

One Step Closer To Jesus



LOSING LIFE, FINDING LIFE

Larry Deason

“One Step Closer To Jesus: Losing Life, Finding Life”

Lessons In Genuine Discipleship

Larry Deason

Life Communications™
Lady Lake, FL

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PREFACE

The content of this material had its beginning over twenty years ago in the mission field. It developed from a study of the Sermon on the Mount with a small group of disciples in a two-year Bible school in the South Pacific.

From that time until the present, a major thrust and emphasis in my teaching and writing concerning our Lord Jesus Christ has been genuine discipleship.

My use of the phrase *genuine discipleship* is for the sole purpose of avoiding phoniness or pretense in following Jesus. My sincere desire and aim is to sit at the Master's feet, seeking to truly follow Him.

May all of us who claim to be His—learning of Him, following Him, and becoming like Him—be decisively real: genuinely so!

I pray that these lessons and the in-depth study guide in genuine discipleship will be helpful to you in coming to know Jesus a little better. May you follow Him in faithfulness and sincerity. May you come *One Step Closer To Jesus*.

“Be complete, therefore, as your heavenly Father is complete” (Matthew 5:48).

Larry Deason

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I owe a great deal of gratitude to many people who have assisted me in my attempt to write. Without the help of these people, my words would not have come into print.

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To all those who requested and studied from the first edition of this book, I am indebted; it is because of the continued interest of people like you that this second printing is now available.

The greatest debt of gratitude I reserve for my Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is because of Him and His love for me that I am what I am: a learner of His will and a follower of His character...a disciple.

INTRODUCTION

This book is written to help the reader to understand the biblical teaching regarding genuine discipleship.

To open one's eyes, ears, and heart to the living Word of God will bring a person face to face with the central character of God's revealed Word: His Son, Jesus Christ. This, in turn, will bring one into a blessed relationship with Jesus Himself. You will learn of Him and you will become a follower of His. You will become a genuine disciple.

The book is divided into a two-part format: lessons and outline. The first part consists of five chapters dealing with very personal decisions: To follow or not follow? To be humble or to be prideful? To love unconditionally or conditionally? To walk by sight or by trust? To lose life or to find life—life that is life indeed? The second part is an in-depth study guide to assist you as you open your Bible and learn from the Master, Jesus Christ. In the study guide, discipleship will be biblically defined and described. The "Self" and selfishness will be examined and studied. This section concludes with an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. Once you sit at the feet of Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher, allowing Him to lead you up "God's Mountain," you will never be the same.

Begin your journey now.

Know the joy of being a genuine disciple.

Come one step closer to Jesus each day.

PART I

**“Come Follow
Me”**

“Come follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Mark 1:17

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Luke 9:23

Now if we are [God’s] children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:17

Who are the truly blessed?

**Blessed
are**

the poor in spirit,

those that mourn,

the meek,

**those that hunger and thirst after
righteousness,**

the merciful,

the pure in heart,

the peacemakers,

**those who are persecuted for righteousness'
sake.**

These are the truly blessed!

1

Come Follow Me

“Come follow Me,” says the Lord Jesus to all who would respond to His invitation. Following Jesus is the decisive call of discipleship. We cannot just call ourselves disciples of Christ because we have decided to become “born again Christians,” as so many popularly believe. Disciples are made by following the teachings of Jesus. When we are babes in Christ we all stand on common ground, at the foot of the cross. We are then to make disciples of ourselves in Jesus Christ through the grace of our Lord.

Disciple means “follower; one in training; trained one.” To be a disciple, one must be developing, growing, always following and learning. Being a “disciple,” as the term is used in Scripture, always involves a personal attachment of the learner to the teacher. It is a heart commitment. Jesus Christ is the teacher; He is the Master. We are His followers. But Jesus does not *compel* us to follow Him; He *invites* us to follow Him. God designed us to have the ability to choose. He invites us to follow Him and leaves it for us to choose.

The greatest danger in following Jesus Christ is in actually *not* following Him. In other words, we don't follow Him in the way He has decided or determined that we follow Him. That has been the primary difference over the years between truly following Jesus *His way* and following Jesus *my own way*.

Until you and I seriously consider Jesus' call to discipleship, the world at large is going to go its way virtually uninterested in Jesus Christ, the man of Galilee, demonstrated and declared to be Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. How tremendous to think that this Christ, proven to be the Son of God, has visited us and has established a personal relationship with us! If we do not take this seriously, we will settle for something much less than that to which Jesus calls us. He calls us to genuineness; He calls us to realness; He calls us to life that's life indeed, without pretense or hypocrisy.

Having worked and studied with a small congregation, I reflected back over their growth in these matters. Having been immersed into Jesus, they gave their allegiance to Him as they surrendered to the truth of the gospel. I have joyfully seen a real hungering desire to develop a relationship of *realness* with Jesus Christ. When I teach in the South Pacific, I see a similar group gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ—growing in sincerity. These Christians really want to know God; I have seldom seen out-and-out hypocrisy or pretense. Granted, some in the body of Christ wear masks; they are pretending. But generally, when engaging in group discussions and later talking one-to-one, I know the genuineness of heart is there.

Unfortunately, I have also seen, even with the sincere, a *casualness*. It manifests itself in a superficiality that prohibits and hinders us from entering into a profound relationship with God Almighty in following Jesus. The underlying cause of this problem in the body is that we are not taking seriously enough the call to follow Jesus. And even though we are sincere, we can easily be distracted by the cares of this world and the things of this life. This is not to say that the things of this world are not to be a part of our lives. There are many good things in God's beautiful creation that He has given for His people to enjoy. But we must have a balanced view of life circumstances and material gains. We must follow Jesus first and live by His standards.

Once I was speaking to a group of young people about having fun after coming into Christ (as compared to having fun before). In order to continue having fun in Christ, I am ashamed to say, I played the part of a hypocrite. This was an attempt to have *my way* in life, to do what *I* (Larry) wanted to do. Living this way, I thought I would have happiness and fun.

I have lived long enough now to say, "With all the genuineness of my heart, as I experienced my life living with Jesus Christ His way, living *His will* from day to day, and as I have developed and grown in His wonderful grace, I have never had so much fun in my life." It is a real, outgoing fun with joy and peace. I don't have the constant frustrations; I don't have the continuous guilt of wrongdoing. If we refuse to put the cares of life before Jesus, the outside world will see Jesus in us. "Come follow Me," He says. "Come follow *Me*. Come with an open mind and be willing to learn of *Me*."

Following Jesus: Too Difficult Or Too Distracted?

It takes true dedication to follow Jesus:

When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

*Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*¹

*Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."*²

Still another man said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family."

*Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*³

Jesus calls us to a decisive discipline of discipleship. He calls us to a realness of life beginning with a humble heart. He calls each of us to follow God's will, admitting that "I" cannot lead my life properly. We must first have the courage to admit our weaknesses, because the greatest obstacle is a refusal to glorify God "as God." Every human being must confront this primary question: Who is Number One? We dare to assume that it could be ourselves.

In our development of a selfish egotism, we find ourselves attempting to occupy that place which belongs only to God.

¹Matt. 8:18-20.

²Matt. 8:21-22.

³Luke 9:61-62.

The world is not ours to control; it belongs only to the will of God. We must understand and come to grips with what Jesus meant when He asked, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?”⁴ And yet, we’ve even become willing to risk losing our lives for the sake of gaining, not the whole world, but just a tiny, tiny portion of it.

But the opposite of this way of life will set us free. For indeed, He says “...the truth will set you free.”⁵ Here’s the greatness of the teaching of Jesus Christ:

“Whoever loses his life for me will find it.”⁶

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”⁷

This takes a subservient attitude. But we blindly pursue our ways and our wills and do not come to know the tremendous position for which God designed us. We hinder our own development as human beings with the potential nobility and dignity of those created in the image of God Almighty. We fail because in our selfish pursuits, we are deaf to the profound and powerful invitation of Jesus: *“Come follow Me. I’ll give you life that is life indeed; I’ll give you joy. I’ll give you a way of life that is more abundant than anything you could imagine.”*

We need to imprint indelibly in our minds that eternal life with Jesus Christ begins the moment we establish a true relationship with Him. This happens when we come to Him in obedience to “the truth of the gospel.” Eternal life is here

⁴Mark 8:36. ⁵John 8:32. ⁶Matt. 16:25. ⁷Matt. 20:16.

and now, right here in this very life in the world. Although this Christian life as a disciple of Jesus is not as grand as our anticipation of going to heaven when we die, it can still be a rich and rewarding life—full of joy, rewards, and profound happiness when following Jesus.

About fifteen years ago I began to seriously reflect upon the teachings of Christ in a way I had never done before. Prior to this time I studied as a preacher/teacher. Then I said to myself, “Larry, it’s time you studied as a student, a learner; not studying anymore merely to prepare a lesson, but studying to prepare yourself for a correct relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”

I was particularly interested in the Sermon on the Mount.⁸ As I began to read this spectacular teaching of Jesus—this business of following Him, denying self, crucifying self, losing self, and all this being contingent upon humility—questions came to my mind. The main one was, “Is this really the way?” One of the strongest periods of doubt in my life occurred at this time. As I was studying the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, I was also studying the Gospel of John. But even with the strongest of doubts, I stayed with Him, and as Habakkuk the prophet, I turned my questions and my doubts over to God’s Word. Therein I found the answer: *Come follow Me; I am the Lord.*

This business of discipleship may seem radical because of the intensity of Christ’s demands. It challenges us to deny self, to lose self, to humble ourselves, and to pour out our selfishness in order to become the beautiful people God

⁸See Matt. 5:1-7:29.

desires us to be. Let's make an important note here: *Jesus Christ is calling us to deny self and to follow Him, but He is not asking us to deny our personhood.* We will remain the persons that we are, but we will be beautifully enveloped in the image of Jesus Christ; we will be learning to put on the new man.

I said to myself, "This is heavy stuff. Is this too extreme? Is this too difficult? Is this impossible?" And many people think it is. But the answer to all these questions is, *no*. This concept of dying to self is feasible, and the truth of all this will set us free, free to live victoriously in the newness of Christ. We go around in chains, not realizing the freedom to which Jesus has called us. Isn't it because we have not yet taken seriously the call of discipleship: to die that we might live? Just follow the pattern of Jesus' life. Like Him, we must place ourselves last, that we might be first; we must be humbled, that we might be exalted; we must lose our lives, that we might find them.

But we must remember: this way of following Christ is a lifetime commitment, an every day devotion. This way of living that the Sermon on the Mount teaches is something we should never leave—sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing Him, sensitively, sincerely, and with depth of heart, allowing His teaching to penetrate far beneath the surface of the skin.

Let's not go *our way* any longer, but let's honestly, genuinely, and openly experience the depth and profundity of following Jesus Christ. No, it's not too complicated. We think it is too hard because we don't take seriously the teachings of Christ, and we go *our own way*. Oh yes, we

may still “go to church,” but it results in spiritual apathy; it results in a powerless life; it results in the ho-humness of religion, and even in self-righteousness. All of these ways of living are in contrast to what we can have: the power of the life of righteousness, living and growing and developing in Jesus Christ as Lord!

Reaction: Negative Or Positive?

First, consider the negative reaction. After being informed about what this invitation means, one may decide that following Jesus is too hard, too complicated, or too extreme. Although these responses seem very definite, they can also cause us to hide behind a certain subtlety. We ignore that it is actually simple to follow Jesus (if we have a heartfelt desire); instead, we remain in a state of withdrawal.

It is easy to follow Jesus, but it is also both painful and powerful; perhaps this is what the negative response is trying to avoid. Following Him requires an examination of self and of the way we live or do not live in relationship to God.

Often this is where the pain comes in. Finding it difficult to abandon our selfishness, we are ready to give up, content to be indifferent, immature, and superficial. Although we say to ourselves, “I go to church every time the door opens, and I’m active in the church,” this is not nearly enough.

We can remain uncommitted to a personal life in Christ and stagnate in our immaturity in Christlike attitudes. We can still live undiscipled lives. We can live what appears to be a

dedicated life “in church,” but behind closed doors be very un-Christlike in our thoughts, words, and actions. Living for Christ is an every day, every minute, every second proposition. This way of following Jesus makes a difference to the world.

On the positive side, we can make a commitment to follow Jesus as our *heart's desire*. We can make it our moment to moment *aim* and *determination*. We can make it our *pledge*. This attitude and response causes one to submit to the lordship of Jesus, which causes one to develop a spiritual commitment, resulting in maturity in Christ. It is a step-by-step process, following the will of God.

Can you imagine what would happen if the whole body of Christ made this positive response—if we took more seriously this business of self-renunciation and crucifixion of the old selfish ego, with all its hideous, disgusting expressions of the life of one who puts self ahead of God and others? The world would see Jesus in us and the church would grow!

The greatest method of soul winning is a life lived under the lordship of Jesus Christ, *speaking* and *living* truth in love to all men. The world can see through “church going”; the world is not feeble-witted. But they can see the real you, and they will come to see the will of God and a life surrendered to Jesus Christ. We sing the songs: “Oh To Be Like Thee,” “I Have Decided To Follow Jesus,” and “All To Jesus I Surrender.” More than ever, let’s mean these words from the *heart*.

What a joyful thing to see the power of God through His

Word in the *lives* of people! If we respond in this way, we will continue to grow and develop in the attitudes and ways of Jesus Christ, our Lord—and also influence others.

Fundamental Concepts To Consider: “Count Me In” Or “Just Kidding”

Before considering these concepts I would emphasize that it takes “genuine” discipleship to receive them. I sometimes dislike using the word *genuine*, because it has become so commonplace; it gets worn and frazzled. Nevertheless, I like the word because Jesus used its meaning throughout Scripture. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, He said, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”⁹

He is not telling us that we must have more of the same kind of righteousness the Pharisees had. They were pretenders; they were religious, but not righteous. They thought themselves to be above all others. But Jesus makes a powerful statement to them:

“I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”¹⁰

Because of the arrogance, religious snobbery, and phoniness of these people, they would not enter the kingdom.

In contrast, Jesus began by pointing His disciples to the way to greatness, that they might be filled with the Spirit and the

⁹Matt. 5:20. ¹⁰Matt. 21:31.

righteousness of God.

First of all, blessed are the poor in spirit. As the Lord said through Isaiah the prophet, “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit....”¹¹ Selfish arrogance and pride will forever be the primary barrier to submission to God. The desire to be independent in a good sense is no problem, but an independence exclusive of the will of God is a serious problem. Did He not take a servant-stand against the worldly attitude of independence—“I can do it on my own; I’ll do it my own way”? Constantly throughout His life, no matter how difficult the situation may have been, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, always said, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Jesus Christ is the epitome of complete dependency upon God Almighty in every aspect of His life. When He lay down, when He awoke, when He went out, when He came in: it was a constant dependency upon the Father, from the difficult situations right down to the basics. And therein lies the secret of His success and ours. Talk about faith; talk about dependency; talk about following God’s will—in all of these, Jesus is our perfect example. “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” This is the key to a healthy dependency upon God.

Jesus was a revolutionary person. It is futile, it is stupid, it is idiotic to attempt to do the will of God without a revolutionary experience, starting with being born again of water and the Spirit. And this experience is not merely a mental exercise; it comes from the heart.

¹¹ Isa. 66:2.

*"But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted."*¹²

"Wholeheartedly obeyed" — obedient from the heart; therein lies the revolutionary aspect of a new life in continuing to walk day by day in the light of His guidance. This is the revolutionary process God demands of us:

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*¹³

Crosses are for crucifixions; crosses are for dying to the old selfish man, that the new man might live and follow Christ.

The First Fundamental Concept In Following Jesus

Now that we have prepared ourselves for the first fundamental concept, let us explore it. It is: There *must* be a genuine, all-out, unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.¹⁴ We are to sanctify in our hearts Christ as Lord, as the Scriptures say. What exactly does that mean? It means: He is the King, I am the servant; He is the Lord, I am the slave. Jesus Christ is calling us, by the use of the word "slave" or "servant," to have a master/slave relationship with Himself.

¹²Rom.6:17. ¹³Luke 9:23.

¹⁴See Matt. 23:10; Rom. 10:10; 1 Peter 3:15.

God calls us to this: a total submission of one's life and being in all that he is and will be; in all that he has or ever will have. He confirms this out of the mouth of Jesus, His apostles, and all His genuine disciples. The Spirit of God speaks this one dynamic truth through everyone who has ever been used to call people to God.

If this is so, let us forever lay to rest the idea that God is just calling us to give Him our weekends, our spare evenings, or our retirement years. No, He is looking for people (boys, girls, men, and women) to give their *lives* to Him and to enter into the joy of the life of the kingdom of God *right now*.

Jesus is calling a people who will deny themselves and give Him an undying allegiance.

And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.¹⁵

It is these words that we should joyfully follow, knowing that we too will die and be raised again from the dead.

Jesus is also calling us to an unconditional surrender. Could anything less be a fitting response to Jesus' sacrifice for us? *Unconditional surrender*. There are no conditions that we lay down. The conditions are layed down by *Him*, and they are for our well-being. If we would only see that they are for our joy and happiness! We follow the beatitudes. They start with the word "blessed". This is a blessedness that does not come from situations, conditions, or external

¹⁵2 Cor. 5:15.

events. It comes from within. If you desire real peace, real joy, the formula is to simply follow Jesus unconditionally. True discipleship is unconditional, total surrender to Jesus Christ.

The Second Fundamental Concept In Following Jesus

There *must* be a definite coming to grips with the requirements of the Lord. Jesus Christ the Lord makes some very stringent demands of those who would follow Him. That is why He warned us to count the cost before following Him. On one occasion, a rich young man went away sorrowful when Jesus laid down the terms of discipleship: total surrender. The man went away in this pitiful condition because he had many possessions; actually, his possessions had him!¹⁶ Jesus saw some flaws in that young man: covetousness, selfishness, and greed. And Jesus said, “Total surrender is what I demand.” Then the man turned away from Jesus in a sorrowful state, but Jesus did not run after the man or say to John, “Quickly, go get him; I love that man.” (Mark did say, “Jesus looked at him and loved him.”)

There is something very sad about this rich young ruler. He came *running* to Jesus and asked the greatest question a person could ask: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Surrender!” Jesus said, and this he rejected as too great a demand. He loved the cares of this world more than anything or anyone. So he started to leave. “Go catch him, James, John!” No, Jesus did not respond in this way. He did

¹⁶See Mark 10:17-31.

not call back the would-be follower and give him a fifty-percent discount on discipleship. There was no markdown. Jesus wants *all* of us, but the man was unwilling; he chose to walk away sorrowfully. Jesus Christ calls us to discipleship unconditionally. Yes, there are stringent demands that must be considered in following Jesus.

I don't know why we stumble over this. When a citizen will lay down his life for his country, we think this is a noble thing. We honor a man who has such great courage, that he will leave everything behind for a cause or a country that he believes in. Yet when it comes to laying down our lives for the sake of Jesus' kingdom we stumble, we falter.

Why do we find it difficult and even believe it impossible to fulfill the apostle's command to lay down our lives for one another? Is it because we have not first seriously considered laying our lives down for Jesus?

If we lay down our lives for *Him*, we will lay down our lives for *His*. However, it is difficult for most of us to grasp that following Jesus involves denial of self, crucifixion of self, and renunciation of self. We must have these qualities to be able to lay down our lives for Jesus and others.

In the past few years many books have been written on self-esteem, because people are finally recognizing it as a serious problem. We must clearly understand that the biblical teaching of Jesus Christ in no way degrades human dignity. Recognizing Jesus for who He is elevates human beings to their full potential.

We must see that human dignity can only find its potential

of greatness and exaltation in Christ Jesus. Torn from that spot, away from the heart of God, human dignity degenerates into the obnoxious, arrogant, and repugnant spirit of a pride-filled egotist. But with Jesus at the center of our lives, as Paul says:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.¹⁷

We must give up the old self (whatever it may be) for the majestic, beautiful new self that we can be in Jesus. If this doesn't help your problem of self-esteem, I don't know what *permanently* will.

This is what Jesus calls us to: a life that is life indeed. This is life that can be lived in a world that has been ruined and wrecked by sin, and we can be the expression of beauty as we travel through this selfish world. We can be a blessing to all others who are created in the image of God, and that means everybody. That's what we all have in common as human beings—both Christians and non-Christians—that we are created in the image of God.

But to accept and express Jesus in our lives in discipleship we must further deal with the ideas of denial of self, crucifixion of self, and self-renunciation. These are the requirements of the Lord in following Him.

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone

¹⁷Gal. 2:20.

who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”¹⁸

Supreme, unrivaled love for Jesus must be given. This passage has been sorely distorted over the years. Jesus said, “Unless you do this, you cannot be My disciple.” “Now Lord, let’s see—‘cannot’—could ‘cannot’ mean ‘might not?’” No, we have no permission to water down that expression. Jesus said, “Unless (you do so and so) you cannot be My disciple.” This expression is repeatedly found throughout the ministry of Jesus. You “cannot” be *unless* “this” is realized.

What can we make of this passage? What did Jesus mean? The Greek word for “hate” means “to love less.” But that does not do justice to the meaning of what Jesus is saying here. To love less could leave the door open to this idea: I’ll love Jesus, but in some inferior way, I’m going to love my parents. Nowhere does biblical love—the love of God—express itself in an inferior way. For whoever is to be loved is to be loved to the maximum with the love of God.

Now, the love of God is supreme in its expression for family. It lends itself supremely to family. But Jesus Christ is greater than family, and we must offer Him supreme, absolute, and *unrivaled* love. But when we understand biblical love for God, we learn to love our parents even more than we ever did, even if they are not in Christ!

That has been a flaw in some of our thinking. Instead of building up our relationships with our family we find our-

¹⁸Luke 14:25-27.

selves contributing to the forging of a sword that Jesus said could come into family situations. The Christian not going to build a wall, but instead, he is going to pour love into every relationship he has and concentrate on developing relationships. This is loving the way that God loves.

We must concentrate on and explain this *unrivaled* love that is peculiarly and specially for Jesus, our Lord. Let us use the example of the love of God that we have for family to further explain this passage.

I have a love for my wife that is exclusively hers. I don't love my family any less, but in a different way. I love my children in a special way, but that relationship cannot change the unique love that I reserve for my wife. These two loves are different.

In the same way no other love should rival the special love I have for Jesus, even though I don't love others any less. I have much love for my sisters in the Lord, as sisters; but they cannot be loved in the same way that I love my wife. And the love I have for my wife, as special and strong as it is, should not rival the love I have for Jesus. This is what Luke meant here, that the love we have for Jesus is to be special and unrivaled; nothing should deter us from this.

The latter part of the passage cited involves carrying one's cross. This means dying to self; it means the *crucifixion of self*. As we stated before: crosses are for dying. We make the initial decision to sign the death warrant with Jesus Christ. This is one of the things that following Jesus requires:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.¹⁹

We need to understand that we are baptized into the *death* of Jesus. What did Jesus do in death? He died. What are we to do when we are baptized? We need to see that we die, too. That is, we die to sin; our sins have been forgiven, and we have changed our hearts to follow the ways of Jesus, not our own.

We not only die, but we arise to walk in newness of life. The new life has a new mind. Paul reminds us in Romans 12 that we must be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This entails steps of growth—a developing process which comes only by following the teachings of Jesus. With time and maturing you begin to see the new man emerge in thoughts, words, and actions; you also experience the disappearance of the old man, because you are putting him off daily. We *renounce self*; we relinquish the old temptations and habits.

Let me share with you how I deal with these temptations,

¹⁹Rom. 6:3-7.

these intrusions upon my life with Christ. I have no apologies for the indignation that I have for unrighteous temptations that come my way. Although temptation itself is not a sin, we can easily let the “old man” feed upon it, and that leads to sin. So, I, without mercy, take the temptation that arises out of the selfishness and rebellion of the old man, and “nail it to the cross.” Temptation begins in the mind; now, whenever I am tempted, I won’t even permit an evil thought to come and reside for a moment. I put on the new man and renounce the old.

Seven Specifics To Consider: Is It Worth It?

1. *A supreme and unrivaled love for Jesus*²⁰
2. *A denial of self*²¹

Self-denial is not to be confused with *denial of self*. *Self-denial* may mean denying oneself certain pleasures or things. This is not at all *denial of self*; it can be a very subtle deception that we are giving up the old self to develop the new self in Jesus Christ.

Denial of self is the absolute and complete submission to the lordship of Jesus. Self abdicates the throne, Christ reigns. I am no longer going to be lord of my life, doing things my way, having things the way *I* want them to be. No, I will instead follow the ways of Jesus, in *every* area of my life.

²⁰See Luke 14:26; Also Review pp. 21-22. ²¹See Matt. 16:24.

3. A definite, deliberate choosing of the cross

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”²²

One's cross is not some physical, emotional, or mental anguish or sickness that people see as a burden they carry for Christ. This is a popular misbelief.

The way of the cross is His way, which involves a dying to self. But it also involves identifying with what Jesus experienced here on earth: shame, reproach, and suffering for His sake and the gospel's. His way is often the difficult way. In Jesus Christ, you may be humiliated; you may be slandered; you may be reproached; you may have to bear all these things.

Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”²³ In one place He said, “for the gospel's sake”; in another, “for the kingdom's sake.” Deliberately choosing the cross means choosing all of this as we follow Him. Following Jesus is also a way filled with the new experience of joy and peace, and it results in eternal life with Him!

4. A lifetime of daily following Christ

To follow Christ is to become what He is and to do what He does. To do this we must learn Jesus' ways. The best way to

²²Luke 9:23.

²³Matt. 5:11.

do this is to read and study His word, although we do learn of Jesus through others—by seeing Jesus' ways in them. But in studying the Bible we sometimes need help, and that's why attending Bible classes or setting up personal studies is so important. We need to read the Scriptures daily, and not be too proud to ask for help in understanding when we need it.

I would also challenge those of us in the body of Christ to seriously consider the biblical responsibility of family heads. This responsibility holds true even for the single parent or the parent who is the only Christian in the family, no matter how difficult it may be. We must restore the concept of the parent or parents teaching children the way of the Lord. As good as Bible classes or Christian schools may be, they will never take the place of that twenty-four hour learning opportunity in the home. We need to follow the Lord in this capacity.

We need to follow Christ in a life of daily, unselfish service for others. In this busy time in which we live, I pray that we would take more time—*much* more time—to meet the needs of others. This is loving service for others.²⁴ I believe this can be done if we give careful, serious consideration to it. If we really want to meet the needs of our people under God, we will take the time to provide *daily* opportunity for encouragement in Christ. He certainly encouraged others, as did His disciples.

Our Sunday gatherings are vitally important, as are our midweek services. Midweek Bible class and fellowship are

²⁴Read John 13:1-17.

wonderful opportunities to nourish ourselves, that we might “make it to the next assembly.” However, they are *not* going to meet the need for biblical teachings and other vital needs of people.

The Bible many times states that we should encourage one another and meet the needs of others on a *daily* basis: not just twice a week but *daily—daily* cross-bearing, *daily* fellowship. It can be done and is being done in some places. Let’s consider this and make a more conscious effort to do so. It’s vital to the growth of the body!

5. A genuine fervent love for all who belong to Him

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”²⁵

In order to follow Jesus, we must have a genuine, fervent love for all our brothers and sisters.

What has divided the body of Jesus over the years? A lack of love for those whom Jesus loves! We actually sin against Jesus if we do not receive and accept those whom He has received and accepted.²⁶ He loves each one in His body, and He accepts us as we are. He gives us the time, however long it takes, for shedding sinful habits and learning to develop and grow in His ways. To overcome those habits which have taken a lifetime to build up, we need time and help and support.

²⁵John 13:34-35.

²⁶See 1 Cor. 8:12; Matt. 25:40, 45.

