

Thursday, December 15, 2011 - Christian Priorities

Each New Year, people make resolutions which they hope will bring more sense and order to their lives. As resolutions are made, please consider this article by [Wayne Jackson regarding Christian Priorities](#).

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One of the most demanding and frequently ignored admonitions from Jesus Christ is found in his renowned Sermon on the Mount: “You are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things [basic needs] will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). This is one of the most challenging, and yet neglected, mandates of Christ—even by many who profess to be his loyal followers.

The first consideration, of course, is the **identity** of the one making this demand. Does he have the right to issue such a rigorous obligation? If this is not understood, nothing productive will ever result. The following factors must be appreciated: Christ is your Creator (John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:3), he is your Savior (Matthew 1:21), and he has been granted authority over you (John 17:2; Matthew 28:18). He thus has the right to command you and expect your obedience. If you do not acknowledge this truth, there is no way you can legitimately claim to be his disciple. Additionally, there are the following constituent elements of the command.

### “Seek”

The verb “seek” (zeteo – 117 times in the New Testament) is a verb in the command mood, and it stresses continuous activity. The word embraces several thoughts, such as “looking for,” “investigating,” “striving to obtain.” It embodies the idea of strenuous effort. Christians are not to prioritize their own interests, but those of their Lord foremost (Philippians 2:21).

### “First”

This adjective is employed adverbially to emphasize precedence. It signifies degree, as: “in the first place,” “above all,” “especially.” It is the very opposite of the disposition of the man who sought to follow Christ, but said: “[F]irst\*, let me go and bury my father” (Matthew 8:21). Jesus admonished the man; not because the man cared for his father, but because he did not appreciate the **preeminence** of his Lord. Legions are of the same caliber.

### “Kingdom of God”

The expression “kingdom of God,” in the sense of this context, is the “reign” of God in your life. Is he enthroned in your heart so that your entire existence is governed by his

rule? The Creator of the universe will not be a mere appendage in your life. He is not a sometimes, weekend, casual point of interest.

### **“And His Righteousness”**

The term “righteousness” signifies living the way God wants you to; it is similar to Jesus’ proclamation to John the Baptist at the time of his baptism: “[I]t becomes us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). One scholar has expressed the matter like this: “Righteousness is seen as God’s demand upon man. Righteousness refers to proper conduct before God.” The term assumes Jehovah’s sovereignty over man, and his perfect wisdom in dictating the appropriate way for people to live.

“Righteousness” is used of various acts of worship, such as giving, praying, or in the exercise of self-discipline—as in the case of fasting (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16). Obedience always should be to honor God, and not to solicit the attention or admiration of others (6:1). Those who engage in performance worship should give heed to this. Jesus taught his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20)—whose religion focused upon externals and neglected internals (Matthew 23:23). Too many today believe if your **heart** is right, it doesn’t make any difference what you **do**. Others go through superficial acts while their dispositions are rotten. Righteousness involves both attitude and action.

### **Applications**

It is a fact beyond dispute that it is easier to theorize about doing right than to practice it with passion. Too, it is very difficult to be honest—even with ourselves—in the matter of adjusting our priorities. This is because conflicts of interest arise that require the exercise of judgment, and our judgments don’t always agree with one another. At times we are conflicted even within ourselves.

Christian people are required to assemble on the Lord’s day (Revelation 1:10) for the purpose of worship and edification (Acts 20:7ff). Concerning the communion supper, for instance, the Lord commanded: “This do . . .” (Luke 22:19), and Paul’s charge to the Corinthians was prefaced with: “As I gave order . . . so also you are to do” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Normally, this is what faithful people do. This is implementing the righteousness of God, and devoted children of God make an earnest effort to be consistent in their worship.

However, what if a mother has a sick child who needs medical care? Is there not a “motherly righteousness” that, in this temporary instance, takes precedence over a worship assembly? No one in his right mind would dispute this.

Or consider this situation: Suppose a Christian physician is called to the hospital on Sunday morning to do emergency surgery to help save a person's life? Would a faithful disciple be faulted for having to miss a service in such an instance? Who would so contend? No reasonable person. **Motive** plays a huge part in many of our decisions.

How would this parallel the person who consistently and whimsically forsakes services for the most trivial matters—a birthday party, sports events, or “I need some extra rest for Monday”? How about missing Christian worship to entertain relatives, or to attend a denominational church with a friend? Such rationalizations do not pass the credibility test.

He who “knows the hearts of all men” (Acts 1:24) knows precisely how serious we are about serving God. A facade of religiosity and “spiritual strut” does not pass muster with the Lord. And quite frankly, it is perfectly transparent to many others as well.