

## *Part Twelve*

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### DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

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##### GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM (Matt. 18)

In Matthew 18 Jesus taught about the heart of God and the attitudes that must be in those who are children of God. People need to learn to live together. All the nations of the world need to learn to live together. Successful home life is mostly a matter of learning to live together in mutual love and to the mutual advantage of the various ages and types of persons in the home. The general principles of this chapter have broad application to life in society as well as teaching concerning church polity, piety before God, salvation, judgment, and eternity. Remember that it is the Lord teaching us (not ourselves making a political or business philosophy, however good) and that His teaching here sets forth His will concerning the fellowship of *believers*, of Christians in the church.

In training the apostles for leadership Jesus taught basic principles and attitudes that should guide us in our relationships with one another.

##### *Humility*

The disciples had been disputing with one another about who was greatest among them (Mark 9:34ff; Luke 9:46ff), possibly provoked by the special blessing and promise given Peter (Matt. 16:16-18), the transfiguration seen by three but not even to be reported to the others (Matt. 17:1, 9), and the failure of the nine to cast out the demon (Matt. 17:14-20). They became so bold in their ambition that they asked Jesus, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom?" (Matt. 18:1). This question started this marvelous chain of teachings in which Jesus tried to transform their minds.

God's thoughts and God's ways are not those of men (Isa. 55:8, 9). Probably in no other respect do the ways of natural and sinful men differ from the ways of God more than in this matter of their opinions of men—how they classify "great" men, "inferior" men and "forgotten" men. It is hard for us to attain to the Lord's attitude. Ambition, envy and contempt arise again and again, and at the most inappropriate times (Luke 22:24). The danger is constantly

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with us and very great—the danger that we shall seek to save or to exalt ourselves and care nothing for others.

Jesus told the apostles that they would have to turn away from their sin of personal ambition and humble themselves as a little child in order to enter the kingdom at all. Their attitude was wrong. It was one of exalting self to the neglect of others, or even at the expense of others. Jesus told them, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3, 4).

Jesus wanted His disciples to have the unique and heavenly spirit of true godliness—the spirit that so loves that it takes thought for others to serve and protect them, even the least honorable, the least significant of them. This attitude alone can protect us from the poisons of selfishness. Selfish ambition always brings strife among brethren and many occasions of stumbling. Selfish pride leads us to climb over others, trampling them down; but the love of God in our hearts makes us willing to stand on the bottom and push them up. So Jesus taught the disciples to be concerned not about the position they would hold, but about the needs of the little and weak ones for whom God cares. They should be doing their thinking and planning on how to avoid occasions of stumbling both to others and to themselves and be willing to cast off even that which was precious to them.

The greatest person is humble (Matt. 18:4). Such persons must not only consent to be lowly, they must look up to the lowliest they know, receive them with honor, taking care lest they stumble (Matt. 18:5, 6). What Jesus says seems to be the expression of strong feelings coming from the depth of His heart—the great heart of heaven, infinite, awe-inspiring, the object of the wondering worship of all men who ever catch a glimpse of it. Feel His sadness as He sees the woe of a world filled with occasions of stumbling. The loving heart of God, distressed at the callous indifference of men, teaches them better with love's own patience and gentleness.

Jesus pleads, "See that ye despise *not one*" (Matt. 18:10). This word "despise" (either in Greek or English) does not mean hate, but to have a low opinion of, to consider as worthless, to ignore or treat with indifference. Alas, we do despise some, but God doesn't. "It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. 18:14). If "one of them be gone astray" He leaves the ninety and nine and seeks that one that is

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wandering and rejoices over every one (Matt. 18:12-13). He who counts our hairs much more counts us. God is no respecter of persons, but **He** respects man. Jesus does not attack their conceit by showing how poor and insignificant is the greatest of men, but by showing how valuable to God is the least of men. Men are precious in God's sight, objects of His angels' care, redeemed by the immeasurable ransom—the life of His unique Son—not because of what is peculiar to one or some, but to all. "See that ye despise not one" (Matt. 18:10).

Jesus' feelings and words were beyond the apostles at this occasion; their selfishness was not immediately overcome, but it is certainly a joy and a source of hope to us to see how grandly they did learn the lesson eventually, to see how self-forgetful and self-effacing they did become, and how they attained a great place in the kingdom. Notice how it was preached and practiced by Paul: "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbor's good" (I Cor. 10:24. See also I Cor. 8:13; 10:33; 13:5; Rom. 12:10; 14:15; 15:1-7; Gal. 6:1-3; Phil. 2:2-5, 14, 15; Col. 3:12-14).

### *Love*

Of all men, those who sin against us are most likely to be lightly esteemed by us. We nurse our supposed grievances and readily resign our offenders to a state of guilt for which we feel no responsibility, often no regret, and sometimes even glory in the wrong, which makes us feel above them. Such is distinctly ungodly! All of us sin against God, yet God gave His dear Son to make a way to forgive us. Love for the offender causes us to care for his salvation as much as for our own; thus it sends us out to seek a reconciliation with Him.

The law of love is the basis of church discipline. Sin estranges and destroys. Love seeks and serves and tries to win to perfect accord. God is love. Love is the law of His kingdom (Rom. 13:8-10). He seeks peace, blesses peacemakers and commands us to seek a settlement of all wrongs and estrangements (Matt. 5:23-25; Rom. 12:16-21). Love is necessary to the godly character. Actions that are in themselves commendable are not truly good without love. It is indispensable to Christianity. Any pretense of Christianity without love is as unorthodox as it would be without Christ Himself (I Cor. 8:1; 13:1-3; I John 3:14; 4:7, 8, 20, 21).

The spirit of love pervades all that Jesus teaches on disciplining sinners. Indifference to guilt and estrangement is not love, any more than indifference to the state of the health and welfare of our families

would signify special affection for them. Jesus knew the deadliness of sin, and His love could not consent to leave men subject to it. What good doctor will willingly ignore the presence of deadly infections that can be remedied! Neither is it godly fellowship or true love for our brethren to ignore in them the presence of sins that can be confessed, forgiven, and blotted out. The fellowship in the church was designed by the Lord to help save us from sin; and it could be a most powerful instrument if we would obey all that the Lord taught concerning the practice and withholding of that fellowship. Love dictated the goal and every step to be taken in the discipline of the offender. The object, of course, is not revenge, but reconciliation, not to crush and humiliate him, but to win and forgive and restore him. The method must be kind and generous, "in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1). First, of course, there must be the fact of a real offense, not imaginary or merely suspicious.

We are to see the offending brother alone. This is just the very last thing some people will do. In pride and fear they shun the very person they should seek. They refuse to speak to him when it is their duty to be frank with him. Yet, too often, they talk of the matter to their neighbors and the train of gossip is started. It is better to speak to him than to brood over the wrong. But speak to him privately, as far as possible avoiding embarrassment and making it easy for him to acknowledge the wrong and repent. If he will not, take witnesses to establish all matters of fact and make another appeal. If he will not hear them, tell it to the church. The church must have reliable testimony of the fact. The church must exhort and expect the man to repent. The church also must refuse fellowship to a known offender who will not repent and accept genuine reconciliation. Heaven has laid a responsibility upon the church and has given her significant authority in such matters (Matt. 18:18). The church that will not heed her Lord in the solemn and sacred duties of discipline is not wiser and better than He, but merely cares less for the souls of men. Carrying out such instructions will never be lording it over one another or exercising undue authority, for when these words are properly obeyed it is by the authority of Jesus and not of men.

Such rigor, though pitiless in appearance, is really merciful to all concerned. It removes from the church a source of trouble and spreading infection which imperils the whole body. It is the best way to bring about the salvation of the offender, because forgiveness must be based upon repentance, and united disfavor of the entire congregation is intended to impress upon him his guilt and need of

repentance. Paul said "Deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Cor. 5:5). The Corinthians did as Paul commanded, and it worked. See II Corinthians 2:5-11. Today the presence of many sectarian congregations glad to receive any member from another congregation hinders much of the effect of scriptural church discipline, but the will and the word of the Lord still stand.

### *Forgiveness*

Peter saw that the Lord's teaching all pointed to the goal of forgiveness and laid an unprecedented stress upon it; therefore Peter asked, "How many times shall I forgive? Until seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). According to the Rabbis, an erring brother should be forgiven three times. Peter must have thought seven times a larger number. The ordinary man falsely thinks he has a right to resent an injury or to demand full payment of every debt. Such an attitude considers forgiveness a special foregoing of one's own rights, and naturally thinks there is a limit beyond which we can not be expected to exercise such forbearance. Jesus' answer states that there is no limit and shows why there should be none. All Christians have asked and accepted from God unlimited forgiveness, and we have no right to refuse forgiveness to those who ask it of us.

Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23-35). In the story, one man owed his lord a million times as much as the other man owed him, yet after he had been forgiven all of his enormous debt he refused to have mercy upon the poor man that owed him so little. He treated his debtor worse in every way than his lord had treated him. Although his conduct was outrageous, it was not different from that which we find among church members who, when they deal with their fellow servants, forget the great mercy of the Lord in the cleansing of their sins. Jesus' story was a cutting satire on Peter's suggestion of seven times, and no doubt it was startling to the disciples. It is new and strange to most of us, too. We are not likely to think of seven times as Peter did, but like the unmerciful servant we will not forgive once.

Jesus' words at the close of the parable are conclusive and fearful. There is no duty on which the Lord insists any more strenuously than this duty of forgiveness, and He always connects closely our forgiving with our being forgiven (See Matt. 6:12, 15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:36, 37; James 2:13; Eph. 4:32; Col 3:13). This commandment concerns personal forgiveness and not social or judicial mercies.

God ordained governments for vengeance on evildoers on His behalf (Rom. 13:1-7). Furthermore, true forgiveness must be both given and received; it must be conditioned upon repentance, and this instruction does not tell us to forgive unconditionally. But we must take care that we have the desire to forgive in our hearts and work for a reconciliation. Jesus said we must forgive "from your hearts" (Matt. 18:35). It is easy enough to grant forgiveness with the lips, but to do it from the heart is confessedly hard for most of us. If it seems to us hard and unnatural, then that is evidence that we need our hearts changed. Above all, the forgiveness must not be grudging, for it must be seeking to take effect. It must be the outflow of love. If Christ lives in us until "it is no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20), then the love of Christ that forgave me much should easily forgive my brother a little—nay, eagerly! "But if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

Jesus said, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14, 15). Does this statement, resting our forgiveness upon our forgiving others, set aside or modify the terms of pardon as authorized in His great commission and as preached by the apostles—faith, repentance and baptism? No, it simply helps to show what the full force of our faith and the fruit of our repentance should be and must be. Repentance is the mental determination to accept and obey God's will. This lesson is instruction concerning what is God's will. Baptism is the first crucial test of faith by which we come into the mercy of Christ, but our salvation is constantly conditioned upon a continued, living (obedient, James 2:14-26) faith. Baptism is not its only test.

We must be willing to be forgiven and also willing to forgive. We must seek forgiveness from God with all the life and spirit that goes with it. We must also seek to forgive in the true spirit of Christ. For we are the debtors who can not pay.

The humble, loving, forgiving spirit is the secret of living together with others. This is the spirit of greatness. One with this attitude seeks what is best for others because he genuinely cares for them. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked" (I Cor. 13:4, 5). When the sons of Zebedee were seeking chief places for themselves, they probably felt it a noble ambition, but they were forgetting to care as they should for their brothers in the apostleship. They were not preferring others

in honor above themselves (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3). When the ten heard it and were moved with envy, they, too, were minding their own ambitions and were lacking in love that seeks to serve rather than to be served. The right kind of ambition to be truly great can be holy and noble: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). But we are usually so wrong in our ideas of greatness. Christ wants to change our ideas of greatness. He wants to build within us true greatness.

Greatness in the kingdom is service to others. That is the way we serve God. These same qualities are found in the greatness of Christ. Isn't it a part of His greatness that He wants to share them with us?

For Further Study:

- Bruce, A. B. *The Training of the Twelve*, 3rd ed. New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d. Fine study of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18 under the chapter heading "Training in Temper."
- Hayden, William, *Church Polity*. Chicago: J. J. Clarke, 1899. Pp. 97-126. Discussion of the necessity, purpose, manner and method of church discipline.
- Lightfoot, Neil. *The Parables of Jesus; Part I*. Austin, Tx: R. B. Sweet Company, 1963. Pp. 48-54. Helpful exposition of the parable of the unmerciful servant.
- Taylor, William M. *The Parables of Our Savior*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 1975 reprint. Pp. 95-103. Good application of the unmerciful servant parable.
- Williamson, Chester. "The Church Should Practice Discipline," unpublished mimeographed essay available from Ozark Bible College Bookstore, 5pp. Very practical.

## THE SPIRIT OF TRUE WORSHIP—LOVE FOR GOD

Though we admit that God exists—even if we acknowledge that the Bible reveals the one true and living God—what does that profit if we do not worship and serve Him in our inmost spirits and according to the truth? To know of God and then neither glorify Him, nor submit to His will, would seem to be a more guilty wrong and a more violent rebellion than the blindness and folly of saying there is no God! In Romans 1, Paul says that the being of God is manifested in the things that are seen, “being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse.” All men are responsible for giving to God reverence and honor. The great sin and degradation of much of the human race is discussed by Paul in Romans 1:20-32.

*Need For True Worship*

To neglect to worship and give thanks to God is a very serious matter and a basis and beginning of gross evils, because it indicates a state of heart that cares not for all the goodness and truth which God embodies. And “out of the heart are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). Then the affection, admiration, and idealism, which should be fastened upon God, will soon be turned to some unworthy thing which is exalted to the place which God should occupy in the heart.

Far too many people think they can live normal and noble lives without any more worship or respect for God than a distant and occasional recognition of Him. They do not realize that (1) they are committing a direct affront and insult against God personally, refusing to accept His proper dominion in all the universe; (2) they are choosing not to exalt and abide by the good and pure and true, preferring darkness and corruption. The (apparently) moral man who is irreligious is one who violates the highest law, who despises the source and essence of righteousness, who resists the best interests of himself and his fellow man “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God” (Luke 4:8). It is right. It is reasonable. It is natural. It is necessary. It is commanded by the supreme ruler and final judge of all men. Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, soul, mind, and strength is the first and greatest commandment on which hangs all the law and prophets; all righteousness and life (Matt. 22:37-40). A character that is right toward every person and thing can be described simply



as one that fears God; and the person who fears not God can not be expected either to respect good or to restrain evil. This contrast in characters is even more vividly implied in the simple statement that one man loves God, while another hates God.

Of all the perils that can assail a nation, there can be no greater danger than that of forgetting God. It seems always true of individuals and of nations that when they are satisfied and feeling no great need of help they forget God. They want Him chiefly for assistance. God, through Moses, warned Israel lest, when they became settled and comfortable, well-fed, and feeling secure, they should forget God (Deut. 8). Every sin we can name begins when we begin to forget God. And America today is showing that the hearts of her people are turning away from God, but we do not realize it as we need to. We must not be indifferent to it, for that very indifference is part of the lack of reverence and concern for the will of God.

The fullness of God's being and character dwells in Jesus Christ, and all God's authority and rule of the universe is given to Christ. All the obligation of man toward God demands that we actively worship and serve Jesus Christ in and through the church. The indifferent and disrespectful attitude of people toward the church, including the non-attendance of members, is indication of forgetting God.

The common acceptance of lowered standards in the home, increase of divorce, disobedience of children, immodesty of dress, salacious literature, impurity of speech, licensed and lavish flow of the liquors of lawlessness, and the almost universal devotion to the lust-laden motion pictures and T.V. programs: all are indications of how our people are forgetting or defying the law of God. America is suffering from trashy ideals.

"Exchanging the truth of God for a lie" and changing the glory of God for the glory of men and material things, ceasing to worship and thank God from the heart, will bring the same results in America today that it brought in other lands and in other times—darkness, lusts, uncleanness, vile passions, and corruption (Rom. 1:20-26). "Even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful; who, knowing the ordinance of God

that they that practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practice them" (Rom. 1:28-32). Are not all these things too much with us?

What then is the true worship which will save us from these things?

### *True Worship Is From The Heart*

It is more than mere form and ceremony. It is more than the place where it is performed, or the posture assumed, or the motions executed. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . And to love him with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33). This last sentence was spoken by an uninspired Jewish scribe, but Jesus approved it and said other things to the same effect. Worship is an attitude of spirit expressed by the attitude of body and accepting the forms and ceremonies which God prescribes. It is reverent adoration. It is love in the spirit of God. In the strictest sense it is not the outward activity of the body, but the inward attitude of active exaltation of God above everything else. It is such an adoration as belongs to God alone, and must not be given to men or angels.

