. Love spots the process at the beginning so it can prevent the process from ever developing to the point of sin. Jesus does not say it is easy, but He says, when anger is in your life you are a potential murderer, and you have an obligation to make choices that rid your life of that risk. Dad can be angry at mom and really be

chewing her out, but when the phone rings he does not pick it up and continue in his anger by saying "hello you knucklehead." He very politely says "hello" and deals with the caller on a level of respect. It is matter of choice.

When we cease to respect another life we no longer choose to control anger, and we become potential killers, and we cease to be channels of love. A mother can be blowing her stack at her children when the doorbell rings, and it's the friendly Avon lady. Mt. Vesuvius immediately ceases to erupt. She smiles, and invites her in. They have a lovely visit. By her will she chooses to stop being angry. She chooses instead to be kind and friendly. She didn't need a psychiatrist or therapist. All she needed was a strong enough motivation to chose a different emotion to express. We need to be motivated to chase awful anger out of the town of our life. The next ugly mug is-

## **II. HIDEOUS HATRED.**

The second brother in the terrible trinity of hostility is just a little worse than awful anger. Anger is an inner attitude, and it may remain quiet and unseen, but hatred comes out into the open and expresses hostility in name calling. Here is one sin most of us can't feel comfortable about, for it is not likely any of us have ever called another Raca. As a matter of fact, with all of the swearing so common in our culture, I have never heard anyone call anyone else Raca. It sounds like we have found a sin that has become extinct. Not so! A number of English words convey its meaning. If you have ever referred to another as an empty headed brainless idiot, or a stupid numskull of a blockhead, you have committed this sin.

Now, of course, these terms are used in fun also, and not as serious expressions of how you feel. Jesus is dealing here with the spirit of murder, and this is referring to those who call others this name in bitter hatred. They mean by this that they judge the person to be worthless, and of no value. Insults are a part of our culture. Most of the humor in sitcoms would be gone without insults. They seem so funny as we watch and hear. One woman asked another woman whose husband was being so loud at a party, "What does your husband want to be when he grows up?" That can be innocent fun, but if you really call a man a brainless idiot before his friends, that can kill his spirit and injure his soul, and you are guilty of the spirit of murder. Pharisees can rip a man to ribbons, and destroy his reputation, and break his heart with lies and slander, but they feel okay because they do not kill him. This is the kind of respectable sinner Jesus came to judge by this sermon.

Such a spirit eliminates love, for you cannot respect and love what you despise as worthless. This attitude toward a man who is made in the image of God is a spirit equal to murder. The law forbids you to kill a man, but Jesus goes beyond that, and He forbids you to hate a man, for if you never hate him, you will never kill him. Prevent hatred and you prevent murder, and thereby you fulfill the law as God intended.

Hideous hatred, even if he does not murder anyone, is still a product of darkness, for he despises the goal of God to love and redeem man. Hatred says he is not worth redeeming, and so as far as the kingdom of God goes he must be brought to judgment.

Anger goes before the local court, but hatred has to go before the Sanhedrin, the supreme court, for he is a more serious offender of the spirit of the law.

Hatred can feel very self-righteous because it keeps the letter of the law, and it does not murder anyone. The Pharisees hated the Romans, and they hated the sinners, and they hated Jesus, and yet they felt they were God's representatives on earth because they kept the letter of the law. Jesus is saying if you keep the letter but forsake the spirit, you do not represent God, or the kingdom of God. Only those who have respect for the dignity and worth of all men, even though they disagree with you, represent the kingdom of God. This is the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The legalistic Pharisees said, it is only if you kill that you are liable to judgment. Jesus says, if you hate you are already in the same category with the murderer. Even if you don't murder, you are guilty of forsaking the purpose of God. Hideous hatred is all the more hideous because he pretends to represent God, when in fact, he represents the enemy of God. There is no salt and no light in hatred.

Look at the great hatred of the Jews and Arabs. Both are convinced they represent God, but it is a great deception. Hatred is their king, and they murder each other every chance they get. The whole world is kept under tension by their hatred. Both reject the love of Christ, and they are condemned to dwell under the reign of hideous hatred. Either you run this bad dude out of your town, or your town will no longer be included on God's map. The third mug we want to look at is-

### III. CALLOUS CONTEMPT.

Here is the blackest villain of them all, and Jesus says he is in danger of hell fire. This sounds a little radical to us, for fool does not seem to be that terrible a term to us. Fool is a frequent term in the book of Proverbs and we hear it all the time in our culture. It makes us wonder if Jesus is being fair, and making the punishment fit the crime. It is not nice to insult people, but hell fire for this seems out of line with justice. It is like capital punishment for putting a mustache on a public picture of a movie star, or life imprisonment for suggesting that some politician made a stupid decision.

This whole context is a mystery if we do not get below the surface. On the face of it, it makes Jesus look like a hanging judge who has no concept of the value of life. It seems the opposite of loving which is the very thing that Jesus is most anxious to convey. If everyone who calls someone else a fool is in danger of hell fire than hell is going to be fuller than most ever dreamed, and the plan of God will be pretty much of a dud program. Obviously we need to get an understanding of this that makes good sense, and that fits the whole value system of Jesus.

First of all, we need to understand the word hell. It is a term that refers to the valley of Hinnom, which was the garbage dump and incinerator for the city of Jerusalem. The fire burned there perpetually, and this is where the corpse of a criminal who died by capital punishment was thrown. This became the picture of the ultimate destiny of the

lost sinner. It was the worse possible destiny for the Jew. Nothing could be more degrading than to be thrown like a worthless rag into the fire of Hinnom. What this means is that Jesus is giving us an example of reaping what is sown. If you treat people like garbage, you will be treated likewise. If you degrade people, and talk to them with contempt, as if they were refuse, that will be how you are treated. You will be like refuse thrown into the garbage dump. If you push others into the sewer, you will be flushed down the sewer yourself. You will sink to the level on which you treat others. You see, the punishment does fit the crime, just like a glove.

Jesus is implying that the man with this callous contempt will more than likely follow through with his value system and murder someone. If their life is as worthless as garbage, why not get rid of it? Hitler was no mere murderer. A murderer is often motivated by rage, but Hitler set about very methodically to exterminate the Jews. It was a cold and callous contempt for human life that treated man as less than an animal. Hitler treated man like garbage, and that is the way history treats him.

Jesus is saying that the man who thinks and acts on this level will be judged on this level, and will be tossed like a bag of garbage into the fires of Hinnom. This is not the judgment for saying someone is a fool. This is where the saying that someone is fool leads to because it makes you a potential murderer if you really feel that level of contempt for another human being. The lower your feelings fall toward another, the more likely becomes the act of murder. When you reach the level of contempt, you are, for all practical purposes, a murderer. The only things that saves you at this level is lack of opportunity or means. If you had these, you would become a killer.

The level of your love, or lack of it, determines the level of mercy you receive, or lack of it. If I hold my finger on a hot stove for one tenth of a second, I just get a burn I can live with. If I hold it there for a second I will suffer deep pain. If I hold it there longer, I will have severe consequences, even to the point of losing the finger. The degree of my folly will determine the degree of the consequences. That is why Jesus portrays this descending scale where the lowest level, the level of contempt, leads to the worst possible punishment. The eternal hell enters the picture too, for anyone so devoid of love that they have only contempt for human life cannot be saved. They can repent and be changed, but if they die in that state of contempt, they are lost. That is what Jesus is trying to convey here: The terrible danger and destiny of those who do not become channels of love.

The legalist deceives himself. He thinks he can keep the letter of the law and please God. Not so! If you do not fulfill the spirit of the law and love people as God does you do not please God at all. I John 4:20 puts it clearly, "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." There is no separation of loving God and loving man. They are one, and if you do not love both, you love neither. Legalistic righteousness tries to get around this, but loving righteousness accepts this reality, and that is why it alone represents the kingdom of God.

All that is hateful and unloving is to some degree evil. Jesus says we need to be aware

of this, and deal with it in its early stages, and so prevent all the serious consequences of thinking that negative attitudes are alright as long as you don't murder anyone. It is not alright. It is awful, hideous, and callous. The wise and loving Christian deals with the roots and not just the branches; the motives and not just the actions; the causes and not just the effects. This is Jesus' head start program. You catch sin in its early stages and prevent it from becoming active. Why do you do this? Because, if you love Jesus, and His Spirit dwells in you, you live a life where respect for others has won out over contempt for others in this heavy weight fight of respect versus contempt.

## **7. THE NOW LIFE Based on Matt. 5:21-26**

Marguerite Higgins, Pulitzer Prize winner for international reporting, stood by a marine during the Korean War. It was 42 below zero, and the soldier was weary and covered with frozen mud. She asked him, "If I were God and could grant you anything you wished, what would you most like?" He stood motionless for a moment and then raised his head and replied, "Give me tomorrow." In a fear-filled world of uncertainty where there is a big question mark about whether or not man has the sanity to prevent a nuclear holocaust, this is a common choice-give me tomorrow.

On the other hand, Peter Bagdanovich, the well-known director of *The Last Picture Show* and *Paper Moon*, was asked why he makes all his movies of the past. He replied, "I like any time better than now. I just don't like what is happening today. The music bores me, the cars are ugly, the people are dull. So I retreat to the past." In a decaying world where so much of what was once good is being lost by the modern mania for the new at any cost, this is the choice of millions-give me yesterday.

Each of us can identify with both choices, for they are the only two directions anybody can go to escape today. Retreat to the past, or march forward into the future. Each choice has its values that can be defended, but Jesus in the Sermon On The Mount rejects them both. Instead, Jesus chooses to third alternative, the one the other two are trying avoid. He says, don't escape to yesterday or tomorrow, but stand fast, and live for today. Now is where its at.

The Lord's Prayer in chapter 6 is a now prayer. Give us this day our daily bread. All of its petitions are for now. Hallowed be your name-now. Thy kingdom come now. Thy will be done on earth-now. Forgive us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, not eventually, but now, today. The Christian life is a now life. Jesus began this sermon with the beatitudes, and you will notice they are not past or future, they are present. Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are the meek; blessed are the merciful, etc. All of them deal with the now and not the some day. Not, blessed will be, but blessed are. The Christian life is to be a blessed life now.

The whole emphasis in this sermon on prevention is based on the now principle. You

**do not wait until your anger becomes murderous hatred to deal with it. You control it when it is developing right now. You don't wait until lust is boiling passion to deal with it. It is not, get them while they are hot when it comes to emotions, but get them while there warm, or even cool. You don't give the germs of evil a chance to develop and create infection, but you go after them now. Catch the disease in its early stages, and stop it before it progresses. Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their country, and their souls as well. Now is always the best time when it comes to prevention. The best time to do anything is between yesterday and tomorrow.**

**In this passage Jesus gives some specific examples of how the now principle is applied. The gist of them is this: Little problems don't tend to fade away, but tend to grow and become bigger, and so deal with them now when they are small, and not later. If you have a bad relationship developing with someone, you don't wait until resentment has time to fester and make healing hard. You don't say after I worship God on Sunday, I'll try to patch it up on Monday. That is the give me tomorrow choice, and Jesus says don't make that choice. Drop what you were doing, and settle the matter today. Now is always the best time to do what prevents evil from building a stronger wall. "Don't let the sun go down upon your wrath." Why not? Because you are choosing procrastination as a method of dealing with sin, and it is not a wise choice. Deal with your anger today, and prevent all of the sorrow it can produce when you let it go another day.**

**In verse 25 Jesus says, don't wait until you get to court to settle a conflict. This is obviously a case where the accused knows he is guilty. Do the right thing now says Jesus. Quickly agree with your accuser, and settle the issue out of court. If you procrastinate and let the thing drag on into tomorrow, you will suffer the consequences tomorrow. Get your punishment over today by settling the issue today. This is the only wise choice. There are endless court cases that waste years and millions of dollars, and magnify the miseries of everybody involved, that could have been settled in an hour if people were wise enough to choose the now way.**

**The whole point of Jesus in the radical statements of verses 29 and 30 about gouging out your eye, and cutting off your hand, is not to promote mutilation of the body, but to give emphasis to the importance of the now and prevention. Don't wait for the future day of judgment to let God deal with your rebellious body. Deal with it yourself, and do it now. Bring it under your control, and choose to regulate its activities now. It is folly to wait. The wise are into the discipline of today. In chapter 6 Jesus deals with all of the anxieties of life, and He says in verse 34, summing it all up, "Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own." Just seek God's kingdom and His righteousness today, and life will be okay.**

**One last illustration of this theme is in 7:12. Jesus gives us the Golden Rule that sums up the Law and the Prophets. "Do unto others what you would have them do to you." That is the essence of the victorious life. You live in the here and now, and you do today in your relationships with others what you want them to do to you. The Golden Rule is golden because it is a rule as relevant as the golden sun that shines today, and each day. It is a rule for living, not in the past, or in the future, but today.**

**The priest and the Levite, who walked by the wounded man on the road said, give me tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow I will not be so busy, and I can get involved in such an inconvenience, but not today. The Good Samaritan was good, and what Jesus expects the Christian to be, because he was a now man. He responded in love now, because the need was now, and tomorrow would too late. Jesus is not saying we can do everything at once, but He is saying we can do something at once, and it is this strategy of living in the now that will fulfill the past and enrich the future.**

**If the new year is to be a year of growth and progress, and a year of pleasing God by doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven, then it will have to be a year in which we grasp the importance of the now life. When does a decaying world most need salt? Now! When does a dark world most need light? Now! The popular song of the 70's said, "What the world needs now is love sweet love." If now is when I have lost my keys in the dark, now is when I need the light. Tomorrow's light is of no value. If now is when the road is icy, now is when we need the salt. The point is, the need is always now, therefore, the solution, to be relevant, must also be always now, and so the Christian life must be a now life.**

**Christians fall into the same traps everybody else does. The trap of the good old days, or of the glorious days of the future. Both can rob us of the real, which is the now. We tend to think of teaching and learning as preparation for the future. It is that, to be sure, but we miss the best of what education is unless we see its value for the now. All we can know of God and His will is for today. It is like our daily bread. It is not for the future only, it is for living today. It is now food so we can live for God today, and enjoy our relationship to Him, and the more abundant life.**

**Yes, it is all good for the future, but it is also good for today, and it is only by redeeming the now that we can prepare for the future. The great French General, Marshall Lyoutey, asked his gardener to plant a tree in Algeria. The gardener objected that it was a slow growing tree and would not mature for a 100 years. In that case the General said, there is no time to lose-plant it now. Waiting is not the solution, for now it the time to get moving. Robert Browning was right when he wrote, "Put in the plow and plant the great hereafter in the now." Not all of us get into the mating game, but rare as the dodo bird are those who escape the waiting game, the putting off of life until tomorrow.**

**A New York psychologist sent out letters to 3,000 men and women picked by random from the phone book. The letter asked only one brief question, "What have you to live for?" The answer was to be very brief. He was shocked that 2,000 of them responded with an answer. More shocking was the nature of the answers. Over 90% of them were just enduring the present while they waited for the future.**

**They were waiting for their marriage to improve.  
They were waiting for their children to grow up.  
They were waiting to become grandparents.  
They were waiting to retire.  
They were waiting to take their dream trip.**



**They were waiting always for something good and exciting to happen. Practically everyone was giving up today, waiting for the golden tomorrow, and never stopping to recognize that today is the tomorrow they waited for yesterday.**

**It is not wrong and foolish to hope and dream, but when this becomes the dominate focus of life, it is a foolish choice that robs people of God's best. We all have many things we must wait for, and it is legitimate to do so, and necessary, but to neglect the now in our hand for the tomorrow in our heart is to have a short in our head. Jesus is saying, get wired right and recognize that today is the day of salvation, and today is the day of sanctification and service, and today is the day to enter into all the blessings that God wants us to experience. Must we wait for everything? Is life all in the future? Not so, says Jesus. He came that we might have abundant life; not just hope for it in the future, but have it now, in this life, today.**

**The future is bright with God's promises, but the present can be made bright with the fulfillment of His promises. The poet asks a good question-why not now?**

**There's a song that faith can sing,  
Why not now?  
There's a hope a friend may bring,  
Why not now?  
Hoarding the sunshine does not pay,  
Joy was meant to give away,  
Why not share your gifts today?  
Why not now?**

**There are burdens love may lift,  
Why not now?  
Kindness bears a golden gift,  
Why not now?  
Earth has never known a creed  
Like a pure unselfish deed,  
Hearts are aching, give a heed,  
Why not now?**

**Alfred Grant Walton**

**The list could go on and on. Each of us could add specifics for the coming year. If I am ever going to read the Bible through-Why not now? If I am ever going to share my faith with my friends or neighbors-Why not now? If I am ever going to obey Christ in some area of my life-Why not now? Now is always the best time to do what is good and right and pleasing to Christ. There is no better time than now.**

**Reality therapy is a new concept which says, so what if you had a rotten past that conditioned you to all kinds of negative behavior and thinking. Right now you are a free and responsible person able to choose what you want to be. You do not have to be bound by the past. That is what the message of the Bible is about too. God has given us the ability to choose an alternate path. Our grandfather and father may have walked in a certain path, but we are free to choose a different path. That is what Jesus is saying over**

and over in this sermon. You have heard that it was said by men of old, but now I say to you. Jesus says, there is a new and a now way to go that fulfills the old, and is superior to it.

Christians are to be realistic and recognize that now has the greatest potential for life. I can't change the past, and I can't claim the future, but I can choose the now, and in the now reap the harvest of the past, and sow the seeds for the future. God wants us, not wishing for the past, nor waiting for the future, but working in the now.

In the name of God advancing,  
Plow, and sow, and labor now;  
Let there be when evening cometh,  
Honest sweat upon the brow.

And the master shall come smiling  
When work stops at set of sun,  
Saying as He pays the wages,  
Good and faithful man-well done.  
Author unknown

Victories do not come to those who will someday conquer, but to those who conquer now. The alcoholic who wins the battle is not the one who says, "I will stop someday," but the one who says, "I will stop now-not forever, but today, and thus, day by day, victory in the now will be the way to go into the future." Someone said, "If you want to know what you were in the past, look at yourself now. If you want to know what you will be in the future, look at yourself now." Now is the only time you can deal with realistically, for now is all you really have. Wise is the man who recognizes this, and Jesus expects His followers to be wise now people.

When is the best time to do what is right? Jesus says, the answer is now. The Pharisees said, not so, for there is a time for everything, and they legalistically ruled out doing what is right and good if the now was not convenient. Wait till tomorrow was their advice to Jesus when He healed people on the Sabbath. Don't do it now, for now is to be devoted to keeping other rules and regulations. They wanted to keep life all compartmentalized, but life will not cooperate. Just as children today won't always get sick between 9 and 5, so problems in life never confine themselves to the convenient time for solution. Jesus said, you deal with the now problems with now solutions, and He healed people on the Sabbath, because they needed healing on the Sabbath. He was a now healer, and not a later healer.

One of the reasons grandfathers are often more loving than fathers is because grandfathers are more often now people, and fathers are more often later people. Loving people are now people. I have been in both roles, and I know that now is better than later. Parents just do not realize how fast their children grow up. Grandparents do, for they have been there, and that is why they tend to be now people, for they know it is so true, its now or never.

**Jesus is trying to help us learn this lesson before we waste a good chunk of our life. If we will just believe Him, and become people who focus on the now, we will be more effective Christians. The way you live with eternity's values in view is by recognizing that anything that is a good goal to achieve in life, is a goal you must strive for now. And unknown author wrote,**

**If you have hard work to do, do it now.  
Today the skies are clear and blue,  
Tomorrow clouds may come into view,  
Yesterday is not for you; do it now.**

**If you have a song to sing, sing it now.  
Let the notes of gladness ring  
Clear as song of bird in Spring,  
Let every day some music bring; sing it now.**

**If you have kind words to say, say them now.  
Tomorrow may not come your way.  
Do a kindness while you may,  
Loved ones will not always stay; say them now.**

**If you have a smile to show, show it now,  
Make hearts happy, roses grow,  
Let friends around you know  
The love you have before they go; show it now.**

**Jesus practiced what He preached, and refused to even wait a day to meet needs that were now needs. Many whom Jesus healed could have waited another day. Some of them had already suffered for years, but Jesus said, when it is in your power to meet a need now and do good, love demands that you do it now. To wait for the sake of a law, a tradition, a ceremony, or custom, is to say that all of these things are of more value than a person. Jesus rejects that value system. Nothing is Christlike that treats persons as secondary to anything, or to anyone, but God Himself. With this kind of value system, where you put people first, you become a now person living the now life.**

**This being the case, Satan's most successful strategy is to get the Christian to miss God's best by procrastination. It is not only the thief of time, it is the thief of every good value God has for your life. If you wait until it is convenient to do the will of God, you will seldom get it done. The most persistent temptation of life is to wait for a more convenient time. Satan well knows that time may never come.**

**William Wilberforce played a major role in destroying the slave trade in England. Many of his closest friends came to him suggesting that he shelve the matter until the Napoleonic wars were over. He was wise enough to see the folly of waiting. If it's God's will to fight this evil, then it has to be fought now, was his attitude, and he tackled it, and got the job done. He may not have done so had he waited.**

**It is faith in the ultimate victory that enables the Christian to be an optimist in the now, even when the now is negative. Ralph Waldo Emerson had this kind of faith. When fire was destroying his priceless library of rare books, many of them autographed by world-famous authors, he stood and calmly watched it perish. His friend, Luisa May Alcott, came to his side to console him, but he responded, "Never mind Luisa, what a beautiful blaze it makes! We'll enjoy that now."**

**The now life makes the past and the future relevant and practical, for it takes the values of these two zones we cannot touch, and applies them in the only zone we can touch-the now. The now life reaches back into the past, and takes all that God has done, and reaches out into the future, and takes all that God promises to do, and with all of this faith and hope, builds a foundation on which one can stand with a sense of security and optimism knowing that nothing can change what God has done, and nothing can alter what God will do. Charles Elliot spoke with the mind of Christ when he said, "The best way to secure future happiness is to be as happy as is rightfully possible today. Today is a precious gift. Use it well."**

**The question is often asked, "Why are there so many unfinished saints?" Why is it nearly 2000 years after grace has been merited to sanctify tens of thousand of worlds like ours, so few have become mature in Christ, able to live the victorious Christian life? The answer is, because we do not listen to Christ in this Sermon On The Mount. Nor do we listen to Paul who makes it clear in II Cor. 6:2, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." People tend to live too much in the past, which can never return, or in the future which may not even be, and so they miss the only place they can live for Christ-the now.**

**C. S. Lewis in Christian Behavior points out that good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the things you do in the now, and everyday little things, are of great importance. He writes, "The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed up. And apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible." This is what Jesus is saying in our text. The victorious life is the now life. It is the life where you don't just drift, but take decisive action to prevent evil in all of its forms from gaining power in your life. The only way you can promote a good harvest is to prevent the weeds and bugs that will hinder the harvest. The only way you can promote your own happy future is to prevent now those evils that can rob you of that future.**

**It is of interest that modern psychiatry is catching up with Jesus, and recognizing that the solution to the messed up mind is not in the past, but in the now. Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist, said, there is a difference between the psychology of Freud and myself. He finds the basis for neurosis in the past, in childhood. I find it in the present. I ask, what is the responsibility from which this patient is retreating? Why is he dodging out of life into illness?" Modern psychiatry is leading people right back to the Sermon On The Mount. Live the now life that Jesus describes. Act now to deal with your inner sins, and prevent external acts of evil, and you will not get your life messed up. It is**

simply a matter of recognizing what even the pagan poet that Paul quotes recognized, which is, "In Him we live and move and have our being." The Eternal Now-The Triune God is our ever present context of living. In God all is now, for there is no past or future in eternity. It is always now, and if we could only be aware of this, and deal with all of our problems and weaknesses now, we could prevent so much of life's sin and sorrow.

Jesus ends the Sermon On The Mount with a story about a wise and foolish man. The future held the same thing in store for both of them. It was rain, wind, and the flood. The difference between them was what they did in the present. The wise man built on the rock, and the foolish man on the sand. It is the choices you make now that determines how you will fare in the future. The only way to prepare for the future is to choose to do what is wise in the now. Jesus practiced this, and if you read Matt. 8 you will see He was no arm chair philosopher. He left the mountain on which He preached this sermon, and that very day he lived the now life. He healed a leper, and a paralyzed servant of a Centurion. He raised up Peter's mother-in-law, and then that evening he ministered to a host of sick and demon possessed people.

Joseph Wood Krutch wrote, "All postponements are potentially dangerous, and to postpone life itself is the most stupendous of follies. One can no more live in the future than one can live in some good old days of the past. One must live now or not at all, and not to live at all is the greatest of mistakes." Deitrich Bonhoeffer, the famous pastor imprisoned by Hitler, did not know he would be executed by the Nazi's in 1945, but he knew it was a real possibility. Yet, shortly before he died he wrote this poem to God-

"With every power for good to stay and guide me,  
Comforted and inspired beyond all fear,  
I'll live these days with you in thought beside me,  
And pass with you, into the coming year.

That is the way Christ wants us all to move into the coming year. It is with the attitude that whatever the future holds, be it good or ill, I choose not to escape into the past or the future, but to live the now life.