Self-rejection poses a greater barrier to living like Jesus than does rejection by our brothers and sisters. We need to be strong and determined, but if we stumble, we need to understand that God is still there loving and accepting us. He gives more grace; we must then get up and go on. Stumbling can also be an opportunity to grow, if we'll look at it that way and learn from it.

Yes, there must be a genuine fervent love for *all* who belong to Him. When God's people lack this love, they "follow Jesus" with deadness and coldness. God's word is clear: if I don't love my brothers and sisters, I truthfully don't love God!²⁷ Loving a brother means accepting him, receiving him as he is. *This is following Jesus.*

6. An unswerving continuance in His word and will

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*²⁸

To start well is commendable, but we must endure daily—to the end. "If you hold to my teaching" has also been translated, "except you abide in My word." The word "abide" in Greek is related to the word which means to "dwell in," "to abide where one lives." Christ's word is supposed to be the Christian's dwelling place—not just what he reads or studies, but *where he lives.*

The Word, then, becomes our necessary food. This is what Jesus did when He lived on the earth. He relied on the word and will of God for His life and living. Above all, we must

²⁷Read carefully 1 John 4:7-21. ²⁸John 8:31-32.

not get caught in the trap of subjectivism and avoid the objective word and will of God. This definitely robs one of his position in Christ.

7. A forsaking of all to follow Him

Again, the Lord says, "...any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."²⁹ Jesus said this to emphasize that *anything* standing in the way of following Him wholeheartedly must be given up. But there has also been some misrepresentation of this verse. The fact is, it's up to you. You must not let things stand in your way of putting Jesus first and following Him.

The truth is that we should first and foremost use the things that God has given us for the sake of the kingdom, and He will in turn care for us and bless us thirty, sixty, or one hundred fold. This is what occurs if we are willing to truly forsake all to follow Him.

Unconditional Surrender Or Excuses?

To truly follow Jesus, one must avoid several deceptions:

I'll follow You anywhere; that is, if it's comfortable and convenient.

We have touched on these verses before. Remember this?

²⁹Luke 14:33.

...a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."
*Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*³⁰

The Christian life makes difficult demands on us, if we are to sincerely follow Jesus. If necessary, we must be ready to deny comfort and convenience.

I'll follow You, but it cannot interfere with my priorities.

Well, Jesus *is* the first priority, and we must know this and learn it well in order to avoid being deceived.³¹

I'll follow You, if it does not interfere with earthly ties.

Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." Jesus replied, "*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.*"³²

When Jesus calls us, His call is *now*; we must choose to follow or walk away.

Genuinely going with Jesus means following Him regardless of the obstacles. We must not suppress God's truth forever because we don't take Him seriously as He calls us to follow Him. A good start is *realizing* that Jesus' call makes a claim on His followers.

Let us then unconditionally *surrender* and follow Him courageously, honorably, and faithfully. We must begin *now* and *continue* each day for the rest of our lives.

³⁰Luke 9:57-58. ³¹See Luke 9:59-60. ³²Luke 9:61-62.

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**The Way Up Is
Down**

*“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he
who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Luke 14:11

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show
it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes
from wisdom.*

James 3:13

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that
though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor....*

2 Corinthians 8:9

*“ ...a dispute arose among
them
as to which of them
was considered to be
greatest.”*

The Call To Humility

The wise man said, “A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.”¹ Pride is a terrible thing, a ruining thing, a blinding thing. It is the very opposite of that attitude and way of life which Jesus of Nazareth embodied, and to which He calls us: humility. In calling us to humility (even as He has called us to love), Jesus calls us to Himself. He calls us to become as He is.

THE GREAT PARADOXICAL TRUTH REVEALED IN GOD’S WORD

The Paradox Implies A Change Of Perception

If we are ever to enjoy “life that is life indeed,” we must come to understand the “God-life” as it is revealed in God’s written Word (the Bible), and as it has been embodied in God’s incarnate Word (Jesus of Nazareth). We need a radical change in our way of thinking about life. As the prophet said, God’s thoughts are not man’s thoughts, and neither are His ways our ways.²

¹Prov. 29:23.

²See Isa. 55:8-9.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are....³

Nowhere in all of Scripture or in all of history is this truth shown more powerfully than in the life, death, and resurrection of the historical Christ. The perspective of the sinful human creature is set against that of his Creator. That is why Jesus calls us to make a drastic adjustment.

The Paradox Must Penetrate Our Hearts

The more I study and reflect upon this wondrous gospel of Jesus Christ—God revealing Himself and His infinite love by putting on human nature and coming to this low ground to be rejected, die, and rise again for the sake of His selfish, arrogant human creatures—the more I contemplate this Good News, the more awesome it becomes to me. It is a gloriously humbling gospel. I pray that the full impact of the gospel of God will penetrate more and more deeply into our hearts, so that all of us may know the incomprehensible peace, joy, satisfaction, and contentment that come only to the humble of heart.

Self-centered pride is a millstone which Jesus would remove from around our necks. In several paradoxical sayings,⁴ Jesus has warned us of the eternal consequences of

³1 Cor. 1:27-28. ⁴A “paradox” is a truth which seems self-contradictory, but really is not.

spending life in self-centered pride.

"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."⁵

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."⁶

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."⁷

"For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest."⁸

Here is an enigma that only the humility of a childlike heart will receive. Yet, it is a constant theme, woven into the entire fabric of Christ's teaching. To the worldly mentality, to the unspiritual mind, it is a concept as inscrutable as the life of the One who uttered it. Even so, it is Jesus' embodiment of this principle of exaltation through humility that eventually transformed the disciples.

The example of Christ, together with the enlightenment and empowering of the Holy Spirit who came on Pentecost to represent the glorified Jesus, eventually turned the Roman world upside down—really, rightside up! But neither the pride of Rome nor the pride of the disciples would be broken in a day. It was a most difficult lesson to learn, even for those who had walked with the lowly Galilean. They had not yet learned it by the night of His betrayal. Their egos clashed together that night for the prize of greatness in the Kingdom, despite the fact that the King Himself was among them as One who served.⁹

⁵Mark 10:31.

⁶Matt. 10:39. ⁷Luke 14:11.

⁸Luke 9:48.

⁹See Luke 22:14-27; John 13:1-17.

In the night of the mockery of His trial, they had still not learned; nor was the dawning of the day of the cross itself sufficient to light up their darkened understanding. Christ would go lower still, buried in the heart of the earth, and yet they would not understand. They would indeed come to know the truth, but not by a process of abstract reasoning. God would have to shake and shatter their self-centered viewpoint by confronting them with an empty tomb, a risen Lord, and the sending of the Spirit to guide them into all truth. The Holy Spirit would illuminate their memories of the past three years with Jesus. Only then would they grasp the meaning of Christ's words and deeds:

*"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*¹⁰

The Paradox Is Personified By Jesus Christ

Apart from Christ, we would rather be self-exalted than God-exalted. We would prefer to lift ourselves up to greatness by our own bootstraps. But the joy that comes through exaltation can never come through *self-exaltation*; it comes only from *God-exaltation*. The gospel of Christ clearly teaches us that the only way to be lifted up by God is through humility:

¹⁰John 12:24-25.

"I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts....How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"¹¹

...And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God .¹²

...you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.¹³

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place....¹⁴

Jesus is the Way to God-exaltation, because His way is the way of humility. He is the “Kingdom paradox personified.” Why was the Father “well pleased” with Jesus? It was because He approached the crown of glory *through* the cross of humility; He didn’t try to go *around* it.

The Paradox And The Principle Of Humility

Humility can come to us by means of humiliation, forced upon us by circumstances that are beyond our control. Humility can also come to us by our own choice to humble ourselves under the hand of God, who is King over all circumstance.¹⁵ Jesus was not humiliated by circumstance; rather, “He humbled Himself.” He freely chose to submit to death on a cross, even as He had volunteered to be born of a woman.

¹¹John 5:41-42, 44.

¹²Rom. 5:2; compare Rom. 15:13.

¹³1 Peter 1:8.

¹⁴Phil. 2:8-10.

¹⁵See James 4:6-7.

Humiliating circumstances may teach us nothing, except to loathe ourselves. However, God may use these same circumstances to persuade us to choose the way of Christ; that is, the way of humility. Humility teaches us to view life realistically, and to love ourselves with the love of Christ.

Humility rejoices in the glorious truth that the way up is down. In God's order, the Kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit; the meek inherit the earth. The guarantee is in the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is alive and reigning in the highest position of authority in the universe. God knows how to exalt the humble, and He knows how to abase and humble the proud. The mind of God is clearly revealed in the written testimony of Scripture; but God's will that we humble ourselves before Him is also written in the language of our everyday life experiences. Ironically, it takes a certain degree of humility to *learn* humility, whether from Scripture or from life's experiences. Pride blinds us to the truth about ourselves. "To him who has, more will be given; he who has not will lose even the little he has." May we recognize life's lessons in humility when they come to us from the hand of our loving God, for they *are* for our benefit.

The Paradox In Old Testament Prophecy

God's revelation that "the way up is down" did not suddenly begin with the New Testament teaching. The prophets had spoken clearly.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.¹⁶

This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”¹⁷

For this is what the high and lofty One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.”¹⁸

Who are blessed with the joy of God’s friendship and the comfort of His presence as they walk through this life? It is the humble, the lowly of heart, the genuinely contrite of spirit.

The Paradox Presented In Biblical Personages

Concrete, historical examples of God’s exaltation of the humble also precede the New Testament revelation. Young David, although courageous and handsome, had been a keeper of sheep for an obscure household in an uncelebrated hamlet of Judah. In a brilliant moment of faith sparked by righteous indignation, David put his life on the line for the glory of Israel’s God. He faced the belligerent Philistine giant with only a leather sling and five smooth stones.

¹⁶Micah 6:8.

¹⁷Isa. 66:2.

¹⁸Isa. 57:15.

Although this incident catapulted David into a national acclaim that eclipsed even that of King Saul, we search David's psalms in vain for a single clear allusion to this display of heroism. If David's attitude had been that of many who claim to follow Christ today, what would he have done? First, he would have written a book, lavishly adorned with color illustrations, entitled: "How I Killed The Giant." Next, he would have assumed an official title ("G.G.K.": Great Giant Killer), by which he would be introduced whenever he granted interviews or took to the lecture circuit. But read Psalm 51, and marvel at the humble, contrite spirit of this giant killer who became Israel's most renowned king.

As the moonlight of Old Testament promise was about to give way to the sunlight of New Testament fulfillment, a solitary figure stood on the banks of the Jordan River. His name was John, son of Zechariah the priest; he would gain the nation's attention as a prophet in the old tradition of Elijah, the fiery reformer. His was the responsibility of directing true Israel to her destiny, for the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand.

Except for Jesus Christ Himself, John the Baptizer stands out as human history's most classic example of humility. As John's gospel account begins, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem send a delegation to John. They ask whether he might be the promised Messiah, or perhaps a reincarnation of Elijah, or that ultimate Prophet whose coming Moses had foretold. John emphatically disowns all of these exalted positions, claiming no greater office than that of "a voice." John was content with humble anonymity. He was satisfied to rejoice with the bridegroom as His friend, though some

of his own disciples wanted greater honor for John. "I must decrease, and He must increase," said he, of whom Jesus would later declare: "Among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist."¹⁹

But consider what John might have said: "No, I am not the Christ—but I am the son of Zechariah, a priest of Israel. Not only that, but surely you have heard of my fame throughout all Judea as a great preacher of repentance and righteousness and readiness for the coming kingdom of God. No doubt, you already know that nobody has personally baptized more sinners than I have. And who, except Christ Himself, could be more important than the one who prepares the way for Him?"

John the Baptizer said none of these things, nor does his behavior indicate the slightest inclination even to think such thoughts. John was a humble man, but I fear that most of us would have fallen prey to the temptation of self-exaltation, had we been in John's place. Perhaps we could have stifled any verbal vainglory before it escaped our lips. We might even have hidden our haughty eyes from other people. But could we have kept our *hearts* humble before God? In our "private" thoughts—even in prayer—it is easy to succumb to the insolent pride of the self-righteous Pharisee, who said, "God, I thank you that I am not like all other men."²⁰

We are all susceptible to the "Little Jack Horner" complex:

*He stuck in his thumb
and pulled out a plum,
and said: "What a good boy am I!"*

¹⁹Matt. 11:11. ²⁰Luke 18:11.

“What a good boy am I.” Why, I’m already as good as Jesus, and getting better every day! (The audacity of such an attitude should drive us to our knees before our gracious and forgiving heavenly Father.)

The Paradox And The Peril Of Jack Horner’s Plum

To *gracefully* receive a compliment is one of life’s most difficult challenges. We naturally tend to take compliments as if we were autonomous, self-created beings; that is, as if we were gods! We receive them without a word or even a thought of glory to God, our Creator and Sustainer and Redeemer. “What a good boy am I,” we say to ourselves, as we go our way in the quiet exaltation of our minds! Christian leaders need to be especially careful about lifting themselves up in arrogant pride.

The “Little Jack Horner” complex can strike anywhere, but I must question the wisdom of some who create breeding grounds for the virus of arrogance by the way they speak and write. It is common to hear preachers introduced with modifiers that recall the blasphemous pride of Herod Agrippa, who gladly accepted the people’s praise: “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.”²¹ Articles are submitted for publication in Christian periodicals that glory and boast, not in the Lord, but in “the great ones in our brotherhood” on the basis of their reputation and popularity.

²¹Acts 12:22.

Such speaking and writing can contribute to pride and can cause good men and women to stumble. We are weak human beings, susceptible to the temptations of pride, in all its subtlety. And God knows that we have witnessed the weakness of some who have lifted themselves up in pride to the point of becoming repulsive and disgusting. These embarrassing displays of arrogance do not properly adorn the way of Christ.

The Paradox And Practicality

I am convinced that Christian teachers have done a great injustice by suggesting that some of Jesus' teachings are idealistic and unattainable. The spiritual growth of God's people is being stifled and discouraged by such false understanding. The surest way to destroy hope, the most effective method of causing people to give up a quest before it is even really begun, is to set before them an unreachable goal.

Let us who teach the people of God first be ourselves assured and convinced that we can, by God's grace, become all that He has called us to become. We *can* become humble; we *can* learn to love as Christ has loved us, and to forgive as we have been forgiven. If, in the full assurance of faith, we would dare to take the smallest taste of the joy of genuine humility, we would desire to return again and again to the heart of Jesus, to drink more and more deeply of His humble spirit.

The Paradox And Parades

Men and women will learn humility from Jesus Christ, or they will not learn it at all. Jesus is the fountain of all genuine humility; to walk with Him is to walk in humility. The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as Israel's glorious King, Immanuel: "God With Us." But He was born in a barn at Bethlehem, grew up as a carpenter's son in a despised Galilean village, and became an itinerant preacher with no place to lay His head.

God might have been expected to enter His world by a dramatic appearance from heaven, such as will occur when He returns in glory. At least, He might have been born on satin sheets, as any other heir to a throne would be. Should not the King of Glory grow up in a palace, amid wealth and splendor, as Moses did? *God* chooses the base things, the lowly and despised things in this world, so that the wisdom of this world might become foolish.

"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"²²

How does the King of Glory present Himself to His people? "See, your King comes to you"—get ready for the next word—"gentle." Meek, humble, lowly. He comes riding a donkey, not a white steed. He comes riding low, not charging in with all the splendor and pomp of human exaltation and pride. The people were ready to acclaim Him as their

²²Matt. 21:5.

King, not on His terms, but theirs. “Hosanna, Son of David”—that is, “Save us now, O national King, from political oppression at the hands of Rome.” They were ready to crown Him without a cross. We have called this Christ’s “triumphal entry.”

Even today, there is this misconception called “triumphalism,” with its empty promise of a crown without a cross, exaltation without submission, glory without humility, and victory without surrender.²³ We still love a parade! But Jesus never forgot, not even for a moment, that the way to glory was the way of the cross. The people might have misunderstood or forgotten for the moment, but Jesus didn’t.

The donkey made it clear that Jesus knew where He was going. He knew that the humiliation of the cross lay before Him, and He rode the lowly animal deliberately toward that humiliation. And though He will return in triumphant glory and awesome majesty and power, He will never change:

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*²⁴

He is not going to change His mind about the way of humility. He will not become bored with being humble and lapse into pride at some point. When His power and glory are unveiled at the end of time, He will be no less humble than He was during His lifetime on earth, or before He descended from heaven to be born of the virgin.

²³See 1 Cor. 4:8-13. ²⁴Heb. 13:8.

The Paradox Presented In The Gospel Of John

John's gospel gives us a striking portrait of the heart of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Here we see "the great descent of God." Deity wraps Himself in human flesh in order to be "lifted up" before sinful mankind: first on a cross, and then into the glory which was His before the beginning.²⁵

What was the nature of divine glory revealed by the incarnation of Christ? It was a glory that sought the approval of God, not of men.²⁶ Jesus refused to be seduced by the allurements of pride, prestige, and popularity. Again and again, the motivating power of His life is attributed, not to Himself, but to the Father who sent Him: "Not My will... not My words... not My teaching... not My glory.... All of it is not Mine, but is of the Father who sent Me."²⁷ He made Himself nothing and the Father everything; therefore, to see Him was to see the Father.²⁸

Jesus could have easily reveled in selfish pride. The throngs were following Him, acclaiming Him as a great teacher and worker of wonders. He disowned all of the credit for His words and works. "*Not Mine,*" He said. "*Glorify the Father.*" Even in the agony of Gethsemene, facing the sufferings of the cross, He prayed to the Father, "*Yet not what I will, but what you will.*"²⁹

Here was true strength of spirit. The cross was not a spur of

²⁵See John 1:1-18; 3:11-13; 6:33-38, 48-51, 58, 61-62; 8:23; 16:28; 17:5, 24. ²⁶See John 5:41-44; compare Matt. 6:1-18; Gal. 1:6-10.

²⁷Read carefully John 5:19, 30, 41; 6:38; 7:16, 28; 8:28, 42, 50; 12:49; 14:10, 24. ²⁸Phil.2:5-11; John 14:5-10. ²⁹Mark 14:36.

the moment decision for Jesus, but the fruit of the discipline of humble submission to the Father from before the foundation of the world.

The Paradox Prefigured At The Last Passover

John's presentation of God's "great descent" in Christ is vividly portrayed in the drama of the Passover meal with the disciples just before the passion narrative. The parallels with Paul's understanding of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11 are unmistakable. The humble condescension of God incarnate, the Teacher and Lord, stripping off His outer clothing and washing His disciples' feet so that they might "have a part" with Him, is a picture of God the Son laying aside His heavenly glory to fulfill the role of the suffering Servant of the Lord.³⁰

The impact of the lesson is heightened against the background material supplied by Luke.³¹ The disciples are again so busy arguing about who will be greatest in Christ's kingdom that they fail to perceive and accomplish the lowly task of footwashing. They would fight for a throne, but not for a towel and basin. God incarnate Himself, removing His outer garment and assuming the place of a lowly servant, performs the customary courtesy of washing dirty feet. He washes the feet of Judas Iscariot, though the lesson will be lost on the betrayer. The protests of Simon Peter do not deter Him.

³⁰See John 13:1-17.

³¹Read carefully Luke 22:17-30.

He is still teaching, as He washes the feet of each self-centered disciple. The Lord's action of loving humility in washing His disciples' dirty feet is a dramatic analogy of what He had done in *laying aside* the form of His divine glory to be born of a Jewish peasant woman so that He might taste death for everyone. Only by thus *washing* away human sin could Peter, or any of us, *have a part* with Him in His glory. When He had finished the humble task of foot washing, He asked the disciples, "Do you understand what I have done for you?"³²

This is a sobering question, indeed. Like so many words and deeds of Jesus, the full meaning of this incident would remain largely a mystery until the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Indeed, the church has hardly begun to grasp the unfathomable riches of Christ, much less exhaust them. Some have bound the washing of feet as a church ordinance; no doubt, many will miss the *spirit* of the teaching in their zeal for the *letter* of it.

But perhaps we who view the washing of feet as a spiritual lesson rather than as a church ordinance are also missing something by never actually humbling ourselves to do for one another what our Lord did for each of His disciples. It is one thing to talk about "the point Jesus was making"; it is another to begin to practice loving humility toward others.

³²John 13:12.

Loving Humility: Unquenched By Opposition³³

In our personal relationships, when another person mis-treats, it is all too easy to seek vengeance and retaliation. We want to watch our enemies die, or at least see them suffer some “just pain.” Yet, the loving humility of Jesus was unquenched by opposition.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus....For he knew who was going to betray him....³⁴

Although treacherous Judas was about to betray Him, although cowardly Peter was about to deny Him, He lovingly served their need. He would go on to Calvary to serve their greater need, and ours as well. From the cross itself, He who taught us to pray for our enemies prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”³⁵

Loving Humility: In Full Awareness Of Power And Position

The loving humility of Jesus was exercised in full awareness of His own power and position. Although He was infinitely superior to His disciples, Christ deliberately

³³The following four points are adapted from Merrill C. Tenney's *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1948), pp. 198-200.

³⁴John 13:2, 11. ³⁵Luke 23:34.

humbled Himself to serve them. Love leaped the walls of class distinction, and the Maker of men and women became the humble Servant of mankind.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God....³⁶

...Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.³⁷

He “made Himself nothing,” though He is the Source of everything. Like Adam, we grasp for the forbidden fruit of “godhood.” Though He had always been God, He refused to cling to the glorious position. A grasping god is no God. But what would *we* do?

In our foolish pride, we believe that we have reputations to uphold; we waste tremendous amounts of time and energy pushing our pitifully puny egos through life. We would rather “save face” than save our souls by humble submission to Christ. We stand on our dignity instead of kneeling at the cross, kneeling with a towel and basin as our Lord did.

Do we not believe that God can uphold our reputation, if He thinks that it needs to be upheld? And what if He allows shame to befall us? What if He should strip us of our reputations, as He allowed sinful men to strip both clothing and flesh from His only begotten Son? Our faith in God is only as strong as our willingness to be humbled as low, low, *low* as He may see fit to allow.

³⁶John 13:3. ³⁷Phil. 2:6-7.

No one wants to be shamed, but Jesus is our example:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³⁸

Loving Humility: Activated To The Disagreeable Task

Humiliating circumstances did not humiliate Jesus, because He *had already* humbled Himself beyond the shame of the cross. His humble submission to the Father's will looked ahead to the joy set before Him at God's right hand. Shame couldn't shame Jesus Christ, though it came to Him saying: "I am about to strip you naked before the world, and nail you to a shameful instrument of death; I'm going to torment you and mock you, and the whole world will rejoice in your misery and your shame and your death!"

Jesus had come to do the will of God; nothing could deter Him from it. He scorned shame; He despised it as unworthy compared to the joy that would come from drinking the bitter cup set before Him.

...so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.³⁹

Loving humility was activated to do the disagreeable task.

³⁸Heb. 12:2. ³⁹John 13:4-5.

The disciples were willing to let their feet remain dirty during the whole meal, rather than humble themselves to do a “dirty job.” Jesus, after waiting to ascertain that none of the disciples would act to meet the need of the occasion, took the initiative. At supper, Loving Humility did for the disciples what they could have done, but would not. At the cross, Loving Humility would do for each of us what we desperately needed, but could not do for ourselves.

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me...Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*⁴⁰

*Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*⁴¹

Loving Humility: Cleansing And Community

All of us have need of being cleansed by the one Lord, Jesus Christ. If we have bathed in His forgiving love at baptism, we still have a moment-by-moment need of being washed by the Lord, even as Jesus said to the community of disciples:

⁴⁰John 13:6-8, 14.

⁴¹1 Peter 5:5-6.

"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.⁴²

Loving Humility provided for the cleansing of the redeemed community of believers. There was a distinction between those whose hearts were cleansed by faith in Christ, and the heart of Judas, the unbeliever. He was no longer a part of the community, and did not enjoy its privileges, because he did not believe. But even true disciples needed a moment-by-moment washing away of the sinful, proud self-centeredness that they had once decisively repudiated in order to follow Jesus.

If God's people are ever going to learn to serve one another in loving humility (as Peter eventually learned to imitate his Lord and Teacher), we must humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. We must acknowledge our sins and failures; we must confess our continuing need of God's forgiveness and grace. We do not compete against one another for the prize of our heavenly calling in Christ Jesus; we are given gifts to humbly help one another in attaining the goal.⁴³ The Spirit of Christ speaks to today's churches with the same urgency in which He admonished the lukewarm Laodicean church:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes

⁴²John 13:10-11.

43See 1 Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12:1-8; Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”⁴⁴

James likewise addressed Jewish Christian communities which had forgotten their need of moment-by-moment humility before God:

You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us tends toward envy, but he gives us more grace? That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.⁴⁵

No one is self-sufficient. We need help from the Lord, and from one another. We all have needs, but our greatest need is to learn the humility that will enable us to receive from the gracious hand of the Father. Jesus calls us to learn this humility from Him:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”⁴⁶

The demands of discipleship to Jesus may be exacting to the point of exhaustion and demanding to the point of the cross itself. But the strengthening grace and joy that flow from fellowship with Jesus make self-sacrifice into a happy song, and denial of self a joyful dance.

⁴⁴Rev. 3:17-18.

⁴⁵James 4:4-8, 10.

⁴⁶Matt. 11:28-30.

The incarnate Word of God demonstrated what the written Word had already declared: *The way up is down.*

THE GREAT PARADOXICAL TRUTH CONFIRMED BY HUMAN EXPERIENCE

God's Purpose And Personal Involvement in Our Lives

God, in His providence and wisdom, knows how to humble the proud. He takes no delight in our humiliation; He treats us with the gentle firmness, the patient persistence, of a father training his son.

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.... without holiness no one will see the Lord.⁴⁷

*And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*⁴⁸

*Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*⁴⁹

*"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*⁵⁰

⁴⁷Heb. 12:10, 14. ⁴⁸Matt. 18:3-4.

⁴⁹Dan. 4:37. ⁵⁰Luke 14:11; 18:14.

The author of Hebrews says that God is at work in the lives of His children, disciplining them so that they may grow in His likeness and enjoy His presence forever. The pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, praised the King of Kings for teaching him humility through humiliating circumstances. God's purpose is not to humiliate us, but to persuade us (sometimes through humiliating circumstances) to humble ourselves before Him, so that He can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

People who persist in the fantasy of their own self-sufficiency are never able to come to terms with this reality: Only He who created our lives can possibly save them. Only our Creator can be an adequate Redeemer. If God will involve Himself in the lives of pagans to teach them humility, will He not remind His own children of the life-giving truth—that the way up is down? From my own personal experience of life in Jesus Christ, I'm certain that God knows how to humble His proud human creatures.

Ping Pong And God's Purpose In My Life

Everybody has a personal story about life's most humbling moment: an experience of humiliating circumstances through which a more realistic self-image was attained.

I experienced one such episode during the height of my reign as "King of Table Tennis" at Northeast School of Biblical Studies in upstate New York, where I was an in-

structor and dean of students. In the early days of the school, faculty and students would recess together in the lunch room for some friendly competition over the ping-pong table. Eventually, I became a proficient ping-pong player—at least, by school standards.

I had little doubt that the agonizing prayer of several students was that God would use them to depose me as the reigning King of Ping-Pong! Those students who were about to graduate seemed particularly intent on defeating me at table tennis before it was too late. When the freshmen arrived to begin their biblical studies, they inherited the responsibility to “get the dean” — the “Kong of Pong.” Being weak in my humanity, I entertained secret fantasies that I could conceivably become “The World’s Greatest Ping-Pong Player.”

