

KINGDOM LIVING SERIES

**A study of the Sermon on the Mount
concerning the teaching of Jesus to us.**

- By Rodney W. Francis

Cover designed by Jean Francis



“THE GOSPEL FAITH MESSENGER” MINISTRY

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This series of teachings is dedicated to all who sincerely desire to learn more from the Word of God in order to live a God-glorifying lifestyle and to those who will use them to teach others the positives of the Holy Spirit Ministry in the here and now.

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FOREWORD

We hear such a lot these days about the Kingdom. In this series we will take a look at the practical aspects of Kingdom Living, applying them where they rightfully belong – in the NOW. The Kingdom is not to come; it is here! Jesus has accomplished His triumphant victory through His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. In doing this He left us His Word so we can daily walk in the power of His victory and show forth the glories of the Christian message – in reality, in your life and mine!

Kingdom Living is the outworking of living in the Kingdom. Too many Christians are confused by the word kingdom; for it is being presented as something outward to come, rather than knowing it is Christ's life and teaching within us NOW by the Holy Spirit. Jesus told us clearly: ***"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation ("outward show"): Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for behold, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU"*** (Luke 17:20-21).

The whole revelation of the new covenant in a nutshell is: ***"CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory"*** (Colossians 1:21-29, esp. v 27).

Kingdom Living is letting Christ live out His life in and through you by word and deed. Each day! Sunday to Saturday! We shall now go through the Sermon on the Mount verse by verse so we can live the Kingdom Life more effectively.

- *Rodney W Francis*

MATTHEW CHAPTER 5

Part 1:

“And seeing the multitude, He (Jesus) went up into a mountain: and when He was sat, His disciples came unto Him:

And He opened His mouth, and taught (“to give instruction, direction”) them, saying,” (Verses 1-2).

Verses 1-2: Jesus saw the multitudes. He saw the needs of the masses. How can they be reached? Changed? They must be taught. To teach those who are outside the Kingdom the right way, Jesus had to first **TEACH HIS DISCIPLES** - those who are inside the Kingdom. Hence “Kingdom Livers” are Biblically called “disciples.” A disciple is “a learner, pupil. In the New Testament more than this, a follower, one who follows both the teacher and the teaching” (Bullinger’s).

A disciple is one who willingly disciplines his/her life to please Jesus and His teachings. He is the Master Teacher - we His pupils. By His blood He purchased us out of the devil’s kingdom and into His own Kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

We have to learn the principles of this new Kingdom, for Jesus’ Kingdom *“is not of this world”* (John 18:36-37). It is not to fulfil the physical and fleshly needs as under Satan’s kingdom, but it is spiritual and it is truth, hearing the voice of Jesus. Yet it has to be worked out in a practical way in this life *“in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23-24).

“His disciples came unto Him.” His disciples should not go to anyone else - unless He allows it (John 10:4-5). We don’t belong to anyone else - we belong to Jesus. He teaches us. He teaches us in such a way that we are able to teach others the principles He has taught us. Before He went back to the Father in heaven, Jesus commanded His disciples to *“GO YE THEREFORE, and TEACH* (meaning “to be or make a disciple”) - (see Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 14:21-22). Kingdom Living is teaching others by example and lifestyle; **showing** them how - not just telling them how!

BLESSED ARE - YES, HAPPY!

“Blessed are the poor (“trembling; to be dependent upon another”) in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Verse 3).

Verse 3: Starting at this verse and continuing on to verse 11 we have what is known as “The Beatitudes.” Every verse starts with the words *“Blessed are.”* The word “blessed” simply means “happy”; it comes from the Greek word “makarios” which is used with some interesting Scriptures in other parts of the Bible. For example: *“If ye know these things, happy (“makarios” or “blessed”) are ye if you do them”* (John 13:17).

“Have you faith? have it to yourself before God. Happy (“blessed”) is he that

condemns not himself in that thing which he allows" (Romans 14:22).

"But and if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy ("blessed") are ye . . .
(1 Peter 3:14).

"If you be reproached ("to defame, i.e. to disparage, reproach, cast in one's teeth, upbraid") for the name of Christ, happy ("blessed") are you; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified" (1 Peter 4:14).

Notice in these verses that each one says: *"Blessed Are."* Present tense - now! Not "Blessed shall be." *Blessed* (right now) *are the poor* ("trembling, living on the alms or gifts of others, having nothing at all" - it speaks of being dependent on someone else to get us through. That Someone is Jesus) *in spirit* (Isaiah 66:2,5) *for their's IS the Kingdom of heaven."*

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Verse 4).

Verse 4: *"Blessed are they that mourn* ("to bewail, lament, grieve, sorrow, mourn for, especially for one dead"). Could this be the process of laying down our old life and taking up the new? Some things are not easy to give up or lay down . . . learning to do it for Jesus' sake, more than going through the physical loss of loved ones? (The world mourns much worse than we do in such time of physical loss). Also suffering for Jesus' sake (Isaiah 61:1-3) *for they shall be comforted"* ("to call to one, call near, to call for; every kind of speaking to, which is meant to produce a particular effect, e.g. exhortation, encouragement, comfort, etc.") Here is one reason for the purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church (or disciples) of Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 14:3).

There are blessings in the life of the Christian when he/she mourns in the outworking of God's will.

THE MEEK INHERIT:

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Verse 5).

Verse 5: *"Blessed are the meek* ("gentle, enduring all things with an even temper, tender, free from haughty self-sufficiency, tender of spirit" - Bullinger's). Meekness is definitely not weakness. Someone once said: "If you think it is weak to be meek, try being meek for a week!" Neither is meekness a form of endurance, for Jesus said, *"Blessed* ("happy") *are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."* While many will see this as a futuristic inheritance, I see the importance for Christians to claim their God-given rights to "possess the land" now. God told Joshua a long time ago: *"Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you . . . there shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage: be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed* ("to become broken, cast down"): *for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever you goes"* (Joshua 1:3-9).

In Isaiah 57:13 God says: *". . . he that puts his trust in Me shall possess* ("to inherit") *the land, and shall inherit* ("to occupy, possess") *My Holy mountain."* God's holy mountain is Mount Zion and the New Testament tells us we ARE come to that mountain now: *"But you ARE come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . and to Jesus"* (see Hebrews 12:22-24).

As we possess our inheritance that is given us in the new covenant, we are "inheriting

the earth” - we are walking in God’s victory which He purposed for us. Otherwise the god of this world, Satan, would have total control over us. Praise God for the victory in Jesus right now on this earth!

FILLED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS:

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Verse 6).

Verse 6: *“Blessed are they which do hunger* (“to hunger after, long for”) *and thirst* (“to thirst, long after”) *after righteousness* (“the doing or being what is just and right; the character and acts of a man commanded by and approved of God, in virtue of which the man corresponds with Him and His will as His ideal and His standard; it signifies the sum total of all that God commands and approves. As such it is not only what God demands, but what He gives to man, and which is appropriated by faith; and hence it is a state called forth by God’s act of justification” - Bullinger’s). A righteous person, therefore, is one who is “right, just, i.e. fulfilling all claims which are right and becoming; just as it should be; a right state, of which God is the standard”) - (Bullinger’s).

This verse must surely be a key verse in the life of a Christian. Righteousness must be our standard. Jesus said if we hunger and thirst after righteousness we shall be blessed and we shall be filled (with righteousness). The word “filled” in this verse is used in the sense of “an animal which is fed with grass or hay; to feed and fill it, which speaks of the satisfaction of being full.”

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Verse 7).

Verse 7: *“Blessed are the merciful* (“actively compassionate, not merely unhappy for the ills of others, which is pity; but desirous of relieving them promptly”): *for they shall obtain mercy.”* Here we see a principle of Scripture: what we sow, that shall we reap. What we give, that is what we will get back. (Galatians 6:7-8 and Judges 1: (4-7).

THE PURE IN HEART:

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Verse 8).

Verse 8: *“Blessed are the pure* (“pure from everything that would change or corrupt the nature of the subject with which it is combined; free from every foreign admixture, whether good or bad; clean and free from every stain, odour, colour, or any useless thing whatever; free from every false adornment” - Bullinger’s) *in heart* (our heart represents “. . . the seat and centre of man’s personal life in which the distinctive character of the human manifests itself . . .” - Bullinger’s).

To be “pure in heart” means we have to be motivated right:

- 1) toward God
- 2) toward others
- 3) toward ourselves.

We do not take advantage of others for selfish means. To the “pure in heart” the promise is *“they shall see God.”* The cleaner our heart, the clearer our vision of Jesus will be! And only the Blood and the Word of Jesus can make us pure and clean like that, so let us walk and live continually with Him.

In John 15:3 Jesus told us: *“Now you are clean through the Word which I have spoken*

unto you.”

How important it is that we take time to listen and to study the Word - Jesus reveals Himself through it to us. The Word is God! God is His Word! (John 1:1) ***“The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God”*** (Ephesians 6:17).

Don't let ignorance be a blockage to the Holy Spirit; rather ***“let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing (“to put in mind”) one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”***(Colossians 3:16).

I came across the following words in the front of somebody's Bible recently, which I think is very good. It exalts the Word of God:-

“This is the Word of God. It is supernatural in origin, eternal in duration, inexpressible in value, infinite in scope, regenerative in power, infallible in authority, universal in interest, personal in application, inspired in totality. Read it through, write it down, pray it in, work it out - then pass it on. Believe implicitly in the Word” - (author unknown).

THE PEACEMAKERS:

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God”
(Verse 9).

Verse 9: *“Blessed are the peacemakers.”* Peace is something most people strive for in life. Unfortunately the opposite often happens. Christians must consciously seek at all times to not only live in peace, but to be peacemakers, especially among our brothers and sisters. I think we may have all found out one way or another that this is easier said than done!

The word “peace” means “peace, rest; in contrast with strife, and denoting the absence or end of strife. A state of health or well-being, it denotes a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being. The peace which is the result of forgiveness enjoyed” - (Bullinger's).

Peace also speaks of God. In Philippians 4:7-9 it tells us that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; that we are to **think** on good things, ***“and the God of Peace shall be with you”*** (see also 2 Corinthians 13:11).

One of the real tests of our Christian walk is in this area of peacemaking. We need to ask ourselves whether or not we **consciously** work at making peace with all in the Fellowship, or do our various moods “rule us”?

Remember: ***“The Kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things where-with one may edify another”***(Romans 14:17-19).

A disciple is a peacemaker - a **maker** of peace. Jesus has called us specifically to this role in life and gives a special title to the peacemaker - ***“they shall be called the children of God.”*** This is the only verse in “The Be-attitudes” where we are given a specific relationship to God Himself - that of His children. God is Peace; God is a Peacemaker;

therefore His children are also peacemakers. *“Blessed (“happy”) are the peacemakers.”*

REVISION QUESTIONS TO VERSE 9, FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What does it mean to be a disciple?
2. What have you learned about “blessed are”?
3. What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?
4. How important is righteousness in our daily living?
5. As a peacemaker, how would you handle a situation where two Christians are at enmity with each other?

PERSECUTION PRIVILEGES:

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (Verse 10).

Verse 10: *“Blessed are they which are persecuted* (“to cause to flee; to pursue after, as flying enemies; to pursue with malignity; hence, to persecute” - Bullinger’s) *for righteousness’ sake.”*

Another meaning of being persecuted is: “to oppress, harass, or maltreat, especially because of race, religion, etc., to bother persistently” (Collins’).

Christian, happy are you when you are persecuted for the right causes! (See 1 Peter 4:12-14, noticing the word “happy” (“blessed”).

There is much tribulation (“pressure, affliction, distress”) in the Kingdom! (Acts 14:22, Romans 5:3-5, 1 Thessalonians 3:4 and Revelation 7:14). Did you notice the promise to the persecuted for righteousness’ sake (verse 10) is the same as to the poor in spirit (verse 3) - *“for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven”*? There is a connection between *“the poor in spirit”* and *“persecution.”* We discovered in verse 3 that being poor in spirit means acknowledging and “being dependent on someone else to get us through” - that Someone else is Jesus! To live dependent on Jesus cuts right across man’s philosophy for life. It is contrary to the whole concept of the world. Thus, when we step out of line with the world’s ideas, we become the target of its displeasure. But, remember, saint of God, **OURS** is the Kingdom of heaven right now!

“Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Verses 11-12).

Verses 11-12: *“Blessed (“happy”) are you, when men shall revile* (“to defame, assail

with scornful, disgraceful words, cast in one's teeth, reproach with anything" - Bullinger's) *you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice*, ("be delighted or pleased, to be glad") *and be exceeding glad* ("to leap much, be glad") *for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets* ("one who speaks forth openly before any one, a proclaimer of a divine message" - Bullinger's) *which were before you.*"

"The Beatitudes" all deal with our attitude, character, personality; our actions and reactions to daily situations in life. They teach us what Jesus expects from His followers and that, basically, we will not get much support from the world. Nevertheless blessed - yes, happy! - are we who walk with Jesus in reality!

As we let the blessings of verses 3-12 work out in our lives we find they are the preparation for us being effective witnesses or representatives of the One whose disciples we are. Straight after "The Be-attitudes" comes a profound statement from Jesus directly to us:-

"YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH"

"You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Verse 13).

Verse 13: *"You are the salt of the earth."* Salt speaks to us of preservation and taste. In Scripture there is "a covenant of salt" which links us directly to God Himself. See Leviticus 2:13. Every oblation ("offering") had to be seasoned with salt. Why? "Salt is the emblem of perpetuity ("eternity, indefinitely"), and especially of friendliness perpetually preserved. Hence, the covenant of priesthood made with Aaron (Numbers 18:19) and of kingship with David (2 Chronicles 13:5) are each called a covenant of salt. The salt with the meat-offering betokened ("signified, indicated") the reconciliation of man and the friendliness of God. All who have now made a covenant with Him by sacrifice are reconciled to Him" - (Bullinger's).

If you turn to 2 Kings 2:19-22 you will see a beautiful type of what we - as the salt of the earth - should be in this present world. There was a city with a bad water supply - *"the water was naught* ("evil, bad") *and the ground barren."* The answer to the problem was a new cruse - that is us! - but salt had to be placed in the cruse ("vessel, dish, pan"). Elisha then took the cruse with the salt in and cast it into the spring of the waters. The result was a healing of the waters, including victory over death and barrenness.

We are made new creations in Christ Jesus, Who then puts salt into our lives. Jesus really is the salt. For it is in Him we have reconciliation and peace, and it is in Him that we have revealed the friendliness of God toward us. Christ working in us is the answer to all the problems in life around us. He, in us, makes us the salt of the earth and wherever He can use us we will bring health and healing to others. Praise the Lord! Only the life in Christ has victory over death.

A WORD OF WARNING:

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:13 that there is a danger of our salt losing its savour: *"but if the salt have lost his savour* ("quality") *wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."* When salt loses its savour it becomes dull, insipid, tasteless; it loses its acuteness.

How can we prevent this happening to us? We must always retain a fresh relationship with our Master, Jesus. Let His life, and the Holy Spirit, continually inspire us to walk and live in Him.

In Mark 9:49-50 Jesus tells us something more about salt. He said: ***“Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”*** What was He saying? Have reconciliation with God, then you will have friendliness one with another, and not disputes (as in verse 33).

Remember, ***“Blessed are the peacemakers.”*** That takes the salt!

Back in Matthew 5:13 we see the sadness of those who, after knowing what it is to be the salt of the earth, lose it. Their life falls away to nothingness, rejection and trodden under the feet of men. Dear saint, whatever you do, **DON'T LOSE YOUR SALT!**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What type of persecution do you face because of your Christian standards?
2. What should our attitude be to persecution?
3. How should we react when we are being slandered for Jesus' sake?
4. Describe some ways by which you know you have “salt” in your life.
5. How would you know if you had lost your savour?
6. How would you react if someone told you that you were saltless?

YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (Matthew 5:14-16):

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Verse 14).

Verse 14: Jesus said: ***“You are the light . . .”*** (the word “light” here is the same as that used of God Himself, Who is “Light” - 1 John 1:5 - and of Christ, Who is “the Light of the world” - John 1:4-5 and John 8:12). “Light” means “radiance.” Kingdom Living is letting Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, shine in and through our life in such a way that others see Him in us. He said: ***“I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life”*** (John 8:12). ***“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world”*** (John 9:5). ***“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness”*** (John 12:46). John the Baptist was a light: ***“He was a burning and a shining light . . .”*** (John 5:35).

The New Testament life is summed up in a nutshell with the words of Paul who said it is

“CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of Glory” (Colossians 1:25-27). Now, if Christ is in us who believe - and He is! - and He is the light of the world, what does that make us? I shall let Jesus answer this question Himself. He said, ***“YOU are the light of the world”*** (Matthew 5:14). What He is, we are!

Once we were darkness; then Jesus came into our life and **NOW** we are light. ***“For you were sometimes darkness, but NOW are you light in the Lord: walk as children of light”*** (Ephesians 5:8).

(See also Ephesians 5:9-14, we are to awake ourselves from sleepiness in spiritual things and Christ will give us light).

“You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6).

Jesus said: ***“YOU are the light of the world.”*** The potential and the impact of your life and mine is such that we can light up the world! What faith Jesus has in us! (Certainly not the “old” us, but the “new” us, created in Christ Jesus unto good works - Ephesians 2:10). Jesus proved by His life that light is greater than darkness. When His light ***“shined in the darkness, the darkness comprehended it not”*** (could not seize or lay hold of it) (John 1:5). ***“Greater is HE that is IN YOU, than he that is in the world”*** (1 John 4:4).

We Christians have made a mistake in our thinking: we think too much of the powers of darkness and evil, rather than knowing that the powers of light and good can be released through us to change things for God’s glory! God has endued us - not subdued us! Let’s stand up and be what He says we are ***“the light of the world.”***

Jesus teaches further on light in Matthew 6:22-23.

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE:

“You are the world’s light - a city on a hill, glowing in the night for all to see” (Verse 14, TLB).

Verse 14: ***“You are the light of the world. A city*** (speaking of a walled city, strong and secure. It stands bold, defying its enemies) ***that is set on an hill cannot be hid.”***

“Don’t hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds glow for all to see, so that they will praise your heavenly Father” (Verses 15-16 TLB).

Verse 15: ***“Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it gives light to ALL that are in the house”*** (Luke 8:16).

Notice our light is to shine for all to see. It is not to be hidden. In fact, the light of Jesus cannot be hidden. So let us not try to hide it. God has chosen YOU to reproduce His Son in, and He is the Light of the World! Look at Philippians 2:13-16, and see there what it says:- ***“For it is God who works in YOU both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring*** (“expressing discontent”) ***and disputing: That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, AMONG WHOM YOU SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD: Holding forth the word of life . . . ”*** (Isaiah 58:10, 1 Peter 2:9).

Verse 16: ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may SEE your good works,***

and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

What a tremendous verse. We can so shine the light of Jesus that people will see God is in us and give glory to Him. But notice, we can control the amount we shine. When Jesus said *“Let your light shine,”* He was encouraging us to put away the doubts, the fears, the inferiorities, etc., and LET our light shine. Don’t quench the light from shining.

OTHER SCRIPTURES ON LIGHT:

Judges 5:31

“ . . . but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might . . .” (That is what you call bright light!)

Isaiah 60:1-3

“Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: BUT the Lord shall arise upon you, and His glory shall be SEEN upon you. And the Gentiles shall come to YOUR LIGHT, and kings to the brightness of YOUR rising.” (Surely this verse is fulfilled in us in Jesus Christ!)

Acts 13:47

“For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

2 Samuel 22:29

“For You are my lamp, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness.”

Psalms 36:9

“For with You is the fountain of life: in Your light shall we see light.”

Proverbs 4:18

“But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.”

Psalms 27:1

“The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

Isaiah 8:18-20

“ . . . If they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them.”

John 11:10

“But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him.”
“People who delve into the occult, witchcraft, etc. have no light in them.”

Luke 12:35

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.”

SHINE YOUR LIGHT:

You can give light to the world day by day,
 And this is important to do;
 Others may shine in their own special way,
 But nobody else can be you.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW, AND THE NEW COVENANT CHRIST:

We now move into an area of Christianity where there has been a lot of confusion, conflict and division. Some churches have their doctrines (“teachings”) firmly based upon Old Testament teachings and most still hold the 10 Commandments as being necessary to follow today. As we go through these verses together, let us make sure we understand that Jesus Christ Himself came to fulfil the Old and, in fulfilling the Old Covenant, He also established the New Covenant which supersedes all that has gone before (see Hebrews 7:22, 8:6-13, 9:15-17, 10:1-22).

No one living outside of Jesus Christ can keep totally the Old Testament Commandments; therefore our aim and desire today should be to have and know Jesus in reality in our lives. It is only in Jesus Christ that we find acceptance with God; not in the keeping of religious rules and regulations.

Remember, Kingdom Living is *“Christ in YOU, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27). What does Jesus say, then, about the Old Law?

Verse 17: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”*

Under the Old Covenant, the law served to point men and women to Christ. It did not, and could not, make the people perfect. If it did, there would have been no need for Jesus to come and die the terrible death He did. He died to take away our sins completely, something the law could not do. (The above Scripture references in the Book of Hebrews bring this out). That old law has now been fulfilled through Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Holy Ghost upon us. When Jesus died on the Cross, He said: *“It is finished”* - He knew that all things had been accomplished to the fulfilling of the Scriptures (see John 19:28-30).

Verse 18: *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot (‘smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet’) or one tittle (‘a horn,’ ornamental curl of Hebrew letters) shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”* The Old Testament was God’s Word, Law and Command to His people Israel from the days of Moses up until the death of Christ on the Cross. It was for that period of time. It is not for us to follow. Rather the law is full of “types and shadows” of Him who was to come, that is **JESUS**. Jesus has brought in for us **NEW** and **BETTER PROMISES** (Hebrews 8:6).

Whatever the law declared, Jesus fulfilled. And everything that the prophets spake under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will, if not already, be fulfilled. God’s Word surely comes to pass!

Verse 19: *“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven.”*

Remember, at the time Jesus spoke these words, the people were still under the Old Covenant. They still had their obligations to it.

The principles of truth in the Old Covenant still apply today when they are interpreted in Jesus Christ. We are still to teach people from the Old Testament, but not to live ac-

ording to the law. We can learn so much from the Old Testament. Instead of us interpreting the Old in the light of the Old, we now interpret the Old in the light of the New.

I came across a little saying some time back about this. I kept it and now share it with you:-

THE BIBLE:

The Old is in the New explained,
The New is in the Old contained,
The New is in the Old concealed,
The Old is in the New revealed.

(Author Unknown).

Verse 20: (Jesus speaking) *"For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes (writer, clerk, one skilled in the Jewish law, an interpreter of the Scriptures, a lawyer, a learned scholar or teacher") and Pharisees (means "separate"; the largest of the Jewish sects; noted for their self conceit and long prayers) you shall in no case ("by no means") enter into the Kingdom of heaven."*

The scribes and Pharisees held the greatest authority under the Old law, but unfortunately for them, their standard of righteousness was not acceptable to God. The Old could not produce the righteousness needed to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. That takes Jesus in us!