## **8. THE LURE AND CURE OF LUST Based on Matt. 5:27-30**

Show me the man who has never looked at a woman with lust, and I'll show you a man with a white cane who was blind from birth. None but a blind man could get through life and not be captivated by God's crowning work of creation-woman. Anyone with an ounce of artistic appreciation knows there are few, if any, more appealing sites than a well formed female. This is not the conviction of dirty old men only, but it represents the mind of men of every age, place, and race; godly and ungodly alike.

**Art Buchwald, the popular secular newspaper columnist, told of his experience at a Washington dinner party. He had every intention of being a perfect gentleman at this party, but the woman to his right wore a black net pajama top with a neckline that plunged down, he says, to heaven knows where, and the blouse was held up by only two tiny strings that looked like they would break any minute. He writes, "God knows we've been sinners and most men are trying to change their attitudes toward women. But when you have nothing but bare backs and cleavage to stare at during dinner, how on earth can any man keep his mind on Henry Kissinger?"**

**We could dismiss that as the struggle of the secular man, but it won't work. The testimony of godly men through the ages is that the female body stimulates their lust. Many women resent David for his lust after Bathsheba when he saw her bathing, and for his foolish and sinful behavior that led him into adultery and murder. Despicable as it was, most men do not despise David, for they know in their hearts that in that same situation they may have done the same stupid thing under the lure of lust. Many godly men have done the same thing, and many who haven't know it is an ever present possibility.**

**Charles Swindoll, one of the most popular preachers today, always makes sure there is a desk between him and the women he counsels, for he writes, "I simply recognize that being a man, temptation is always on the back burner waiting to singe me." In his little booklet on Resisting The Lure Of Lust, he writes, "Non-Christians and Christians alike wrestle with its pressure and its persistence throughout their lives. Some think that getting married will cause temptation to flee. It doesn't. Others have tried isolation. But sensual imagination goes with them, fighting and clawing for attention and gratification. Not even being called into Christian service helps. Ask any whose career is in the Lord's work. Temptation is there relentlessly pleading for satisfaction." Swindoll is saying, there is no escape from lust. There is no place to go, and no something to become, that will take you out of the range of the arrows of forbidden desire.**

**This goes for women as well. Jesus does not mention women lusting for men, for at that point in history women did not have the power and freedom. They were dominated by men. But whenever women have had the power and freedom to be sexual aggressors they have exhibited the same lust as men. One of the strongest examples of a lust led person in the Bible is that of Potipher's wife. She admired the handsome servant her husband had brought into the home, and one day when Joseph was home alone with her she said in Gen. 39:7, "Come to bed with me." That is what you call the direct approach, and only by the grace of God did Joseph escape her clutches.**

**We live in a period of time when the female is nearly, if not clearly, equal with the male in sexual lust. This is no proof it is the end of hope for the human race, however, for it has happened before. Martin Luther wrote of what was going on at the University of Wittenberg in 1544. "The race of girls is getting bold, and run after the fellows into their rooms and chambers and wherever they can, and offer them their free love." Sex was not discovered in the 20th century. It has been a major problem throughout the history of mankind, and nobody escapes the power and influence of lust. Not everybody idolizes it and make it a god, but everybody must reckon with its presence.**

**L. Nelson Bell, father-in-law of Billy Graham, and a great preacher and author for many years in Christianity Today, wrote on the imagination and its potential for lust. He wrote, "It is, even for the true Christian the last frontier to surrender to the cleansing and redemptive work of the living Christ." This is equivalent to saying, it is a never ending battle for the Christian. Sometimes sickness, psychological handicaps, and old age set people free from this conflict, but for the majority there is no discharge from the war of the spirit with the flesh. Martin Luther said, "If no other work was commanded than chasteness, we would all have enough to do, so dangerous and raging a vice is unchasteness."**

**The facts of life and history force us to recognize there is no moral majority when it comes to lust. Before Jesus gave his Sermon on the Mount there was a chance for a moral majority to exist on this issue. As long as adultery was limited to an act of sex with a woman not your mate, the majority of men could be innocent. That is still true today even in our sexual revolution. The majority of mates are faithful, but Jesus changed the rules in this passage. He thrusts the majority of the human race into the camp of the guilty.**

**Jesus says that to look at a woman with lust, that is with a strong desire, is to be guilty of adultery. That means the millions of men and women who have overcome temptation, and have never been unfaithful to their mates, but who have looked at others with lust are guilty of adultery. This is not a pleasant message, and the result is, out of many thousands of indexed sermons, there is not one that deals with this text. Jesus is being too radical here. He apparently never read the book How To Win Friends And Influence People. It is no wonder the Pharisees wanted Him out of the picture. He just made the majority of the human race murderers by making anger equivalent to murder, and now He makes the majority adulterers by making lust equivalent to adultery.**

**Teachings like this totally shatter the whole foundation for legalistic righteousness. You may be able to avoid a lot of sins by legalism, but Jesus is saying you can't avoid sin. You can pretend you are really righteous because you have never murdered, or gone to bed with another man's wife, but Jesus takes away the facade and says, but look at the anger and hatred for men that thrives in your breast; look at the lust that rages there. You have cleaned the outside of the cup, but inside it is still filthy. You can plead not guilty on the basis of the external evidence, but let the jury see the movies of your mind, and you are hung. The law does not go deep enough, for it only deals with acts. Jesus goes deeper, for He deals with attitudes.**

**The whole point of Jesus is, that external legalistic righteousness just won't cut it. The Pharisees were destroying true religion by their hypocrisy and external show. True religion, and a relationship to God that pleases Him is one where men are honest about their sin, and seek His help to conquer it. Jesus knew what He was doing when He destroyed all ground to stand on for legalistic righteousness. He knew by these statements He was making murder and adultery, for all practical purposes, universal. Jesus had just described a stubborn man who refused to agree with his accuser. He could only insist on his innocence. Now Jesus accuses practically everyone of being guilty of adultery. The question is, will we be stubborn and fight this accusation all the**

way to the judgment, or will we submit, and admit our guilt? Jesus wants us to escape the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and be honest about our inner sinful nature.

A child misunderstood the seventh commandment, and recited it, "Thou shalt not admit adultery." This was the problem with the Pharisees. They would not admit to their guilt. This was David's problem. He refused to admit his guilt. This is the problem with almost everyone. We refuse to admit that our lust makes us guilty. When Jimmy Carter was president he confessed publicly that he had lust. This was no surprise, but the fact that he admitted it was the surprise. We do not like to admit that all of us are guilty. But that is precisely what Jesus is forcing us to do. He knew that everybody gets angry at sometime. He knew that everybody struggles with lust at times. We know He knew this by the way He handled the situation with the woman brought to Him who had been taken in the very act of adultery.

He said to all of those religious leaders, who in self-righteousness were ready to stone her, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." Then instead of leaping out of the way to avoid the flying rocks, He knelt to write on the ground before the accused. He knew it was not a risky gamble, for He knew they were men, and men do not live that long and escape lust. Everyone of them walked away, and Jesus knew they would. For He knew they were guilty, and He knew they knew they were guilty. Christopher Sykes was right when he said, "Of the seven deadly sins, lust is the only one about which all mankind (with very few exceptions), knows something from experience."

Most everyone has had the experience of going to a restaurant with others, and when they get their order, it looks better than you ordered, and you often wish you had what they have. It is the grass looks greener on the other side of the fence feeling. It is just a part of our human nature to desire what we do not have. Lust is one of these desires. It starts at puberty, and that is when most boys begin their battle with lust. The girl next door, the attractive teacher, the objects of lust are everywhere. And now in our culture there is the added temptation of movies, magazines, and the computer. It is at this stage of the battle that boys see the female, not as a person, but as a thing. If they do not control their sex drive, and girls do not help them control it by resisting their advances, they may never learn what love is, but spend the rest of their lives under the dominion of lust.

Marlyn Monroe said, "I hate being a thing." She was a sex symbol, and a symbol is a thing. She never really felt loved as a person, but only used like a thing. If only youth could see that lust controlled can lead to love. But lust unleashed and freely expressed leads to becoming locked into an immature relationship of the sexes. Some men never know love for the person of a woman because they are locked in on lust for women. Women can never be equal to them, for women are things, and only objects of gratification. Quick sex does not build love, it destroys it. It is sex controlled that builds love.

Once a man has robbed himself of the power to relate to a woman as a person, he has robbed himself of the potential of love. He will be reduced to a life on the level of lust where self-centered pleasure is all that sex will ever mean. I have read of preachers who



have been locked in at this level, and it is tragic, for they cannot love over half the human race. They can only lust, and life is so much tougher a battle without love for persons to help you in the fight against lust. It is one of life's great paradoxes that those who let lust have its way, and have sex whenever, and with whomever, lose the highest value of sex. Those who control lust, and prevent promiscuous expressions of it by keeping it exclusive, come to enjoy sex on the highest level as God intended. Lust is the wrong use of that which rightly used is love.

It is important that we do not develop negative attitudes on sex because of our battle with lust. The papers recently revealed that many of the sex offenders in our culture are not strange freakish people, but respectable professionals. They are people like teachers, pastors, doctors, and policemen. You can count on it, they are also people who repressed their lust, they refuse to admit the reality of it in their lives. Had they been honest about their lust they may have been able to prevent its dangers. The same thing has happened all through history. Many Christians leaders of the early Catholic Church did not want to admit that Mary had sex like any normal married woman, and so they developed the doctrine of her perpetual virginity. The other children in the home were cousins and not hers they said.

If artificial insemination would have existed then, the church probably would have made it a sin not to have babies that way. They could thereby eliminate sex even for marriage. This suppression of sex, and glorification of the non-sexual priest and nun led to lust overflowing its banks in a flood of immorality. The hypocrisy of pretending to be non-sexual beings has never been an effective weapon against lust. The bleeding Pharisees were called that because they frequently ran into walls and fell down injuring themselves, because they tried to avoid looking at women. This only made them more lust conscious than their non-bleeding brothers.

If we go back to the Puritan leaders who burned so many witches at the stake, we see that it was a time of sexual suppression. People were pretending sex did not exist. They put cloth over the bare legs of the tables even, and a book written by a woman was not permitted to be set along side a book written by a man. Witch burning became a popular pastime, for the respectable leaders of that society. It was because the witches had to be examined nude, and then they were burned at the stake nude. This was a motivation to find more and more witches to examine. Their refusal to deal with their lust honestly produced very dishonest and cruel expressions of it. Women are just as degraded when sex is suppressed as when it is too openly expressed. Balance is the only way to wisdom.

What is lust? It is a good thing gone to an extreme. The word for lust is *epithumeo*. It is a word used for all kinds of strong desire both good and bad. Desire is not evil in itself. It is a normal part of life. Lust is a desire to satisfy the sex drive outside of the boundaries that God has set. He set boundaries, not because He is a killjoy, and does not want men to enjoy His gift, but because limitations is what gives value to His gift. Sex without boundaries is like a river without boundaries. It is no longer a beautiful and beneficial gift of nature, but it is a beastly judgment of nature that floods and destroys. We all have cars and other things with engines that warn us about overfill. Too much of a good thing is a bad thing, and that is what lust is. It is too much of a good thing. Lust is

to sex what gluttony is to the enjoyment of food. It is the sex drive trying to go beyond its rightful limits, and when it does it destroys rather than build.

Love is willing to be limited, and become exclusive, and make a commitment for better or worse. Lust wants no part of confinement, and it says for better only, and when the pleasure fades it moves on. The self is all that matters in lust. The other is only an object to be used. Lust oriented sex is strictly a me me me affair, and not an us experience. It is not true that everything you most enjoy in life is a sin. It is the excess of what you enjoy that is sin. Eating is no sin; sex is no sin, and anger is no sin. It is the excess of these that become sin. Few will argue about the lure of lust, and its power in our lives, but many question the cure, for it sounds like such bitter medicine.

Jesus takes a very radical approach to solving the problem of lust. The fact that you seldom see a one eyed, one handed man is evidence that the solution is nowhere nearly as wide spread as the problem. Only a few in history have considered that Jesus meant for us to literally gouge out our right eye and cut off our right hand. If you took it literally, the whole world would become a center for the handicapped. Normal people with both eyes and both hands would become freaks that we could only see in side shows.

The strongest Bible literalists do not take this solution literally, because it is obvious self-mutilation. This would not solve the problem at all. The whole point of Jesus is that sin is an inner problem, and so an external solution would not touch it anymore than cleaning the outside of the cup would make the inside clean. A literal obedience to Christ here would still leave you with a left eye, left handed man, and I have never read any study that even hinted that lefty's are not as lusty.

Origen, the great church father, realized the cutting off of a hand and gouging out of an eye was of no real value, and so he solved his lust problem by castration. He remained a great preacher and theologian, but his solution was not acceptable, and it was condemned by the church as out of the will of God. As universal as lust is the universal agreement is that Jesus does not want us to fight lust by literal self-surgery. But because we are not to take Jesus literally, does not mean we are not to take Him seriously. Jesus is using radical language to get our attention focused on the importance of being very serious with this matter of lust.

How do we deal with it? The answer of Jesus in these radical words is in essence-prevent it. Not the lust, for that is inevitable, but the consequences of lust can be prevented. It parallels the issue of anger and murder. You can't avoid anger, for it is part of life, but you can control it and prevent it from destroying yourself, and your relationships to others. So it is with lust. You can't avoid lust, but you can prevent it from hurting your life, and the life of others. Luther said, "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from building a nest in your hair." That is what Jesus is saying here. We have a choice, and we are to choose to control those things which cause lust to lead us into dangerous actions. Whatever causes you to sin is the culprit you focus on, and you prevent that cause from having its effects. You don't let life just happen to you. You take control and chose what life is going to be.

**If the eye gate is the gate that leads you to lose control, you have the responsibility to cut off that channel of temptation. You will not be relieved of that responsibility just because the world is full of pornography, and sensual TV and movies. You have a choice, and you are accountable for your choices. If you choose to open that gate and let lust lead you into sin, you were just like the stubborn man in the previous paragraph, and like him you will have to pay the bitter price for your stubborn rejection of Christ's advice.**

**The same principle applies to the touch gate. If your lust is stimulated by touch to the point of losing control, and yet you still touch members of the opposite sex in ways that promote it, you are deliberately toying with the fire that can consume you. Jesus says to cut it out. Cut off any activity that opens up the possibility of your lust to go out of control and do its deadly damage. Seeing and touching are the two most common ways that people are led into acts of immorality, and that is why Jesus focuses on the eye and the hand. People vary as to their sensitivity in these areas. There are Christian men who can go into houses of prostitution and witness to the women. This is rare, but the point is, some can do dangerous things without losing control. This does not mean it is an activity that most can be involved in. Each person must know what their limitations are when it comes to lust.**

**I am not responsible for you, nor you for me. I must know where I face risk, and make choices that cut off those things which lead me to lose of control. If a man gets turned on by taking his secretary out to lunch, he has a responsibility to cut it out. If the secretary gets turned on by it, she is to cut it out. The point is, everybody knows when lust is being stirred up, and at that point one is responsible to sacrifice the lesser for the preservation of the greater. That is the principle in Jesus' solution. You lose an eye or a hand to save the whole body.**

**That is the principle behind surgery, and behind the prevention of sin. It is a law of life. The lizard, or the lobster, will lose a tail or a claw in order to escape with their life. A part of the forest will be deliberately burned in order to save the whole forest. The chess player will sacrifice, not only his pawn, but even more valuable pieces to save his king. Jesus says pay the price necessary to escape the price you will have to pay if you let lust have its way. Give up part of your life to preserve the whole. Many a man has enjoyed his flirting with another woman, and so he refuses to give it up. The price he pays is sometimes the last penny. It cost him his family, his home, and his reputation. All that he most treasured in life is lost because he would not sacrifice a part. They refuse to give up the part, and ended up forced to give up the whole. We are not talking about dirty old men, but about godly people.**

**The Bible makes it clear that those who stand must beware lest they fall. There is nobody immune to the dangers of lust. Charles Swindoll tells of his experience.**

**"I remember a conference I addressed. I was getting on the hotel elevator-alone as usual-and two women followed me on. I smiled and said, "Hi," punched my floor, six, and said, "What floor would you like?" They said, "Oh, six would be fine." suddenly felt a little flattered. But it was remarkable what happened between the first floor and the sixth. I had a**

momentary fantasy, but then God pulled a shade between the three of us, and on that shade I could read as clear as day-"Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If we let God protect us, He will. God pulled the shade right when I really needed it."

He chose to cut out a fraction of his life to preserve the whole. He sacrificed the temporary for the sake of the permanent. He gave up the shiny case, but kept the diamond. Honestly about your lust is what Jesus demands of us. It is because this gives us the edge over the enemy. We know where we are, and we know our weakness, and so we know when we are under attack. Honesty enables you to fight the enemy on your home field. If you wait until your lust devises a plan, and you are involved with a forbidden partner, you may be at the point of no return. You avoid this by recognizing your sin does not begin in the motel room, but in your heart. If you fight it there, you can prevent the motel scene from every happening.

We do not know if Jesus had lust or not. The Bible says He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin. It is matter of debate, and there is no certainty, but if He did, we know He conquered it in His mind, and prevented it from leading to any sin.

The Christian does not escape sin in his heart. He is not innocent at all, for in his heart he hates, and he lusts, and he knows he is guilty of murder and adultery, but he keeps his sin on a level where the forgiveness of God covers it all, and no permanent damage is done. Once the anger or lust is allowed to become acts of sin they can still be forgiven, but then even the grace of God and the blood of Christ cannot remove the scars, and all the evil consequences that may result. David was forgiven, but he suffered the scars of his fall for the rest of his life.

Those who fall are not necessarily more lustful than those who do not. Many who live a lifetime of faithfulness to their mates have a strong sex drive, and they face the battle of lust equally as strong as those who yield. What makes the difference? It is the wisdom of obeying their Lord. They build on the rock, and so they are ready for the storm. They are not better, but they are wiser. They know Jesus is right, and so they heed His counsel, and they pay the price of obedience. They know this is the best deal that can be made.

Only you can prevent forest fires the signs use to say. Jesus is saying to us all: Only you can prevent the fires of lust from burning out of control. Sex was designed by God to build lives, and not destroy them, and so cut off, and block out, and make the sacrifice necessary to limit lust to where you can control it. The lure is real, but so is the cure, and when you keep them both in balance, sex can play a very positive role in your life, and not be a source of offense to God or man.

How was all this suppose to be helpful by being pronounced guilty? It is good because it eliminates the basis for hypocritical righteousness. You don't have to pretend you are not a sinner, and not affected by the sensual world. You are guilty of lust, and you know it, and God knows it, and Jesus knows it. Now we can get down to the serious business of preventing this acknowledged power from doing damage to lives and relationships. Love

says, because I have lust, and it can hurt people that I love, I must take serious the matter of keeping it under control. Love make wise choices to cut out those things that are high risk. The lure of lust will fail when we have our focus on the love that will prevail.

## **9. THE CAUSE AND CURE OF DIVORCE Based on Matt. 5:31-32**

Jo Fleming in her book *His Affair* reveals that almost every sinful emotion and action known to man is kindled by lust that is not controlled. Her husband of 26 years went to the apartment of a woman he worked with to return some books. This was an action he could have avoided, but he chose not to. They had an affair, and sometime later she discovered it, and was devastated. She writes of that day she learned of his unfaithfulness. "Nothing will ever be the same again. Inside my head I am screaming, screaming, screaming. Dear God let me die....give me oblivion. Please! Please! I can't stand the pain, I can't live, I want to die, now, this minute."

The book is a diary of her journey through the hell of grief and back. It is a story of the human heart, and its capability of all the evil's Jesus deals with in the Sermon On The Mount, and especially this context of chapter 5. She experienced anger, hatred, thoughts of murder and suicide, revenge, adultery and divorce. Forbidden sex is so glamorized in our culture that people are blind to the terrible consequences, and the tremendous cost involved. Her husband had to go through the pits of guilt as she went through the pits of grief. Both suffered months of depression. But finally healing began to take place, and they were able to talk about the cause of the affair. They discovered true intimacy as they shared their self-fears and doubts, and talked to each other as never before about their marriage.

There was much weeping, but she stopped praying for a fatal disease to remove her from the battle. They made it without a divorce, but many do not. In fact, the number one cause of divorce all through history has been lust. When I think of the people I have counseled with about divorce, the common factor in all of them is lust for another partner, and my reading confirms my experience. This is not the only cause for divorce, but it is the primary cause. It is no accident that Jesus deals with divorce immediately after the subject of lust. They go together like love and marriage, the destructive duo-lust and divorce, and the constructive duo-love and marriage. Which duo becomes the determining factor in your life largely depends on what you do with your sexual energy.

If someone tells you there is a fire in your house, you do not know if this is good or bad news until you know where the fire is. If its in the furnace, the stove, or the fireplace, that is good and comforting news. If it is on the roof, the floor, or the walls, that is bad news. Fire in the right place provides the pleasure of warmth, but in the wrong place it destroys and brings pain. The sex drive is just like fire. Fire is not evil, but it is a power that has potential for good or evil. It can save life or destroy life. Such also is the fire of

**sex. There is so much love and warmth in the world because of sex, but there is also so much sorrow and heartache because of it. Sex controlled by love is one of life's greatest blessings. Sex controlled by lust is one of life's greatest burdens.**

**Jesus, as the Creator of sex knows this better than anyone, and that is why the love versus lust issue is so vital to His whole teaching on divorce. The Old Testament law allowed too much freedom to relate to women on the level of lust. The law gave men a feeling that they were doing okay in their relationship to their wives if they treated them legally. That is, if they divorced them, they gave them a certificate of divorce. This was a great blessing to a divorced woman, for it gave her the freedom to go and remarry, and not be labeled as an adulteress. Without that certificate the law demanded, she would become an outcast, and if not stoned, she likely would be forced to become a prostitute for survival.**

**This was a step up from the level where women were just sent packing when their husbands were tired of them. Treating a wife legally was a higher level of righteousness than giving her no rights at all. However, it was still far short from the ideal of treating her lovingly. Jesus is calling men to a higher level of relating to their wives. It is a level beyond the legal level to the level of love. That is what this passage on divorce is all about, for you will observe that in these two verses Jesus condemns two men. The man who divorces his wife for any cause other than being unfaithful, and the man who marries this innocent woman. Here are two men not treating their women in love, but with lust and legalism.**

**This is a radical reversal of the Old Testament, and from the world perspective. The focus of all condemnation before Christ came was not on the man, but on the woman. In every nation the unfaithful wife was treated unmercifully, and almost always killed. For men it was a different story. Adultery did not mean the same thing for men. If he took another wife or two, he was not being adulterous. If he went to a prostitute, he was not being adulterous. If he went into a single girl, he was not being adulterous. The only way a man could be guilty was to violate the property rights of another man by laying with his wife. You could not be guilty unless you hurt another man. Violating any number of women was no problem.**

**Women were property and not persons of equality. Their lives were regulated like property. Cato the Roman wrote, "If you take your wife in adultery you may freely kill her without a trial. But if you commit adultery, or if another commit adultery with you, she has no right to raise a finger against you." The Jews were only slightly ahead of the pagan Gentiles in this respect. Their wives were possessions. They may have had to capture her in battle at the risk of their lives, or pay a large sum to acquire her. She was his most costly possession. Any threat to this prize was a great offense to men. It was like someone throwing rocks at your new car. The result was, the legal system developed almost entirely along the lines of protecting a man's rights and possessions.**

**The Code of Hammurabi in ancient Babylon decreed that a wife accused by her husband of being unfaithful had to take the water test. She was thrown into the river, and if she drowned it proved she was guilty. If she survived, she was innocent. In reality**

all it proved was whether she could swim or not, but the point is, only a wife had to endure such a test. The Old Testament has a test for accused wives as well. In Num. 5 we read of how the priest was to mix dust from the floor of the sanctuary with water, and the accused woman was to drink it. If she was innocent nothing would happen, but if she was guilty, her body would swell and give her away. This test was based on well known psychosomatic facts that show that the guilty can produce the very effect that is feared. Again, the test is only for wives. There is no such test for men. The double standard has been a part of both sacred and secular history.

Now Jesus comes along in this great sermon, and He says the good old days are over, for they were bad old days for women. The double standard is done, and is no longer a level of righteousness acceptable in the kingdom of God. Women are to be treated equally, and from now on they are to be treated lovingly. Legalism is only a support for male lust, and that is what Jesus is attacking. A husband may feel he is being a nice guy by giving his wife a certificate of divorce. Jesus says, that may be the legal thing to do, but it is not the loving thing to do. He says to this husband who is putting his wife away, that he is forcing her into adultery, if she has not already committed it. He says the man is the cause of his wife committing adultery. This was a shocking approach. You are not suppose to blame the man. But Jesus says that idea is obsolete, and now we go to the source of the problem, and stop dealing only with symptoms. The real issue in adultery and divorce is the way a man treats his wife. In our day, of course, it can also be how a wife treats her husband.

Jesus knew that the only reason a man usually wanted to divorce his wife, if she had not been unfaithful, was because he has lust for another woman. He wanted to get rid of her so he could remarry another. He knew this because that is the way it was, and the way it is, and the way it will be. Lust for another is the key cause for divorce. No Jewish man remains single after a divorce. They soon remarried. This was all fine and dandy for him, for he could legally put his wife away, and legally be nice enough to give her a chance to remarry. In fact, the whole thing could already be legally arranged as he would marry his friend's wife, and his friend would take his wife. The husbands could feel that all is legal, and their lust was perfectly compatible with being a nice guy according to the law.