I received a phone call one day from a beloved Japanese sister in the Lord whom we had known since the days of my own biblical and ministerial studies. In the providence of God, this sister and her husband had met a young Japanese student. They befriended him, taught him the truth of the gospel, baptized him, and sent him on his way to meet his brother, who was coming to the States from Japan via Europe. Since he would need a place to stay in New York for a few days, I agreed to take this newly converted Christian into our home. Little did I realize that this young man, so polite and modest in the Oriental custom, was the very instrument that God had prepared to bring my “deceived mind” back to humility concerning ping-pong.

After our young Japanese friend had spent several days with us, as we were talking, getting to know one another, I

casually brought up the matter of table tennis. "Table tennis? Oh, you mean ping-pong! I play...little ping-pong," he replied in his broken English. I knew he wasn't trying to "hustle" me; his humility was honest. He was genuinely modest. I think he really meant what he said: "I play (a) little ping-pong."

I invited (or was it lured?) him to the basement for a few rounds of ping-pong. He said, "Oh, I play with you, if you like." I'm sure that, in my wildest fantasies, I had dreams of conquering a foreigner. I had imagined the glorious splendor of conquest, but I had forgotten one thing: Orientals are the world's best ping-pong players. Not only that, but in my folly, I thought I had one who knew little or nothing about the game. "I play a *little* Ping Pong." It is as dangerous to underestimate your opponent's modesty as it is to overestimate your own abilities!

I kept a record of my table tennis victories on the wall in our unfinished basement: names of "victims" and numbers of conquests. "You don't mind if I keep score, do you?" I innocently inquired. With his characteristic Oriental meekness, my young brother in Christ answered, "No, I not mind." Twenty games later, the writing was on the wall: visitor, twenty; Larry, nothing!

That score stood inscribed on the wall as a written testimony to the lesson I learned that day. The Lord knows how to humble us. He loved me too much to permit me to get carried away with unrealistic fantasies. I *am not* the world's greatest table tennis player, nor do I really care about becoming the undisputed King of Ping-Pong. What I really care about is being a true servant of God. And I want to

learn every lesson I can about humility and submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered the shame of the cross for you and me.

Had Jesus been a Roman, He would not have been crucified, for the cross was considered too shameful a death for a Roman citizen. Paul, the Roman citizen, was martyred by beheading, not by crucifixion. The Roman historian Tacitus said the cross was “a torture only fit for slaves.” The Jews regarded the cross as proof of God’s curse:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”⁵¹

Jesus died a death that was considered a shameful scandal by Gentile and Jew alike. Yet, by being lifted up on the cross, He continues to draw men and women of all nations to Himself. He resolved to accept whatever shame and humiliation might lie in His path as He pursued the will of His heavenly Father. He looked beyond the shame and endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. Will we understand that joy comes after humiliation? If we refuse to humble ourselves, then may God in His mercy humble us in whatever way it takes for us to learn and live the truth: *The way up is down.*

⁵¹Gal. 3:13; compare Deut. 21:23.

THE GREAT PARADOXICAL TRUTH DEMANDS A DECISIVE COMMITMENT

God's Grace Versus Human Pride

God's grace will not be a transforming power in our lives as long as we resist humility. Since God will not violate our free will, we tie His hands as long as we persist in arrogant, selfish pride. Pride prevents people from accepting God's free gift of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It takes humility to confess that we don't measure up, we don't make the grade on our own merits. But even after true repentance and conversion to Christ, humility is essential in order for God's grace to transform us into what He wants us to be in His Son. The work of the Holy Spirit can be resisted by a proud, stubborn human heart.

The apostle Paul could have boasted in many of his attributes and attainments.⁵² As a Christ-rejecting Pharisee, he could boast in his racial purity, his religious uprightness, his external law-keeping. But in the crisis of confronting the Christ whose cause he had violently opposed in his proud self-righteousness, Paul began to learn a different attitude:

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me....⁵³

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

⁵²See 2 Cor. 11:21-29; 12:12; Phil. 3:4-6. ⁵³Rom. 15:18.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet, not I, but the grace of God that was with me.⁵⁴

The Pitfall Of Pride And The Preacher

Paul's conversion didn't end his struggle against the sinful attitude of self-centered pride. He seems harsh and unforgiving toward John Mark's weakness on one occasion.⁵⁵ He confesses to the struggle against pride in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.⁵⁶

Paul saw God's gracious providence in the midst of his pain and humiliating circumstances as a Christian. From these things, he learned moment-by-moment dependence on God's grace and power in Christ. And from our pain and humiliating circumstances, we also can grow.

We can learn to recognize and confess our human limitations, weaknesses, and sins. We can come to realize that

⁵⁴1 Cor. 15:9-10 and compare Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:12-17.

⁵⁵See Acts 15:36-41.

⁵⁶2 Cor. 12:7-9.

words like “I’m sorry,” “I was wrong,” “I have sinned,” and “Please forgive me” do not become obsolete after obedience to the gospel.

One of the hardest things that a minister of God’s Word (Bible teacher or preacher) can do is to admit fallibility and error. After we have taught something publicly, a brother or sister comes to us with the Bible and says, “Have you thought about the possibility of this other interpretation?” Even though the error may clearly be a blatant contradiction to biblical teaching, rather than openly admit a mistake to the congregation of God’s people, the preacher or teacher will often deliberately persist in error.

How refreshing it would be to hear more Christian leaders and teachers say clearly, to the whole church, “Brothers and sisters, I have a confession to make. As a human being, I sometimes make mistakes. I’m not God, nor do I have the gift of inerrant, divine inspiration. I would like to correct something I taught here.”

Pride Versus The Truth About Ourselves

There are many ways for pride to rear its head, even in the midst of God’s people—perhaps, *especially* in the midst of God’s people. The self-righteous Pharisees of the gospel accounts prided themselves most in their religiosity. Pride blinded them to the truth, not only about Jesus (that would be serious enough!), but also about themselves. Could any-

thing be more ugly than self-righteousness masquerading as the righteousness of God?

"Yes, I made a mistake once: I thought I had made a mistake!"

"I used to be conceited, but now there's nothing wrong with me!"

Pride is a subtle temptation among God's people.

...God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God.⁵⁷

The way up is down.

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This Thing Called Love

Reality or Fantasy?

*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his
love endures forever.*

Psalm 107:1

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in
this: While we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

*This is how we know what love is: Jesus
Christ laid down his life for us.
And we ought to lay down our lives
for our brothers.*

1 John 3:16

“...the real thing—God’s love”

3

False Concepts Of Love

People are failing to find the Way of Life because they do not understand the most basic aspects of love. Consider these four false ideas about love that are currently popular.

First, the emphasis today is on “how to be loved” rather than on “how to be loving.” A glance at the popular titles in the self-improvement section of your local bookstore reveals the modern preoccupation with trying to become lovable by myriad techniques and gimmicks. It is easy to become infected with the false idea that we become lovable by attaining vocational success, material wealth, and social prestige. Especially ensnaring is the obsession with making ourselves *attractive*. Many are paying dearly for trying to keep up with faddish tastes and trends in clothing and cosmetics. Physical health and financial soundness are being sacrificed on the altar of “The God of Good Looks.”

Of course, there is nothing wrong with making ourselves

attractive; the problem occurs when our physical appearance becomes the *basis* of our self-esteem, rather than a *reflection* of it. And yet, we do all kinds of things to make ourselves “look good” in order to be liked and accepted. We cultivate our bodies, our dress, our sex appeal, our manners. We develop our conversation to make it as broad and as interesting as possible, so that we can “win friends and influence people.” As long as this wrong emphasis persists, we will understand nothing about the real nature of love and will therefore fail to find meaning in life.

A second myth about love is that its real challenge is in finding the right lover or love object. The underlying assumption is that loving is easy; the trick is to be sure to direct one’s love toward a sufficiently lovable object. While the first misconception kept us preoccupied with our own shortcomings (both real and imaginary), this one causes us to blame others for our failure to love. The headlines on the supermarket tabloids about this or that celebrity finding “exciting new love” seem to reduce this thing called love to a matter of shopping. Many blindly follow this pathetic approach to love: shopping from place to place in quest of the perfect one to love or to be loved by.

Third is that peculiar notion that people “fall in love.” Music has strongly influenced our thinking here. I could “date” myself by recalling the lyrics to musical standards of the past few decades, but the reader is probably familiar enough with songs about chance encounters of two strangers passing like ships in the night. Their eyes meet, and suddenly they are caught up in a magic moment. The proverbial birds sing; the traditional bells ring. They have, as the saying goes, “fallen in love.”

I am truly in sympathy with those who desire to retain an element of romance and mystery in our words. Poetry is, after all, one of the evidences that man is uniquely created in the image of God. But our speech often reveals and reinforces deeply held beliefs that we have never deliberately examined.

What poets and romantics mean by “falling in love” is clear enough: they mean that love, like an accidental tumble, is something that happens to us by chance, in an unguarded moment. It is elusive, unpredictable and yes, even victimizing. No wonder those who subscribe to such a view of love seem to stumble from one disastrous relationship to another, for “falling” is a dangerous, often harmful, experience.

Until we understand that love is not some power beyond the control of our wills, we will undoubtedly keep “falling in love again”—and again, and again, and again. One can fall out of a chair, through a window, or into a hole; but one does not “fall in love”—not even metaphorically. If we think so, it is because we have not thought deeply enough about the idea. Sleep and temptation are things into which we may fall. Love is not.

A final example of erroneous thinking about love is the belief that “nothing is easier than loving.” This attitude about love is reflected in cliches about “doing what comes naturally,” and “learning about the birds and the bees.” This “natural” thing, which is being billed as the simplest of human endeavors, is not love at all—at least, not in any proper sense of the word.

Everyone knows that the most natural, effortless, and agreeable function of human nature is the enjoyment of experiences that feel good. Insofar as such experiences often involve communication and interaction with other people, it is easy to confuse pleasurable social contact with love. But as for the idea that loving is a simple pastime, the evidence of all human history is against it. Eric Fromm wrote, "Is there any activity or enterprise which is started with such great expectations and tremendous hopes, and yet fails so regularly, as this thing called love?"

A behavioral scientist who specializes in the field of human sexuality recently admitted in a television interview that man's best efforts have failed to unlock the secret of love. He said, "After fifty years of work as a researcher in sex, [I believe that] we have come to know everything about physical sex, but we don't know much about love. This is the problem."

Some know more than others about this thing called love, but they did not learn it by their own ingenuity. They learned it by listening to and imitating One who knows more about love than any of us, for He is the personification of love. For us human beings and for our salvation, He became the physical embodiment of love. Love is not discovered through scientific research; it is bestowed by gracious revelation. It is not a human achievement, but a divine gift. It is not mined out of the earth: it descends out of heaven. It is not made with hands: it can only be received by empty hands. *All sound thinking about love must begin with God:*

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.¹

The Truth About Love

Love is not “one of the virtues of Christianity.” “Real” love is “real” Christianity and “real” Christianity is love. We should not think of love as one of the most important things that Christians have to do; rather, this *one* thing is the Christian’s “whole” business.² He has no other concern.

The spectrum of love’s expressions may be so broad and multi-colored that our definition of Christianity itself must stretch beyond the boundaries of Bible classes and church buildings. Narrow ideas about Christianity usually co-exist with shallow thinking about love; deep, genuine Christianity thrives on deep love. That is why the Good News about Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, couldn’t remain confined within the old wineskins. It is a gospel of love that is too big to be held within any single nation or culture.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I

¹1 John 4:7-10.

²The Christian’s business is to do the will of God, which is entirely fulfilled in the commandment of love. (See Matt. 22:34-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; 1 John 2:3-10; 3:11, 23-24; 4:21; 5:2-3; compare John 13:34-35; 15:12.)

have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.³

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.⁴

Our problems—as individuals, families, communities, and nations—are overwhelming, both in nature and in number. But if God has indeed spoken in Christ and the Bible, we have only one basic problem: selfishness. “All we like sheep have gone astray,” each disregarding the voice of the Shepherd and oblivious to his fellow sheep. Had we never left the Shepherd, we never would have strayed from the flock. If we will hear His call of love, He will lead us back, not only to Himself, but also to the other sheep of His pasture.

The remedy for our social ills, then, depends on the solution of our spiritual dilemma. The Good News is that in Christ God has reconciled us to Himself and to one another.⁵ We must open our hearts to this proffered divine love, both *initially* (when we obey the gospel of Christ), and *continually* (as we apply it by faith to our personal problems and in our relationships).

³1 Cor. 13:1-3.

⁴1 John 3:14. This entire First Epistle of John is marked by a strong insistence on practical demonstration of love toward fellow believers. This was John’s response to certain early gnostic-like teachers who apparently believed themselves to be “above” ordinary Christian morality (compare 1 John 2:9-11; 3:10-11, 16-20, 23; 4:7-11, 16-21; 5:1-2).

⁵See Rom. 5:6-11; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Eph. 2:11-18; Col. 1:19-23.

God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.⁶

But the fruit of the Spirit is love....Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.⁷

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore....⁸

The Mentality And Mindset Of Love

The Bible clearly teaches that God's love is mediated to us by His Holy Spirit, as we open our inner selves to the Good News concerning His Son. This teaching of God's Spirit, once internalized in our hearts, can begin to progressively solve the problems and mend the broken relationships caused by our selfishness. But, as with any worthwhile endeavor, this thing called love is far easier to talk about than it is to do.

The grip of selfishness is so strong in our hearts that we must begin by decisively rejecting it as a life principle. We cannot pick up the cross of Christ if our hands are already full of selfish pursuits and priorities. Surely, we were not hoping to receive such a precious gift as divine love without

⁶Rom. 5:5. ⁷Gal. 5:22, 25.

⁸Eph. 4:30-5:1.

picking up the cross, were we? For there is no real love except that which is offered at the cross. *The way of love is the way of the cross.*

*Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."*⁹

The world at large has rejected Christ and His cross, and calls upon each one of us to do the same. Like shady street vendors at some vanity fair, the spiritual forces of wickedness are filling the world with cheap, shoddy life-styles that will fall apart under the pressures of life and death. The merchandise often looks very real and most attractive: self-improvement psychology, social and economic programs, political platforms, religious reforms, and medical and technological advances.

Some of these commodities can be real blessings, and many are compatible (in theory, at least) with Christianity. *But where is the cross in all of this?* Where is the divine mandate to renounce self as the center of life, and to put in its place Christ's steadfast determination to do the will of God, no matter what the cost?

There is no use complaining that we haven't the personal means to do what God commands. Our Forerunner removed that objection by emptying Himself of all divine privileges to face human trials and temptations with the same resources that

⁹Luke 9:23.

God supplies to us: the power of prayer, the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit, and the sure guidance of Holy Scripture.¹⁰ Our failure to love is not due to inadequate resources, but to a refusal to choose the way of love once for all, trusting God moment by moment to provide the means:

*"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" He replied, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."*¹¹

There is only one love worthy of the name, and that love begins with a firm rejection of all “self-ism.” God has promised to supply the means as we, in faith, give Him our wills. We would do well to heed the warning against this world’s alluring (but ultimately dead-end) self-centered philosophy of life:

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*¹²

Misdirected Life-Styles—That Is, “Love-Styles”

The central issue in being human, in being uniquely created in the image of God, is each person’s accountability before the Creator to choose an approach to living in His world. We must

¹⁰See Phil. 2:5-8 and compare Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16.

¹¹Luke 17:3-6.

¹²John 2:15-17.

choose a working philosophy of life. No person is exempt from this God-given responsibility. Every individual must first adopt a way of looking at his or her life in this world, and then live one's life in a manner consistent with that worldview.

Of the two parts of this task, the first by far is the most crucial: once we have decided how to *view* our lives in this world, it is almost inevitable that we will (in general) *behave* accordingly. But if we constantly fail to practice what we have perceived to be right, we are probably either deliberate hypocrites, or self-deluded about our real beliefs.

Obviously, some sincere believers occasionally act "out of character," who may even repeatedly stumble into unbelieving behavior because of spiritual immaturity, weakness, or habitual response to certain stimuli. But Jesus was not addressing such cases when He taught about the relationship between a person's beliefs and his behavior, his perception and his practice:

*"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*¹³

This matter of adopting a worldview is too important to be left to "chance"; our life-style and eternal destiny depend on it! Yet, most people seem content to let circumstances and environment determine their view of life. They uncritically absorb the attitudes and ethics that infiltrate their minds (often on a subconscious level) from such sources as family tradition,

¹³Matt. 6:22-23. Jesus makes a similar point in Matt. 12:33-37.

television and other media, their social and economic peers, and their educational institutions.

Most people pursue a way of life that is chiefly concerned with fame, fun, pleasure, and power. Some opt for the “passive” point of view. I’m referring to those who view life indifferently—they are unconcerned about living life to the fullest. They are apathetic. Some reach a point where they simply “drop out of life”; they merely exist.

These life-styles are the product of habit. They have become “ways of life” because of previous desires, interests, and pursuits. One has unthinkingly developed certain patterns of living, and these have finally become a life-style.

On the other hand, have you ever seriously considered the kind of life pursued by the Son of God when He lived among men? His way of life can be summarized by this brief statement: “He pleased not Himself.”¹⁴ When Jesus was tempted to live selfishly,¹⁵ He virtually responded, “No, I’ll not live for selfish pleasure; I’ll not live for selfish recognition; I’ll not live my life irresponsibly. No! I’ll not live my life without God...without meaning...without love!”

The only life worth living is based upon a principle that produces and promotes life, and the only thing that brings authentic life is a genuine love. e. e. cummings wrote, “Unless you love someone, nothing else makes any sense.” Nothing so demonstrates our selfishness as a continuous failure to express love!

¹⁴See Rom. 15:3.

¹⁵Matt. 4:1ff. See the exposition of Luke 4:1-13 by John Powell (*Unconditional Love* [Niles, Il.: Argus Comm., 1978], pp. 16-18).

Why should the way of love, God's love, become my life-style? Because God's love is the only way to true meaning, purpose, joy, and fulfillment. Without it, we remain confused, frustrated, and cheated—aimlessly wandering, never having anything except superficial relationships and never knowing the satisfaction this love brings!

As a follower of God, I want to walk in love. My Father is love and I want to be like my Father. My Lord responded to the love of the Father by loving as a way of life.

What "Walking In Love" Is

In following Jesus, we are following the way of love, the "most excellent way," of which He Himself is the perfect embodiment.¹⁶ In Jesus Christ, the principle has become a Person; the Word has become flesh. It is past time to finish our abstract conjectures about love. Jesus takes the guesswork out of the study of this subject. It is now a matter of observation, not speculation. The matter is no longer restricted to the realm of the professional theologian, philosopher, or psychologist.

Love Is More Than A Feeling

Away with our prejudices and preconceptions about this thing called love—they are preventing us from seeing the truth that

¹⁶John 1:1, 14, 18. See also John 3:31-36; 5:17-30; 6:44-59; 7:28-29; 8:12, 19, 23, 28-29, 42-59; 10:30-38; 12:41, 44-50; 13:1-3; 14:5-11; 17:1-26; 20:24-31; 1 John 1:1-5; 2:23; 4:7-12; 5:20-21; 2 John 9.

renders such guesswork an unnecessary hazard. It is folly to continue along a route which is only one's best guess, when an absolutely reliable map is readily available.

We need not make the legalistic mistake of believing that the Way is merely a matter of consulting a rule book; it is rather a matter of knowing and following a living Person by means of a written revelation. There is a place for personal feelings and an experiential relationship in Christianity. But the way of love is more than a feeling. It must begin with an informed decision, a conscious commitment to follow this living Person.

The love to which Jesus calls us is the love which He embodied. In the New Testament, this love is called *agape* (noun form) and *agapeo* (verb form). Since it is an attitude or quality of character which is commanded of us by the Lord Jesus Christ and enjoined upon God's people throughout the entire biblical revelation, *agape* is obviously not primarily a matter of emotional involvement. Indeed, it is to be practiced even toward those who count themselves among our enemies, toward whom we may feel nothing positive whatever.¹⁷ The concept of intimate endearment or personal fondness is covered by another Greek root with which we are not presently concerned. We must think here of the divine love that was revealed by the Father in sending the Son, and by the Son, in submitting to the Father for our salvation.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*¹⁸

¹⁷See 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-8; Rom. 8:3-4; Heb. 2:9-18; 4:15.

¹⁸John 3:16.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.¹⁹

This is a love that deliberately chooses to be committed to the highest good, the ultimate well-being, of its object. It is not concerned with the “worthiness” of the beloved, nor the possible rejection of the love offered. It is absolutely forgetful of superior status of the one who is offering this undeserved kindness.

Agape is the natural companion and generator of *charis* (grace). Its active cause lies in the nature of its giver, not its recipient, and its ultimate and only source is God. God decided; God chose; God committed; God gave; God loved! Love, pure and personal and infinite, has poured itself out from the highest height of heaven, down into the lower parts of the earth, where the broken body of Christ lay until the third day, on which He arose!

But consider the incarnate Son of God, whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth, in Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed:

He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.²⁰

¹⁹Rom. 5:6-8.

²⁰Luke 22:41-44.

The entire New Testament (especially the Epistle to the Hebrews) repeatedly emphasizes the true humanity of Jesus. The best way to understand what Jesus experienced in Gethsemane that night is to ask oneself: “How would I have felt, knowing that I was about to be unjustly tried and condemned, flogged and manhandled, reviled and ridiculed, and finally tortured to death by crucifixion?”

As William Barclay noted, no one wants to die; no one wants to die at only thirty-three years of age; and no one wants to die by slow torture. Jesus, in His “loud cries and tears” that night, was saying to His heavenly Father, “I don’t want to go through with this! Emotionally, I am not up to it. Isn’t there some other way, Father? I don’t feel like going through this. Nevertheless....”

The Great “Nevertheless”

How I thank God for that great “nevertheless”! By means of it, Jesus Christ was saved from the rule of His emotions at that critical moment, when the salvation of all believers hung in the balance. Jesus demonstrated in His own life that which He calls each of us to learn and demonstrate in our lives: the decision, the commitment, the “choice” to love, no matter what the external circumstance or the internal emotion.

This “agape” love is foundational in all covenant relationships, because the commitment of the *will* acts as a “backup” support when emotional affection fails. Husbands and wives, let’s admit it: we do not always maintain those same feelings

of joy, warmth, and oneness that we had when we took those sacred vows of marriage. A bad day at the office, a particularly trying day at home with the kids, and friction occurs. Tension rises, emotions become strained nearly to the breaking point. Both partners are suffering; both are really crying out, “Meet my needs!” What will see us through those moments when our emotions would lead us to damage or even destroy the relationship of oneness with our spouse? It is this thing called love! “Father, I am not happy in this relationship at this time. If you are willing, I think I’ll ‘pass’ on this one, and try another cup instead.” But God has clearly said that He is far from willing that people should tear apart that which He has joined together. Since love is primarily a matter of commitment, and not emotion, we are called at such times to say to God: “Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done.” I will continue to love in spite of my feelings.

Loving The Unlovable Unconditionally

In Christ, God has taught us the truth about love, and it is the truth about Himself: Love loves the unlovable and the unlovely, unconditionally. Love is committed, without qualification or exception, to the *ultimate* (and nothing less than the ultimate) happiness, well-being, peace, joy, help, service, stability, and growth of the loved one(s). God may disapprove, may detest with His entire being, certain attitudes and actions of His human creatures. His own loving nature constrains Him to *oppose* ungodliness (lovelessness) whenever it establishes a stronghold, to *forbid* it to continue its destructive work unchecked, and to clearly *reveal* His wrath from heaven

against it. But no human being has ever lived, nor ever will, for whom love, unlimited and unconditional, has ever failed in the heart of God.

Truly, “love never fails.” It is we who fail. Love is not measured by degrees, as if God had more for some than for others. Can God be limited or parcelled out, like dessert servings? Love’s only limitations are in the capacities of our own hearts, first to freely receive, and then to freely give. As our Lord said to Simon the Pharisee regarding a certain sinful woman:

*“Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”*²¹

I personally have chosen to commit myself to the way of love. Of course, I don’t practice it flawlessly at all times. My best efforts undoubtedly fall far short of perfection. My commitment, however, is fixed. I am walking in the way of love. If in a moment of pressure or distress, I speak harshly or say unkind things, I will acknowledge my error and renounce it. I will continue to love you, no matter what the external circumstances or the internal feelings might be. There will always be love here for you, for in Jesus Christ I have tapped into a bottomless ocean of love.

There is an old con artist’s trick in which a piece of nearly invisible string is attached to a coin or bank note. When the currency has changed hands in a purchase, the swindler pulls the string at an opportune moment and the money returns to its place in his “bag of tricks.”

²¹Luke 7:47.

This game is often played for much higher stakes, however. I might extend a hand of loving concern toward a fellow human being (my spouse, my child, my brother, sister, or neighbor). I am holding out my love to another person, but I find my other hand reaching out also—not to give, but to receive in like manner. I will let go of my love for you, if you will reciprocate. I have a string attached to my “love”; it is not unconditional. This is not love. It is a cheap counterfeit. The love of God calls us to let go of our love, leave it in the other person’s hand, and let it work for God. We are not to seek love in return.

“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”²²

If we will faithfully invest in others the love which the Lord entrusts to us, we need not worry about the return. It is *His* love, to be spent on *His* purposes. And yet, as one who has committed himself to this way, I know by experience that, however much we offer to others of the riches of God’s love, forgetful of the outcome for ourselves, much more is reaped than is sown.

God knows I am not boasting, except in the Lord: I have, in my lifetime, known and dearly loved three individuals who, on separate occasions, have freely and spontaneously confided a willingness to lay down their lives for me. I did not solicit such a confession; I never manipulated or dressed up anyone to love me in this manner. I only committed myself,

²²Matt. 5:46-48.

by the mercy and grace of the God who loves me, to love even the unlovely, unconditionally.

Loving “Even As Christ” Loved

The gospel of Christ teaches us that, as surely as sin leads to death, love leads to everlasting life. Therefore, when we think of a life of selfless love as “a big risk,” we are forgetting the meaning of the Christian faith. *Jesus* took the “big risk,” though He never doubted the eventual outcome. We are not called to blaze the trail, but to follow it faithfully. The crucial question is, do I trust my Guide? This question clarifies the relationship between “faith” and “love” in Christianity. If we believe in “Love” (as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ), we will practice “love.”

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.²³

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.²⁴

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.²⁵

²³Gal. 5:6.

²⁴James 2:18. James specifically discusses the “works” that come from “faith.”

²⁵1 John 3:17-18. Compare Matt. 25:31-46.

Jesus embodied the kingdom (rule) of God, not only by miraculously breaking Satan's grip on human minds and bodies, but by constantly sowing love everywhere He went.²⁶ The Servant has poured out His life unto death for the triumph of the Kingdom. As He left His proper place at the head of the pascal feast, stripped off His outer garments, and washed His disciples' feet, He vividly illustrated His descent from heaven, the laying aside of His divine glory to assume the work of Yahweh's Servant.²⁷ And for what prize did Deity descend from the throne of the universe to be born of a poor Jewish virgin? What treasure could possibly warrant such humiliation?

The answer is so shocking that it has proven too scandalous for many to believe. Those who do believe it usually confess it to be the most wonderful facet in the entire mystery of divine love: He did it all for you and me! He did it so you and I could clearly see and choose the way of love, the way of healing and restoring that which has been broken by sin.

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God....Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her....²⁸

²⁶See Acts 10:38 and compare Matt. 12:22-30; 1 John 3:8.

²⁷See John 13:1-17 and compare Phil. 2:5-11 and the so-called "Servant Songs" of Isaiah (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), as well as Isa. 61:1-4.

²⁸Eph. 5:1-2, 25. Compare also Matt. 12:20; John 13:34-35; Phil. 2:1-5.