In spite of all their religious knowledge, learning, traditions, rules and regulations, the scribes and Pharisees were at the forefront of having Jesus rejected. All "righteousness" outside the righteousness of Jesus Christ will cause people to reject Jesus - not accept Him. Our righteousness today is not based on knowledge gained from religious teachers or good works - it must be based entirely in Jesus Christ and His finished work on Calvary. Kingdom Living is Christ's righteousness in us.

It is interesting to note that throughout Matthew 5 and 6 Jesus quotes from the law and then immediately says: But *"I say unto you"*. These words are stated: 9 times in Matthew 5: verses 17-18, 19-20, 21-22, 25-26, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39 and 43-44. (They are also written 5 times in Chapter 6:2, 5, 16, 25 and 29).

When we are in doubt about anything Scriptural,
LET JESUS BE THE FINAL AUTHORITY.

What does He say unto you?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (Matthew 5:14-20):

1. What does the word "light" mean?
2. What does it mean to you to be called the light of the world?
3. Why did Jesus have to bring us a New Covenant?
4. What did Jesus do to the law?
5. What kind of spirit, do you think, kept the scribes and Pharisees from

accepting Christ?

6. On matters of doctrine and Scriptural interpretation, who should have the final authority?

OF ANGER AND DISSENSION:

As we have seen to date in this series, Christianity is very much one of personal discipline and self control. All our knowledge is to no avail if we cannot control our emotions, moods and general conduct. In this next section Jesus teaches us the importance of having our relationship right with one another.

Verse 21: *“You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not kill (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17) and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger (“liable, subject to”) of the judgment”* (“separating, sundering; judgment, especially of judicial procedure; the act or time of pronouncing sentence”): The words *“and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment”* are not an exact quotation of the Old Law. But, nevertheless, it fully describes the perils of a believer who takes another person’s life. I think this quotation could be taken from Leviticus 24:17 - *“And he that kills any man shall surely be put to death”* (See also Leviticus 24:21 and Numbers 35:30-31).

Christianity is following Jesus Christ and He did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them (Luke 9:56). (The reason why men and women are lost eternally is because of their evil deeds and their rejection of what Jesus came to give them, namely, total salvation and eternal life. See John 3:16-21). Killing other human beings should be one of the furthest things from our minds!

Verse 22: *“BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, that whosoever is angry (“anger, with the desire of revenge”) with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca (An Aramaic word meaning “an empty, vain worthless fellow”) shall be in danger of the council (“a sitting together, senate; English: Sanhedrin. The supreme council of the Jewish nation composed of 70 members, besides the high priest, selected from former high priests and heads of the 24 courses” - Bullinger’s Lexicon): but whosoever shall say, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

These are serious words from Jesus. We Christians need to be very careful about belittling our brothers and sisters - they are God’s sons and daughters! I have looked up a few other Bible translations on this verse and I’ll share some with you:-

“But I tell you this: Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgment. If he abuses his brother he must answer for it to the court; if he sneers at him he will have to answer for it in the fires of hell” (New English Bible).

“But I say to you that every one who continues to be angry with his brother or harbours malice (“enmity of heart”) against him shall be liable to and unable to escape the punishment imposed by the court; and whoever speaks contemptuously and insultingly to his brother shall be liable to and unable to escape the punishment imposed by the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, You cursed fool! - You empty-headed idiot! Shall be liable to and unable to escape the hell (Gehenna) of fire” (Amplified Bible).

“Under the laws of Moses the rule was, If you kill, you must die. But I have added to that rule, and tell you that if you are only angry, even in your own home,

you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse him, you are in danger of the fires of hell” (verses 21-22, The Living Bible).

HOW TO MAKE RECONCILIATION:

Relationships - how important they are! Right relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ are vital. Not one of us can afford to harbour grudges, resentments, etc. We must seek to be right with one another at all times. If our relationship with one another is not right, then we are not going to get very far with God. Consider the next two verses:-

Verse 23: *“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember (“to call to one’s mind”) that your brother has ought (“any thing”) against you;*

Verse 24: *“Leave there your gift (to God) before the altar (“a place of sacrifice”) and go your way; first be reconciled (“to change one’s own feelings towards another, so that he changes his; to be reconciled to each other”) to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

Being right with one another is more important to God than any gifts we give to Him. If we are not right with one another, we are not right with God.

If we do not love one another, we do not love God how we should. Let the Scripture speak:-

“If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”
(1 John 4:20)

“Hatred stirs up strifes: but love covers all sins” (Proverbs 10:12).

“And above all things have fervent (“extended, stretched out”) charity (“love”) among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

When we know someone has something against us (that needs to be put right), then we are to seek to have that something put right. The way to go about it is to “go to your brother” or “go to your sister” - in love - and get the matter settled. See also Matthew 28:15-17. If the fault is on our part, then we need to practice forgiveness as well - Mark 11:25-26.

Also remember the words of Jesus from earlier in this study: *“Blessed (“happy”) are the peacemakers”* (“peace” meaning “rest; in contrast with strife, and denoting the absence or end of strife. A state of health or well-being, it denotes a state of untroubled, undisturbed well-being. The peace of which is the result of forgiveness enjoyed” - Bullinger’s). A disciple of Jesus is a peacemaker - a maker of peace. And it is the peacemakers who are called *“the children of God”* (Matthew 5:9).

IN CLOSING THIS SECTION:

Our church is only as strong as our love for one another. If we want a strong, thriving Fellowship that will have a greater impact in the community then we can have it by building Christ-exalting relationships with one another. Let us do all that is in our power to prevent differences, strife, anger, hatred, bitterness, etc., and go out of our way to build, encourage, love and support those God has placed you with.

“By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

HONEST DEALINGS:

Verse 25: *“Agree* (“to be well minded towards, to be friends with him”) *with thine adversary* (“an adversary or opponent in a lawsuit, any enemy or accuser”) *quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary delivers you to the judge* (“a judge, umpire; one who decides according to equity and common sense”) *and the judge delivers you to the officer* (“one who does service under the direction of any one such as a magistrate”) *and you be cast into prison.”*

Verse 26: *“Verily I say unto you, You shall by no means come out thence* (“from that place”) *till you have paid the uttermost farthing* (or the very last cent).”

Jesus teaches us here the importance of having right dealings and right relationships with those in the field of commerce. The less we live dependent upon others for finances, etc., the more we should be able to live without the threats and fear of being taken to court. Romans 13:8 says: *“Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loves another has fulfilled the law.”*

In today’s world, it is virtually impossible for the average citizen to get through life without having to borrow money or get some kind of a security backing from someone else. Buying a house for example. For Christians it is expected that we shall enter into all our dealings in an open and honest way - not trying to “beat the system” or short change those who have undertaken to help us. Many enemies are made because of this. If a Christian cannot be trusted to keep his word in all circumstances, then he cannot be trusted. And if we cannot be trusted, we will be guilty of turning people away from God rather than to Him. Court cases involving Christians’ wrong doings are bad news indeed!

SEXUAL CONDUCT:

Verse 27: *“You have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shall not commit adultery* (sexual misconduct outside the marriage bond) (Exodus 20:14, Deuteronomy 5:18);

Verse 28: *“BUT I SAY UNTO YOU, That whosoever looks* (“to use the eyes, to see, to look; to observe accurately with desire; hence, of mental vision”) *on a woman to lust* (“desire which attaches itself to or upon its object. It is used exclusively of sinful desire, which corresponds to man’s depraved nature. The inward passion of concupiscence.” Concupiscence is “desire, yearning, longing, denoting the inward passion of the mind in a good or bad sense”) *after her has committed adultery with her already* (“now, at, or by this time”) *in his heart* (“as the corporeal organ of the body, it is the seat of life, which chiefly and finally participates in all its movements. Also as the seat and centre of man’s personal life in which the distinctive character of the human manifests itself. Hence the significance of the heart as the starting point of the developments and manifestations of personal life, as well as the organ of concentration and outgo”).

In the above two verses Jesus has put His finger on the main “problem” area that all Christian men face. And face it we must!

We must recognise that God created us with a sexual desire; but that sexual desire has

to be disciplined and directed according to the teachings of Scripture. For the committed, Spirit-filled Christian, sex is for the enrichment of two people in love and marriage. Outside of marriage sex is a “No No!”.

Sexual relationships among unmarried people is called fornication (this includes de-facto relationships!) Christian the Bible says:-

“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body” (see 1 Corinthians 6:13-20).

Let me share what the Living Bible says on this:-

“But sexual sin is never right: our bodies were not made for that, but for the Lord, and the Lord wants to fill our bodies with Himself. And God is going to raise our bodies from the dead by His power just as He raise up the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't you realise that your bodies are actually parts and members of Christ? So, should I take part of Christ and join himself to a prostitute? Never! And don't you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute she becomes a part of him and he becomes a part of her? For God tells us in the Scripture that in His sight the two become one person. But if you give yourself to the Lord, you and Christ are joined together as one person. That is why I say you should steer clear of sexual immorality. No other sin affects the body as this one does. When you sin in this way it is against your own body. Haven't you yet learned that your body is the home of the Holy Spirit God gave you, and that He lives within you? Your own body does not belong to you. For God has bought you with a great price. So use every part of your body to give glory back to God, because He owns it.” (1 Corinthians 6:13-20, L.B.)

How well that is put! Let's continue from the Living Bible in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8:-

“Let me add this, dear brothers: You already know how to please God in your daily living, for you know the commands we gave you from the Lord Jesus Himself. Now we beg you - yes, we demand of you in the name of Lord Jesus - that you live more and more closely to that ideal. For God wants you to be holy and pure, and to keep clear of all sexual sin so that each of you will marry in holiness and honour - not in lustful passion as the heathen do, in their ignorance of God and His ways. And this is also God's will: that you never cheat in this matter by taking another man's wife, because the Lord will punish you terribly for this, as we have solemnly told you before. For God has not called us to be dirty-minded and full of lust, but to be holy and clean. If anyone refuses to live by these rules he is not disobeying the rules of men but of God Who gives His Holy Spirit to you.” (See also Galatians 5:16-21).

Single Christians need to pray for God's choice and provision of a wife or husband for God-blessed love and fulfilment. Married Christians need to continually cultivate their love and respect for each other. Value your partner as being God's gift to you.

If you have doubts and/or questions regarding the matter of sexual relationships, be encouraged to share with your pastor or church leadership. For further reading on this subject, I suggest you see Chapter 9 of my book “Counselling and Deliverance” entitled “Sexual Problems”.

So far in this series we have covered a wide range of subjects that are very relevant to practical Christian living. Jesus certainly wants us to know life, and life more abundantly - **NOW** (John 10:10).

His will is to bless us **NOW**. To so transform us that we recognise **WHO** we are as new creations: *“the salt of the earth”, “the light of the world”, “a city set on an hill”* etc. We are a new covenant people delivered from the old law and its concepts, a people who know reconciliation from God and who know how to minister reconciliation (“to so put away all enmity that friendship follows, and no impediment remains to unity and peace”) to one another, that Christ’s life is seen flowing in and through us. Surely this is what Matthew 5:16 is saying to us as well.

“YOUR RIGHT EYE”

In our last lesson we discussed Matthew 5:28 about **looking** (“to use the eyes, to see, to look; to observe accurately with desire; hence, of mental vision”) on a woman to lust (Job 31:1). The eyes can be used for good or bad purposes. We can thank God that He created us with eyes to see. Just think, for a moment, how different life would be if you were to lose them . . .

In verse 29 it almost seems as though Jesus is telling us to have our eye removed if it causes offence. Let us look at this verse:-

Verse 29: *“And if thy right eye offend* (“to lay a snare for, set a trap for; hence to cause to stumble or fall, to give offence or scandal to anyone” - Bullinger’s) *thee, pluck* (“to take out or away”) *it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable* (“an advantage”) *for thee that one of thy members* (“part of the body”) *should perish* (“be destroyed”) *and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”*

Jesus is giving us warning that our eyes (when used wrongly) have the potential to take us away from His teachings and so foul up our lives that it is possible for us to finish up in hell. This is strong language indeed.

To fulfil God’s will for us we must focus our eyes upon those good, clean and healthy goals in life that will lift us up beyond the realm of the dictates of the world, the flesh and the devil. If and when we recognise that our eye is causing offence to the purpose of God within us, we need to take practical steps to removing it (the offence). We must tackle the area of desire and lust by consciously keeping our eyes off those things that continue to feed those wrong things. For example, we must guard against the types of T.V. and video programmes, the floor shows, magazines, etc. that are specifically produced to arouse through our eye gate those passions that take us away from the will of God. Make no mistake about it - the world today is geared to pulling the Christian down so he will be ineffective for the Kingdom.

To just physically have an eye removed is not going to solve the problem. It goes deeper than that. Through the Holy Spirit we are told to mortify (“put to death”) the deeds of the body so we can live (Romans 8:13).

It is not the eyes that are at fault, but rather *“the lust of the eyes”* that is the problem. (1 John 2:16). It is not money that is the root of all evil, but rather *“the love of money..”*

“Your right eye” is speaking about the best eye, according to the Living Bible: *“So if your eye - even if it is your best eye! - causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. Better for part of you to be destroyed than for all of you to be cast into hell”* (Matthew 5:29, Living Bible).

THE BIBLE AND EYES:

The Bible has a lot of interesting things to say about eyes. Let me share just a few with you so you can see something of the wonder of the Scriptures, as well as give you some “food for thought and discussion”:-

Eve, in the garden of Eden:

“And when the woman SAW that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (If discussing, read Genesis 3:1-19). The result of Eve using her eyes wrongly was the fall of the human race!

Hagar despised Sarai:

“And he (Abram) went in unto Hagar (means “wandering”) and she conceived: and when she SAW that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.” (Read Genesis 16:1-6).

Abraham a covering of Sarah’s eyes:

“And unto Sarah he (Abimelech) said, Behold I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved” (“to be reasoned with”). (Genesis 20:16 - see whole chapter for context).

God, concerning marrying the heathen:

“. . . and shall be . . . thorns in your eyes” (Joshua 23:11-13).

Jonathan, when he ate honey:

“. . . his eyes were enlightened” (“to be or become lightened, shining”) (1 Samuel 14:24-29 and Psalm 13:3, Psalm 19:8).

Asaph, when he envied the foolish:

“Their eyes stand out with fatness . . .” (Psalm 73:7, 17-18).

Some more verses:

“Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” (Jesus, in Revelation 3:18).

“The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling . . .” (Ephesians 1:18).

“I will set no wicked thing before my eyes” (Psalm 101:3).

“But we see Jesus . . .” (Hebrews 2:9 and 12:1-3).

“. . . we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

THE EYE IS SO IMPORTANT:

When our eye is free from offence, we can then confidently release faith in the promises of God to accomplish virtually anything. A Christian free from offence has a real authority in ministry and can impart the life and gifts of the Kingdom into others. There are es-

pecially three parts of our body we can use to impart.

1. By the words of our mouth;
2. By the laying on of our hands; and
3. By using **our eyes**. *“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single (‘‘free from defect, unspotted’’) , thy whole body shall be full of light’’* (Matthew 6:22).

In Acts 3:1-8, we see Peter and John using their eyes to impart healing to a hopeless cripple, giving him a whole new way of living. Their eyes were ‘‘single,’’ enabling the Holy Spirit to flow through them to minister to others. If we are feeding our eyes with questionable things, then our ability to impart life to others is severely affected.

The eyes are important. They tell us so much about people. Never be ashamed to look them straight in the eye and let the life of Christ in you minister unto them. So many times I have experienced receiving discerning of spirits, word of knowledge, prophecy, compassion, etc. through having ‘‘eyes to see’’ when looking at people.

The need today is to continually feed our lives upon the Scriptures. To do this we must use our eyes to look and read. This subject of eyes, looking and seeing, is so important that Jesus in His teaching of the Sermon on the Mount refers to them in several places:

Matthew 5:8, 16, 28-29, 38.
Matthew 6:1, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18, 22-23.
Matthew 7:3-5.

Therefore we will be touching on various matters relating to sight, vision, light, etc. as we progress on through this series.

Let a clean heart give clear vision to **SEE** God (Matthew 5:8).

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION:

How can we encourage one another to have cleaner, clearer eyes before God?

‘‘YOUR RIGHT HAND’’

Verse 30: *‘‘And if thy right hand offend (‘‘to lay a snare for, set a trap for; hence, to cause to stumble or fall, to give offence or scandal to anyone’’ - Bullinger’s) thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable (‘‘an advantage’’) for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.’’*

So much of what has been said already about eyes can be reapplied for the hands. Our hands can be used for good or bad. Kingdom living means the giving up of evil deeds our hands help us to achieve, i.e. stealing (Ephesians 4:28), fighting, etc. Like the eyes and the mouth, God wants us to learn to use our hands to impart the life, gifts, and graces of Christianity to others.

THE BIBLE AND HANDS:

The angel to Hagar:

"And the angel ("messenger, agent") of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress ("mistress, mighty one"), and submit ("humble") thyself under her hands" (Genesis 16:9).

Joseph's brethren, concerning Joseph:

"Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content" (Genesis 37:27).

Joseph:

"And the Lord was with Joseph ("increaser") and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master ("lord, sir") the Egyptian. And his master SAW that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Genesis 39:2-3, 6, 8, 22-23).

God to Moses:

*"... What is that in thine hand?" (Exodus 4:2)
"Put forth thine hand . . ." (Exodus 4:4).*

Moses, when fighting Amalek:

"And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed ("to be or become mighty"): and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun" (Exodus 17:11-12).

Moses and Joshua:

*"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua ... and lay thine hand upon him . . . And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge" ("to command").
(Numbers 27:18-23).*

Some more verses:

"They (the believers) shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18; see also James 5:13-15).

"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people . . ." (Acts 5:12, 8:18, 14:3).

"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:11-12).

These few illustrations from Scripture are enough to show us the importance of our hands in the service of the Lord. Let's be willing to cleanse our hands of all deeds that are not becoming to children of the Kingdom:

"Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false" (Psalm 24:3-4).

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION:

How can we encourage one another to have “cleaner” hands before God?

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE:

Verse 31: *“It has been said, Whosoever shall put away* (“to let loose from, loosen away from, let go free”) *his wife* (“a man’s partner in marriage”), *let him give her a writing of divorcement* (“a cutting off, departure from”) (Jesus here is quoting from Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Verse 32: *“But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving* (“outside, without, except”) *for the cause* (“word, matter, charge or accusation”) *of fornication* (Collins’ English Dictionary gives the meaning as (1) “voluntary sexual intercourse outside marriage. (2) voluntary sexual intercourse between two persons of the opposite sex, where one or both are unmarried - that is interpretation by the law. (3) Sexual immorality in general, especially adultery - Bible interpretation”) *causes* (“to do, make, produce, be the means of a thing”) *her to commit adultery* (“voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man or woman and partner other than the legal spouse” - Collins’ English Dictionary): *and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery.”*

To suggest that the subject of divorce and remarriage in church circles is a touchy and explosive one would be quite an understatement. To commit one’s self to writing on it is likely to cause a fair share of misunderstandings and criticism. However, we Christians need to be big enough in God to face this issue (divorce and remarriage is growing at an alarming rate!) and come up with some practical and workable answers. This paper is only my general conviction and not an official statement of belief by any of the Christian organisations I am associated with.

GOD ORDAINED MARRIAGE IN THE BEGINNING:

The will of God for us is that when we develop into maturity, we find (under His blessing and guidance) a wife or husband. *“Whosoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains* (“to bring out, cause to come forth”) *favour* (“pleasure, good will”) *of the Lord”* (Proverbs 18:22, Proverbs 30:18-19, Proverbs 31:10-12).

If people lived according to Kingdom living principles, marriages would be entirely successful and thus for life, and there would be no necessity for divorce and remarriage. Arguments, differences, unfaithfulness, etc. would never deteriorate to the stage where love and trust was lost. When a man and wife are both submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and *“walking in the light with one another and Him”* (1 John 1:7), there is no need for marriages to crumble.

JESUS IS THE ANSWER! - when we will let Him be the Answer!

The sad fact of the matter is that those who live out their marriage by divine rule are very much in the minority. Christians, who marry in the will of God, have everything going for them as they simply continue in the will of God. Anyone who marries outside of God’s will is headed for trouble and will need all the grace and patience to make a marriage successful. In New Zealand today we are told that the number of divorces per year are almost half that of the number of marriages per year. We are a nation of mixed-up, messed-up people when we line ourselves up with the ideals of God’s Word.

Many people coming to Christ today have come to Him because of the terrible experiences life has brought them. This often involves a broken marriage. Where we can, we seek to reunite husbands and wives - often it is fruitless. So, as Christians, we must rebuild these broken and divorced lives upon faith in God and His Word. We must show forgiveness, mercy, grace and kindness to them, making sure we have the right attitude towards those who have gone through the trauma of a marriage break-up.

WHEN IS A PERSON MARRIED?

I am not trying to be silly here. Christians have big “hang ups” on divorce and remarriage. In God’s eyes, is a person married when they receive the legal marriage licence telling them they are, or is it through sexual union? By the law of man the first applies - by the law of God the second applies.

As Christians we fulfil first the law of man by getting married in the right manner of legal process and then we fulfil the law of God by consummating the marriage through sexual union . . . by becoming one flesh (Genesis 2:18-25, Matthew 19:3-9).

Because true Christian standards have almost disappeared in today’s world, we find sexual immorality is rampant. Is it any wonder that marriages fail? The majority have had sexual relations with someone else before they get married legally and so the purity and love of the husband and wife is marred before they even leave the church or registry office.

Another question: “Why do Christians find it easier to forgive an immoral single person than the person who gets married legally and right, but whose marriages fail? I have personally counselled men and women who have “slept around” for years and seen them come to Christ. There seems to be no problems if they then settle down and get married to a Christian. But the poor person who has only had sex with one - husband or wife - is utterly condemned (generally) by the Christian community if the marriage fails. Is the breaking of a legal marriage contract committing the unpardonable sin? I do not believe so.

Now I am not advocating the break-up of marriages, but where it happens, we have to be realistic enough to face up to what needs to be done to build a new future for the persons concerned.

WHAT IS DIVORCE?

According to Collins’ Dictionary, divorce is:

1. the dissolution of a marriage by judgment of a court or by accepted custom.
2. a judicial decree declaring a marriage to be dissolved.
3. a separation, especially one that is total or complete.
4. to separate or be separated by divorce; give or obtain a divorce (to a couple or from one’s spouse).
5. to remove or separate, especially completely.

In Scriptural terminology divorce comes as a result of *“the hardness of hearts”* (Matthew 19:8). The love, respect and softness towards one’s partner disappears. A violation of the unity of body, soul and spirit takes place. The marriage dies. The tragedy of mar-

riage breakdown and divorce is that it leaves people “on their own”. God never made us to be alone. He said: *“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helpmeet for him”* (Genesis 2:18).

Very often the divorced person finds himself battling with loneliness. They have experienced (in better times) the love, fellowship and companionship of a man or woman (which brings considerable confidence and fulfilment) - and now it is gone. Some cope better than others. Once people become committed to Christianity and they start seeing God’s ideals for their lives and how life **should** be lived, if they have experienced a marriage break-up, this should not be held against them. The past needs to be forgiven and all spiritual connections with it broken. I believe that if they meet and fall in love with a committed Christian, they should be encouraged to marry and set up a home after God’s order. We should not keep them condemned by past tragedy, but see them released into building a future in God. The ministry of mercy must prevail - *“mercy rejoices against judgment”* (James 2:13).