Jesus says, yes, that is the way it use to be. You could be righteous and legal if you did not murder, even if you were full of hatred. You could be righteous and legal if you did not commit adultery, even if you were full of lust. You could be righteous and legal if you did not send your wife away without a certificate of divorce, even if you were full of lust for another, and were very unloving toward your mate, and you were putting her away just to take another partner.

Jesus will no longer tolerate this level of righteousness in the kingdom of God. You deal with the problem in the inner man, and prevent all of these person destroying actions. You deal with anger and hostility, and prevent murder. You deal with lust, and prevent adultery. You deal with your unloving perverted value system that makes a woman a piece of property, and you prevent divorce. Divorce starts in the heart right along with all other human follies. It starts in a heart that refuses to treat a mate as a

person equal in all that really matters. In Jesus' day the problem was to get men to see women as equals made in the image of God. Today the female has the same responsibility to love her husband as a person, and not just a paycheck provider, and fix it man.

In this passage Jesus is condemning the man, for this has been the main problem all through history. Men did as they pleased, and what did not please was the woman's fault. Jesus says this is not so. The men are the culprits. They unlovingly cast their wives aside for another. They rush to marry another who is then cast aside. The women are just pawns in their hands, but Jesus says these men are the ones who are guilty. Today, the wives who cast aside their husbands to go off with another on a new fling are in the same category. Whoever lets lust determine their relationship to their mate is the source of the problem that destroys marriage.

Where lust is in power divorce will rise. Where lust is controlled by love divorce will subside. There is a direct connection between lust control and divorce. Japan had no divorce problem until they become westernized in the last several decades. The western promotion for lust in male-female relationships has caused divorce to skyrocket in that land. Christian divorces are on a rise everywhere because of the influence of lust. Wherever there is a promotion of lust there is a loss of respect of the sexes. They each treat the other as objects of gratification. Personhood is lost, and all that matters is the pleasure of the moment. Marriage cannot build on such a foundation, for marriage demands commitment. Marriage cannot survive on lust. It has to have love that says, for better or for worse. Lust wants to bail out. It says, only for better, and when it is not better it says goodbye.

Today, the need for love is equal for both sexes. In the day of Christ He is dealing with a male dominated society. He started the process that led to females gaining equality as persons, but that victory only raises them to a higher level of responsibility. They are now equally responsible when it comes to lust that leads to divorce. The important thing according to Jesus is to get to the cause. If your right hand causes you to sin, or your right eye, deal with those causes directly, and cut off their power to produce the negative effect. So here He says of the husband who divorces his wife: He causes her to commit adultery. He is the cause of this evil, and he not only causes her to be adulterous, but the man who marries her is also guilty of adultery.

We have a tendency to get all caught up in the effects, and neglect the cause. Jesus is not condemning the woman at all. Yes, He says, if she is not already an adulteress, she becomes one by her remarriage, but He does not say she should not remarry. In fact He assumes that she will remarry, or go live with someone, like the woman at the well did, for if she did not, she could hardly become guilty of adultery. If she stayed single, she would be totally innocent, but Jesus says she is forced to commit adultery, because He knows a woman has no choice but to remarry, for the only other way to survive is to become a prostitute. He assumes that she will remarry, and thereby commit adultery.

The cause, however, is the focus of condemnation. The husband who forces his wife into this is the culprit, and that is where prevention has to take place. No mate is to force another into immoral behavior, for each is responsible for what they make the other do.



**Under the law you can get by with such unloving conduct, but not in His kingdom. Legal won't cut it any longer, for only love will.**

**Now the second man that Jesus condemns may not be quite as unloving as the first husband, but he is still primarily guided by lust rather than love. This has to be seen in the light of what the law permitted. The law allowed a man to put away his wife, and give her a certificate of divorce. She was then a free woman, and so she was available. Another man could take her to be his wife, and when he got tired of her he could send her off with another certificate. She could be tossed from one to another by as many men who would have her. The Hollywood system is not new, for the woman at the well had 5 husbands. Deut. 24 makes it clear, however, that she could not go back to her previous husband. This prevented men from using the law for legal wife swapping. Nevertheless, the woman was the pawn in the chess game of lust.**

**Jesus says this is no longer acceptable. This going from one man to another is to stop. The man who gets in on this game of serial polygamy is also guilty of adultery. Jesus slams two doors shut on men's freedom to abuse women, and treat them as objects of lust rather than persons to love. It was all a matter of self-centered lust with no thought about God's plan for marriage. One of the reasons Jesus was not harsh in condemning the prostitutes of His day was because He knew that many were forced to this choice by the lusts of men. They were victims of a system that treated them like property, and they were helpless things. But it was all legal, for legalism only cared about the right paper work, and not the person. As long as men gave their abused wives the proper papers, that is all mattered.**

**Jesus says, no more is a piece of paper primary. The personhood of a woman is to be primary. Both men are condemned, for both treat women as objects of lust. Jesus condemns the first husband, for he has permitted lust and not love to determine his course of action, and it destroyed his marriage. This is not acceptable in the kingdom of God. It might be legal to let lust guide you to divorce and take another, but it is not loving, and what is not loving is not Christian, and not acceptable to God.**

**Divorcees are prime targets of lust. Talk to any divorcee and you will discover they become objects of lust to most every man who knows them. She is depersonalized as few others ever experience. She is such a threat to other women that she is rejected, and such a temptation to men that she is tempted to believe their attention is love. She is in a terrible bind, and often gets on a marriage-go-round of lust that she hopes will lead to love.**

**There is one bad lady we need to consider in this passage, and that is the wife who is guilty of being unfaithful. The husband who divorces her is not being unjust, or for that matter, even unloving, for the more he loved her, the more deeply he would be hurt, and the more he may feel the need to escape. He is not commanded to divorce her, but he is not condemned if he does, for he is not the cause of her becoming an adulteress, like the other man. She has chosen on her own to be guilty, and the blame cannot fall on the husband who puts her away. He is like a man who chooses surgery, not because he wants it, or enjoys it, but because he has to have something cut out of him that does not work**

right in order to survive.

Keep in mind, Jesus is adding something new to the regulation of marriage and divorce. In the Old Testament there was no provision for divorce because of adultery. Adultery was punished by stoning, which left the innocent mate free to remarry. Jesus is making divorce the way to deal with unfaithfulness, and there is no death penalty. He knew that much unfaithfulness is caused by the supposed innocent party. That means the unfaithful mate is now left in the land of the living, and can carry on a new life, and possibility get their act together, and make something of themselves. Jesus offers the guilty a second chance. This complicates life somewhat, however, for many who try to figure out how to deal with every conceivable situation.

What if this guilty wife remarries? Is she, or the man she marries, committing adultery. Jesus does not say. He only deals with the innocent wife who is faithful, but who is put away by her husband. Jesus is not giving a law that covers all possible cases. He is dealing with the abuse of women. This woman is being forced into adultery by her second marriage, and so is the man who marries her. But the guilty one is already guilty, and so rightly divorced. How can her second marriage be adultery if she is divorced, and rightly so. She is a single now, and free to remarry. What about the husband who puts her away for her unfaithfulness? Is he free to remarry? Why not, if he is no longer married, and so truly single again?

Many Christians get all bent out of shape over the remarriage of divorced people, as if that is the thing Jesus is trying to prevent. That is not the problem at all. Jesus and the Old Testament agree on this principle: Anyone who is rightly divorced is single again, and free to remarry. What Jesus is trying to prevent is illegitimate divorce, and the remarriage of people who have no valid divorce. He is trying to prevent divorce and remarriages of convenience for the sake of fulfilling lust. You do this the same way you prevent all the other evils Jesus is dealing with in this context. You get back into the heart, and deal with the causes of conduct. Deal with anger to prevent murder. Deal with lust to prevent adultery. Deal with disrespect of your mate as a person to prevent divorce.

Prevention of all this unloving behavior is the purpose of Jesus. But if you read a lot of Christian literature on the issue of divorce and remarriage, you would think the purpose of Jesus was to prevent people from ever being happy again if they make a mistake. If you applied all the rest of what Jesus says like you do their view on divorce, no one who has ever been angry with his brother, or lusted after a woman, should have any right to ever be happy again. Christian legalism is often more unloving than the legalism of the Pharisees. Jesus has been anti-legalism all along, but now many feel He has shifted gears, and chooses to come down hard and strong on the divorced who seek to remarry. This Christian legalism becomes a contradiction to the whole spirit of Christ.

For example, some Christians feel that even the man who puts His unfaithful wife away is not permitted to remarry. Jesus says nothing about it, but they make it a law. The guilty wife is free to become a swinging single, or remarry, or do as she pleases. He, however, is never to remarry. If he does, he is either excommunicated, or made a second

class citizen of the kingdom. He is condemned to suffer the rest of his life for the lust of his mate. He must struggle with his own lust now for the rest of his life with no legitimate outlet. This kind of hard nosed legalism is so contrary to the spirit of Christ, and of Paul, and is so anti-loving in its dealing with people that I fear for Christians on the day of judgment who impose such laws on some of God's children.

If you are going to make a mistake, err on the side of being too loving and forgiving, and not on the side of being too legalistic. Jesus did not condemn the woman taken in adultery. He said to her, "Go and sin no more." We know that many people ignored Jesus, and did not obey Him, and she could have gone on in her sin, but He chose to give her the benefit of the doubt, and go the way of love rather than legalism. This has to be our attitude toward the divorced. Many, including Christians, are divorced for reasons that may or may not be legitimate. They have not prevented this tragic result of loss of love. It is tragic, but it is part of reality we have to live with. God Himself could not prevent His bride Israel from going after other gods, and damaging their exclusive relationship. God finally divorced Israel, and took a new bride, which was the church. The point is, not even God can prevent all the tragedies of man's fallen nature. Men cannot do it either, and so they end up in situations which are bad.

We can only assume from the context where Jesus goes on to say, deal with your enemies even in the spirit of love, and not a spirit of revenge, that this certainly applies to brothers and sisters in the family of God who blow it. If you are to go out of your way to be like God, who causes the sun to rise on the evil as well as the good, how much more is this the case with those who are good, but who allow evil to gain a victory in some area of their life? Jesus treated the woman at the well who was divorced five times with a spirit of love. You will look in vain in the Sermon On The Mount for any basis for a hard-nosed, legalistic spirit of rejection of the divorced person.

Those who treat the divorced harshly reveal hypocrisy when they do not treat themselves equally harshly by gouging out their eyes and cutting off their hand for their own lust. They choose to be harsh on sins they do not commit, and go easy on those they often commit. Where Jesus does advise severe action, they ignore it. Here, where Jesus has no action recommended, they want to write a book on all that should be done to show how strongly they stand for righteousness. They have all kinds of laws and regulations for the divorced and remarried. It is such a conspicuous evasion of their own guilt to judge others. It is like the picture of the man with a log in his eye trying to help another with a speck in his eye.

If you are going to be a stubborn legalist demanding justice be done, and not mercy, you will be dragged into court on the basis of your own lust, and you will be treated on the same legalistic basis, and you will be made to pay the last penny for your hardness of heart. Many Christians get hard hearted because they develop the elder brother syndrome. Why should that louse of a little brother get to go off and indulge in wine, women, and song, and still be able to come home and be treated with love? It is just not fair to me. So many who have never known the heart ache of divorce say, why should they be able to break God's ideal, and indulge in more than one sex partner, and still be accepted on the level of equality with myself, who has been faithful all along? It is just

not fair. This leads to Christian legalism that prevents grace from having its way.

God is always into prevention so that at some point you block Satan's victory. If Christians do not prevent lust, at least they are to prevent actions that lead to adultery. If they do not prevent adultery, at least they are to prevent its dissolving of marriage in divorce. If they do not prevent divorce, at least they are to prevent the divorce from being treated as an unforgivable sin that makes them feel rejected. This final prevention can still redeem the total life, and make it possible for love to win. Unless love steps in to stop the erosion at some point, lust will be ultimate victor. The cause of divorce is always some sinful behavior, and the cure is always to deal with the sinners with a spirit of love.

## **10. SIMPLICITY VERSUS COMPLEXITY Based on Matt. 5:33-37**

Human nature loves to magnify the minute and give significance to the insignificant by the simple method of stretching the truth. An army cook, for example, feed a mob of men with scrambled eggs, and then he sat down and wrote to his girl friend: "Dearest, for two hours shells have been bursting all around me." What he said was literally true, for egg shells were bursting all around him, but his true statement conveyed a picture that was not true at all. He used the truth to tell a lie. The best lies are conveyed by the truth, for this kind of line is technically, or legalistically, not lying, but legitimate. If you work at it, you can get so clever that you can lie quite consistently, and always be telling the truth.

It's like the pastor who received a poorly baked pie from one of his members. He threw it into the garbage, and the next time he saw her he said, "I can assure you a pie like yours does not last long around our house." He is matched, if not out done, by the pastor who bought a new boat and named it visitation. When someone called the parsonage his wife could say that he was not home, but out on visitation. Unfortunately, these are not just jokes. They are real problems that all Christians face.

Jamie Buckingham was one of the great Christian authors of our day. He had books selling into the millions. He was also one of the biggest Christian liars I have ever read. He tells of how he got started as a boy, and lying got him out of so much trouble that he should have punished for that he couldn't stop. He flushed rags down the commode in college, and flooded the whole second floor of the dorm. He ruined many students clothes, but he lied his way out of it. He went into the ministry and was very successful. In fact, he became pastor of one of the largest Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina. But he could not stop lying. His self-image compelled him to lie about his church; its size; the attendance, and youth group.

He could not tolerate to be criticized or seen in a poor light of any kind, and so he

exaggerated and twisted the facts to suit his purpose. By the time he was 35 he had been asked to leave two churches, and his marriage was going down hill fast. Finally the crisis became so great that he was going to lose everything. He came to the end of his rope, and for the first time he confessed he was a liar. He told of all his fears that compelled him to lie. He experienced forgiveness, and he gained liberty from the need to lie. He went on to become a man greatly used of God in communicating the truth.

Jesus knew that one of the great battles of life for believers would be the battle to speak the truth. Every source of power in man is also a source of corruption. Power does corrupt, and so Jesus has been dealing with each of the sources of power in us, and warning us of the danger of abusing these powers. He is trying to prevent this abuse, and keep the power functioning in a way God intended. He has dealt with the power of spirit—the anger and hostility that leads to the breakdown in relationships, and, thus, to murder. He has dealt with the power of stubbornness that leads to unnecessary suffering. And then the power of sex that leads to lust and adultery. And then to the power of superiority that leads to abuse of one's mate and divorce. Now Jesus deals with the power of speech that leads to lying and deception.

Everyone of these powers used rightly are blessings, but used wrongly they damage you and your relationship to God and man. Everyone of them used as God intended is a source of energy for love. Everyone of them used unlovingly is a source of energy for evil. We see it confirmed in the Sermon On The Mount that sin and evil are primarily the abuse and misuse of energy that is good in itself. Speech is a source of power that makes man what he is in superiority to the animals. Speech is good, but there is such a temptation to misuse this power. The two areas of life where the temptation is greatest are politics and religion. Both tempt people to develop a clever and complex gobbledegook that can muddy the waters of communication.

The realm of religion is full of hocus pocus jargon. Jesus is not saying anybody can be too religious, for it is impossible to love God or man too much, and this is the essence of biblical religion. He is saying, however, you can talk too religious. It sounds like you are really spiritual if you are heavy on God-talk, and bring him in on every statement you make. Some people are always saying, "As God is my witness," or, "I swear to God." This sounds like a good habit to get people more God conscious, but Jesus says we should not do it. It leads to superficiality, and it undermines the truly spiritual. If you swear to everything, and use the name of God to confirm everything you say, it soon becomes a meaningless habit, and you will not be taken seriously by anyone. It destroys your credibility, for your words become empty sounds. People find it hard to feel you authentic if you try to make everything spiritual. It is like underlining every sentence in a book. Instead of emphasizing everything, it is emphasizing nothing, for there is no distinction between the tremendous and the trivial.

This is what the super spiritual talker does with God-talk. If everything is marvelous, then nothing is commonplace, and since everybody knows this is not the case, they can only doubt your sincerity or your sanity. If every sermon you hear, and every book you read, and every concert you go to, is the greatest, and you are perpetually declaring it was the nearest thing to heaven, and it was like being with the angels, you will soon have a

reputation as an unreliable source of information. You are losing the ability to be realistic, and you are living in a world as you want it to be, and not the real world where we must all live.

You do not enhance the truth by swearing that everything you say is absolute truth. You degrade the truth, and lower it to the level of your own subjective feelings. Enthusiasm is good, but when it leads to excessive God-talk, and dragging God's name into every sentence to confirm it, it is no longer a good. H. L. Menchen wrote, "The man who boasts that he habitually tells the truth is simply a man with no respect for it. It is not a thing to be thrown around loosely, like small change; it is something to be cherished and hoarded and dispersed only when absolutely necessary." If you swear what you say is true, what are we to think when you do not swear it is true? You leave room for doubt, and so you soon have to swear about everything, and that only complicates life, and makes the oath a meaningless burden.

We need to see that the primary problem of the Pharisees was that they were too religious. Some people go bad because of their vices, and others because of their virtues. The Pharisees fell into the pit of their own virtues. The Pharisees who went into the temple to pray, and said, "I thank God I am not as other men-robbers, evil doers, adulterers," was being very honest. When it came to external sin they were Mr. Clean, but the inside was sewer city. They were so proud of keeping all the external rules that they became corrupt within, and could not see how ungodly they had become in their cold legalistic religion. Spiritual as all get out, and God-talk in every sentence, and swearing by God and His temple, and everything imaginable. But all of was hard, mechanical, and so unloving.

They developed a language of loop holes, and like modern lawyers, they found ways to get out of everything. They could swear to some commitment, and then break their word and not feel guilty at all. It was because they never used the word God in their oath. They swore by heaven, but they did not say God, and this was a loop hole. It would be like we use to do as kids. I don't know if they still do this, but we could say, "I promise to do such and such," and then not do it, and say that we didn't have to because we had our fingers crossed when we said it. This allows you to tell a lie, and not be held accountable, for the crossed fingers canceled out the promise. When the trick was known you were asked to keep your hands exposed when you promised, but if you could cross your legs you still had them in your advantage. It got so ridiculous, you could get out of a promise by having two sticks crossed in the grass.

Man is perpetually seeking ways to escape simple honesty. That is what the small print is all about. They give you the world in bold print, and then pull the rug out from under you in the small print that you can't see. You get a clear impression given on one hand, but there is a subtle way out of the commitment on the other hand. But, of course, it is all legal, for you gave a cautious discerning person a chance to catch your deception. Fortunate for the deceiver is the fact that most people just trust the big impression, and never see the loop hole, and they get stung. But its all legal, and that is what really matters-today, and in the say of the Pharisees. Our society is based on legalism. If you give a sucker a chance to get out his magnifying glass and discover the loop hole, you are

**being fair and legal.**

**Jesus is saying, do away with all of the loop holes. Stop all of the trick thinking that says a promise does not need to be kept if you swear by Jerusalem, rather than by Jehovah. Avoid the whole temptation to play tricks by ceasing to swear at all. Eliminate the problem by going to the source of the problem, which is the abuse and misuse of words. Cut out all of the complex trickery, and just simply say, yes I will do this, or no I will not. Keep it simple. You talk less, but you say more, for with yes or no people know where you are at.**

**Jesus says, get to the source as with all other sins. Don't make rules about the symptoms, but cut off the cause. The man who does not swear at all has eliminated the danger of swearing falsely. Simplify life by ridding yourself of those practices that lead to complexity in communication. The man who swears at all will be tempted to abuse it. Spurgeon said, "...when a man tells a lie, the next thing he does is to swear to it." Therefore, Jesus says, avoid the following:**

## **I. THE CURSE OF COMPLEXITY**

**The more complex any form of communication becomes the more it tends to become a tool for deception and injustice. The curse of complexity is when it is used as an aid to be dishonest, and unloving in your relationship to people. The Pharisees nullified the law of God by their clever schemes with words. If a son says, "Corban," which means that his money is devoted to God, he does not have to honor his mother and father, and take care of them.**

**There are values to complexity, and the clever use of it can be a powerful weapon in warfare. Back in April 30,1943 a British royal marine crashed in his plane off the coast of Spain. His body was recovered by the Spanish government, and along with it military documents of the highest importance. Britain demanded the return of the body and the documents, but the Spanish stalled long enough for the German espionage agents to get the information. A letter to General Eisenhower in North Africa hinted that the allies would be focusing their efforts on the evasion of Greece. The Germans responded by shifting their troops to the defense of Greece. This is just what the allies wanted, and they invaded Sicily instead. It was all carried out by a complex scheme of deception in which a real corpse was dressed while frozen, and put into that plane and crashed. It was a clever means of getting misinformation into the hands of the enemy, and it worked. It helped the allies win the war.**

**I share this so that we see there can be blessings in complexity. Complexity can be a legitimate tool in the battle of light against darkness. But Jesus is talking of every day life in relationship to other people we are to love and respect. In this context complexity is a curse. Jesus says, there is a way to prevent this curse, and it is this we want to look at next.**

## **II. THE SOLUTION OF SIMPLICITY.**

**Why is Jesus so concerned about simplicity of language, and reverence for the truth? It is because truth is vital to relationships, and that is what this whole chapter is all about. Cleverness and complexity are generally the tools of evil. The only reason for complexity of language in every day relationships is to take advantage of other people. This is not loving, and it is not the fulfilling of the law. It is designed to rip people off, and lead them astray, or confuse them. Love is up front with people. It is simple and straight forward, because it has nothing to hide. Love and honesty are linked as one. If you love someone, you want to be fair and honest with them, and not deceive them.**

**The whole idea of oaths and swearing leads to the temptation to deceive. You learn, that by clever use of words you can manipulate people. You can get them to do what you want even if it is not best for them. Just as lust does not care about the other person, but is only concerned about the self, so swearing leads you not to care about truth, and what others think, but only about what you can get for yourself by the power of words. Jesus is calling the Christian to a life of yes or no, or to a life of simplicity.**

**We need to understand that just as complexity can have its values, so simplicity can have its defects. The simple can also be the superficial. A family travelling had a flat tire out on a country road. When dad got out to change it, it wouldn't come off. Then it started to rain. He jumped back into the car, and he was angry and frustrated. He shouted, "Now what do we do?" His 5 year old son said, "Daddy, let's switch to a different channel." If you don't like the story you are in, just switch the channel until you find one you do. It works in the world of TV, but real life is not that simple.**

**Jesus is not saying that life will never be complicated if you reduce your vocabulary to yes or no. If you took that literally, you would only complicate your life if you were asked the age old question, have you stopped beating your wife? Jesus is simply saying, that in relating to people the Christian must be one who establishes a reputation for keeping his word. If you say, yes, I'll pay you back that ten dollars on Friday, that should be good enough. You don't have to swear on the Bible, or call God in to witness your promise. The guy who swears to God that he will pay it back is likely a higher risk, for men tend to use God to cover their own weakness and self-doubt. This just magnifies the sin, for you are then using the name of God in vain. It is not for His glory, but for your own gain. That is one of man's problems with oaths. You tend to use God for ends that degrade rather than hallow the name of God.**

**Jesus is saying, the truly righteous man does not need to swear to God, or make any kind of religious oath. His word alone ought to be trustworthy. The legalist looks for loopholes, and a way to escape his word, and still be legally right. The loving person does not want to deal on a level of deception, but is open and honest about his intentions. So Jesus says, just forget swearing all together, and eliminate God-talk in your promises. This only leads to complicating life.**

**A promise with a oath is a sacred duty. If there is no oath, it is secular, and not as serious or as binding. We think that by exalting the religious side of life we are doing good, but in fact, we are doing just the opposite. Christians so exalted the Sabbath or Sunday that it was more evil to do certain things on this day than the rest of the week.**



This led to people feeling free to do the rest of the week what they could not do on Sunday. It is wrong to do in the sanctuary what it is okay to do in the fellowship hall. It is wrong to do in church what it is okay to do at home, and at work, and so, like the Pharisees, a legalistic religion developed. Life was put into compartments where things were right or wrong depending on the context. This led to all kinds of loopholes, and a complexity of life.

Jesus rejects this kind of thinking, and He says there is no distinction between a sacred or secular promise. If you say yes, it is to be yes, whether you called God in on it or not. If you said no, then let it be no, regardless of an oath. God practices what He expects us to. He is not given us a Gospel that is complex and confusing, so that we can know for sure where we stand. He says very simply, "He who has the Son has life." In II Cor. 1 Paul makes it clear that God does not speak double talk in Jesus, but very simply says, yes. He says in verse 19-20, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, were not yes and no, but in Him it has always been yes. For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ.

You can be assured that when you put your trust in Christ, God will keep His promise to save you. He is trustworthy, and there is no need to fear trickery or deceit. God means just what he says in Christ. He says, yes, I love you. Yes, I forgive you. Yes, you are my child. Yes, you will be with me in heaven. No, there are no tricks. He who comes to me I will in no wise cast out. There is no need for uncertainty with God. His message is not complex, but simple. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Salvation is simple, and simplicity is superior to complexity as a way of life, and as a way of communication. So if we listen to Christ we will avoid complexity and strive for simplicity.