Relational Love

The love of God came into this world to “seek and save that which was lost”—to reconcile rebellious human beings back to God. The purpose of God among men concerns *relationships*. Some human actions and attitudes are reflective of those of God in Christ, and always result in healing, restoring, nourishing, and extending personal relationships according to God’s purpose. Other human actions and attitudes are unlike the heart of God revealed in Christ. These selfish characteristics tear down and destroy the very relationships that Christ came to build up among human beings.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails....²⁹

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.... We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself.... Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.³⁰

Christ is the standard, in action and attitude. Love, acceptance, forbearance, encouragement, and service for others—espe-

²⁹1 Cor. 13:4-8. Compare Gal. 5:13-26.

³⁰Rom. 14:15; 15:1-3, 7. Compare 1 Cor. 8:1-13; 16:14.

cially for brothers and sisters in Christ—are enjoined on Christians as part of Christ’s light and easy yoke. But without reliance on the grace of God and prayerful submission to Christ’s indwelling Spirit, it would indeed be a yoke too heavy to bear. It is fellowship with God in Christ that transforms the most burdensome labor into a joyful walk of discipleship.

As Christ leads, we follow. We learn the steps from Him: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness....your brother for whom Christ died....accept one another as Christ accepted you....” What begins as clumsy, faltering imitation becomes natural, flowing, graceful movement—with much practice. It is a heavenly walk that never ends:

*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.*³¹

Earlier in this context, Christ’s apostle had commanded that Christians pay everyone whatever was due. A Christian can and should pay in full whatever debts he or she incurs: taxes, revenues, honor, and respect should be rendered to governing authorities, as the Lord Himself had taught.³²

It is possible and desirable to fully meet financial and fiscal obligations. You can receive a “paid in full” receipt upon completion of property payments or tax installments. But the obligation to love is inexhaustible; it is an eternally outstanding responsibility to be carried out with a willing heart.

³¹Rom. 13:8.

³²See Mark 12:13-17 and compare Rom. 13:6-7.

Love: Central And Supreme

I have written about “this thing called love” with a general readership in mind. But now I must single out the disciple of Christ: I urge you, I admonish you, I beg you to seek this thing called love as the most crucial and important value in life. Sell all you have to possess it and develop it. Count everything else rubbish in order to gain it and grow in it. Don’t be sidetracked by any other emphasis, no matter how apparently noble or lofty.

Love is the most excellent way, because God is love. Let us admonish one another to keep love central and supreme in our thinking and in our living. Errors in certain points of doctrinal theology will separate us from certain portions of truth, but if we miss this thing called love, we will be eternally separated from Truth Himself. If you settle for less than love, you are settling for less than God Himself.

I must admonish parents: do not sin against your children by offering them less than unconditional love. Don’t give them the idea that love is something they must “deserve” or “earn”; that, unless they measure up, or unless they never fail in a moment of weakness, you will not continue to love them.

God has never dealt in this way with any of His children. His love is steadfast. God is always ready to run toward even the most wayward penitent who wants to come home. Only false love holds itself aloof and says, “I will not love you as you are. You must *buy* me by becoming what I want you to be. Then you can have me.” This is not love; it is prostitution. If you

need to understand more about the difference between God's love and prostitution, read the biblical book of Hosea. It was written for the very purpose of teaching this distinction to God's people.

A Family Affair: Participating Love

Divine love is a "family affair." It originates from eternity in the relationships that created and sustain all things: the mutual love and communication and purpose existing among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From all eternity, the Son has lovingly submitted Himself to the creative and redemptive purpose of the Father.³³ From beyond the beginning of time, the Father has been pleased to center all things in His Son, to place all fullness in Him, to give all things to Him.³⁴ The eternal Spirit of God has ever participated in the loving interaction between the Father and the Son, and has mediated this divine love to mankind throughout history.³⁵

By its very nature, love has always been expressed in the mutual submission, obedience, and joint participation that we describe as "fellowship" or "community." In Christ, God brought His love down from heaven into the arena of human

³³See John 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18; 5:18-30; 6:35-39; 7:14-18, 28-29; 8:25-29, 42-59; 10:14-18, 22, 38; 12:44-50; 14:1-10, 22-24, 28-31;

³⁴See Matt. 11:25-27; 17:1-9; 28:18-20; Rom. 8:28-30; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 2:5-13; Rev. 5:1-13.

³⁵See Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 1:1-2, 10-12; Eph. 1:11-14; John 7:37-39; 14:15-26; 15:26-27; 16:5-15.

history. This was done primarily for our salvation, but also (and, in a way, inseparably) for our instruction:

*"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."*³⁶

*"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love....My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."*³⁷

In the case of the eternal Godhead, proper community relationships were maintained (and mankind's broken relationships restored) by obedient submission: the Son to the Father, the disciples to the Son.

Christ's perfect obedience unto death won us a restored place in the family of God. He calls us now to imitate the "family pattern" in our human relationships. Having failed to render *perfect* obedience to God, we can yet render *real* obedience, because Christ's love has set us free from the condemnation of sin and has shown us the meaning of fellowship with God.

But, as always, God will not treat us as less than human—not even to save us from sin and death. He has done all He possibly can to restore us to fellowship with Himself, but friendship must be freely accepted; love cannot be programmed or coerced. Will we choose to respond to God's love, even from this moment on, in all of the relationships He has entrusted to us?

³⁶John 13:34-35. ³⁷John 15:9-10, 12.

We who are husbands, wives, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, even (regrettably) enemies: will we choose to participate in the divine nature by activating God's love in each of these relationships? In the home circle, in the classroom, the office, the local congregation: there is a solution for all the heartache, disillusionment, and discouragement. There is a way out of the pain of broken promises, shattered covenants, betrayals, and back-stabbing. It is this way of love. There is no other way out.

How many persons are in your family? Only two, you say? Two plus love always equal one. Have you more than two at home? Are there five hundred or more in your local church? No matter. Love can bind any number of people together in unity and cause them to live cooperatively in peace.

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace....to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it....to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ....From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*³⁸

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord....Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church....In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his

³⁸Eph. 4:1-3, 7, 12-13, 16.

*wife loves himself...just as Christ does the church—for we are members of His body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*³⁹

The love of God in Christ brings oneness into human relationships. It can transform a bickering pack of self-proclaimed “spiritual superstars” (such as the first Corinthian epistle reflects) into the beautiful, spiritual unity described in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It can make the “one flesh” of marriage mean infinitely more than the mere physical joining of two bodies in sexual intercourse. It is more than physical; it is most importantly spiritual.

Where love reigns, division and divorce are nonexistent. Where there is love, there will be a visible, beautiful (though not flawless) unity which will commend the gospel of God’s redeeming love to a blind, sinful, and sick world. Jesus prayed that God’s “extended family in Christ” would live in a unity that would confirm the truth of the apostles’ message to the world at large:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”⁴⁰

The Christ-rejecting world is finding it more and more difficult to avoid the conclusion that lovelessness means lifelessness. The evidence is piling up: broken trusts, broken

³⁹Eph. 5:21-22, 25, 28-33.

⁴⁰John 17:20-21.

homes, broken people. Love—healing, restoring, reconciling love—is needed.

What does “life” mean to you? If you find no real meaning in it, I know that you have not realized *love* in your life. And I affirm, in the name of God, who cannot lie, that if you will open your heart to the reality of God’s love, you will find yourself ready, willing, and able to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You will come to know and love yourself with an overflowing love that will spill out into every relationship of your life. You will enter a life-style of joy beyond your natural imagination, and you will find inexhaustible spiritual resources to deal with life’s obstacles and troubles.

You may have noticed a tendency throughout this chapter to vacillate between the discussion of “this thing called love” and the consideration of the personal God who *is* love. I have tried to be as straightforward as possible in presenting the subject, but I confess my inability to totally separate this *thing* (quality, attribute) called “love” from the One who absolutely personifies it, and who embodied it among us.

I leave you, therefore, with this final appeal: For the sake of your own life, choose the will of God; choose the way of life; commit yourself to this thing called love; the real thing—God’s love.

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Not By Sight

We live by faith, not by sight.
2 Corinthians 5:7

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain
of what we do not see.*
Hebrews 11:1

*Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” Then
Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have
believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet
have believed.”*
John 20:28-29

“...Lord, increase our faith!”

4

We Walk By Faith — Not By Sight

“We *live* by faith, not by sight”;¹ another translation reads, “We *walk* by faith, not by sight.” Both expressions mean the same thing, for our lives should be a walk by faith, not by sight.

It is imperative that we know the meaning of the phrase “not by sight.” It is also crucial to one’s understanding of walking by faith to keep in mind the negative aspect of this entire concept. We need to comprehend that following Jesus is not only a life of faith, but also involves *not* walking by sight.

Consider statements made by Jesus Christ throughout His ministry. He talked very explicitly about faith and the lack of it. He mentions again and again to His followers, “You of little faith.”² When Jesus spoke these words to His fol-

¹2 Cor. 5:7.

²See Matt. 8:24-26; 14:26-31; 16:6-11.

lowers, He was trying to bring to their awareness the need for faith in various situations; He was in no way disparaging His disciples to the point of full reproof or rebuke, for Jesus spoke often of the smallest degree of faith and of its value. Jesus valued faith that was only the size of a mustard seed, the tiniest of all seeds.

On one occasion Peter had the faith to step out of a boat and walk on water. But he became faithless; taking his eyes off Jesus and then seeing the waves, he began to sink. When he looked at the waves, he began to walk by sight, not by faith. A valuable lesson can be learned here. In troublesome times, during moments of frustration and futility, when everything seems to be lost, we must ask ourselves some very important questions: What am I seeing? What am I looking at? Am I walking by sight or by faith? The Lord once said to Peter, “I have prayed... that your faith may not fail.”³ In a post-resurrection appearance, Jesus Christ said to Thomas, “Stop doubting and believe.” In other words, the Lord is calling His disciples to “walk *not by sight*, but by faith.”

Faith Is A Necessary Part Of Daily Life

What is faith? The word “faith” portrays the idea of *believing*. The basic definition of the word involves *trust*. Usage of the word expands its fullest meaning to the concept of not only trust, but also “dependency, confidence, and reliance upon.”

³Luke 22:32.

There are those, however, who object to the supposition of faith; this we must consider. In the world, we find many who say in response to those who have belief or faith in Jesus Christ: "That 'faith' stuff is just for Christians!" But we all live in a concrete world, in the realm of realities, and in this creation there are many *unseen realities*. All that we can have faith in (as being real) is not that which is simply seen by physical means. Entities exist that are both seen and unseen—invisible realities. But non-Christians reject the notion that people have to rely upon something called faith, a thing they say is not real. They say that, because of insecurities, Christians resort to this phenomenon we call "faith."

The truth of the matter is that *every* human being, whether a believer in God or not, lives his life on a principle of faith: that is, believing. All of us, because of the essential characteristics and makeup of human beings, live in a world which, of necessity, activates what is called "faith."

Henry Ford, maker of the four-cylinder automobile, had an ingenious and incredible idea. He went to his engineers and proposed this idea: "Make a V-block engine for me." "Impossible!" they replied. "There is no way you can make four cylinders with pistons in a V shape." Ford thought this would make automobiles faster. He insisted on it. Six weeks later he returned to find them still saying, "Impossible." But he continued to have faith in spite of this intangible idea. He insisted that this must be brought about.

He *believed* in his idea, that it could be done. Twelve months passed and still the word came back, "Impossible."

He persisted: "This can be done." And then the breakthrough came and the V-block engine was invented. Here is a man who had faith — in his idea and in himself. He thus experienced the power and results of believing!

Those who object to faith in God would never object to faith when it comes to something as basic as eating. They do not say to themselves, "I have no faith because I do not know what is in this; therefore, I won't eat it." We consume things with complete confidence, with thorough trust in those who have prepared it. We get a little apprehensive sometimes, and this is one of the reasons why we stop for a moment as our faith is shaken: for instance, during the Tylenol scare and other food and drug incidents. But in spite of this, people trust. They continue to indulge in these things to survive. People get into automobiles or other transportation vehicles (trains, boats, aircraft), and in doing so they express their trust, their faith. I myself, and others to whom I have spoken, do not feel comfortable while flying in an aircraft, which is supposed to be the most reliable source of transportation. Yet we trust sufficiently in the mechanics of the craft and those operating it to actually get on board and fly. Everyone who flies, whether atheist or theist, expresses confidence and trust in doing so, regardless of their fears.

A situation may occur in family life or relationships that may cause lack of trust in someone, but those involved should not stop trusting or believing in that person altogether. They may even regain that lost trust. Their faith can be restored.

When people read, confidence is expressed in what they

accept and believe. Geography students, never having been to the places read about and seen on maps, believe those places exist. The world doesn't stop reading, flying, driving, or eating. Instead, people are *believing* in these areas of life.

Some say, "I will not believe in anything I cannot see, touch, control, or hear." And yet these same people will walk into a bank, give the teller a piece of paper representing their money and this deposit slip disappears from view. They don't see where it goes, but have the confidence that it is going into the vault and that it will represent the amount of dollars deposited. They don't see the results of it, they don't feel the money; and yet, they proceed on the basis of faith.

We go to our employer and receive a piece of paper that represents "X" amount of dollars for services rendered. I have never heard an employee say, "This is just a piece of paper, and it only represents 'X' amount of dollars for services I've rendered. I can't trust this piece of paper!" But what does he do with it? With the utmost confidence he takes the check, goes to the bank, makes that deposit, and feels assured that his money is in the bank. We have confidence and trust in this process.

Will we trust men, but refuse to trust God? Some say, "It is foolish to trust God." And yet, is it not foolish to trust men and their procedures?

We trust, believe, have confidence in, and rely upon unseen things every moment, every day of our lives. *Everyone* lives by faith.

False Concepts Of Faith

Some believe faith to be a “religious experience.” We have already shown that everyone has faith; it is a common thing among both non-believers and believers in God. Faith is not an abstract “exercise of the soul.” It is not a mere “gracious disposition of the heart.” Faith is not something we can see, look at, or feel. It is not a “passport to God’s goodness,” nor is it to be looked at as “currency to purchase His gifts.”

By this latter false concept some believe that if you have faith, God is going to graciously give you something. It is true that He bestows His grace and mercy upon those who have faith, if that faith is in Him. But God does not bestow it upon them simply because that they have *human* faith, as will be further explained in the next section. Some falsely believe faith to be an “inner condition of man”: something that is unexplainable. Neither is it mere “mental assent.”

What is faith? It is dependency: trust in and reliance upon *something or someone*. Every human being under the sun operates on this principle of believing. We believe in things and use our senses to determine what not to believe in and what to believe in. So people believe, disbelieve, and even misbelieve. People are inherently believing beings. They are made that way in order to survive. The question is this: “What is *biblical* faith?”⁴

⁴See Rom. 4:17-25; James 2:17-26.

Faith Is Believing In God

What is the faith that is “unto the saving of the soul”—biblical faith? What is the faith that reaches beyond human experience? This is the faith that Jesus calls us to. The faith that Peter had when he stepped out of the boat and walked on water was a reliance upon someone other than himself. Peter reached beyond his own human experience and mere human ability.

Subjective faith has no power within itself. Biblical faith, as Scripture reveals, rests on the power of an objective reality. The individual believes in something outside himself. The believer will experience the power of the *object* in which he places his faith. Biblical faith, then, is believing in *God*, the all-powerful.

Paul, the apostle, demonstrates the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to reveal a righteousness that is exclusively of God. It is accredited to all who come to fix their faith in Jesus as Savior, in obedience from the heart. Such people are then pronounced justified by God. They are cleansed from their past sins because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. “God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through *faith* in His blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice [in forgiving], because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.”⁵

⁵Rom. 3:25.

Faith With Flesh On It

Abraham is presented as having faith in God. The Holy Spirit of God, who spoke through the letter of Paul to the Romans, did not merely give an abstract definition of faith, but used the personification of the great man, Abraham, to demonstrate what faith in God truly is.

The following verses introduce what is written about Abraham:

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.⁶

"In whom he believed...God." This is the key. Abraham approached God and His promises by faith, not by sight. He was made righteous before he was circumcised. Circumcision followed after. He was accounted righteous before circumcision, which was a sign or seal of the righteousness of faith. “The promise comes by *faith*,”⁷ and is guaranteed to all of Abraham’s offspring, both Jews and Gentiles. This all rests upon the *faith of Abraham in God*. It did not rest upon some subjective act of the believer.

Abraham believed in the God who “gives life to the dead

⁶Rom. 4:16-17. ⁷Rom. 4:16.

and calls things that are not as though they were." He lived his life on the basis of unseen reality; he walked by faith, not by sight:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.⁸

Faith: Going And Growing

Throughout his life, Abraham continually believed God. And Abraham was told by God, "Do you see the stars up in the heaven? Your descendants are going to be this innumerable."⁹ As he walked along the sands of the sea he was reminded again by God who promised, "Abraham, do you see the sands of the shore that are too many to count? The descendants out of your loins are going to be this innumerable."¹⁰ He believed in hope against hope. Could Abraham have had the confidence and the trust in the power of God's promise that he would become a father at the age of a

⁸Rom. 4:18-25.

⁹See Gen. 15:5.

¹⁰See Gen. 22:15-18.

hundred years old, with Sarah's womb being dead, had he forgotten the object of his faith—God?

Consider this man's faith! The messenger from God said that they were going to have a son. Abraham carefully scrutinized the situation. He looked at the things that he could see: he took his own body into account. Conclusion: his body was dead. He then considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. Conclusion: dead. Twice dead was the conclusion based upon that which he could *see*.

Had he only evaluated the situation with these facts, would he ever have been called the father of the faithful? Would he ever have realized the promise that God had given him? No. Instead, his faith grew strong in the God who had spoken, believing that God could perform that which He had promised. Abraham believed *in God*. He walked not by sight, but by faith.

Therefore, we conclude that faith is walking on the basis of the *object* of one's faith. The success, the achievement of one's faith, will come to rest upon the *object* of his believing. This explains why Hebrews 12:2 states: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...." The idea of the word "fixing" or "looking" means the removal of our attention from a prior object to focus it on Jesus Christ, the author, the source and the origin of faith, trust, and dependency upon God. The word "perfecter" or "finisher" denotes completion, the fullness. The completion of one's faith rests upon the object of one's faith.

Houdini was known as the greatest escape artist in the world. He could get out of straitjackets, chains, and locked

boxes of all kinds. He had a standing offer that he could escape from any jail in sixty minutes provided he would be permitted to walk inside the cell in his street clothes and that all present would turn their backs while he worked; he didn't want to reveal his way of getting out.

In the British Isles many had heard of the great Houdini. They believed they had a jail from which he could not escape. Houdini accepted the challenge of this escape-proof jail.

He tried to trip the lock with a long flexible steel rod. Keeping his ear close to the lock, trying to hear it trip, sixty minutes had passed and he was not successful in getting out. He continued for another two hours until he became exhausted. In his fatigue he leaned against the door and it fell open. Houdini *believed* the cell door was locked but it had never been locked! It was locked only in his mind!

How many things are only locked in our minds when the door is wide open?

Abraham believed God. He believed not only in God, but in the God *who promised*. Ask yourself a few questions as you read the historical narrative. Inscribed in the Bible are all the promises that God has ever made to man. The questions: Has God ever faulted on any of His promises? Has God ever failed to carry out with enabling power that which He has promised? No, He has *never* failed, He has *never* faulted on any of His promises. Therefore, we can believe in God, with an utter dependency upon *His word* and *power*.

Humanly Helpless—But Not Without God's Help

Faith, then, extends itself by believing in God's promises. Another look at Abraham and his faith in God's promises shows that he walked not by sight, but trusting in God, even though he had *no ability* to make any contribution from a human standpoint. He was helpless in the matter of resolving the problem of giving life to the dead womb of Sarah. He was resting completely upon the power of God, the promise that God had spoken. Abraham believed, *in spite of* all human calculations that contradicted the realization of this promise. Physical sight is helpless when it comes to believing in the *unseen realities* of God's promises! *Seeing* someone or something is "sight-knowledge." *Believing* someone or something is "faith-knowledge." Abraham lived by faith-knowledge.

The Hebrew writer gives us examples of faith-knowledge and its results:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.¹¹

Faith-knowledge is the way of righteousness. Walking “not by sight” is a way to have a faith-relationship with God throughout our lives. In having this relationship with God we are blessed. We must believe in the integrity of God and trust that He will fulfill the promises He makes to those who honestly seek Him, to those whose belief is based upon faith-knowledge, rather than sight-knowledge.

Where Is Faith’s Power?

Faith’s power and results do not rest in “my believing,” but in that something or someone which I trust and believe. If I believe in the “truth of the gospel” as revealed by God in Jesus Christ my Savior, who died in my place, and the response of genuine faith fixes on Him with an obedience from the heart, I am saved! God has promised!¹² However, if I believe in “another gospel,” I believe in a lie. Consequently, I will not have the promise or prospect of salvation, for God has not promised that He will save me if I believe in a lie. The saving power of God is in Jesus Christ and our trust must be in Him only to receive the promised result—salvation!

¹¹Heb. 11:1-6.

¹²See Rom. 3:21-31; 10:9-10.

If I believe a lie, I'll get only what that lie can deliver. In the event that I rest my faith in a job, I'll get what that job can do. If I fix my faith on my education, I'll get only what education can do, with its limitations. If I trust in government, I'll receive only what government can offer. And if I fix my faith on the pleasures of this world, I will obtain only what the pleasures of this world can give. If I suppose that drugs and alcohol can give me something in my life, I live only with the consequences of what these things can do to me. If I find myself looking to famous people and set my faith, confidence, and reliance on what their lives represent, I'll get what this way of life can do—and only that! Finally, if I place my trust and faith in myself, I'll get only what self can do.

But thankfully, if I place my faith in God, I will get what God can do! This is the faith to which Jesus calls us: *faith fixed in God*. The act of believing is the same in all of these proposals listed; the experiential, subjective expression of believing is identical. It is the *objects* of our faith that are different. We have seen repeatedly that Abraham believed in *God* (the object) with his whole heart; as a result we can appreciate the magnitude, the beauty, and the powerful results of this great faith.

In summary, through Abraham's example we have seen that faith apart from its object is nothing. His faith was complete dependence upon *God*. Faith is confidence in God's promises and *holding to that*, even if no human ability can build on it, even if all human calculations contradict it, and even if conditions and circumstances make hope seem hopeless and impossible! In addition, we have observed through

Abraham's godly example that faith is not *seeing* something or someone, but *believing* something or someone:

*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*¹³

Abraham gave the example that faith's *power* and *results* do not rest upon the individual's believing, but in that someone or something on which belief (trust) is fixed.

Faith Is Believing In God And Trusting Him By Walking With Him

We have examples in the Scriptures of many great men and women who walked with God daily by faith and not by sight.¹⁴ Faith's walk is *nothing more* than believing God's promises, believing God's word, and trusting God to keep His word!

No matter how difficult life's situations may become, don't abandon your walk of faith with Jesus Christ. Rather, look to this great cloud of witnesses previously mentioned who endured hardships. They did not obtain the promises *apart* from us, for their completion was to be *with* our completion on the basis of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice and priesthood, which are eternal. "God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."¹⁵ Jesus Christ crowns the whole, who endured the

¹³1 Peter 1:8-9.

¹⁴See Heb. 11:1ff.

¹⁵Heb. 11:40.

shameful humiliation of the cross and continued for the joy that was set before Him.

Christ looked at things seen in Gethsemane and pleaded, "Father, let this cup pass from Me." Three times He sought the Father as He looked to the cruel death that He did not deserve. "...he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death...."¹⁶ But Jesus walked by faith and added, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." And the Father delivered Him from death.

God the Father did not deliver Him from *dying*, but He did deliver Him from *death*. His body did not see corruption; it was impossible that the grave should hold Him.

Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God, demonstrated dependency upon the Father. He was tempted in all points, as we are; He suffered through many temptations. Jesus Christ did not desire to experience the scourging and dying on the cross; He simply did not want to go through with it! But He willingly did so on the basis of a loving response of faith: confidence and trust in the spoken word of God Almighty. And the Father rescued Him from death, as He will do for us if we believe in His word!

The Father gave Jesus strength to overcome temptation and endure dying, and raised Him from the dead. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of trusting in God. He demonstrates by His life on earth how to believe in God's promises; how to believe in God's word; how to trust God to keep His word.

¹⁶Heb. 5:7.

Though we may prove faithless, He abides faithful. Will the faithlessness of man bring about the unfaithfulness of God? Will the unrighteousness of men bring about the unrighteousness of God? No! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is dependable, reliable, and trustworthy. We may fail ourselves, we may disappoint ourselves; but He never will disappoint us.

Trusting God Each Minute, Every Day...All The Way

Walking by faith, walking with God, means committing *all* to God and His management *without worry*:

*"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?...Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."*¹⁷

And yet, we often find ourselves worrying about these everyday necessities of life, when what we need to be concerned about is our walk with Him. The Scriptures say to seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and as a result all these other things will be supplied to us. Every step we take in life has cares. They should not make our

¹⁷Matt. 6:25-27, 34.

walk a walk of worry, but rather a walk of faith, knowing and believing that God will work all things out for our good. We must trust His management of our entire lives: every second, every minute, every hour, and every day.

Abraham shows us that faith's walk is committing *all* to God and his management, no matter what demands are made of us. The promised child was born right on schedule. God was faithful. The boy, Isaac, grew and became the apple of this aged father's eye; but God spoke once more. Abraham was told to take his only son and offer him up as a sacrifice to God.

I abhor the representation that the movie, "The Bible," gave of Abraham's reaction. Abraham is shown rejecting the directions of God. He shouts out, "No! No!" And with his groans and screams, he takes his spear and in anger beats it upon a boulder in the desert night. He looks up to God in arrogant, unbelieving protest.

This display was far from the truth of how Abraham responded to God's call. Instead, he calmly continued to believe in God, knowing that God is able to perform that which He promised. He trusted in God and His management *without worry!*

Faith in God is negated by man's dependency upon himself. Self-management is not "walking by *faith*"; nor is self-sufficiency or self-confidence. Instead, we must walk hand in hand with Jesus, trusting in Him with our every step.

Faith's walk takes a stand upon the power, promises, and

trustworthiness of God. In everyday life, we trust His management and control of the sun and moon, the stars and galaxies, the winds and the seas, the rivers and the lakes, the birds and the animals, and the whole universe.

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.¹⁸

God appointed Jesus Christ as heir of all things and through Him He made the universe. Jesus Christ sustains all things by His *word!* He is the master of nature and all things are controlled by His spoken word; we trust in Him to command it without worry.

He is also the Lord of circumstances in our lives. We must trust His management and control of *us*.

In him we were chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.¹⁹

We must trust Him at all times and during all conditions. Trust Him from morning to night; trust Him in the light and in the dark; trust Him in good times and bad times; trust Him in sickness and in health; trust Him in want and in wealth. We must trust Him in all things, in all ways, and at all times.

This trusting, believing faith will become like breathing if

¹⁸Col. 1:16-17.

¹⁹Eph. 1:11.

we give our all to it. It will be logical, natural, and even subconscious. All our actions will be dependent upon God our Father, through Christ Jesus, His Son.

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

As we have died to sin, we now walk in newness of life and Christ is now Lord of our new lives. We must believe in the fact that God is our *Father*. He cares, He provides:

...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"²¹

With these words from God it becomes only logical that we trust in Him as we believe His promises. We see again through this scripture that faith's walk takes a stand upon the power, promises, and trustworthiness of God!

Summary: Faith Walking And Waiting —But Not Disappointed

Faith's journey will not be disappointed as we walk *not by sight*, but we must wait on the Lord.

We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.²²

²⁰Gal. 2:20.

²¹Heb. 13:5-7.

²²Heb. 3:14.

We must not be like those of old who heard and rebelled—the ones whom Moses led out of Egypt. They were not able to enter God's rest *because of their unbelief*. They did not wait on the Lord!

