

Lesson #6 – The Principles Related to a Correct View of Priority.

Introduction

- A. The Christian is described in the Bible as a member of the Kingdom of Heaven. The implications of this are staggering. The practical benefits of such a relationship are beyond numerical designation. The deepest fulfillment in life finds its source and character in the acceptance, freedom, and service which accompanies our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- B. In all the practical areas of this walk with God - we can continually grow. Forgiveness, for example, is not only a complete absolution from all blame - we can increasingly learn of its meaning and enjoy the spiritual experience it is meant to produce in the daily life.
- C. In order to grow in grace, as we should, we must understand and implement the correct priorities. It is in this very area where so many believers have introduced a limit to their Christian life. Perhaps this lesson will be a help to us.
- D. The basic text for this lesson.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33

1. In the context of this verse the Lord Jesus was teaching His disciples that they should have priorities and goals which go beyond the daily necessities of life. This is a good lesson for each of us.
 2. This is an important verse of Scripture because our priorities inexorably stamp us with their character. We become like our priorities. They determine the kind of a person we will become and how we will live.
- I. The Importance of Priorities.
- A. The ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ regarding priorities.
 1. He reminded us that there were "... weightier matters of the law."

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. These ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone. Matthew 23:23

Observations:

- a. The tithe He referred to was related to a handful of herbs. This was a religious act performed with great exactness and faithfulness. While it was the right thing to do - it was done in such a way that it far overshadowed the more important commandments of the Bible.
- b. That which was more important is here designated by the Lord Jesus as "judgment" (being just, doing what is right); "mercy" (being a kind and forgiving person); and "faith" (being an individual that is faithful and trustworthy).

- c. All of us are prone to make the mistake of putting great stress and high value on those areas of our religious life where we can easily obey God - and neglect the more difficult.
2. The Lord Jesus also taught us that many of those things that we emphasize and cherish - may be entirely out of the will of God.

And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. Luke 16:19

Observations:

- a. By use of the term "abomination" the Lord Jesus is referring to that which is detestable to God and under His condemnation.
 - b. We are all vulnerable to developing a way of life which may lead us out of the will of God. It is also very easy to "justify" our own way of living.
 - c. Due to our sinful "nature" we must examine our goals and priorities to make sure they correspond to the will of God. It is easy to make profound mistakes in this area.
 - d. Too many of us are spending a great deal of time and energy on things that are not important.
- B. The testimony of history regarding priorities.

1. King Saul lost the kingdom because of wrong priorities.

And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? . . . Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king. I Samuel 19:17,23.

Observation: Saul lost the kingdom because of his pride. He thought of himself and his abilities more and more highly as he grew older.

2. King Solomon gained everything by the right priorities.

And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing (for wisdom to serve God), and hast not asked for thyself . . . Behold I have done according to thy words . . . And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour . . . I Kings 3:9-14

Observation: By being unselfish Solomon gained everything.

3. Ezra was blessed of God through choosing correct priorities.

This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses . . . according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. For (because, this is the reason why) Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. Ezra 7:6-10

Observation: Because of Ezra's decision to honor God and His Word, and his perseverance in carrying out that decision - God could put His hand upon him and bless him.

4. Wrong priorities cause the Word of God to be "choked".

He also that received seed (the Bible) among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. Matthew 13:22

Observation: The choice of wrong priorities caused this man to neglect and disobey the Word of God. Every believer has been caught in this situation to some degree. This parable comes to us as a serious warning.

C. The practical application regarding priorities.

1. We are all prone to make two mistakes in this area of the Christian life.

- a. We may have the wrong goal in life.

- 1) There is only one Biblical goal - God Himself and His glory.

- a) Too often, even though the question and the answer of the catechism is known to us, this is not a practical and meaningful reality to us.

- b) Wrong goals have a tendency of slipping into our life and bringing us into bondage.

- 2) We must be willing to ask the questions, "What am I working to achieve?", "What is important to me in the practical areas of my life?", "Do I have concrete evidence that I am living for God and His glory?".

- b. We may have the wrong priorities for the achieving of the right goal - of God and His glory.

- 1) Our most important priorities must conform to our "inner man" and be of a spiritual nature. Our seeking of money, education, pleasure, influence and advancement must be an expression of Biblical faith and love.

- 2) All believers are vulnerable to exalting priorities into goals. That which is highly secondary is often "sought" as though it is primary. Money would be a good example here.

2. It is very important to introduce the issue of decisions of faith and love into our discussion of priorities.

- a. This is a good way to test the validity of our priorities - whether or not they reflect our love for God and we can utilize them as a way whereby we trust God.

- b. It is clear in the example of Solomon and Ezra that their choice was an expression of both faith and love.