## **11. THE REVERSAL OF REVENGE Based on Matt. 5:38-42**

Aaron Burr could have been a great name in American history. He was elected to the U. S. Senate, and in 1800 he was a candidate for President of the U. S. Thomas Jefferson won that election, and Aaron Burr became Vice President. His future was bright, but then he was insulted by another famous political figure by the name of Alexander Hamilton, and he challenged him to a duel. On July 11, 1804 two great leaders of our land shot at each other, and Hamilton died. Burr got his revenge, but at enormous cost. Revenge is sweet, but the bitterness that follows makes you realize what God was trying to prevent by forbidding it. God's negatives are never because He wants to deprive you of anything good, but to prevent you from suffering unnecessary evil.

Aaron Burr lost his popularity because of his sweet revenge. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with him. He lost all his wealth, and he lived in obscurity and poverty for 29 years. He died alone in a hotel room in New York. Our nation lost 2 excellent leaders,

and they lost the opportunity to share their potential, and all because of the desire for revenge. A different attitude in Burr's heart could have changed all of history, and made him an honored figure of our American heritage. The facts of history demonstrate that those who are compelled to get even tend to end up way behind. Revenge tends to back fire.

A farmer was having trouble with a hawk preying on his chickens. One day he set a trap and caught the thief. His desire for revenge motivated him to devise a cruel way to punish the bird. He tied a stick of dynamite to the leg of the bird. He then lit the fuse and let it go. Instead of flying into the air, however, the hawk flew into his barn, and the exposition blew up his barn. His sweet revenge turned soar immediately.

If revenge was only a problem for unwise politicians and pest fighters, we could skip this paragraph of Jesus. But we know Jesus has selected sins that would be common to all men for all time. What this means is that few, if any, of us get through life without being tempted to abuse the legitimate desire for justice, and pervert it into a lust for revenge. Frank Hinkle wrote,

A fellerman had hurt me sore,  
An fer a weak or mabbe more,  
I set around and thought up ways  
To even up the bloomin' score.

It has happened to the best. John Wesley as a young pastor in Georgia fell in love with Sophia Hophey. He would not make up his mind regarding marriage, however, and so she suddenly married another man. John was deeply wounded, but he made the big mistake of using his power as a pastor to get even. He debarred Sophia from communion, which was very important socially as well as spiritually. Her husband sued Wesley, and a notice was posted for his arrest. He had to flee his ministry, and even the country. He sailed back to England. He had to learn the hard way that you can't get ahead by trying to get even.

Many, if not most, of the patients in mental hospitals are there because they have become obsessed with resentment and revenge. Masses of the sicknesses and sorrows of our world are due to the determination of men to respond to all offense with a spirit of retaliation. Like James and John the sons of thunder, men want to call down fire from heaven to show others they cannot get by with treating them with disrespect. Jesus rebuked them and said they did not have his spirit. Jesus is not interested in revenge and in getting even, for he knows this an illusion that can only lead to the story of the Hatfields and the McCoys. It stands to reason that if the goal in life is to get even, then after you have retaliated your foes have no choice but to strike again, for he now must also get back at you and even up the score.

If you want to see how effective this method of dealing with conflict is, just look at the history of the Middle East. That whole part of the world operates on the principle of revenge. If you shoot me, I shoot you back. If you blow up my city, I blow up yours. If your goal is to have hell on earth, you can hardly find a better road to travel than the

road of revenge. Given enough retaliation you can develop a nearly hopeless situation where hate is the only language that is heard.

People are always saying that the way of Jesus is unrealistic, and it just won't work, and so they don't try it. They keep trying hard, however, at the way of revenge. They work at it with commitment, and it never works. The folly of man is that he will work constantly at what has been proven not to work, but refuses to even try the way of Christ because he suspects it won't work. Man in his folly never even gives the way of Christ a chance, for man cannot tolerate giving up the spirit of revenge. It is so powerful a drive, that once one is obsessed with it he would rather give up sex than give up the pursuit of getting even.

The result is a world with enormous unnecessary suffering. Abigail Van Buren says, "People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes." The response of revenge is the way of the natural man. It is normal to feel the urge for retaliation, but the fact is, it is the poorest way to deal with issues of conflict. There are two other ways beside the response of revenge. There is the way of law which is the regulation of revenge, and the way of love which is the reversal of revenge. Let's look first at-

## **I. THE REGULATION OF REVENGE.**

The Old Testament law recognized that man is a revenge seeking being. The need to retaliate to injury is inevitable, but it needs to be controlled, or it will become excessive, and add to the injustice of life. If my neighbor carelessly shoots his arrow into my property and puts my eye out, or if he let's his axe fly out of his hand and it breaks out my tooth, I may get so angry that I want to retaliate by sending his arrow back through his heart, and returning his axe by planting it in his skull. The law put limits on the response of revenge. You could get even, but that is all. You had the right to put out his eye, or to break out his tooth to even up the injury suffered, but you could not take his life for the injury.

The law was good for it kept people from being totally barbaric in dealing with injury and offense. It gave the victim rights to retaliate on a level of fairness, and it protected the offender from excessive violence. The regulation of revenge is what the law is all about in all civilized societies. It simply means that the punishment must fit the crime. This is the only way you can have a system of justice.

The law is not abolished by Christ. It is basic to all civilization. The worst places to live in the world are those places where there is not regulation of revenge. Where people with power can kill and imprison anyone they wish, and where death squads can kill at will anyone they choose. We need to see that the law was, and is good. And eye for an eye, but not a life for an eye. A tooth for a tooth, but not an eye for a tooth, for to take an eye for a tooth is unfair, because the eye is a much greater loss than the tooth. The law said you can get even, but that is all. That is the limit of your revenge and satisfaction.

The most just societies are those where this principle still applies today. Our sense of justice is offended if two men steal a loaf of bread and one gets a 50 dollar fine, and the

other is sent to prison for a year. The man sent to prison is paying an eye for a tooth, and this is not fair. It violates the principle of justice that the punishment must fit the crime. No matter how Christian a nation is there is always a need for law to regulate revenge. You know yourself how frightening power can be. How many of us have had some driver tailgate us, or pull out in front of us, or in some other way offend us? You feel that if you had the power to do so they would be pushed into the ditch or all four wheels would drop off, or in some other way our revengeful spirit would be satisfied.

That is why you should thank God everyday that you are not God, and that nobody else is either. His wrath does not fall until the cup of evil overflows. We are ready for wrath when the cup tips and spills a drop or two. That is why we are warned to leave vengeance to God. Nobody will get by with anything ultimately, but if we get involved with revenge we only magnify the evil that God will have to judge. Everybody desires to play God sometimes, and that is why revenge needs to be regulated by law. Jesus said He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. That means it is a false dichotomy to ask, "Are you under the law or grace?" The Christian is in reality under both. His priority is to live by grace, and he is saved by grace, but he still needs the regulation of law.

We still need the law to regulate our conduct when we fail to live on the high level where we ought to live. We do not always love our enemies, and we often still get angry, stubborn, lustful, and defensive. We all would enjoy a little revenge now and then. Four year old James got a well deserved spanking by mom for his misbehavior. When bed time came he knelt as usual to pray. He asked God's blessing on each member of the family. His mother alone was conspicuous by being left out. He rose and climbed into bed, and with a look of satisfaction on his face he looked up at mom and said, "I suppose you noticed you wasn't in it?" We chuckle, but that satisfaction is in all of us at times. We like to see people get what is coming to them. Most of the pleasure of good entertainment is seeing the bad guys get it in the end.

Dr. Roy Angell, pastor of Central Baptist in Miami, tells of watching the great passion play in Europe. When Jesus staggered under the weight of the cross and fell, a Roman soldier struck him. A Centurion uncoiled his long whip and swung it out over the back of his head. He brought it down with a resounding crack, not across the back of Jesus, but across the back of the soldier who struck Jesus. "Help him up!" he commanded, "And don't strike him again." Dr. Angell said, "I've loved the Roman Centurion ever since." He is saying that we cannot escape it even as Christians. We love to see evil get its due. We enjoy retaliation which pays back evil for evil. It is so normal to experience the desire for revenge, and that is why we need to the Sermon on the Mount, and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Without them we could not add any salt or light to this decaying and dark world. To be part of the answer we must rise above the law to the level of love, and that leads us to our next point-

## **II. THE REVERSAL OF REVENGE.**

The law is good, but the good is not necessarily the best. The law says you have a right to get even, but Jesus says you have a responsibility to do better than get even, and as a Christian you have a responsibility to overcome evil with good. Regulating revenge is

**good, but reversing revenge is the best. Take the negative circumstance and turn it around, and make it an opportunity to be salt and light.**

**Does it really make the world a better place to live if the man who put your eye out is also made a one eyed enemy? A two eyed friend who feels bad about injuring you, and who come to appreciate you, would add a lot more light to a world of darkness. Jesus is going way beyond the goals of the law and justice. Jesus is concerned about the loving relationship of people. The problem with the law is that if you stop there, and become a legalist, all you really care about is getting your pound of flesh. Your revenge is regulated and limited, but you are dominated by the thought of getting even. Your right to be satisfied according to the law is more important to you than the privilege of showing love to those who most need it, for they are guilty of violating your rights.**

**The law is so impersonal. All it really cares about is rights and justice. Love is concerned about people and relationships. You can do everything right according to the law, and feel vindicated, but never have a relationship again with the offending friend or neighbor. Whereas love can absorb the loss, and not try to get even, but prevent the loss of a relationship that can be of far more value than justice in the long run.**

**This is what the cross is all about. Jesus absorbed the offense of man's sin, folly, and ignorance. He took all of this in justice, and then instead of retaliating in a spirit of revenge He prayed, "Father forgive them." He reversed the spirit of revenge which seeks retaliation, and instead seeks reconciliation. Love is far more radical than law. Law regulates revenge so you do not destroy your enemy. You just get even with him, but he is still your enemy. Love reverses revenge so that the goal is to get rid of your enemy for good by means of reconciliation whereby he becomes your friend.**

**Love is committed to using the very issues that make this a dark world a world of greater light. The offenses and injustices of life are the reasons why the world is a battle ground, and why everybody is striving for justice. The Christian is to see these offenses, not as matters for legal response, but for the response of love. When the legalist is offended the only question is, what does the law say? The Christian is to rise above this and say, how can I turn this negative experience into a positive relationship where all parties involved experience the grace of God? This reversal of revenge is what makes Christians righteousness superior to legal righteousness.**

**Revenge may be sweet for awhile, but it turns so bitter that it is never a long range value. This reversal of revenge, however, can add sweetness to life that lasts for time and eternity. Jesus says that the Christian is not to repay and offense in kind, but in kindness. Use the offense as an opportunity to pass on the grace of God. It is what saved you when you were worthy only of God's wrath. The law elevates man above the pagan spirit of revenge, but love is to eliminate the pagan spirit of even needing to get even.**

**The Christian will probably go through all three stages. He will respond to offense with the natural instinct to retaliate. But he will realize this is not proper, and so he will wonder how to deal with the issue fairly. Then if he prays and seeks the mind of Christ he will break out of the bondage of law, and begin to evaluate how he can be salt and**

light, and thereby bring good out of the whole negative situation. Pagan revenge says leave the enemy in the dust as you march ahead over his dead body. The law says just get even with your enemy. Love says, so respond to your enemy that he and you both get ahead, and both are winners. Law puts the beast on a chain and says, this far and no further. Love turns the beast into a pet so the chain is no longer needed.

Is this practical, and can it really work? It did with Jesus. He died for those who hated Him, and many of them came to know Him as Savior. Millions of sinners since have done the same, and everybody comes out winners because He responded with love rather than revenge. But what about the rest of us? Robert James told of how after many years they finally had their first child. Larry became his whole life. One day he got a call that Larry had been struck by a hit and run driver, and he was killed. The driver was 14 year old Warren Jones who stole a car as he was running away from an orphanage. Mr. James was so full of hatred and revenge that he wanted to see this Jones boy fry in the electric chair, or choke to death in the gas chamber. There was no punishment bad enough to satisfy his rage.

He called a lawyer and wanted him to prosecute to the limit. Keep in mind, this is a Christian man we are dealing with. To make a long story short, he got through his grief, and began to pray about the matter. As he did Jesus filled him with love for Warren. The story ends with him adopting Warren, and both he and his wife loved this boy as their own son. The tragedy ends in triumph because the spirit of revenge is reversed, and the spirit of love triumphs over the tragedy, and makes this worse of enemies the best of friends. It not only works, it is the only thing that does work if the goal is to overcome evil with good.

## **12. LOVING OUR ENEMIES Based on Matt. 5:38-43**

Andrew Jackson was the 7th president of the United States and one of the most popular presidents ever. After two terms he left office with greater popularity than when he entered. He is one of the most interesting presidents to study, for the record would indicate that he had no business being president. He was left an orphan at age 14 because of the horrors of the Revolutionary War. He had a rough life from the start, and never did learn to speak or write correct English. He was unrefined and uneducated, and he had a violent temper. All of the presidents up to Jackson had been from the social aristocracy, and were wealthy and highly educated.

One thing Jackson was really good at, however, was hating. He hated the British for killing his family. He hated the Indians for he had seen them massacre many families. He hated his political and personal enemies. He was divorced, and his enemies tried to use his former wife in attacking him. He fought several duels over her. Jackson was a fighter all his life, and that is how he became a popular hero. He led his riflemen to victory in the battle of New Orleans with only 8 of his men killed while the enemy lost 700 dead and 1400 wounded. This man of battle, driven by hatred, became a Christian in later years, and after confessing Christ as Savior he was baptized and joined the church.

He spent a great deal of time in study of the Bible. He died with a deep commitment to Christ and the Word of God. But he confessed that his toughest battle as a Christian was the forgiving of his enemies.

This is easy to understand when you think of a man who has been conditioned from childhood to hate. He thrived on hate, and hate is what motivated him and made him the hero of the masses. He was an expert hater, and only had a short part of his life to learn to love, and so he was only an amateur at love. Jesus wants us to be real professionals at love, but unfortunately even those of us who have not been conditioned by a life time of hate find it hard to rise above the amateur level. Sometimes we are able to do it, and other times we are so overwhelmed by anger, bitterness, and resentment, that the best we can do is feel guilty because we fall so far short of the ideal.

God specializes in the impossible, but we have a tough enough time trying to be effective on the level of the possible. It is possible to love our neighbor as our self, but even this can call for enormous effort. We even struggle at times to love our loved ones, and God Himself is not always a snap to love, for we do not understand His ways, and we suspect we could do something better if we were God, and so we even sometimes resent Him. No love comes easy all the time. But this love of ones enemies really goes against the grain of our nature. It does not seem to fit reality. It is like trying to taste sound or hear color. It doesn't make sense. What good is an enemy if you cannot enjoy hating him? There are some people you just love to hate, and, therefore, you would hate to love them.

Elizabeth Skoglund in her book *To Anger, With Love*, tells of how a Christian can battle with this business of trying to love an enemy. She worked under a supervisor who treated her and others unfairly. She was filled with resentment because of the unjust treatment. She was furious within, and she wanted to quit, but she would only damage her own career. Her only release was in prayer, and she revealed how honest prayer can save your sanity. She shares one of her prayers: "Dear God, you know how I hate this woman. You know I'd only be playing games with you if I ever said I want to like her. I don't. I thoroughly enjoy hating her, but I can't be close to you and hold on to hate. So because of that, I give you the right to love her through me. I ask you for a love I don't have and can't produce."

She began to eat lunch with her supervisor, and she asked about her family. She realized the only way to love is to know. People you despise become more real as people when you know them. It took time, but she got to know her well enough to genuinely like her. She never completely trusted her, for she was unpredictable and changeable, but she came to the point where she had a relationship where her anger was not in control of her emotions. By surrendering to God and opening herself up to know her enemy, she was able to come to the place where she was able to love her enemy. It was not perfect, but enough so that love triumphed over hate, and set her free from the spirit of revenge.

The convicted prisoner was brought before the judge for sentencing. "I find you guilty on 26 counts," the judge said. "And I sentence you to five years on each count, making a total of 130 years." The prisoner was shocked, and he said, "I can't serve that

much time." The judge responded compassionately, "I know, so you don't have to serve the whole 130 years. Just do as much as you can." Jesus as our judge wants us to love on His level, and if we are totally yielded to His Spirit we can actually be channels of that kind of love. But the fact is, we are seldom that yielded. The ideal is not lowered to our level, but it is kept on His level of perfection, and His word to us is, "Do as much as you can." We are not to do nothing just because we can't do everything.

What we need to avoid is the terrible guilt feelings that develop in Christians because they have so many negative feelings toward others that contradict the spirit of Christ. Some of that guilt is good, for it is based on rebellion and a refusal to follow Christ, and are guilt is to lead us to repentance. Much guilt, however, is false guilt that comes from misunderstanding. Many Christians feel that they have an obligation to like everybody, and this really is impossible. Loving your enemy is not the same as liking your enemy. If you really liked your enemy, he would not be an enemy, but a friend. That is the goal, of course, of loving your enemy, but if that goal is not reached you can never like your enemy.

It is demanding of yourself more than Jesus intended to try and pretend that you like people who despise and persecute you. It is impossible to like a lifestyle that is one of evil, and which is injurious to those who live it, and to the society in which they live.

Trying to like everybody would be like trying to like all tastes in food, clothing, cars, life-style, etc. The commands of Christ are tough enough without making them absolutely impossible, and if you equate loving with liking, that is exactly what you are doing. Love for an enemy is based on an awareness that they are persons of infinite value for whom Christ died. They have the potential as you to be trophies of God's grace, and part of God's eternal family. This means you care about them and are concerned that they find God's best in Christ. You deal kindly with them in anyway you can, and you pray for them. You go out of your way to avoid offense and being a stumbling block to them. You strive by word and deed to enable them to feel the touch of God's grace in their life.

Jesus did this with His most antagonistic enemies, the Pharisees, and many of them came into His kingdom as leaders. Nicodemus, Joseph of Aramathea, and Paul the Apostle just to name a few. But Jesus never once altered His dislike for the Pharisees, and their whole legalistic scheme of life. He loved them and ate with them, and He counseled with them. His door was ever open to meet any need of the Pharisees, but Jesus never did like them. To like them would be to approve of them, and Jesus could never do that. So we see the paradox of being able to love your enemies while at the same time never liking them.

The Christian who tries to eliminate the not liking of his enemies is trying to do what goes beyond Christ, and that is not an achievable goal, nor is it even a desirable goal. If one could get to the point where he liked evil, injustice, and folly, one would be more like Satan than like Christ. It is failure to keep this distinction between love and like that leads people to distort the love of God. God is love, but God is not like. When you make the love of God such that it means He likes all as He loves all, you end with an



**universalism that eliminates judgment. You have reduced God to a level of indifference to evil, and so there is really no difference, and everybody is okay.**

**Nothing could be further from the truth of Christ's teaching. Jesus loved His enemies so much He died for them, but He never did like them, and He never ceased to fight their evil and warn them of the judgment to come if they persisted in their evil ways. Matthew chapter 23 reveals Jesus telling the Scribes and Pharisees how it really was. He calls them hypocrites, snakes, a brood of vipers, and sons of hell. He warns them over and over again of the judgment awaiting them for their folly. It is clear that Jesus did not like His enemies, and, therefore, do not demand of yourself that which is contrary to the spirit of Christ. To despise evil men and evil schemes is not inconsistent with obeying Christ. Following Christ's demands that we oppose the forces of evil, and do all we can to prevent their evil influence from hurting lives. Loving an enemy does not mean cooperation with him in promoting evil.**

**We have here then a great paradox where both sides are to be fully true even though they sound so contradictory. We are to love our enemies, pray for them, and treat them with kindness, yet we are not to like them, but despise their evil, and do all we can to prevent their effectiveness. You can't pick and choose which side of the paradox you are going to live on. You live on both sides or you cannot be complete as your Father in heaven is complete in His love, for He lives and acts on both sides of this paradox.**

**In the Old Testament the balance shifted toward hating ones enemies. There was such a battle for survival that Israel became very self-centered. The Gentiles were a threat, and so they were to be despised and rejected. The Jews came to think of the Gentiles as dogs, and, of course, the Gentiles felt the same about the Jews. There is a picture of universal love in the prophets, but in practice the Jews were very exclusive. The result is that to this day there is hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The Old Testament is not a very good foundation for a universal kingdom, even though that is the promise of God to Abraham.**

**Jesus came to fulfill that promise that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth would be blest. Jesus came to establish a kingdom where all walls are to come down. There is to be no Jew or Gentile, no rich or poor, no bound or free, and no male or female, but all are to be one in Christ. They are to come from every tribe, language, and nation. Everything that divides men is to be eliminated in Christ, and all former enemies are to become one in the family of God. What this means is that the Christian is to be constantly fighting against all of the natural tendencies of man to divide and categorize people, and put them into their proper box. Jesus is fighting this tendency because that is what creates so many enemies so unnecessarily.**

**If you love does not go beyond the circle of your own kind, you are no different than the rest of the world, and the worst of the world. Even the Publicans and the tax collectors, the most despised group of people, love those in their same box. Traitors and cut throats get together and have a ball, for they have much in common, and they enjoy one another. This is true for all people, for everyone likes those who are like them. Christians do the same thing. Evangelicals like evangelicals. Fundamentalists like**

**fundamentalists. Liberals like liberals. But the Christian who stops there, and only likes those like themselves have ceased to be truly Christlike. Jesus expects us to go beyond this liking of like to the loving of the unlike.**

**Remember you don't have to like the unlike, but you must, to be Christlike, love the unlike. If you do not, you are not any better than the rest of the world, and are not a part of the answer, but a part of the problem. Many Christians are of no more value to the plan of God than are unbelievers of the world, for they only love those who love them. Anybody can do this, and so the Christian who does only this has not risen above the level of the world, and this is to be salt with no saltiness, and light under a bushel, and so of no value as far as God's purpose is concerned.**

**Only by crossing over the lines and breaking down the walls, and reaching into other boxes can the Christian be truly Christian in this world. The Christian is one who loves those he does not like, but the world are those who love only those they do like. The Christian, therefore, is different from everyone else. If they are not, they add nothing to life that is unique and of Christ. All other people feel obligated to hate their enemies, for that is part of their love and loyalty to those of their own in group. The Christian can, and must, love those who oppose their in group, and do so without any love or loyalty lost to the in group.**

**This means the Christian must love the non-Christian, and even the anti-Christian. He does not need to like them, but he does need to love them. He must relate to them differently than all others relate to their enemies. He must care about them as persons, and not just seek to win victories over them. Many are the true stories like that of the young Armenian girl who watched a Turkish soldier kill her brother. She escaped and later became a nurse working in a military hospital. That Turkish soldier was brought into the hospital severely wounded. A little neglect could have ensured his death, but she fought back the natural desire for revenge. She gave him the best possible care she could. When he recovered and came to know who it was that saved his life he wanted to know why she did it. She shared with him her faith in Christ. He wanted to know the Christ that could give such a love for an enemy, and he became a Christian and her brother in Christ. Revenge could have been so sweet for a short time, but her love brought sweetness that will be forever.**

**Love always looks at the long run. The reason God can be good to evil men is not because He likes evil for a second, but because, though He hates it, He knows evil is only temporary. He loves evil men, and providentially shows them grace, not only by the sun and rain He gives, but in a multitude of ways, because some will respond to that grace and be saved forever. That is worth a lot of patience and endurance. It was worth the cross to God and Jesus.**

**Many feel the Sermon on the Mount is incomplete because it lacks the cross, but this is not so, for the cross is right here. To take up the cross and follow Jesus is to deny self and love your enemy. That is what the cross is all about. Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners, that is, the enemy. Bearing the cross is saying, not my will but Thine be done. It is letting go of the natural desire for revenge and retaliation in order to love and have**

concern for the well being of those who do not deserve it. This is not hard, it is impossible, but by the grace of God it can be done, and in being done we see redemptive love rising above all other values as the cross rises above all other symbols or self-sacrifice. History proves that the way of Christ does work, and no other way does. His teachings are the only way to victory over the forces of evil in our own hearts and in the world. The way of the cross leads home, and it is the only way to get a taste of heaven in time. May God give us the wisdom to see that the only way to be truly Christlike is to practice loving our enemies.

### **13. TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK Based on Matt. 5:38-48**

Almost everybody agrees with the Sermon on the Mount in general, but almost nobody can agree to the specifics of the last part of chapter 5. Even Nikita Krushev, an atheist, when he was the leader of Russia, could say he agreed with the Sermon on the Mount, for even in Russia they do not consider murder, adultery, divorce, and all kinds of broken relationships as beneficial to society. Krushev said, "I only disagree on one point and that was when Christ said, 'If I am struck on the one cheek I will turn the other.' I believe in another principle: If I am hit on the left cheek, I hit back on the right cheek so strongly that the head may fall off."

Krushev was representing the vast majority of the world, for most of the religions of the world can buy into the wisdom of this great sermon, but at this point they draw back and refuse to follow. Only one non-Christian ever had the nerve to try and apply these teachings of Christ in a world of conflict, and that was Gandhi. He changed the course of history for many millions of people because he proved that the way of Christ can work. In one of the closing scenes of the movie Gandhi, a Hindu leader comes to the bedside of Gandhi, and he pleads for him to stop his fasting. He reaffirms that he will not stop until Hindus and Moslems stop fighting.