In Christ Jesus **all** can be forgiven when there is genuine desire to go on with Him.

It is interesting to note that the Book of Esther is all about the salvation of the Jews through a woman by the name of Esther. An evil man in high places, Harman, plotted to have the Jews destroyed. It was as the result of Esther marrying the king, Ahasuerus, that this great deliverance came about. Yet previously, King Ahasuerus was a divorced man who remarried a Christian girl. This second marriage brought Esther into a position where she was able to have access to the king and, in so doing, caused the law to be changed to enable the Jews to escape their intended judgment.

I am not advocating divorce and remarriage. That is a tragedy. But God, who is rich in mercy, can take tragedies, mistakes, failures, etc., and turn them for good. Marriage failure and break-up, and divorce is not the “unpardonable sin,” and we should not “stand in judgment” on those who experience this sad and traumatic happening in their life. Our job is to rebuild their future and help them to live in God’s ideal for their lives . . . whether that includes remaining single or remarrying.

In John, Chapter Four, we read of the Samaritan woman who had been married five times and was living de-facto with a sixth man when Jesus met her and changed her life. He did not condemn her to a life of second-rate citizenship with “church restrictions of service” upon her. He rather turned her into an evangelist who became the means of revival amongst her people!

God obviously views our past sins and failures quite differently to us! He is always interested in restoring us, renewing us and using us to show forth the power of His forgiveness, love and grace. Let us do likewise.

THE BONDAGE OF RELIGIOUS OATHS:

Verse 33: *“Again, you have heard that it has been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear (“to swear against or falsely”) thyself, but shalt perform (“to give away from one’s self, i.e. deliver over; spoken of obligation of any kind, to give in full, render, pay over or off” Bullinger’s) unto the Lord thine oaths (“the object by which one swears, the witness of an oath; to shut in, restrain, and so, strictly, it denotes, that which restrains from doing a thing”):*

Collins' Dictionary has this to say on the word "oath":

1. A solemn pronouncement to affirm the truth of a statement or to pledge a person to some course of action, often involving a sacred being or object as witness.
2. The form of such a pronouncement.
3. An irreverent or blasphemous expression, especially one involving the name of a deity; curse.

In this verse, Jesus was more than likely referring to Numbers 30:2, which tells us:

"If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

A "vow" is:

1. A solemn or earnest pledge or promise binding the person making it to perform a specified act or behave in a certain way.
2. A solemn promise made to a deity or saint, by which the promiser pledges himself to some future act, course of action, or way of life (Collins' Dictionary).

Verse 34: *"But I (Jesus) say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven* ("the overarching and all-embracing heaven beneath which is the earth and all that is therein"); *for it is God's throne* ("a seat, a throne as the emblem of regal authority");

Verse 35: *"Nor by the earth* ("land, ground as cultivated"); *for it is His footstool* ("footstool of the feet"); *neither by Jerusalem* (means "possession or dwelling of peace"); *for it is the city of the great King* (Psalm 48:1-2, Isaiah 66:1). "King" is "He who rules over the people, and is in possession of a dominion" (referring to God or Christ).

Verse 36: *"Neither shall you swear* ("to take or make an oath; declare with an oath, promise with an oath") *by your head* ("the head of man, the head or chief part of anything"), *because you cannot make one hair white or black."*

Jesus is teaching us not to be involved with making oaths and promises to others by using God, things of religious significance, etc., that we personally have no control over at all, as a means of persuading others that we will be true to our word. A Christian should not have to stoop to this religious bondage to convince others of our genuineness. We should always be honest, totally truthful and keepers of our word. It is part of the old religious order to say to people when making a promise: "God's honour." (How often do you hear people say that?)

The Bible has a lot to say about the keeping of vows, our word, etc. That is not wrong. It is wrong when we start making promises and using heaven, earth, etc., as a "guarantee" our word is sure.

Many Christians today have brought themselves into a self-inflicted bondage through the making of hasty and not-thought-out promises to God and others. For example the "bargaining with God" promise of, "Lord, if You will do this for me, then I'll do that for You." God does His part, then we back out on ours. (If we do it with God, how much more do we do it with our fellow man?).

In our previous lesson, we looked at the subject of divorce and remarriage. That only

comes about when people break their wedding vows to one another. Broken oaths, vows and promises always bring hurt and loss.

THE BREAKING OF OUR WORD:

When it happens continually we show ourselves to be unreliable and untrustworthy. A Christian must be a person of their word. Likewise we need to develop our word so that we shall not be uncertain, indecisive, and never able to make up our minds. What does Jesus say about this?

Verse 37: *“But let your communication* (“a word that is spoken”) *be Yea, yea* (Yes) or *Nay, nay* (No): *for whatsoever is more than these cometh* (“to be; begins to be”) *of evil* (“the Evil one, the active worker out of evil”).

Let’s be simple and decisive in our decision making. Give the devil **NO** room to move! If we have been guilty of breaking our oaths (foolish or otherwise), we need to ask God’s forgiveness. If possible, fulfil our obligation to those we have not as yet kept our word to. This will release us from the bondage of broken and unfulfilled promises. Be careful about entering into new ones.

VOWS TO GOD SHOULD BE KEPT:

“When you shall vow a vow unto the Lord thy God, thou shall not slack (“tarry, delay”) *to pay it: for the Lord thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin* (“error, failure, missing the mark”) *in thee. But if thou shall forbear* (“to cease, leave off”) *to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep* (“observe, take heed”) *and perform* (“to do”); *even a free will offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised* (“spoken”) *with thy mouth*”(Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

See also Ecclesiastes 5:1-6, Jonah 2:9, Psalm 61:5-8, Psalm 66:13-14, Psalm 116:14. From the above Scriptures we see that there is a place for vows, and vows are to be fulfilled.

KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING:

When making a vow, make sure you know what you’re doing. If it involves other people, talk it over with them first. We have no right to commit others to things without their knowledge and approval. I have seen the sad results of people who made unwise vows, the consequences of which have caused others to suffer as well.

In Judges 11:29-31 we read of Jephthah seemingly making a very spiritual vow to God. God did as Jephthah asked, but his vow was somewhat rash - *“whatsoever comes forth of the doors of my house to meet me . . . I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”* It sounds very right and good, but that which came forth from his door was his only daughter! The stupid man had not thought it through. Because of his own foolish word, he sacrificed his only daughter (Judges 11:32-40).

Absalom told lies about making vows when he set up a conspiracy against his father, King David (2 Samuel 15:7-8). He didn’t go far after that. When riding his mule under a great oak tree, he got strung up by the neck (bringing daylight between him and the saddle!) Joab and his men finished him off (2 Samuel 18:9-17).

John the Baptist lost his head because of the oath of King Herod - Matthew 14:6-10. Simon Peter made an oath denying he knew the Lord - Matthew 26:69-75, especially verse 72. He bitterly regretted it. Jesus forgave him.

SUMMING UP: It appears that the making of oaths was much more prevalent in the Old Testament than the New. Jesus in Matthew 5:33-37 teaches us that we can live by a clear "Yes" or "No," that we do not need to enter into such things. As far as living in the Kingdom is concerned, this is so. Praise the Lord! We all should be men and women of our word. Our word should be reliable and trustworthy. When it comes to living in the world, it is virtually impossible to get by without having to enter into oaths, contracts, promises, etc. especially where money is concerned. Even there we Christians should be most honourable and pay our dues.

At this point it would be good for you to consider other subjects that help us to keep our word - to God and others. Subjects like commitment, dedication, personal vision, etc. These all help to make us worthy of the Kingdom of God and to fulfil the promises we have made to Him and others that we are now born-again Christians in word and deed. Let your word be "Yea, yea" or "Nay, nay".

TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK:

Verse 38: *"You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:"* (Jesus quoting from Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21).

Verse 39: *"But I say unto you, that you resist* ("to stand against, to set one's self against, i.e. to withstand, oppose, resist, either in words, or deeds, or both" - Bullinger's) *not evil: but whosoever shall smite* ("to slap") *you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."*

In the Kingdom we do not retaliate against those who wrong us. We must be rid of the "get even" spirit, which is the cause of so much trouble in society today. It also causes a whole heap of inward emotional and spiritual problems as it plots and schemes its ways and means of getting back at the other person.

Let the Bible speak: *"Recompense* ("to give away from one's self, i.e. to deliver over, bestow, render, pay over, pay off") *to no man evil for evil"* (Romans 12:17).

"Abhor ("shrink from") *that which is evil"* (Romans 12:9).

"Dearly beloved, avenge ("revenge, punish, to give full justice") *NOT yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath* ("the native character, disposition, temper of mind, anger with the desire for revenge"): *for it is written, Vengeance* ("execution of right and justice, maintenance of right") *is Mine, I will repay* ("to give back"), *says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy* ("opponent, adversary") *hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome* ("to be victorious, come off victor, conquer") *evil with good"* (Romans 12:19-21).

In the Christian life there will always be people who try to take advantage of us, who seek to manipulate their will over our will, who say things to "put us down." The natural thing is to get back - "to fix them", but that is not the Jesus' way. Jesus taught us not to resist, but to turn the other cheek. This message is also contained in the Old Testament:-

“You shall not avenge, nor bear (“carry”) any grudge (“to keep anger”) against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18).

“Do not say, I will recompense (“to finish, complete”) evil; but WAIT on the Lord, and He shall save (“to save, give safety or ease”) you” (Proverbs 20:22).

“Say not, I will do so to him as he has done to me: I will render (“to cause to turn back”) to the man according to his work” (Proverbs 24:29).

The big “I” (“self”) has been nailed to the Cross with Jesus - leave big “I” there and let Jesus do the “fixing up” of those who trespass against us. The correct way to react was brought out earlier in this Kingdom Living series. See Matthew 5:10-12.

HOW TO REACT TO THOSE WHO “RUFFLE OUR FEATHERS”:

Jesus said:

“Don’t resist them” (Matthew 5:39).

“Turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39).

“Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19).

“If he’s hungry, feed him” (Romans 12:20).

“If he’s thirsty, give him a drink” (Romans 12:20).

“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully (“to use threats, threaten; to treat with insult”) use (“to injure, harass, incriminate”) you” (Matthew 5:44).

We are called to DO these things, not just talk about them. I have learned by experience that it is a very good thing to pray for those who talk and do nasty things against us. Put their name at the top of your prayer priorities and you will soon discover that a change takes place within your own heart towards the person(s) concerned.

Remember, two wrongs don’t make a right. (We reap what we sow!) Our reactions are just as important as our actions. “It is easier to fight for our principles than to live up to them.” Christian, we are called to live up to Kingdom principles more so than fighting for them. Simon Peter had to learn this lesson when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane (meaning “wine press and oil farm”) with Jesus.

See Matthew 26:47-56 and John 18:10. When the soldiers came with their swords to take Jesus, Peter retaliated by drawing his sword and cutting off an ear of the high priest’s servant. Jesus had to teach Peter by overruling him publicly: ***“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”*** Luke 22:50-51 tells us Jesus healed the man’s ear. Quite embarrassing for Peter; yet it most likely saved him his life, for the consequences would have gone hard against Peter. (How many times has Jesus saved us out of awkward situations?) Like Peter, we have to learn to put away our sword and let Jesus deal with the problem.

IF YOU WANT A HAPPY, GOOD LIFE . . .

Let's sum up this lesson by leaving with you 1 Peter 3:8-16 from The Living Bible:-

“And now this word to all of you: You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don't repay evil for evil, don't snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead, pray for God's help for them, for we are to be kind to others, and God will bless us for it. If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and guard your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Try to live in peace even if you must run after it to catch and hold it! For the Lord is watching His children, listening to their prayers; but the Lord's face is hard against those who do evil. Usually no one will hurt you for wanting to do good. But even if they should, you are to be envied, for God will reward you for it. Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord and if anybody asks why you believe as you do, be ready to tell him, and do it in a gentle and respectful way. Do what is right: then, if men speak against you, calling you evil names, they will become ashamed of themselves for falsely accusing you when you have only done what is good.”

How privileged we are to be in the Kingdom!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In what other ways, besides those mentioned in this lesson, can we defuse aggravated people that rise against us?
2. Can you tell of examples in your own life where you have defused a situation? (And what did you experience?)
3. Have you learnt from a time when you failed “to turn the other cheek?”

GOING THE SECOND MILE:

Verse 40: *“And if any man will sue (‘to institute legal proceedings against’) thee at the law (‘anything divided out, what one has in use or possession: hence, usage, custom, right, ordinance; law as prescribed by custom or statute; then, in a special sense, the laws of state and equity committed to writing ... the established name for law when set up in a state and recognised as a standard for the administration of justice’ - Bullinger's Lexicon), and take away thy coat (‘shirt, tunic, under garment’), let him have your cloak (‘outer garment’) also.”*

Here we have an interesting verse. Our first reaction is, “Why would anyone want, or need, to take a Christian to court?” Especially if we Christians are living right with God and man? If we are taken to court over debts and broken promises, then that is a very bad testimony against us. The law and its working does not understand the spiritual life of the believer and so will, more than likely, rule against us.

See Proverbs 25:8-10. This is what the Living Bible says: *“Don't be hot-headed and*

rush to court! You may start something you can't finish and go down before your neighbour in shameful defeat. So discuss the matter with him privately. Don't tell anyone else, lest he accuse you of slander and you can't withdraw what you said."

We touched on this matter earlier in this series - see Matthew 5:25. The message to Christians is clear: Keep out of lawsuits, and away from legal proceedings against fellow Christians! Live peaceably with all men as much as we possibly can (Romans 12:17-21).

In writing this, I am aware that we shall see in the days ahead more outward attacks upon Christians and Christianity in general. With so many humanistic laws being passed by governments around the world, Christian principles are being violated more and more. Already some Christians and Christian organisations are being taken to court over Christian education. In communist countries, thousands are imprisoned for teaching Christianity to their children, or possessing pages of Scriptures. Right now in New Zealand (other countries too) the battle is on over such areas as sex education, abortion, women's roles, church rights etc. It is possible that pastors will be sued for "restricting the rights of others" because we preach and uphold the Bible principles that sex is for marriage, homosexuality and abortion are wrong, the use of the rod of correction is the right way to train up a child, etc. *"In the last days perilous* ("hard, difficult, fierce") *times shall come . . ."* (see 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13; Romans 1:28-32).

Should this happen to any of us, what should our attitude be? Jesus said, if he takes your shirt off your back, give him your coat also! Don't get bitter and twisted - keep giving! *"It is more blessed to give . . ."* (Acts 20:35, Luke 6:38).

One final comment: It is not a good thing for Christians to be taken to court by non-Christians. It is an even worse thing for Christians to sue Christians in a court of law (1 Corinthians 6:1-3). (I have heard of this happening, e.g. churches suing churches over property rights). Something is definitely wrong when such things take place.

Verse 41: *"And whosoever shall compel* ("to despatch, as in public service") *you to go a mile* (1.60934 kilometres!) *go with him twain* ("two").

The Living Bible says: *If the military demand that you carry their gear for a mile, carry it two."*

The New English Bible says: *"If a man in authority makes you go one mile, go with him two."*

Jesus always expects extra of us - this way we glorify Him. We do it as unto Jesus, not because "we have to".

Although not always easy to do, we Christians must keep our eyes upon Jesus and His will for us, rather than on the prevailing circumstances about us. Our motivation must be love for Jesus, not reaction to worldly circumstances.

RESPONDING TO CRIES OF HELP:

Verse 42: *"Give* ("present, supply, give freely and unforced") *to him that asks* ("to entreat, beg, crave, supplicate; implies a distinction in position and circumstances between the parties, and expresses a petition from an inferior to a superior" - Bullinger's) *you, and from him that would borrow* ("to put out at usury") *of you turn not thou away."*

Those who "have" are to help those who "have not."

This is what the Amplified Bible says: *“Give to him who keeps on begging from you, and do not turn away from him who would borrow (at interest) from you”* (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

We do need to have wisdom in our giving and efforts to help others less fortunate than ourselves. If we just give “willy-nilly” to everyone who comes to us, we will soon be worse off than them (while they go and rip the next “sucker” off!).

The Bible shows us there are genuine cries for help that we need to respond to. Those who willingly offer to borrow properly from you (by paying interest rates) will more than likely be properly helped and brought to a place where they can help others. Whether you charge them interest rates or not is between you and your conscience. Others want “hand outs” without making the necessary adjustment to improve their lot in life - to give largely to them would be a waste of God’s resources that could be channelled more effectively elsewhere.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIAN BEGGARS?

More and more we Christians are being deluged with cries of help from Christian ministries and organisations. How are we to respond to them? In all our giving it is important that we have our priorities sorted out right before God. First and foremost, every Christian should seek to fulfil his obligation to God in the place where he or she worships. Without getting too far off our subject at hand, that obligation should be at least a tithe (“a tenth”) of our wages or income. Anything over a tenth then becomes a freewill offering to God and His work (Malachi 3:8-12, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

It is important to seek God’s guidance on who or what organisation we support, as some are not functioning in the will of God and therefore are not fulfilling anything of eternal value. Every Christian ministry needs to sincerely ask themselves this question: “Am I trusting a Faithful God, or am I trusting God’s faithful?”

Likewise, in our giving to whoever, we want to be led by the Holy Spirit so that He can work through our actions in helping others. As long as there are people on the face of this earth, there will always be the poor among us (John 12:8). And there will always, it seems, be Christian beggars appealing to us to support their cause. Much money given to “God’s work” is used very foolishly by well-meaning saints. One illustration I heard of recently brings this out:- “It is estimated that with all the Christian missions operating in Israel, it costs \$1,250,000.00 to win **one** Jew to Christ as compared to 20-25 cents to win **one** Asian to Christ.”

If we Christians are genuinely concerned at winning lost souls to Jesus Christ, then where should we be investing our finances? Certainly not in Israel! Surely this is “Missions Madness” to spend so much for so little return, especially when so many Christians believe that “all Israel will be saved” anyway! Incidentally, I believe we can win souls to Christ through “The Gospel Faith Messenger” Ministry for even less than 20-25 cents.

In closing, if you are in doubt as to who you should or should not help, you can always talk it over with your church leadership or House Group Leader. Kingdom living has abundant resources to be shared with others! (Philippians 4:19).

TRUE CHRISTIAN LOVE:

Verse 43: (Jesus speaking): *“You have heard (“been informed”) that it has been*

said, *You shall love your neighbour* (“one near, also a fellow-man, i.e. any other member of the human family”), *and hate* (“usually implying active ill-will in words and conduct, or a persecuting spirit”) *your enemy* (“adversary”).

Verse 44: *“BUT I say unto you, LOVE* (“love that is self-denying and compassionately devoted to its object. Love in its fullest conceivable form: towards God, the brethren and all”) *your enemies, bless* (“speak well of”) *them that curse* (“to wish or pray against anyone, i.e. to wish evil to, hence, to curse”) *you, do good* (“well, fairly, beautifully”) *to them that hate you, and pray* (“pray to God”) *for them which despitefully* (“to use threats, threaten, to treat with insult”) *use* (“to injure, harass, criminate”) *you, and persecute* (“to pursue with evil intent”) *you.”*

In these two verses, Jesus is putting the record straight. We no longer live by what others say (what we have heard) but by what He says. When it comes to reacting against those who hate and oppose us, this is what we are to do:-

1. **Love them:** Love brings God on the scene.
He is love (1 John 4:7-8).
The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22) but the work of the flesh is hatred (Galatians 5:19-20).
“Love covers a multitude of sins, whereas hatred stirs up strife” (Proverbs 10:12). 1 Peter 4:8.
2. **Bless them:** This means to speak well of them. Don’t allow them to rob you of a free heart and free spirit before God. Once we start reacting negatively to our opponents, they bring us down onto their level and the devil gains the victory.
3. **Do good to them:** Continue to do right in the eyes of God. Remember what the Word says in Romans 12:17-21 and *“overcome evil with good.”*
4. **Pray for them:** Lift them up to God. Let Him deal with them. Don’t forget He is most likely using our persecutors to refine us, to bring things to the surface in our lives so we can see them for what they are and deal with them. In praying for them we will also help ourselves to grow more in Jesus.

Earlier in this series we covered a section called “PERSECUTION PRIVILEGES” where we learned that Jesus told us it would happen. See Matthew 5:10-12. We are to react to persecution with happiness and rejoicing.

WHY ARE WE TO DO THE ABOVE THINGS?

Jesus tells us why:-

Verse 45: *“That you may be the children* (“sons”) *of your Father* (“spoken of God as Creator”) *which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sends rain on the just* (“fulfilling all claims which are right and becoming. A right state - of which God and His Word is the standard - so that no fault or defect can be charged; Conformity to God’s revealed will” - Bullinger’s) *and on the unjust* (“unrighteous, not as it should and ought to be”).”

God wants us to be seen by our actions that we are His children - sons and daughters

of the Living God. Here is the fulfilment of Matthew 5:9 - ***“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”***

God shows impartiality (“not prejudiced towards or against any particular side or party, fair, unbiased”) towards all people in His love and favour towards them. e.g. God so loves the world (not just you and me); He sends the sun and the rain upon all, (not just the Christians). Likewise He wants us to display His attributes in our lives by being free of hate, envy, enmity and evil in our actions. We are Kingdom lovers, living under the direction of our Great Head, **JESUS**. He loves **ALL!** What love! What impact!

Verse 46: *“For if you (only) love them which love you, what reward (“hire, wages, pay”) have you? Do not even the publicans (“a farmer of the taxes or customs. One who paid to the government a certain sum for the privilege of collecting the taxes and customs of a district; consequently the object of bitter hatred among the Jews” - Bullinger’s) the same?”*

Verse 47: *“And if you salute (“to draw to one’s self; hence to embrace, salute, greet”) your brethren (“friends”) only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?”* See also Luke 6:32-33.

How easy it is to be “natural” in this area of human relationships and just move in our own circle of friends. But the “spiritual” way is to love everyone sufficiently that they cannot take away from us our love for them.

“If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even scoundrels (“a worthless or villainous person”) do that much. If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen (“those outside the Kingdom who do not acknowledge the God of Christianity”) do that” (Matthew 5:46-47, The Living Bible).

We are called to be an example, to set the example and to show others (by our actions) the better way. We are called to be different. We are called to be seen as the children of God:

“That you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse (“twisted, distorted”) generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15, New American Standard Bible).

Compare this verse with Matthew 5:14-16 where Jesus told us we are the light of the world - NOW! ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER which is in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:16, KJV).

Our light shines the brightest when we react the Jesus’ way to those who are our enemies. Praise the Lord!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. From memory, what are the four things Jesus taught us to do to our enemies?
2. Can you recall examples in Scripture where Jesus demonstrated His love to those who opposed Him?
3. Can you tell of an example in your own life where you have made a good friend who, before, was an enemy?

4. In your own words, what does it mean to be a son or daughter of God?
5. Is there need for adjustment in your love to others?