*As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."*²³

Some preferred the way of legalism, so that they could establish their own righteousness. They did not rely on God's righteousness, the true righteousness, the righteousness that is by faith in Christ. It is the one who believes in the Lord's righteousness who has *faith*, and will not be embarrassed.

Faith's walk will not be put to shame, although we are confronted with mounting difficulties, faced with overwhelming odds and impossibilities, confronted with insurmountable trials—and even though present conditions seem to contradict it. Walking by faith, not by sight, will overcome all these obstacles!

Faith's walk is to take each step *with* God and to glorify God. "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God."²⁴ Abraham's faith glorified God!

Faith is faith because it depends upon God. A believing and trusting that is not absolute dependency upon God is not biblical faith at all.

²³Rom. 9:33.

²⁴Rom. 4:20.

The Lord commends us even if we have faith the size of a mustard seed. But in order to not walk by sight we must pray that the Lord increase our faith. The apostles cried out, "Lord, increase our faith!" They desired the righteousness of God that comes by faith, not by sight. Let this be our prayer everyday...all the way!

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Losing Life And Finding Life

“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:35

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ....

Philippians 3:7-8

“Losing life to find life is the basis of Christianity because it is the essence of Christ’s own character and experience.”

5

Losing Life, Finding Life

Probably no teaching of Jesus Christ is more difficult for us to accept than the admonition uttered to His disciples immediately after Simon Peter had confessed Him to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God”:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”¹

¹Matt. 16:21-25. Compare Mark 8:31-35; Luke 9:22-24.

The Paradox: Losing Life In Pursuit Of Life

It was difficult enough for the disciples of Jesus to come to terms with the idea that this One, whom they had come to know as Israel's promised Messiah, would be rejected and painfully executed at the instigation of His own people. His talk of being "raised to life" was beyond their comprehension. No less baffling was this paradox of losing one's life in order to find it. One day, they would come to realize that their own lives would be woven into the same pattern as that of their Lord: suffering, then glory; death, then resurrection. In the meantime, Jesus repeatedly taught the same lesson: losing life in order to find it.

The Problem: Life Pursued Apart From Jesus Is Life Lost

This theme was emphasized by Jesus in many different ways on numerous occasions throughout His teaching ministry. He spoke of "losing life" as a prerequisite to finding one's proper relationship to God, to one's very self, to other human beings, and to things and events in the external world. There is no way to properly approach Jesus' teaching concerning the central issues of life and relationship to God unless we come to terms with this truth. Without a personal comprehension of "losing life to find life," there can be no understanding and appreciation of what it means to live and walk by *faith*; there can be no realization of *hope* in joyfully anticipating the future; there can be no initiation into the

fulfillment and fruitfulness that *love* brings about in the human personality. To reject or ignore this teaching of Jesus is to guarantee that we will fail to live abundantly, meaningfully, and victoriously in this world of pain, perils, and problems. But a word of caution is crucial: *The teaching of Jesus cannot be separated from His personality and His redemptive work.* The teaching of Christ is indivisibly bound up in the Good News of His saving life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. The teaching must not be isolated from the gospel itself, for it is incomprehensible apart from Jesus and His life-saving mission. His teaching is not a hastily scribbled prescription that merely relieves the symptoms of spiritual sickness. It is, rather, God's own personal portrait of our human souls: exposing what we really are, revealing what He created us to be, and enabling us to become whole human beings in His Son.

We cannot embrace Christ without embracing His cross. To follow Him means the death of self-centeredness and self-rule. Because Jesus had taught that He would be killed and then raised on the third day, Peter rebuked the Son of God: "This shall never happen to You!" This "noble sentiment" of Peter was immediately exposed by the Lord for the Satanic deception that it was: "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." In confessing Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Peter had spoken the purest words of divine revelation and orthodox Christianity. But in repudiating the teaching that Christ would lose His life in crucifixion in order to find it again in glorious resurrection, Peter denied His Lord as surely as he later would in the courtyard of the high priest. Losing life to find life is the essence of Christianity because it is the essence of the experience of Jesus of Nazareth. Those who follow Him

must embody His teaching, even as He embodied it. The Jesus who died to conquer sin and rose again to conquer death in the arena of human history must dwell in us. In union with Him, we can die to the rule of sin and death, and live joyously and victoriously in the presence of God.

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*²

*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body....*³

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*⁴

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*⁵

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who

²John 15:5. ³Rom. 6:8-12.

⁴2 Cor. 4:8-11. ⁵2 Cor. 5:14-15.

does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.... In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”⁶

The Solution: A Transformation Of Life Through Jesus

It is not just a matter of being Christ’s disciple; it is a matter of life and death. God wants us to have life:

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”⁷

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.⁸

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.... Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.”⁹

Each of us should ask himself or herself: Am I living my life to its fullest potential? Is there a meaning or purpose, some divine intention for my life, that I am missing? If I find that my life seems to lack solid meaning, if my life is less than satisfying even in the face of life’s difficulties, I must ask myself whether I am in harmony with God’s will, God’s mind, and God’s method of living life.

⁶Luke 14:26-27, 33.

⁷John 10:10.

⁸1 John 5:11-12.

⁹John 6:53, 57.

When Jesus said that “whoever wants to save his life will lose it,” He meant that all who seek to live for selfish reasons and from self-centered motives will, in the end, lose everything that can rightly be called “life.” Even memories of enjoyment and pleasure will finally give way to the mockery of worthlessness and madness. The promise life once seemed to hold will ring hollow and empty, like the hole in the ground that threatens to devour not only our bodies, but all of our achievements, ideals, and hopes. The Bible speaks of “loss,” “ruin,” and “eternal destruction.” Those who are determined to “do their own thing”—to live as though they created themselves and sustain themselves for the purpose of their own selfish desires—will lose the lives that have been entrusted to their stewardship.

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.... And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”¹⁰

The steward in Christ’s parable refused to accept his God-given responsibilities because he refused to honor God as God. He was deliberately ignorant of the true nature of God, and lived in fear and insecurity. The wicked, lazy steward was without excuse, as are all who refuse to ac-

¹⁰Matt. 25:24-28, 30.

knowledge God's sovereign authority and infinite kindness and love. The Father has fully revealed His nature to us in Jesus Christ, His Son. God can be known personally, loved wholeheartedly, and trusted completely. We are His, by right of creation and by right of redemption. We can, however, choose to rebel against God's rightful claim on our lives.

Life can be selfishly hoarded and squandered on egocentric concerns. Such a misuse of this sacred trust will eventually be brought to account, and the stewardship forfeited. On the other hand, we may freely choose to "lose" our lives by handing ourselves over to God (as we know Him in Jesus Christ). As the Son has always submitted His life to the Father ("Yet, not as I will, but as You will"), even to the point of dying for us on the cross, we may choose to put God and His will in Christ at the center of our lives. In doing so, we realize the purpose of our lives here and now, and enter into a relationship with God that will never end.

The Reality: Emergence Of New Life Under The Lordship Of Christ

It is not only a matter of having life after death, but also of enjoying fullness of life *before* death:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is

by grace you have been saved.¹¹

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”¹²

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.¹³

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!¹⁴

The kingdom of heaven is not only awaiting us beyond this present world; it also exists on earth here and now, whenever and wherever people submit to Jesus as Master and Savior of their lives. As people grow physically by reason of time, exercise, and nourishment, so do we also grow in this new life, toward the goal of the likeness of Christ, who is Himself the image of God the Father. God provides for the growth and nourishment of His children in Christ through His Word, His providence, His people, and His indwelling Holy Spirit:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.¹⁵

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,

¹¹Eph. 2:1-2, 4-5. ¹²John 5:24.

¹³1 John 5:13. ¹⁴2 Cor. 5:17.

¹⁵2 Tim. 3:16-17.

attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁶

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing
glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.¹⁷*

What God has in mind for us is beyond the comprehension of human imagination, and so is His power to bring it about. He can do

*...immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according
to his power that is at work within us....¹⁸*

When we understand this, we will gladly surrender ourselves to God in Christ, so that He can make us what He wants us to become. As hymn writer Isaac Watts so beautifully expressed:

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

We are all born into a material world in a physical body. We are constantly concerned with the task of physical survival. It is easy to succumb to the idea that life is purely biological, the universe entirely material, and that each person is a self-contained unit whose only responsibility is to maintain bodily health and happiness. Of course, man is biological in nature; the universe *is* physical; the individual must be concerned about personal health and survival. The fatal flaw in this "natural" way of thinking is seen in the words "purely," "entirely," and "only." As noble and God-given as the physical side of life is, we must ask: Is there

¹⁶Eph. 4:11-13. ¹⁷2 Cor. 3:18.

¹⁸Eph. 3:20. Compare Eph. 1:18-21.

more? Whether or not we are Christians, few would say that Jesus of Nazareth should be ignored when He speaks about the nature of human life:

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"¹⁹

"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell."²⁰

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."²¹

"Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes."²²

Our full human potential lies far beyond the physical, although the physical world is the training ground of our stewardship. If we are faithful with little, God will entrust to us much more. God has given us life, personal abilities, a physical body, and material possessions. We are responsible to invest and spend them in His interests, for His purpose. To submit *everything* we are and *all* that we possess to Jesus Christ is the only way to properly exercise our trust of *His ownership*. The Lord's will for each of us is that we follow His Son in losing our lives for the purposes of God, in order that we might find them new again in His kingdom!

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it

¹⁹Matt. 4:4.

²⁰Matt. 10:28.

²¹Luke 12:15.

²²Luke 12:23.

dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”²³

Unless we die to our self-centered interests, we will know only the meaningless, shriveled existence of fading flowers that are killed by frost before they ever germinate and bloom. *When we die to egoism and selfishness (“lose life”), we come into life that centers on God’s will and His purpose (“find life”).* That which is united to the eternal “I AM” can never die, nor does it lose its identity. On the contrary, it becomes more “itself,” since it now fulfills the purpose for which it was created. One’s personality is not annihilated; it is made new, repaired, renovated, revitalized, regenerated. The only thing that is destroyed is the old self-centeredness, the old, wrong relationships; that is, the “body of sin.”²⁴

Are we willing to die? Here is the paradox: In pursuit of life, one would naturally tend to “get out there and grab it by the throat.” We are conditioned from an early age to believe that “God helps those who help themselves.” Jesus tells us that God helps those who humbly admit their own helplessness, who abandon the “pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstraps” philosophy. It is the poor in spirit who are blessed, says Jesus. The whole world says, “Storm the citadel of life and grab all the gusto you can, because life is quickly passing by: a short, warm moment in a long, cold infinity.” He who is Truth has entered our world and has

²³John 12:23-26.

²⁴See Rom. 6:1-7.

brought life and immortality out into the broad daylight, where all who so desire may plainly see. "Lose your life," He says, "so that you may find it again, even as I was dead but am alive again forevermore." And He asks the sobering question:

*"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and lose or forfeit his very self?"*²⁵

The devil offered Christ the whole world on the condition that He would worship him (Egoism Personified!). He had once succeeded in ruining humanity by inducing Adam and Eve to grasp for themselves what God had forbidden. But the "Last Adam," Christ, had not regarded even His rightful divine position as something to be selfishly grasped.²⁶ He would not now grasp for power which the Father would restore to Him in His own time and in His own way. People often sell their lives for far less than "the whole world": thirty pieces of silver, a pot of red stew, a moment of forbidden pleasure, a financial empire built on corrupt motives and methods. Will we believe Christ or Satan? Will we grasp for life, or lose life in order to find it?

The Transition: From Old Life To New Life

Imagine your heart (inner self) as the throne room of your life. Within that throne room, there are two entities, contending with one another for the right to rule your life. The two entities are God and Self. If God is enthroned, then Self

²⁵Luke 9:25.

²⁶See Phil. 2:5-11.

must die; if Ego (Self) is crowned, then God (in Christ) is once again judged worthy of death. In our freedom to choose, each of us stands in the place of Pilate: we must crucify either our righteous King (Christ) or the lawless rebel (Self)!

God has a *double* right to rule in our lives, for He is our *Creator* and our *Redeemer*, in Christ Jesus. Egoism (the attitude of self-centered pride) is an insurrectionist, trying to seize control of what rightly belongs to God: *life*. Egoism attempts to evade this truth by making noble protests against "surrendering responsibility for my own life." But life was never ultimately "ours" to begin with. We are not our own creators, much less our own saviors! Our lives are a stewardship, a trust from God. Our freedom, our responsibility, and our true human dignity consist only in choosing to give back to God the lives He entrusted to us. Self (egocentricity) must abdicate the throne of our lives; but, being a lawless rebel, Self will not willingly choose to do so. Christ is an infinitely stronger personality than Self, and can force Self off the throne of our lives. But whereas Self despises our human freedom and dignity, seizing our lives by deception and turning us into slaves, Christ will not violate our right to make informed choices. He will depose the tyrant Self and reign on the throne of our hearts only at our own invitation and request.

*"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*²⁷

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to

²⁷Rev. 3:20.

my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”²⁸

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!²⁹

God’s Word tells us that there is a living that brings forth death, and a dying that brings forth life. If Christ rules our lives, we will come to see life as He sees life: we will have the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ is sometimes called “the mind of the Spirit.” Both expressions simply mean “agreement with God; submission to God’s will.” Since God is love and holiness, and egoism is self-centeredness, it is obvious that the “mind of the Spirit” and the “mind of the flesh” (NIV, “sinful nature”) are mutually exclusive. They are opposites, as “Christocentric attitude” is opposed to “egocentric attitude.”

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do

²⁸John 8:31-36. ²⁹Rom. 7:21-25.

so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.... For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.³⁰

The old egoism, the old selfishness, cannot please God. It cannot even subject itself to God, for it is “anti-love” by its very nature. That is why the Bible insists that the egocentric attitude must be crucified. It is not wrong to have the desires and appetites that are inherent in human nature. But when self-centeredness gains control of our hearts, it immediately proceeds to twist and distort every good gift of God. It perverts our natural, God-given desires and incites us to find in every divine commandment an opportunity to selfishly disobey God. It deliberately ignores, stifles, and tramples on every claim of God upon our lives. Until, by God’s grace, we become sufficiently aware of our wretched, desperate condition apart from God, we will continue blindly down the primrose path toward bottomless ignorance, frustration, and destruction. Will we continue to grit our teeth and affirm, in the face of every evidence to the contrary, that we possess within ourselves sufficient power, wisdom, and resources to run our own lives?

The truth that we must face, the truth that can set us free, is that we need God. God *created* us in such a way that we can find wholeness and fulfillment only in right relationship to Him. He has given us Himself, in the person of Christ, so that everyone who chooses to become free from the tyranny of Self can do so, by enthroning the living Christ as Lord of his or her life. Led by the Spirit of the risen Jesus, we can

³⁰Rom 8:5-8, 13-14.

commit ourselves to genuine discipleship. When we surrender to Christ's teaching, example, and authority by turning from self-centeredness and being truly converted in His name, He is no longer "outside looking in." He comes to live inside us, working in us and through us. We have now become parts of the spiritual organism (body) through which the Spirit of the risen Christ now does God's will on earth:

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.³¹

Death To The Old Nature, Life Through The Spirit

New life in Christ is not a mere dreamer's quest, like the search for a "holy grail" or a pot of gold at the rainbow's end. It is a present reality into which we may enter the moment we are ready to remove Self and all of its vain idols from the throne that rightfully belongs only to God:

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."³²

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.³³

³¹1 Cor. 12:13. ³²Matt. 6:24.

³³Gal. 2:20.

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.... The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control....³⁴

The throne of our lives cannot endure two kings whose characters and conduct are so opposed to one another. It is not that a decision *should* be made; it is rather that a decision *must* be made. Let us frankly admit to ourselves that when we attempt to rule our lives egocentrically (self-centeredly), we find ourselves expressing the kind of disgusting behavior that Paul has described as acts of the “sinful nature” or “the flesh.” That which the Spirit of God produces in our lives when Christ is enthroned in our hearts is called the “fruit of the Spirit.” This list is as lovely as the former list was loathsome.

What is issuing out of your life, and out of my life? Whoever sits on the throne of our hearts will express his rule, or kingdom, through our attitudes and actions. Do qualities of Christlikeness dominate your character with growing consistency? If your life is under Christ’s lordship, if you have lost your life to the old selfishness and found it under the rule of Jesus, God’s kingdom will bear its fruit through your life. But a decision is crucial: your kingdom and my kingdom must surrender to God’s kingdom:

³⁴Gal. 5:17, 19-21, 22-23.

*"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."*³⁵

At the conclusion of history, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to bring judgement on all that refuses to be subjected to the kingdom of God. Now is the time to declare allegiance to the true King; when every knee must bow, it will be too late to choose sides. And if we decide to submit to the coming King before He arrives, He has already made clear what the terms of peace will be: unconditional surrender of all we have and all we are.

The New Life: A Daily Progressive Death

The principle of losing life in order to find it, when first we encounter it, seems so strange to us that we may be tempted to think that Jesus was being deliberately difficult. Our earth-bound minds become impatient with this paradoxical, "upside down" philosophy of life: finding by losing; living by dying; glorification through humility.

Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep

³⁵Luke 14:31-33.

it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”³⁶

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.” By submitting to the Father’s plan in descending from heaven to die *as Man for man*, Jesus won a harvest of human souls, a spiritual family of redeemed brothers and sisters who would bring glory and honor to their heavenly Father.³⁷ The Good Shepherd became a sacrificial lamb so that the sheep of His pasture could become like their Shepherd.

If this principle of losing life and finding life seems unnatural, perhaps we have forgotten that nature itself has become “unnatural”; it is unlike it was when God created it and pronounced it “very good.” Beasts, once submissive to man, must now be tamed (lose their “savage” lives); but in submission to man, they find a higher “domestic” life. Even the cursed ground, where thorns and thistles speak of man’s sin, reflects the eternal, divine principle: “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.” Human nature also has become unnatural; it is beastly in its refusal to submit to its rightful Master. Jesus calls us to leave our cold dens and lairs, to come into the warmth and peace of God’s household. He will teach us new ways that will seem unnatural to the jungle animal, but perfectly fit for the children of God.

“But I don’t want to die!” we protest. Do we really prefer

³⁶John 12:23-26.

³⁷See Heb. 2:9-11; John 10:14-18.

the frustrated hunger and anxious insecurities of the jungle, produced by generation after generation of self-centered living? Do we intend to hold out forever in the jungle—to “bite the bullet”? But what happens when we bite *through* the bullet? We will have to grind our teeth in the outer darkness, presumably until our teeth are ground down to the gums! Then what? Will we go on grinding away, until we have consumed, not only our gums and then our jaw bones, but everything that makes us recognizably human? We don’t have to. We weren’t meant to.

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”³⁸

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.³⁹

Jesus offers us abundant life on the same terms in which He Himself realized it: crucifixion; denial of self; death. Our problem is not our humanness, our natural desires or our personal individuality. Jesus of Nazareth had all of these. Our problem is sin, the essence of which is self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness, lust rather than love. This condition feels natural to us in the same way an orphanage feels natural to a child who can’t remember his parents. So long have we been alienated from God in our proud, selfish “independence” that we think we were meant to rule our own lives. We could hardly be expected to feel natural when the Father whom we had long thought distant, disinterested, or dead suddenly appears to take us home.

³⁸John 10:10. ³⁹Gal. 2:20.

“But I thought you had abandoned me,” we cry. In fact, we had hardly learned to walk before a stranger’s voice had lured us from the safety of our home; our Father had been seeking us ever since.

God doesn’t “need” us, in the sense of being needy or incomplete without us. He loves us and yearns for us as a father for his wayward children. He knows that we are inadequate to know what we really need. He would spare us the pain of struggling under the weight of His responsibilities: caring for us, teaching us, providing our needs, giving us direction and purpose. He knows that we can no more sustain our lives than we could create them. God wants us to submit to Him *for our own well-being!* He wants our lives to be well ordered, full, and meaningful. Our true welfare, our very life, has always coincided with His will. We were never meant to function without the Father; in union with Him, our true persons are fulfilled and realized. Life is to be a partnership: God and I together living it out. He initiates, I respond; He gives, I receive; He directs, I obey. To desire personal fulfillment and wholeness of life without God is to desire what could never exist. But to invite God to sit on the throne of my life without Self abdicating that throne is an equal impossibility.

Denial Of Self Vs. Self-Denial

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰Luke 9:23-24.

Clearly “denial of self” is the same as “losing one’s life”; both expressions denote the renunciation of self-will and self-rule so that one can follow Christ in doing the will of God. But further clarification is needed. Why the necessity of “daily” death to self-will? Has not the apostle plainly stated that this death to the old selfish nature is decisively realized when our faith in Christ is embodied in baptism?

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.⁴¹

Here again is the paradox: we die (to our old, rebellious self-ruled lives) so that we might “live a new life” (of friendship and peace with the Father). This is absolutely accomplished when we, by faith, become united with the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But this objective, decisive change of relationship to God carries with it a continuing personal moral obligation to “live a new life.” We must keep saying “no” to Self and “yes” to God by following the Lord Jesus day by day, moment by moment. The old desires of “Lord Self” will continue to try and reassert their claim on our lives every day. As soon as Self rears his ugly head to even suggest a sinful expression, we must respond, “To the cross with you!” The crucifying factor for every expression of selfishness is an expression of love:

⁴¹Rom. 6:1-4.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age....⁴²

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.... He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.⁴³

We must not misunderstand Jesus on this point: He was not discussing “self-denial” in the ascetic sense of depriving oneself of certain comforts and commodities. Self-denial can be a part of denial of self, but the two are not equal. Denial of self is easily understood when we consider Peter’s denial of Christ:

“I don’t know the man!”⁴⁴

Here is a denial of Christ. Now there must be, for you and me, a denial of the “old self”: “I don’t know the man!” When temptation comes to call for the “old Larry,” I must answer: “I don’t know the man.” He is dead; a “new Larry” now lives under the lordship of Christ, every moment of every day.

⁴²Titus 2:11-12. ⁴³Eph. 4:25, 28-29. Compare Col. 3:5-11.

⁴⁴Matt. 26:72, 74.

New Life Means A New Mind

“Sanctification” means the development of that new man. The man who is in Jesus must become more and more like Him. We grow in Christ throughout the rest of our lives. God mercifully accepts us as we are, even while He graciously transforms us into the new creatures He has designed us to be.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.⁴⁵

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind....⁴⁶

Our spiritual transformation begins with submission to Jesus as Lord, and continues by the renewing of our minds. We must again take spiritual inventory: What is foremost in my *heart*? What do I most often *think* about? What matters chiefly occupy my *mind*? What do I value most highly? We will become like that which we adore and worship. If the kingdom of God, embodied in Jesus Christ the King, is first in our thinking, we will become like Christ: loving and compassionate, righteous and holy. We need a change in our thinking, our values, and our priorities; we must embrace the paradox of “losing life to find life.”

⁴⁵Rom. 8:28-29. ⁴⁶Rom. 12:1-2.

*"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*⁴⁷

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*⁴⁸

*If anyone thinks he has reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more.... But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ....*⁴⁹

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."*⁵⁰

⁴⁷Matt. 5:6.

⁴⁸Phil. 4:8.

⁴⁹Phil. 3:4, 7-8.

⁵⁰Matt. 13:44-46.

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PART II



GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP

AN IN-DEPTH STUDY GUIDE

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***LOSING LIFE OR FINDING
LIFE....***

INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS

The content of this material had its beginning twenty years ago in the mission field. It began from a study of the Sermon on the Mount with a small group of disciples in a two year Bible school in the South Pacific. Since that time, until now, Genuine Discipleship has been a major thrust in my teaching concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

My sincere appreciation and gratitude for this course of study is owed to many from whom I have learned while “sitting at the feet of the Master” and seeking to truly follow Him.

My use of the title “Genuine Discipleship” is for the sole purpose of avoiding phoniness or pretense in following Jesus. May all of us whom claim to be His, learning of Him, following Him, and growing in Him, be decisively real—genuinely so!

I pray that this expanded outline of study will be helpful to you in coming to know Jesus and in becoming conformed to His image as you genuinely follow Him up God’s mountain.

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”
(Matthew 5:48).

INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP

I. THE DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF “DISCIPLE” IS SPECIFIC

A. The Specific Definition Is As Follows:

1. “Disciple” (Greek: *mathetes*) means: “Taught, trained one; learner; follower.”
2. A “disciple” of Jesus is “one who believes His teaching, rests upon His sacrifice, imbibes His spirit and walks in His steps” (Farrar) (see Luke 6:40).

B. The Specific Description Is As Follows:

1. Real discipleship “always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as ‘disciple’” (cf. Bruder, s.v. *Mathetes*. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament., 4:441).
2. Real discipleship goes beyond many “good things” that we (as Christians) do, such as
 - a. “going to church”
 - b. “preaching sermons”
 - c. “singing songs”

- d. “giving contributions”
- 3. Real discipleship is not a matter of mere externals.
 - a. Holy activities can become habitual.
 - b. Authorized activities can become automatic.
 - c. Religious activities can become reflexive.

Note: There is a real danger of being superficial, “skin-deep Christians” rather than genuine, “heart-deep disciples.” We could do all these good things and still be (even if not hypocritical) superficial!

4. Real discipleship involves

- a. absolute conditions
- b. absolute commitments

II. THE DESIGNATION OF “DISCIPLE” IS RELATED TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS AND SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS

- A. You Are My Disciples If You Abide In My Word
(Read John 8:31 and compare John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 2:9).
- B. You Are My Disciples If You Have Love One For

Another (John 13:35. Compare 1 John 3:13-14; 4:7-12; 1 Cor. 13:4-8, 13; also compare John 15:9-13 with Col. 3:14).

- C. You Are My Disciples If You Bear Much Fruit (Read John 15:1-8. Compare John 12:24; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 1:11; also compare Matt. 28:19-20 with Rom. 1:13-15).
- D. You Are My Disciples If You Take Up Your Own Cross (Read Matt. 16:24-26. Compare Luke 9:23; Matt. 10:38).
 - 1. Early disciples had their crosses: sufferings, shame, afflictions, and reproach endured as the cost of discipleship.
 - 2. We have our cross: the same way of life (2 Tim. 3:12).

III. THE SUMMARY OF DISCIPLESHIP IS “CHRIST-LIKENESS”

- A. The Absolute Musts Of Discipleship Are Inflexible (Read Luke 14:25-33).
 - 1. I **must** have a personal love/heart commitment to Jesus, unrivaled by love of family or self—or I cannot be His disciple! This is self denial. (See Luke 14:26.)

2. I **must** bear my own cross and follow after Him—or I cannot be His disciple! This is self-crucifixion. (See Luke 14:27 and compare Gal. 2:20; 5:22-24; 6:14.)
3. I **must** renounce (literally, “utterly disown”) all that I have—or I cannot be His disciple! This is self-renunciation. (See Luke 14:33.)

B. “O To Be Like Thee,” That I May Be Truly Your Disciple, Lord Jesus! May I Be Always

1. Abiding in your Word, loving my fellow-disciples, bearing much fruit, and daily taking up my cross and following after you (see John 6:60-69)
 - a. regardless of pace
 - b. regardless of pain
 - c. regardless of pressure
2. Denying self, crucifying self, renouncing all that I am and all that I have, being conformed and transformed to Your image, reflecting Your life (Amen)

C. Alone, Let Each Of Us Go And Commit (Or Re-commit) Ourselves To Genuinely Following Him.

1. If Christ is on the cross, “Self” is on the throne.
2. If “Self” is on the cross, Christ is on the throne.

THE STUDY OF DISCIPLESHIP

I. SELF AND “SELF’S KINGDOM”: THE DEVELOPMENT AND DOMINION OF SELF ARE EXAMINED

A. The Pattern Of “King Self” Begins In The Mind.

1. In his mind, the self-dominated person believes all things must and can be done according to his will.
2. In his mind, the self-enslaved person believes himself to be always right and never wrong.
3. Reality destroys the fantasy of his mind!
 - a. When the control of his “selfish world” is lost
 - 1) self-hatred sets in
 - 2) self-pity sets in
 - b. The resulting depression and despair of the self-dominated person can lead to
 - 1) contemplating (and oftentimes attempting) the doing of that which he does not want to do: self-destruct
 - 2) committing suicide, because he can’t stand himself

- a) With his “kingdom” in such bad shape, why continue?
 - b) Is there an alternative? Thank God, yes!
- B. The Problem Of “King Self” Begins To Develop In Infancy.
- 1. Infancy: Self is “King” (“Number One”) of necessity.
 - a. He cries: He gets attention and is served.
 - b. He wets: He gets attention and is served.

