

UPON THE ROCK

Jul/Aug, 2007



Vol. 10 Issue 4

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Upon the Rock is published bimonthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians

.Mark Reynolds, Editor
Larry G. Reynolds, Co-Editor
Jim Witty, Printer
mreyn8391@comcast.net

The Christian's Character

Phil Gear

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) has been accurately called the greatest sermon ever preached. The speaker was Jesus, the audience was his disciples, and the subject was His kingdom. In this masterpiece of public speaking Jesus referred to the kingdom of heaven nine times as he discussed two points: (1) The *character* of those in His kingdom (5:1-12) and (2) the *conduct* of those in the kingdom (5:13-7:27). His follower would be a special type of person and live in a particular way.

Much of Jesus' teachings in this wonderful sermon so contradicts common thinking that it leaves the world absolutely dumbfounded. He requires many things that seem exactly opposite of human nature. But then, Christians strive to overcome *human* nature and become "partakers of the *divine* nature, having escaped the corruption that is in this world" (2 Peter 1:4).

Perhaps no portion of this sermon illustrates the difference between worldly and divine thinking more clearly than the section we commonly call the "Beatitudes." These wonderful gems of wisdom describe the character of the Christian.

Each Beatitude begins with the word, "blessed," meaning "happy." In a world obsessed with the pursuit of happiness, Jesus says it is found not in what we own or what we do, but in who we are. We are happy when we develop the right character traits. Each of these surprising qualities bring with it a corresponding blessing that results in happiness. Who would not want comfort, satisfaction, mercy to see God, or be called a child of God, *etc.*? The first and last beatitudes promise the kingdom of God (vs. 3, 10). It is in Christ's kingdom, his church, that true happiness is available. Those not part of that

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Hear - (Romans 10:17; Matthew 7:24-27).

Believe - (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).

Repent - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3).

Confess - (Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).

Be baptized - (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

blood-bought body are engaged in an ultimately futile search for happiness. They may even think they have found it, but what they have found lasts only as long as this life, but has no benefit beyond this earth. But the happiness found in Christ's teachings will last into eternity.

Let us examine each of these extraordinary qualities Jesus says will characterize his followers.

1. **HUMILITY.** *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* The world exalts those who are "high-spirited" or "full of attitude," but Jesus says happiness is found in being without spirit. He uses a word for "poor" that means "completely poverty-stricken, to have none of." So blessed are those who are poverty-stricken in spirit. They are cooperative instead of belligerent; humble and not proud. They humbly accept the teachings of Christ without argument.

2. **SERIOUS.** *"Blessed are they that mourn."* This is not a call to walk around constantly crying or wailing, but to understand the seriousness of the sin in our lives. This will motivate us to seek Jesus' will to eliminate it. Then we *"will be comforted."*

3. **MEEKNESS.** *"Blessed are the meek."* "Meekness" is not weakness. Jesus said of himself, "I am meek and lowly in heart." Although meek, Jesus certainly was not weak. No weakling could have endured the opposition and suffering he did without surrendering. Meekness is gentleness. It is surrendering your own rights for the benefit of others. The meek will not worry about who gets what or owns what, but will enjoy what they have. This lets them inherit the joys of the earth.

4. **RIGHTEOUSNESS.** *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness."* It is not enough to just desire or even admire righteousness. One must hunger and thirst after it. He must want it as the body wants food and water. He must have sufficient

desire for it to motivate him to actively seek it with all of his being. Only then will he be filled.

5. **MERCIFUL.** *“Blessed are the merciful.”* None is beyond the need for mercy. We need it from our families and our fellow-man, but most importantly from God. But to receive it we must extend it. People tend to be merciful to those who show it themselves. God has warned that He will not forgive us if we do not forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Unless we show mercy to others we will never know the mercy of God.

6. **PURITY.** *“Blessed are the pure in heart.”* Something that is pure contains nothing of a contaminating nature. Our society forgot this virtue a long time ago. But Christians still strive to maintain hearts that are uncontaminated by sin or sinful attitudes. This sets the Christian apart from the world as much as any of these wonderful traits.