The Hindu says he hates them and cannot stop, and he explains the basis for his hatred. Moslems took his little boy and crushed his head. He in turn captured a Moslem boy and killed him by the same method. Revenge reigned in their hearts, and though everyone was miserable there was no way out of this living hell of endless retaliation. Gandhi said that there was a way out. He said to go and find another boy like the one you killed, and the one the Moslem killed, and take him into your home and raise him as a Moslem. Gandhi was saying that the only hope is to love your enemy, and he proved that even pagans can be part of the answer if they live by these principles of Christ. Unfortunately, Gandhi was one in a billion.

We are dealing with that part of the Sermon on the Mount that really separates the men from the boys. The Jews have done enormous research to show that their Rabbis,

through the centuries, have come up with similar ideas to those of Jesus, but they cannot find anything to match this idea of loving your enemy. The religious leaders of the world can quote their wise and holy men in ways that show they too have many of the values of the Sermon on the Mount. But they have nothing to match the teachings of Christ on the love of one's enemies. After all, enemies by very definition are not to be loved.

E. Stanley Jones, author of dozens of marvelous books, writes of these verses we are looking at: "When I come to the following verses I breath a little faster, for we now have reached the very crux of the whole Sermon on the Mount. This refusal to retaliate, the turning of the other cheek, and the loving of one's enemies are the center of the whole. If this principle is not workable, then the heart of the sermon does not beat-it is a carcass, a dead body of doctrine. If it is workable and every other way that cuts across it is unworkable, then its heart does beat, and beating it pumps its warm life blood into every portion of the Christian soul and of Christian society and makes them live." It is hard to believe these verses can be of such great significance, but the evidence is very strong that they represent the only hope for man to escape from his own self-destruction.

Billy Graham's book *Approaching Hoofbeats* deals with the four horseman in the book of Revelation. In it he makes clear that the next war will be the only truly World War, for it will involve the whole world. All other wars leave millions of people detached, and they can talk about the war going on someplace else. Graham quotes the president of the United Nations General Assembly. "What have the governments of the world to respond to the fervent demand of the people's of the world that this insane arms race be stopped?" He gave his own reply by saying, "You and I know that answer, but I want to state it for the world to hear-nothing!" Things have changed since Graham wrote his book, but the fact remains that there are enough nuclear weapons to destroy the whole world many times over.

Graham knows that the end will come someday, but he feels that Christians can delay the end for generations by being the peacemakers God wants them to be. He regrets that he did not get active for world peace sooner, but he feels it is still not too late. The problem is that governments are so impersonal, and they tend to operate on the level of the legalistic, and that is not good enough. Only people can love, and it is people who will make the difference. Graham quotes Dwight Eisenhower, "I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than are governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of their way and let them have it."

Graham's favorite basis for hope is the story of Ninevah. It was a doomed city, for God had already sentenced them. It looked as hopeless as anything could be, for judgement was sure. But because of the repentance of the people when Jonah preached of God's wrath, God altered His plan for history. The response of the people so moved God that He postponed their destruction for 150 years. Graham was convinced that people can still change history today by repentance. We have taken a detour to look at the views of Billy Graham, but now we want to get back on the main road. It is the road that Jesus says is narrow, and it is not very widely traveled. It is not a popular road because most everybody is convinced it is a dead end, and will not get you anywhere.

**Jesus, however, says it is the only road that will get you anywhere worth going, for it is the road that takes you to that level of living where you relate to people like God does. Only those who travel this road can be part of the answer to local and world peace. Only as Christians prove by their life that they Prince of Peace really has a strategy that works will there be any hope of the world noticing the light. One of the most important thing we can do for world peace is to learn to understand and obey these crucial teachings of our Lord.**

**Look at verse 39 where Jesus says, "Do not resist an evil person." The number of things this doesn't mean could fill volumes. It does not mean that if some mad man is coming at you, or your family, with a knife that you should not find a weapon to defend yourself. There is nothing spiritual about dying or suffering for such a meaningless cause. There are all kinds of evil we are to resist. Resist the devil and he will flee from you is the advice of James. Jesus resisted the evils of the Pharisees by His words and His actions as He cleansed the temple of their racketeering.**

**Only once do we have a record of Jesus actually taking a fist to the face, and though He did not swing back, neither did He say, "Thanks, I needed that," or turn His other cheek. He rebuked the striker. In John 18:22-23 we read, "...One of the officials near by struck Him in the face. "Is that anyway to answer the high priest?" he demanded." Jesus replied, "If I said something wrong testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" Jesus protested the unjust hit. You are obviously going the wrong direction if you think Jesus means we are to let evil have its own way, and not resist it. This leads to the totally unrealistic view of Tolstoy who said we should not have policemen, for they resist evil men, nor armies for they do the same.**

**Jesus did not come to abolish the law, and so the law will be needed for all time. Without force to resist evil the world would already be long pass judgment. The only reason it is not totally rotten is because of the salt and light that Christians bring to it, plus the rule of law that prevents man from being his worst. The whole purpose of law is to resist evil.**

**What then does Jesus mean by not resisting an evil person? Is He saying, shame on all the Christians who resisted Hitler, and who threw enough monkey wrenches into his plans so that he could not move at the speed that could have made him a world ruler? Jesus is certainly not condemning the resistance movements of history, which have been the cause of so many evil leaders to fail. Thank God for those who have and do resist evil men, and all of their satanic plots to destroy man's liberty. It was resistance to all of the evils that Britain imposed on the colonies that led to the Revolutionary War, and the birth of our great nation. Resistance to evil is what the history of Christian heroism is all about. Like I said, there is a endless number of things Jesus could not have meant by this statement.**

**What he meant has to do with a very specific situation, and that is one where you have been insulted, and your pride is injured, and you feel the inner compulsion to retaliate and get revenge. The being struck on the right cheek is the slap of insult. It is the strike of the offenders right hand turned over, and so you are being slapped with the back of his**

hand in contempt. Early Jesus taught us not to treat others with contempt. Now he is telling us how to deal with it when we are treated with contempt. Jesus says, do not add fuel to that fire in the offender. He is angry at you for some reason, and in his evil state of mind he is challenging your ego, and he insults you with his slap. You have two choices. You do back to him what he has done to you, which is the eye for eye response of the Old Testament. The problem with this is that the evil action, and the evil person doing it, sets the tone of the relationship. By reacting to evil with evil you are only feeding the negative and magnifying it, and you are becoming part of the problem.

I have another choice, however, which will make me part of the answer, and this is the one Jesus says is the way of superior righteousness. Instead of reacting to his agenda, you have an agenda of your own. I will not strike back, but turn an offer the other cheek. We are not talking about telling some big lug to knock our head off. We are talking refusal to retaliate to an insult, and instead showing our willingness to endure the insult without hatred, and a desire to get even. The turning of the other cheek is to say, "I have no intention of challenging you to a duel. Consider yourself to be the winner if that is what your ego demands." You thereby, defuse the bomb of hostility in the other. This makes you the one in control, and now the offender is forced to make a decision. He is forced to be rotten and reject this response of love, or respect you and be open to the spirit of reconciliation.

There is no guarantee that the offender will choose the way of peace, but that, at least, becomes a choice you have made possible for him. If you retaliate, there is only one choice open, and that is the way of conflict. Your choice of not resisting leaves the way clear for the choice of peace. This is how the Christian is to be a peacemaker. It is a principle that can be applied by the Christian in situations that effect races, and whole nations. Tom Skinner, the black evangelist, was converted after being the leader of the Harlem Lords in New York City. He was a tough dude. He was playing football after his conversion, and a white boy that he was blocking got very angry and slammed him in the stomach. As he bent over in pain the boy knocked him to the ground by a blow to his back. Then the boy kicked him and called him a dirty black nigger.

Tom, as a non-Christian, had pulverized many a man for far less. He got up and said, "You know that because of Jesus Christ I love you anyway." This guy was so shocked by that response that he later said, "Tom did more to rid me of prejudice than anything that has ever happened to me." Tom could have struck back and won a battle, but he would have lost the war, and that boy would have gone on hating blacks the rest of his life. Does the way of Jesus work? It is the only way that does work.

Pride is what leads to the conflicts of the world. We can't take an offense from our mate, our neighbor, our friends, or strangers, and so we retaliate and start a conflict. This same thing happens with nations. Everybody is trying to play God and respond in wrath when they are offended. God is the only one who can take offenses and not destroy the offender. He is patient until all means of peace are rejected. Jesus is saying that if you really want to be like God you will shallow your pride, and respond to offense with love rather than wrath. God gives rain and sunshine even to those who despise Him. God is in the business of redemption and not retaliation. Billy Graham points out in his

book that there is a final day of judgment coming, but God hates that day, and He postpones it every chance He gets in order that more might be saved.

God gladly seeks for every possible reason to continue history. If there would have been as few as 10 righteous men in Sodom, He would have held back His judgment, and let even that very wicked culture survive. If God was only interested in judgment, He would have wrapped up the show of history long ago, but God is long suffering not willing that any shall perish. How many obedient Christians will it take to keep our nation from judgment? How many will it take to prevent the whole world from a terrible judgment? We do not know, but we do know that everyone of us plays a role in whether or not the judgment comes in our generation, or is postponed to a later generation.

The spirit of love for our enemies is basic to the survival of our world. So that millions more can be won to Christ. Not to be a peacemaker is to not care that the day of judgment could come and end the chance for the lost to find Christ. This is a spirit of contempt for mankind that is opposite of the spirit of Christ. To be like Christ we must develop a spirit of love and respect for even those who do not deserve it, because they have contempt for us and God. To develop such a spirit is more significant than we can really grasp. It gives your life meaning and purpose like nothing else can do, for it makes you part of the answer that keeps this world going so that the Gospel can keep changing the hearts of men. We feel so small, and we know we cannot save the world, but by having the spirit of Christ toward offenders we are deeply involved in saving the world.

When Christians stop being the salt and the light of world the end is sure, for the rottenness of the world will be severe that God will have to judge it. This day of judgment is sure, but it is constantly postponed due to the salt and light of those who strive to obey Jesus. Billy Graham uses the analogy of death. Death is certain for all of us, but when we get sick we do not say, "Well, I'm going to die anyway, so why fight it?" No! We say, "I will fight it with everything I know, for death can be postponed and put off for years. Many battles can be fought and won, and so I will keep fighting." Some have escaped death many times by means of medicine, diet, surgery, etc. Death can be postponed, and so can the day of judgment if people do what has to be done. The point is, turning the other cheek is just another pill of prevention that can hold back the day of judgment, and give others a chance to live forever.

The whole idea here is to be flexible, and not be locked into the legalistic mold that says an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. The Christian goal is to save the lost, and not get even with them. God is willing to bend. His grace is universal. He gives many blessings to those who despise and reject Him. He is not stubborn and saying, "I refuse to show grace to those who will not show me respect." This would be legalism, and judgment would come swiftly to the world if that was God's spirit. Love has to be flexible, and be willing to put up with a great deal of rejection for the sake of the offender. Contempt for the offender is only concerned about judgment of the offender. Love is concerned about eliminating the offense by winning the offender.

Some Christians have missed the whole point, and they have made this another system of law. Like the man who came back to his hometown from the army, and he was greeted

by an old enemy. "I heard you became a Christian in the army," he said. "And you know what the good book says about turning the other cheek." And he then gave him a blow. The guy turned the other cheek and got the second one. That fulfilled the letter of the law. So he took off his coat and gave the guy a severe thrashing. His legalism missed the whole point. If the only difference between Christ's righteousness and that of the law is one extra punch before you retaliate, then it is truly much ado about nothing. The real issue is, can the Christian prevent the confrontation from leading to a war? Can you take the steam out of the pressure situation that threatens to blow up?

The natural response is to resist evil by force. We want to smack it back when it smacks us. When we do that we are voting for the day of judgment to come now. We want evil to pay now, and reap what it has sown. Love, however, says, I want to put off the day of judgment, so I vote for postponement of it by absorbing the blow. I will suffer the pain, and seek revenge, for I prefer to see the offender saved rather than judged. The legalist says, I want to see evil men get what is coming to them, and the sooner the better. The loving Christian says, I want to see evil men escape judgment by the grace of Christ, and experience the same salvation I have experienced by God's grace.

Choosing this way is choosing the way of the cross. It is taking up the cross and following Christ. It could very well lead to scars as you turn the other cheek, and it does not always work. On the other hand, your temporary suffering may prevent the permanent suffering of the offender. Like produces like. Retaliation will bring retaliation, and love will stimulate love. Of course, it will not always work. Loving people get clobbered all the time, just as Jesus did. But the point is, hate never works, and when love doesn't work it is still pleasing to God that you choose His way.

Billy Graham had a large crusade going in McCormick Palace in Chicago. Three hundred Satan worshippers marched in to take over and stop the crusade. George Beverly Shea had just finished his Gospel song, and Cliff Borrows was about to lead the mass choir when a policeman ran to the stage and whispered to the mayor of Chicago who was there to give a welcome.

The Satan worshipers had forced their way past the ushers, and they were proceeding down the aisles. The mayor said to Dr. Graham, "We'll let the police handle these intruders." Graham said, "Let me handle it another way." Graham went to the microphone and interrupted the choir. He addressed the 30 thousand Christian young people and said, "There are about 300 Satan worshipers coming to take over the platform. I am going to ask you Christian young people to love them, pray for them, and sing to them, and gradually ease them back toward the entrance." Hundreds of them responded and held hands as they blocked the aisles. They put their arms around the Satan worshipers and prayed for them. They were so confounded that they moved slowly back out of the auditorium, and the service was continued. Graham got a letter from one of the leaders thanking him, for he was convinced that lives had been saved by the way he handled the situation in love. Even the messengers of Satan himself are best handled by love, and not by hate and violence, for that just provides them with the fuel they need to explode into evil action.



**There are times for anger, and the Christian has to fight back in some situations, but only when forced into it because the evil person rejects all love. Evil men are often evil because they feel rejected and unloved. Your first task as a Christian is to do what Jesus did and show them respect. Will this save the world? Probably not, but it is the only way we can be part of the answer. Not doing it on a grand scale is what is leading us to the final revenge. I choose to stand with Graham, and believe that every step of obedience to Jesus we take will help postpone the day of judgment so that many others can be saved.**

**There is a well known soap opera called As The World Turns. I have no idea what it is all about, but there is a drama going on far more significant for all the world, and for each of us to have a part. We could call it, As The Cheek Turns, for how each of us obeys this specific teaching of Jesus could determine, to some degree, how the world turns, or how the world burns. The more who turn the other cheek, the more they will turn others to Christ. The more who say this is unrealistic, the more who will burn in the wrath of both God and man. Do yourself a favor; do the world a favor, and do God a favor by seeking to be filled with the Spirit of Christ, that you might learn to turn, and even yearn to turn, and by this attitude lead people to Christ, who alone can save the world.**

## **14. WHAT IS SUCCESS? Based on Matt. 6:1-6**

**Paul Aurance in his book, Destiny tells of the life of Bartholomew Roberts, one of the great sea captains. He commanded 3 ships-The Fortune, The Good Fortune and the Royal Fortune. Back in his day the ships musicians were on call to provide music anytime of the day or night. But his musicians got Sunday off as a day of rest and religious observance. On his ships, temperance was strictly enforced, and gambling was forbidden. Any sailor who smuggled a woman on board was hanged. He was one of the most disciplined sea captains ever, and he ran a truly, tight ship. His discipline was very effective, and made him the best of what he was. Unfortunately, what he was, was a pirate. He captured an average of 100 ships a year for one four year period of his career. He was the most feared man on the sea. All of his religion, morality, discipline, efficiency, and effectiveness, were for the sake of an evil end.**

**He was very successful in using good things for evil goals. That is why success is not an absolute measure of value for the Christian. It is possible to be very successful, and yet be evil, and displeasing to God. This being the case, we have the paradoxical reality of a successful failure. That is what Captain Roberts was. Herod and Pilate fall into this same category. This forces us to seek for a Biblical definition of success. Roberts was religious, good to his own men, moral, and a hard worker. He had so many good points. He was just like the Pharisees that Jesus is holding up in this chapter as successful failures. They were very religious, and did all kinds of right and good things, and they were very good at it. They had a large following of people who admired them. They were the people who had fame. Yet Jesus said, with all of these values that made them a success, by one definition, did not make them successful by his definition. By his**

definition they were failures, and not to be followed by Christians.

The first thing we have to get straight in order to be successful according to Jesus is,

## I. THE DEFINITION OF SUCCESS.

This is where the Christian gets confused, and is often torn between his culture and his Christianity. In our culture the definition of success always revolves around the trinity of possessions, power, and prestige. There are no poor, weak, and unknown successful people by our cultural definition of success. The successful man, someone said, is the one who can make more money than his wife can spend. The successful woman is one who can find such a man. The problem with the worldly definition is not that those things are not good. It is just that they are not adequate. They are like Captain Roberts and his good things. They fall short of the glory of God.

We need to get a new definition of success in our minds so we can distinguish between the worldly and the Christian understanding. This passage in Matt. 6 makes it clear that for Jesus success is, very simply, pleasing God. It is not in pleasing man, and getting his approval, but pleasing God, and getting God's approval. This is the essence of Christian success. You can do a lot of good things for reasons other than pleasing God. You can give, pray, and fast, as did the Pharisees, to get fame and man's approval. You can be very successful in achieving goals, and becoming famous for your religious values, but if in the process you forget that pleasing God is the number one priority, you become a successful failure. Or, in other words, a failure in spite of your success. To fail to please God makes all other achievements ultimately worthless.

If God is not pleased with your religious activity because it is all done to please men, and win their approval, then all of your religious life is a form of idolatry. If pleasing God is not the goal of your activity, then pleasing someone else is, and that someone else, which may be self, the crowd, or whoever, is in the place of God, and that is idolatry. Success according to Jesus is not measured by the pleasure of the crowd. You cannot take a vote, and if thousands of people say I am pleased with you, then you must be a success. Jesus said this was the definition of the Pharisees. Popularity was a key concept of success in their minds. That is why they made a big production out of their religious practices. They sounded the trumpet in the synagogues and the streets to call attention to their giving, and to get the praises of men. They could have used W. S. Gilbert's poem as their theme song.

If you wish in the world to advance  
Your merits, you're bound to enhance.  
You must stir it and stump it,  
And blow your own trumpet,  
Or, trust me, you haven't a chance.

It is true, if your definition of success is pleasing men, and getting their praise, you have to blow your own trumpet, and they did. But if your definition of success is that which pleases God, you do not need a trumpet at all. You can please God by doing what

is good and right, and do it quietly without fanfare, and do it just because He wants you to. Jesus had done no mighty works, and had gained no large following by the time he was baptized, but when he was baptized, God spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." Jesus was successful even before He had any public ministry, because He pleased His Father in heaven.

Dr. Charles Malik once said, "Success is neither fame nor wealth nor power. Success is seeking and knowing and loving and obeying God." This is the Biblical definition of success. If success is what the world says it is, then most human beings can never achieve success. But Jesus' definition of success is good news to all men, for there is no person who has ever lived who cannot achieve the ultimate success of pleasing God. God is pleased by faith. In fact, as the book of Hebrews says, without faith it is impossible to please Him. This means you can have fame and fortune, but if you do not have faith, you are not a success, but a failure, for these things without faith do not please God. But with faith it is impossible not to please God, and faith is possible for all men.

There are many fringe benefits that we can enjoy as a plus when we please God. But when these things are aimed at as the end and goal of life, they become minuses, and in God's eyes signs of failure. This leads us to the second thing we need to focus on, and that is-

## II. THE DANGER OF SUCCESS.

Nothing succeeds like success is the cliché, but equally true, though seldom said is, nothing fails like success. The Pharisees were failures just because of their success. They were in to goal setting, and they said, we want to achieve the goal of being praised by the people for our piety. We want the honor and respect of the masses. They knew where they wanted to go, and they had a strategy for getting there. By all standards, except one, they were successful. The one exception was God's standard. By His standard they failed miserably. But if you ignore this minority opinion of Jesus, and take a vote among the people, the majority would tell you they were successful. They got just what they wanted, and what can be more successful than goal-oriented men who achieved their goal?

But this is the problem. They got what they wanted, and that can be a curse. That is why success is so dangerous. It is because it works. You get what you want, and you are a success. Now you cease to ask is this good or wise, and is it what God wants for me? Your very success cuts you off from seeking the essence of success, which is pleasing God. You are pleased and that is all that matters. Your success has led you to failure. We need to see that the reason Jesus urges us not to practice our piety publicly is not because it will have no effect, but just the opposite. It can have a powerful effect. It may lead to your becoming popular, and then you may become motivated to please men rather than God. If you never become a success before men, then you will be motivated to do what is spiritual in order to please God, and not man. That is why Jesus stresses privacy in such matters as giving, praying, and fasting.

Nothing is more dangerous than getting a reputation for being spiritual, for it can lead

**you to be doing the right thing for the wrong reason. So Jesus says, don't do these things in public, for you might just succeed, and our goal is not to succeed, but to please God. The paradox of life is that so many things are dangerous just because they succeed. Selfishness is a good example. It works very effectively, and many go far in achieving their goals by being selfish. If selfishness always failed people would not cling to it so persistently. Its danger is precisely because it works, and can lead to all kinds of success. But because it is not pleasing to God, it is success which, in the final analysis, is failure.**

**Jesus says that in the judgment there will be those who say, did we not cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name, and Jesus will say depart from me for I never knew you. These are examples of successful failures. They were religious, and even used the name of Christ, and yet, it was all for self-glory, and not for the kingdom of God. This can never please God, and so it is final failure. In our culture we love to take people from the pit to the pinnacle, and this is very dangerous. Any person who becomes a Christian and is a celebrity will be magnified by the media. This popularity and so called success can lead to pride and a sudden fall.**

**Another paradox we see is that God often uses success as a means of judgment. He does not send bolts of lightening upon the sinner, but simply lets them succeed in their schemes. The Pharisees succeeded, and got the praise of men, and Jesus said that was their reward. They lost God's reward as a result, but they got what they were after, and that was their judgment. People are not only judged at the end of history, for judgment is going on all through history. The child who succeeds in cheating will feel it is worth while to cheat, for it works. Therefore, they will go on doing more cheating, and may experience even greater success. The more success they achieve, the greater likelihood they will continue until they undermined their entire moral sensitivity. The more the sinner succeeds in his sin, the more he ends up with the sinners reward, and that is ultimate failure.**

**I have always been thankful that I failed at smoking. I have known so many Christians who have had to fight enormous battles with this habit. I had the good fortune of failure. I must have been in the first grade when my uncle and I had stolen some cigarettes, and we went out behind the church and smoked them. Some saw the smoke and reported it to my grandmother and mother. When I got home I got a good spanking, and the whole thing was a painful flop of an experience. Had it been successful, I may have had to endure much unnecessary torture in trying to break a bad habit. Getting what you want can be a curse, but on the other hand, failing can be a blessing. I wanted to succeed in smoking, but thank God for my failure. The danger of success forces us to go back to the Biblical definition of success, and evaluate all of life in its light.**

**The Bible is full of examples of men who were successful by the worlds definition, but who were failures by the Bible definition.**

**1. The rich young ruler. He was wealthy and had what the world dreams of achieving. He was also quit successful in his religious observance, for he kept all of the commandments from his youth. But Jesus made it clear that success, even in religion, does not please God when it is all for self-glory. This rich successful man would not**

submit to the Lordship of Christ. This would have pleased God and made the man a true success.

2. Take the farmer who had such success in his fields that his barns could not hold the bumper crop. He had to build bigger barns. All earthly definitions would put this man in the category of the successful. Yet God said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul is required of thee." He did not please God, and was a failure.

3. There is the story of the rich man and Lazarus. By earthly standards the rich man was a success, for he had it all. Lazarus, on the other hand, would be considered a failure, for he was desperately poor. But because Lazarus pleased God he became an ultimate success by ending up in heaven, and the rich man became an ultimate failure by ending up in hell. This parable of Jesus totally reverses the value system of the world. Its definition of success can keep people from being truly successful forever. You can have all the wealth of Solomon, and all of it is of less value than a cob web and a hurricane if God is not pleased. The opposite is also true. No matter how little you do, or how high you climb, or how much you acquire and achieve of what the world calls success, you are an ultimate success if you please God, for you will enjoy the riches of His eternal kingdom.

That is the point of the parable Jesus told of those who worked all day in the vineyard, and others worked just part of the day, and still others worked only the last hour of the day. When they all came to get their wages, they all received equal pay. The owner of the vineyard was pleased with their willingness to work, and it was his pleasure to reward them equally. It was not the amount of work that made anyone a success. It was the pleasing of the master. God is not just pleased with quantity, but with the quality of people's commitment to His will. That is why you have examples like the thief on the cross. He was accepted into the kingdom even though he had only minutes of his life to give, but in those minutes he expressed a faith that was pleasing to God. That is all the time it takes to be a success, for one can in moments put his faith in Christ and pleasing to God. That dying thief lived a lifetime of failure, but in a few moments he achieved eternal success because of his God pleasing faith.