REVISION OF MATTHEW 5:

Throughout this chapter of Matthew 5, we have been discovering afresh the tremendous truth from Jesus to us. Kingdom Living is positive, practical and powerful! Jesus has shown us the way of blessing, the importance of right attitude and motivation, how to act and react. He has taught us how to daily live to glorify Him, as well as to overcome in areas of life that can have far-reaching repercussions.

In the Kingdom we are (**NOW**) blessed, persecuted, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, under a better covenant, changed to live a new life style that can be free of adultery, divorce, religious oaths; enabled to turn the other cheek, give away extra when required, go the second mile, love our enemies and do good to all. Jesus said the reason for this is so we *“may be the children (“sons”) of our Father which is in heaven.”*

This means God is making us just like Jesus! **NOW!** We are not only His representatives here on earth - we are His sons and daughters. Family! What He is, and has, belongs to us. We are now joint-heirs (“receiving an inheritance; not one to whom an inheritance is allotted, because it is derived from the active; but he who has the inheritance, the stress being laid on the possession”) with Jesus Christ! (See Romans 8:14-17). Notice the present tense. Galatians 4:1-7.

BE YOU THEREFORE PERFECT:

We now come to the last verse of this chapter, which has been a cause of inner conflict in the lives of many because we always seem to come short of it.

Verse 48: *“Be you therefore* (“now, for the reasons stated before”) *perfect* (“what has reached its end term, or limit; hence, complete, perfect, full, wanting nothing, with special reference to the end for which it was intended” - Bullinger’s), *even as your Father* (spoken of God as Creator) *which is in heaven is perfect.”*

Being perfect! - the thought scares us. We all expect everyone else to be perfect - but us? We can’t do it. Not without Jesus we can’t. Throughout this whole chapter Jesus has been teaching us how to be perfect, complete, full, wanting nothing; He teaches us how to be mature, how to overcome those things that pull us down and rob us of the perfection that is rightfully ours **NOW** in Jesus Christ. **HE** is the Perfect and Perfected One . . . *“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished* (“made steadfast, confirmed”) *in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding* (“to be over and above, more than enough”) *therin with thanksgiving . . . For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. AND YOU ARE COMPLETE IN HIM, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also you are . . .”* (Colossians 2:6-15).

In Christ, how can we be anything less than what He says we are now? Going back to Matthew 5, if we fail to be “perfect” in the Bible sense of the word, it is because we have

failed to acknowledge and take heed to what Jesus has been saying throughout the whole chapter. Doing as Jesus tells us makes us perfect.

Notice in verse 48, the standard of perfection is *“even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”* It is not man’s standard of perfection, but God’s. We no longer should be subjected to man’s concepts, but to God’s. His way is right, better . . . perfect:- *“As for God, HIS WAY is perfect* (“plain, whole, complete, perfect”) *... It is God that girds me with strength, and makes MY WAY perfect”* (Psalm 18:30-32). (2 Samuel 22:31-33). Believe the Word of God!

“Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man..” (Job 8:20). (Job was a perfect man: Job Chapters 1 & 2. So also was Noah - Genesis 6:9). Now, in Christ Jesus, we are too. Praise the Lord!

THE NEW COVENANT REVELATION:

The New Covenant revelation is simply (but a very powerful fact) that Jesus Christ has come into the world to redeem us unto God and make us just like Himself. It is now *“CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY* (“real knowledge of a matter, revealed truth”): *Whom we preach* (“to put in mind, admonish, exhort”) *every man, and teaching* (“to teach, to give instruction or direction”), *warning every man in all wisdom* (“skill, a right application of knowledge; wisdom regarded as residing in the mind”); *THAT WE MAY PRESENT* (“to cause to stand beside or near, place near by, present, exhibit”) *EVERY MAN PERFECT* (same meaning as Matthew 5:48) *IN CHRIST JESUS: Whereunto* (“unto which”) *I also labour* (“to toil, to be weary, faint”), *striving* (“to contend, exert one’s self, strive very earnestly”) *according to His working* (“energy, power in action, effectual operation”), *which worketh in me mightily* (“with power”) (Colossians 1:27-29).

These three verses from Colossians One put Kingdom Living into a nutshell. They show the impact and effect of Christ within - the goal is always perfection (by God’s standards). There’s no other way. God in Christ, and Christ in us is a winning combination.

SOME SCRIPTURES ON PERFECTION to look at for meditation:-

1 Kings 8:56-61,
2 Chronicles 16:9
Romans 12:1-2,
2 Timothy 3:14-17
Hebrews 6:1,

1 Kings 15:9-14,
Psalm 101:2,6,
Colossians 4:12
2 Corinthians 13:9,
Hebrews 10:1-14.

1 Chronicles 28:9
Psalm 138:8,
James 1:4,
Colossians 3:14,

“The disciple (“a learner, pupil; more than this a follower, one who follows both the teacher and the teaching”) *is not above his Master: but every one that is perfect* (“to make fully ready, put in full order, perfectly equip, prepare fully”) *shall be as his Master”*(Luke 6:40).

The words “perfected, perfect, perfection” are used 68 times in the Old Testament, 56 times in the New Testament = 124 times in the Bible.

I trust this series of “Kingdom Living” from Matthew 5 has been a rich challenge and blessing to you. The teachings of Jesus in this series continue on through to the end of Matthew 7.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 6

Part 2

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us the necessity of practical living, showing us how to **do** that which pleases Him. Taking heed to what Jesus says to us in His Word means we have to apply ourselves through loving obedience, **NOW** - not just in the future. **Kingdom Living is NOW!** It is here! You can enjoy the outworking of it right now through living by what Jesus tells you. Kingdom Living is letting Jesus Christ live out His life in and through you by word and deed. Each day! Sunday to Saturday!

In Matthew Chapter 6 we are challenged by divine principles to live a life that shows forth the open blessing of God upon us. May you be open and willing to respond to whatever He tells you in the Word. Remember, Jesus began doing miracles after His mother, Mary, had told the servants, *"Whatever He (Jesus) says unto you, DO IT"* (John 2:5). Many years before Pharaoh said the same thing of Joseph when there was a great famine in the land - Genesis 41:55.

When the people obeyed they were fed. They lived instead of dying! Obeying Jesus gives us **LIFE** and not death! And Kingdom Living is the outworking of **living** in the Kingdom.

Let us now go through this chapter verse by verse and see what we can glean from it. This study is being presented basically from the King James Version of the Bible.

ACTS OF KINDNESS (or the spiritual art of giving):

Verse 1: *"Take heed* ("bring to or near; used of the mind, thought, or attention to a thing, be intent upon it") *that you do not your alms* ("kind acts, kindness, pity, compassion, a work of mercy, particularly almsgiving; alms or money given to the poor" - See Acts 9:36) *before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward* ("hire, wages, pay") *of your Father* ("spoken of God, as Creator, etc., and as distinguishing the first person of the ever-blessed Trinity") *which is in heaven*" ("the over arching and all embracing heaven, beneath which is the earth and all that is therein").

The Living Bible puts it this way: *"Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, for then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven."*

Verse 2: *"Therefore when you do your alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites* ("one who plays a part, an actor, a dissembler") *do in the synagogues* ("house of assembly, congregation") *and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily* ("truly, certainly, surely") *I say unto you, they have their reward."*

Verse 3: *"But when you doest alms, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing:"*

Verse 4: *"That your alms may be in secret* ("in the hidden or secret place"): *and your Father who sees in secret Himself* ("personally") *shall reward you openly* ("visibly, manifestly")".

In the above verses Jesus is teaching us how, or the way to giving. It is the first of three things in this chapter that Jesus tells us to do in secret and, when done in secret, will bring us an open reward from God.

NOT TO MEN, BUT TO GOD:

Jesus taught us to be careful that we are not caught up in public almsgiving; doing things in such a way as to gain the plaudits of men. The Christian Church has **lost** herself many blessings down through the years because of the way “needs” are appealed for publicly. In many ways, money (or the need for it) has become the motivating drive in church life. This is wrong.

Jesus is saying to us that there is greater blessing, honour and reward when we give secretly - after prayer, or when we are moved by compassion towards others.

If we give to impress others, Jesus said there is no reward from God. The motivation is wrong and the blessing is lost. In Kingdom Living we are vitally concerned with pleasing our King, and He tells us to do our giving in secret. It is between you and God.

THE WIDOW’S MITE:

In Mark’s Gospel Chapter 12:41-44 Jesus tells us of the many rich in their giving and of a poor widow. The rich cast in much. Then came this poor widow who gave two mites (the smallest Jewish coin) - a very small offering compared to the others. But Jesus, Who knows the hearts of all, drew His disciples attention to the widow’s gift. He said, *“Verily (‘truly, certainly, surely’) I say unto you, that this poor widow has cast more in than ALL the rest.”*

What did Jesus mean?

The New International Version states: *“But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny”* (Mark 12:24, NIV).

He knew the poor widow had given everything she had. The rich still had plenty in reserve. It didn’t hurt them to give what they gave. The widow woman gave all to God. Her material needs were greater than those of the rich, but she secretly gave to God, knowing that He knew her heart.

Human nature hasn’t changed today. Tragically men still use the church and giving to impress others, to find favour in the community. But there is no reward from God in that! That is not Kingdom Living.

In Matthew 6:3 Jesus shows us there is a glorious spontaneity of giving. Being open to Him we can be moved on to give at any time. No one else needs to know anything about it.

OTHER SCRIPTURES FOR DISCUSSION:

Acts Chapter 10: This Chapter tells of the exciting events that led up to the Gentile believers receiving the Holy Spirit. God used a man called Cornelius, a converted Roman centurion, to send for the Apostle Peter. Notice how God rewarded him openly for his

almsgiving: verse 1-4, 29-35, 44-48. Paul gave alms: Acts 24:17. Luke 6:38, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 11-12, 2 Corinthians 9:6-9; Proverbs 19:17, Galatians 6:7-10.

Let's finish this section on acts of kindness by letting the Word of God sum it up:-

***“And whatsoever you DO, DO it heartily* (“out of the whole man”), *as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward* (“a giving back again”) *of the inheritance* (“what is obtained by lot, possession”): *for you serve the Lord Christ*” (Colossians 3:23-24).**

And the Lord Himself will reward YOU openly! (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).

WHEN YOU PRAY:

We now come to a very important part of Kingdom Living - prayer. “Prayer” is “personal, spiritual communication” with the King of the Kingdom. At any time of the day or night we can have access and audience with our Almighty Lord. This communion of prayer is the very source of our vital and personal relationship with Jesus. The more we seek to get close to Him, the more we will come to know Him - and the more we know Him, the more we will be conscious of His guidance in our lives.

Let us look now at what Jesus has to say to us about prayer:-

Verse 5: ***“And when*** (referring to an oft-repeated or possible action in the present or future time) ***thou*** (“you”) ***prayest*** (to God), ***you shall not be as the hypocrites*** (“one who pretends to be what he is not”) ***are: for they love to pray*** (to God) ***standing in the synagogues*** (“house of assembly, a building for Jewish religious services and usually also for religious instruction”) ***and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily*** (“truly, certainly, surely”) ***I*** (Jesus) ***say unto you, They have their reward.”***

When you pray . . . notice these words are mentioned three times (verses 5,6,7). (Jesus did not say “If you pray” - He said “when”)!

When you pray - Jesus gives us instruction on how to pray. We can pray wrong or we can pray right. It is wrong to pray in such a way that we seek to impress others. That is hypocritical. Nobody enjoys hypocrites! Except other hypocrites!

All prayer is rewarded, but all prayer is not rewarded of God. Can you think of some prayers that God doesn't answer?

Verse 6: ***“But you, when you pray, enter into your closet*** (“any place of privacy”), ***and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret*** (“in the hidden or secret place” - see Psalm 91:1): ***and your Father who sees in secret shall reward*** (“to give in full”) ***you openly*** (“visibly, manifestly”).

“When you pray” . . . Here Jesus gives us one of the great keys to prayer, and how to live each day under the open blessing of God. The secret of prayer is praying in secret. It is communion between you and God alone. Jesus teaches us to find a secret place and shut the door behind us. God is found in the secret place. And might I also add, that we “find ourselves” when we take time with God in the secret place.

This verse is a major verse that all Christians need to get to grips with. For when we fulfil this in our own daily devotion to God, we discover something of the certainty of God to keep His Word to us. He does reward us openly when we seek Him secretly.

This verse is the second thing in this chapter that Jesus tells us to do in secret and, when done in secret, will bring us an open reward from God. Do you remember what the first thing was? (See verse 4). Can you think of some prayers that God does answer?

JESUS PRAYED ALONE:

“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day (long before daylight), He (Jesus) went out, and departed into a solitary (deserted) place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Isn't it amazing that even Jesus needed the secret place to spend time with His Father! And if Jesus needed to take time alone with Father, **how much more do we?**

In what way is this Scripture speaking to you? See also Mark 6:46-47, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12 and Luke 9:18.

When we take time to meditate on the importance of right praying, one thing rings out loud and clear: we just cannot afford **not** to make time to seek the Lord in the secret place. Beloved, let us pray! Does God answer **your** prayers?

PRAYER CHANGES ME!

One of the best things that has ever happened to me in recent years has been God's dealing with me over my prayer life. It never used to be given the priority that it does now. Since making the adjustments to revolve my life around that daily need to spend time with the Lord, I have seen Matthew 6:6 being fulfilled in many areas of my life. I share this as a testimony to encourage you and in no way to boast. Faith has revived, God's Word and Holy Spirit are exciting teachers to enable me to solve the many "problems" that face us in the ministry today. Jesus always has the answers! We just need to take sufficient time with Him to allow Him to share them with us. Then we know what to do, what has to be done. How wonderful is our Lord! And how real have the following Scripture experiences become to me:-

“The one thing I want from God, the thing I seek most of all, is the privilege of meditating in His Temple, living in His presence every day of my life, delighting in His incomparable perfections and glory. There I'll be when troubles come. He will hide me. He will set me on a high rock out of reach of all my enemies. Then I will bring him sacrifices and sing His praises with much joy. Listen to my pleading, Lord! Be merciful and send the help I need. My heart has heard You say, ‘Come and talk with Me, O My people.’ And my heart responds, ‘Lord I am coming’” (Psalm 27:4-8, TLB).

“As the heart pants and longs for the water brooks, so I pant and long for You, O God. My inner self thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Psalm 42:1-2, AMP). See also John 7:37; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)”

“O God, You are my God; earnestly will I seek You; my inner self thirsts for You, my flesh longs and is faint for You, in a dry and weary land, where no wa-

ter is;

So I have looked upon You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.

Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You.

So will I bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your Name” (Psalm 63:1-4, AMP).

“Whom have I in heaven but You? And I desire no one on earth as much as You! My health fails; my spirits droop, yet God remains! He is the strength of my heart; He is mine forever! But those refusing to worship God will perish, for He destroys those serving other gods. But as for me, I get as close to Him as I can! I have chosen Him and I will tell everyone about the wonderful ways He rescues me” (Psalm 73:25-28 TLB).

- Are you satisfied with your prayer life?
- How important is prayer to you?
- What must you do to improve your prayer life?

Beloved, let us pray!

DON'T BE A PARROT!

Verse 7: *“But when you pray, use not vain repetitions* (“to speak or use empty words”), *as the heathen* (“a person who does not acknowledge the God of Christianity”) *do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.”*

The Amplified Bible says this about the first part of the verse: *“And when you pray do not multiply words, repeating the same ones over and over, and heaping up phrases as the Gentiles do. . .”*

Jesus tells us that even the heathen pray! So it is not the fact that we pray that brings God’s answers to prayers, **but how** we pray **when** we pray. It is a waste of time to “parrot” prayers. Let us pray genuinely from our heart, totally honest with God. Let us communicate from our heart to His and then allow Him to communicate His heart to ours.

“Wait (“to wait, expect, look for, hope”) *upon the Lord . . .”*(Isaiah 40:31).

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew (“to change, pass on” - Young’s) *their strength* (“power”); *they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary* (“fatigued”); *and they shall walk, and not faint* (“to be weary”)” - Isaiah 40:31.

- You shall renew your strength (“power”).
- You shall run and not be weary.
- You shall walk and not faint.

OTHER SCRIPTURES FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION:

Jeremiah 29:11-14
John 14:13-14

Psalm 4:3
John 16:23-24

Psalm 34:17

When we pray, we pray to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ (John 15:16, Ephesians 5:20).

LEARNING HOW TO PRAY:

Prayer is one of the most important responsibilities we have in the Kingdom of God, yet it is often the most neglected. The Holy Spirit has called each “blood-washed saint” to a renewed commitment of prayer. It is in prayer where the real battle is won or lost. Therefore we need to learn and know how to pray effective prayers that will bring God’s answers.

Having found a place of prayer - the closet (verse 6) - it is important we do not “spoil” that precious time with Jesus by using “vain repetitions” (verse 7). Let Jesus Himself speak:-

Verse 8: *“Be not ye therefore like unto them (the heathen): for your Father knoweth (“has seen”) what things you have need of, before you ask (“to entreat, beg, crave, supplicate - from an inferior (us) to a superior (God)”) Him.”*

Because God knows us and our needs, we can be confident to share with Him what we really desire. We don’t have to bother Him with prayers we’ve read or learned. Be genuine. Tell Him like it is!

He knows what is there in your heart even before you tell Him. He is God! Sometimes He even answers before we pray (Isaiah 65:24).

You may ask: “If God already knows **before** I pray, why bother ask Him?” God wants to show us He answers the cry of our heart, besides He has so many things to teach **us when we pray**. Prayer is more than asking and receiving. It is “personal, spiritual communication” with the King of the Kingdom. He likewise wants to talk to us; to direct our pathway in life so that we will know the joy of living in the centre of His will.

PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE:

Let’s digress at this point from Matthew 6 and turn over to Luke 18:1-8 where Jesus made this amazing statement:-

“. . . that men ought always to pray (“to speak out, utter aloud; to pray, wish strongly to God”), and not to faint” (“to lose one’s courage, cave-in”). He then gives us the example of a widow woman who had been treated unjustly. She refused to give in, to be defeated. She stood up for her rights and kept going to the one who had the power to solve the problem for her. At first there was no response, but then the judge changed his mind saying *“lest by her continual coming she weary me.”*

Here Jesus is teaching us a principle of prayer. It is a “continual (“unceasing unto the

end”) coming to the throne of grace; a “crying day and night unto Him.” Just because prayer is not answered quickly every time, it does not necessarily mean that it is not God’s will to answer. We must learn to be persistent in prayer. Keep praying! Keep believing! The answer is on the way.

One time Daniel had his prayers “delayed” for 21 days owing to enemy attacks against Michael the warring angel. Michael was on his way to answer Daniel’s prayers when he came under attack of the spiritual opposition (See Daniel 10:10-14). His prayers were heard from the first day he prayed - and the answer sent - but hindrances were encountered on the way.

Be like that widow woman - *“always pray and not faint.”* Keep the matter before God until **you know you have** the answer from Him. Praise the Lord!

When we continually come to Jesus with prayers from our heart of hearts, He promises to *“avenge* (“to do full justice”) *us speedily*” (Luke 18:8). This “continual coming” to Jesus also demonstrates an action of faith. We pray to God because we have faith in His Word and what it says. Prayer strengthens our faith.

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN:

If we read on in Luke 18:9-14 we see Jesus giving us an example of two kinds of prayer. Two men went to pray. The first was a Pharisee (means “separate”; the Pharisees were the largest of the Jewish sects and were noted for their self conceit and long prayers. They tithed, fasted often and held to traditions). He was so religiously caught-up with himself that his prayers really only went to himself (verse 11). Five times in his short recorded prayer the word “I” is mentioned. He was full of himself! He needed prayer!

The other man was a publican (“a farmer of the taxes or customs. One who paid to the government a certain sum for the privilege of collecting the taxes and customs of a district; consequently the object of bitter hatred among the Jews”). While the Pharisee went up close to the altar in the temple and prayed, the publican stood back, knowing his own unworthiness. He just smote his breast and said, *“God be merciful to me a sinner.”*

Jesus commended the publican’s prayer. His attitude was right. He was being totally honest with God (and himself). There was no big “I” in his prayer; only *“God be merciful to me.”*

PRAY AFTER THIS MANNER:

Let’s turn back to Matthew 6 again:-

Verse 9: *“After this manner* (“on this wise, accordingly, i.e. so, thus”) *therefore* (“then”) *pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed* (“holy, sanctified”) *be Thy name* (“that by which one is known”).

Verse 10: *“Thy Kingdom* (“the royal dominion, including the power and form of government, with the territory and the Kingdom”) *come. Thy will* (“wish, desire”) *be done in*

earth, as it is in heaven.”

Verses 9 and 10 are the start of what is known as “The Lord’s Prayer”. Some say it is “The Disciples’ Prayer” because it is an example of how Jesus wanted us to pray. Whatever one wants to call it, let it not become a “Parrot’s Prayer” which I’m afraid it has to so many.

These two verses show us that in the commencing of prayer we need to **first of all honour God. Give Him His rightful place. Exalt Him. Hallow Him.** Remember we are coming into audience with the King of the Kingdom - His Majesty.

Then we submit ourselves to His will. Let us desire that His will be **done in us** before others.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is repetitious prayer to you?
2. What is not repetitious prayer to you?
3. What have you learned from the widow woman’s example?
4. Do you think we must guard against becoming a Pharisee in our praying?
5. What do you say to God when you commence your prayers?

In our study of prayer so far in this chapter we have discovered some of the things Jesus has taught us on this very important matter. We certainly need to pray. Jesus said:-

- Do not pray like the hypocrites - to be seen of men;
- But enter into your closet (“place of privacy”) and pray in secret to God;
- Do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do;
- But know that God knows your needs even before you ask Him.

Therefore pray after this manner:-

“Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed by Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven . . .” (See Matthew 6:5-10).

GIVE US:

Verse 11: *“Give* (“to give, present freely, to yield, deliver, supply, commit”) *us this day* (“today”) *our daily bread* (“a loaf”).

We now come to that part of prayer where Jesus instructs us to pray for ourselves and our own needs. Prayer is not all praying for other people. We must learn to effectively pray for ourselves and see God answer those prayers we pray for our own personal needs. It is God’s will to provide us with daily food to keep our bodies healthy and strong.

Jacob:

In Genesis 28:10-22, Jacob has an encounter with God. There God promised Jacob: *“And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land . . .”* (verse 15).

Jacob’s response was: *“If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God . . .”* (verse 20-21).

To fulfil the promises of God in our lives, we must have bread for the natural body. God wants to supply us.

Elijah:

Elijah was a mighty man of God and accomplished great things. Yet the Bible tells us in James 5:17 - *“Elias (Elijah) was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly . . .”*

The Amplified Bible says it this way: *“Elijah was a human being with a nature such as we have - with feelings, affections and constitution as ourselves . . .”*

Was God interested in feeding Elijah? Of course He was. In 1 Kings 17 we read twice of God feeding Elijah miraculously. The first time (verse 4-6) God told Elijah He had commanded the ravens to feed him by the brook Cherith - *“and the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening.”*

The second time was when Elijah was told by God to go to Zarephath (“place of refining”): *“Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain (‘to provide for or give support to, especially by supplying necessities’) you”* (Verse 9).