7. **PEACEMAKING.** *“Blessed are the peacemakers.”* Our Heavenly Father is a peacemaker. He sent His Son into the world specifically “to reconcile all things to Himself” (Colossians 1:20). If we want to be called “children of God” we must also be reconcilers or peacemakers. We must be known as people who strive to stop violence and fighting, and bring about peaceful attitudes and conduct.

8. **PERSERVERANCE.** *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.”* Those who do not quit, in spite of opposition, are those who will know the true blessings and happiness of God’s kingdom. It is impossible to stand for the truth without arousing antagonism. People will “revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake” (Matthew 5:11). But that is no excuse to give up and quit. Take comfort in the fact that God’s prophets before you were so treated. Such determination and faithfulness will eventually be rewarded when you are given eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven.

Mark your calendars now for the Annual Upon the Rock Lectureship February 23-24, 2008

West Side Church of Christ
6600 W. Kilgore Ave.
Yorktown, IN. 47396
765-759-5984

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churchgoing respectability (read, for comparison, Ezekiel 13:10-16)? If so, we need to start afresh. There is nothing to stop us following the example of the wise man, and reestablishing our life on Christ, and Christ alone (1 Corinthians 3:11; 2 Timothy 2:19).

Even if our worldview is in good shape, we cannot neglect the foundation. Have we been down in the spiritual cellar lately to check for mold and decay? Have we inspected the pillars of our faith for signs of peeling and cracking? Are our doctrinal subfloors straight and level, or are we sinking into mediocrity and compromise? We must make a deliberate choice, on a daily basis, to ground our life on the words of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Trevor Major

What an impressive list of personal characteristics! What an impressive character such a person would be! Who would not admire a humble, serious-minded, meek, righteous, merciful, pure, peacemaker who never gives up? Such is the character of those in His kingdom according to the greatest sermon ever preached.

Phil Gear may be reached at 2863 East High Street, Springfield, OH 45505.

Let Your Light Shine

Mark Bass

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is considered by many Bible students to be the greatest sermon ever delivered. While everything Jesus taught was great, surely this sermon has gone down in history as His most famous and perhaps His best known. Without a doubt it is one of the most eloquent discourses ever delivered by the Lord.

This sermon has been given such titles as “The Manifesto of the King,” or “The Constitution of the Kingdom.” However, Matthew simply calls it “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23). As we study the Sermon on the Mount we can easily see that it contains a summary of the teachings of our Lord rolled into one tremendous sermon.

Perhaps one of the best remembered phrases of this grand sermon is found in verse 14 where the Lord tells His followers, “Ye are the light of the world.” This statement was uttered after he told them that they were “the salt of the earth” (verse 13).

This idea of our being the “light of the world” is explained or elaborated on in verse 16: “Let your light so shine before men, that

they may see your good works, and glorify you Father which is in heaven.” This concept of letting our light shine (being good examples) is taught throughout the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). Two verses later he continued, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phil. 3:17). Listen to Ephesians 5:8: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” Timothy was told to be “...an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (I Tim. 4:12). As Christians we must let our light shine (I.E., be good examples) before our children, our neighbors, our co-workers and our brethren (especially the weaker ones). Our light may be the only one that they see!

In spite of its brevity, it would be impossible to cover every aspect of this phrase in this brief article. However, I would like to make a few pertinent observations as food for thought.

First, this statement implies that the world is in a state of darkness. Numerous other passages bear this out. While our world would consider itself to be “enlightened,” we know that all of those outside of Christ are in “darkness.” Paul speaks of this contrast in Colossians 1:13 where he writes: “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.” So prior to their obedience, the Colossians (and all men) were in darkness. This contrast is seen again in I Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

When one obeys the gospel he comes out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. As citizens of this kingdom of light we must “...walk in the light, as He is in the light” (I John 1:7). John goes on to

Not only do we get the impression from this parable that there is a difference in how each builder approached the task at hand, we also get the impression that both houses were essentially the same. From a distance, both would have had windows, walls, doors, and a roof. So also the life of the faithful Christian and the life of the one who merely says “Lord, Lord” will look very similar—at least on the surface. Both will have jobs, spouses, children, and bills to pay. Their cars might even pull out of the driveway at the same time on a Sunday morning as they go to their respective places of worship. The authentic Christian, however, will have a living and active faith (James 2:20).