I fear that we attend many "worship services" in which we do not actually do much worshiping. Singing may express worship, but it is likely to be done without worshiping; we may have our attention on the tune or the time or the persons present. Reading the Bible and listening to sermons are not in themselves worship. Prayer should be accompanied by worship in the heart turned toward God, but we may be occupied in thanksgiving by thinking of the things we have received, or in petitions by thinking of the things we need and desire. Worship is a soul's bowing down in adoring contemplation of God Himself. (Study Exod. 4:31; Josh. 5:13, 14; II Chron. 7:3; 29:29).

Formal "worship" in the place and ceremonies which God commanded is not acceptable to Him if it is without a repentant and submissive spirit, if it comes out of evil hearts satisfied in disobedience. Such pretense in attempting to flatter and deceive God is the height of presumption and irreverence. No wonder it is so very offensive to God, who says: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; I am weary of bearing them. I have had enough of your sacrifices, bring no more vain oblations. I will not hear; your hands are full of blood" (Selected statements from Isa. 1:11-17;

cp. Amos 5:21-27; Josh. 7:6-15; Hosea 6:6).

*True Worship Is According To The Truth Of  
God's Nature and God's Revealed Will*

No matter what the spirit and intention, God will not be pleased to be worshiped with the use of images and idols. He positively forbade His people to make unto Him any image of anything in heaven or earth (Exod. 20:4). Images completely misrepresent Him and would lead the people away from the true worship and away from the true knowledge of God into the errors of polytheism and into the terrible depravity of sensuous indulgence and perversion that has always been connected with idol worship.

Worship is more than some ceremony or program that pleases us, that stirs, thrills, or moves our spirits to fervent feelings and longings—it is addressed to a God of truth, and must be according to the truth, not just a free expression of our feelings. It matters to God how we worship. "Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim" (I Sam. 15:22, 23). Perhaps Cain's sacrifice was more valuable to him than Abel's was, but since it was not according to God's revealed will (being not according to faith, Heb. 11:4) it was not accepted. The most gorgeous and costly and fervent display is not true worship if it rejects the will and word of God. The best way to exalt Him, to show love to Him and to reverence Him is to do what He asks. There can be no more spiritual worship than literal obedience performed with the whole heart and eager willingness. "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Certainly the spirit of true worship is in that which glorifies God and not us. Any "religious" acts which cause us to boast or to be quite satisfied with ourselves are not truly worshipful. The whole-hearted participation in the Lord's Supper is a most excellent act by which to express and to stimulate the spirit of true worship to the glory of Christ and humbling of ourselves. Every Christian should take advantage of each Lord's Day's opportunity to gather about the table.

For Further Study:

Campbell, Alexander, R. Richardson, Moses Lard and others. *The*

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*Pioneers on Worship*. Kansas City: Old Paths Book Club, 1947. Essays calling for a restoration of worship of God as taught in the New Testament.

Torrey, R. A. *What the Bible Teaches*. London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., n.d. Pp. 471-478. Good outline summary of the Bible's teaching on worship.

Turnbull, Ralph G., ed. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967. Pp. 364-372. Deals with the New Testament teaching concerning worship.

THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE—LOVE FOR OTHERS  
(Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus taught that love for God was the first and great commandment and the second commandment was love for one's neighbor. These fundamentals form the basis for all of God's laws (Matt. 22:34-40). During the third year of Jesus' ministry, Jesus used a lawyer's question as an opportunity to teach the lesson of love for others (Luke 10:25-37).

*"This Do and Thou Shalt Live"*

A scholar of the Old Testament law asked Jesus, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" It was a large inclusive question well calculated by the official clique to test Jesus as a religious teacher.

Jesus replied with a question indicating that the answer was to be found in the word of God: "What is written in the law?" This does not mean that we should go back to the same law to find life after God has given us a new and better covenant (Heb. 8-10) and has "taken away the first that he may establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). The only way of life for any one is obedience to the will of God, the author of life, under the terms of whatever covenant God addresses to him—the Jew under the law, the Christian under Christ.

But to obtain life by doing the law one had to do all its requirements perfectly (Gal. 3:10; James 2:10), and no one, except Jesus, ever did accomplish the keeping of the law (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). Therefore, since the law could not save, through the weakness of the flesh, God, in grace, sent forth His Son that we might be saved through Him. The grace of God and the sacrifice of Christ blot out our sins on the condition of our faith and obedience toward Christ (Mark 16:16; John 3:36; Heb. 5:9; I Pet. 1:22). Under the new covenant of grace we are expected to fulfill the law of love as far as is possible. Love is even a test of our faith, without which we can not claim the promise of grace (I John 3:10-24; 4:7-21; Matt. 25:31-46). "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (I Cor. 16:22). Our love to God and to man is not the cause of the salvation provided for us by Christ, but it is a required result. Love is the basis of all righteousness, and the essence of the "newness of life" in those who have been "made free from sin, and become servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:4, 18-22). It is the spirit of those

who have been born anew of "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Love must be in us if "it is not I that live, but Christ that liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Thanks be to God that we have the Savior and do not depend upon unbroken perfection of works of righteousness of our own for our salvation (I John 1:8, 9). Still, supreme love to Christ is the condition of Christian discipleship (Matt. 10:35-38; Luke 14:26).

*"Thou Shalt Love"*

Can love be commanded? Some folks consider Jesus' command that we love everybody, including our enemies, impracticable or utterly impossible. But it is plain that the Lord does command it and expect it (John 13:34; 15:17; I Tim. 1:5; I John 3:23). The believer, therefore, must accept its possibility and practicability, and set out to do his Lord's will. Then what is the love that can be and is commanded?

R. A. Torrey described love:

Love for another is a desire for and delight in their good. Love is not mere fondness for another or pleasure in their society. The character of another may be hateful to me and his society disagreeable, but still a real desire for his welfare is love.<sup>1</sup>

Torrey cites Matthew 5:43, 47; and I John 3:14, 16, 17 as the basis of his conclusion.

Jesus says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Surely, love is giving of ourselves in the interests of others, and the greatest love is the giving of our whole lives for the benefit of others.

Love belongs to the emotions and motives of the heart. It is not an act in itself, but the cause and spirit of many actions. Like all the virtues of the Christian life, it can not be obtained merely in the abstract and held in passivity. The reality of love is measured by the deeds it produces, or at least by the extent to which it struggles to express itself when its true desires are beyond the range of possibility. While the scripture speaks of love as an internal quality, motive, or attitude necessary to the true righteousness of even beneficial deeds (I Cor. 13:1-3), it usually recognizes love in its outward manifestations.

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<sup>1</sup> R. A. Torrey, *What the Bible Teaches*. (London: James Nisbet, n.d.), p. 393.

Love is not theory but practice, whether toward God or men. Love is much misunderstood. Few words have ever been more abused than "love." It is used to name feelings and motives that range all the way from the genuine giving of self for the good of others to its very opposite, including some of the worst forms of selfishness and abuse of others. Still it is not what we don't know about love that should bother us as much as what we do know and don't practice.

*How Love to God (or Christ) Is Manifested*

1. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments" (I John 5:3). "If a man love me, he will keep my word" (John 14:23; See also Exod. 20:6; II John 6; Deut. 10:12; John 14:15, 21; 15:10).
2. By hating evil (Ps. 97:10; Rom. 12:9) and by not loving the world (I John 2:15; James 4:4).
3. By loving God's children, our brethren (I John 4:20, 21), feeding His lambs and shepherding His sheep (John 21:15-17).
4. By worshiping Him with humility and gratitude (Luke 7:44-47).
5. By longing for His appearing and desiring to be with Him (II Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:20; II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23).

*How Love to Man Is Manifested*

1. By doing no injury to others (Rom. 13:10), but good, even to enemies (Luke 6:27; Gal. 6:10).
2. By becoming a servant to others (Gal. 5:13; John 13:1-5; Phil. 2:4-7).
3. By seeking not our own, but our neighbor's, good (I Cor. 10:24); pleasing not ourselves (Rom. 15:1-3); bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2).
4. By forgiving and comforting the penitent, restoring gently the fallen, encouraging the fainthearted, admonishing the disorderly, etc. (II Cor. 2:7, 8; Gal. 6:1; I Thess. 5:14; Eph. 4:2, 32).
5. By avoiding that by which a brother stumbles, and by doing things which make for peace and which edify (Rom. 14:15-21; I Cor. 8:1-13).
6. By giving of our means to help another's need (II Cor. 8:24; I John 3:17).
7. By preferring others in honor above ourselves (Rom. 12:10).
8. By praying for them (Matt. 5:44).
9. By rebuking them that sin in order to save them (Lev. 19:17; Prov. 27:5, 6; Eph. 5:11; Matt. 18:15-17; Titus 1:12, 13; Heb. 3:13).
10. By loving God and doing His commandments (I John 5:2).