Note: The biological necessity of six feedings plus three bowel movements equals nine assertions of baby’s “authority.”

- c. His world is around him: he is central, by creation, design, and necessity.
- d. This self-centered position of infancy must change with adulthood, or else miserable consequences will follow (read 1 Cor. 13:11 and compare Heb. 5:13).
 - 1) Infa-centric : “Everyone in the world exists to meet my needs.”

(See Figure 1.1.)



Figure 1.1 “Infa-centric relationship” with the world

- 2) Adult ego-centric : “Everyone in the world exists to serve my interests.” (See Figure 1.2.)

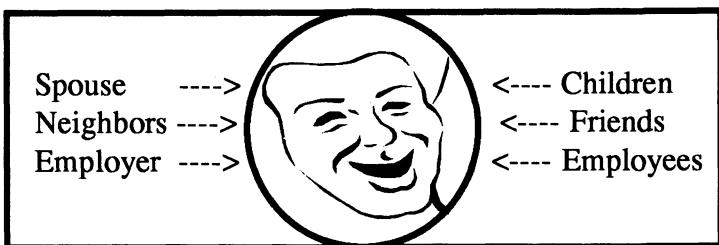


Figure 1.2 Adult “ego-centric” relationship with the world

Note: “A Sense Of False Security”; The loneliest spot in the world is the exact center!

- 3) Theo-centric : “God has created me to be a servant, like He is.”

(See Figure 1.3.)

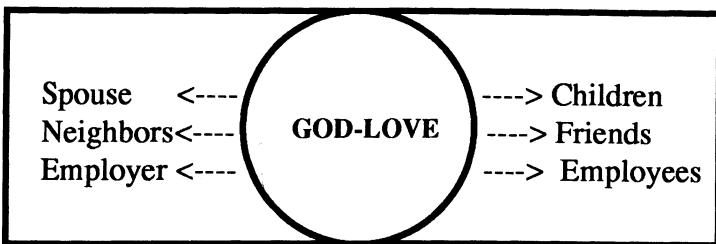


Figure 1.3 Theo-centric relationship with the world

- e. Our position as fully developed human beings is not in the center of this world; that place is for God only (read carefully Matt. 22:37; John 13:34-35).
- 2. Ages two to six: Who is “Number One”? (“Am I divine or human?”)
 - a. The child learns how to deal with mother and father.
 - 1) The struggle against external authority involves a contest of wills: if the child wins, he loses!
 - 2) Each triumph over authority establishes the fantasy that “I” am King (God), and conditions the child to become
 - a) spoiled
 - b) selfish

- c) arrogant
 - d) destructive
- 3) It is absolutely crucial that the child does not win in its clashes with authority!
- b. The authority issue (or “god-problem”) is the central problem in human life: a simple problem!
- 1) “Who is number one?”
 - 2) There are ultimately two possible candidates:
- a) God
-
- or
- b) Self
3. Ages six to thirteen: Further developments in dealing with the “god-problem” are noted.
- a. Much time is spent in using tactics to “divide and conquer” authorities, such as
- | | | |
|-------------|--|---------|
| 1) Mother | | Father |
| 2) Teachers | | Parents |
- b. Increased pressure against the limits of parental

and educational authorities may result in confrontation with the last fortress of authority (civil law enforcement) and final defensive tactics against the now self-deified individual.

Note: Seeking to find his life, this child is losing it! The need and subconscious desire of most youth is for someone to stand authoritatively!

4. Ages fourteen to twenty: Final adjustments in anticipation of “self-autonomy” are made.
 - a. Prospectively, the adolescent is entering physical maturity (and soon, independence) with expectations of being his own boss; that is, “Number One”!
 - 1) He/she will be “free” from dependence (but not entirely)!
 - 2) He/she will be “free” from supervision.
 - 3) He/she will be “free” from commands.
 - 4) He/she will be “free” from authority.
 - 5) He/she will be “free” to obey no one but himself/herself!
 - b. The anxiety of really making it “on his own” is a big factor in these years.
 - 1) He wants “self-rule.”

- 2) However, he's not sure how to rule "self."
 - c. Finally, the step is taken: the "King-god" takes the keys of his kingdom, and the delusion of freedom begins to intensify into "reality"!
5. Adulthood: Age twenty and onward usually involves a deepening and hardening of the commitment to serve self.
 - a. The delusion: Who is number one? ("I think it is I, myself!")
 - b. Such a person is doubly deceived, because
 - 1) his "divine" attributes remain formally unstated (though implicitly acknowledged)
 - 2) his "divine" characteristics are politely denied (though secretly believed)
 - 3) his "divine" godlikeness goes officially unrecognized (though practically pursued)
 - c. However, "the truth" is lived out in actions which are based upon self-convictions such as the following:
 - 1) *I am power.*

- 2) *I am truth.*
- 3) *I am right.*
- 4) *I am above time.*
- 5) *I am the law (or above it).*
- 6) *I am perfect (that is, sinless).*

Note: These beliefs concerning self are almost always unspoken and subconscious.

C. The Painful Admission And Acknowledgement Of
“King Self” Results In Joy: “*I Am Not God; I Am
Human.*”

1. *I am limited.*
2. *I am sometimes right, sometimes wrong.*
3. *I am able to help others, but also need others’ help.*
4. *I am under authority (especially, God’s authority).*
5. *I am weak as well as strong.*
6. *I am sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding.*
7. *I am able to grow and develop in faith, hope, and love.*
 - a. *My love for God can be purer.*

- b. My love for others can be greater.
- c. My love for myself can be healthier.

Note: The student should read again Matt. 22:37-40; 2 Cor. 10:12, 17-18; Rom. 12:3.

D. The Agonies Of Selfish Arrogance Are The Earned Miseries Of Egotism (Read Rom. 6:23).

- 1. "Self-flesh" feelings include
 - a. anger (the primary destructive feeling)
 - 1) Its varied forms fall into two basic categories: outward and inward.
 - a) Outward expressions of anger are revealed in such things as rage, hostility, temper tantrums, sadism, and murder.
 - b) Inward expressions of anger are often concealed as suspicion, teasing, depression, and resentment (anger's most malignant form).

Note: Resentment is a response of anger toward external circumstances or persons that has been turned inward. It becomes stored up with the passing of time, layer upon layer, and eventually solidifies (hardens) into an all-consuming malicious bitterness.

- 2) Its biblical condemnation prohibits such manifesta-

tions as

- a) an ungodly and antisocial spirit (read Rom. 1:18-32; 12:19 and compare Matt. 5:21-26)
 - b) an unloving and impure spirit (read Eph. 4:30-5:2 and compare Mark 7:21-23)
 - c) an unreasoning and wrathful spirit (read James 1:19-20)
 - d) a disobedient and carnal spirit (read Col. 3:5-14)
 - e) a sensual and self-promoting spirit (read Gal. 5:13-26)
- 3) Its crucifixion and our liberation from it involve
- a) looking to Jesus (read 1 Peter 2:21-14)
 - b) letting God be judge (read Rom. 12:19)
 - c) loving (a deliberate act expressed) regardless of your “feelings” (read John 13:34-35)

Note: Anger can drive us to selfish expression (and destruction), or it can be crucified and turned into compassion and forgiveness (see Gal. 5:13-6:2). The temptation of anger always gives us this choice! See the Study Guide, *How To Defeat Anger*, by Larry Deason (Clifton Park, NY: Life Communications).

- b. **fear** (primarily, assumed omnipotence)
 - 1) Its varied forms include
 - a) fear of failure
 - b) fear of cancer
 - c) fear of water travel or air travel
 - d) fear of elevators
 - e) fear of germs
 - f) fear of darkness
 - g) fear of death
 - h) fear of the authorities
 - 2) Its cause is the belief that “everything depends on me!” (See Matt. 6:26).
 - 3) Its cure is belief in the all-competent Christ (see Mark 4:40; Rev. 1:17-18).
 - a) The solution is not a new idea, concept, explanation, or insight.
 - b) The solution is a Person (the only Lord and God)!
- c. **guilt** (primarily, punishment for wrong-doing)

- 1) Real guilt subjectively involves the indictment of the conscience for wrongdoing (see Rom. 1:32-2:16).
 - a) People are guilty because of God-dethronement or God-displacement in their lives.
 - b) People are guilty because of disobedience to God's moral will.
- 2) Real guilt's alternatives are
 - a) punishment (misery, depression, despair)
 - b) pardon (forgiveness, freedom, and delight through trust) (read Rom. 2:1-4; 8:1-4 and compare Heb. 8:12 with Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 5:14-19)

Note: The question is: Shall I remain "Number One" or abdicate the throne of my life to the Person who is really "Number One"? (See Rev. 1:17-18.)

2. "Self-flesh" feelings (anger, fear, guilt) are the result of a person enslaved to "Self"!
 - a. When God is driven out, the lordship of our lives falls into our own hands!
 - 1) The self now serves "self" (flesh) as Lord. One's life is now out of control! Selfishness expressed (anger, fear, guilt) is difficult to stop once it has begun (see Rom. 7:7-24).

- 2) The bondage is seen in the inability to stop when we want to stop and begin when we want to begin! The person has become a prisoner of “self-flesh.”
- 3) Illustration: Interpersonal breakdowns occur due to something such as resentment, hatred, or sexual immorality, but
 - a) “I can’t...although I want to...”
 - b) “I’m not free to begin”—even though my mind tells me it’s best
 - c) as “self” (flesh) worked its selfishness, I became “out-of-control”: no brakes! So now, to “start over” (by natural, self-reliant means, or human wisdom and power) is like trying to drive a car without an accelerator: *bondage* (read John 8:31-36 and compare Gal. 5:16-17; Rom. 7:15-24; 2 Peter 2:19)
- b. “Lord Self” and his kingdom of bondage may be analyzed as follows:
 - 1) Authority-hatred enslavement is characterized by
 - a) continuous resentments
 - b) state of segregation and alienation
 - c) repeated jealousy

- d) argumentativeness (with parents, civil and religious authorities, even with God)
 - e) suspicion
 - f) unteachableness
 - g) repeated interpersonal conflicts
 - h) chronic complaining and criticism
- 2) People-hatred enslavement (peer level) is expressed in
- a) all of the above symptoms
 - b) inability to feel equal (rather than either inferior or superior to others)
 - c) prejudices and discriminations
- 3) Violence-enslavement is marked by
- a) uncontrollable outbursts of hot temper, rage
 - b) compulsion to take needless chances
 - c) preoccupation with violent “tools” (weapons)
- 4) Body-worry enslavement is denoted by

- a) worry about health
 - b) anxiety about “nervous tics,” and so forth
- 5) Sex-enslavement is indicated by
- a) the practice of promiscuity
 - b) the perusal of pornography
 - c) the perversions of fornication (sodomy, lesbianism, homosexuality, and all abuses of human sexuality)
- 6) Mind-enslavement is manifested by
- a) bottomless anger
 - b) recurring moods of depression
 - c) delusions
 - d) obsession with inferiority feelings
 - e) endless indecision
 - f) adamant unteachableness
 - g) continual running from problems
- 7) Ideology-enslavement is signified by such “causes” as

- a) communism
 - b) racism
 - c) religious liberalism or legalism
 - d) fanaticism concerning “issues”
- 8) Things-enslavement reveals itself in
- a) gluttony
 - b) materialism
- 9) Chemical-enslavement can be seen in the abuse of
- a) alcohol
 - b) drugs (legal and illegal)
 - c) mood-altering substances
- 10) Word-enslavement is displayed in such ways as
- a) compulsive lying
 - b) repeated profanity
 - c) recurring obscenity
 - d) Constant “broken record-chatter box” talking

- 11) Time-enslavement is distinguishable by
 - a) habitual tardiness
 - b) constant reminiscence of “good old days”
 - c) impatience (intolerance towards waiting)
 - d) fear of the future
 - e) fear of growing old
- c. All are in bondage without Christ and His way (read carefully John 8:31-36; 9:40-41; Ezek. 18:1-32 and compare Gal. 2:20; Luke 18:13; Rom. 7:24).
 - 1) “I” must admit my enslavement.

Note: The principle of personal and mutual confession of weaknesses and transgressions is taken seriously by such fellowships as “Alcoholics Anonymous.”

- 2) “I” must accept the reality of my enslavement (see Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:1-23).
- 3) “I” must examine myself (not others!) and genuinely see and confess that
 - a) “I” am a sinner
 - b) “I” am a selfish person

- c) "I" am enslaved
- d. All may be set free by Christ and His way (read John 8:31-36).
 - 1) Consider these paradoxical passages.
 - a) No one can live without dying (read John 12:24).
 - b) No one can save his life without losing it (read Matt. 16:23-25).
 - c) No one can follow Jesus without denying self (read Luke 9:21-23).
 - d) No one can live for Christ without crucifying self (read Gal. 2:20; 5:22-24).
 - 2) Consider these three steps.
 - a) First, confess your bondage (read John 9:40-41).
 - b) Second, commit your enslavement to God: "Let go and let God" (read carefully Matt. 6:24, 33; 1 Peter 5:7; 2 Tim. 1:12).
 - c) Third, constantly keep yourself in God's will and under His rule (read Rom. 6:1-17 and compare Jude 21).

Note: "The end" (of our self-struggles) brings "the beginning": "We must die before we can live!"

3. Self's freedom: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (see John 8:32, 36).
 - a. Let us humbly admit the "chains" of our bondage (read Gal. 2:20; 5:24-26; 6:14 and compare Rom. 7:1-8:4).
 - 1) "I'm a sinner."
 - 2) "I'm a selfish person."
 - b. Let us humbly submit (to God through Christ) each and every "link" that is binding us.
 - 1) The old way was
 - a) deny our "bondage"
 - b) excuse our "chains"
 - c) rationalize our "shackles"
 - 2) The new way is
 - a) "confess": Admit our enslavement
 - b) "submit": Commit ourselves to God through Jesus Christ (read 1 Peter 5:5-10 and compare James 4:6-10; Heb. 4:14-16)

Note: "Let go and let God!" (See Eph. 3:20-21 and compare Phil. 4:13.)

II. SELF AND DISCIPLESHP'S COMMITMENT: "LOSING LIFE TO FIND LIFE" IS EXPLAINED

A. The Passages Are Paradoxical.

1. Jesus speaks of losing life and finding life (see Matt. 10:37-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-36; Luke 9:23-25; 14:25-35; 17:33; John 12:23-26).
2. Paul writes of dying with Christ and living for Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Gal. 2:20; 5:22-24 and compare Rom. 15:3; Phil. 2:1-11).

B. The Pattern Is Personal (Who Is King And Lord?). (See Figure 2.1.)

Self	God
Frustration	Love
Bitterness	Joy
Hatred	Peace
Anger	Gentleness
Jealousy	Meekness
Envy	Righteousness
Sickness	Health
Death	Life

Figure 2.1 Who is King and Lord?

C. The Presentation Is Practical.

1. Will we choose a life lost to find true life, or a life gained to lose true life?
 - a. Peter's denial of Christ: "I know not the Man!"
 - b. Personal denial of self: "I know not the man!"
2. Will we choose to be self-centered or Christ-centered?

Note: The biblical teaching of denial and crucifixion of "self" is not the ruin or loss of personhood.

- a. The definition of "self" is as follows (*World Bible Dictionary*).
 - 1) "Self is one's own person: his very self."
 - 2) Hyphenated words concerning "self" number over three hundred in the dictionary; for example
 - a) self-absorbed
 - b) self-centered
 - c) self-approved
 - d) self-contained
 - e) self-willed
 - 3) Biblical doctrine concerning "self" emphasizes its

negative nature (see Luke 14:25-35).

- a) The disciple of Jesus “must” utterly deny and disown “self” (read Matt. 16:24-25 and compare Luke 9:23, 25).
 - b) The disciple must crucify (nail to a cross or stake) “self” (read Gal. 5:24).
- 4) Why must this be the fate of self?
- a) This will be answered in the course of our study.
 - b) This awesome and wonderful teaching applied is the key to Christianity; it is here (and only here) that Christianity is practical. “Self” must be dealt with before discipleship can be genuine (without hypocrisy, pretense, or shame) (read Matt. 5:20 and compare Matt. 5:43-48; 23:1-32).
 - c) Let us therefore look at “self” described, denied, and crucified.
- b. The description of “self” with reference to “me” is the basis of my defeat (read 2 Tim. 3:2).
- 1) Self is our greatest enemy.
 - 2) Self is the source of all that’s wrong with us (see James 4:1-3).

- a) Why do we lose our temper? Something has not pleased self!
 - b) Why does one covet, desire, lust? It is because of self!
 - c) What is that which creates envy and jealousy within and among us? It is self!
- 3) Self *exalted* is selfishness *expressed*: Why do you do what you do? (See Luke 14:11 and compare Luke 16:15.)
- a) Is it for *self*-show?
 - b) Is it for *self*-success or *self*-will? (You have your reward!) (Read Titus 1:7; Matt. 6:1-18 and compare 2 Peter 2:10.)
 - c) Is it for *self*-glory?
- 4) Self is that which underlies all the works of the flesh (see Gal. 5:13, 16-21).
- 5) Self is the source (instrument) of all sins!
- 6) Self is what we “are,” not how we “think, feel, or act” (see 2 Cor. 10:18).
- 7) Self’s element is “flesh” (Gr: *sarx*) meaning: “Man in his own ability, without God” (see Rom. 7:18).

- a) My flesh is “me” (read Rom. 7:24-25).
 - b) F-l-e-s-h spelled backwards (with the “h” dropped off) is *self*.
 - c) As long as the “I” (“me”; ego) is exalted (first) and Christ is second, I’m living a carnal life (read carefully 1 Cor. 3:1-3 and compare Matt. 6:24).
- c. The denial of “self” on the part of Jesus is the basis of my victory (read Rom. 15:3).
- 1) Jesus took a stand against “self-interest.” His temptations were an appeal to “self” (see Matt. 4:3-10).
 - a) He was tempted by self-pride.
 - b) He was enticed with self-ease.
 - c) He was tantalized by self-glory.
 - d) He was propositioned by self-pleasure.
 - 2) Jesus is the perfect example and demonstration of self-denial. (He did not yield to temptation to satisfy self!) (See Matt. 26:39; Phil. 2:5-11.)
 - 3) Paul, the true imitator of Christ and soldier of the cross, is an example of self-denial “in Christ” as he

exhorts disciples to “die daily” (see 1 Cor. 15:31 and compare Luke 9:23; Gal. 2:20).

- 4) The one aim of Christianity is to exalt Christ to where man puts self: Will we be “self-dominated,” or “Christ-dominated”? (See Col. 1:27; Matt. 5:48; Phil. 2:5.)
 - a) Which dominates your life: flesh or spirit?

Note: To live in the “flesh” is non-Christian (see Rom. 8:9, 12 and compare Rom. 7:5, 18; 8:3, 5, 8).

- b) Who rules your life: self or Christ?

Note: Spiritual independence (self-autonomy) is not a virtue! Jesus lived a truly dependent life! Even the vegetable kingdom teaches us that life is completely dependent. “Consider the lilies” (see Matt. 6:28-30).

- 5) The Serpent hissed and the first pair heeded (see Gen. 3:1-6):

- a) “Be independent: make your own way.”
 - b) “Do your own will: please self.”
 - c) “Be God!”

Note: That first pair withdrew from God, having made themselves the pivot-point of the universe. They exalted

“self” as the center of activity in their lives, and so fell from fellowship with God.

- 6) Selfishness is the curse of the world today! It is the curse of everyone who has self as the center of his life! (see 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Tim. 3:2).
 - 7) How can we be rid of self-domination (“flesh”)? (See 2 Cor. 5:14-17.)
- d. The crucifixion of “self” with reference to the disciple is realized in two steps.
- 1) Step one is the disciple’s identification with the cross of Christ (see Rom. 7:18, 24-25 and compare Rom. 8:3-4).
 - a) Sinful “self” was nailed to the cross (read Rom. 6:3-6).
 - b) Sinful “self’s” execution has been decreed by God: self’s *pride* must be “put to death”; self’s *jealousy* must be “mortified”; selfish *pleasure* must be “nailed to the cross” (read Col. 3:5-10 and compare Gal. 2:20).
 - c) We come to an end of ourselves in Christ at the cross! (“We died” is aorist tense, meaning a past,

once-for-all death) (see Col. 3:3; Gal. 5:24).

Note: In Christ, “self” was on the cross. Christ was there instead of (representing as a substitute) my “self” and your “self.” God has clearly decreed the “death sentence” for self in Christ. Where is your “self”? (Real Christianity has been misrepresented by those who profess to be Christians, but have not died to self) (see Phil. 2:7-8 and compare 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; Heb. 2:9).

- d) The cross of Christ stands between me and my self ; me and my past; me and the world.

Note: Then, the “I” was the center of my life. Now, it is no longer “I,” but Christ (see Gal. 2:20 and compare Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10; Gal. 6:14).

- 2) Step two is the disciple’s demonstration of the Spirit of Christ (see Rom. 8:9, 13 and compare Gal. 5:16-17).
 - a) We are to mind the things of the spirit (read Rom. 8:5-7).
 - b) To “mind” (Greek: *phroneo*) means: “To think, to be minded in a certain way” (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*, p. 70).
 - c) It is by the Spirit that “self-flesh” is continually put down (read Luke 9:23; 1 Cor. 15:31).

Note: The Spirit's moment-by-moment dominion over our lives is designated by these verbs: *mind* (see Rom. 8:5); *walk* (see Gal. 5:16); *led* (see Gal. 5:18); *live* (see Gal. 5:25).

- d) “Self” and “Spirit” are contrasted in the description of their results: “self” brings forth *work* (produced by man himself), while the Spirit brings forth *fruit* (borne by a power not of one’s own self, but by that of another: the Spirit of Christ) (read Gal. 5:19, 22-23).
- e. Conclusion: Genuine discipleship calls for genuine decisiveness!
 - 1) Which are you: the old or the new? (See 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.)
 - a) The “old man” was self-dominated and sin-indwelt; the “new man” is Christ-dominated and Spirit-indwelt (read Eph. 4:22; Rom. 6:6).
 - b) Remember, the crucifixion of the selfish “self” is not the destruction of one’s personhood (one’s true value, worth, and being), but is rather the affirmation and salvation of the whole person!
 - 2) Can you truthfully say:
 - a) It is no longer I but...? (Read Gal. 2:20.)
 - b) It is not me but ...? (Read Col. 1:27.)

- c) It is not self but ...? (Read Gal. 4:19.)
 - 3) May this saying of our Lord be a reality in our lives: “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you ” (see John 14:20).
3. The realities of dying to self (or, “losing life to find life”) are practical and yet profound.
- a. When you are forgotten, neglected, or purposefully set at naught, and you don’t sting and hurt with the insult or oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, *that is dying to self*.
 - b. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, or even to defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loving silence, *that is dying to self*.
 - c. When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, an impunctuality, or any annoyance; when you stand face to face with waste, folly, extravagance, spiritual insensibility, and endure it as Jesus endured it, *that is dying to self*.
 - d. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation, or to record your own good works, or itch after commendation; when you can truly love to be unknown, *that is dying to self*.

- e. When you are content with any food, any offering, any raiment, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, *that is dying to self.*
- f. When you can see your brother prosper and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy nor question God, while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, *that is dying to self.*
- g. When you can stand up to preach or teach without giving in to the arrogant appeal of the evil heart to “blow one’s own horn,” *that is dying to self.*
- h. When you can listen to others tell of an unusual experience in their life without interrupting to “go one better,” *that is dying to self.*
- i. When you are involved in spats and arguments, and you have the willingness to admit your part in it and to say, “I was wrong; I’m sorry, forgive me,” *that is dying to self.*
- j. When sinful thoughts and imaginations of sexual distortion and perversion arise in the mind, and you choose deliberately to flee from them, to avoid them, to make no occasion for fleshly desires, *that is dying to self.*

Note: Real life situations, conditions, and relationships are endless for opportunities to die to self. Continue to add to this list.

SELF AND JESUS' TEACHING: GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP IS EMBODIED

- I. DISCIPLESHIP AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: JESUS PAINTS THE DISCIPLE'S PORTRAIT (READ MATT. 5:1-7:29)
 - A. The Author And Authority Of Genuine Discipleship Is Jesus Himself (See Matt. 5:1; 7:24-29).
 - B. The Aim And Goal Of Genuine Discipleship Is To Become (In Character) And Behave (In Conduct) Like Our Heavenly Father (See Matt. 5:48 and compare Matt. 5:20; 6:1, 33).
 - C. The Analysis Of The Sermon On The Mount Is Two-Fold.
 1. First, there is the descriptive statement of a true Christian (read Matt. 5:1-16).
 2. Second, there are the decisive aspects of Christian living (read Matt. 5:17-7:29).
 - D. The Applicable Lessons Teach Us The Following:
 1. All Christians are to be like this.

2. All Christians are to manifest all of these characteristics.
3. All of these characteristics refer to spiritual growth, not to “natural tendencies.”
4. All of these characteristics show the essential, complete difference between the genuinely Christlike and the non-Christlike.
5. All of these characteristics clearly contrast the two entirely different realms which are
 - a. “the kingdom of God” (the *heavenly*), to which the Christian belongs
 - b. “the kingdom of Self” (the *worldly*), to which the non-Christian belongs

II. DISCIPLESHIP AND THE BEATITUDES: JESUS PRESENTS THE DISCIPLE'S PATTERN (READ MATT. 5:1-12)

- A. Firstly, Definitions Related To The Text Must Be Clarified.
 1. Generically, the term “beatitude” (Latin: *beatitudo*) means: “State of blessedness, happiness”.
 2. Specifically, “blessed” (Greek: *makarios*) means: “A state that is neither produced nor affected by

outside circumstances, but is intrinsic." The word implies

- a. true contentment
 - b. genuine comfort
 - c. dependence upon Christ, not chance
- B. Secondly, Explanation Of The Text Will Be Considered (See Matt. 5:1-16).

Note: See Figure 2.2.

1. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" (read Matt. 5:3).