Finally, Jesus emphasizes the mighty crash of the foolish man’s house (verse 27). This is set in contrast to the other builder’s good choices (verse 25). The winds might have blown some thatching from the wise man’s roof. The waters might have torn away a brick or two, but his house on the rock stood firm. As for the foolish man, he might have looked around and seen his house holding together just fine, but then, in an instant, collapse in catastrophic failure around his head. We face the same danger today. As we look around we might convince ourselves that sincere belief is enough, but this is simply not true. We must ground our spiritual life on obedience to God. Without that foundation, our precipitous fall from the Master’s presence will seem all the more disastrous (Luke 12:47-48).

As New Testament Christians we need to keep in mind that this parable is aimed squarely at us. We can tell ourselves that it really only applies to rank sinners, or our denominational friends and neighbors. In reality, we need to look closer to home. Indeed, we need to look at the home we have made for ourselves in this life. Have we ever given serious thought to constructing a coherent Christian worldview? Are our lives an eclectic mix of materialism, relativism, and other worldly ideas covered by a thin coating of

his life to the test, it will survive, but only if he is firmly anchored to the right foundation.

Whether our house stands on the rock or on the sand is, indeed, a matter of choice. Through the years I haven't made much practical use of my degrees in geology. I haven't walked out, hammer in hand, to search for oil and gold. Even so, I promised my wife that I would keep the local natural hazards in mind. I wouldn't knowingly buy a house on a fault line, build on a flood plain, or ask her to live in the shadow of an active volcano. What about you? How did you choose the house you are living in right now? Was it a last-minute decision? Was it merely a matter of convenience, or did you just like the brickwork? Most of us, I am sure, thought long and hard before signing our life away for the next thirty years. How much more should we think about the decisions that will affect our eternal life!

Clearly the first builder made the right choice in the right way. Jesus highlights this point by repeating the builder's intentions: the house survived the storm precisely because it was built on a carefully chosen foundation (verse 25). This cannot have been an easy task. A rocky outcrop or hillside would have been a lot harder to work with than a flat piece of ground. The man on the sandy plain was closer to his crops and a supply of water, but he was also closer to the flood when the river broke its banks.

Sadly, many people go through life without making any plans for eternity. Like the foolish builder they construct a life for themselves without paying serious attention to the disaster looming on the horizon. That disaster, of course, is to fail the test of faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). To build a life on the words of Jesus is not easy, but the rewards are incalculable.

point out that if we do this (I.E., walk in the light), "...we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7b).

Second, we see that Christians are the only ones who can give true light to the world. The ordinary Christian with little formal education knows more about life and truth than all the scholars and experts of the world. The great Greek philosophers (Plato, Socrates, Aristotle) had already given their teachings and yet the world was still in darkness. Jesus came along with a handful of uneducated "nobodies" (in the eyes of the world) and turned the world upside down — they brought light to a world of sin and darkness.

It's vitally important to realize that Jesus is the source of light (John 1:4, 7-9; 8:12; 12:35). On the coming of Jesus, Matthew said, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light" (Matt. 4:16). The light that the world sees in us (should see in us) is not our own; but is a simple reflection of the Lord's light. Just as the moon has no light of its own (it merely reflects the light of the sun), we as Christians have no light of our own; we only reflect the light of the Son.

Before concluding, I would mention three important points based on the last part of verse 16. Notice that it is the "works" which are to be seen and not the worker. Jesus dealt with this in Matthew 6:1-8. Old timers used to say that the best lamp is the one that cast the most light and the least shadow. In the same way the genuine Christian is the one who reflects the most of Christ and the least of himself.