Just as parents and grandparents are pleased with the tottering attempts of a child to walk, so the heavenly Father is pleased with the often awkward and inefficient attempts of His children to walk in the light. It is not just the getting there that pleases God, but the trying. It is not just the destination, but the direction you are going that pleases Him. This means that success is not just a goal of life, it is a state of life. It is not something you aim for out in the future. It is a present relationship in which I choose, to the best of my knowledge, that which pleases God. Mary and Joseph were not successful people by the world's standard, but they pleased God. John the Baptist would be considered a total failure by the world. Successful people would consider him a laughing stock, but Jesus said he was one of the greatest men who ever lived. We could go on and on with the list, but more important, we should join the list of those who live by the Biblical definition of success.

This means that the most important thing in life is to become a success. There is no higher goal that you can think of, nor a higher one that God has reviewed. Success is the pinnacle toward which all who are wise will climb, for if we do not succeed in pleasing God, and achieve the highest success, which is the equivalent of salvation, then we are

finally and forever failures. There is really only one question by which we evaluate all of life, and all human activity: Is it pleasing to God? Not, does it work? Not, does the majority support it? Not, does it lead to riches and fame? There are dozens of wrong questions, but only one right one—does it please God?

## **15. HELPFUL AND HARMFUL HYPOCRISY Based on Matt. 6:1-6**

Every able bodied man in Russia must serve in the army, but Abe managed to remain quietly on his farm year after year. One day his neighbor asked him, "Abe, how does a strong young man like you manage to get by without being drafted for the Red Army?" "That is what I am asking myself," replied Abe. "Every time the comrade doctor comes around to give me my physical to see if I am fit for the army, I bet him 500 rubles that I will pass the exam. But would you believe it, never once have I won that bet."

Man is the most clever creature when it comes to figuring out how to get his own way. Hypocrisy, or pretending something that isn't so, is one of his best methods. John Barrymore, the famous actor, once lived with Frank Butler in New York where both were struggling to survive. One day they were down to their last dime. They went to a cheap lunchroom where you could get hot cakes and two cups of coffee for a dime. John waited outside until Butler had ordered the two cups of coffee and had eaten half the hot cakes. Then he dashed in and whispered in Butler's ear. Butler jumped up and dashed out of the lunchroom. John then sat down and drank the second cup of coffee, and finished the hot cakes.

It was all an act, but it was clever, for they were both able to get a meal for a dime. Few would be anxious to condemn this hypocritical little ploy, for their deception intended no one harm. They were simply being clever in making the best of a bad situation.

I suppose that is the reason why all of us are amateur hypocrites. If you have ever responded to the question, "How are you?" with just fine, when in reality you are far less than fine, then you have played the role of the hypocrite. If you have ever smiled and said, "Excuse me," when in fact, you would have liked to scream, or tell somebody off, then you have played the hypocrite. If you have ever gone to a social event pretending you were enjoying yourself when, in fact, you would rather be several others places, then you have played the hypocrite. If you have ever pretended to like something that you really didn't like at all, then you have played the hypocrite. We could go on and on, but I think you get the point. All of us to some degree are actors and pretenders, and that is what the word hypocrite means. It refers to the actors who put on a mask of someone else, and play the role of that person. The hypocrite is one who pretends to be someone he is not.

Since we all do this on occasion, we need to establish that it is not an entirely negative experience. There is no point in feeling guilty for all pretending. Wearing the mask and pretending to be fine when we are not is often an act of love. We feel it is not appropriate to burden others with our ills in all situations and times. Much of our pretense is simply to prevent unnecessary concern about what we expect to be a passing experience. What a pain life would be if I was obligated to tell everybody of every bad feeling I had every time they asked me how I am. We have the right to choose how much, and to whom, we reveal the status of our health, and many other private matters, and that is why we play the hypocrite.

Sometimes it is a mistake when we do not play the hypocrite. We have worn the mask all day, and we have smiled when we didn't feel like it, and we were sweet when we didn't feel like it, and so when we get home we throw away the mask and act just how we feel with those we love the most. The sad thing is that we have been wise with strangers, but now we let it all hang out with our family. We no longer hide our anger and frustration. The mask is off, and we are done acting for the day. Now we are for real, and the real is not very pleasant. We play the good guy or gal all day, and then come home and act the villain.

The family could use a little of the hypocrisy that you have lavished on the world. Many a marriage could be renewed by mates pretending to be as sweet, loving, and thoughtful as they were when they were first dating. What I am saying is that there is a positive side to hypocrisy where we put on a mask and pretend to be in a better mood than we really feel. This pretense can lead to that very better mood, and even if it doesn't, it is an act of love and kindness toward those who most need it. We waste too much of our hypocrisy on people who do not care when those who love us would give a standing ovation for the same acting.

Hypocrisy is sometimes a key sign of sanity. Knowing when to put on the mask and hide reality that hurts and embarrasses others is part of loving your neighbor as yourself. Those in insane asylums lose this sensitivity. If their underclothes do not feel comfortable, or are on backwards, they may take them off right in the middle of a group. There is no pretense, and no mask. If they feel like cursing you, they do it. If they want to spit in your eye, you can expect spit to fly. Nothing is held back in language or behavior. The sane person, however, smiles and pretends to be comfortable in their backwards underwear until they can change it in private.

The sane person is constantly evaluating the wisdom and value of his words and behavior. This means that what he says and does may not always correspond to what he feels. He is, therefore, acting, or being different on the outside from what he is on the inside. This is not wrong, but very right, for it means he has the capacity to choose how he influences his environment, and not be at the mercy of his feelings, or a slave to circumstances. For the computer it is garbage in and garbage out, but for a person it can be garbage in and a gourmet dinner out, for the person can choose how to respond where a computer cannot.

Much of our hypocrisy, or play acting, ranks as a virtue. Even Jesus while walking

with the two on the road to Emmaus pretended he was going on further, but was glad when they invited him to stay with them. It is the experience we all have when we say, "I am full," but are so glad when the hostess encourages us to take another helping. Much hypocrisy is just common courtesy. Love covers a multitude of sins, and does so often by means of hypocrisy, or by pretending so as not to bring out the worst and call attention to the weaknesses and follies of others.

Most of the entertainment of our culture is due to man's ability to be a hypocrite, that is an actor who can pretend to be somebody else. By means of these actors we can be, by pleasant deception, transported to other times and places, including biblical times and places. We can experience in many ways the message of God's Word through these actors. We are, in fact, disappointed if the hypocrisy fails, and we feel it is too fake, and does not move us to feel that we have tasted the real past. The point of all this praise for hypocrisy is not to exalt it excessively, but in order that we might maintain a sense of balance and perspective as we focus on it as one of the sins that Jesus most despised.

Nothing made Jesus more angry than the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. No other sin is so blasted by Jesus. He never raked any other sin over the red hot coals of His judgment like He did the sin of hypocrisy. The Gospel of Matthew is full of the fury of Jesus against this sin. There are more references in Matthew than in all the rest of the New Testament, and here in chapter 6 Jesus strikes at hypocrisy three times.

In chapter 5 Jesus had been dealing with major sins, but now He begins chapter 6 dealing with the master sin. Jesus warned His disciples in Luke 12:1, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy." This sin can turn everything good into evil, and that includes our religious faith and practice. It substitutes external show for internal reality. In Matt. 15:7-8 Jesus said, "You hypocrites. Well did Isaiah prophesy of you saying this people draw high to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." This is a very uncomfortable sin to deal with, because Jesus was so down on it, and we all can be made to feel guilty, for all of us are aware of the gap between our external public life, and our internal private life.

It is easy to manipulate people by the power of guilt in this area. One pastor had a wife complain to him of her husband's unkind behavior in the home. He assured her he would help her solve her problem. So he announced from the pulpit on Sunday that he had become aware of a gentleman, much respected in the congregation, who was behaving in a very unchristian way at home. He said he would expose this man if he did not acknowledge his hypocrisy by placing a twenty dollar bill in the offering, and by mending his ways. When the offering was counted there was an unprecedented fifty twenty dollar bills in the plates. This sounds like it could be a good fund raising scheme, but the problem is that it is doing the very thing Jesus is condemning in this chapter, and that is the abuse of religious power.

When religious power is used, not for the glory of God, but for the glory of man, that is hypocrisy at its worst. It is the devil's favorite show, for he loves such acting as this, for it permits man to be very religious and at the same time be anti-God. That is why it is life's most dangerous sin, and why Jesus so blasted it. Other sins are clearly anti-God,



but everybody knows that they are. If you lie, cheat, steal, commit adultery, or murder, you are doing what is out of God's will and everybody knows it. But hypocrisy is pro-religious, and it can even be super religious. It is one of the most subtle forms of evil that exists. Other sins are clearly identified, but this one is hidden and often identified as good. It is using the good for evil ends. There is much power in religion, just as there is in politics, and that is why both of these realms are so subject to corruption. Power corrupts, and that is why most of the scandals of life will be found in the realm of religion and politics.

Jesus sounds this warning right after He reaches the pinnacle of perfection at the end of chapter 5. Be perfect He says, and then He adds, be careful, as He begins chapter 6. Pride goes before a fall, and, therefore, perfection is an ideal place for which to take a tumble. You would think you could be safe if you have reached perfection, but not so, for you must be ever on your toes lest you lose your balance. Your very status of being just what God wants you to be can be the source of the temptation to be a hypocrite. Satan was just what God wanted him to be, but he saw his status as an opportunity to get in on some of the glory of God. He was thinking, why should God get it all, and he choose to be a competitor rather than a cooperative servant. That is where hypocrisy has its origin. It is the desire to rob God of glory that is due to him alone by using religious power for self glory.

Hypocrisy is being religious, not to please God, but men. Hypocrisy is an appeal to the crowd rather than to God. Hypocrisy is a public show for popular acclaim, and not private devotion for God's approval. The goal of hypocrisy is to use religion to get your will done on earth, and not God's will. In short, it is the ultimate idolatry. The very sin that Israel thought they had eliminated finally crept back into their culture, and it was again the key cause for their judgment.

The Pharisees were a very good part of the history of Judaism. They preserved the spirit of Judaism, and they became the religious leaders who kept the law alive, and kept Israel on the right track. There is so much good you can say about them. Even Jesus, who blasted them with severe criticism, gave them a great compliment in Matt. 23:2-3 where He said, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach." Jesus was saying that they were good teachers and preachers, and what they said was often very good and true. The problem was that they had gone beyond the good and true, and they had their own hypocritical religion where all that mattered was themselves.

God does not matter, and people do not matter, but if I can control the power involved in people's desire to know God, that is what matters. Such was the thinking of the Pharisees, and so they were into a do it yourself religion where you do it yourself for yourself. There is no greater perversion of religion than this, and that is why Jesus so condemned them. In this chapter Jesus shows how the Pharisees took the 3 major areas of religious life and perverted them so that the glory went, not to God, but to themselves. The whole law is summed up in loving God and your neighbor as yourself. This means that the full, complete, and perfect religious life is one of three relationships. It is

**upward to God, outward to others, and inward to self. Remove anyone of these three and you have a non-biblical religious life. The trinity of relationships is the only acceptable biblical faith.**

**Specializing in loving God and ignoring human need will produce a man made religion. Focus on meeting human need and leaving God out will also produce a man made religion. Develop a combination of the two without an emphasis on self-esteem and personal growth, and you again fall short. Unless God, others, and self are all a vital part of your religious life you do not follow Christ and His Word. A truly biblical Christianity will always have this three fold emphasis.**

**The Pharisees had all three, but they were counterfeits. It looked good on the surface, but underneath, the first two were only faked for the sake of the third, which was self-glory. The self is a rightful part of the true trinity of righteousness, but when the self becomes the primary focus, and God and others are only used as aids for self exaltation, then you have idolatry. This is the danger that all religious people face. Jesus would not bother warning His followers about the great danger of hypocrisy unless He knew it would be a problem all through history.**

**We live in a super bowl culture where the bigger is the better. The more show with publicity and celebrities, the more we like it. We want our religious life to be like the rest of it, and be popular and spectacular. Religion is not just to please God, but to keep those cards and letters coming. It is not enough that the angels of heaven rejoice over every sinner who repents. We need the applause of men as well, for what matters is not that God's will is done, but what matters is the ratings.**

**Let's face it, much contemporary Christianity is showmanship. That is the name of the game, and we need to see that as dangerous as it is, it is not all bad. Paul said he tried to be all things to all men that by all means he might win some. If our culture is to be reached, then it can be assumed that God will call and equip some of His servants to use showmanship to reach it. Risky as it is, there can be blanket condemnation. But we must be ever careful that we do not become culture and celebrity centered rather than Christ centered.**

**One of the main teachings of Jesus in Matt. 6 is that religion is a dangerous business when it becomes a public matter. That is why Jesus is rejecting showmanship, and pushing for a life of private and quiet devotion. In our culture it is the celebrity Christian who is known and applauded by millions, who is the ideal. For Jesus the ideal Christian is the obscure Christian who gives, and prays, and denies himself, not for the crowd, but for God alone. Jesus would not condemn anyone just because they become popular, for He became a very popular figure in His own day. People followed Him by the thousands, and they flocked from everywhere to hear Him and be healed. Popularity is no sin, but you will observe that Jesus in His personal religious life was very private.**

**We have no record of what Jesus gave, for He did not make an issue of it. We know He prayed often, but He went off alone and did not use His prayer life to draw attention to Himself. He is the only one who could have done it, but He did not stand in the temple**

like the Pharisee and pray, "I thank God I am not as other men." The prayer life of Jesus was primarily private. As for His fasting, He did not do much of this at all. The Holy Spirit drove Him into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting before His temptation, but this was an experience He had all alone. If He ever fasted again, it was a private matter, and not an issue He made public. The point is, the private life of devotion to God is far superior to the public show of your religion, and primarily so because you prevent the ever present danger of hypocrisy. Public religion makes you a wide open target for Satan to tempt you to use your religious faith for self gain.

It is better to be an obscure unknown Christian who pleases God than to be a popular Christian who gets hooked on the praises of men, and then settles for the rewards men can give, and loses the rewards only God can give. There is high risk in being a public Christian. God calls some to this high risk role, but it is not for us to envy them, but rather to pray for them to be able to escape the dangers of their role. Don't feel bad if your giving, devotion, and self-denial are private matters known only to God, for you have the best chance of receiving God's, "Well done thou good and faithful servant." The more public you become the greater risk that you could lose it all by being enticed into playing the hypocrite. Jesus says that those who seek by their religious practices to get the praises of men have received all the reward they will get. What a poor trade that is, for the rewards of man's popularity is as fleeting as the life of a snowflake on a warm day.

Jesus wants us to understand that it is possible to do the right thing in life for the wrong reason. Everything good can be done for a very self-centered goal, and not to please God, or to help men. Does it really matter what the motive is as long as the job gets done? Yes it does. The motive reveals the true inner self, and if all you do is for self glory, then you are competing with God rather than cooperating with Him. The great issue of life from day one was, who is the center of life-God or man? Satan fell because he wanted to be in the center. Man fell because Adam and Eve wanted to be in center. The Pharisees fell because they choose to move on to center stage, and get the glory for being so religious. Everything they did was for effect. They would have loved our day of directing plays and movies with all of the spectacular effects. They gave with gusto to get the attention and honor of men. They prayed with public eloquence to impress people with their spirituality. They fasted with flare to call attention to their sacrificial devotion.

Jesus did tell us back in 5:16 that we are to let our light so shine before men that they see our good works, but that sentence closes with, "And glorify your Father in heaven." There is the catch, true righteousness seeks the glory of God, but hypocrisy does the same things for self-glory. Candle light is light for seeing. It points to other things, but a chandelier is designed to call attention to itself. The Christian is to be a candle that lights the way to Christ, and not a chandelier calling attention to themselves, and pulling attention away from Christ.

It is not an absolute, but a general principle that display, conspicuousness, and ostentation, or, in other words, making a big deal of any religious practice in public, is a man centered rather than a God centered activity. For many, the public display is the

name of the game, but for Jesus it is the name of the shame, for it tends to push God to the fringe, and put man in the center. The greatest battle Jesus ever fought was in Gethsemane, and He won because He was able to pray, "Not my will but Thine be done." That is the key battle of life. Whose will is to be done? This battle of the wills is the crucial battle that determines whether our life will be God centered or man centered.

Jesus starts chapter 6 with a condemnation of hypocrisy, but chapter 7 starts with a condemnation of being a judge. This clearly means that Jesus is not calling us to a witch hunt. He is not trying to fire us up to determine who is, or is not, a hypocrite. Milton in his Paradise Lost wrote,

For neither man nor angel can discern  
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks  
Invisible, except to God alone.

However accurate that is, it is not our job to label people for being hypocrites. This chapter is a call to self-examination. Your responsibility is to make sure you are not falling for the trap, but are seeking God's best by doing what you do to please Him, and not for the praises of men. Sometimes the enemy you need to love is none other than yourself. You need to see that you may be your own worse enemy, and that you may be falling into the snare of being religious for your own ego, and your own purposes, and not because you really care about the kingdom of God and His purposes. This could rob you of your rewards in both time and eternity. Therefore, listen to Christ, and examine yourself, and ask yourself questions about your motives. Keep yourself on that narrow road that leads to what is best for you, because it leads to you making sure that the glory of God is your primary motive. When this is your master motive then you will practice only helpful and not harmful hypocrisy.

## **16. PREVENT BEING OUT OF ORDER Based on Matt. 6:1-6**

After World War II there were five army dumps in France full of machinery. It was too good to throw away, and yet not good enough to haul back to the United States. It was a major problem. The Quakers saw an opportunity for service, and so they offered the United States Army 200,000 francs for the machinery, and then they made an agreement with the French government. They offered to sell to the French people the desperately needed equipment of spades, saws, axes, trucks, and motorcycles at a fraction of the cost if the government would provide free transportation on the French railroads, and give them 200 German prisoners to help.

Everyone went along with the idea, and everybody benefitted. The United States solved a problem and got some money. The French got needed equipment. The German

families of the prisoners who helped the Quakers receive money, and the Quakers used the money they got to build a hospital in France to go on doing good and meeting needs for generations to come.

With the motivation of love man can turn problems into blessings and bring order out of chaos, and harmony out of discord. By cooperation men can make plans where everyone comes out a winner. The key word is order. God is a God of order, and the whole universe is a precision made work of order. Out of darkness and chaos God brought forth light and order, and order is the sign of life and intelligence. Disorder and discord are signs of sin and death. There is no such thing as a wrong note in itself. All notes are good and a part of the harmony of music. A note is wrong only when it is out of place, and not in the order of the laws of harmony.

ABC is right, but BAC is wrong, even though there is no difference in the content. The same three letters are there, but in the second series they are in the wrong order. AB and C are always right. They are always legitimate letters, for there are no wrong letters, but there is a wrong order of letters. A word that is misspelled does not have any wrong letters, but just letters that don't belong. They do not fit, for they are out of order, and it is this lack of order that makes the word wrong. The difference between a messy room and a neat room may not be in its contents at all, but rather in the order of those same contents.

1-2-3 is the proper order of counting, and so 2-1-3 is out of order. Math, spelling, music, and all of life are based on rules of order. Business meetings in churches usually go according to Roberts Rule of Order because it is God's will that the church do everything decently and in order. Order is a key factor in all of life. Dirt is just matter out of place. In the garden, and in your pots for plants it is good, for that is its place. But on your floor or face it is out of order. What I am driving at in all of these illustrations is the paradox of how the same thing can be good or bad depending upon its place, or proper order. Sin is often something good, but it is out of order, and that makes it bad. Sex is not wrong until you get it out of order. Anything good can become bad just by being out of order. My telephone number begins with 754, but if you dial 745 you have used the right numbers in the wrong order, and the result will be you will not get my phone to ring. How can the right numbers lead to the wrong number? It is because they are the right numbers out of order.

The point is that a lot of good things in life become wrong, and their value is not only lost but ruined and turned to a negative by being out of order. Jesus here in Matt. 6 deals with three good things the Pharisees ruined and turned into negatives by getting them out of order, and they are giving, prayer, and fasting. How can you go wrong with all of this good stuff? The same way you go wrong with good letters like ABC, and good numbers like 1-2-3, you get them out of order. There is nothing wrong with giving, prayer, and fasting, but they are good things that can be used in such a way that they throw God's entire value system for man out of order.

Jesus makes it clear in 6:33 that man's first order of duty is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all else will fall into place. If you start wrong

here it is like getting your first button in the wrong hole. All the rest will also be out of order so that nothing fits right. Believe it or not, everything religious can be out of order if it takes priority over your relationship to God. Relationship must come first, and then religious activity can be good, but if you reverse that order, then religious activity can be bad. The best things in the world can be bad when they are out of order.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matt. 7:22-23. "Many 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. Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers." This doesn't make sense until it is seen in the light of our theme on order. How can all these things be evil. They sound like powerful good things. To prophesy, cast out demons, and do miracles sounds like spiritual power we would all love to have. This is not commonplace religion, but spectacular religion, and yet Jesus says it is evil. Why? Because they had religion, power, glory, crowds, reputation, and who knows what all, but it was all out of order because they had no relationship to Christ. He said that He never knew them. Their religious life and activities were not for the kingdom of God, but for self glory.

T.S. Elliot said, "The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right deed for the wrong reason." That is what hypocrisy is all about, the doing of the right thing for the wrong reason. Hypocrisy reverses the order of God's plan. It does not seek first the kingdom of God, and then have all things added. Instead, it seeks first all things being added to them, and then, hopefully, the kingdom of God will be thrown in as a bonus. Jesus says this whole scheme of things is out of order, and it makes all the good values of the religious life bad things, and enemies of the kingdom of God. Religious practices can be the greatest enemies of the kingdom of God. The paradox is that in their proper place and order the same religious practices are a vital part of the kingdom of God. So what we have is the same things being both bad and good. Our giving, prayer, and fasting good things? The answer is yes and no, says Jesus, for it all depends on the motive.

We only see that something is done, but God sees why it is done, and the why makes all the difference in the world. We may see a man give 5 dollars to a blind man, and we are impressed by this good deed. What we do not see is the why, or the motive for his giving. It could be:

1. He wanted to be seen by you and others watching so that you think he is very generous.
2. He may have stolen the blind man's cane the day before, and is now easing his conscious by giving him some of the money he got from selling it.
3. He may be repaying the blind man for a loan he received from him 6 months earlier, and with not a penny of interest.
4. He may have been asked to help the blind man get to his mother's house to visit, but he was too busy, and so he just gave him cab fare to go alone.
5. He may feel grateful to God for his own sight, and he is moved with compassion to share some of his blessings with this man to encourage him.

The act is the same in any case to the observer, but whether it is good, or merely selfish, or even evil, cannot be seen. It is the motive that determines the value of the act. It is because we cannot see the motive that Jesus tells us not to judge, for we have no idea

whether the motive is good or evil. J. P. Morgan was too cynical when he said, "A man always has two reasons for doing anything—a good reason and the real reason." There is enough truth to this to make us realize that it is important to examine our own motives. That is the essence of what Jesus is calling us to in this chapter. The only way you are going to keep life's values in a proper order is to keep on evaluating your motives to make sure the primary motive behind all your religious activities is that of pleasing God. This is to be the master motive that prevents the master sin of hypocrisy.

Motives come in three categories: The supreme, which is pleasing God; the social, which is pleasing others, and the selfish, which is pleasing self. These three correspond to the three relationships of the truly righteous and religious life, and they are God, others, and self. All of them are vital, and none can be left out or balance is lost. The Pharisees had all three, and yet Jesus was condemning them. Why? Because the arrangement of their motives was out of order. The proper order is supreme, social, and self. That is the 1-2-3 and the ABC of the true Christian life. The Pharisees changed it to 3-2-1 or 2-1-3. They mixed up the proper order of motives, and this turned all that is right into what was wrong.

They put self into the place of the supreme, and their primary motive in life was to get glory for themselves, and please themselves. Pleasing God became a secondary motive. They wanted reward for their religious devotion. Was this wrong? Not at all. It is part of the proper order of things. Jesus promises reward to those who obey Him. The motive of getting something in return for which you give is a perfectly legitimate motive. Those who pretend that we can be loyal and sacrificial in our devotion to God with no hope of return are being superficial. We are made by God to expect something to be in it for ourselves. The reward motive runs all through the Bible. So what is wrong with the Pharisees wanting reward for their giving, prayer, and fasting? Nothing, if the order had been right, for the order is everything.

They have taken this legitimate religious motive and pushed it up into first place where it does not belong, and by so doing they made what is good a bad thing. Their chief end was self-glory. As a secondary motive this can be okay, but as the primary motive it is folly, for it pushes the glory of God and pleasing Him into second or third place. This is a problem for the same reason spelling cat as tac is a problem. The order makes the same three letters wrong that are right in the proper order.

Why do you give? The proper order of motive is, to please God, to help others, and to feel good about yourself.

Why do you pray? The proper order is again, to please God, to intercede for others, and to get my own needs met.

Why do you fast? The proper order is, to please God, to influence others, and to increase my own self-esteem.

We could go on dealing with numerous things that must fall in this same order if they are to be truly good things. There is nothing wrong with self-centered acts and motives

when they fall into the proper order. When the motives are in the right order you are being just what God wants you to be. The reason Jesus calls us away from public display to private devotion is because the only way to keep your motives in proper order is by a one on one relationship to God. If you let this private and personal relationship fade, and become a public type Christian, you risk getting your motives and priorities out of whack. When your actions are on public display you tend to shift toward the self-centered values and motives, and that is why you are more likely to keep the proper order and balance when you seek to please God in private.