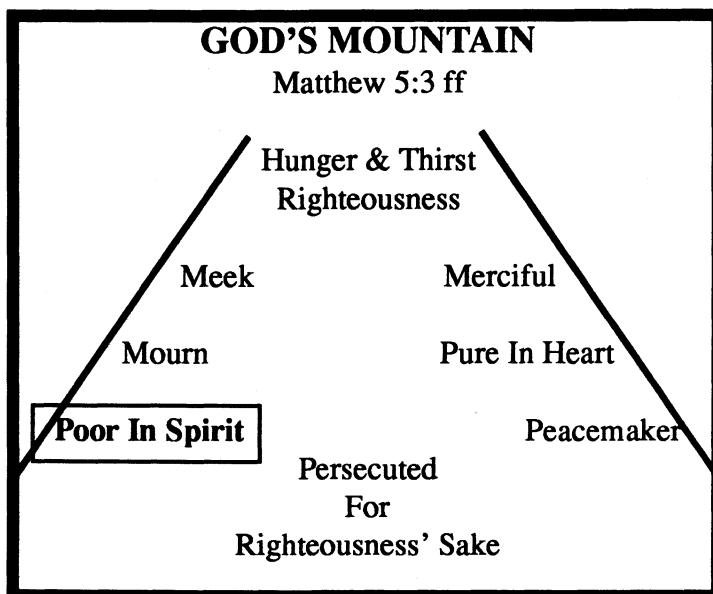


Figure 2.2 God's Mountain

- a. The word Jesus *did not* use in this teaching concerning the “poor” (Greek: *penes*) signifies: “To suffer pain, toil.”
 - 1) Therefore, a person that is “poor” (in this sense) can, by his own labors, eat his bread.
 - 2) This “poor” man satisfies his own needs.
 - 3) This word for “poor” (Greek: *penes*) is *not* the word used by Matthew or Luke in the Beatitudes to translate the intent of what Jesus originally spoke in Aramaic language.
 - 4) This word for “poor” (Greek: *penes*) occurs but once in the New Testament (read 2 Cor. 9:9 and compare 2 Cor. 8:9).
- b. The word Jesus *did* use in this teaching concerning the “poor” (Greek: *ptochos*) means: “Destitute; poverty-stricken; powerless to enrich.” (It describes one who “crouches,” such as a beggar.)
 - 1) This word describes one who is poor but cannot satisfy his own needs.
 - 2) He depends upon others; his help and resources must come from outside.
 - 3) Lazarus depended upon the “mercy” of others (read Luke 16:20).

- c. Thus the significance of the word “poor” (in spirit) in the Beatitudes suggests the following:
 - 1) Man is empty (void); he is spiritually poverty-stricken, helpless.
 - 2) Man cannot, by his own labors, earn his most desperate need: salvation. He needs help from above!
 - 3) Man is empty; he is totally dependent upon God’s grace and mercy.
- d. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” means the following:
 - 1) Unless a person realizes his poverty, his complete emptiness (that is, lack of purpose in life without God) and his inability to fill the void, he will not be filled.
 - 2) We must be empty of self so that we can be filled with God, Christ, and righteousness.
 - 3) Man’s need is “spiritual”: “poor in spirit” defines the area of human emptiness and poverty. (It is not the “body,” but the spirit. It is a “heart” need.)
 - 4) Humility of heart is the basic requirement for entrance into the kingdom of heaven: pride is that wall which keeps one outside (read Rev. 3:14-18 and compare Isa. 66:2).

Note: The contrast between the “servant of God” and the “man of sin” is most obvious in this matter of heart attitude (see Phil. 2:5-11 and compare 2 Thess. 2:1-5).

- e. This Beatitude comes first because there is no entry into the kingdom of heaven unless one first becomes “poor in spirit.”
- f. This first Beatitude is an “emptying”; the others are filling. There are two sides: a tearing down, and then a building up (see Jer. 1:10).
 - 1) I must reject self and receive Christ (as Lord).
 - 2) I must be convicted and then converted.

Note: This brings us to the admission that we need help: we cannot save ourselves! We need God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see 2 Cor. 13:14).

- g. Jesus is not speaking of the physically poor—that is, the poverty stricken. (There is no teaching anywhere that the economically poor have an exclusive premium on the Kingdom.)
- h. What is Jesus’ teaching concerning the “poor in spirit”?
 - 1) Ultimately, this involves my attitude toward self.
 - 2) It is not an attitude of self-reliance, self-confi-

dence, belief in self (in the sense that you may attain education, knowledge, make self better, and conquer the world).

- 3) It is the opposite of the world's concept; worldly self-sufficiency is a fatal attitude which brings about the idea that we can legislate, through government, a "perfect society."

*Just and holy is Thy Name,
I am all unrighteousness,
Vile and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.*

- 4) It is not anything that is produced artificially.
- 5) It is not false humility; that is, the changing of names, identifies, and so forth.
- 6) It is not a timid, weak, or nervous individual lacking in courage and conviction of whom Jesus speaks. These are natural traits, and natural traits are not being considered. It is a basic attitude, a fixed purpose of heart.
- 7) Jesus is speaking about a God-man relationship; that is, how we should feel about ourselves in the presence of God Almighty, and how we must come to realize our utter and complete poverty of spirit before Him. This is the real "poor in spirit"! (Read carefully 1 Cor. 15:10; Isa. 57:15.)
 - i. Prominent biblical examples of "poor in spirit":

- 1) Gideon (read Judg. 6:11-15)
- 2) Moses (read Exod. 3:1-4:12)
- 3) David (read Ps. 51:1-17)
- 4) Peter: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man”
(read Luke 5:8)
- 5) Paul (read Phil. 3:3-11)
- 6) Jesus (read John 17:1-26)

All of self, none of Thee

(The first verse describes what we once were.)

Some of self, some of Thee

(The second verse describes what we are now.)

None of self and all of Thee

(The third verse describes what we are
becoming.)

- j. How do we become “poor in spirit”? (See Luke 18:9-15.)
 - 1) Do not look at self.
 - 2) Do not try to prove that you are humble.
 - 3) Look at others (away from self).
 - 4) Study the Word of God: The more we know the Father, His Son, and His Holy Spirit, the more we

will realize who He is and who we are (or who we are not!) (read 2 Cor. 10:12, 18).

- 5) Look to Jesus to fill the absolute emptiness, worthlessness, and poverty of selfishness (read John 5:44).

*Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Just as I am, I come!*

2. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (read Matt. 5:4). (See Figure 2.3.)

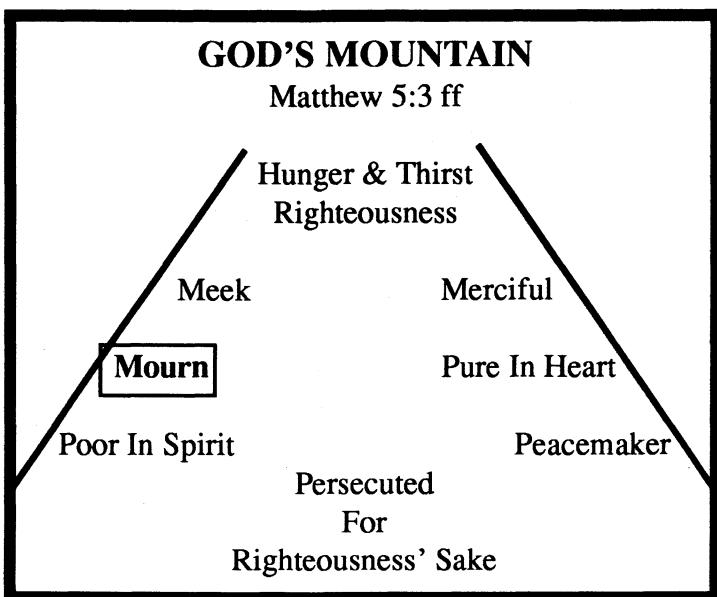


Figure 2.3 God's Mountain

- a. This is not a physical, but rather a spiritual application. (There is no happiness in mourning, as such.)

- b. “Mourning” naturally follows “poor in spirit”; therefore, Jesus is speaking of genuine spiritual grief and mourning.
- c. Jesus wants His disciples to mourn concerning that for which He mourned.
 - 1) He wept at the tomb of Lazarus (read John 11:35).
 - 2) He wept over Jerusalem (read Matt. 23:37).
 - 3) Sin (and sin’s consequences) caused His grief.
- d. This is the mourning over one’s own sinful condition, as well as over others who may be in the same condition. (Rom. 7:24 gives us a great insight into spiritual grief: “What a wretched man I am!”) (Read also Rev. 3:16-17.)
 - 1) After becoming “poor in spirit” and realizing how miserable, wretched, helpless, and hopeless we are without Jesus Christ, we are shocked and grieved at our own sinfulness.
 - 2) We grieve at all the evil that is around us and among us!
 - 3) We weep when we see others reject Jesus!
 - 4) We mourn for all the misery and suffering that sin has wrought!

5) We sob because of the philosophy of this world:
“Eat, drink, and be merry.”

e. How is one made happy in mourning? (See 2 Cor. 7:10.)

- 1) The realization of these things (the tragic nature of sin) is the first step to repentance. (Conviction comes before conversion.)
- 2) The fulfillment of “blessed mourning” is realized in the seeking of deliverance in Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, who is the sin bearer of the world (read Rom. 7:24-25).
- 3) If we truly mourn over deep-rooted sin in our lives, we will find comfort and assurance in His grace (read Rom. 5:1-5).
- 4) Only the true Christian can understand this, since only he has experienced it. The impenitent sinner cannot understand “blessed mourning” (read carefully John 7:17; Phil. 4:6-7).

f. In summary, one who “mourns” is

- 1) sorrowful (but not miserable)
- 2) serious (but not solemn)
- 3) sober-minded (but not sullen)

4) grave (but not cold)

Note: This is not hypocritical or double-minded. It is a genuine, blessed “balance.”

- g. The mourning of such a one, then, is the response of one who weeps with a deep doctrine of sin and rejoices with a high doctrine of grace. (The happiness of this mourning is found only in the comforting bosom of Jesus Christ! This is the comfort of a true child of God.)
- 3. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (read Matt. 5:5).

- a. Another paradox: who ever heard of the meek conquering the world! This is unnatural and unexpected. (These Beatitudes are not natural descriptions: all of them must be cultivated; that is, these things are not what we are *naturally*, but they are what we *become*.)

(See Figure 2.4.)

- b. The world’s standard for possessing the earth is power, might, strength, aggressiveness: push forward! (But Jesus said the meek, and only the meek, shall possess the earth!)
- 1) This quality sets Christians apart from the world; it makes the Christian different: “a new creature.” (He is a citizen of a different kingdom.)

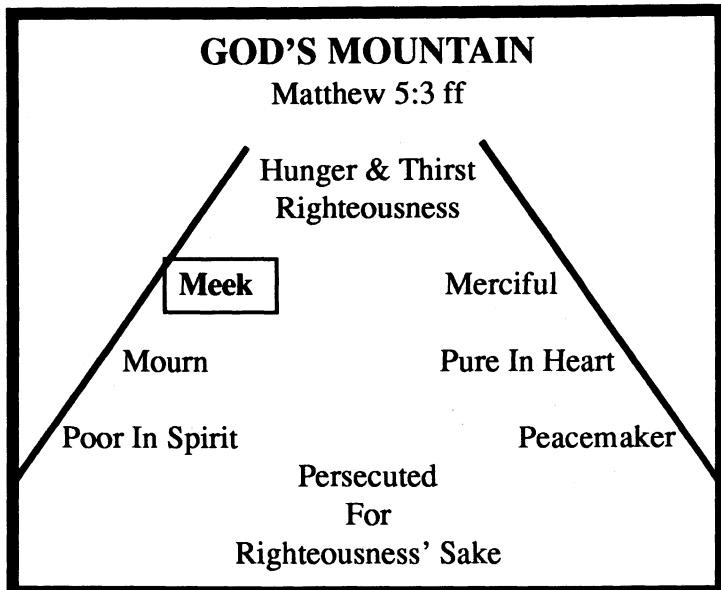


Figure 2.4 God's Mountain

- 2) The world cannot understand him; he is a problem and an enigma to the world.
- c. Jesus' disciples were probably shocked at this statement; they were looking for a Messiah of might and power (as the world considers "power"). Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world"; that is, "I'm not like you think I am" (see John 18:36).
- d. The church today tends to rely on great organization, great numbers, and human strength to oppose the enemy (Satan and his forces). This is not the way God does it: remember Gideon! (See Judg. 7:1ff.)

Note: Bigness is not necessarily greatness!

- e. This Beatitude logically follows “mourning.”
 - 1) The first Beatitude was “poor in spirit”; that is, the emptying of self and turning toward God, thus leading to the conviction of sins (of one who sees his own helplessness, and need of God), an earnest desire to repent of those sins, and conversion (a complete submission of oneself to God).
 - 2) The second Beatitude was “mourning”: that is, after recognizing my helplessness and pitiful condition, there is grief for sin and wrong doing, and then a seeking of forgiveness. This leads me to a spirit of “meekness.”
- f. This is a logical sequence and as these Beatitudes are adopted, we then begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness. (This is the full picture of birth, growth, and development.)
- g. As one proceeds further in the Beatitudes, he finds each one becoming more difficult than the previous one. Humiliating? It is less and less of self, and more and more of God!
 - 1) The first, “poor in spirit,” is not easy: it means coming to realize that we are face to face with God! This is the beginning. (It is the recognition of spiritual poverty that leads to God.) This leads to the second.

- 2) We mourn over sin's destructive deep-rootedness (read Rom. 7:24).
- 3) Then, blessed are the "meek." This is an ever-deepening thought.
- 4) With "meekness," we have reached the point concerning our relationship with others. Before, it was God and I. Now it is my relationship with God and the confessing of it before others, or having others point it out to me. Self resents this! (We can condemn ourselves, but we cannot let others show us our faults.)

Note: Until now, we were the only ones looking deep down into our sinful hearts, but now others are looking! How do we react? (This is very humbling: allowing someone else to look into my heart as I have done.)

- h. The specific meaning of "meekness" can be seen in the biblical examples of
 - 1) Abraham, who accepted Lot's selfish choice without complaint (read Gen. 13:8-12)
 - 2) Moses, with his lowly concept of self, choosing to suffer (read Heb. 11:24)
 - 3) David (especially as concerning King Saul) who, though he was anointed to be king, respected Saul even in spite of Saul's persecution

- 4) Stephen (read Acts 7:59-60)
- 5) Paul (read 2 Cor. 11:23-30)
- 6) Jesus, who loved sinners and for their sake humbled Himself to become flesh and die a criminal's death (read Matt. 11:28-29 and compare Luke 23:34; Phil. 2:5-8)
 - i. The biblical definition of "meekness" is radically different from the world's understanding (read Eph. 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 10:1; Titus 3:2; James 1:20-21).
- 1) It is nothing natural: all must *become* meek. (Note the biblical examples: all of them changed through giving themselves completely to God!)
- 2) It is not indolence : some *appear* to be meek, who are not. (They are merely flabby, easy-going, indifferent, lazy people who let all criticism "roll off.") This is not Bible meekness!
- 3) Meekness is the opposite of both *self-will toward God* and *ill-will toward man*.
- 4) In true meekness, we see the "taming of the lion"! It is the antithesis of selfish pride, stubbornness, viciousness, and vengefulness.
- 5) It is not "just being nice." Some people are just "naturally nice." This Beatitude is not speaking of

those who smile and curtsey and never lose their composure.

- 6) It is not weakness of personality and character. (There are some who are always letting someone take advantage of them and dominate them.)
- 7) It is not a spirit of compromise! It's not "peace at any price." (Some will agree with any and everybody just to avoid controversy!)
- 8) It is not an outward manner, but an inward spirit.
- 9) Meekness is compatible with power, strength, and authority through God. (Note the examples; they were defenders of God and truth, even unto death.) This is meekness. Meekness is not weakness!
- 10) Meekness is essentially a true view of ourselves. This in turn is expressed in our attitude and conduct toward others: under God's control.
- 11) Meekness does away with the legalistic concept: there can be no more pride, no more glory for self, no more boasting, but only honest shame and humility: "Have mercy on me, a sinner!"

Note: The meek person does not demand for himself, does not claim his rights by demand. He does not take advantage of his position, possessions, privileges, or status in life. It is also in this sense that Christians are to be like Christ. *This is meekness* (see Phil. 2:5-9).

- j. The following observations depict further characteristics of a meek person.
 - 1) A meek person is not selfish, defensive, or sensitive about himself. (Some people look for ways to be offended!) The meek person recognizes his imperfections.
 - 2) He is never filled with self-pity; that is, he doesn't waste time brooding over his woes and troubles. He is completely finished with self!
 - 3) He is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do, in spite of what he knows himself to be.
 - 4) He expresses this attitude of meekness toward others (read James 1:21).
 - 5) He is mild, gentle, lowly.
 - 6) He is a quiet spirit; that is, he is approachable.
 - 7) He is without the spirit of retaliation (the desire to "get even"). He possesses a seasoned, controlled anger: not "excessive anger" or "no anger."

Note: The meek person is angry at the right things at the right time (righteous anger), rather than angry at the wrong things at the wrong time (unrighteous anger) (see Eph. 4:26-32).

- 8) He is patient and longsuffering, and more especially when he suffers injustice: he is “cool when others are hot” (read carefully 1 Peter 2:18-25; Gal. 6:1).
- 9) He is teachable: he realizes his ignorance and need for learning God’s Word (read James 3:17).
- 10) We must leave everything: ourselves, our rights, our needs, our *everything* in the hands of God. Meekness is complete submission to Him and His will.
 - k. The result of becoming meek: “They will inherit the earth.”
 - 1) The meek have learned true values. They put first things first.

Note: The meek person realizes that this earth is transient, changing, and temporary. He realizes that the only important things are those things that are holy and of God. He is, finally, content as he finds himself, without undue concern and anxiety (see Matt. 6:33 and compare Phil. 4:10-13; 1 Cor. 3:21-23).

- 2) The meek inherit the earth in a spiritual way; that is, they have conquered it, overcome it, risen above it (read 1 Cor. 3:21-22; 2 Cor. 6:10).
- 3) Meekness is not easy. One cannot do it alone. The help of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are needed,

since it is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit (read Gal. 5:22).

Note: I must turn my back on self and look to God. I must maintain godly attitudes at all times and under all circumstances. “Meek” is what we *must become* (see 2 Peter 3:11; Titus 2:11-12).

4. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (read Matt. 5:6).

(See Figure 2.5.)

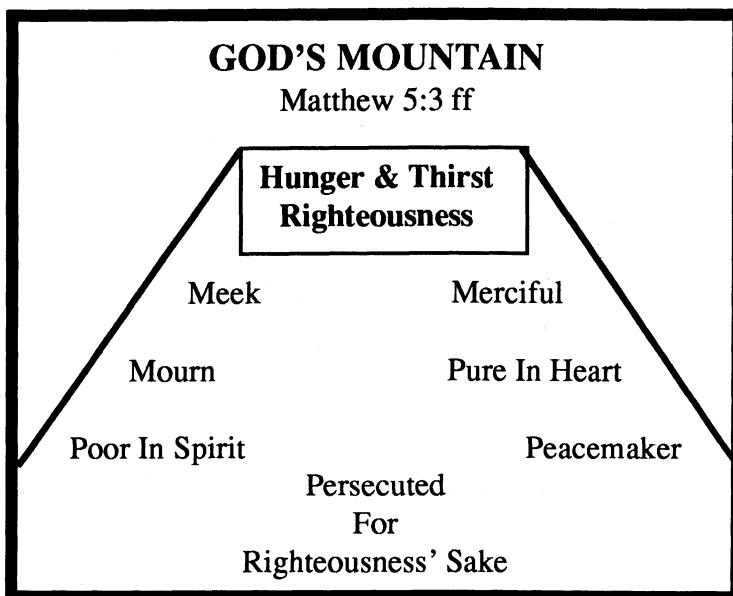


Figure 2.5 God's Mountain

- a. This Beatitude, as the others, falls into place in this logical sequence.
 - 1) Become poor in spirit.
 - 2) Become a mourner.
 - 3) Become meek.
 - 4) Become a seeker for righteousness (read Matt. 6:33; Rom. 10:3-4).
- b. Compare this teaching of Jesus to God's way for salvation.
 - 1) Conviction: Belief and confession concerning one's own need and God's sufficiency are primary in the experience of salvation.
 - 2) Sorrow: A divinely-produced negative evaluation of one's past life that results in repentance is essential to salvation.
 - 3) Submission to God: One seeks cleansing and newness of life through baptism into Christ Jesus (read carefully Rom. 6:1-14; 1 Peter 3:20-21).
- c. What is righteousness? (Note that it does not say "hunger and thirst after *happiness*.")
 - 1) The world seeks happiness, but it will not find true

happiness because it does not seek it after the proper order; that is, the world seeks happiness through work, pleasures, recreation, accumulation of money and worldly goods. But the world does not find it! Why? The world has the order reversed.

- 2) Jesus said we must seek righteousness *first*. Happiness comes as the result of this. (Happiness is elusive: if it is sought, it cannot be found.)
- 3) Happiness is not a goal, but is that *result* which inevitably comes after “righteousness.”

Note: Hungry and thirsty people are *unsatisfied* people!

- 4) Generally, this righteousness is the practice of godly morality, honoring of promises and contracts, keeping God’s word, fair play, straight dealing, abstaining from sins of theft, robbery, cheating, lying, greed, sexual immorality, strife with neighbors, and all other conduct that perverts right relationships.
- 5) “Generic righteousness” (as described above) is “just,” but this righteousness that Jesus is speaking about goes deeper than “being just.”
- 6) The “righteousness” of which Jesus speaks includes justification, but it also means sanctification; that is, it encompasses the whole righteousness of Christ.

Note: What stands between me and the whole righteousness of Christ?

- 7) This “righteousness” which Jesus commends is the strong, earnest desire to be completely free from sin’s guilt, shame, power, and desire; it is an awareness of uncleanness and guilt that cries out for cleansing!
- 8) The essence of “righteousness” is a desire to be right with God, with others, and yourself : therefore, we must rid ourselves of all that separates us from God; that is, we must put away sin (read Isa. 59:1-2 and compare 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; James 1:21).

Note: “Righteousness” is a desire to be free from the power of sin, but even more than this, it is the desire to be free from the *desire* for sin; that is, we must come to hate sin in all of its forms (see Rom. 7:24 and compare Rev. 2:6; 1 Thess. 5:22).

- 9) “Righteousness” implies a desire to be clean and holy; free from “self”! It means to be like these Beatitudes, like Jesus who perfectly embodies them. It involves a panging desire to be in fellowship with God.

d. What is “hungering and thirsting”?

Note: These Greek verbs are in the present durative tense, indicating a continual “hungering and thirsting.”

- 1) It is the consciousness of needs, even to the point of pain, discomfort.
 - 2) It is a desire that continues until satisfied. It will not go away if ignored! It is hunger pangs! (For example: when the prodigal son was hungry, he would have eaten the husks; but when he was starving, he returned to his father's house!) (Read Luke 15:11-32; 1 Peter 2:1-2.)
- e. What is the meaning of “they will be filled?”
- 1) The gospel of righteousness is here, and they shall have it.
 - 2) They shall know of Christ, His sacrifice, salvation, forgiveness, and how to become sons of God. As examples, recall the Eunuch, Cornelius, Paul, and many others (read Matt. 7:7-11 and carefully consider the Book of Acts).
 - 3) This “filling” is immediate! It continues and it is lasting (read 1 John 5:13 and compare 1 John 1:7).
 - 4) This “filling” is a filling with peace (read Phil. 4:6-7 and compare Rom. 5:1-5).
 - 5) This “filling” is a filling with divine blessings, with no sorrow added (read Rom. 8:1).
 - 6) This “filling” is a filling with praise and thanksgiving.

ing to Him who has wrought all these works through us (read Eph. 2:10 and compare Phil. 2:13-14).

- 7) This “filling” is a filling with that which this world can never take away nor give.
- 8) This “filling” is a filling by the goodness and mercy of God. Our cup runs over! Ah, but this is but a mere “foretaste” (read Eph. 2:4-9 and compare 1 John 3:2; Rev. 7:17).

Note: From the mouth of one of God’s most outstanding *righteous* men comes a clear description of “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” (see Job 23:12 and compare Job 1:8; 2:3).

- f. The following questions are tests of a spiritual appetite.
 - 1) Do I see through all my own false righteousness? (Do I really understand that my righteousness is but “filthy rags” and “dung”?) (Read Phil. 3:1-8; Isa. 64:6.)

Note: As long as there is any selfish satisfaction, we are still claiming our own righteousness. We must truly see ourselves as “nothing,” and all good that is done is “God working through us” (see 1 Cor. 15:10).

- 2) Do I avoid all that is opposed to righteousness? We must get out of the gutter, the sewer, and “walk in the light” (read 1 John 1:7).

Note: We must avoid anything that would even dull our spiritual appetite. Things that would put Jesus in second place (or that would displace Him in any way) must be “hated.” What “things”? Even good things, like T.V., golf, surfing, fishing, jobs, education, family, children, (and so forth) must not come between Lord and disciple (see Luke 14:25-35).

- 3) Do I constantly remind myself of this righteousness?: We must not become so busy and preoccupied that we forget it even for one day! (We will always put first things first.) (Read Matt. 6:33-34 and compare Phil. 2:1-11.)
- 4) Do I constantly meditate upon my relationship to God’s righteousness? (“What have I been today?”; “What of my influence?”; “What about my thoughts? My actions? Were they helpful? Or were they hurtful?”) (Read 2 Cor. 13:5.)
 - g. We will, in our “hungering and thirsting,” place ourselves in such a position to attain “righteousness”: We can’t *produce* it ourselves but we can *find* it (see Matt. 7:7).
 - 1) We can find it by reading and studying the Bible.
 - 2) We can find it by gathering together with brothers and sisters in Jesus where these things are taught and discussed.
 - 3) We can find it by making opportunity for Christian fellowship.

- 4) We can find it by much earnest and fervent praying.
 - h. Many who claim to be Christians have never had this earnest seeking, craving, starving, “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” experience. Such people may want to place the blame for their own lack of spiritual appetite on
 - 1) elders
 - 2) the preacher
 - 3) the congregation
 - 4) a fellow brother or sister
 - 5) schedule (“I don’t have time”)
 - i. The real reason for not ever having hungered and thirsted after righteousness, as investigation usually shows, is
 - 1) very little Bible study, or none at all
 - 2) poor attendance when Christians meet together
 - 3) few, if any prayers
 - 4) bad companions

- j. It is a pity that so few have ever really tasted the Bread of Life. (Try it! The craving desire will grow each day, and with the hunger and thirst, the blessedness and happiness.)

(See Figure 2.6.)

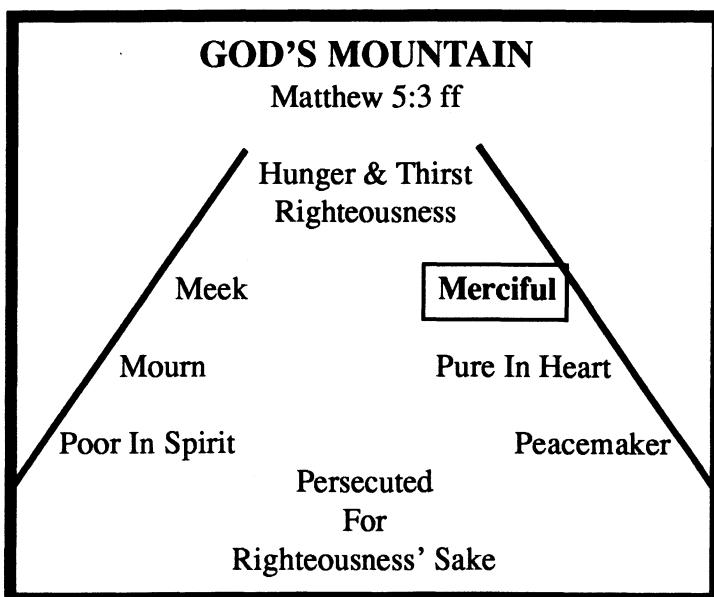


Figure 2.6 God's Mountain

5. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (read Matt. 5:7).

- a. Before proceeding, let us review the previous Beatitudes, that we might view “mercy” in its proper perspective.
 - 1) We saw our spiritual poverty: conviction.
 - 2) This brought on grief and mourning because of our sins: repentance.
 - 3) We become meek: submissive and obedient.
 - 4) We then hunger and thirst after righteousness, desiring to know God and be like Him. We have, therefore, seen the need and have been made personally conscious of those needs. Now, concern turns to disposition; that is, we want to be “merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers.”
 - 5) These Beatitudes are things we must *become*.
 - 6) Jesus is saying, “If you would become my disciple and inherit eternal life, you must put self away and become as I am: the kind of person here described.”
 - 7) This is not merely how we *should* act, but how we *will* act, since it is the only way such people *can* act.
 - 8) Is genuine discipleship a heart-searching endeavor? Yes; Jesus tells us what we are and what we should be!