II. The Importance of Spiritual Priorities.

A. The distracting pressure of wrong priorities, Matthew 6:19-34.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth

No man can serve two masters

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat?

Take therefore no thought for the morrow

Observations:

1. These statements of the Lord Jesus are in the context of the basic text of this lesson. Our Savior is not advocating the type of life which would neglect the virtue of responsible provision. He is teaching, however, the priority of the spiritual and promises that if this is carried out then we can expect His help in the material.
2. It is very common for even the Christian to reverse this principle. We often work carefully for the material and recreational areas of life - and if we have any time or energy or money left over - then we become involved in the spiritual. If this is so in our daily life - then we must repent.

B. The Biblical example regarding spiritual choices, Hebrews 11:24-29.

1. Our "natural tendency" is to choose honor - Moses made a choice of faith contrary to personal honor.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Hebrews 11:21.

2. Our "natural tendency" is to choose pleasure - Moses made a choice of faith contrary to personal pleasure.

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Hebrews 11:25

3. Our "natural tendency" is to choose wealth - Moses made a choice of faith contrary to personal wealth.

Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. Hebrews 11:26

4. Our "natural tendency" is to choose security - Moses made a choice of faith contrary to personal security.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Hebrews 11:27

5. Our "natural tendency" is to choose a rational explanation of life - Moses made a choice of faith contrary to personal rationality.

By faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. Hebrews 11:28

Observation: These verses clearly remind us of the priority of the spiritual. We must utilize this passage of Scripture as a yardstick for our own life. It is not enough to simply follow our "natural tendency".

III. The Important Priorities Designated. (Sample only)

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ is first in importance.

Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. I Peter 2:6

Observation: The Lord Jesus Christ is not only to be recognized as the goal of our daily life - but also the main priority - in that all that we do we are to do "for His sake", out of love for Him, and in deep trust upon Him. If we fail here no amount of careful work in other areas* can be a substitute.

- B. People are important in priority.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:34,35

Observation: People must be important to us because they are important to God. We may not "use" people nor manipulate them for our selfish purposes. To glorify God in our relationship with others - it is necessary to love them and thereby give them the rights and privileges that belong to them.

- C. The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is important in priority.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation (empty life) received by tradition from your fathers,

But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. I Peter 1:18,19

Observation: High on the list of our priorities must be placed the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is not only the provision God has made for our deliverance for sin - it is also the pattern of how we are to live our daily life. Since He made my freedom from sin a possibility through His Crucifixion - then I must live in that freedom. Since He provided an enablement to live successfully through His Resurrection - then I must live successfully.

D. The person of the believer is important in priority.

Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee . . . ~ Isaiah 43:4

Observation: From this verse we are reminded that we must give ourselves the respect, care, discipline, love, and responsibility that is in harmony with being "precious" in the sight of God. There is no place for an attitude of inferiority in the life of the spiritual believer.

E. The New Testament virtues are important in priority.

And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love. I Corinthians 13:13

Observation: All three of these virtues are decisions - not feelings. They are spiritual choices to trust God on the basis of His Word (faith), to love God and to give Him His rightful place in life (love), and to apply this faith and love to the future (hope). These virtues must be applied in some way to all we do.

F. The will of God is important in priority.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Observation: There are not many areas of life which could be described as "good", "acceptable", and "perfect". The will of God is all of this and more. Whatever we do in the daily life must be in harmony with God's will. This also relates to all that is the will of God for us to have - such as love, joy, peace, etc., (Gal. 5:22,23). We must face ourselves with the question, "Are we in the will of God?".

Conclusion:

- A. We are to "seek first" that which the Bible defines as "the Kingdom of God" and His "righteousness".
- B. We must begin, as we have seen, with an honest surrender to the King - the Lord Jesus Christ - and then living our daily life in harmony with His will.
- C. When we have taken that important step - and practice it daily - then we are promised that our secondary needs will be met.

My Goal is God

My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God,
'Tis His to lead me there, not mine but His,
"At any cost, dear Lord, by any road!"

I may not hurry Him, for nought is gained,
God's way is perfect, and His time is best;
Nor may I hinder Him and stay His hand,
Nor settle down half-way to take my rest.

No, faith must forward press, the goal is God,
And love can trust her Lord to lead her there;
Upheld by Him, my soul is following hard
Till God hath full fulfilled my deepest prayer.

No matter if the way be sometimes dark,
No matter though the cost be oft-times great;
He knoweth how I best shall reach the mark,
The way that leads to Him must needs be strait.

One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;
One thing I do, I press towards my Lord;
My God, my glory here from day to day,
And in the glory there my Great Reward.

Francis Brook
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