Notice also that the words are to be "seen" and not simply heard.

John wrote "my little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). It is fine to talk and make plans, but is important that we do what we plan (to follow

through with those plans). “Well done” is far better than “well said.” Scientists tell us that it would take 1,936 minutes for a sound to reach the earth from the sun; whereas a sunbeam will reach the earth in eight minutes! Why? Because light travels so much faster than sound. Yet, so often we do more “sounding” (talking) than we do shining.

We are told that the purpose of our “good works” is that our Heavenly Father might be “glorified.” You may recall that Herod “was eaten of words, and gave up the ghost...because he gave not God the glory” (Acts 12:23). God said that this is why man was created: “for I have created him for my glory...” (Isa. 43:7). We must be careful to do all things to the glory of our heavenly Father. People sometimes do the right thing (good things) for the wrong reasons. They want others to look at them, to take notice of what they have done. They want the praise and accolades of man more than the praise of God. Jesus says that those who do this have received their reward (Matt. 6:1,2).

Among the ancient Greek games, the runner who won the race was not the first man to cross the finish line, but the first to cross the finish line with his torch still burning. May we so run as to cross the finish line with our lights still burning so that we will hear the Lord say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With God’s help and perseverance we can and will claim that heavenly prize. Are you letting your light shine?

Mark Bass may be reached at 2781 Alkire Road, Grove City, OH 43123.

Building on a Solid Rock

(Matthew 7:24-27)

Trevor Major

So many people in the world today lack what we might call a coherent worldview. A worldview is like a house in which every brick forms a part of who we are and how we relate to others. For this house to remain viable, our beliefs about humanity must hold together with our beliefs about God, which must hold together with our beliefs about morality, and so on. However, this house will weaken and crumble if its foundation is incapable of supporting a life burdened by sin.

As we see in Matthew 7:24-27, the only suitable foundation is God’s Word. The wise man, as Jesus says, is one who “hears these sayings of Mine, and does them.” The foolish man is one who hears them, but does not do them. Perhaps there were those in Jesus’ audience who were little more than spiritual tourists. Perhaps there were Pharisees who were hoping to catch Jesus in error, and had no intention of following the Master’s teaching. All of this may be true, but Jesus focused His attention on a specific group of people: His disciples (Matthew 5:1-2; Luke 6:20).

It is Jesus’ closest followers who are being challenged to make the right choice. Are they going to take the narrow gate, or the wide gate (verses 13-14)? Are they going to bear good fruit, or bad fruit (verses 15-20)? Are they going to say and do, or just say (verses 21-23)? The wrong answer to any of those questions will result in spiritual destruction, unquenchable fire, and eternal separation from God.

When we get to verse 24, Jesus is ready to make a conclusion: The disciple who chooses to enter the narrow gate, who chooses to bear good fruit, and who chooses to do the Father’s will, is someone who will stand firm in the judgment. When God puts the superstructure of

commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (I John 3:22). Those who are not keeping his commands do not have the guarantee of an answer. God will hear His children and answer their diligent prayers.

What Jesus encourages most in this passage is for Christians to ask, seek and knock on the door of God in prayer, and if they do they will receive answers from Him. Let all Christians be diligent and confident in prayer.

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Jack Gilchrist may be reached at 1009 Amherst Rd. NE Massillon, OH 44646 or through e-mail at jack@christlinks.com.

A New Understanding of Right Living

Matthew 5:17-48

Gregory Alan Tidwell

You will enjoy the blessings of faith to the extent you apply the teachings of Jesus Christ consistently in your life. Jesus tells you about a new way of living in this section of The Sermon on the Mount.

Our Lord repeatedly contrasts an old and inadequate way of thinking with the new outlook provided in the gospel. He begins this section by reaffirming the everlasting power of God's revelation and the superiority of the New Covenant in Matthew 5:17, 18:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

You need to understand the superiority of the New Law to the Old Law, if you want to understand God's will for your life. The ceremonial and civil parts of the old law do not remain because Jesus has fulfilled them. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Galatians 3:13 tells us, "for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." The moral and spiritual lessons contained in the old law remain forever, since they are not fulfilled, but are still in effect. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith," Galatians 3:24.