When Elijah found the widow woman, she and her son were almost dead from starvation! Elijah commanded her to make him a cake first with the last lot of meal and oil. The result would be a miracle provision of food from God day by day. That is exactly what happened (verse 11-16). God supplied daily food. Psalm 103:1-5 tells us of the wonderful provision of God to us. Part of that provision is *“He satisfies our mouth with good things.”*

Psalm 147:9 tells us *“He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.”* How much more does He want to supply for you? See Matthew 6:31-34.

God knows our need of food - He supplies what we need, not what we want. Proverbs 30:8-9 says: *“. . . feed me with food convenient (‘suitable for one’s purpose or needs, an apportioned thing’) for me: Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”* (See also Philippians 4:11-19).

Can you tell of God supplying you with food in answer to prayer?

AND FORGIVE US:

Verse 12: *“And forgive (‘to send away, pardon, dismiss, set free; where the guilty person is dealt with as if he were innocent’ - Bullinger’s) us our debts (‘that which we owe,*

such as money, goods or services; an obligation to pay or perform something; liability”), *as we forgive our debtors.*”

Here Jesus teaches us to pray through on a divine principle. He wants us to know in all reality that we only receive as much forgiveness from God as we are prepared to give to those who owe us something. Do you battle with unforgiveness? Is there someone in your Fellowship you find difficult to forgive because they have done something to hurt you? How can we be released from the snare of unforgiveness?

Let’s answer these questions by asking some more questions. Have we ever hurt Jesus? Yes, we all have. But, when we come to Him and ask Him to forgive us, does He do it? Yes, He does! What does that forgiveness from Jesus do to us? It releases us into new-found freedom. Especially when we also forgive ourselves for that which we have trespassed against Him! (That is very important).

Now, as Christians in the Kingdom of God, Jesus wants the same principles of forgiveness that we enjoy with Him to work between us and every other person. **We cannot afford to hold grudges and unforgiveness against our brothers and sisters!** Everyone of us from time to time are going to offend or upset someone else (either knowingly or unknowingly). Therefore the act of forgiveness must be continually working in our heart. Pray! Pray forgiveness! Then act on it - forgive those who are indebted to you. If we cannot forgive others, then God cannot answer our prayers.

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus told us that it is more important to be reconciled (“to change one’s own feelings towards another, so that he changes his; to be reconciled to each other; to become friendly with someone after estrangement; to settle a quarrel or a difference”) to our brother than it is to give gifts upon God’s altar. One of the main gifts we have to give to God at His altar is the gift of ourselves and the gift of our time of prayer. Both of these gifts cannot be fully acceptable to God when we know we are not right with our brothers and sisters. We must first **FORGIVE** and then come to God’s altar with our gifts.

Notice from Matthew 6:12 that we only have as much forgiveness from God for **our** debts as we have forgiveness for those who owe us debts. This verse is written in such a way as to say, “Lord, I have now forgiven those who are indebted to me, and according to the promise of Your Word, I now come to receive Your forgiveness for my debts against You.” A fulfilment of Matthew 5:23-24. Praise the Lord!

True prayer involves forgiveness; otherwise the spirit of unforgiveness will hinder God from answering our prayers.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why do you think people struggle with unforgiveness?
2. What does a forgiving person reveal to you (in character, grace, personality, friendship, etc.)?
3. Why does God place such an importance on our forgiving others?
4. If you know someone has something against you, what should you do about it?

The subject of forgiveness and unforgiveness will be continued a little further on in this Kingdom Living series.

CONCLUDING THE LORD'S PRAYER:

In the Lord's prayer we have discovered a pattern that we can pray after. I think it is good to build our prayers around a certain structure (with flexibilities of course) to help us spend effective prayer time with God. The pattern or structure here is:

1. Acknowledging God as our Father.
2. The Holiness of His Name.
3. Praying in the Kingdom lifestyle.
4. Praying God's will to be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Then a change from God's needs to our needs:

5. Give us this day our daily bread.
6. Grant us forgiveness according to how we forgive others.
7. Lead us not into temptation.
8. Deliver us from evil (there is a tendency towards evil when we do not walk close to God). Again the prayer changes and finishes up with . . .
9. Confidence in knowing that our Lord is over everything.
10. Has all power and glory.
11. For ever! Amen!

Therefore we can trust Him to answer our prayers when we ask in Jesus' name to do according to that which He has taught us. Our Eternal Lord watches over His Word to perform it. And when we pray according to His Word, He will answer us.

The Apostle John puts it this way: *"And this is the confidence* ("boldness, openness, frankness") *that we have in Him, that, if we ask* ("to entreat, beg, crave") *anything according to His will, He hears us: And if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions* ("thing asked for, object sought") *that we desired* ("to ask for something, require, demand") *of Him"* (1 John 5:14-15).

Let us return to Matthew 6:

Verse 13: *"And lead us not into temptation* ("to attempt to persuade or entice to do something, especially something morally wrong or unwise; to allure, invite or attract") *but deliver* ("to draw or snatch to one's self; to draw or snatch from danger, to rescue, deliver") *us from evil* ("the Evil one, the active worker out of evil"): *For Yours is the Kingdom* ("the Kingdom of the heavens, as being the development of God's purpose. The Kingdom introduced by the Messiah"), *and the power* ("capability of anything, ability to perform anything; not merely power capable of action, but, power in action. The Power of God"), *and the glory* ("splendour, brilliance, glory; all that God is for us for our good, the fullness of all that is good in Him), *for ever. Amen* ("so be it!").

TEMPTATION:

Jesus specifically reminds us to pray that **we** do not get led into temptation. The fall of the human race came about as a result of Eve being tempted by the serpent and giving

in to his lies (Genesis 3:1-7). What serious consequences have come upon us because of that!

(See my Book on “The Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil and The Tree of Life”.)

Even **Jesus** was tempted by the devil to get outside of the will of God (Matthew 4:1, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2). The religious leaders of His day were always trying to tempt Jesus (Matthew 16:1, 19:3, 22:18, 35, Mark 18:11, 10:2, 12:15, Luke 10:25, 11:16, 20:23, John 8:6). No wonder Jesus told us to *“watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation . . .”* (Matthew 26:41, Mark 14:38, Luke 22:40, 46). People backslide because of temptation (Luke 8:13, 1 Thessalonians 3:5).

GOD DOES NOT TEMPT THE CHRISTIAN TO DO WRONG:

“Blessed (“happy”) is the man that endures (“to keep one’s ground, hold out, to remain behind after others have gone”) temptation: for when he is tried (“a proving, testing, as metals by fire”), he shall receive the crown (“that worn by victors”) of life (“activity”), which the Lord has promised to them that love Him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust (“over desire; It is used exclusively of sinful desire, which corresponds to man’s depraved nature. The inward passion of concupiscence, which is strong desire, especially sexual desire”), and enticed” (“to catch by using a bait”). (James 1:12-14).

Jesus wants to help us through our temptations: Look up and discuss the following Scriptures:- Hebrews 2 :18, 2 Peter 2:9, Revelation 3:10, 1 Corinthians 10:9-13.

Areas to avoid temptation:

- We should avoid chasing riches and the love of money (1 Timothy 6:9-10).
- Husbands and wives should not deprive one another (1 Corinthians 7:5).
- Above all, we must not tempt God by continued wrong living (Hebrews 3:7-14, Matthew 4:7, Luke 4:12).

The Christian faces many temptations:- James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:6.

Yet in spite of the many temptations we face we can look to Jesus Who has conquered over all, and He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities (“weaknesses”). Jesus was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (See Hebrews 4:14-16).

DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE:

By now all Christians living in the Kingdom will have discovered that it is not all that easy following Jesus. There is opposition from within and without. We have an enemy whose name is Satan, the devil, the evil one. If we do not live close to Jesus he will tempt us to get caught up with other things that will render us ineffective in our Christian witness. Jesus told us to pray that we be delivered from the Evil One!

Satan is the accuser (“to speak down, a slanderer, an adversary”) of the brethren (Revelation 12:10-11).

Satan is a deceiver (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

Satan is an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Satan causes disciples to sin when we are not on guard, or ignorant:

- Peter (Matthew 16:21-23).
- Judas (Luke 22:3).
- Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:3).
- All unforgiving Christians (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).
- Young widows are a target for Satan (1 Timothy 5:11-15).

Satan places sickness upon people:

- spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:11-17, 4:32-41).
- lunatics, palsy, all manner of diseases (Matthew 4:23-24)
- fever (Matthew 8:14-17)
- dumbness (Matthew 9:32-33)
- blindness (Matthew 12:22), to name a few.

Yes, we do need to continually **pray** that God will deliver us from the Evil One!

THE KINGDOM IS GOD’S, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER, AMEN!

Praise God, we are not left with a negative ending to this prayer. We are victors in Christ because He has already triumphed over the enemy. That victory is only maintained as we continue to ABIDE (“to remain, dwell”) in **CHRIST**. We have come into the most powerful, most glorious and eternal Kingdom that can ever be, whose King and Leader is our All to us. He answers us. He grants the petitions we ask according to His will. His spirit indwells us and enables us to communicate and speak mysteries unto God when we pray (1 Corinthians 14:2, Romans 8:26-28).

Our God has equipped us to **PRAY!** To **PRAY TO HIM** and to take time to sit at His feet and commune with Him. Oh how He loves us! How He loves to have audience with us. It is worth the fight against temptation and the Evil One to be able to share our life with the King of the Kingdom. Don’t be discouraged! Don’t let Satan rob you of the unsearchable riches of Christ! Don’t let sin drag you down! Find the secret place of prayer with the Lord, so He can pour out upon you His open reward.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are some ways you’ve discovered to make a prayer time more effective?
2. When you are being tempted, what are some things you can do to

- help resist temptation?
3. What have you learned from the times you gave into temptation?
 4. What have you learned when you have been able to resist temptation?
 5. What temptations are the worst ones for Christians in this generation?
 6. How real is Satan to you?
 7. If Satan came to you as an angel of light, how would you be able to tell whether it was him or not?
 8. Because of Who our Lord is, we can have great confidence in Him. How does this confidence affect your Christian life?

SUPPLEMENT TO THE "KINGDOM LIVING" SERIES

Part two, Matthew Chapter 6

The following are some Scriptural names and references to our enemy Satan, the Evil One. Knowing who he is and what he seeks to do to us helps us to realise that we need to keep praying, *"Deliver us from evil."*

Before his fall, he was called **LUCIFER, SON OF THE MORNING** (Isaiah 14:12) - terms that describe his brightness and shining appearance. Ezekiel 28:14 calls him the **ANOINTED CHERUB**.

Since his fall, the following names apply: They are names that clearly highlight his depravity and evil purposes.

ABADDON or **APOLLYON** - Destroyer. Revelation 9:11.
ACCUSER - Revelation 12:10.
ADVERSARY - 1 Peter 5:8
ANGEL OF LIGHT - 2 Corinthians 11:14.
ANGEL OF THE ABYSS - (or "bottomless pit") - Revelation 9:11.
ANTICHRIST - 1 John 4:1-4, 2 John 7.
BEELZEBUL - (also known as **BEELZEBUB**) - "Lord of the flies"
 - a dung god of the Ekronites. Matthew 12:24, 27.
BELIAL - Worthless, perverse. 2 Corinthians 6:15.
CONDEMNER - 1 Timothy 3:6.
DECEIVER - Revelation 12:9, 2 Corinthians 11:3.
DEVIL - Accuser, slanderer. Matthew 4:1, John 8:44.
DRAGON - Revelation 12:3-17.
ENEMY - Matthew 13:39.
EVIL ONE - (or "Wicked One") - Matthew 13:19.
GOD OF THIS WORLD - 2 Corinthians 4:4.
KING - Revelation 9:11.
LIAR - John 8:44.
MURDERER - Destroyer of life. John 8:44.

OPPRESSOR - One who has dominion over. Acts 10:38.

PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR - Ephesians 2:2.

ROARING LION - 1 Peter 5:8.

RULER OF THE DEMONS - Matthew 12:24.

RULER OF THE WORLD - John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

SATAN - Adversary (“one who is hostile, opposing, against”). Matthew 4:10, Zechariah 3:1.

SERPENT - A snake. Genesis 3:1, Revelation 12:9, Revelation 2:13.

TEMPTER - Matthew 4:3.

THIEF - John 10:10.

TRAPPER - (or “Fowler”) - Psalm 91:3.

FORGIVENESS:

One of the important things for us to remember as we go through this “Kingdom Living” series is that Jesus is the One Who is speaking and who is teaching us the way He wants us to live. When we obey Him we find that He is right; life goes so much better and our relationships with others come into “divine order.”

In this section we are looking at a very important subject - that of forgiveness and unforgiveness. Nothing affects our prayer life more than unforgiveness!

Verse 14: *“For if (making what is to follow conditional) you forgive (“to cease to blame or hold resentment against; to grant pardon for a mistake or wrong-doing; to free or pardon someone from penalty” - Collins’) men their trespasses (“a falling aside from right truth or duty, lapse,” - Bullinger’s); (“ being let down”) your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.”*

God’s blessing to us is directly gauged by our ability to forgive others. So many have a battle with forgiveness because they have (in some cases) been deeply hurt by other people.

Mark’s account of this statement links forgiveness directly with our prayer life:-

“And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought (“anything”) against any: that your Father also which is in Heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

(Mark 11:25).

To get ahead with God we must learn to forgive people.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE FORGIVE?

Perhaps you would like to discuss this question before going on any further. It is an important question because we feel justified in “letting people go” or “cutting them off” when they continually trespass against us. Is there a limit? What does Jesus say about this? Please turn to Matthew 18:21-35 where Peter was running a little low on patience, so he asked Jesus: *“Lord, how often shall my brother (a fellow Christian) sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? (I wonder if Peter thought he was being very generous by stating seven times?)*

“Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven (70 x 7)!”

Christianity is a life of continual forgiving - not a keeping of the record to excuse ourselves putting up with others' behaviour!

In reading on through Matthew 18:23-35 we discover how even those who have been forgiven much by God and others, can turn around and punish others who owe them something. One man owed the king ten thousand talents (about 10 million dollars - Amplified Bible). The king has mercy on him and forgave him the entire debt. Yet the same man, who had just been forgiven so much, went out and demanded from a fellow servant who owed him an hundred pence (about \$20 - Amplified Bible) to pay him back fully there and then. He even *"laid hands on him, and took him by the throat."* In his demanding he physically assaulted his fellow servant.

The fellow servant did exactly what the other man had done before the king - but there was no mercy and no forgiveness shown. For a \$20 debt the fellow servant was thrown into prison.

The king got to hear about this wicked, unforgiving action and summoned the man who had been forgiven the 10 million dollar debt. The king **reversed** his decision - the **forgiveness was taken away**, the 10 million dollar debt **returned** and, on top of that, the servant was thrown into the hands of the **prison torturers** and jail until he could repay his massive debt.

Jesus, in summing up this passage of Scripture, said:

"So likewise shall My Heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35).

In short, none of us can afford not to forgive!

Joseph forgave his brethren:

In Genesis Chapters 37-50 we read the beautiful story of the life of Joseph. Because Joseph was blessed of God his brethren grew jealous of him and hated him. Joseph was sold to strangers, eventually ending up in a high position in Egypt. Famine forced Joseph's brethren down to Egypt to buy food and the second time Joseph was made known to them. This greatly troubled them, for they thought they had got away with their sin against God, Joseph and Joseph's father. In Genesis 50:15-21, Joseph's brethren who trespassed asked forgiveness of Joseph and Joseph freely forgave them. You and I **can forgive** those who trespass against us - we can forgive them in Jesus' name. And when we do, our Heavenly Father also forgives us. Hallelujah!

UNFORGIVENESS:

Verse 15: ***"But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither ("definitely will not") will your Father forgive your trespasses."***

Unforgiveness brings a direct blockage between us and God (as well as other people). It robs us of the blessings of God and can open us up to sickness and even allow Satan to get an advantage ("to have more or a greater share than others; to make a prey of, to defraud; to let the enemy get the better of us" - Bullinger's) of us (see 2 Corinthians 2:9-11). Satan will always capitalize upon unforgiveness, because unforgiveness ties the

hands of God in our life. The world today is full of bitter, hurting, sick people because of unforgiveness. Christian, even “the thoughts of our heart” need to be forgiven (Acts 8:22). God requires a total genuineness from us in our forgiving.

WHAT THE APOSTLE PAUL SAYS TO CHRISTIANS:

“Let no corrupt (“bad, rotten, putrid”) communication (“word spoken”) proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying (“building up”), that it may minister grace (“graciousness”) unto the hearers. And grieve (“to afflict”) not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed (“marked”) unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness (“sharpness, sarcasm”) and wrath (“the mind, the spirit that is breathed out, an intense passion of the mind; angry, violent, or stern indignation”) and anger (“anger with the desire of revenge, to kill”) and clamour (“a crying out, screaming, shouting”), and evil speaking (“injurious speaking, to blaspheme, slander, revile, defame”) be put away from you, with all malice (“badness including every form of evil both physical and moral”): And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted (“compassionate, merciful, tenderly affectionate”), FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven YOU.”(Ephesians 4:29-32).

If Paul had to write these words to people as spiritual as the Ephesian Church, how much more should we understand when it happens from others to us, and us to others. **BE FORGIVING CONTINUALLY!**

“Forbearing (“to hold one’s self upright, to endure; then, to bear with”) one another, and FORGIVING one another, if any man have a quarrel (“complaint, fault, blame”) against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you . . .”
(See Colossians 3 :12-17).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What does forgiving mean?
2. Why do people struggle with forgiveness?
3. What does forgiveness do to us?
4. What does it mean to forgive seventy times seven?
5. How does Satan get an advantage over us?
6. Do you think the Apostle Paul was mistaken when writing to Christians in Ephesians 4:29-32?

So far in Matthew Chapter 6, we have discovered two principles which are very important to Kingdom Living. They are: (1) Almsdeeds or giving, and (2) A consistent prayer life. In both of these we are instructed to fulfil them in secret. Our Heavenly Father has promised to reward us openly.

In this lesson we look at a third principle that is to be done in secret, yet carries the personal promise of Jesus that it will bring open reward.

FASTING:

Verse 16: *“Moreover when (referring to an oft-repeated or possible action in the present or future time - see usage of word “when” in verses 2,3,5,6 (twice), 7, 16,17) you fast (“to abstain from eating”), be not, as the hypocrites (“someone who pretends to be what he or she is not”), of a sad countenance (“of a gloomy, sorrowful, even a scowling face”): for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily (“truly, certainly”) I say unto you, they have their reward.”*

Verse 17: *“But you, when you fast, anoint (“to anoint with oil, indicating health”) your head, and wash your face;”*

Verse 18: *“That you appear not unto men to fast, but unto your Father which is in secret: and your Father, which sees in secret, shall reward you openly.”*

Here are these verses from the Living Bible: *“And now about fasting. When you fast, declining your food for a spiritual purpose, don’t do it publicly, as the hypocrites do, who try to look wan (“unnaturally pale, suggestive of ill-health or unhappiness” - Collins’) and dishevelled (“untidy, unkempt appearance”) so people will feel sorry for them. Truly that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, put on festive clothing, so that no one will suspect you are hungry, except your Father who knows every secret. And He will reward you.”*

THE PURPOSE OF FASTING:

Whenever this subject is raised there is inevitably a voice of protest? Why? Because it is self-denial; it is bringing the “old man” into subjection to the spiritual. But it is also a means (in God) of causing greater things to happen than the normal day-to-day accomplishments we attain as Christians. So, then, we need to know the Scriptural purpose of fasting - the reason why we should have times of abstaining from food in order to please God.

Isaiah 58 is a tremendous chapter that sets out wrong (verses 1-5) and right (verses 6-14) fasting. We don’t fast to get our way! We fast that God’s will might be done - in and through us! *“Is not this the fast that I have chosen, says God? . . .”*

1. *“To loose the bands (“pains”) of wickedness (“wrong”);*
2. *To undo (“to move, loose, shake off”) the heavy burdens;*
3. *To let the oppressed (“broken, bruised”) go free;*
4. *That you break (“to draw asunder”) every yoke (“an immense oppressive force or burden”);*
5. *To deal (“divide”) your bread to the hungry (“famished”),*
6. *That you bring the poor (“needy, those in poverty”) that are cast out to your house;*
7. *That you cover (“clothe”) the naked;*
8. *That you hide not yourself from (the needs of) your own flesh and blood (AMP.); (Isaiah 58:6-7).*

In the light of what the Scriptures have to say above, answer these questions:-

- a. Does the church need to fast more?
- b. Do I need to fast more?

Isaiah 58 does not stop at verse 7 on the subject of fasting. It goes on to give specific promises to those who will give time to fasting and to fulfilling the above eight points.

When we fast secretly unto God to see His will and glory revealed in the lives of others, God promises us:-

1. Then **our light** shall break forth as the morning;
2. Then **our health** shall spring forth speedily;
3. Then **our righteousness** shall go before us;
4. Then the glory of the Lord shall be our reward (“gathered unto us”)
5. Then when **we call** on the Lord and cry unto Him; He answers us and makes us know He is with us (Isaiah 58:8-9).

When we draw out **our souls** to the hungry to satisfy them:-

6. Then shall **our light** rise in the darkness, and **our darkness** shall be as the noon day (very bright);
7. Then the Lord shall **guide us continually**;
8. The Lord shall **satisfy our soul** in drought;
9. The Lord shall make **fat** (“to arm”) **our bones**;
10. We shall be like a watered (“full, satiated”) garden;
11. We shall be springs of water, whose waters fail not (Isaiah 58:10-11).

The chapter does not finish there either. It continues to give tremendous promises to those who will fast:- ***“And they that shall be of you shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called, the repairer of the breach*** (“a crack, break or rupture”), ***the restorer*** (“to return something to an original or former condition, to bring back to health” - Collins’) ***of paths to dwell in.”*** (Isaiah 58:12). In honouring God; in doing His ways; in delighting ourselves in the Lord, **God will cause us** to ride upon the high places of the earth and, as the Living Bible says, ***“Get your full share of the blessings I promised to Jacob your father.” The Lord has spoken.*** (Isaiah 58:13-14).

If nothing more is mentioned in all Scripture about fasting, Matthew 6 and Isaiah 58 would still give us sufficient reason to seriously tackle the principle of fasting. But the Bible has a lot more to say on fasting.

HOW LONG SHOULD WE FAST?

The Bible reveals there can be fasts from one day to 40 days (much wisdom is required for longer than 3 day fasts):-

- **One day** - Judges 20:36, 1 Samuel 7:6, 2 Samuel 1:12, 2 Chronicles 20:3-4, 16.
- **The Fasting Day** - Jeremiah 36:6, Joel 1:14 and 2:12,15, Zechariah 8:19.

- **Three Days** - Esther 4:15-17, Acts 9:8-9.
- **Seven Days** - 1 Samuel 31:13, 2 Samuel 12:16-23.
- **14 days** - Acts 27:33.
- **21 days** - Daniel 10:2-3.
- **40 days** - Exodus 34:28 (Moses), 1 Kings 19:6-8 (Elijah), Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:2 (Jesus).
- **Regular fasting** - 2 Corinthians 6:5, 11:27, 1 Corinthians 7:5, Luke 2:37, 5:33-35, Psalm 109:24.