This has already happened to many good and godly people, and so it is folly for us to think that it can never happen to us. Jesus would not use such a large portion of His most famous sermon dealing with this danger if it was not a threat to all believers in all times. The greatest argument for a devotional life, or a quiet time-a time alone with God-it is that it helps you keep your motives and priorities in order. Everything we do we do for a reason. It is possible to be a drifter, and, like a log on the river, just float along with the stream having no care or concern as to where we are going or why. This is not the choice most of us make most of the time. We want to go a certain direction, and toward a goal. The question is why? Why do we give, pray, and deny self? Why do we go to church, and read the Bible, and sing Christian songs, and go to Christian entertainment? Why do we do so many things that are a part of what we call Christian living? There may be many motives that are moving us.

1. We may have been raised to do these things, and we feel comfortable doing them.
2. We may feel uncomfortable, but we feel guilty if we don't, and so we do them to escape guilt feelings.
3. We may just feel that religion is the in thing, and we want to go with the flow to be part of our culture.
4. We may fear hell, and so we are compelled by our fears to conform in hopes of escaping judgment.
5. We may feel a deep desire for heaven, and so we are religious for the sake of eternal rewards.
6. We may feel family and social pressure, and so we do it for human approval.
7. We may, like the Pharisees, discover that there is power in this approval of people, and so be motivated by the desire for fame and popularity.

The motives for the religious life and behavior are many, and all of them may play some role in each of our lives at different times. Some of them are less noble than others, but none of them are bad or evil if they come under the control of the master motive, which is to please God. If this is the primary and supreme motive of your life, all other secondary motives will exert their influence in a proper order, and so become legitimate motives. But if you let one of these secondary motives take the place of the master motive, it becomes your worst enemy, just as it was for the Pharisees.

How do we avoid this? Jesus says you develop a partnership with God so that pleasing Him becomes the name of the game in your life. Your Christian life is a matter between you and God. Your giving is a matter you have agreed on with God, and pleasing Him is all that matters. Your prayer life a private matter with you and God, and not something



**you use to get attention. Fasting, or any other act of self-denial, is a matter between you and God, and not for getting a reputation among men.**

**Many of the mysteries of the Christian life are solved when we see them in the light of this issue of motive and order. Take the mystery of the Christian student who is a leader in his home church, and the pride of the youth group, who goes off to a Christian college and becomes a wild trouble maker or an indifferent Christian. What is going on? 99 times out of a 100 it is a matter of motives out of order. They were motivated to be Christian leaders in the home church because they got recognition and praise. They go off to college, and now they are just one of a crowd, and they no longer are any big deal. This is a real test of their relationship to God. If they have let their personal relationship to God slip, and have been living on the joys of human praise and approval, they will become depressed when these are longer experienced. Now there is no reward for being spiritual and, like a trained animal that is no longer rewarded, they cease to perform.**

**The Christian who has dependant upon human reward for his motivation will become discouraged when he does not get it, and may do all sorts of things for attention. Some Christians find that they get more attention by being a non-conformist. If becoming worldly and doing shocking things gain the glory and attention he needs, then he will go that route. He is then being very non-religious for the same reason he was formerly being very religious. It is to get the attention and the approval of men. The whole problem could have been prevented by never letting the wrong motive dominate his life. That is what happened to the Pharisees, and what happens all the time to good people who let their motives get out of order.**

**The game of life is like the game of bowling. If the head pin is off the mark and out of order, nothing will go right. Everything depends upon that head pin. The head pin of the Christian life is pleasing God, and all else depends upon that being in the proper place. If that is your supreme motive, then when circumstances change you will not be tempted to change in a negative way. So what if you are not getting the attention and approval you had before? That is only a secondary motive, and since your primary motive is to please God and receive His reward, and that is still in place, you go on being just what God wants you to be because change in circumstances does not change your relationship to God. Your partnership is intact, and His approval is all you need.**

**It may not be all you want, and you may want human approval as well, and that is not wrong as long as it is secondary. If it is, it will not become a stumbling block to cause you to fall out of God's will and into the snare of Phariseeism. You will go on doing God's will to please Him, and hope that circumstances will change so that other desires will also be met, but the supreme motive will carry you through regardless of how many other motives must wait for fulfillment. A major part of being perfect is being a Christian who is motivated primarily by pleasing God. This is the key factor to prevent being out of order. The most pleasing thing anyone can do, of course, is to receive the gift of His Son as one's Savior.**

**This concept of order of motives helps us with the many paradoxes of life. The situation ethics problem, for example, where love is the supreme value. If you love, you**

can do most anything and it is right according to those who promote situation ethics. It is hard to escape the truth of what they say, for there are so many cases where it does fit, but it also leads to the justifying of so much that seems clearly to be wrong. Paul says that love is the supreme virtue, and that all else is nothing without it. How can we escape the abuse of this truth? We do it by recognizing that love can be abused, and so it is not just love, but love in the proper order, that is absolute.

Love for God is absolute, but love for others and self must be relative to that absolute. My love for my friend makes me want to lie or cheat to help him, but my love for God makes me refrain from lying and cheating, because I want to please Him most of all. Love for self is the cause for temptation to do many things not pleasing to God, but if self love is in the right order it will not go beyond my love for God and pleasing Him. My self love and other love have to be dominated, and be under the control of my love for God. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that love is the absolute. It is love for God that is the absolute, and there is no higher authority in anyone's mind than that of doing what they are convinced pleases God.

Self love is not an evil motive, but it is a vital part of the balance Christian life. You cannot obey the second great command to love your neighbor as yourself without it. This vital virtue, however, can become the road to the master sins of idolatry and hypocrisy. Self love must be under the control of love for God in order to be good and beautiful. If it is, then even hypocrisy is controlled so that it can be a value. If I am hypocritical in order to please God, then even this can be valid behavior. I say to the child who has just sung that they did wonderful, even though I feel it was far from being good. I do it, not just to please the child, but because I know it pleases God to encourage a child.

I know a seminary professor who was brought up to prejudice, and even after years of being a Christian he struggles with it. If he meets a person for whom he has prejudice, he will suppress that negative feeling, and he will treat the person in love as a Christian should. He is pretending at this point. He is hiding his deep inner feeling of prejudice, and is covering it over with Christian love. This acting is a performance of Christian love that is pleasing to God, for he has chosen to do what God wills, and not what his training urges him to do. He is fighting the old man in him, and he is saying, "Not my will but Thine be done." Pleasing God is his master motive, and the result is that his hypocrisy is transformed into a virtue, for he does it in obedience to God.

This is an example of sanctified hypocrisy, for he is acting Christian on the outside until the inner man catches up to feel Christian. He has his motives in the right order, and so even his hypocrisy is pleasing to God. He has not yet reached the ideal, but at this point he is perfect, for he is being just what God wants him to be in that context. If his self love was allowed to dominate, he would do as some Christians do. He would say, "I am not going to be a hypocrite. I'll be honest about how I feel. I do not like minorities. I will treat them as things and not as people, but I will be honest about it." This they think is a virtue, but in reality they are sinning against God and others, and the only one they please is their self. Such a Christian is out of order, and that is the sign that should be

hung on them-out of order. People could then know that this is not the way a Christian is designed to function. He is not being submissive to his Creator and Redeemer. His self will is in the place of the master motive, and now what pleases him is all that matters.

It ought to be clear that we are dealing with a daily battle to keep our motives in order. Will Durant said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of order as well as liberty." We need to often get alone with God and practice His presence, and renew our cooperation in the partnership in order to keep pleasing Him. Everyday we need to ask God to help us keep our priorities in order. Every Christian needs to make a commitment to devote some time to being alone with God to have a sense of the need to keep the proper order in their life, so they can prevent being out of order.

## **17. THE REWARD MOTIVE Based on Matt. 6:1-6**

A 16th century German monk discovered the power of religious bribery. The children showed great reluctance in learning their prayers. Scolding and punishing them did not improve things, and so he tried offering them a reward. Tradition has it that he took thin strips of dough and twisted them into a knot. This was suggestive of the folded arms of a person at prayer. He would bake these little cakes and give them to the children who learned their prayers. Spurred on by this reward, his students learned so much more rapidly that other monks followed his example. The novel little tidbits came to be called pretzels from a medieval Latin term that some feel was *pretiola*, which means a little reward. They became popular in England, and in the 19th century they became popular in the United States the pretzel is good symbol of the subject we are looking at, for it is the complex and often twisted subject of rewards.

We know rewards are the key to animal training and scientific experiments. No self-respecting rat is going to bother to figure out how to get through a maze just for the sake of pure knowledge. It doesn't care a fig about scientific progress, and couldn't care less if there is a way through the thing or not, unless there is a reward in it, and namely something to eat.

Truffles are a great delicacy in Europe. They are an underground mushroom that grow by several species of trees in the forest. They bring a high price as gourmet food, and so hunting them is very profitable. Hogs love the odor of them, and they will root them out of the ground. Hogs became the main tool for finding and digging up this delicacy. Their owners would muzzle the swine to keep them from eating up all the profits. They soon learned, however, that unless the hogs got a chance to eat some of them they lost all interest in the pursuit, and they quit rooting for them. They didn't carry signs, but it was clear that they were on strike, and they were saying, no reward-no rooting.

We could conclude that rats and hogs need rewards to function, but this would not be so for humans. This would be too hasty a conclusion, however, for Jesus clearly appeals to

our love of reward to get us to go God's way in the practice of our faith. Love of reward is also that which is motivating the Pharisees to go their self-centered way, and so we have another paradox of life. Reward can be good or bad, and it can be ratty or righteous, and hoggish or heavenly. The evil man out of God's will, and the righteous center of God's will may both be motivated by the love of reward. It is obviously a subject then that needs to be seen from both the vicious and the virtuous side.

## **I. THE VICIOUS SIDE OF REWARD.**

There is a double paradox here in the case of the Pharisees because their deviate, defective, and depraved love of reward was evil precisely because they were satisfied with too little. They did not want a great enough reward. They were content to have the praise of men, and so they stopped short of seeking the praise of God. Wanting reward is bad when you do not want enough, but if you want God's best, then it is good.

You can miss the mark by aiming too low as well as by aiming too high, and that is what they did. This is the major folly of man that he strives to attain rewards that are so puny and passing, and they give up the rewards that are so powerful and permanent. They aim for the passing pleasure of a sexual encounter, and give up the permanent joy of a lifetime commitment. They aim for the temporary escape of guilt through alcohol, and they give up the permanent joy of sin forgiven. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the desire of men for peace, joy, contentment, and happiness. These are worthy rewards every man should seek, but when these rewards are pushed aside, and cheap substitutes and shoddy counterfeits are put in their place, the reward motive becomes a vice. Anything that motivate a man to aim too low is a vice.

The man who marries a woman for her money is considered evil. The man who marries her for love is considered good. Both are motivated by reward, but one seeks a reward that is too low, but the other seeks the highest reward, which is love. The reason bounty hunters were despised, even though all they did was shoot outlaws who were wanted, just the same as the sheriff would do, is because they did it for the reward of money. The sheriff did it for justice, and the protection of the innocent. He was also rewarded by being loved and appreciated. The mercenary soldier is not held in high esteem, for he fights a war for anybody, and kills for money. The regular soldier fights for his country and his freedom, and he is respected.

There are numerous illustrations of two people doing the same things where one is despised and the other admired, and the difference is in the value of the reward they seek. It is not the seeking of reward that is wrong, but the fact that the reward they seek is too small and unworthy. This is why there is a negative side to rewards. They can motivate us to do the right thing for the wrong reason. They can make us aim too low. In the case of the Pharisees, they sought the benefits of popularity with men. This is a reward that has its place, but when it is made the supreme reward over and above that of pleasing God it becomes a vicious motive leading to idolatry, hypocrisy, and every other folly known to man.

## **II. THE VIRTUOUS SIDE OF REWARD.**

The study of man reveals that the reward motive is built into him by God just as it is built into the animal kingdom. I got out an old text book from my college days which was titled **What Education Has To Learn From Psychology**. One chapter begins, "Learning takes place only when the act that is performed is reinforced or rewarded." In other words, rats and hogs are not so dumb after all. They are motivated by the same thing that motivates people. Neal Miller goes on in his book to say, "Without rewards, people fail to learn." I didn't have to bother to check with the latest text books to see if this theory is still current, for Jesus makes it clear in the Sermon on the Mount that it is a universal and perpetual truth.

If Jesus appeals to the reward motive to get His followers to give, to pray, and to fast in a way that is pleasing to God, then we have a key to all teaching. Jesus was the master teacher, and He used the reward motive constantly to teach the highest truths. Deny the validity of the reward motive, and you reject the methods of the Master. He made us so that we learn faster by being rewarded for good behavior than by being punished for bad behavior. The beauty of what Jesus is teaching is that we see Jesus practicing the wisdom of balance. The tendency of all teachers of righteousness is to ignore the balance and go to extremes. Many will say, "The Pharisees seek for reward, and so I say unto you that seeking for reward is evil. Never do anything for reward." This is still a very common practice. You over react to folly, and you throw out the baby with the bath water.

Jesus does not do this. He says, "Look at the mistake of the Pharisees. They seek reward, and they get just what they want, which is the acclaim of men. Don't you aim so low when you seek reward. Aim higher by seeking the acclaim of God." He does not throw out the reward motive just because it is abused. That is the folly of over reaction. TV is used for promoting evil, therefore, do not use it at all is what they say who over react. The balance Christian says that though TV is used for evil, I will use it for good. Reward seeking is done for evil, but I will seek reward for the glory of God, for the benefit of others, and for the good of my own self-esteem. The point is, the Christian never gives up anything that can be used in a God pleasing way just because it is abused and misused by those who care only about their own will.

Can you imagine the generals in the Pentagon deciding that since the enemy already has developed a larger gun that we should, therefore, not bother. We don't want to have and use the same kind of weapons they do. You would hear no such thing. They would command the research to be speeded up, for they want the same superior weapon. You not only want the same weapon as your enemy, but you also want to learn how to use it better. Jesus says that Satan can use the reward motive to entice people into being obsessed with low goals to aim for. Rewards can be used to lead men into idolatry and self-centeredness. But Jesus did not say to scrap all interest in the reward motive. On the contrary, He said to develop this weapon to its highest power, for what Satan can use to glorify self, you can use to glorify God, and reap the highest rewards. Don't reject anything just because evil forces use it. Perfect it and use it the way God intended it to be used.

Scientists use the reward motive very effectively some years ago when a shower of meteors fell in North Central Mexico. Freshly falling meteorites are valuable to

astronomers, and so the team of scientists drove to the scene and set up a soft drink stand on the edge of town. They offered the Indian children a free drink for every meteorite they brought in. It was a swift and effective plan, and they soon had all they needed. You can just imagine those kids scampering all over the countryside with enthusiasm. That is the way God wants us to live for Him-with the excitement and anticipation of being greatly rewarded. Heb. 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him. For whosoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."

The reward motive is at the very heart of the Christian faith, for you cannot function properly for God at all unless you believe He is a giver of rewards. If you want to serve God for nothing, you are more of a Stoic than a Christian. A Christian wants what God delights to give, and He so delights to give that Jesus says that even a cup of cold water given in His name will not go unrewarded. There is no act of kindness so trivial that God does not record it for future reward. The whole emphasis of Jesus in Matt. 6 is on the fact that you do not have to fear if no one knows of your good works, and you never hear the applause of men for what you do for God. If only God knows, that is enough. In fact, it is even better, for then there is no danger of taking the lesser reward. If only God knows, you can be assured of God's reward in time and eternity, for Jesus says that God will reward openly that which is done in secret.

We need to recognize that the Gospel is good news. That means it is an offer of present and future reward. Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He did not say He would add another burden, but He would give rest, and that is just what is needed. There is no Gospel if there is no reward. Sinners need to experience forgiveness and release from guilt now to have any joy and peace. This is part of the appeal of the Gospel to motivate people by the promise of reward. It was the reward motive that enabled Jesus to stay on the cross and finish the plan of salvation. Heb. 12:2 says, "Who for the joy that was before Him endured the cross." If Jesus could not look ahead to eternity, and to the reward of everlasting joy with a multitude of redeemed sinners, He would not have had the motivation to endure the price He had to pay on the cross.

We have not covered a fraction of this vast subject, but we have seen enough to make it clear that there is a negative and a positive side to the issue of rewards. The important thing is that we prevent the loss of the best rewards by promotion of that which pleases God rather than that which pleases only men. Every day we have abundant opportunities to please God and add to our treasures in heaven. But we are so often like those knights who were traveling through unknown country. As they crossed an old dry river bed they heard a voice that said, "Take a handful of pebbles from the river bed and you will be both glad and sad." Each night scraped up a handful of the pebbles and road on. In the morning they looked in their pockets and saw in the blaze of sunlight that they had taken up diamonds, opals, rubies, and sapphires. They were glad they had taken so many, but sad that they had not taken more.

There is no doubt that all of us will feel the same way when we receive our rewards for what we have done in the body for our Lord. We will be glad for what we have done, but

sad that we did not do more. Jesus is showing us how to close that gap so that we will have more to be glad about. The way is to seek the highest rewards by developing the inner life that lifts you closer to God. This leads to the now reward of enjoying more and more of the abundant life Jesus wants us to have in time. Those who learn to get alone with God and develop the inner life are like a ship in the lock. The gates close in front and behind. The engines cease to drive. It rests quietly, and no longer going anywhere. But as it rests the water is lifting it, and when the gate swings open the ship goes out for its journey on a higher level. This lifting of the Christian life to higher levels of activity is just the reward Jesus wants each of us to enjoy.

Jesus died that we might live forever and be free of sin, sorrow, suffering, and death. This is the greatest goal anyone can aim for, and the good news is that you do not have to earn this as a reward. It is a free gift that God gives to all who will put their trust in Jesus as their Savior. If you have never done so, ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior now, and receive His greatest gift of salvation. Then you qualify to earn all of the rewards he offers for a life of obedience to Him. You need to receive the free gift first, and then live for His highest rewards that come by doing what pleases God.

## **18. THE SIMPLE LIFE STYLE Based on Matt. 6:1-8**

I've always loved the Cinderella story, and have read it to my granddaughter, and listened to it on record many times. It is a story that fits so well in our culture. From rags to riches is the American dream come true. The poor little servant girl escapes from the wash water to live in elaborate elegance with the prince, and because of all that wealth, presumably, lives happily ever after.

Denise George in her book, *The Christian As A Consumer*, points out that the story would, no doubt, be a flop if it was reversed. If Cinderella started as the wife of a prince, and ended up as a poor servant girl, few would get interested in a second reading. Yet the greatest story ever told, the story of Jesus, involves a reversal of the Cinderella theme. Paul tells it in one verse in II Cor. 8:9, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich."

Jesus, the prince of the heavenly palace, became a servant, and by His voluntary poverty and service He gave us the greatest life ever lived, and the greatest sacrifice ever offered. He did so that all people might have the potential of being a prince or princess in that heavenly palace forever. So what you have in the Gospel story is Cinderella reversed, but also retold and revived so that it becomes a two way street, and both ways can be good, for after Jesus became poor for us, He was again exalted to the right hand of God, and eternal riches. It can be good to go from riches to rags, and it can also be good to go from rags to riches. Neither of them are always good, but both of them are potentially beautiful roads to travel.

**Modern Christians in a materialistic culture tend to see successful living as only a one way street, and it is the road from rags to riches. Many Christians, however, have rebelled against this kind of Christian life-style that is culturally enslaved to the materialistic mind. They have sought to promote and practice what is commonly called the simple life-style. In some cases it is radical, and there is a going from riches to rags as people give up good jobs, big houses, expensive cars, and other possessions to live in communes where they share everything with one another. This does not appeal to the masses, however, and so the major effort is to get Christians to rethink their whole relationship with things, and develop a more simple, and less possession dominated, life-style.**

**If everybody was happy with the concept of success that dominates our culture, even the Christians would probably be content to conform, and go along with it, because the fact is, everybody enjoys prosperity better than poverty. Unfortunately, not everybody gets a fair share of the pie. Not only is our country full of people who live in poverty, but we live in a world where the haves have more, and the have nots have less than ever before. The world view has forced many Christians to question the economic policies that promote world poverty for the sake of prosperity for the few. The materialistic drive for success has put an enormous burden on the self-image of millions of Americans. Teen-age suicide has been growing, and much of this tragedy is tied to the pressure to succeed, according to the value system of our culture.**

**To follow Jesus literally in His life-style is so radical that few Christians could handle it, or have any desire to attempt. We read in Matt. 8:20, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has no where to lay His head." We can rough it camping for awhile, but to have no place to call our own to come back to is not our idea of the good life. Nor do I think Jesus would expect us to try and imitate what was so appropriate for Him, and His disciples, at that point in history. Imagine a traveling evangelist today trying to live by Christ's command to His disciples in Luke 9:3: "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, no bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics." Nobody ever traveled lighter than this, for this was the simplest life-style. To urge this on anyone in our culture would be unrealistic.**

**Ronald Sider, is one of those who wrote the book, Rich Christians In An Age Of Hunger. He came out of the Brethren In Christ, who are very close to Mennonites, and he became professor of theology at Eastern Baptist Seminary in Philadelphia. He, and his wife and child, are part of the Jubilee Community which is a non communal church. They do not share everything, or live in a community together, but they are more of a family than most churches. What they do would not be acceptable to most churches. They love small groups where they talk about each others finances and family budgets, and discuss them in the light of Biblical priorities. The idea is to strive to overcome the self-centered approach of most American Christians, where money belongs to the individual, and no one else has the right to know how it is used.**

**They do not feel that a raise in income means you must raise your standard of living. A raise in income can help you be a key to raising somebody else's standard of living from dying to survival. Sider feels churches should spend as much on helping the needy**



of third world countries as they spend on themselves in comfortable buildings and furnishings. What he says, we all know is true, that we tend to live up to the level of our income. For many years we ate out only at McDonalds, but as our income grew we began to eat out at more expensive places. We never gave the idea a second thought that our life-style should not improve with our level of income. We see Christians with a much higher income living in larger houses, with better cars, and staying at more expensive hotels, and eating at more expensive places, and we except this as the logical conclusion to success. God has prospered them and so we assume they will live on a higher level. The Gospel of prosperity is as appealing as the story of Cinderella.

We like the road from rags to riches, and so we seldom ask if this is the direction we ought to be going? We would prefer not to be bothered with hearing about all the starving, and suffering masses of the world. Sider says we cannot escape being part of the problem, for we live in a world where there is structural evil. That is, there is nobody in particular you can go after, for the evil is built into the very system that we all support. You may buy coffee or fruit from South America harvested by workers who barely get enough pay to survive. Everybody profits from their labor, and many get rich, but they live in poverty. This gets to be a complex mess of selfish policies that make it nearly impossible to change.

Sider says the system is evil, and so drop out of it, and stop eating Honduran beef, for example. Other Christian scholars respond, but if you stop, and the profits go down for the company that exports it here, they will eliminate jobs for Honduran peasants, and all you do is make their lives worse by not cooperating with the evil system. It is too hard for any of us to really know what is best for Christians to do in many situations, and so the way of wisdom that makes sense, is to simplify. This is the theme of most evangelical Christians who are writing on the subject. Lois Ottaway, of Wheaton College, stresses these points:

1. Resist the pressure to purchase.

We live in a culture where we are bombarded constantly with adds to make us feel a need. We say, I need this or that, but do we really, or is this a result of brainwashing?

2. Recycle what you tend to throw away.

3. Responsible managing of existing possessions.

We need to stretch the life of usefulness of what you have, and do not join the throw-away philosophy of our culture. Vance Packard in *The Waste Makers*, points out that the American culture is enslaved by a deliberate and calculated plan to design products to become obsolete. We could design them to last longer, but that is contrary to the whole idea that expansion is the highest good. If your going to sell more light bulbs this year than last year, you have to make them burn out faster. The Christian is to resist this by striving to make things last longer.

It is no simple task to live simply. I have many shirts and ties that I would be embarrassed to be buried in, because they are so out dated. They are still very wearable, but I would look so behind the times that I would not be a good testimony for Christ. So I am caught in a paradox where I should wear them for the cause of Christ, and yet if I do I would detract from the cause of Christ. We are caught in psychological warfare in

trying to live the simple life. That is why we tend to be moderate at best, and not radical in our simplicity.

The appeals to give more also bothers the consciences Christian, for there is too much evidence that more giving only leads to a higher life-style for those in leadership of the programs to help the unfortunate. More giving does not mean that more poor people are lifted, and until that is established, the Christian has a right to be reserved about the wisdom of sacrificial giving to help the rich get richer. Does it make sense for poor Christians to give more so other Christians can live on a higher level?

The simple life-style is not easy, but it has all kinds of wisdom. The more you study how you use money, the more you can do with less. You can get food that is a waste of money at any price, because it has no more nutritional value than saw dust. To pay good money for what is worthless to your body is not good economy. It is cooperation with those who exploit the human race. We are all guilty sometimes, and that is why it is hard to be simple. Kathryn Lindskoog says she tries to save money by neglecting things. She lets things go to pieces before their time, and so they need to be replaced at great cost. She admits it is a stupid kind of frugality. This points out the danger of how being simple can lead us to being a simpleton. Balance is needed to become wisely simple.