Although the New Law has fewer ceremonial rules, it restricts sin more aggressively. Jesus repeatedly shows these restrictions, as in Matthew 5:21,22:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

You need to control your anger if you want to follow the way of Jesus Christ. You must control your tongue, as James 3:6 warns, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” 1 John 3:15 summarizes this teaching, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, Matthew 18:21-35 provides a similar encouragement.

Jesus highlights the importance of controlling your attitudes if you want to control your actions. Matthew 5:27,28 says:

Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

You need to control your wants if you want to live a Godly life. David’s sin with Bathsheba, told in 2 Samuel 11:1-5, begins with David looking at another man’s wife and wanting what he had no right to have.

times that “if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will” (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). Already in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had given the model prayer for his disciples. Jesus’ followers also prayed. Paul prayed three times that his “thorn in the flesh” be removed (II Corinthians 12:8). Christians, or followers of Christ, are encouraged to be diligent in prayer. This is why Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17).

Jesus guarantees that the Father will answer our prayers. This would have been a somewhat revolutionary idea in the Greek world. “The Greeks had their stories about the ‘gods’ who answered men’s prayers, but often the answer had a ‘barb’ in it” (Nelson 220). The Greek gods would trick men by answering their “prayers,” but including some punishment as well. According to the myths, it was dangerous to pray to a Greek god because one never knew what one might actually get. With God, there is no punishment included in an answer to prayer, no tricks added in for God’s amusement. Christians can be confident that God will answer their diligent prayers.

The confusion about God’s answers to prayer comes when man does not receive the answer he wants. What man needs to realize is that God’s answer is better than his, because God knows what man needs. Therefore, God’s children are guaranteed an answer, according to verse 8, but he is not guaranteed the answer he wants.

Jesus’ illustration brings out one more important thing about prayer. The illustrations are of a father and child, and Christians’ prayers are between the heavenly Father and His children. This shows first, that Christians need to be praying to their Father and second, that the Father definitely hears His children’s prayers. John writes, “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His

Jesus then speaks of a child who asks for a fish, but is given a serpent or snake instead. “Fish and bread were the common food of peasants in Galilee” (McGarvey 264). Therefore, it is reasonable for a child to make these requests of a father. Instead of it being simply a trick to give a child a serpent instead of a fish, “it would be both deceptive and injurious” (ibid.). No loving father would give a child something that would cause harm.

The connection to the principle comes in verse 11. Man, who is imperfect, knows how to care for his children. If man can figure it out, how much more can man rely on his creator to take care of him? The word “evil” here means “evil that causes pain [or] sorrow” or evil in the “ethical sense” (Vine 211). It is a reference to man’s imperfection. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), but “your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Therefore, because God is perfect, we can approach him in prayer and expect Him to respond.

Man needs to ask and seek God for help and blessings in prayer. “The key words in verses 7 and 8 are ask, seek, and knock. The sequence of the words suggest an increasing intensity in our prayers” (Roper 257). Imagine an individual is **seeking** for a lost pet on his own. He might just casually try to find it where he thought it might be or where he thinks it logically would go. If he is unsuccessful, he might start to **ask** for others to help him. He could ask a passer-by if he might know where the pet in question is. If still unsuccessful, he might need to seek more help by **knocking** on people’s doors to get more information. This displays how persistent we need to be in prayer.

Christ lived a prayerful life. He took time out of his day to talk to his father and make requests of Him. In the garden he prayed three

Moral purity is important in the teachings of Jesus, as we see in his emphasis on the permanence of marriage, Matthew 5:31-32:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saying for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

You need to have integrity in keeping your marriage vows. If you cannot keep your promise in marriage, how can you keep your promises made to anyone else? The Bible does not leave open the idea of “no-fault divorce.”