11. By laying down our lives for others (I John 3:16; John 15:13).

12. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (I Cor. 13:4-7).

The Jewish lawyer, in order to justify his own limited practice of love, sought to limit the scope of its application. Most of us are very much like him. Love patterned after the love of God must cross boundaries. Love regulated by opinion is merely love of our own opinion.

God, our teacher and example in love, does recognize some distinctions among men; He does not act the same toward all kinds of men; His wrath falls upon the sinner that will not forsake sin, but all God's acts are prompted by and carried out in love. He separated Himself from men because of sin (Gen. 3:23, 24), but He "commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). In like manner, we, too, can and must refuse to be joined to unbelievers and idolaters; we can and must have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (II Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11), but still sacrificial love must dominate our hearts continually toward those even from whom we must withhold our approval and partnership.

In commenting on Romans 13:8 David Lipscomb says:

Love, then, beyond all doubt, is doing good to a person. When we do him good we love him, it matters not whether the good we do pleases or displeases him. Do to him what the divine law commands, and we do him good. It frequently will offend him. Be it so. Love demands that we should help him, even if he persecutes us for it. That was the love of Christ to man. He loved him, although His love excited the wrath and enmity of man.<sup>2</sup>

Love that is real and heartfelt will also strive in all ways honorable, though sacrificial, to avoid offending and displeasing (see I Cor. 10:31-33; 9:19-22). As in the case of the good Samaritan, love may be expensive. Christ's love for you and me was very expensive to Him!

Much has been written and said in this world concerning the

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<sup>2</sup> David Lipscomb. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Romans*. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1943). p. 238.



THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE—LOVE FOR OTHERS

excellency of love—"The Greatest Thing in the World." The Bible itself is full of the subject with superlative emphasis on its pre-eminence.

For Further Study:

Hendricks, Howard. *Say It With Love*. Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1972. Emphasizes love in our telling and living the gospel.

Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960. Lewis discusses with good insight four Greek words for love: romantic love, family love, friendship love, love that unselfishly acts in the other's best interest.

Lightfoot, Neil R. *The Parables of Jesus: Part I*. Austin, Texas: R. B. Sweet Co., 1963. Exposition of the parable of the good Samaritan.

Schaeffer, Francis. *The Mark of a Christian*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1970. Strong appeal for the necessity of love in our relationship with others.

EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPOND  
TO GOD'S MESSAGE (Outline of Luke 12)

## Introduction

## A. The time and circumstances.

1. Many thousands gathered together, so that they trod on one another, to hear Jesus, or to accuse Him, or just to see the parade.
2. Pharisees in vigorous opposition—Luke 11:53, 54 (jealousy, hatred, prejudice).
3. Loyal friends of Jesus, no doubt: apostles, women from Galilee, Lazarus, Mary, Martha.
4. Many who had heard the seventy, had seen miracles. See John 7, 8, 9, 10.
5. Many, no doubt, just stood back and watched, avoided a decision, like the parents of the man born blind (John 9), like the rulers (John 12:42), secret disciples?

## B. Relevance of the sermon.

1. Imagine yourself in that mighty crowd. In which group would you belong? Bitter enemies? Loyal friends? Weak and silent believers? The undecided?
2. The same groups exist today. Many are undecided for various reasons. Many really believe Jesus must be right, but will not make a definite and open decision to be all out for Christ and to lay hold of the kingdom of life and righteousness.

## C. Goal of the sermon.

1. In this sermon Jesus calls for men to (1) *Decide* who's right and what's important; (2) *Choose* the real aim and dependence of their lives; (3) *Live* in service and in expectation of His coming.
2. In making this call, Jesus answers many of the reasons or excuses that hold men back. He offers understanding advice and divine help according to each man's need.

EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPOND TO GOD'S MESSAGE

I. RESPONSIBILITY TO DECIDE

(Luke 12:1-12).

Between favor of men and favor of God.

Between fear of men and fear of God.

Help for those  
hiding from  
reality and  
denying truth.

A. Beware of Phariseeism (12:1-3).

1. Some think, "I stand well enough among men; that's the main thing." Others think, "I'm not such a bad sinner; I don't want to act like I had to forget everything else to get forgiveness by following Jesus."
2. Jesus' answer: failure of hypocrisy, and triumph of truth. All will out.

Help for the  
fearful in face  
of opposition.

B. Fear God, not men (12:4, 5).

1. Some think, "I'd be put out of the synagogue." "I'd lose business." "Rome will crush this kingdom before it gets started." "I'm afraid to be for Jesus."
2. Jesus' answer: men can't really hurt you much or for very long; but God's wrath destroys body and soul in hell.

C. Trust God and fear not (12:6, 7).

1. God's infinite knowledge and care, even for birds.
2. Don't be afraid that God will not care for you.

Assurance to  
those who  
confess Him.

D. Acknowledge Jesus, and beware of rejecting God's Spirit (12:8-12).

1. Promise to those who confess Jesus before men, and warning to those who deny.
2. Warning to avoid blasphemy by denying God's divine messengers.
  - a. Blasphemy of Jesus now may be repented of and forgiven when more light comes.
  - b. But blasphemy of the full and final revelation of the Spirit will not. Do not defame the latest and greatest manifestation of divine power, authority and grace—do not reject the last offer of

DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

help (miss the last boat).

3. Promise of help by the Holy Spirit to meet persecution when they stand for Jesus.

II. RESPONSIBILITY TO CHOOSE (Luke 12:13-34). Subject of money brought up by one in the crowd but turned by Jesus as important part of His teaching to all. All must choose what they value most, what they rely upon and are most concerned about (Luke 12:13, 14).

A. Materialism is foolish—love of riches is vain (12:15-21).

Help for those greedy for gain.

1. Life does not consist of possessions (deceitfulness of riches vs. 15). (See I Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19; Mark 4:18, 19; 10:23-26, 29-31; Phil. 4:10-13).
2. Riches take wings and fly away, or must be left behind, not worth the candle (vs. 16-21).
3. Men satisfied with temporal wealth are likely to be very poor indeed before God (vs. 21).

B. Trust God and be free from anxiety for things (12:22-30)

Help for those worried about "necessities of life."

1. Realize that life is more than things.
2. Notice how God takes care of His creatures.
3. See that anxiety doesn't accomplish anything, can't add a step to your life.
4. Have faith and be free from slavery to material needs: God knows your needs.

C. Put first things first and place your treasure in heaven (12:31-34).

Assurance for those who put God's service first.

1. Seek the supreme value, God's kingdom; and all else will come with it.
2. God desires to favor and care for those who seek His will. He does not command us to do something and not enable us to do it.
3. Instead of holding to possessions, use them up in God's service, and gain treasure

## EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPOND TO GOD'S MESSAGE

in heaven. It's safer that way. Act according to faith.

4. Your heart will be where your treasure is.

### III. RESPONSIBILITY TO LIVE (Luke 12:35-53).

Through all of life, in every way, against all odds, to live according to the truth of God.

A. Be steadfast, always looking for the Lord (12:35-40).

Challenge for  
wavering  
followers.

1. The Lord's coming is certain—but the time is uncertain (vs. 35, 36, 40).
2. He will honor and reward those who are ready at His coming (vs. 37, 38).
3. Example of householder and thief (vs. 39).

B. Be faithful in service (12:41-48). (Peter's question does not change the course of the sermon, vs. 41).

Charge to  
stewards  
tempted to  
be selfish.

1. Everyone who has received any commitment from the Lord must be a faithful steward—stewardship of life (vs. 42).
2. Rewards await the faithful stewards (vs. 43, 44. See Luke 17:7-10; 19:17, 18).
3. Punishment is sure for the unfaithful servants (vs. 45, 46).
4. Accountability varies, and judgment will be according to responsibility (vs. 47, 48).
  - a. Even the ignorant will suffer for not doing God's will.
  - b. To whom much is given, of him more will be required.

C. Be standing for Jesus, uncompromising and unmoved by opposition (12:49-53).

Call to arms  
for any who  
love peace  
more than  
righteousness.

1. Christ is a burning issue; His presence demands division over right and wrong (vs. 49).
2. Christ must face the issue to the point of complete submergence of self in suffering for righteousness and God's gracious purpose: He cannot turn aside, is pressed to that end (vs. 50).

## DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

3. Believers must be willing to "take sides" over Him, and suffer division from family or friends. Christ is the issue over which the world is split (vs. 51-53).