OTHER REASONS FOR FASTING:

- To know the right way to go, for help and victory - Ezra 8:21-23, Acts 13:1-4.
- When God's people are in sin, bondage and defeat - Nehemiah 1:3-5, Esther 4, Daniel 9:2-6, Ezra 10:6.
- To humble our soul - Psalm 35:13, Psalm 69:10.
- To help us rise above unbelief - Matthew 17:19-21.
- To give us more power over Satanic forces - Matthew 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29.
- In choosing church leadership positions - Acts 13:1-4, Acts 14:23.

During a time of fasting we need to make the best possible use of it by seeking to spend extra time in effective prayer, confession, thanksgiving and Bible study. We deprive ourselves of natural food in order to gain definite spiritual progress in God and His service.

I believe the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to a renewed commitment to prayer and fasting today. How willing are we to obey God? How willing are we to deny ourselves? Do we really want more power with God? (Can we get it without fasting?) As a Church, and as individuals, let us prove that Jesus means what He says when we fast to Him in secret: ***"and your Father, Who sees in secret will reward you openly"*** (as in Isaiah 58).

Kingdom Living is not merely a theory or religious belief; it is a practical outworking - a doing - of those things Jesus taught. It is discipline - discipleship - a showing whether or not we really are following Jesus day by day. Christianity is a doing thing . . . Notice what Jesus has been saying throughout Matthew 6:- ***"When you do your alms"*** (verse 2-3) . . . ***"When you pray"*** (verse 5-7) . . . ***"You forgive"*** (verse 14-15) . . . ***"When you fast"*** (verse 16-18). It is what **we do** that is so important to Jesus. It is ***the doers of the Word*** (James 1:21-25) who find the treasures of God and it is treasures of God that this next lesson is all about.

LAYING UP TREASURES:

Verse 19: ***"Lay not up for yourselves treasures ("wealth") upon earth, where moth ("a clothes-moth, which eats woollen stuff") and rust ("a corrosive influence") does corrupt ("to cause to disappear, put out of sight, hence, to do away with") and where thieves ("one who steals by fraud or in secret") break through and steal ("to take by moving with extreme care, cunningness and quietness so as to avoid detection")"***.

Verse 20: ***"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth or rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."***

Verse 21: ***"For where your treasure is, there will your heart ("the seat of life and centre***

of man's personal life") *be also.*"

Treasures are important. Collins' English Dictionary describes the word "treasure" as meaning: "1. Wealth and riches, usually hoarded, especially in the form of money, precious metals, or gems. 2. A thing or person that is highly prized or valued. 3. To prize highly as valuable, rare, or costly. 4. To store up and save; hoard."

We Christians have the choice of treasures, what we do with them, and where we store them. If we are seeking after the treasures of the world, then we will be sacrificing the true treasures of the Kingdom. Jesus said if we go for earthly treasures (treasures that only have significance upon earth) then we are in real danger of losing them or being robbed of them. We have the choice: we can lay up treasures upon earth, or we can lay up treasures in heaven. Earthly treasures are for self; heavenly treasures are for the love of Someone else (Jesus). According to Mark 10:17-27 (the rich young ruler), earthly treasures and riches make it very difficult for people to get into the Kingdom of God. Most earthly riches today are valued in terms of dollars and cents. The more one has, the more one wants to get. It becomes a way of life and the Bible strongly warns Christians against wanting to be rich (see 1 Timothy 6:9-12). Beware of the sin of covetousness (Luke 12:15)!

HEAVENLY TREASURES:

Jesus told us to lay up treasures in heaven. There are spiritual treasures for us to have. That is why we are called to follow Jesus the King of the Kingdom. He has treasures to share with us that the world knows nothing about. Laying up treasures in heaven means seeking to give and not to get; relying on God's help through prayer, rather than our own self-sufficiency; denying ourselves food at times rather than endlessly gorging ourselves on the dainties of life (Daniel 1:8-16). To do what Jesus says means we are laying up treasures in heaven. Praise the Lord!

Jesus said, *"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* What is your great treasure in life? Is it something of worldly gain, or is it **JESUS HIMSELF**? How valuable is Jesus to you? Is He worth more than anything and everything else in life? The only way for us to walk continually in victory in the Kingdom is for Jesus to be Number 1 in our life in everything. *"... the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field"* (Matthew 13:44).

Treasures motivate us; affect us emotionally, and reveal what our priorities in life are. When Jesus truly is our Treasure, we will be willing to give up everything of our own in order to gain Him. Not grudgingly, but for joy!

GOD PROVIDES FOR THOSE WHO OBEY HIM:

In Deuteronomy 28:1-14 we read the promises of God to those who harken diligently unto His voice. *"All these blessings shall come on you, and overtake you . . . in the city, in the field, the fruit of your body, your ground, your cattle, your kine ("ox, steer") your sheep, your basket, your store; you'll be blessed coming in and going out; you'll have victory over your enemies. The Lord shall command the blessing upon you in your storehouses, and in all that you set your hand to; He will bless you in the land He gives to you. The Lord establishes you a holy people unto Himself. All the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and will be afraid of you. The Lord will make you plenteous in goods. The Lord shall open to you His GOOD TREASURE, and bless you. The Lord shall make you the head and not the tail, and you shall be*

above only and not beneath" (see also Proverbs 8:17-21 and Proverbs 21:20). What more could one ask for?

(If we continue reading Deuteronomy 28 we discover the opposite happens to those who do not listen to God). God has more treasures for us than we know what to do with when He is Lord of ALL within us. *"In the house of the righteous is much treasure"* (Proverbs 15:6).

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS A TREASURE:

Finally, I would like to share with you one more portion of Scripture that is relevant today:- *"The Lord is exalted* ("to be high, and strong"); *for He dwells on high: He has filled Zion* ("fortress" - speaking of the Church) *with judgment* (1 Peter 4:17) *and righteousness. And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability* ("a sure foundation" - N.I.V.) *of your times, and strength of salvation: THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS HIS TREASURE"* (Isaiah 33:5-6). The Amplified Bible puts it this way: *"the reverent fear and worship of the Lord is your treasure and His."*

Know your treasure(s) and possess them for the glory of our Lord. It's the ones that are laid up in heaven that really count (2 Corinthians 4:18).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why do you think it is so difficult for some Christians to know what their true treasures are?
2. Name some things that are involved in "laying up treasures in heaven."
3. Do you think giving, praying and fasting has got anything to do with laying up treasure in heaven?

HAVING A SINGLE EYE:

If we were to summarise what we have studied thus far in Matthew 6, we could say this chapter is "a call to commitment to God." This lesson continues the challenge of total commitment to Kingdom Living:-

Verse 22: *"The light* ("a lamp fed with oil, whose light is kindled by another") *of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single* ("free from defect, unspotted, one way"), *your whole body shall be full of light."*

The Living Bible says: *"If your eye is pure, there will be sunshine in your soul."*

What we take in through our eyes is important. What we see **does** affect us. This statement is quite contradictory to the worldly "experts" who continually tell us, for example that pornography has no harmful effects upon us and therefore people should be free to look at what they want to. For the Christian, anything we look at that feeds the flesh is only going to cause the light of our life to grow dim. Watch what you look at. Remember, it was when Eve **saw** the forbidden fruit that she began to covet it, even though she knew it violated the commandment of God. Her eyes deceived her and the light of God in her life went out! (Genesis 3). Likewise, Achan (Joshua 7:20-21).

What makes a man or woman burn brightly for Jesus? The fact that he or she is com-

mitted to the cause of Christ. The will of Jesus is placed before the will of man within us. Jesus said of John the Baptist: ***“He was a burning and a shining light”*** (John 5:35). His eye was single for God.

What makes a person double-minded? Wandering eyes; undisciplined eyes; lustful eyes (see 1 John 2:16, 2 Peter 2:14), ***“an evil eye”*** (Mark 7:20-23), and at the same time confessing to be a Christian.

If our eye is not single for God, what effect does it have upon us? Let the Scripture answer that question:-

Verse 23: ***“But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness*** (“without light”). ***If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!”***

This verse shows us how Christians can deceive themselves. If we continue to use our eyes to take in questionable and wrong things, then Jesus says we are not filled with light at all, but what we think to be light is in fact darkness.

Commitment to Jesus demands a single eye. We discovered in Matthew 5:27-29 that if our right eye is causing offence (“causing one to stumble or fall, be trapped”) then we were to cut it out and cast it from us. In other words, we must remove the offensive parts of our life.

The Living Bible says: ***“But if your eye is clouded with evil thoughts and desires, you are in deep spiritual darkness. And oh, how deep that darkness can be!”***

How do we do it? We consciously determine that we will not allow our eyes to dwell on things that cause us to selfishly covet worldly possessions - things that take up time and energy and take our heart away from God. Remember the lesson on “Laying up Treasures?” Jesus said, ***“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*** What feeds the heart? Surely it is the eye gate.

God will not allow Christians to make out they’re walking in the light and at the same be caught up in things of darkness. Jesus said we must be hot or cold, light or darkness. If we are of the truth and are genuinely seeking to walk with Jesus, this is what we do:- ***“But he that doeth truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought*** (“produced”) ***in God”*** (John 3:21).

Jesus is that light within us (John 8:12). You see, a Christian has nothing to hide or be ashamed of when his eye is single and full of light. It is darkness that makes us want to cover up and make excuses for the way one lives.

Nothing is hid from God (Hebrews 4:12-16), so why not let Him deal with any darkness that seeks to pull us down.

If you are watching questionable movies, videos, or live shows, reading sensuous magazines, or keeping company with people seeking to undermine your Christian principles, then you must make a decision whether you want your life to radiate life and joy, or darkness and despair. You cannot have both - one is going to win out and unless you determine to let light fill your life, then you will reap darkness.

NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS:

Verse 24: (This is the word of Jesus to us): ***“No man can serve*** (“to serve as a slave and to act accordingly, to serve in subjection to someone over you”) ***two masters***

(“lords, principals, rulers”): *for either he will hate* (“usually implying active ill-will in words and conduct, or a persecuting spirit” - Bullinger’s) *the one, and love* (“to regard, to cherish with reverence”) *the other; or else he will hold* (“cling to”) *to the one, and despise* (“to think down upon or against, to think slightly of”) *the other. You cannot serve God and mammon* (“wealth, riches, that in which one trusts”).

Christians must be devoted to the cause of Christ! Single minded and one eyed as it were! Being half-hearted, slothful and apathetic only opens us up to darkness. We need to ask ourselves in all sincerity: “Who is my Master?” “Who do I really serve?” “Do my daily actions say Amen to the things I say with my mouth?” “Am I willing to give up the things of darkness that my body might be full of light?” The more we devote ourselves to walking in the light, the more our lives will radiate the glory of Jesus Christ.

Now here is a real challenge: *“But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship* (“sharing, communion”) *with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from ALL sin.”* (1 John 1:7).

SELF DISCIPLINE:

To do what Jesus teaches us demands self discipline. The natural part of us does not want to yield up to the light. The flesh does not want to be subject to the spirit. The emotions do not want to be harassed. (Do you control your moods, or do your moods control you?) Self discipline means making a decision as to who our master is and then living to show that our master is in control. For the Christian, our only Master can be Jesus Christ the risen Lord! We manifest who our Master is by our willingness to obey Him. We are dedicated, committed to His cause, not ours, through prayer, fasting, obedience - whatever He says.

Who is your master? The brightness of light within you has already answered that question for those who know you.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND MEDITATION:

1. How will the world see more of Jesus?
2. How do we deal with darkness in our life?
3. How can we increase the light in our life?
4. Why, do you think, so many Christians are afraid to really “sell out” to Jesus?

A life committed to God trusts God for everything. There is no need for us to worry when God is in control of our life. It is good for us to learn this. Our next lesson in this Kingdom Living Series teaches us not to worry about the everyday things in life - food, drink, and clothing. God knows all about our needs. Earlier in Matthew 6 He taught us to pray *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (verse 11), so, having committed our day to the Lord’s care and provision to us, we can quit worrying about things. He is bigger than food, drink and clothing. Praise the Lord!

TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE . . . or STOP WORRYING!

Verse 25: (Jesus is speaking): *“Therefore* (“in the light of what has been written before in this chapter”) *I say unto you, Take no thought* (“do not be full of anxiety which divides up and distracts the mind” - Bullingers’s) *for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment* (“anything put on, covering”) ?

All too often our life can be taken up with overmuch caring about things. God will take care of us! That is His job!

Not only do people worry about what they shall eat and drink, and about the clothes they wear, they worry about being overweight and underweight. They worry about not having enough clothing, or good enough clothing to entertain, etc.

Christians, don’t be caught up in that. Some people have such a “hang up” about eating they suffer with anorexia nervosa, which is a psychological disorder characterized by fear of becoming fat and refusal of food, leading to debility and even death. Women especially seem to be affected more than men. Others gorge themselves and then make themselves sick. This is not God’s way for you. Stop worrying about yourself. Guard against becoming too self-conscious. Jesus teaches us to take a good look at the rest of His creation and learn from them. Then, simply trust .. rest in the promise of God to you.

STOP AND LEARN FROM CREATION:

Verse 26: *“Behold* (“look at”) *the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?”*

The birds do not struggle day after day worrying about their food. God takes care of them. You are much more important to God than birds and He has promised to care more for you than them. Believe Him - Trust Him!

Verse 27: *“Which of you by taking thought* (“by being anxious and worrying”) *can add one cubit* (in the New Testament a cubit was the common ancient measure of length, equal in distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, or about 24 or 25 inches) *unto his stature* (“length, adulthood, maturity of life, mind, age or person”) ?”

Worry only takes away from life. Worrying does not solve problems or alter circumstances. Worry is connected to unbelief, as it prevents us from accepting that God will take care of us or the situation we are faced with. Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do, but gets you nowhere!

Verse 28: *“And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider* (“to observe well, learn thoroughly, note accurately”) *the lilies of the field, how they grow* (“increase”); *they toil not* (they do not wear themselves out), *neither do they spin* (“to rotate or cause or rotate rapidly, as on an axis; to draw out and twist”).:”

Verse 29: *“And yet I* (Jesus) *say unto you, That even Solomon* (name means “peace”) *in all his glory* (known for his tremendous wisdom - 1 Kings 3:5-15, and for the fabulous temple he built, where God’s glory came down - 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 and 2 Chronicles 7:1-3) *was not arrayed* (“clothed”) *like one of these.”*

One of the great lessons we have is this: when we obey God and put Him first in the realm of the spiritual He will take care of us in the physical. We do not have to wear ourselves out being anxious over the everyday needs of life. Jesus tells us to learn thoroughly from the birds and the lilies. They do well. Our Father looks after them - how much more you? It's time to stop living in a spin! **Relax . . . rest . . . let God supply YOU** (Philippians 4:19).

Most of us will never attain the wealth and riches that Solomon had (and he must have looked quite something when "dressed up") but Jesus can do more for us than Solomon and riches will ever do! *"Consider the lilies . . ."*

Verse 30: *"Wherefore* ("for which reason: used as an introductory word in legal preambles" - Collins' Dictionary), *if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"*

Let me share this verse with you from "Good News for Modern Man":- *"It is God who clothes the wild grass - grass that is here today, gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't He be all the more sure to clothe you? How little faith you have!"*

The simple but powerful message coming through this lesson from Jesus to us is: **"Trust Me, Trust Me, Trust Me."**

When we stop worrying and simply trust Jesus, our faith will grow in leaps and bounds. Worrying means we only have little or no faith. So if we do not worry, and let God take over our everyday affairs, we will have great faith. And that pleases God! (Matthew 8:10).

Verse 31: *"Therefore* (then) *take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"*

The Living Bible says it loud and clear: *"Don't worry at all about having enough food and clothing."* That's it! Stop worrying! God won't let you down. He will supply. Have you ever starved to death? You say, that's a silly thing to say. And God says worrying is a silly thing to do. You **are** still alive and worrying has not accomplished anything.

SUMMARY:

In summing up this lesson we have seen that God desires to take care of every little detail and need in our life. There is no need to waste valuable time in worrying over the day to day necessities of life. We are called to live by faith - to trust and not be anxious. When we do not trust God it is because we doubt God's ability to provide for **ME**. That is doubt, unbelief, faithlessness. All the worrying in the world will not help things - only add to the problem, for worrying can affect our health as well. God's cry to us is: **"Trust Me, Trust Me, Trust Me."**

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. When we worry over food and clothing, do you think that pride can be involved?
2. Can you tell of any experience when you felt God let you down?

3. Can you tell of any experience when God supplied wonderfully for you?

CONCLUDING MATTHEW CHAPTER SIX:

We now come to the final lesson in Part Two of the Kingdom Living Series. So much has been learnt as we have studied and meditated upon the teachings of Jesus throughout this chapter. His calling for our life is so different to that of the world. Jesus shows us a better way to live today.

By now we should have established in our Christian walk the practice of:

1. Doing kind deeds unto others.
2. A daily prayer relationship with our Heavenly Father and Jesus.
3. Putting aside time for fasting in secret.
4. Letting go of the treasures of this world in order to lay up treasures in heaven.
5. Growing more definitely in a single eye to God.
6. Becoming committed to only one Master (Jesus) and.
7. Stopping worrying over the daily needs of life.

When Jesus is in control everything must work out right!

Verse 31: (repeated from last lesson to give verse 32 in context): *“Therefore (then) take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed?”*

Verse 32: *“(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.”*

Let me share this verse with you from the Amplified Bible: *“For the Gentiles (“heathen”) wish for and crave and diligently seek after all these things; and your heavenly Father well knows that you need them all.”*

So, Kingdom dweller, don't go worrying and pursuing after the necessities of life as a priority. Give God the opportunity to do for you what He has promised. **SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Verse 33: *“But seek (“look for, strive to find, desire”) ye first (before anything else) the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things (food, drink, clothing) shall be added unto you.”*

There is a standard that God sets before us in our seeking first the Kingdom. That standard is His righteousness. The word “righteousness” means “right, just, e.g. fulfilling all claims which are right and becoming; just as it should be; a right state, of which God is the standard” (Bullinger's).

“Righteousness,” therefore, is “the **doing or being** what is just and right; the **character and acts** of a man commanded by and approved of God, in virtue of which the man corresponds with Him and His will as His ideal and His standard; it signifies the sum total of all that God commands and approves. As such it is not only what God demands, but

what He gives to man, and which is appropriated by faith; and hence it is a state called forth by God's act of justification . . ." (Bullinger's Concordance).

The standard of righteousness in the Kingdom of God is set very clearly in Romans 14:17 - *"For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."* David in Psalm 15:1-2 asked the question of God: *"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?"* and then proceeded to answer it: *"He that walketh uprightly* ("perfect, complete, plain") *and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart."*

Another meaning for "uprightly" is: "straightness, rightness, right, duty, what is right and proper; of persons, uprightness, integrity" (Wilson's).

Here are a few more Scriptures on God's righteousness for you to meditate on:- Matthew 5:6, 1 John 2:29, Jeremiah 23:6, Acts 10:34-35, Romans 1:16-17 and 3:21-26, Romans 10:1-13, 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 3:8-10, 2 Peter 1:1.

Notice again in Matthew 6:33, we are told to seek "His righteousness" - not our own standard of what **we** think is acceptable to God. When we seek **His** righteousness **He** undertakes to "add all the necessary things of life" unto us.

The Apostle Paul declared this wonderful truth when he said: *"But I have all, and abound* ("to be over and above, more than enough"): *I am full* ("complete") . . . *But my God shall supply* ("to make full") *all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:18-19).

Let us trust the King of the Kingdom to do for us continually what He wants to do for us. So . . .

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW:

Verse 34: *"Take therefore no thought* ("to be full of anxiety which divides up and distracts the mind, to be full of cares, anxious; be full of anxious or distracting care" - Bullinger's) *for the morrow* ("tomorrow"): *for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."*

The Living Bible simplifies this verse by saying: *"So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time."* Sound advice.

Day by day we can prove the goodness and provision of God to us as we take and make the time to "seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

I trust this series on Matthew 6 has proven to be a real help and strength to your life. May you be inspired to press into all the benefits of the Kingdom in the days ahead, that others - seeing your example - will want to follow Jesus too.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What does one do when seeking first the Kingdom of God?
2. How do we know when we have received of His righteousness?
3. Why should we not worry about tomorrow?

4. What subject or subjects have challenged you most in Matthew Chapter 6?

Throughout this Series we have been discovering the practical aspects of what it means to be a follower and disciple of Jesus. A disciple is a pupil, learner; more than that, *“one who follows both the teacher and His teachings.”* What Jesus says we should love to do. Some of those things are not easy to do, but nevertheless we need to keep disciplining ourselves so as to “walk even as He walked.” The full verse reads like this: *“Whosoever says he abides in Him ought - as a personal debt - to walk and conduct himself in the same way in which He walked and conducted Himself.”* (1 John 2:6, Amp. Bible). In this Christian way of Kingdom Living, our example (“pattern”) is Jesus Himself - not some other man or church teachings. What He says we believe. What He instructs we obey.

MATTHEW CHAPTER 7

Part 3

Let us look now at Matthew 7:

SITTING IN JUDGMENT UPON OTHERS:

Verse 1: *“Judge not, that ye be not judged . . .”*

The word “judge” and “judged” as they are used in verses 1 and 2 mean “to divide, to separate, to make a distinction, come to a decision, to judge, pronounce final judgment. Not merely sentence of condemnation, but also a decision in any one’s favour.”

Verse 2: *“For with what judgment* (“the result or issue of the judging done; the decision arrived at, the sentence pronounced, unfavourable to those concerned”) *you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure* (“that by which any thing is measured, a measure or rule or standard”) *you mete* (“measure”) *it shall be measured to you again.”*

These verses have much to do with our attitudes and opinions of others, especially the negative sort. The Living Bible says this: *“Don’t criticize* (“to judge someone with disapproval”) *and then you won’t be criticized. For others will treat you as you treat them”* (Matthew 7:1-2).

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

“Do not judge and criticize and condemn others, so that you may not be judged and criticized and condemned yourselves. For just as you judge and criticize and condemn others you will be judged and criticized and condemned, and in accordance with the measure you deal out to others it will be dealt out again to you”
(Matthew 7:1-2).

Jesus here is telling us to get rid of our negative attitudes and criticisms. There is a principle in Scripture and in life that we reap what we sow. The Bible says very clearly in these verses that we will get back from others exactly what we give. That is a fact. If we talk negatively and condemningly of one another, the spirit of our judging is picked up and it is returned upon us again. So many Christians are hurting today because of what others have said about or to them in negative criticism. Jesus tells us the way to stop it is to stop doing it ourselves. We need to repent before God - and one another if necessary - over negative criticism and begin seeing the good things in each other. There are times when things have to be said in correcting others, but always it should be done in love and with the view to forgiveness and restoration. The judging Jesus is warning us against is that which leaves people forever condemned because we fail to work at making them better people who are loved by us.