One of the greatest problems missionaries have when they come back to America is how to fight the temptation to be judgmental, and to be critical of the very people who support them. They come from four or five years of laboring with people who live in poverty, and then they see Christians spending thousands of dollars for trinkets and extravagant expenditures. We do not see from their perspective, and, therefore, we do not feel the least guilty by the money we waste on non-essentials.

Lory Lutz said when she came back from Africa she was very critical, but in no time she was caught in the trap. She got her visa card, and felt the power that comes with the freedom to buy whatever you want. She had to keep reminding herself that Jesus addressed the issue of wealth and poverty more than He did the subjects of heaven and hell. On the other hand, she recognized the need for balance. In Africa they lived so simple that it took so much time just to live that they had little time for serving. The modern conveniences of Americans could mean more time for actual Christian service, and so a blanket condemnation of American materialism is not legitimate.

Each individual Christian needs to keep asking themselves, how can I simplify my life, not for the sake of simplicity, but for the sake of the kingdom of God. This may call, not for giving up things, but for getting things. You may need a second car to do what needs to be done. You may need a computer to get things done more efficiently. Simplicity is not an idol we are to bow down to, but an ideal we are to live up to. Different tasks in the kingdom will make Christians go different ways in their simplicity. You do not impose your idea of it on others, but strive to do with your own life and resources that which you feel is pleasing to God, for the pleasing of God is the only success that really matters. The simple life is to strive to need only one thing desperately, and that is the need to please God.

## **19. SUCCESSFUL PRAYER Based on Matt. 6:1-8**

Henry Brown prayed for a way to escape. He was a slave in Richmond, Virginia, and desperately wanted to be free. He finally felt his prayer was answered when he was inspired by a unique idea. He had the plantation carpenter construct a box the same size of the largest boxes that were shipped in that day. He then poked three holes in this three foot by two foot crate, and then he got inside. The box was taken to the express office, and from there it was taken by a baggage car to a steam boat, and finally transferred to a wagon which brought him to Philadelphia and to freedom. There was many a time when he longed to cry out for help, but he was resolved to be free, or to die trying. When the people he was mailed to opened the crate, he stood up and fainted. It was a hard price to pay, but he made his escape.

Escape is a word and experience we are all familiar with, but in the 1950's a new word developed that we are not very familiar with: The word is inscape. It is opposite of escape, in some ways, in that it refers, not to getting out of something, but of getting into something. It is not a fleeing away, but a fleeing within. On the other hand, it is very much like escape, in that its goal is also freedom. Henry Brown used escape as the means of getting his freedom. But many could mail themselves to anywhere in the world, and still not be free, because their slavery is of a different kind. They are like the Pharisees; enslaved to external values.

1. What do people think of me?
2. How is my external image?
3. How can I make the outside appear right?
4. How can I win the approval of men?

Their self-esteem and worth were tied directly to their popularity with men. They were slaves to the crowd, and this influenced every thing they did. They developed a fish-bowl religious life, for what good was it to be religious if people did not see. The external was everything. Whatever veneer made it look good was all that mattered. We probably would have liked the Pharisees, for they fit the Western culture, and are far more appealing to us than most Eastern holy men and mystics. The poet describes the contrast of the East and West in their religious method.

In Eastern lands the holiest gents  
Are those who live at least expense,  
They rarely speak; they seek release  
From active life in prayer and peace.  
But in the Western hemisphere  
A saint must catch the public ear,  
And rush about, and shout and bustle  
Combining holiness and hustle.

We are in a culture where the external outweighs the internal in our religious value

system. We cannot help that, but we can prevent becoming slaves to it. That is what Jesus is teaching His disciples to do in relation to the Pharisaical external system. How do you escape the domination of the external? Jesus says the answer is inscape. You don't run away from it, or mail yourself off to a monastery, or a society of mystics, but you strive for a balance by developing your inner world.

If success is pleasing God, and God is not pleased with all kinds of external forms and activities, where the heart is far from him, than it follows that the only road to spiritual success is the road to inner space. We are caught up in our focus on outer space, and that is awesome and wondrous, and leads to worship, because the more we know of the magnitude of God's creation, the more we marvel at His majesty. This is good, and it is to be pursued, but if it is the only road we travel, God is seen as a Sovereign King, but we miss the intimacy of knowing God as heavenly Father. This vital aspect of the God-man relationship calls for the conquering of inner space. Jesus says we must get away from the crowd, and get alone with God.

Alfred North Whitehead said, "Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness....Thus religion is solitariness, and if you are never solitary, you are never religious." In the light of what Jesus is teaching, this is true, if we add one word-if you are never solitary, you are never successfully religious. The Pharisees were religious, but not successfully. Their religion pleased men but not God, and so it was not successful. Giving, praying, fasting, can all be religious activities, but only when they please God are they successful activities, and since Jesus says they cannot please God if they are only external, and not matters of the inner life, then it follows, no one can be a success at anything without inscape, or getting away to within.

Let's apply this the specific need to be successful in prayer. There are several characteristics that Jesus emphasizes that are crucial to successful prayer, but we want to focus on the one He most stresses, and that is-

## **I. SUCCESSFUL PRAYER IS SECRET PRAYER.**

Prayer is not primarily a social activity. It is a private matter between an individual and God. Prayer is to the spiritual life what sex is to the marriage life. It is the secret, private, and intimate aspect of the relationship. It is not for public display. The Pharisees were using it for public display in both sacred and secular settings. They prayed in the synagogues, and on the street corners. Prayer was to them a publicity stunt that attracted the attention of men. This led to their being praised for their piety. They were symbols in their day very much like the modern day sex-symbol. Sex is displayed in a public way, not to enhance the marriage, and internal relationship of mates, but to attract the attention of the crowd, and get praise and popularity.

Prayer and sex have much in common, for both are avenues of intimacy that can be exploited, and become external tools for mass appeal. The world uses sex to get attention, and to manipulate people into buying most everything under the sun. Religious exploiters use prayer to do the same thing. The prayer gimmicks that have been used to manipulate Christians could fill a box car. As the world is titillated into

thinking they will get an erotic thrill, so Christians often have the same motivation, and they are enticed into thinking they can get a special spiritual thrill, and supernatural answer to prayer, if we send out request to brother so and so, who will read it by the Jordan River, or nail it to a cross in some prayer tower.

All of these pro-Pharisee prayer promotions would never get off the ground unless there was something in human nature that loved external power. The fact is, the Pharisees were not as bad as we often portray them. They were just like everybody else, including us. That is why they play such a major role in New Testament teaching. When Jesus attacks their values, we need to see that as an attack, not on a few weirdo's of ancient history, but an attack on the natural tendency of human nature, including His own disciples, and us.

In verse 8 Jesus says we are not to be like them. Why bother to warn his sensible and godly followers not to be like them, unless this was the road they would tend to travel unless they were given other guidance? Lets face it, to this day we tend to be external rather than internal oriented, and what Jesus is teaching us here is just as relevant as the day he spoke it. Successful prayer must be first and foremost secret prayer. It is a matter of private communication between the believer and God. Jesus is anti-external because externals tend to lead to idolatry.

The woman at the well tried to get Jesus into the controversy of whether it was best to worship on the Mount in Samaria, the sacred place of the North, or the temple in Jerusalem, the sacred place of the South. What she failed to realize was, that in so many controversies the choices are limited to two, when often there is a third and better way. Jesus did not choose either of these two external places. He said, "God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." In other words, the external place of worship was not the real issue. What really matters in successful worship is the inner spirit of the worshiper. If the spirit is right, and it is pleasing to God, one worships more successfully in a cabin than in a Cathedral.

From the perspective of Jesus, the Christian is to be much like the turtle who carries his sanctuary with him, and he can inscape anytime he chooses, and withdraw from the external world to the world within. The Christian needs to take seriously some of the Biblical imagery, and recognize that the kingdom of God is not out there in the world, but, as Jesus said, it is within. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. That means we don't have to go anywhere to pray, for we have our own temple with us all the time. How often Christian get into such strange controversies. Some struggle with the issue, should the church be left open for prayer? Some said no, for thieves and vandals could come in and do damage. Others said, but it is only right that people be allowed to approach God when they feel a real need. All of this is based on the world of externals which misses the whole point of Jesus. He is conveying the truth that the secret, solitary, sanctuary of the soul is always open, and God is ever present there.

I am afraid few Christians even consider the teachings of Christ in our national controversy over prayer in public schools. Nobody ever asked if public prayer is pleasing to God, or if Jesus ever advocated the idea. Here in the Sermon on the Mount

**Jesus even condemns prayer in the synagogue, the place of worship, when it is done for the wrong motive, based on the need for the external display of religion. I have a hunch that many who want prayer in the school want it there for the same reason the Pharisees wanted it: For display, and the making of the external environment looked more religious. I agree that prayer should be a part of every day in the life of children, but it should not be the prayer of some adult that could lead children astray. It should be private prayer in which each child seeks the guidance of God in their life.**

**There are a whole host of reasons why Baptists have historically opposed prayer in public schools. Many Baptists now support the move in this direction believing that our country needs all the help it can get to change its ungodly course. Nobody can disagree with that motive, and the day may come when it needs to happen. But the fact is, if children are taught to add prayer on to their lives as an external religious exercise, rather than to enter into the secret place of their soul to commune with God, we will be training people to be Pharisees, and not Christians. Millions have been spent, and millions more will be, to get children the right to do what Jesus encourages us not to do: Pray in public. Nobody needs a law, or any change whatever, to practice successful praying, according to Jesus. The freedom to pray in secret is, has been, and will ever be, available to all men. To pretend that any person, including a child, lacks what is necessary for successful praying, which pleases God, is to deny the teaching of Christ.**

**Religious practices are not automatically good, for if they are mere externals, as it was with the Pharisees, they actually become a hindrance to pleasing God. Who were the enemies of Jesus? It was not the publicans and sinners, nor the unbelievers. Jesus never once went into a tavern or house of prostitution to drive the sinners out with a whip. It was the temple that He so cleansed. It was praying in the synagogue to be seen of men that He condemned. Religion was the greatest obstacle to Jesus. It is dangerous to think that prayer, or any other religious practice will make men, or a nation, better. It will not. It will make them worse unless their religion, and their praying, becomes a part of their inner life, and makes them open to the spirit of God. Religion of any kind that does not change the inner man is seen as a curse all through history.**

**External religion thrives on public display and public approval. Much of our Puritan heritage is external religion. A mother shouted at her son, "Get out in the back yard and play, its Sunday." He said, "Isn't it Sunday in the back yard too mom?" Mark Twain said he could only play chess on Sunday if he gave Biblical names to all the pieces. All of the external religion piled on him led him to rebel against his Christian background, and he became a skeptic. This is a common problem, because the fact is, it is hard to be a Pharisee. Unfortunately, the world of religion is most often mere externals. Judson tells of how his first convert in Burma read this passage, and then responded, "These words take hold of my heart. They make me tremble. Here God commands us to do everything in secret, and not to be seen of men. How unlike our religion. When Burmans make offering at the pagodas, they make a great noise with trumpets and musical instruments that others may see how good they are. But this religion makes the mind fear God."**

**We do not mean to imply there is no place for public prayer. We have public prayer as a part of every worship service. But they are not private prayers said in public. They**

deal with public issues and needs common to the body. The pastoral prayer lifts up body concerns and needs so the whole body can join in seeking God's will. It would be folly for me to pray my private prayers in public for the attention of men. There is even a danger of praying in a restaurant. We almost always do it, but it is folly to think there is any merit in it if you attract the attention of others. My thanks to God is a private matter, and its only value is if God is pleased. If I started doing it to impress people around me, I am doing it for the same reason as the Pharisees did. When the motive for prayer becomes anything other than pleasing God, it is not successful prayer. That is why secret prayer is a key to success. In secret there is nobody else to impress but God. By inscape you escape all the foreign elements, and the temptation to be religious for the sake of others.

It is not that God is not present with us in the noisy market place, it is just that we are more present with Him in the quiet secret place. By shutting out the world, we concentrate on the One above all others. Just as your mate is pleased when you withdraw from the world to devote your full attention to them, so God is pleased when you forsake all others to be in His presence. This can be hard for many people in an external focused society. Secret prayer is hard for many American Christians, because they have not learned to enjoy solitude and being alone. We feel the pull of the crowd, and not the pull of the closet. In the middle ages the monastic movement went the opposite way, and Christians flocked to monasteries, and to the life of the closet. Much good came out of that, but it was also a loss of the balance life.

Jesus did not call us to live in the closet, but only to withdraw to the closet for prayer. We are to get back out into the world, and let our light shine before men. But, like Moses, we will not have the light of God shining from us if we do not get alone with God. So it is not a matter of either-or, but of both-and. We are to be introverts and extroverts, and, therefore, ambiverts. We are to be able to withdraw into solitude, and then to enter again into society. The Christian is to have the best of both worlds, for this is pleasing to God, and pleasing to men.

Prayer is the entering into the realm of liberty where you are free to be the real you. So much of what we express in public is based on how we feel we ought to be because of what people will think, but in prayer you can be honest. If you are hurt over some trivial thing, and it is causing resentment, on the outside you can be kind, but inwardly you feel anger and hostility. In prayer you can open up to God, and let Him see the real you that you fear to show to others. You can tell God you know its wrong and stupid to feel the way you do. This makes prayer a sort of therapy, where you confess and get cleansed from the negative feelings that life often brings to you.

Jesus did not go around preaching openly about His struggles with His divine destiny. In prayer, however, He opened up to the Father and shared the inner pressures and trials He had to deal with. Once He even prayed, "If it is possible let this cup pass from me." Jesus dealt with His inner conflicts in private, as He came before His heavenly Father in the privacy of prayer. The secret prayer life of Jesus is made public knowledge so we can see that even He needed a place of retreat where He could be fully honest before God about His inner feelings. If we follow Jesus as our example we will discover

the secret of successful prayer.

## **20. SUCCESS IN SIMPLICITY Based on Matt. 6:1-8**

**C. S. Lewis, the brilliant atheist who became one of the most famous Christians of the 20th century, said, "It is no good asking for a simple religion after all, real things are not simple." Little did he realize, when he wrote those words in his early book, Mere Christianity, just how true they were to become in his life. He was a middle aged bachelor living with his bachelor brother, and both of them were scholars and authors. Life was so simple and uncomplicated until Joy Davidman came into it. Joy was a living example of life's complexity. She was born into a Jewish home as a near genius. She was reading history and philosophy at the age of 8, and like her father she became an atheist. She got fed up with the American economic system during the depression in the 30's, and joined the Communist party. She taught school, wrote books and scripts for Hollywood.**

**She got married and had two sons, and then she heard the Gospel and surrendered to Christ. She became a devoted Christian, and immediately she used her skills to write Christian books. She discovered C. S. Lewis, and fell in love with his writings. To make a long story short, she eventually got to England, and met Lewis in person. They were two brilliant former atheists who now loved Christ, and were writing books to tell the world of their faith. They enjoyed each other immediately. When she returned to the United States, and to her alcoholic husband, there were problems. She fought for years to keep her marriage together, but finally her Christian friends advised her to divorce him. She did, and moved to England, and there she and Lewis had a romantic relationship for three years. Life was still fairly simple, but then the British government sent her a letter saying her permit to stay in England was expired, and she had to leave.**

**That is when Lewis realized he loved her and could not live without her. But the Anglican church, of which he was a member, did not allow the remarriage of divorced people. He was torn, and had to act, and so he married her secretly so she could stay in England. They lived in their own homes separately. She kept her own name. It was very complicated, and gossip began to grow as this 59 year old bachelor began to spend an extraordinary amount of time visiting Joy. He pleaded with his church to be allowed to marry her, but he was denied.**

**Joy discovered she had cancer, and was very soon on her death bed, but God spared her long enough for them to have a beautiful honeymoon. They traveled to Ireland and Greece. Then her cancer returned, and she died in her early 40's. C. S. Lewis was never well after he lost her, and he died three years later in 1963. He was a brilliant godly man who changed the course of history for millions, but he knew from his study, and from experience, life is not simple.**

**Even though it is true that life can be complex, the common people heard Jesus gladly**



because they knew what he was saying. Jesus had the gift of simplicity. He said, "love thy neighbor," and not what the intellectual scholar might say, "Display empathy in a psychic ethnocentricity." Jesus said, "Fear not, I have overcome the world," and not, "unlock your libido, the existential predicament has been transcended." With a little thought Christians can be lifted beyond the reach of the masses, and be lost in the complexity of language. Better have five words that people understand, says Paul, than 10 thousand in a tongue they can't understand. Simplicity is best, but Paul wrote that because Christians were getting caught up in complexity. Paul knew that life was not simple. Nevertheless, that is a goal to aim for.

A judge in Illinois issued an order that forced a patient to have a blood transfusion she had refused on religious grounds. She lived because of it, and then sued the judge who had saved her. The Illinois Supreme Court agreed, he had violated her first amendment rights. He had saved her life, but he was reprimanded for violating her rights. Had he let her die, he would have done no wrong-legally. Life is not simple. How can we reconcile what we know about the reality of life's complexity with the emphasis of Jesus on simplicity?

One of the dominant themes of Matthew 6 is on, success in simplicity. Do you want to have a life well rewarded for your spiritual efforts in prayer, giving, and fasting? Jesus says do not make it complicated by trying to please the masses. You only have to please God, and so keep it secret, and keep it simple. Do not think you can snow God with eloquent, but empty, words. If quantity of words was the key to prayer, then the pagans with their prayer wheels, which through a prayer off to God every time they revolved, have us all beat. Jesus says stay away from all ideas that make prayer complicated. God already knows your need before you ask, so keep it simple. Jesus gives us the example we call the Lord's prayer. It is so simple, and so short, you can pray it in 20 to 30 seconds.

Jesus simplified everything he touched. The Old Testament saints had ten commandments to guide them, but Jesus said you can simplify these ten, and reduce them to two. Love God with all your being, and you neighbor as yourself. This is not easy, but it is simple to grasp. In verse 24 Jesus says you cannot serve two masters. Even when things are down to two, Jesus is still saying, simplify, and cut it down to one only as Lord. Thoreau said, "Simplify, simplify, simplify! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand--simplify, simplify." Jesus went beyond this and said your life is a complicated mess until you cut down to only one ultimate loyalty, which is God. He ends this chapter by saying do not get caught up in worry over many things. Simplify by seeking first the kingdom of God, and all the complex pieces of the puzzle will come together. Don't reach out into tomorrow, but keep it simple, and live one day at a time.

This entire chapter, from beginning to end, has one common theme: Keep it simple. Life is complicated; love is complicated; but the Lord is not complicated. How can this be when He is the author of life and love, and all the vast universe of colossal cosmic complexities? But that is just it, the many have their source in the One, so that though reality is complex, the source of reality is simple. When our lives revolve around the One, which is God, life can be simple in one basic sense, even if it is complex in many areas.

**There is no escaping the paradox involved in simplicity, for it is both sought and shunned, because like everything else there are two sides to it. In other words, simplicity is not always simple.**

**The Bible deals with both sides of simplicity. The book of Proverbs warns of the folly of being simple-minded, which means lacking wisdom and discernment. The simple can be simpletons, and be led like an ox to the slaughter by the cleverness of the tempter. Paul is amazed at the foolish Galatians who are such simpletons that they allow themselves to be led back into trusting in the law. It is possible to be simple in a way that makes simplicity synonymous with stupidity. There is a childishness as well as a childlikeness, and they are opposite kinds of simplicity.**

**John Bunyan, so famous for his Pilgrims Progress made this clear with his character named Simple. He was one who said, "I can see no danger," and the result was he walked into a snare set for him, and he ended up enslaved. It happens all the time to the simple-minded. Alexander Whyte, in describing Simple in his book, Bunyan Characters writes, "There is so much that is not simple and sincere in this world; there is so much falsehood and duplicity; there are so many men aboard whose endeavor is to waylay, mislead, entrap and corrupt the simple-minded and the inexperienced, that it is next to impossible that any youth shall long remain in this world both simple and safe also."**

**We know this is true, and we dare not leave people in that state of simplicity like sitting pigeons to be ensnared. They need to be taught that things are not always what they seem, and there is value in being somewhat skeptical, and not believe everything they hear and read. In other words, even though simplicity is our goal as Christians, it is possible to over simplify and go to an extreme that only complicates life. The same is true in the realm of science. Albert Einstein said, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not one bit simpler."**

**Alfred North Whitehead put it, "The aim of science is to seek the simplest explanations of complex facts. We are apt to fall into the error of thinking that the facts are simple because simplicity is the goal of our quest. The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher should be, 'seek simplicity and distrust it.'" This makes a good motto for the Christian life as well. Simplicity is our goal, but there is a superficial side of simplicity that can get us off the truly simple track. One master is better than two, but this does not mean that one leg is better than two, or that two heads cannot be better than one. To try and make a simple truth apply to everything is usually the way to being a simpleton.**

**We must be alert to the danger of over-simplification. This was the cause of the friends of Job being a pain, rather than a comfort. It is true that sin leads to suffering, but they over simplified the issue of suffering, and said all suffering is a result of sin. They accused him of being a rebel sinner for having to suffer so severely. It is a classic case of over-simplification that made these, otherwise reasonable, men into simpletons.**

**Simplicity, according to Jesus, is simply to live with a single eye, that is, a single dominant motive, which is to please God. This means there is only one ultimate loyalty in the successfully simplified life. Two ultimate loyalty is one too many, and it complicates**

life. It is like trying to stop two tennis balls at the same time. The lack of concentration on one ball leads to a breakdown in your mental capacity, and you will tend to miss both. You cannot serve two masters. The simplified life is one in which there is a single thread that holds all of the pearls of life together. Take 40 pearls without a string, and you have the complicated life. Take the same 40 pearls with a string running through them, and you have the simplified life. All is held together and made useful and beautiful by a single string which unifies the complexity of parts into a meaningful whole. Successful simplicity is not the rejection of complexity, but the unifying of it. You do not have to deny the reality of life's complexity, and try to escape it. You accept reality for what it really is, but you keep life simple by being dominated and motivated by a single purpose—the pleasing of God.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported that the army assigned a group of eminent psychiatrists to determine the best way to select soldiers for duty on a variety of fronts. After many tests they gave this report. The best way to find out if a soldier will be more effective in the desert or in the North is to ask him, "What kind of weather do you like....hot or cold." The simple and the obvious are often the most scientific and effective. Knowing the will of God is an issue all Christians struggle with at some point. One of the best ways to know if you are doing God's will is to simply ask, is what I am doing pleasing to God? Brent said, "Simplicity is not doing one thing, it is doing all things for one motive." The most dangerous thing in life is trying to jump over a chasm in two jumps. It is one, or not at all. So also, the leap from the complex life to the simple life is but a single jump to that solid rock where nothing is more important than pleasing God.

Human nature resists simplicity because it does not leave enough room for creativity. Fallen human nature loves complexity, for this leaves the door open for rationalization, self-justification, and a host of other ways to throw a monkey wrench into the machinery of life. Solomon was able to resolve a very complex case that baffled the judges of his day by threatening to cut a baby in half, and it worked. But someone said, try satisfying two children by cutting a cupcake in half. Inevitably one will charge that you always give the other one the biggest piece. One parent found a simple solution to this problem. She said to her son, you get to cut the cake, and your sister gets first choice of the pieces. It seemed foolproof, for you could count on it, he made the cut as even as the human eye can detect. But the sister deliberately ate her equal size piece slowly, so that when her brother was finished, she could waft it under his nose, and say, "ha, I out foxed you again, and got the biggest piece." This is why simplicity can still be so complex. It is because of the human heart that refuses to abide by the principles of simplicity.

Lawrence Houseman introduced Gandhi to a London audience, and he said, "You are so simple you baffle us; so sincere you embarrass us." Gandhi's simplicity won freedom for millions in India, but it was hard, for simplicity is despised. That is why the Gospel is despised and rejected of men. It is too simple. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. There is no complexity. There is only one way to the Father. There is only one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Men want to complicate the simple Gospel, and add a few other requirements, here and there, for this gives him a measure of power, and a sense of superiority. The simple Gospel puts all men on the same

**level. All have sinned, but all can be saved by simple faith in Christ.**

**When Robinson Crusoe climbed the hills of his island, and gazed out at the watery horizon, he was not looking for a fleet of ships, but one sail is all he sought, for one ship was all he needed to be saved. That is all anyone needs, one ship or one Savior. Life's greatest decision is not complex but very simple: Believe and be saved. Eugenia Price in her book, *Early Will I Seek Thee* wrote, "How I long for simplicity before I became a Christian. Little did I know I was longing for the very essence of the Gospel of Christ! I would have laughed if anyone told me I longed for Christ Himself. I merely long for simplicity knowing that all great art, painting, music, writing, sprang from simplicity itself."**

**Her longing was only satisfied when she opened her life to Christ as Savior and Lord. In Him she found the simplicity that tied all else together. Life may not be simple, but the Lord of life is. Love may not be simple, but the Lord of love is. The more we are truly surrendered to Christ, the more we will be set free from the burdens of complexity to enjoy the blessings of simplicity. In believing and in obeying of our Lord we find success in simplicity.**