Conclusion: APPEAL AND DEMAND FOR THE DECISION WHICH WILL LEAD TO THE CHOICE AND LIFE OF FAITH (12:54-59).

- A. You *can* decide! You can tell the signs of the weather; then you can tell the evidence of Christ's authority and truth (vs. 54-56).
- B. Why not judge for yourselves what is right?
- C. You *must* decide! Settle with God now, before you are dragged before His judgment seat, convicted, and sentenced where you can never get out! Make use of this day of opportunity for a peaceful and gracious settlement of your unpayable debt to God. You cannot be excused because people have differences of thinking over religion, Christ, and the kingdom; you must decide who is right and then follow with action.

Read the challenge in Joshua 24 and in I Kings 18.

For Further Study:

Geldenhuis, Norval. *New International Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951. Pp. 348-369. Exposition of Luke 12.

Plummer, Alfred. *International Critical Commentary: The Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922. Pp. 316-339. Scholarly comment on Luke 12.

## THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

The price we must pay to be disciples is not the cost of our redemption. What it has cost to prepare the gospel feast can not be calculated. To bring Christianity and its manifold treasures to us has cost an unparalleled array of rare materials and sacrificial services, such as the time, life, services, and suffering of chosen men who prepared the way for Christ; and even greater number of lives (beginning with the apostles) who have labored and suffered, spending and being spent that the message of Christ might be carried even to us. However, the real price of our salvation has been paid by God and Christ—the Christ who “emptied himself” (Phil. 2:7), “humbled himself” (Phil. 2:8), “became poor” (II Cor. 8:9), “suffered” (Heb. 2:18) and “bore our sins in his own body” (I Pet. 2:24). By these the kingdom has been prepared and is offered to us. The things required of us are merely terms of individual participation.

*The Price Is High*

To follow Christ and share in His salvation we must surrender all to Him. The price is all that any man can pay. There is no standard amount that any man could possibly render and still have something left over to call his own. This young ruler had kept the Commandments as he understood them, and appeared to men to be godly enough. But Jesus knew where to test him and reveal whether he exalted God above every other thing. In spite of all the good points in his favor (and he had many), one thing caused him to turn away in sorrow. In effect, he had another god. It is not wrong for a man to have money, but the money must not have the man. It must be subject to the command of Christ. Jesus does not command us all to put away all money immediately, but He warns us all that we “cannot serve both God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). He actually requires of all what He required of the ruler (Luke 14:33)—to renounce all that we have. The Lord seemed to realize that money, more than any other thing, was likely to rule men and keep them from serving God wholly. (See I Tim. 6:9, 10, 17-19; Matt. 6:19-34; Eph. 5:5.) But any other thing that holds us in its grip and does not yield to Christ is just as deadly. Your heart’s idol may be a small one, legal and respectable, but if it causes you to disobey Christ, it is quite as fatal as the greatest sin on earth.

"How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24). The Lord deemed it necessary to warn us thus. He knew the reality of the danger. Most of us refuse to see it or believe it. A vast number of unfaithful preachers "having itching ears" (and palms) have tried to explain away the force of these plain Bible statements. The idleness, self-pleasing and confidence in economic security that go with a "high American standard of living" although they become general and are not called riches, still have all the dangers that Jesus ascribed to riches. What could great wealth do for a man in Jesus' day that ordinary "comfortable means" can not do for one today, materially and spiritually? What if Jesus should put to the test today all the seekers after eternal life? How many church members today would readily give up all their earthly possessions at His command? He does require us to put all that we are and have into His service. Are we doing it? What doth it profit a man (or a nation of men) to gain the world's highest standard of living and lose his own soul? (Matt. 16:26).

No other discipleship on earth is so exacting as Christian discipleship. To accept Christ is (1) to renounce all other masters and (2) to give ourselves wholly to His service. To have God we must have no other gods. To have righteousness we must resign sin. To enthrone Christ we must renounce every other rule, including self-rule. "If any man cometh after me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

### *Self-denial*

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me!" (Matt. 16:24). To deny ourselves, that is the crux of the matter. We are willing to deny some things to ourselves, but then we seek to compensate ourselves by some other indulgence and call the whole thing "self-denial." The world, the flesh and the devil constantly urge us, "Assert yourself," "Suit yourself," "Avenge yourself," "Exalt yourself." Self-denial is such a continuous business it can not be accomplished once for all and forgotten about. In the motivation of every act throughout life there is the choice between our will and God's will. We must set our wills to do only God's will until, as Paul says, "It is no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). It is the saddest rejection of Christ for any one to say, "My life is mine and I'll live it to suit myself." "Ye are not your own; for



ye were bought with a price" (I Cor. 6:19, 20). We just do not realize what a mess we make of things when we do as we please. We bring on sin and death and eternal destruction, besides all the miseries due to sin upon this earth. God would heal our lives, tune them in harmony, set them in beautiful order, make them fruitful and transform us into glorious children of His, to wonder at His love forever; but we must let Him have His way with us.

Such a complete surrender may seem hard to us, but it is no more than the sovereign Son of God has done first. Jesus submitted to the Father's will perfectly in all things, setting us an example and showing the wisdom and triumph of surrender to the love and righteousness of God. His example helps show His meaning in this text. He does not ask us merely to empty our lives, but to fill them with things divine, fruitful and glorious. A person might renounce all kinds of idols, eschew wealth, "hate" his family ties and "his own life also," and yet not be a Christian. He must take up the cross and follow Jesus. Christianity can never be merely in things we do not do, but must be in a positive life of active holiness.

#### *Cross-bearing*

We are much inclined to overemphasize the wealth that Jesus asked the young ruler to abandon, and we forget the life of service that Jesus asked him to adopt (Matt. 19:16-22). Likewise, we probably at all times think too much of the self we are required to deny and the way we must forsake, and think not enough of the cross we are to take and of the following of Jesus.

What did the cross mean? To Jesus it meant condescension, humiliation, reproach, suffering and death. We should be willing that it mean all that to us. But Jesus did not mean that our cross should be merely extraordinary sorrows or misfortunes; the cross is for every disciple. "Whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). Jesus' cross was the burden of the world. In bearing it He spent Himself completely for the salvation of others. He gives to every one of us the challenging call to take upon ourselves real concern and responsibility for the needs of others, especially, their salvation. The cross constrained and straitened His whole life (Luke 12:50; Matt. 20:28; John 12:27). The true disciple of Jesus has the same burden upon his soul (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1; I Cor. 9:22). He "will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (II Cor. 12:15). We neither bear the cross nor follow Jesus if we do not feel the need of lost men and use ourselves up, a living

sacrifice, for their salvation. The great commission definitely and plainly assigns to us the cross we are all to bear:

*The Price Is Low*

The price is low. Anybody can pay it! It must be low in price if all or any can obtain salvation. God paid the cost. He asks of us what little (very little) we have. It is well said: "It does not take a great man to be a Christian, but it does take all there is of him." The Lord gives us the new and divine and eternal life; He merely asks us to turn in the old wreck.

The price is low compared to what we gain as disciples of Jesus. Consider some of the blessings and values of being a Christian. We escape our condemnation (Rom. 8:1); we have peace that passeth understanding (John 14:27; Rom. 5:1; Phil 4:7); we have an inheritance in the family of God as sons (Rom. 8:17; I Pet. 1:4); we have a Father in heaven who loves us, (Phil. 4:19), who hears our prayers (I Pet. 3:12), who does not forget our labor (Heb. 6:10), who chastens (Heb. 12:5, 6); we have a hope that is sure and steadfast (Heb. 6:19), a new and worth-while purpose in life (Phil. 1:21), a new and satisfying view of death (Phil. 1:21, 23). Being a Christian brings us all the joys of that eternal home that Christ has gone to prepare (John 14:3; Rev. 21 and 22). These are values no one can afford to miss. There is no other way or place to obtain them. The yoke of Jesus is not a burden, but a bargain. Is it a sacrifice to invest a nickel in an oil well?

The price of following Jesus is certainly low compared with the cost of not following Jesus. When we refuse to follow Jesus we not only lose all of the above-named blessings, but we incur the wrath of God (John 3:36), exclude our names from the book of life and must look forward to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8:36).

We don't actually pay the price. The lord returns many times what He asks of us (Matt. 19:29). He knows our needs and grants us the use of much of what we devote to Him. "It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). He makes a special blessing of every sacrifice we are called to make. "The toils of the road will seem nothing when we come to the end of the way! Well, not exactly; for it is likely that they will seem like a very blessed part of the gift.