The faithfulness you have in marriage should reflect in all of your life. “Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay,” Jesus instructs in Matthew 5:37, “for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

You need to have integrity in all of life. There is no place in Christian living for duplicity or double-talk.

This section closes with Jesus encouraging us to embrace a life of meekness and love. One of the most difficult teachings for us to apply is in Matthew 5:39, “...resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Our Lord provides the greatest example of this principle, “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously,” 1 Peter 2:23. You need to understand the power of meekness if you are going to follow Jesus. This principle of meekness and love, even towards your enemies, is a fundamental aspect of godliness, Matthew 5:43-48:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good....Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

You need to aspire to godliness in all of life, following the example of Jesus Christ. The love of the Savior provides a template for successful living. You will find every area of your life filled with blessings as you follow the teachings of Jesus.

Gregory Alan Tidwell

Religious Show-Offs

Michael E. Phillips

On a hill in Galilee, the Savior Jesus Christ delivered the greatest sermon ever preached. The practical information which He offered would serve to help His listeners to be acceptable to the heavenly Father, as well as to identify individuals who were not acceptable to God through the outward show of their misguided hearts. These same guidelines will continue to be valuable until the end of time, as they shed the light of inspired truth on “religious show-offs.”

Matthew 6:1-4 deals with the improper offering of BENEVOLENCE. Jesus said, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them” (vs. 1). The word “alms” is defined,

Ask, Seek, Knock

Jack Gilchrist

Jesus is the master teacher. Perhaps nowhere is this displayed better than in the recorded Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. Jesus’ teachings cover many subjects in these chapters, including this section on prayer:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:7-11).

As he so often did in His teaching, Jesus started with the principle he was teaching and then illustrated it with common things that his audience would understand. The illustration is proof in and of itself of what a great teacher Jesus is. Jesus had all the knowledge in the world, yet he spoke to the people in ways they would understand.

Jesus begins by pointing out that earthly fathers know how to give gifts to their children. If a child were to ask for bread, then the father would give him bread. Robertson adds that “[s]ome stones look like loaves of bread. So the devil suggested that Jesus make loaves out of stones (Matthew 4:3)”(61). This comparison of stones and bread is used at least twice in the Bible. In this case it may even be reference to playing a trick on a child by giving him something that only looks like bread when he asks for something to eat. A loving father would not play this trick on his child.

“But Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God”

The kingdom of God will be our top priority in life when we truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord. In putting the Kingdom of God first, we will do those things within our power to promote the growth of the church. We will assemble regularly and faithfully with the church to worship God, to provoke one another to love and to good works (Hebrews 10:24), to be instructed, strengthened, and edified. When we put the Kingdom of God first, we will talk the church up, not down. We will talk to those who are not citizens of the Kingdom and teach them how to become a child of God. Whatever talent God has blessed us with, we will use to His glory for the furtherance of the Kingdom. When we seek the Kingdom of God first, Heaven will be our main goal in life. The Christian who desires to go to Heaven more than anything else, will not have a problem putting the church first in their life. The one who seeks first the Kingdom does not ask, “How much do I have to do,” but “How much more can I do!”

The apostle Paul wrote, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4). When Christ truly is “OUR LIFE,” we will have our priorities in the proper place! Are your priorities in life temporal or eternal? Are they physical or spiritual? Our priorities will determine the eternal destiny of our soul! Where are YOUR priorities?

Bob Vincent may be reached at 1311 Sanlor Ave., West Milton, OH 45383.