When we are always judging others in a negative way we are only assuring ourselves of a negative future. And in the Kingdom of God nobody likes spending time around a negative person. If we want to be loved and accepted we show love and acceptance towards others. Remember, our judging of others is not necessarily a gift of discernment that enables us to "suss them out" but rather be aware that anything we speak to others about them also manifests what is (and what is not) in our own heart.

Verse 3: *"And why beholdest ("see, look") you the mote ("chaff, splinter, stubble") that is in your brother's eye, but consider ("to perceive thoroughly - with the mind") not the beam ("rafter, a long thick straight-sided piece of wood") that is in your own eye."*

Verse 4: *"Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and, behold, a beam is in your own eye?"*

Verse 5: *"You hypocrite ("a person who pretends to be what he is not"), first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye"* (See also Luke 6:41-42).

In negative criticism we always see the problem as being in others. Jesus says this is not true. The problem is in us. When we see a splinter in someone else's life, it is because we have a big rafter in our own!

Jesus teaches His disciples to work on removing the big rafter from our eye first! When we are free of wood from our eyes, our life carries in itself a strong enough conviction for others to want to walk with Jesus even as we do.

Judging in itself is not wrong - but negative, critical and condemning judging is. We must do away with it from our lives.

In John 7:24 Jesus said this: *"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment"*.

Let us be mature enough to judge righteous judgment; to form our opinions and attitudes according to the truth of the situation, knowing that always we have to judge ourselves first. Then we see clearly how to lift up those who are cast down and restore them to a healthy life in the Kingdom.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JUDGING AND DISCERNING:

In the first five verses of this chapter, Jesus has taught us against judging others nega-

tively and putting them down. He showed us that when we criticise and condemn there is a bigger problem in us than in the other person and that we must first judge ourselves. To judge ourselves means to put our own house in order before we attempt to put someone else's house in order. If we are not right in ourselves, how can we make righteous judgment upon someone else? It cannot be done. But when we have judged ourselves (and we need to do this continually) we are then able to discern much clearer where someone else is at and act accordingly in a Christian manner.

We saw in our last lesson that the words "judge" and "judged" mean "to divide, to separate, to make a distinction, come to a decision, to judge, pronounce final judgment."

The word "discern" means "to recognize or perceive clearly; to examine carefully, investigate, then, to determine, judge of, estimate; to know and understand, be acquainted with."

Having said that, let us see what Jesus has to say to us in Matthew 7:6.

Verse 6: *"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine ("pigs") lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend ("to break, burst through, break asunder or in pieces; shatter") you."*

Let's read this verse from the Living Bible:

"Don't give holy things to depraved ("morally bad or debased; corrupt") men. Don't give pearls to swine! They will trample the pearls and turn and attack you."

When Jesus told us not to judge, He was not telling us to be naive people, scared to form an opinion on anything or anyone. He was rather showing us the right and wrong way of judging. When we come to verse 6 Jesus very clearly shows us how important it is for us to be able to discern people so we can talk and act accordingly with all wisdom.

What we have received in the Kingdom of God is holy. Our salvation, water baptism, infilling of the Holy Spirit, Holy Communion, the Bible, Fellowship, Christian service, a life separated unto God, etc., are all holy things - they should be having that effect upon us (hence the need for us to judge in a Christian manner). But not every person appreciates what we have, and if we are not wise in discerning these people we will find ourselves being the subject of ridicule. See Proverbs 23:9.

DOGS:

When Jesus said, *"Give not that which is holy unto dogs"* He was not speaking of a natural dog; He is speaking spiritually.

In Psalm 22, which is a prophetic Psalm of Jesus, we read two verses making reference to dogs:

"For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet."

"Deliver My soul from the sword; My darling ("only, lonely, singly") from the power of the dog" (Psalm 22:16-20).

These verses are speaking of the crucifixion of Jesus and describes His accusers as

dogs.

When God's watchmen fall down on their job and fail to keep watch, guard, protect, warn of good and bad . . . they are likened to **dogs**:-

"His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" ("end") (Isaiah 56:10-11).

These verses reveal to us the "dog" nature and we need to discern it when we come across it.

"Beware of dogs . . ." (Philippians 3:2).

"For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loves and makes a lie" (Revelation 22:15).

When Jesus was testing the Syrophenician woman's faith He likened her to a dog (Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30). But her faith was stronger than any seeming insult and she pressed through to win commendation from the Lord.

HOGS:

"Neither cast ye your pearls before swine."

The Christian has received something very precious from God and it can be likened to jewels, treasure, pearls. We must carefully guard that which is given to us, yet also be able to share these precious blessings to others. Hence the need to discern who to share with and who not to share with. If we are not discerning then we will make the mistake of casting our pearls before swine. Pigs have no sense of value when it comes to treasures!

Look at Proverbs 11:22 - ***"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair (beautiful) woman which is without discretion"*** ("taste, sense; the quality of behaving or speaking in such a way as to avoid social embarrassment or distress"). Christian knowledge is no good to us if we do not know how to wisely speak it out! It is like putting jewellery into a pig's nose - a complete waste. In Scripture "swine's flesh" is linked directly with abominations ("impure, detestable things") (see Isaiah 65:4, 66:3, 17).

The Prodigal Son when away from his father's house, reached his all-time low when he desired to eat with the pigs (Luke 15:15-17).

In 2 Peter 2:20-22 we see backsliders referred to as dogs and pigs! They represent those who live in rebellion against God! There are two things dogs and hogs will do to undiscerning Christians: (1) they will trample the things you hold dear underfoot, (2) they will seek to break you. Their desire is to drag you down to their level. They despise what you stand for and they despise you for standing for holy principles. Be discerning!

THE LORD'S TABLE:

In the Lord's Table (Holy Communion) we have a precious treasure that is meaningful only to those who really know the Lord. Let us turn to 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 and see

Paul's teaching on it. Notice especially verses 28-32. It is talking on judging and discerning. If we do not examine ("to prove") or judge ourselves we will eat and drink unworthily because of an inability to discern the Lord's body. The result is weakness, sickness and death among believers! This is very serious indeed. We need to take more time making sure we have our lives right before God; that we can stand clean and righteous before Him because the cleansing blood of Christ has been applied. To be right before God also includes being right before one another. We cannot afford to be otherwise. When we judge ourselves God does the convicting and correcting (He may use someone right with Him to bring it about). If we do not judge ourselves, then others will judge us harshly in a destructive manner.

Each time before we partake of the Lord's Table we should examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5) to make sure we are worthy. We judge ourself - not the other Christians - and so eat and drink with true love in our heart for God and His people. ***"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened*** ("instructed, trained, brought to a place of submission, disciplined or corrected by punishment") ***of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"*** (1 Corinthians 11:31-32).

To be condemned means "to express strong disapproval of; censure; to pronounce judicial sentence on; to demonstrate the guilt of." And we certainly do not want to have that from God!

Let us make sure that we know how to judge righteous judgment and discern clearly.

ASKING, SEEKING, KNOCKING:

Jesus always teaches us for our good. What we have covered so far in this chapter is important and for our good. Wherever we feel we are lacking in our life we can come to Jesus and ask . . .

Verse 7: ***"Ask*** ("crave, to entreat, beg, supplicate"), ***and it shall be given you; seek*** ("desire, require, question, look for, strive to find"), ***and you shall find*** ("to discover or obtain, especially by search or effort"); ***knock*** ("to knock, rap, as at a door to capture attention"), ***and it shall be opened unto you."***

When the Christian has lack in his/her life we are told to ask God all about it. To pray! Speak our needs out to Him, so He can work on our behalf. If, for example, we are having a problem with discernment (and most of us wished we had more!) then let's make it a matter of positive prayer. Jesus said, "Ask, Seek, Knock." **We** do the asking; **we** do the seeking; **we** do the knocking first - then the Lord promises to do the providing.

The Amplified Bible puts it this way:

"Keep on asking and it will be given you; keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking reverently and the door will be opened to you."

One reason why we do not always get the answer from God like we should is because we are not persistent enough in our asking. We give up too easily. We must be convinced that the Scripture is true and that God means what He says. In Kingdom Living it is imperative that we be persistent, committed prayers so we can receive all the Lord has for us. Why should we settle for second-best when God says we can have the very best!? Just in case there are any doubts about what Jesus said in verse 7 let us look at what He says in:-

Verse 8: ***"For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened."***

There is not one doubtful expression here. Every one who asks receives; every one who seeks finds; every one who knocks the door will be opened. That's God's promise to Y-O-U!

Verse 9: *"Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will give him a stone?"*

Verse 10: *"Or if he ask a fish will he give him a serpent ("snake")?"*

In our asking, seeking and knocking we need to be specific in what we are requesting of the Lord. I'm having to learn this - it is so easy to be only general in our praying. What specific thing do you want Jesus to do for you?

Even in the natural, when our children ask us for bread we do not give them a stone and tell them to chew on that. That would be ridiculous! Likewise Jesus wants to give us exactly what we ask Him for:-

"If you abide ("to remain, wait for, continue") *in Me* (Jesus) *and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you"* (John 15:7).

Dr Paul Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the world's largest church situated in South Korea, has been instrumental in bringing to the fore the need to be specific in our asking and praying. In his book "The Fourth Dimension" he tells us how he needed a chair, a desk and a bicycle. After praying for a long time without receiving any of those things, he almost gave up in discouragement. God began to show him to be specific in his praying. "What kind of chair do you want? What kind of desk? What brand of bicycle . . .?" Once he became specific as to exactly what he wanted, God began to answer his prayers. He got all three!

So many times we have not sat down and thought through exactly what we want God to do for us. When we have done that, abiding in God's will, we can ask what we will - and it shall be done unto us.

PRAYER DELAYS:

Sometimes our prayers can be delayed owing to opposition in the spirit world. In Daniel 10 we read how Daniel fasted and prayed for 21 days before the answer was received. However, the Scripture is clear to point out that his prayers were heard, received and attended to on the very first day he prayed:-

"Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that you didst set your heart to understand ("to attend, to know and comprehend the nature or meaning of"), and to chasten ("to humble oneself, to bring to a state of submission, to discipline") yourself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for your words" (Daniel 10:12).

The devil hates saints praying continually.

Another hindrance to prayer is a judging, critical attitude towards our brothers and sisters. Talk to God about those who upset us.

We must keep on asking, seeking, knocking until we get the answer from God. Another very important Scripture is 1 John 5:14-15 . . .

“And this is the confidence (‘the feeling of trust in a person, the speaking all one thinks, hence boldness, openness and frankness’) we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us: And if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions (‘things asked for, objects sought’) that we desired of Him.”

This is how the Living Bible puts it:-

“And we are sure of this, that He will listen to us whenever we ask Him for anything in line with His will. And if we really know He is listening when we talk to Him and make our requests, then we can be sure that He will answer us.”

These are good verses to memorise. Daniel knew God would not let him down. We must know this too. Confidence in our Lord teaches us He never fails.

HOW MUCH MORE:

Verse 11: *“If you then, being evil (‘hard-hearted, sinful people’) , know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?”*

Verse 12: *“Therefore (then) all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”*

Our heavenly Father is far more concerned about providing the needs of His children than a natural father is. God knows our every need - which is far more than the receiving of “things” - and works to provide to us that which will help us in time and eternity. Our first calling in life is to live to glorify God and to let God be glorified in us. We are to be more than the “receiver of everything we pray for” (in a selfish manner) but rather to be examples to the world of **how much more** our heavenly Father provides for those who serve Him fully.

A good measuring rod in our life and praying is: “Would we like others to do the same to us?” So, in our praying we do not ask God to hurt, maim or destroy somebody because they have upset us. We certainly do not want others to hurt, maim or destroy us! Do unto others what you want others to do to you.

This way we fulfil the law and the prophets and follow in the footsteps of our Master Who came to fulfil them as well. In the above verses Jesus taught us very positively that we are to ask, seek and knock . . . knowing that . . .

“Every one who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking it will be opened.” (Matthew 7:8, AMP. Bible).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you think there is a direct link with Matthew 7:7-8 to the six verses before them?
2. In what way does judging others negatively affect our prayer life?
3. Is there a difference between asking, seeking and knocking, or is Jesus saying the same thing three ways?

4. What are some answers to your prayers that you know you've received?

All the way through this series in Matthew 5,6 and 7 there is a real emphasis on practical Christian living. We must not neglect what Jesus is teaching us: If we do we will be the loser. When we believe and obey we are a winner.

ONLY TWO WAYS:

Our lesson today is one that is important for us to know as there are so many voices proclaiming the "right way," the "truth," "peace," etc. that it is easy to start believing that not all are wrong. The final authority on these things is the Word of God, not the emotional appeals or teachings of men. What does the Bible say? It tells us there are only two ways one can walk in this world: the straight and narrow, or the broad way to destruction.

Verse 13: *"Enter ye in at the strait ("narrow, restrained") gate: for wide is the gate, and broad ("easy, wide") is the way, that leadeth to destruction ("loss; of things, waste, ruin; do away with; death") and many there be which go in thereat."*

Verse 14: *"Because strait is the gate, and narrow ("compressed, limited in boundaries") is the way ("a way, highway, road, access") which leads unto life, and few there be that find ("to find as by search, hence, find out, discover") it."*

Jesus tells us very clearly there are only two ways in life - the narrow and the broad; or, the right and the wrong; or, the way of truth and the way of error. We have one of two choices to make in life, but let it be clearly said that there are not two ways to God and heaven. There is only one way - the strait and narrow way through Jesus Christ. He is *"the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by Me,"* Jesus said in John 14:6. We choose to go God's way through Jesus Christ, or we choose to go our own way, whether it be religious or otherwise. As Jesus is the door to the narrow way (John 10:7-9) no one can ever fool God about where he stands. God knows His own only through the acceptance of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

No matter what the multitude of voices in the world tell us, there is only one way to God and life - **JESUS CHRIST!**

Make sure you know the Bible way to God!

THE BROAD WAY:

Going to church, helping the poor, giving our money to worthy charities, living morally right, being law abiding, etc do not make us acceptable to God. All those things without the saving grace of Jesus within us only deceive us into believing we are on the narrow road, when we are on the broad road. Outside of Jesus Christ all are sinners! It makes no difference whether we are a Sunday School teacher, minister, bishop, or even a pope! Outside of Jesus Christ all are sinners!

Let's read what the Living Bible says on Matthew 7:13-14:-

"Heaven can be entered only through the narrow gate! The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide enough for all the multitudes who choose its easy way. But the Gateway to Life is small, and the road is narrow and only a few ever find it."

That puts it very straight! The highway to hell is the easy way. We don't have to do a thing to be on that road. It's so wide and easy. The tragic thing is that so many people are taking pleasure in being on that road. In Isaiah 5:11-14 we read that because of the sins of people in drinking, partying and feasting, and not regarding ("respecting") the work of the Lord, **HELL HAS ENLARGED ITSELF** to accommodate the multitudes who choose to go there!

Jesus told us the reason for people condemning themselves to hell is because they love darkness (evil) rather than light (Jesus and His teachings). Turn to John 3:16-21 . . .

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes ("trust, rely on, adhere to") in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believes on Him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. For everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd ("rebuked, convicted of"). But he that does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest ("plainly shown, easily noticed"), that they are wrought in God."

In the light of what God has done for everyone of us in sending Christ to redeem, there are no excuses. People go to hell because they choose to go there, or they choose not to follow Jesus, thinking that good works will get them God's favour in the end. That is a lie! There are no excuses according to Romans 1:18-32 (see especially verse 20).

How important it is that we who know the way of salvation will so let our lights shine that they will see our good works (evidence of a changed lifestyle) and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

THE NARROW WAY:

"The Gateway to Life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it." The Amplified Bible says it this way: "But the gate is narrow - contracted by pressure - and the way is straitened and compressed that leads away to life, and few are they who find it" (Jeremiah 21:8, Deuteronomy 30:19).

The narrow way in Jesus has to be sought. We must seek it out if we want to find it.

"Strive ("contend, agonize") to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." (Luke 13:23-28).

What challenging words to us from Jesus! Are we sure that we have found that narrow way to life? In what way has it affected our lifestyle? Just because we go to church doesn't mean we have found life. We must ask ourselves continually these questions as it is important we really know Jesus. Life eternal is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3).

Do we know God? Do we know Jesus? How well do we know God and Jesus? Does this knowledge of Jesus cause us to lay everything at His feet in order that His will be done in us?

Let us make very sure that we have made our choice to follow Jesus in the narrow way. Don't expect the world's approval - they will think you're mad. Don't expect it to be the "popular" way - only a few (in comparison to the total world population) will find it. Following Jesus brings pressures to bear upon us from within ourselves as well as without from family, relatives, friends and work associates. Stand up and be counted. By faith **see** that with Jesus you have so much more to gain (in this life and in the next) because you have consciously chosen the way of life, truth and peace in Jesus Christ. Living with Him in the Kingdom is better - far, far better - than anything this old world can offer you! If you are not sure where you stand in life, right now through an act of your will, confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Step through that narrow gate into the arms of Jesus and evermore walk with Him.

ENEMIES:

Christianity has many enemies that oppose it from without, owing to the fact that unless one is born again by the Spirit of God, one cannot understand spiritual truth. Opposition towards us as believers is growing more open and hostile world-wide. It is important that we be aware of this and allow it to press us closer to Jesus.

However, there is a far more subtle enemy that works against us, and that is the one who works within the Church to undermine and divide the people of God. This enemy is:-

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING:

Verse 15: (Jesus speaks this warning to us): *"Beware* ("be on guard against, be mindful of") *of false prophets* ("a false hypocritical prophet, one falsely professing to come as a messenger, and with a message from God"), *which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening* ("snatching, devouring in a greedy way") *wolves"* (used of a rapacious, violent, or wolf-like person).

The Living Bible puts it this way:

"Beware of false teachers who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are wolves and will tear you apart."

There are counterfeits in the Church - Jesus told us there were wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43); sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-33) - and wolves in sheep's clothing. This is where we especially need to know how to judge righteous judgment (John 7:24) and to rightly discern between good and evil (Hebrews 5:13-14).

A false prophet or teacher usually has a lot of truth in his message. This, coupled with a pleasant yet persuasive personality, often causes us to be attracted to what they have to say. Yet, behind it all there comes forth a subtle "knocking" of the church, the present emphasis of Bible teaching within the church, the leadership, the pastor, all are cunningly criticized in such a way to make us believe that this "teacher" has got more than we have. His vision is better than ours! He comes across so spiritual, yet he is seeking to draw followers after himself instead of Jesus.

Because they are "wolves in sheep's clothing" they know all the spiritual jargon that we use, like "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord, Isn't Jesus wonderful?, born again, etc." On the outside they appear so good, so spiritual, so loving - but it is all a subtle manipulation to

get us to follow **their** revelation (which is always better than the one **you** have!)

“Beware!” said Jesus.

Wolves will always eventually set you up to devour you! So many Christians have fallen from grace because they have gotten caught up in doctrines and ideas which, though sounding good at the time, have proven not to be Bible based, causing heart-ache and division. This is one reason why it is so important that you be firmly planted in a good church where the Word of God is preached in soundness through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Sheep are a congregating animal! When they isolate themselves and try and make it on their own, the wolves are able to easily grab and devour them. There is nothing more sad than to see beautiful on-going Christians get caught up into some “off-shoot” teaching that eventually causes them to lose their first love for Jesus and go into spiritual deception.

Stay within the safety of the sheepfold (the church) under proven pastors and leadership!

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S WARNING:

In Acts 20:17-31 we read of Paul’s strong admonition to the elders of the church at Ephesus to guard against wolves whom, he said, **would** come:-

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers (“watchers”) and feed the Church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood.

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous (“heavy, oppressive, hard to be borne; afflictive, violent”) wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock (showing no compassion or mercy).

“Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse (“distorted, twisted”) things, to draw away disciples after them.

“Therefore watch (“be awake, vigilant”) and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Verses 28-31).

Right now the enemy is seeking to sow his seeds of doubt, confusion and division in the minds of God’s people so he can get us separated; so he can get our eyes off of Jesus and on to some “spiritual man.” With the present emphasis on total commitment, discipline and greater authority in our personal lives, the enemy seeks to divert us away from such, as he knows he will bear the brunt of it eventually. Satan works on the weakness of the flesh to make us take a “spiritual short-cut”. Short cuts often lead to deception and division.

Paul further warned us:

“Now I beseech (“beg, earnestly ask”) you brethren, mark (“watch”) them which cause divisions and offenses (“stumbling blocks”) contrary (“opposite, against”) to the doctrine (“teaching”) which you have learned; and avoid (“don’t let it happen to you, to keep out of the way of, refrain from”) them.

“For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive (“mislead, delude”) the hearts of the simple (“harmless without evil”)” (Romans 16:17-18).

Paul’s concern was not just for the Church of his day. He knew that in every generation there would be wolves in sheep’s clothing. These wolves would increase in the last days - the days we are in now - therefore we must be very sure that we are building our lives and faith upon the sure foundation of Jesus Christ and His Word.

Timothy was warned by Paul of the need to know those who looked so spiritual and right on the outside but inside their hearts were not submitted to the Lordship of Christ. Regarding the conditions of our day, please see 1 Timothy 4:1-3 and 2 Timothy 3:1-17.

We are to know people, not just by their words, but by their fruits. That is the subject of our next lesson.

QUESTIONS:

1. If you believed there was a wolf in the church or house group, what should you do about it?
2. Whom should you tell?
3. Then what should you do?

THE FRUIT TEST:

In our last lesson we looked at the subject of false prophets or “The Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing”. Jesus was warning us of the enemy from within the church who would seek to draw us away from the truth and the sheepfold. Some false prophets are very cunning and are not detected quickly; therefore we must be on guard continually and not taking everything we hear for granted.

One of the most effective ways to know the difference between a true and a false prophet is by the fruit of their life. And this is what this lesson is all about.

YOU SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS:

Verse 16: (Jesus speaking) *“Ye shall know* (“to know thereupon, i.e. by looking on as a spectator, to give heed, to notice attentively, to know fully or well” - Bullinger’s) *them* (false prophets, wolves) *by their fruits* (“that which they produce, results”). *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”*

The fruit manifest the true identity of the life. As in plant life where a rose produces roses, a peach tree produces peaches, and a potato produces potatoes, so in the Christian life one is known by their fruits. What a person produces is what they are. A false prophet will produce fruit of dissent, division, isolation, “holier than thou” attitude, loss of joy, love, and peace. He (or she) will take you away from the centrality of Jesus Christ and get your emphasis upon a “deeper” or newer revelation, or something extra “we must do” in order to find favour with God. Others will try and take you back to law and legalism. Before trusting your life to the message of a prophet - especially if the message

means a major change or direction - make sure you know the fruits of that prophet's life and ministry.

Verse 17: *"Even so every good* ("worthy of admiration, that which is of advantage, morally good, righteous; it denotes the inner harmonious perfection which is its own standard and measure, and which primarily belongs to God" - Bullinger's) *tree brings forth good* ("beautiful, pleasing, acceptable, agreeable, well fitted") *fruit; but a corrupt* ("bad, rotten, putrid, lacking in integrity, dishonest practices, morally depraved") *tree brings forth evil* ("causing labour, sorrow, pain, morally wrong or bad, causing harm or injury") *fruit."*

Notice the difference between good and evil fruit - good fruit lifts one up closer to God and reproduces His character in our life, while evil fruit produces a lowering of moral standards which takes one further away from God.