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

For Further Study:

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan, 1963. Ringing challenge to be totally committed to Christ regardless of the cost. Critical of 'cheap grace'—wanting salvation without surrender to Christ.

Bruce, A. B. *The Training of the Twelve*, 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, n.d. Pp. 262-271. Deals with the account of the rich young ruler under the theme of the rewards of self-sacrifice in the kingdom.

## MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

Introduction: This is intended to be a brief summary of what is revealed of God's will on this much disputed subject. An effort is made to present every pertinent passage of scripture and to bring to consideration every permissible interpretation. But space is not given to refute or to support every interpretation.

## I. Marriage

## A. Marriage Was Instituted and Blessed by God.

It was a part of God's design in the creation of man, and is central or basic in His will for human society (Gen. 1:27, 28; 2:18-25). Marriage is honorable for all, or is to be kept honorable by all (Heb. 13:4). To forbid marriage is a doctrine of demons or conscienceless men (I Tim. 4:1-3).

## B. The Positive Rule of Marriage for Life.

"Leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife" (Gen. 2:24). Jesus quoted Genesis 2:24 and added, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matt. 19:5, 6; Mark 10:6-9). A wife is bound by law to her husband while he lives (Rom. 7:1-3). A wife is bound for so long time as her husband lives (I Cor. 7:39).

## C. Remarriage Permitted After Death of a Spouse.

"If the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (I Cor. 7:39, cp. Rom. 7:3). Paul recommends marriage for younger widows (I Tim. 5:14).

## II. Adultery

## A. Prohibition of Adultery.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14). Adultery comes from the heart and defiles the man (Mark 7:21). An adulterer cannot enter the kingdom, but can be justified (I Cor. 6:9-11). "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). No fornicator . . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ" (Eph. 5:3-5). Adultery is frequently included in lists of sins in the New Testament (Gal. 5:19-21; I Thess. 4:3-8). The word translated "fornication" includes adultery and is not distinct from it. It is used in I Thessalonians 4:3-8 apparently of married persons, and seems to include adultery in I Corinthians

## MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

6:18; Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:3-5; Galatians 5:19; and Revelation 21:8.

- B. In the Old Testament Adulterers Were to be Put to Death. "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10; cp. 11-21; Deut. 22:21-24). Adultery is a very serious matter. How can one who believes God's word take it lightly? It nullifies God's plan for the very important relations and responsibilities of the family unit. It defies His will and disrupts lives. It takes what God made holy and makes it common and profane. It degrades the soul of a being made in the image of God. What was made to be ennobling and a means of spiritual strength is diverted to the practice of self-gratification. It is a crime against individual persons, against society, and against the wise will of God.

### III. Divorce

#### A. Teaching Against Divorce.

While divorce was permitted in the Mosaic law, Jesus said that it was only because of the hardness of men's hearts and was not God's will even in the Old Testament society (Matt. 19:8). Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was given for the protection of the woman who was cast out, and to prohibit wife-swapping back and forth. In this text the first three verses furnish a protasis (condition) for the fourth verse, which is the law under these conditions. (This is evident in these translations: Revised Standard Version; New American Standard Bible; New English Bible; Modern Language Bible; An American Translation; New American Bible; and Jerusalem Bible.) The passage implies that men will put away their wives, but it does not so much give permission to put one away as it prohibits taking one back who has been married to anyone else. God says, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:16). Some would point out that the context emphasizes the treachery of Israelites putting away their wives.

#### B. Dealing with the Divorced.

1. Avoid disputes about words to no profit, questionings and strife (II Tim. 2:14-26; I Tim. 1:5-11; 6:3-5; Titus 3:9, 10).
2. Avoid being unnecessarily judgmental (Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 6:37-42; Rom. 12:16-21; 14:10-13; James 2:1-13; I Cor. 5:7-13), for we are sent to serve people more than we are to sort

## DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

- them for the Lord.
3. Continue studying God's word to apply it with true spiritual understanding, and accepting a dogmatic and legalistic church position or traditional view without discerning God's will. Try not to "go beyond what is written" (I Cor. 4:6).
    - a. Always realize and teach that:
      - (1) God does not want divorce.
      - (2) That every divorce represents some spiritual failure.
      - (3) That divorce and remarriage is not unforgivable.
      - (4) That these as well as other evils can be overcome, even prevented if we give God's word its place in our hearts.
    - b. Too often church people are studying only superficially, if at all, or trying to apply old opinions or unscriptural phrases, to determine how to judge divorced people, rather than how to save them and serve them.
  4. We must be more concerned to succeed in helping them than we are to find excuses for our failure or for finding someone to blame for it (cp. Matt. 17:14-20; Mark 9:24-29). It should not be our aim to defend ourselves or make a name for ourselves in the minds of the unbelievers and the leaders of our society.
  5. We must *communicate* to all God's grace and love, His truth, authority and righteousness, His reality and trustworthiness.
    - a. Not merely discourage, but encourage them.
    - b. Not only with words, but with what we are and do. Let Christ live in us and work through us.
    - c. Not to shirk, but to fulfill our responsibility to Christ.
    - d. Not to excuse the sin, but to cure and heal the sinners.
    - e. The cross shows that sinners are not worthless (Rom. 5:8); the cross of Christ draws men to Him (John 12:32); if we bear the cross we will draw more people, too.
  6. We must fulfill our calling as God's new creatures and ministers of reconciliation, knowing no one from a merely human point of view (II Cor. 5:11—6:1). Try our best to represent Christ and all the transforming power of His love and truth.

IV. Adultery and Divorce

A. Scriptural Statements.

1. General — “And he said unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her: and if she herself shall put away her husband, and marry another, she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:11, 12). “Every one that putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth one that is put away from a husband committeth adultery” (Luke 16:18).
2. Exception — “but I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery” (Matt. 5:32). “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

B. Exception Interpreted. Various views of this exception and of conclusions drawn from it.

1. Some think this applied only to Jews under the law, and it is not to be considered for Christians at all. The law decreed death for adultery, so of course a man could put away an adulterous wife and remarry because she would be executed. If he put away any other (an innocent wife) he would be guilty of adultery and cause anyone who married her to commit adultery.
2. Some think this term fornication applied only to sex before marriage, and she could be put away because the marriage was not a genuine one. Commentaries and lexicons generally agree that fornication in these passages includes and probably specifies the sin of adultery.
3. Does the fornication refer to any illicit sex, homosexuality, etc.?
4. Does the sexual unchastity of a mate make the other obligated to divorce, or is it better to forgive and to restore the sinful mate?
  - a. Some think that an adulterer becomes one flesh with even a harlot, so that the original wife must divorce him or she will be living in a “polygamous union” (I Cor. 6:16).

- b. Some think that since the law decreed death for adulterers that they are unforgivable. But didn't Jesus know that the Samaritan woman at the well was unforgivable (if that be so)? See John 4:10—what would Jesus give her, if she knew who He was? Does John 6:37 really mean to leave out as exceptions at least 1/10th of the people because of divorce or adultery, when Jesus said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out"? Why did Jesus say, "harlots go into the kingdom" (Matt. 21:31)? Why did Paul write (I Cor. 6:9-11) that adulterers were washed and justified and sanctified? Compare Ephesians 2:1-9 and 4:17-19.
- c. Divorce on the ground of fornication may be permitted, but it is nowhere commanded or even recommended.
- 5. Does this exception contradict Paul's statement "a wife is bound to her husband as long as she lives" (Rom. 7:2; I Cor. 7:2; I Cor. 7:39)? Does it contradict Mark 10:6-12?
  - a. Jesus' statements in both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 are complete, clear and specific. There is no manuscript evidence to support any doubt about their being an original part of the book of Matthew.
  - b. A simple statement of a general truth cannot contradict limitations on or exceptions to that truth when they are given on equal authority elsewhere.
  - c. Paul's purpose in Romans was not to teach all about divorce and remarriage, but to illustrate the fact that Christians have been discharged from the law to be joined to Christ. In Corinthians also he states the general rule without having any reason to deal with a possible exception under bad or abnormal conditions.
- 6. How does one who divorces a wife, not for the cause of adultery, make her an adulteress (Matt. 5:32)?
  - a. He gives her his permission to be joined to another, and it will seem to the woman that she has a legal right to marry; also it may become a necessity to find a way of living.
  - b. Some think this only means that she will be made to bear the stigma of an adulteress, or appear to be an adulteress.