“compassionateness, as exercised towards the poor” (Strong’s No. 1654). The “hypocrites” among the Jews were indeed giving alms in support of the poor, but it was for the purpose of being seen and glorified by men. Jesus had just taught the proper purpose of doing righteous deeds, saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Whether the Pharisees were literally sounding trumpets in order to draw attention to their benevolent work is a matter of scholarly debate, nevertheless, the issue clarified that their benevolent work is a matter of scholarly debate, nevertheless, the issue clarified that their motive for giving was in error. “The most important reason for giving alms was not centered on one’s self. It was service to others. Men who gave gifts to others in order that they might be admired for their giving, needed a change of heart before they could be good citizens of the Kingdom of God.” (Leon D. Stancliff, COMMENTARY ON THE BOOKS OF MATTHEW & MARK [Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2000], p. 78). In the present day, instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, there are religious leaders and groups who “toot their own horn,” publicly proclaiming, “This ministry has established orphan homes, soup kitchens, drilled water wells, etc.!” While they claim that they are doing these things “in the name of the Lord,” in the judgment they will ask, “In thy name have we not done many wonderful works?” (Matthew 7:22). They already have their reward of men, for the God of heaven sees and rewards the intents of the heart, according to the inspired Word.

Matthew 6:5-15 deals with the specific subject of personal PRAYER. The hypocrites desired to offer their personal prayers in public, to be seen and heard of men. “It is said that the Pharisee took care to be at the cross streets and in the public places when the crowd was the largest, in order that he might be seen; he was displaying a false

piety” (H. Leo Boles, MATTHEW [Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1967], p. 157). God can see and hear in the most secret of settings. The reward for prayer is not based on the length of the prayer, but the intent and content. Jesus gave a model prayer, not for the purpose of repetition, but for instruction. There are some five issues addressed in this model prayer. First, the *grandeur* of the hallowed name of the heavenly Father. Second, the *gratitude* expressed for all the blessings bestowed upon man through the will of God. Third, the *generosity* of God, from the very smallest of life’s needs, to the forgiveness of the most heinous of sins. Fourth, the *guidance* from God which leads man away from evil and toward the pathway of righteousness. Finally, the *glorification* of the one true God, Who deserves recognition as the all-powerful Creator. Of all the items addressed in this model prayer, Jesus returns again to the subject of forgiveness, which was needed among the Pharisees and the people. Such a humble attitude in prayer was diametrically opposed to the attitude which was revealed in the prayer-life of the religious “show-offs.” The examples of the arrogant Pharisee and the humble publican in Luke 18 reveals the result of their prayers, as Jesus said in verse 14, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” The man who offers prayer on TV, sweating, crawling around on a stage, requesting unauthorized blessings, is “putting on a show” for the camera. Prayer is not a gift, but it is a talent which can be taught, learned and developed. “One of our greatest needs in growing as Christians is to learn to be more prayerful. It will teach us greater dependence upon God and cause us to be more introspective of ourselves” (THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, The Seventh Annual Spiritual Lectureship, The Model Prayer, by Alan Highers [Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1982], p. 175).

“Take No Thought for Your Life”

How many of us worry about things in life? Probably all of us would have to admit that we stand guilty. As we seek to live for the Lord, Jesus taught that we are not to worry realize what is important in life. As important as food, clothing, and shelter are, they are secondary importance when it comes to the priorities of life. If we will live for God first and foremost, He will take care of us. So many times we get so caught up in worrying about things of this life that we loose sight of what is most important. There is more to life than things! (cf. Matthew 6:25). Second, we must learn to trust the knowledge of God. Jesus said our heavenly Father knows all that we need (cf. Matthew 6:32). God provides for the birds of the air, the flowers of the field, and the grass that is here today and gone tomorrow. Therefore, we need to trust in God, having faith that He knows what we need and that He will supply. Truly, “Our God whom we serve is able!” (Daniel 3:17). Third, we must learn to live one day at a time. Jesus said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (Matthew 6:34). Do not borrow tomorrow’s troubles today! Do not live in yesterday that is past! Do not get bogged down with the “what ifs” of life! Live one day at a time. So many folks never learn this valuable lesson. God will give us the strength to deal with life’s difficulties and challenges day by day. We must follow the example of the apostle Paul when he wrote, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Are you worried? Turn your burden over to the Lord.

as a Christian by desiring “the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). We must grow in grace, and in the knowledge” of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). We must grow in the “Christian graces” revealed in 2 Peter 1:5-11. We lay up treasures in heaven by giving of our time, energy, talents, and finances to the glory of God. We must realize that spiritual values are far more important than the physical things of life. Are you laying up treasures for yourself in heaven?