- 9) What is your reaction to Jesus' teaching? Will you turn away and lack these heavenly traits, or will you face it and then begin to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"?
- b. What does Jesus mean about being "merciful"?
- 1) He is not speaking of being "easy-going"; He does not command those who pretend not to see, overlooking evil—the "free-minded." People such as these are not merciful. They are just unconcerned! They are indifferent.
 - 2) Mercy is best described by comparing it with grace; however they are not the same.
 - 3) Grace is God's unearned favor; it is associated with men in their sins.
 - 4) Mercy is associated with men in their *misery* over sin.
 - 5) Grace looks on overall sin; mercy looks on the miserable consequences of sin. Mercy has pity and desires to give relief.
 - 6) For example: You find yourself in a position of power with the ability to inflict punishment. What is your attitude: revenge or forgiveness? (Read Eph. 4:32-5:1.)

- 7) The Good Samaritan was *merciful* (Luke 10:25-37). God sending His Son to die for sins: *this* is mercy! (Read Eph. 2:4-5.)
- c. "...for they will be shown mercy."
- 1) The idea is not: "If I'm merciful, I'll receive mercy"; or, "If I forgive, I'll receive forgiveness."
 - 2) But someone will say, "What about the other teachings of Jesus concerning forgiveness? Does Jesus not elsewhere teach that I'm forgiven of God to the same extent as I forgive others?" (Read carefully Matt. 6:15; 18:21-35.)
 - 3) The above concept is shallow and legalistic when viewed in light of other Beatitudes. It completely misses the lesson of our Lord's teaching.
 - 4) If we are judged by this legalistic concept, it is doubtful if anyone would get into heaven.
 - 5) This idea of "forgiveness for forgiveness" rejects grace, presenting a system of merit for forgiveness: "Because I forgave, Lord, You are obligated to forgive me!" (God does not forgive like this) (read Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).
 - 6) Jesus is saying that only the truly repentant are forgiven. (This is the one who realizes that he deserves punishment and that his forgiveness is entirely through God's love, mercy, and grace, and

nothing else at all! Therefore, he forgives because he has been forgiven) (read Eph. 2:8-10).

- d. This mercy is not a “feeling,” but it is an operating principle (see 1 John 3:17).
 - 1) Mercy has duties to perform.
 - 2) This mercy regards the total person: body, soul, and spirit.
 - 3) We receive mercy here, although it is but a foretaste! (Read 2 Tim. 1:16-18; Jude 21.)
- e. It is the mercy and grace of God that make us merciful. We forgive because God has forgiven us: a most sober and humbling fact (see Hebrews 4:15-16 and James 2:12-13).
- 6. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (read Matt. 5:8). (See Figure 2.7.)
 - a. This is the ultimate aim of all Christian activity: “to see God.” This is one of the Bible’s greatest statements! It is the pure in heart who shall see God, and they only!
 - b. Notice the location of this Beatitude.
 - 1) After being filled with the righteousness of Christ, and then having become merciful (because we have obtained mercy), we become “pure in heart.”

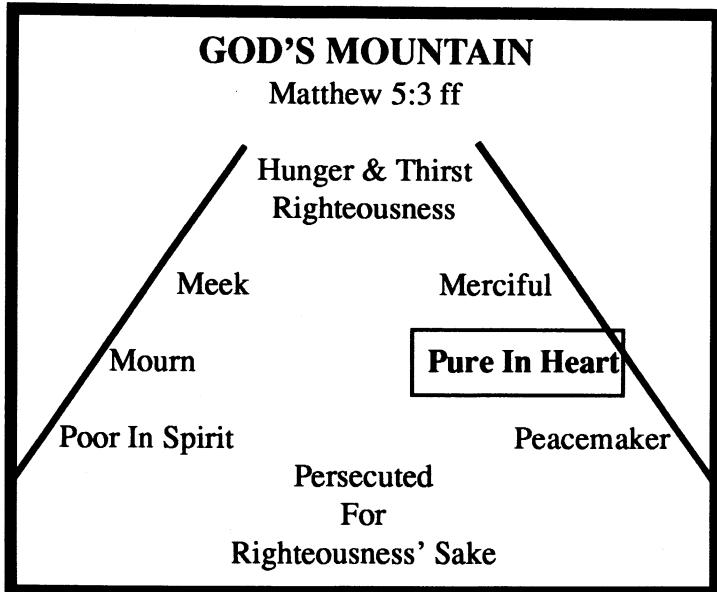


Figure 2.7 God's Mountain

- 2) This Beatitude corresponds with "...they that mourn"; that is, the mourning over sin leads to a cleansing of the heart; thus, "blessed are the pure in heart."
- c. "Heart" is the key word in this Beatitude. (Remember, the Beatitudes are concerned with attitudes, intents, and purposes; that is, with *being* rather than *doing*. It is the spiritual heart that Jesus speaks of here, not the physical.)
- 1) The heart is the seat of the emotions, the personality. From the heart comes everything, the total man.

- 2) Whether it be good or evil, all springs from the heart: the emotions, intellect, words, deeds, attitudes, and intentions (read Mark 7:20-23; Prov. 4:23).
 - 3) When speaking of the heart we are speaking of the true and real self: not what I think I am, nor what others think I am, but *what I really am as God sees me* (read Col. 3:5-10, 12-15; James 4:7-10).
- d. The purity of which Jesus speaks may be defined as that which is: “Pure, chaste, not contaminated, pure from every defilement, as being cleansed” (that is, without defilement, purged of all unrighteousness) (see 2 Peter 1:9).
- 1) A “pure heart” then, is a heart that is undivided, single in purpose (read Matt. 6:19-24; 12:30).
 - 2) A “pure heart” is not divided between good and evil but is united in one purpose (read Phil. 3:13).
- e. Purification (sanctification) is a must, an absolute necessity, if one is going to “see God” (see Heb. 12:14).
- 1) When we become “pure in heart,” we will see God, though not in the literal sense in this present life. However, we can see (understand, perceive) even now God’s love, goodness, presence, comfort, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and peace (read John 14:10; 10:10).

- 2) This purification cannot be done alone. We must rely upon help from above. Only God can cleanse and unite our hearts and make us without spot or blemish (read Jude 24-15; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 1 John 5:2-3).
- 3) Some think that their “pureness in heart” equals sinless perfection (being honestly able to say, “I do not commit any sin or have any evil thoughts”). But this “purity of heart” does not mean living a perfect, sin-free life. (If we could do that, we would not need a savior) (read 1 John 1:8).
- 4) We are not speaking about Pharisaism (external religion), but Christianity (the internal).

Note: Christianity is not a *head* religion only (solely concerned about “sound doctrine”), nor is it *hand* religion only (busily engaged in what is called “Christian service”), but a *heart* religion (encompassing the whole person): “pure in heart.”

- 5) On the other hand, we are not made pure by the grace of God that we may continue in sin; that is, grace is not a license to sin. “God forbid!” Where sin is “allowed,” fellowship with God is severed (read Rom. 6:1 and compare 1 John 1:5-6).
- f. Can you pass this spiritual “purity” test?
- 1) Have I been freed from the dominion of hypocrisy?

- 2) Are my motives pure?
 - 3) Are my intentions genuine?
 - 4) Do I meet with the Lord's people to have true fellowship? Or do I meet to be seen of men?
 - 5) Do I daily deny self, confess my sins (to God), and walk in righteous paths? (Read Luke 9:23; 1 Peter 2:21-24.)
 - 6) Do these words express my heart's desire? *Purer in heart O God, help me to be.*
7. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (read Matt. 5:9).
- a. This Beatitude has more to do with conduct than character.
 - b. This Beatitude emphasizes the terrible nature of jealousy and hatred, war and strife, turmoil and anguish that have been brought into the world by sin. Where there is no strife, there is not a need for peacemakers (see Titus 3:3).

(See Figure 2.8.)
 - c. The world's answer for peace deals with external symptoms and physical compulsion to conform to desired behavior.

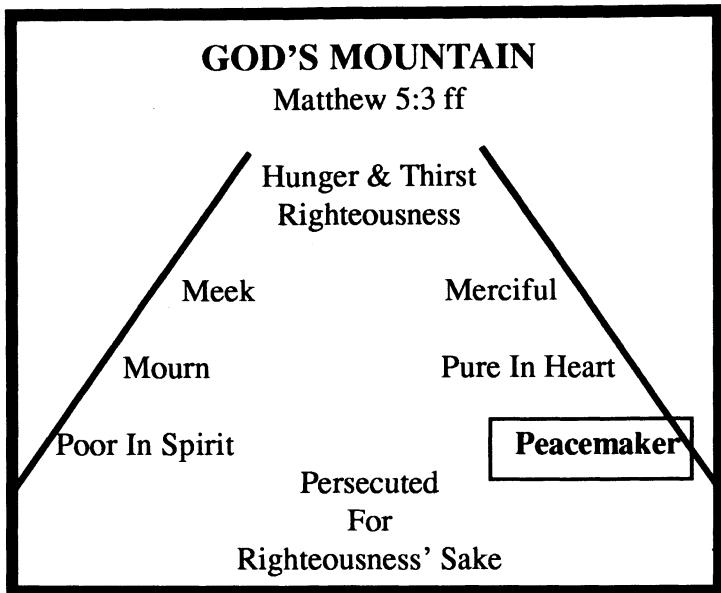


Figure 2.8 God's Mountain

- 1) Arms, conferences, laws, police forces, political treaties (and so forth) are the only tools for “peace” the world knows.
- 2) But these have failed, and will continue to fail.
- 3) This is only trying to check the *results* of sin. This is not the *root* of the matter (read James 4:1).
- d. Heaven’s answer for true peace deals with the internal problem and spiritual surrender to the kingdom (rule) of God.

- 1) God's peacemakers go to the *heart* of the situation.
(Sin issues from the heart, and this is the peace-maker's field of operation.)
 - 2) God's peacemakers will proceed and succeed, because they are following the true Prince of Peace! (Read Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:4-5; Eph. 2:14.)
- e. Traits of God's peacemakers are modeled after the pattern of Jesus, the Prince of Peace (see 1 John 4:20).
- 1) He is at peace with himself; he is not quarrelsome (read Rom. 5:1-5).
 - 2) He desires peace, but is not an appeaser (read James 3:17-18).
 - 3) He pursues peace (read Heb. 12:14).
 - 4) He must be at peace with God (read James 4:4).
- f. The practice of peacemaking is brought about by his new outlook (meekness).
- 1) He is *selfless*.
 - 2) He is neutral in disputes (read 1 Peter 2:21-24).
 - 3) He is not burned by criticism.
 - 4) He is not worried about the effect something may

have upon himself, but the good of all is his main interest (read Rom. 12:18; Eph. 4:3).

g. How does the peacemaker work?

- 1) He controls his tongue, learning when to speak and when to be silent. (For the sake of peace, he is silent; for the sake of truth, he speaks) (read James 1:19; Rom. 14:1-15:7; 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1).
- 2) He views all things in light of the gospel; he learns to exalt Christ's ways above his own way. (How would Jesus act in this case? What does the Bible teach?)
- 3) He approaches things positively and goes out of his way to make peace; he does good to those that use him spitefully, and feeds his enemies when they are hungry (read Luke 14:12-35).
- 4) He never insists on having his own way, even if the decision is rightfully his (read 1 Cor. 6:1-8).
- 5) He endeavors to spread peace wherever he is.

h. "They will be called sons of God."

- 1) Jesus is our peace (read Eph. 2:14).
- 2) We become as He is, a son (read 1 John 3:1-2; John 14:27; Rom. 8:29-30; Heb. 2:10-15).

- 3) We bring others to this peace, the peace that only sons of God have (read Phil. 4:6-7; Rom. 5:1-5).
8. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (read Matt. 5:10-12).

(See Figure 2.9.)

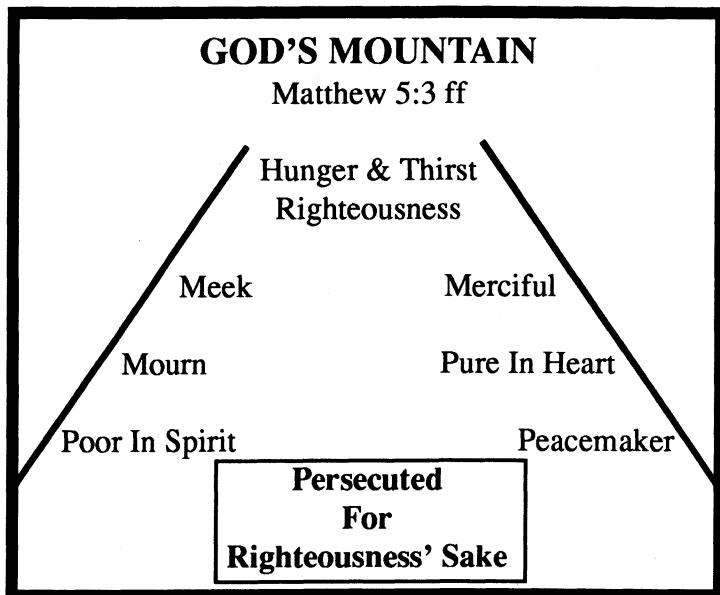


Figure 2.9 God's Mountain

- a. The Christian and persecution: who would have ever thought that someone would be persecuted for righteousness' sake?

- b. This, the last Beatitude, is a very important one; notice the emphasis placed upon it by Jesus (see Matt. 5:11-12).
- c. At first glance, this Beatitude seems different from others; but upon closer examination, we see that it isn't.
 - 1) The others described the Christian's *character*; they show us things we must *become*. (This one tells of something we also become, but it comes from *without* and not from *within*.)
 - 2) One does not ask, "How can I become persecuted?"
 - 3) According to Jesus and the apostles, it *will* happen (provided we become the person described in the other Beatitudes.) (Read 2 Tim. 3:12.)
- d. It is necessary to first state what this persecution is *not*.
 - 1) It is *not* the persecution that is brought about by one conducting himself in such a manner as to invite it, that one may boast of his persecution. (It is not hard to make people hate you!)
 - 2) It is *not* being persecuted merely for a "cause": Righteousness is certainly a "cause," but the two terms are not always interchangeable (read Luke 18:19; Mark 10:29-30).

Note: Many have suffered (even died) for “religion,” not because they were righteous, but because they belonged to a certain group. Many others have suffered for the sake of political ideologies. Right or wrong, political and/or religious affiliation is not “righteousness.”

- 3) It is *not* the persecution that comes from being noble, good, or self-sacrificing: such are not persecuted by the world.

Note: If Christians were content with doing justly and loving mercy, and would cease walking humbly with God, they might go through this world, not only in peace, but with applause! The world does not persecute such people: they are honored and praised by the world. They are made heroes!

- 4) It is *not* an assertion for self-identity: “I could be like that if I tried.”
- 5) All of this is *not* righteousness according to Christ. It is merely exercising the natural nobility of man!

e. What is the real cause of persecution?

- 1) It is simply “being different,” being apart from the world, being changed. (We see the world as Jesus sees it and not as the natural man views it.)

Note: Those who are *different* will be persecuted!

- 2) This “difference” (and the persecution that accom-

panies it) is the test and proof that we have become that which Jesus describes in the other Beatitudes.

- 3) All the other Beatitudes were a direct description, but this one is indirect: he is not telling us that we must bring on persecution for its own sake. (It must and inevitably will be brought about by the fact that we are not as others!)
- f. This “righteousness” of which Christ speaks is simply this: to be like Christ. We are blessed by being like Him. (Recall the literal meaning of the word “Christian.”) (See John 15:18-20; 17:14-20; Phil. 2:5.)
- g. It is a proven fact that this righteousness brings persecution, as demonstrated in the historical examples of
 - 1) Abel (read Gen. 4:1-8)
 - 2) Moses (read Exod. 5:11; 14:11; 16:2; 17:2)
 - 3) Samuel (read 1 Sam. 8:5)
 - 4) Elijah (read 1 Kings 18:17; 19:2)
 - 5) Micaiah (read 2 Chron. 18:17)
 - 6) Nehemiah (read Neh. 4:1-15)
 - 7) Jesus (read Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:63; 27:12-14)

- 8) Stephen (read Acts 7:54-60)
- 9) Peter and John (read Acts 5:40; 12:2-5)
- 10) James (read Acts 12:2)
- 11) Paul (read 2 Cor. 11:23-28)

h. From where comes this persecution?

- 1) It is from the most “religious people”: not from the savages and infidels, but from zealous religionists!
- 2) True prophets were persecuted by false prophets (read 1 Kings 22:1-28; Jer. 28:1-17).
- 3) Jesus and His apostles were persecuted by Pharisees and Sadducees.
- 4) Persecution by various “religious” individuals and groups often comes upon genuine Christians.

i. Why does this persecution come to the genuinely righteous?

- 1) The righteous are persecuted because they are *different*: this was why Jesus was hated by the scribes and Pharisees. (There was something about Jesus that stung their consciences, condemning them and making them feel cheap and guilty.)

Therefore, they chose to hate Him rather than to repent!)

- 2) Righteous people do not have to accuse or even speak to be persecuted; a mere realization of what and who they are is enough to condemn others who are not genuinely righteous.

Note: They are hated and persecuted by evil people, especially by those who pride themselves as being righteous, and are not! These are the ones who are hurt the most, and they cry the loudest (see Dan. 6:1-28).

- j. When we become like Jesus, we too will suffer the contempt of the world, for they will feel condemned by our presence.
- k. Here is a true personal inventory test for those who have become poor in spirit, to see if they have become “like Christ.”
 - 1) Is my life controlled and dominated by Jesus?
 - 2) Am I unlike everyone else who is not a true Christian?
 - 3) Is my life directed toward maturity in Jesus and the world to come?
- l. How is the Christian to face this persecution he can expect to come?

- 1) He must not retaliate.
- 2) He must eliminate all feeling of resentment. (This is difficult.)

Note: This “emptying” must go beyond just controlling our words and actions. We must feel no resentment toward our tormenter! (We are merciful and forgiving) (see Rom. 12:14, 17, 19-20).

- 3) Persecution (especially abuse, mockery, and hatred from loved ones) could cause us to experience severe depression and even despair, unless we are careful to remember God’s mercy (read Rev.2:10).

Note: Jesus said that houses would be divided. Yet, He also said, “Rejoice and be glad.” This is utterly impossible for the “natural” man, but not for the “spiritual” man (see Matt. 10:34).

- m. How are those blessed who are “persecuted for righteousness’ sake”?
 - 1) These trials indicate the genuine character of our faith (read Luke 21:13 and compare Phil. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:8; 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:6-9).
 - 2) Christian character is purged and continually developed through suffering (read James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 4:15-16).
 - 3) Persecution affords the Christian the opportunity to glorify God by his constancy, courage, and

fidelity to the truth (read Acts 5:41 and compare Rom. 5:1-5).

- 4) Persecution allows us to be like Christ and have fellowship with His sufferings (read 1 Peter 2:20-25; Phil. 3:10).
- 5) Persecution allows us to have fellowship with the prophets, for “in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (read Matt. 5:12).
- 6) Persecution is followed by a reward in heaven. The reward is much greater than the sacrifice (read 2 Cor. 4:17-18; Rom. 8:18; Rev. 14:13).
- 7) “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (read 1 Peter 4:13).

III. DISCIPLESHIP AND THE METAPHORS SALT AND LIGHT: JESUS PICTURES THE DISCIPLE'S PARTICIPATION (READ MATT. 5:13-16)

- A. “You Are The Salt [Not Sugar] Of The Earth.... You Are The Light Of The World” (See Matt. 5:13-16).

Note: The changing of the pronoun in v. 11 to “you” (rather than “they” in the previous verses) sets the stage for Jesus to present the deeply personal and individual commitment of discipleship.

- B. This Metaphor Involves Two Basic Things.

1. It involves a grave indictment and judgement of the actual corrupt state of society. (This corruption is not mythical, but is a scriptural and historical fact.)
 2. It involves the lofty claim that the Lord's disciples are able to affect and help the world. (The Christian is to be otherworldly minded, but this does not mean he is "retired" out of this world) (read 1 Peter 2:10-11).
- C. The Lord's Disciples Have Become That Which Is Described In The Beatitudes So That They May Be "Salt Of The Earth," And The "Light Of The World."
1. Both "salt" and "light" emphasize the Christian's character.
 2. These metaphors also emphasize the distinction of the Christian: his "separateness" (read carefully Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:1-4).

Note: When this characteristic and distinction is lacking, the "salt has lost its savor" and "is good for nothing."

3. Salt and light cause their distinctiveness to be seen and felt. (There is probably nothing more useful than "salt and light.")
- D. The Two Metaphors Will Be Studied Separately.
1. First, the symbolism of *salt* will be considered.

a. Salt's description is noted as follows.

- 1) Salt is something that *cannot be ignored*.
- 2) Salt is an *obvious quantity*. (If it is present, one must recognize it; if absent, it will be missed.)

Note: Sometimes the presence of salt is welcomed. At other times, it is resented. However, it must always be recognized.

- 3) Salt is essentially *negative*; its use implies that something is lacking in that to which it is applied.
- 4) Salt *makes a difference*, whether a little or a lot. (Salt is essentially different from the medium to which it is applied.)
- 5) Salt provides *savor*, to prevent insipidity, tastelessness.
- 6) Salt's main function (other than seasoning) is to *preserve* (prevent processes of decay and rot) and *purify* (provide a healing antiseptic).

Note: Salt is a foe of impurity and the enemy of decay.

- b. Disciples may be described as salt because they are
- 1) a strong force in preventing deterioration in the world (read Col. 4:6)

- 2) an undeniable presence of purity in the world. (For example: when a disciple enters a group where swearing has been going on, they often stop using profanity)
- 3) an absolute essential if the world is to be kept from becoming a foul-smelling, rotten corpse

Note: The tragedy of the flood of Noah's day was not that a generation ceased to live, but the fact that a generation ceased to be *fit* to live.

The ancient cities Sodom and Gomorrah desperately needed "salt." They were busy, boastful cities, thriving and yet rotting at the same time. Ten righteous men could have "salted" that rotten mess, but they could not be found. So the "corpse" was buried under fire and brimstone (consider carefully Gen. 6:1-6; 18:16-19:29).

- c. Genuine Christians (salt) are identified as positive, pungent, strong people who may be
 - 1) liked or disliked
 - 2) loved or hated
 - 3) fought alongside of, or fought against
 - 4) anything except ignored

Note: Jesus was like that: wherever he went, dullness and stagnation fled. There were some who loved Him with a love

that nothing could kill, while others hated Him with a hatred that could only be satisfied with His blood. He always divided men into groups. He was never ignored: He was salt!

- d. Disciples (Christians) cannot salt the earth unless they are themselves salt (see Mark 9:50).
 - 1) We must be salt in contact (read Matt. 9:10-13).
 - 2) We must be salt in character.
 - 3) We must be salt in continuity: "If the salt loses its saltiness...."
- e. "Good for nothing" salt is not fit to be called "salt."
 - 1) One has lost his savor (Savior!) when he ceases to be a saint. (Can there be a "saltless saint"?)
 - 2) If a disciple (Christian) loses his "tang," his enthusiasm, he becomes utterly useless (read Rev. 3:14-18).
 - 3) If a genuine disciple (as described in the Beatitudes) loses his "salting influence," he is "good for nothing." (He has become like the things about him: corrupt!) (Read Rom. 12:1-2.)
 - 4) The Lord's pronouncement of doom upon the "savorless salt" speaks of being *rejected* of God and *trodden under the feet* of men (read Luke 14:35 and compare Mal. 2:9).

Note: Saltless salt (having lost its distinctiveness) is the most worthless thing on earth (see 2 Peter 2:20-22).

2. Second, the symbolism of *light* will be examined.

a. Light's description is noted as follows.

- 1) Light *dispels darkness*: it exposes (read John 1:1-9; Eph. 5:8-14).
 - 2) Light is a *positive* force: it cannot be ignored.
 - 3) Light *reveals*.
 - 4) Light is *different* (as is salt) (read 2 Cor. 6:14).
 - 5) Light *shows the way* out of darkness.
- b. Disciples (Christians) are portrayed as “light” (see John 12:36; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 5:5).
- 1) Again, by showing that those described in the Beatitudes are “light,” Jesus, by implication, shows that the state of the world is darkness (read Matt. 4:16).
 - 2) Note the order: first salt, then light. Salt describes what one *is*. Light depicts what one *does*. (We *are* something before we *act* as something.)
- c. How can it be said that disciples (Christians) are light? (See James 1:17; 1 John 1:5.)

- 1) Jesus is the light of the world (read John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35, 46 and compare 2 Cor. 4:6).
 - 2) Jesus is light in Himself; we are light only if we are in Him. (We are “transmitters.”) (Read John 1:4-9; 3:19-21 and compare John 5:35.)
- d. The sinful world needs lighting, and only the “children of light” can do it (see John 3:19 and compare Rom. 13:12).
- 1) “Light” describes the attitude and influence of disciples (read Matt. 6:23; 10:27; Luke 11:35; 12:3).
 - 2) “Light” describes the mission and message of Paul (read Acts 13:47 and compare Acts 26:18, 23).
 - 3) “Light” describes the identity and impact of disciples (read Eph. 5:8-14).
 - 4) “Light” describes the life and love of disciples (read 1 John 1:7; 2:8-10).
- e. The responsibility of the disciple (Christian) as light: “In the same way, let your light shine before men...” (see Matt. 5:16).
- 1) Jesus has stated that we are to be “salt and light,” but he does not leave it at that. He commands: “Let your light shine.”

- 2) The true disciple (Christian) cannot be hidden; he cannot escape notice any more than Stephen or Peter and John could remain “inconspicuous” (read Acts 6:8-7:60; 4:13-20 and compare Phil. 2:14-16).

f. Why let your light shine?

- 1) It is the nature of light to shine. It is impossible for true light not to shine, and it is unnatural to “hide” it (read John 8:12).
- 2) It is the only force that overcomes darkness (read John 1:5; 8:12).
- 3) It is needed (read John 11:9-10; Luke 11:33-36).
- 4) It glorifies God, the Father (read Matt. 5:16; 1 Peter 2:10-11 and compare 1 Tim. 4:12).

g. “Let your light shine”

- 1) clearly (read Matt. 6:23 and compare Prov. 4:23; Ps. 57:9-13)
- 2) conspicuously (read Matt. 5:14-15; 1 Peter 3:15)
- 3) continuously (read John 9:5 and compare Heb. 10:23)

h. “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your

**Father in heaven” (see also Eph. 2:8-10;
1 Cor. 15:10; Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14).**

GOD'S MOUNTAIN

There is a heavenly mountain
That we have need to climb;
So we may be perfected in
The will of God sublime.

May we be poor in spirit —
Put aside our selfish ways;
Mourn and grieve o'er sinful acts
And give our God due praise.

We must be meek and gentle,
For righteousness—we'll thirst.
The gospel of our Lord so dear,
Will in our lives be first.

To others—we'll show mercy,
As God to us has shown;
And if our hearts know purity,
We'll see God on His throne.

Only then, as peacemakers,
We'll be called, "sons of God."
There will be persecution.
We could even feel the rod.

If, for God's sake, men revile us,
There's no need to be sad.
Our reward will be in heaven.
We shall rejoice and be glad.

We have a wonderful privilege
To be God's salt and light;
To glorify our Savior, and
Show the world what's right.

Exult in Heavenly treasure
That nothing can destroy.
When God is first in everything—
We'll know true peace and joy.

Lillian Hewitt
May 31, 1980

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