#### V. Is Remarriage Adultery?

- A. Divorce under the law explicitly gave permission to marry



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someone else (Deut. 24:1-3). If no one has a right to remarry, why did Jesus state an exception to the rule that one who puts away a wife and marries another commits adultery? If divorce and remarriage, except for the cause of fornication, constitutes adultery, then divorce and remarriage for that cause does not amount to adultery.

- B. Then why does Jesus say that anyone marrying her that is put away commits adultery? Is there an exception *implied* in this statement to conform to the exception *stated* in the preceding statement? Does this mean that only the sexually faithful spouse who puts away an unfaithful one may marry another? Some think that if the marriage bond is really broken for one of the pair it can no longer be binding upon the other, but of course the guilty one has already committed adultery to be forgiven or punished. Since the Jews in Jesus' day did not have the power under Roman rule to execute the death penalty upon adulterers, divorce was the only way of escape for innocent parties to intolerable marriages to immoral mates. Did Jesus give His consent to this kind of statement? If the person who puts away a faithful spouse remarries, then the innocent partner has no chance of reconstructing that marriage and can consider the divorce valid in God's sight, and hence can remarry. One whose companion has given himself (or herself) over to sexual immorality can divorce that person and marry another without being guilty of adultery. If this is not true, then the only exception to remarriage being adultery is when the unfaithful mate is executed for adultery.

### C. Summary of Possible Conclusions:

1. All marriages of divorced persons are adulterous.
2. All marriages after a divorce where fornication was not the cause of the divorce are adulterous.
3. An innocent spouse who has been put away not for fornication may not marry just because he or she is put away; but if the mate who got the divorce marries, then the divorce may be considered valid in God's sight because there is no chance of that marriage being reconstructed.
4. If a marriage has been dissolved, even the one who committed adultery may repent and be forgiven, and later marry again. (If this be so, how then does anyone who marries a divorced person commit adultery?) It may be

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- granted that neither party is married any longer after a divorce for fornication has been secured; but it is not necessarily true that any unmarried person has an automatic right to marry.
- D. Is divorce merely a legal separation under human law for protection of property and personal freedom or preservation of peace?
1. The Old Testament spoke of divorce as permitting remarriage. The Jews seem to have always had that concept, and asked Jesus with that in mind. There is no evidence that any ancient society had a practice of legal separation from bed and board without the right of remarriage.
  2. If that is all Jesus intended divorce to mean, it would be unlikely that He would state only one cause for which it would be permitted. I Corinthians 7:11 seems to allow a Christian wife to depart from her husband but to remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.
- E. Does I Corinthians 7:27 say that a divorced person may marry without sinning? The person who was "loosed from a wife" might have been loosed by the death of the wife? It seems possible that Paul may have used the perfect passive of the verb to refer to a state of singleness without referring to any past action by which they became loosed. Therefore, it is a doubtful text to prove that one divorced may marry innocently.
- F. Does I Corinthians 7:15 say that a marriage is dissolved if a non-Christian (unbelieving) husband is not willing to live with his Christian wife? If the non-believer departs, how is the Christian brother or sister "not in bondage in such cases"? Does the bondage here refer to the marriage contract? Or does it refer to a bondage in which a Christian would have to yield to any demands by the pagan mate in order to get him or her to live with the Christian and not depart?
1. Some say that Paul uses the same word "bound" in reference to the marriage contract and its responsibility in Romans 7:2 and I Corinthians 7:39. But there is some difference between being "bound" as by a contract and being in bondage of slavery to a manner of life? Paul does not use the same word in Greek in both of these expressions. The fact is that in I Corinthians 7:15 he used a verb which means to be enslaved. It could refer to the total bondage

of a life that could not separate from the unbeliever. It does mean at least that much. It is doubtful whether it was intended to mean that the Christian is set free to be remarried to anyone else.

2. Many believe that "not in bondage" was intended to include dissolution of the marriage obligation in every sense. If the unbeliever who departs subsequently commits adultery or marries someone else, many would conclude that the believer's obligation to the marriage was certainly broken.
- G. Did the apostles ever teach anything about divorce and remarriage? What did they do about people who wanted to become Christians after they had divorced and remarried not according to God's law? If the apostles required everyone who was not still married to their first spouse to break up the marriage they had and live without marriage, does it seem reasonable that no mention is ever made of such drastic teaching?
1. Some think that non-Christians were not subject to any of Christ's teaching for they could not be responsible to any law they had not been taught. Then it is inferred that at baptism their old sins and marriage bonds are blotted out; they are simply to live faithfully in the marriage in which they are involved when they become Christians. Others are afraid that this means that the non-Christians had no sin in any of his actions that were against Christ's teaching, which He did not know.
  3. When a pagan accepts Christ as Lord, does he not accept Christ's standards in judgment over his past life as well as for direction of his present actions? Thus he repents and is forgiven, and serves under the rule of Christ as well as he can in the state in which he was called. He does not try to escape the responsibility for his former sins; neither can he change them. Our problem arises from the assumption that God could not forgive him and let him live with a second wife.
  4. Is it God's purpose to punish all who married contrary to His law by making them remain unmarried all their lives? Or is it His purpose to make new creatures who will live according to His will in family relationships?
  5. It is true that one should not plan to profit by sin. A Christian should not lust after a different woman and plan to commit adultery by divorce and remarriage then expect to

repent and be forgiven and be able to keep the second for which he lusted. But how do we know that no one can repent of a wrong marriage without breaking it up? The Bible does not use the phrase "living in adultery." Neither does it say that a man who has divorced and remarried "has two living wives." Do we distort our thinking by using expressions that beg the question? In I Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul mentions adultery along with other sins which were forgiven. In Corinth there were probably many who had been involved in divorces and remarriages. Paul can see them as former adulterers, but ones who are now cleansed and forgiven. There is no indication that they had separated from all illegal partners. For a Christian to marry an unbeliever is a sin by New Testament standards; yet those who are married to unbelievers are taught to continue faithful to their marriages where the unbeliever is willing. One who tries to apply an Old Testament example (see Ezra 10:3) might conclude that a Christian must put away the unbelieving spouse. But Paul says not to (I Cor. 7:12, 13). John the Baptist did tell Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. This close relationship was expressly forbidden in Leviticus 20:21.

6. Does the rule of I Corinthians 7:24 state a principle broad enough to apply to a second marriage?
7. Do the instructions of I Corinthians 7:26 not apply at all to persons who have been divorced?
8. If the first marriage cannot be restored (see Deut. 24:4) what command of God is served by sinning against the second wife or husband? The remarried husband is not bound to his first wife, if adultery is just cause for breaking up the marriage (Matt. 19:9). If the first marriage was not broken up by fornication before, then it was after the second marriage. And God forbids it to be reformed after a second marriage (Deut. 24:4).
9. Was the sin of adultery in breaking the vows and the union of the first marriage, or is it adultery to live faithfully with a second partner after one has a real change of heart? Must the sinful attitudes and actions that destroyed the marriage be continued? Or if their damage cannot be fully repaired, can they be repented of and forsaken in the context of a marriage of forgiven sinners?

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10. Does forgiveness of the sin of divorce and remarriage become the same thing as approval of adultery, as if it were no sin at all? Does the church which welcomes repentant thieves to forgiveness admit that thieves did no wrong? Does a man who forms a legal, business partnership for bad motives have to break his contract, or can he change his sinful purposes and live up to his contract in a righteous way?

H. What shall we do in actual practice of marrying people?

1. Shall we act as an agent of state law without reference to morality of the marriages performed?
2. Shall we refuse to marry any divorced persons?
3. Shall we marry only the "innocent party" of a broken marriage?
4. Shall we teach the words of the Lord to each couple and lay upon them the responsibility to decide whether their marriage is in obedience to God?

### VI. Concluding Observations

1. Let us beware of striving to be strict in interpreting and applying the words of scripture in order that we may feel merit in holding a more perfect legal standard. God may want to teach a kind of character in men more than a strict set of limitations on the legal status of a marriage.
2. Let us beware also of looking for loopholes to allow a lenient application of God's statements. Our leniency may be used to help men feel relieved of obligations to do what God wants.
3. Let us leave judging to God, as far as possible. When we try to decide exactly how men should be judged, we need to ask questions why we want to settle the matter. Did God intentionally leave His word so that it was not easily settled and so that we hesitate to judge others? Teach God's will against divorce; but we may not be sure how God will judge those who have been guilty.
4. Preach God's mercy, repentance as needed, and forgiveness as available.
5. Expect the fruit of repentance in the continued seeking of God's will and in obedience to it as we can determine it. But beware of going beyond what is written in decreeing harsh terms as necessary fruit of repentance when God has not given a hint of such application in the word.