“No Man Can Serve Two Masters”

In prioritizing our lives we must acknowledge our single allegiance to the Lord. The fact of life spiritually is that there are only two alternatives as to whom we are serving. We are either serving God and Christ in righteousness, or, we are serving Satan and sin in unrighteousness. Paul penned, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). The person who has the right priorities in life realizes that living for God according to His word is the only rational decision to make. To serve God means that we surrender our will unto His. Like Jesus, our attitude in life will be, “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus’ motto was “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29). Joshua of old challenged the children of Israel, “choose you this day whom you will serve . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Regardless of what everyone else is doing, we must serve the Lord faithfully. Are you committed to doing God’s will?

Matthew 6:16-18 deals with inner dedication to God in the form of FASTING. Fasting is simply the practice of “abstaining from food religiously” (Strong’s No. 3522). “After the Jewish custom fasting was frequently joined with prayer that the mind, unencumbered with earthly matter, might devote itself with less distraction to the contemplation of divine things” (Merrill F. Unger, UNGER’S BIBLE DICTIONARY [Chicago: Moody Press, 1982], p. 346). Fasting was also practiced as a form of sorrow for sin, thus, the outward show of “a sad countenance” with disfigured faces. This was not the proper expression when fasting. “It was never intended to be outwardly displayed and was not itself meritorious. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, to be seen of men (Luke 18:12). Their purpose was for show and self-recognition. Hypocrites are liars who intend to deceive, nothing more or less than actors! This practice God condemns. The modern-day practice of “Lent” well illustrates the wrong way to fast” (STUDIES IN MATTHEW, The Fourteenth Annual Denton Lectures, THE GREAT SERMON ON THE MOUNT — PART II, by Gary Colley [Denton, TX: Valid Publications, Inc., 1995], p. 97). When one is fasting, it is between that individual and God, not a spectacle of discussion about “What one is giving-up” for a special religious observance.

Jesus dealt with “religious show-offs,” with the subjects of hypocrisy in almsgiving, hypocrisy in prayer, and hypocrisy in fasting. All three of these activities are not for the purpose of public display, but for pleasing the God of heaven.

Michael E. Phillips may be reached at P.O. Box 176, Belington, WV 26250.

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Proper Priorities

Bob Vincent

The greatest preacher who has ever lived delivered the greatest sermon that was ever preached. That sermon is the lesson preached by the Lord Jesus Christ, known as "The Sermon on the Mount" recorded in Divine record in Matthew chapters five thru seven. In that lesson Jesus addressed a variety of topics such as the happiness of believers, the influence of His disciples, matters regarding worship, marriage, divorce and remarriage, the proper use of our speech, loving our enemies, doing the will of God with the right motive, the proper way to pray, warning against harsh judgment of others, practicing the golden rule, entering the strait gate that leads to eternal life, doing the will of the Father, and being a wise or foolish person. In Matthew 6:19-34 Jesus addressed the topic of proper priorities. We must realize what is most important in life. In following Jesus' instruction we will have our priorities right, lead a happy fulfilling life, and be able to enjoy Heaven for eternity.

"Lay Up for Yourselves Treasures in Heaven"

There is a great concern in our nation today over where to invest. Jesus gives us an investment guarantee. If we will lay up treasures in heaven, we cannot lose out! Wealth invested in stocks, bonds, etc. will not last forever. It can literally be here today and gone tomorrow. The things that we buy with money are only temporary. Everything in this life is subject to decay. However, the spiritual treasures of living for God will endure eternally! How do we lay up treasures in heaven? We begin by first becoming a Christian! Jesus offers salvation to those who will obey Him (cf. Hebrews 5:9). We obey the Gospel when we are "baptized into Jesus Christ," and are "baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3). Upon being "born again" we must endeavour to grow