Verse 18: *"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit".*

Jesus puts a very clear difference between good fruit and evil fruit. For the Christian the Word of God tells us what kind of fruits we are to grow in our lives. If you turn to Galatians 5:22-23 you will see what they are: *"love, joy, peace, long suffering* ("patience"), *gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance* ("self restraint")".

In Ephesians 5:9 there are two more fruits mentioned that are not written in Galatians 5. They are "righteousness" and "truth." Also in James 3:17 we read that "wisdom" is *"full of good fruits."* That makes a total of 12 fruits which makes up to the number of fruits that *"the tree of life"* bears as mentioned in Revelation 22:1-2. Each of the above-mentioned fruit are part of the character of God and take the Lordship of Christ within us to come to manifest maturity. If these fruits are not clearly seen in the life of a prophet, then it is more than likely that he or she is false. If a life is not bringing forth good fruit then it is headed for real trouble, as the next verse shows:

Verse 19: *"Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn* ("to cut down, destroy") *down, and cast* ("thrown") *into the fire."*

Jesus give us a clear warning that false teachers can have such a destructive effect upon us that if we get caught up into their teachings we can be led into internal fire. Don't get fooled by a person's giftings and personality - look for their fruits. Because it is by their fruits, Jesus said, that we know them, that means we should guard against hasty decisions regarding new doctrines, changing churches, etc. We can afford to take time to observe and, in taking that time, be in much prayer about God's will for your life. When we rush into decisions because of impatience, compulsiveness or restlessness, we can get ourselves into deep trouble. When major decisions have to be made you can always have the added confirmation of sharing with your pastors or leadership. A wrong decision to follow someone who later proves to be a false prophet can be a disastrous experience. Once isolated from the fold it is sometimes very hard to get re-settled back into a good sheepfold. Let the words of Jesus be repeated:

Verse 10: *"Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them."*

WHAT ABOUT OUR FRUIT?

This study has been concentrating on testing other people's fruits to know them. I think

it is important that we conclude it by taking a look at our own fruitfulness and making sure we are as protected as possible by showing forth fruits for Jesus. When we live according to the Word we become an example to others and also help to protect them from the wolves. Be fruitful in Jesus!

John the Baptist's message is similar to that of Jesus, except John placed the emphasis of fruitfulness upon us (don't look for fruit in others without first having it in our own life):

“Bring forth fruit that is consistent with repentance - let your lives prove your change of heart;

And do not presume to say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our forefather; for I tell you God is able to raise up descendants for Abraham from these stones!

And already the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 3:8-10, AMP).

In Luke 13:6-9 we read of the barren fig tree. For three years it had not produced fruit (when it should have) and the order went out to cut it down because it was wasting good ground area. A cry for a stay of execution was granted in that one more year was given for the fig tree to bear fruit. If in that 12 months fruit came forth the tree would survive. But if not it was for the axe and the fire. We must be fruit bearers. *“Herein is My Father glorified* (“honoured, praised, invested with dignity”) *that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be My disciples”* (“a learner, pupil; in the New Testament more than this: one who follows both the Teacher (Jesus) and the teaching (Word of God)” (John 15:8).

Paul said *“. . . I desire fruit that may abound to your account”* (“that which backs up your spoken word”) Philippians 4:17).

The more fruit we grow in our lives the harder it will be for “wolves in sheep's clothing” to deceive us and lead us astray.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. How would you apply the “fruit test” to a speaker preaching something “new” in the church?
2. How well should we be able to know and find things in the Scriptures?
3. What things are you doing to avoid being caught by a false prophet?

LET'S BE HONEST:

Kingdom Living demands a total honesty on our part if we are going to succeed with the promises of Christ. It does demand commitment, discipline and fruitfulness to be an overcoming Christian. In our lessons to date we have discovered the need for right judgment, to know how to discern, to ask, seek and knock, to do unto others as you would have them do to you, knowing there is only one way to God - the straight and narrow - that life has enemies (false prophets) who seek to devour us, and the absolute importance of knowing the fruits of a person's life.

In this lesson we are again faced with the challenge of being a totally genuine and honest person. There is no place for “mouthing” the Gospel without the corresponding actions. Let us see what Jesus has to say to us:

LORD! LORD!??

Verse 21: (Jesus speaking): *“Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that does”* (“spoken of an external act, something produced”) *the will* (“desire”) *of My Father which is in heaven.”*

The Living Bible says:-

“Not all who sound religious are really godly people. They may refer to Me as ‘Lord,’ but still won’t get to heaven. For the decisive question is whether they obey My Father in heaven.”

Here we see a further exposing by Jesus of the wolf in sheep’s clothing and the person whose life does not reveal the true fruits of the Kingdom. It is not enough to know the “religious lingo” (i.e. knowing the right words to say) but of actions that demonstrate that Jesus truly is the Lord of our life. If we are walking in disobedience then it is obvious Jesus is **NOT** our Lord. When He is our Lord **WE DO WHAT HE TELLS US**. So much of Christianity has fallen into disrepute because we “talk the walk” rather than “walk the talk.”

The whole Kingdom Living principles depend entirely upon our obedience to what Jesus says.

In this verse He warns us that there are people who say “Lord, Lord” in seeking to get into the Kingdom of heaven but who will not allow Jesus to become Lord in their life. It is not what we **say** so much as what we **do** that determines entry. Actions speak louder than words! And our actions must also be in accordance to what God requires.

WORKS OR OBEDIENCE:

Verse 22: *“Many will say* (“relating not to the words only of the speaker, but also to the mind and will of the speaker”) *to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied* (publicly expound, to speak forth, in declaration, warning, or exhortation, as directed by the Spirit of God, a proclaimer of a divine message”) *in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils?* (In the New Testament the word is specially applied to evil spirits, which are viewed in their morally destructive influence. They appear as special powers of evil in the service of Satan influencing the physical and psychical life of human beings. Probably they take possession of the place that belongs to the spirit, so that the action of the personal life is disturbed and deranged . . .” - Bullinger’s) *and in Thy name done many wonderful* (“able, powerful”) *works?”*

Here we see three areas of Christian “**works**” where many, yes, many people try to justify themselves as well as think that works is sufficient merit to gain God’s approval: (1) Prophesying (2) Casting out devils, and (3) Doing many wonderful works (signs and wonders). Notice they were all done in the name of Jesus! This verse is not saying these things are wrong. Indeed they are not! But to use them as a reason or means to get to heaven rather than the **DOING OF GOD’S WILL** is wrong! We are justified through obedience to the faith (of Christ), not by works (anointed or other-

wise).

What did Jesus reply to those who tried to justify themselves by good works?

Verse 23: *“And then will I profess (“publicly confess”) unto them, I never (“not ever, at any time”) knew you (“I have never had a true and personal connection with you”): depart (“go away, withdraw”) from Me, ye that work iniquity” (“violation of law; non-observance or transgression of the law, whether unknown or willingly violated; lawlessness”).*

We find these Scriptures quite amazing in that they make some people question how can one prophesy, cast out devils and do miracles, yet not know Jesus personally? Anything that comes before our personal walk and relationship with Jesus is in fact idolatry. They are gifts, not fruits. It is by our fruits that we are known. Gifts function through faith, whereas character develops the fruits.

We see a similar statement of self justification in Luke 13:24-27:

“Strive (“agonize, contend”) to enter in at the strait (“narrow”) gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek (“try, look for, strive to find”) to enter in, and shall not be able.”

“When once the Master of the house has risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence (“from what source, place”) ye are:”

“Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets.”

“But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity” (“the doing contrary to right”).

We must come God’s way into the Kingdom and live by His standards. That is the only way we can walk in right relationship with Him. He is the Lord of the Kingdom!

In 2 Thessalonians 2 we read a strong warning of the prevailing conditions in the days preceding the coming of Jesus Christ. They are:

- Days of deception (verse 3).
- A falling away (from sound faith and doctrine) (verse 3).
- An increase of sin (verse 3).
- The rising up of the man of sin who devises and opposes the things of God (verse 3).
- Deception and pride, through Satan getting the eyes of the people off God and onto himself (verse 4).
- Days of iniquity - he is a man of iniquity (remember Matthew 7:23 and Luke 13:27) whose “ministry” is accompanied with “all power and signs and lying wonders” (verse 9-12). Not God’s power - but Satan’s power!

- Without true fruits - he is a worker of iniquity without the true fruits of the Kingdom.

Do not be discouraged over this lesson. Jesus has clearly shown us the way to go and we who are walking according to Kingdom principles have nothing to fear as long as we keep our lives anchored to the Rock, Jesus Christ.

Let us finish on a very positive note from 2 Timothy 2:19 -

“Nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure (“solid, firm, immovable”), ***having this seal*** (“an impression for privacy or secrecy, for security and authority”), ***The Lord knows*** (“has a personal and true relationship with”) ***them that are His.*** ***And, let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.***”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What does “doing the will of My Father” mean to you?
2. How much personal discipline do you think doing God’s will requires?
3. What is the difference between works and fruit?
4. Obviously iniquity is an abhorrence to God. How can we turn away from it?

SUMMARY:

For those who have been studying with us the entire “Kingdom Living” Series of Matthew Chapters 5, 6 and 7, we come now to the illustration that summarises the whole series. It is a very simply stated story of what Kingdom Living really is - **hearing Jesus and obeying Him.** In Matthew 7:24-27 we see:

KINGDOM LIVING IN A NUTSHELL:

(The story of the wise man who built on the rock and the foolish man who built on the sand).

If we have forgotten some of the things about this series, we must beware that we do not forget this lesson. Our very life depends on it! The message of Kingdom Living is **“Hearing what Jesus says and doing it.”**

THE WISE MAN:

Verse 24: (Jesus speaking) ***“Therefore*** (“then, in the light of what has been said before”) ***whosoever hears*** (“to learn by hearing, be informed”) ***these sayings*** (“the word spoken, an exposition, or account which is given, as expressive of the speaker’s thoughts”) ***of Mine, and does*** (“to form, produce, spoken of an external act as manifested in the production of something tangible, completed action; also, to do, expressing an action as continued or not yet completed; what one does repeatedly, continually”) ***them, I will liken*** (“compare”) ***him unto a wise*** (“understanding, thoughtful, practically wise, sensible, prudent”) ***man, which built his house*** (“house, household, family, retainers”) ***upon a rock.***”

Verse 25: *“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat (‘to rush against’) upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded (‘the foundation was laid’) upon a rock.”*

The whole crux of being a Christian comes right down to the above two verses. A Christian is one who has had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ and, who then from that moment on, seeks to follow Him and His teachings. We listen to what He says and then we obey - we do it. Jesus tells us we are then like the wise man. We build our lives and families upon the solid and sure rock of life (Who is Jesus Himself). When the rains, floods, winds and storms of life come against us (Christians are not exempt from the trials and pressures of life) we are able to stand firm and succeed where all others fail. Kingdom Living is the most secure lifestyle of all!

To *“hear these sayings of Mine”* we must have a willingness of heart and mind to search the Scriptures (for they testify of Jesus - John 5:39); find out in context what they are saying, and then apply them in our daily living. We must also have an alert ear to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, for it is His work to bring the words of Jesus to our remembrance and to teach us the way of truth (see John 14:26, John 15:26 and John 16:13-15).

Once we know we have heard the sayings (words) of Jesus we can obey them. Obedience comes about as a result of attentive hearing. Obedience has to be learned. Even Jesus *“though He were a Son, yet learned (‘to learn from others, from study and observation’) He obedience by the things which He suffered”* (Hebrews 5:8).

Obedience is not always an easy thing, but we must seek to obey the Master nevertheless. The rewards of obedience are far, far better than those of disobedience!

How are you building your life right now? Is it firmly upon the Rock?
How is your listening ear right now? Is it in tune with the Master?
How is your obedience right now? It is causing Jesus Christ to be revealed as Lord of your life?

Don't be put off by the pressures of the Christian lifestyle of daily discipline. Remember, those out in the world are under pressure too - and they have no hope at all outside of your Jesus. You have everything you need in Jesus, so don't despair when the storms come. Be strong! Stand firm on the Rock, Christ Jesus!

THE FOOLISH MAN:

Verse 26: (Jesus speaking) *“And every one that hears these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish (‘dull of mind, slow, silly’) man, which built his house upon the sand (‘loose material’):”*

Verse 27: *“And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell (‘downfall, ruin’): and great (‘great, large, of physical magnitude in measure, number, cost and estimation of things’) was the fall of it.”*

This is a sad account of so many today. Notice that both the wise and foolish man heard the sayings of Jesus. BOTH heard the same sayings. BOTH were listening to Jesus. Yet their lives finished up in opposite directions. What made the difference between success and destruction?

It was not because they did not know what to do. They both knew that! The foolish man

thought he knew better than Jesus. His own way seemed to be succeeding for he actually got his house built (just as the wise man did). But the foolish man did not give attention to the word he heard. He had not learned obedience. Because he did not take heed to Jesus he built upon a wrong foundation. And foundations are all important when the storms of life hit!

Can you imagine the foolish man feeling very proud of his new house - with all the modern conveniences inside it - even looking across at his neighbour, the wise man, who was still labouring away at building because he gave more attention to detail? The foolish man had found many "short cuts" and had finished his house much quicker than "Mr. Wise Man." But then one day the storms of life unexpectedly hit both men. The rains poured down, the floods came, and the winds beat against both houses. The wise man's house stood secure! But the foolish man soon discovered that his foundations were letting him down. Once the sand was hit by the flood, he had nothing to stand on. His beautiful house suddenly gave a twist and a lurch and toppled into the raging torrent of water, never to be seen again.

What a story of life this illustration is. Jesus has given us life in time to enable us to prepare for life in a timeless eternity. Only wise men and women will be in eternity. The foolish - though having heard the words of Jesus - will be swept away into the eternal fires of hell. Why? **They chose to disobey!**

Friend, there is a terrible price to pay for disobedience. Jesus has very clearly shown us the way to go in life. We disobey at our own peril and loss.

There is no excuse for being a foolish person. Right now, if you know you have been building your life and future upon the sand, then you need to start again by hearing afresh what Jesus is saying to you and get your life firmly founded upon the Rock, Christ Jesus. **DO WHAT JESUS TELLS YOU!** That is Kingdom Living! You can't go wrong when you obey Jesus, for He is *"the way, the truth, and the life . . ."* (John 14:6).

Nothing you say or do to disagree will alter the word of the Lord Jesus, so make very sure you line up your life and actions with His teachings. Only then can you be assured that you can weather any and every storm throughout time and eternity.

"Whoso is wise, and will observe ("take heed, keep") these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Psalm 107:43).

We come now to the final two verses in this series of Kingdom Living which has covered Matthew Chapters 5, 6 and 7. These two verses concentrate on doctrine ("teaching, process of teaching, thing taught; especially the act" - Bullinger's) and authority ("delegated power, authority to do anything; permission, licence, privilege"). They work together and are very necessary in our life if we are going to teach others the Kingdom lifestyle.

DOCTRINE ("teaching"):

Verse 28: *"And it came to pass, when Jesus ("Jehovah the Saviour") had ended ("completed, fulfilled, performed; not merely ended, but completed and perfected") these sayings ("the word spoken, an exposition, or account which is given, as expression of the speaker's thoughts"), the people were astonished ("to be greatly struck in mind, filled with amazement, greatly surprised") at His doctrine:"*

The Amplified Bible states it this way:

“When Jesus had finished these sayings (the Sermon on the Mount), the crowds were astonished and overwhelmed with bewildered wonder at His teaching.”

These Kingdom Living principles that Jesus has set out for us are sufficient to make us God-pleasers. They carry the words and instructions of how to live successfully in this life and be fully prepared for the next. The more we “learn of Jesus” and obey Him, the more He makes us shine as lights in a world of darkness.

The Word of Jesus is the Rule book in the Kingdom. We accept it to our advantage or we reject it to our doom. We cannot please Jesus and ignore His teachings (“doctrine”) at the same time. This whole series has been designed to teach what Jesus says to us. We are His disciples and a “disciple” is one who “follows both the Teacher (Jesus) and His teachings.” We hear what He says and then we do what He asks - hearing and obeying. Hearing the Word of Christ is the only way to grow in Christian grace, knowledge and character. Therefore it is important that we spend time every day feasting upon the Word of God.

“As newborn babes, desire (“crave, to desire earnestly over and above other things, long for”) *the sincere* (“without guile or deceit, unadulterated, pure”) *milk of the Word, that you may grow* (“to receive, increase, to grow up”) *thereby*” (1 Peter 2:2).

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in (“inhabit”) *you richly* (“abundantly, largely”) *in all wisdom; teaching* (“giving instruction and direction”) *and admonishing* (“putting in mind, instructing, warning”) *one another in psalms* (“songs of praise on instruments in commemoration of mercies received”) *and hymns* (“a hymn of festive song in praise of God”) *and spiritual* (“belonging to the Spirit, or determined by the Spirit, or influenced by the Spirit, or proceeding from the Spirit”) *songs, singing with grace* (“a kind, affectionate, pleasing nature and inclining disposition. It denotes personal gracefulness, a pleasing work, beauty of speech, etc.”) *in our hearts to the Lord*” (Colossians 3:16).

The more our lives are filled with the Word of Jesus, the more our songs of the heart shall sound forth in graciousness.

Here is a question for discussion: “How much time do you spend each day in God’s Word, and how can you increase that time?”

To be really effective in the Holy Spirit ministry we must have a good knowledge of the Word:

“. . . The sword (“fighting weapon for cutting”) *of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17). In fact the Word of God is sharper than any two edged sword! (see Hebrews 4:12).

There are scores of Scriptures that tell us of the importance of the Word of God in our life, but space in this lesson does not permit us to include them. I suggest you make this a personal Bible study some time and see how powerful God’s Word is. (See Psalm 119 and 2 Timothy 2:15, for starters!)

AUTHORITY (“delegated power, privilege”):

Verse 29: *“For He (Jesus) taught (“instructed, directed”) them as one having authority, and not as the scribes”* (“one skilled in the Jewish laws, an interpreter of the Scriptures, a lawyer. Hence, one instructed, a scholar, a learned teacher” - Bullinger’s).

The Scribes had all the theory of the Scriptures, but no heart relationship with Jesus. Theirs was the letter that kills rather than the spirit which gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6 and Romans 7:6).

Their conception of Christianity was lifeless - it was merely dead religion and as such they had no real authority in their teaching.

Authority comes out of knowing both the Word of God and the God of the Word. Authority comes out of obedience to Jesus the Master of the Kingdom. The word “authority” in this verse is translated from the Greek “exousia” which gives us the meaning of being able to function under the power of someone over us.

Jesus’ authority came from His Father as He obeyed His Word. Our authority comes also from Jesus the King of the Kingdom as we obey His Word. It is knowing His Word that gives us the authority to speak on His behalf. The Holy Spirit always works through the Word of God that is in our heart. He does not work through ignorance! We must equip our life with the Word of Jesus if we want true authority in our life.

Right now God is at work to release a new authority in His people. This is happening as we allow the truth of the Word to be applied to our daily life style. The very next chapter of Matthew Eight - is a chapter of authority and how authority worked in Jesus. Before we can exercise real authority we must learn to be under authority - be willing to learn from someone else by taking orders, doing the lowly tasks, etc. That is how the centurion grew to be a man of authority, which Jesus acknowledged as being great in faith. (See Matthew 8:5-13).

Of ourselves we are weak and useless. But with Jesus as our Captain we can learn how He wants us to function in life in His authority, His strength, His everything. That’s why we must go through the dealings of God, the stripping down of self, so Jesus can put into us those things that should be there to enable us to walk in Kingdom authority.

The more we follow the doctrines of Jesus in simple obedience the more we shall experience His authority shining through us to *“salt the earth”* and *“light the world”* (Matthew 5:13-16). You and I, together, have been chosen to express the risen Christ in word and deed in our generation. This series has taught us how. What we do with it will determine the level of our authority as a believer. God bless you.

“For the Son of man is a man taking a far journey, who left His house, AND GAVE AUTHORITY TO HIS SERVANTS, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch . . .” (Mark 13:34-37).

This brings us to the completion of this Manual: a verse by verse walk through three powerful chapters of St. Matthew’s Gospel.

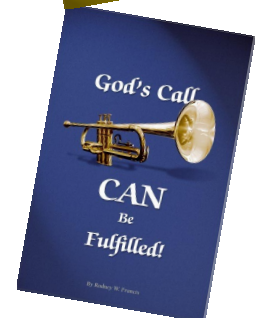
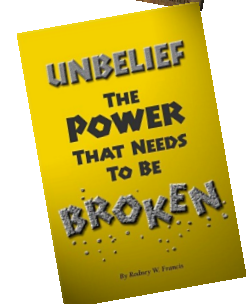
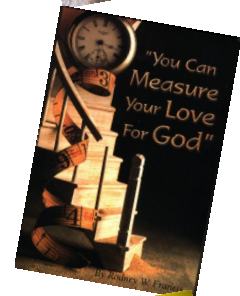
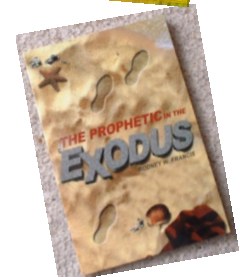
I trust you have found the time spent studying these Chapters to be most beneficial to you personally, and to all those you share with. There is just so much to learn when we allow the Words of Jesus to sink into our lives.

God Bless you!

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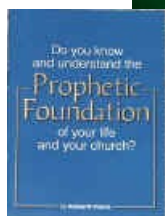
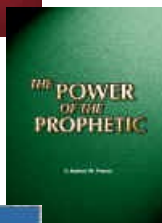
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



RODNEY AND JEAN

Rodney W. Francis was converted in 1959 at 17 years of age, and sovereignly received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the midst of a herd of cows at 18 years of age. There he received the call of God to preach. Doors opened up for him to commence preaching a short time later, and he has been preaching ever since. He is the Founder/Director of The Gospel Faith Messenger, a many-faceted Christian Ministry that reaches out to multiplied thousands of people around the world through Gospel literature, books, booklets, manuals, Gospel Tracts, E-Mail ministries, the World Wide Web, a monthly Prayer Support Letter and Barnabas Bulletin, 3 Bible Correspondence Courses (free), Equipping Stations (Training of Prophetic Teams), Prophetic Equipping Schools, Prophetic Conferences, Personal Prophetic Ministry, Schools Of The Holy Spirit, Church Meetings, Counseling, CD's, GFM International Prayer Team, etc. For more than 47 years (commenced April 1964) this Ministry has impacted multiplied thousands of people in over 108 nations. Today many are discovering their Spiritual Gifts and the joys of hearing and obeying the voice of God through the teachings of The GFM Teams.

Rodney and his wife, Jean, live by faith and the Ministry has a number of dedicated, voluntary workers that enable us to make the financial donations go almost 100% toward reaching people for Christ. Your ongoing prayer support of The GFM Ministry is greatly appreciated.

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