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6. If divorced and remarried persons can become accepted and active members of the church, does that make the church teach that there is nothing really bad about divorce and remarriage? Does it need to? Let's not let it.
7. Let us make far greater efforts to teach so that Christians will avoid divorce.

### For Further Study:

- Duty, Guy. *Divorce and Remarriage*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1967. Balanced study on the interpretation and application of the relevant Biblical texts.
- Meredith, Maurice. *The Divorce Question*. Bound together with Alva Hovey's *The Scriptural Law of Divorce*. Rosemead, Cal.: Old Paths Book Club, n.d. Both very fine works but are now out of print.
- Schubert, Joe D. *Marriage, Divorce, and Purity*. Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1966. A study guide on the Bible's teaching in regard to the whole area of marriage, divorce and sexual purity.
- Stott, J. R. W. *Divorce*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1971. Brief booklet which carefully deals with the problems in interpreting the texts on divorce.

## THE PRACTICE OF NEIGHBORLINESS

What does God expect of us concerning our treatment of the stranger, the poor, the homeless, and the helpless? The total teaching of the Old Testament on this subject is not different in principle from the teaching of the New Testament. Although some difference between the Testaments may be noted in matters of detail or emphasis, the principle of the Golden Rule plainly underlies both. The motives inculcated in the Old Testament are as high and as closely related to the character of God as are those in the New Testament. Jesus said the weightiest obligations under the law included mercy along with just dealing and faith toward God (Matt. 23:23).

*Oppression Prohibited*

It seems that human nature is inclined to hold an unfavorable attitude toward people who are foreign to us, or who by any marked difference are distinguished from us, and who do not come within our circle of fellowship. "From the mythical gentlemen who excused himself for not saving a drowning man because he had not been introduced to him, to the Yorkshire native, who, seeing a strange face in his hamlet, cried, 'Let's heave a brick at him!' how common it is for people to limit their kindness to persons of their acquaintance!" It is a universal and persistent problem how to overcome the ill will and prejudice that men of one class hold toward men of another class or race. How common it is to despise and look down upon foreigners, and even to lay aside honesty and mercy in dealing with them! Immigrant laborers, especially if transient, are often considered as hardly human. Men of weak scruples will take advantage of a stranger which they would not take of an acquaintance. "Taking in" strangers has in modern slang, and in too much modern practice, a meaning quite contrary to Christian hospitality.

As we might expect, the law of God was against all oppression, mistreatment, and fraud, whether to strangers or any one else. It went beyond this, and commanded the Israelites not to glean their fields, not to strip their olive trees clean, etc., but to leave some of the fruits of the earth for the poor and needy to gather. (Read Exod. 22:21-23; Deut. 24:14, 15, 17-22.)

In several connections the Lord ordered them to have one law for both the native Israelites and the sojourner among them (Lev. 24:22;

Num. 15:15, 16, 29) with no respect of persons (Deut. 1:17; 10:17; etc.). Yet they were permitted to charge interest to foreigners and not to their own brethren (Deut. 23:19, 20).

### *Kindness and Service Commanded*

Israel was commanded not only to do no wrong to a stranger, but also to "love him as thyself" (Lev. 19:33, 34; Deut. 10:17-19). Strangers were to share in the benevolent giving of Israel—a special tithe of the increase every third year went to strangers, widows, orphans, and Levites (Deut. 26:12, 13). Every seventh year they were not to farm their land, but whatever grew of itself was for servants, strangers, and beasts (Lev. 25:3-7). Further extensive hospitality and generosity were commanded in Leviticus 25:35-38 and Isaiah 58:6, 7.

Christianity is more than mere neighborliness, or even brotherly kindness and social welfare but it certainly includes unselfish service to others. Many who promote utopian social and economic schemes have no higher object than a high physical standard of living. In Christianity the prime object is righteousness in the heart through reconciliation with God. In Christ "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (II Cor. 4:5).

Jesus, the Lord, commands and exemplifies service. He "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" and "went about doing good." He said, "Whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:25-28). Confucius said men should not do to others what they would not want others to do to them. But Christ set us to active service with His rule: "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them" (Matt. 7:12). With general rules that are truly amazing He boldly outlines a life of overflowing goodness that we might not make for ourselves a place to stop in selfishness. He tells us to give to the man who has robbed us, to go willingly a second mile after we have been forced to go one, to lend without hope of receiving again, to do good to enemies, and to show kindness to all men. He assigns to us the most menial tasks of benefit to others: "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

Too often we forget that our Christian life must be one of active service as well as worship and separation from the practices of sin. We are tempted to remain aloof from the needy world and pride ourselves on our separation when He has sent us to do a work for Him. The only way we can serve Him is to serve men, for Jesus does not



need us to serve Him directly and immediately. He says, "Lovest thou me? . . . Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). He has placed us in His creation to do good to His wayward and lost creatures—His weak, starving, and homeless ones—just as a ranch owner has men who serve him by looking after his flocks and herds. Hence, Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). It is a very dangerous temptation for us to be so much concerned about orthodoxy of opinion, so satisfied with ourselves for forsaking certain popular evils, and so interested in forms of worship, that we never get ourselves busy in His needy world to do the things that He has commanded us to do there. We can be condemned as much for the good we do not do as for the evil we do (James 4:17; 1:22-27; Matt. 25:41-45).

### *Hospitality*

The Greek word translated "hospitality" in the New Testament is a compound of simple words meaning "love for strangers." Christians are commanded to provide for their own household (I Tim. 5:8), to do good especially to the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10), to love their brethren fervently (I Pet. 4:8), "communicating unto the necessities of the saints" with tender affection one toward another (Rom. 12:10-13). But in immediate connection with these instructions there is added the command to "forget not to show love to strangers" (Heb. 13:2), to be "given to hospitality" (Rom. 12:13), to do good to all men. Brotherliness must not become exclusiveness. Gaius is commended for charity to both brethren and strangers (III John 5, 6). A deserving Christian character is marked by "hospitality to strangers" (I Tim. 5:10). Elders must be lovers of hospitality (I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Christian hospitality should be performed not grudgingly, not merely as an obligation, but for the love of it. There is usually some one in each congregation who has grown in this grace and is ready to share and enjoy serving unselfishly. With what tender affection we remember them! But it has been so easy for many, many others to excuse themselves for selfishness and indifference that they do not recognize this duty or its rich rewards. Those who have the most are commonly the least ready to share it with others—the truly poor are generally the most hospitable, and the truly poor are those whom Jesus calls "blessed" in Matthew 5:3—"the poor in spirit."

*Judgment: Faith and Works*

All men have sinned and deserve condemnation (Rom. 3:20-23; 6:23). They can be saved only through the grace of Jesus Christ, which is granted to them that believe. But the judgment of our faith will be by our works (James 2:14-26). Our faith in the mercy of God must work in us appropriate deeds, or it is mere sham. The New Testament constantly speaks of salvation according to grace through faith, but of judgment according to works. It makes plain that no man can blot out his own sins by good works alone. It is just as plain in stating that faith alone can not save (James 2:23). Baptism saves, but not baptism alone—or may other requirements for salvation alone (I Pet. 3:21). Many things are required.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:34-46 does not mean that men may be saved by works of mercy without confessing Christ, for He Himself taught differently (John 6:53; 14:6; 8:24; Mark 16:16, etc.) He did not intend this picture of judgment to nullify the greater part (or any part) of the New Testament.

The lesson taught in the passage is this: works of Christian benevolence, as we have opportunity to perform them, constitute one of the conditions of our acceptance in the days of judgment. They are, indeed, but the outgrowth of faith and love, and their absence proves that our faith is dead, and that love has not been born within us.<sup>1</sup>

Give as you would to the Master,  
If you met His searching look;  
Give as you would of your substance  
If His hand your offering took.  
—Author unknown

The way we are treating every needy soul along the way is the way we are treating Him. The finest gift we can give to men is the gift of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

## For Further Study:

Cairns, Earle E. *Saints and Society*. Chicago: Moody Press. A church historian gives examples, such as Wilberforce, of Bible-believing

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. McGarvey, *A Commentary on Matthew and Mark* (Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Co., n.d.), Pp. 220-221.

THE PRACTICE OF NEIGHBORLINESS

Christians who led the way to social justice.

Henry, Carl F. H. *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971. Calls for social action that takes the truth of the Bible seriously.

Lightfoot, Neil. *Parables of Jesus*, Part II. Austin, Texas: R. B. Sweet Co. Pp. 82-87. Exposition of the parable of the sheep and the goats.