

COUNTING THE COST

INTRO: There is nothing free in this world... that should be more obvious to us now than ever before. It requires money, lots of money, time, effort, hard work. We ought to be used to that. Anything that is worth having at all costs us something.

You may be thinking of taking a new job. It may demand that you give up some of the things you enjoy. You may have to work nights and weekends, and be out of town a lot. Before taking the job, you first examine the conditions... you may have to be away from family, there may be long hours, and the job may conflict with worship services. You sit down and count the cost... the money and benefits are good, but is it really worth it?

Salvation is offered to us. It is the gift of God, but it's going to cost us! Before we take the first step in becoming a child of God, we must first "count the cost".

I. EVERYONE SHOULD COUNT THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 14:25-33)

A. We Cannot Serve Two Masters (Matthew 6:24). We must go forward full force. We cannot look back (Luke 9:62). Discipleship is a life long commitment and we must consider its cost before we take the first steps!

1. Before Building A House One Must First Count The Cost (Luke 14:28-30). Elsewise that construction is a waste of time, effort and money. That man is shown to be not too smart or prudent. Others will mock such a foolish man.

That unfinished structure stands as proof of man's foolishness so all can see.

2. Before A King Goes To War He Must First Count The Cost (Luke 14:31-32). If he goes out to battle outnumbered and weaker, he shows a lack of foresight and wisdom... and it is a sign of sure defeat because there is no compromise after the battle has started (Saddam Hussein did not count the cost).

B. Only Those Who "Count The Cost" Can Withstand All The Trials. Because we expect them and are therefore ready for them when they come.

These statements are not meant to discourage us from being disciples, but rather to encourage us to take it seriously! And not enter it frivolously or half-heartedly. If we do, then we are destined to failure.

II. TO BEGIN FOLLOWING WITHOUT FIRST COUNTING THE COST MEANS:

A. One Could Become Discouraged. Demas was one who could not stand the test (2 Timothy 4:10). Like the rocky ground of Jesus' parable, the word had not taken root. We must keep on because the reward is to those who endure (2 Timothy 2:12).

B. One Could Apostatize And Be Lost. One not willing to pay the price to stand for truth will compromise on truth. He loses his own soul and

also influences others by his example, causing them to fall (Luke 17:2). Perhaps you would hear a "hard saying" which would upset you and cause you to turn away (John 6:60-61,66).

- C. **Opportunity For World To Speak Evil Of The Gospel.** If a Christian falls it becomes an opportunity for the world to speak evil of Christ and the gospel ("If that is what a Christian is, then I don't want any part of it"). We are the only Bible many people will read!

There may be many hypocrites in the church. Many people look for these to compare their lives to. In their eyes they are then justified. It may be you are contributing to someone who is forsaking the Lord because of the life you are living.

Friend, are you injuring the cause of Christ?

III. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

- A. **Involves Many Sacrifices.** It calls for putting self in the background and God in the foreground. We need to understand the terms of discipleship.
1. **Hate Father And Mother (Luke 14:26).** Often those close family ties must be broken when they stand in the way of our service to the Lord. We must keep Christ first and these family ties behind Him. Jesus uses the term "hate" to impress the need for true sacrifice and love, rather than some outward, superficial actions.
 2. **Riches Or Even Extra Comforts (Matthew 16:26).** Remember that all we have is given to us from the Lord... it is His anyway!
 3. **Deny Self (Luke 14:26-27).** That is the hardest thing to do. Put Jesus and His work first. But remember that our self-denial could never match Jesus and the sacrifice He made for us!
 4. **Time, Effort, Entertainment.**

CONCLUSION: Discipleship costs a lot, but also pays a lot. We receive peace of mind (Hebrews 13:5-6), forgiveness of sins, and a home awaiting us in heaven.

The advantages of discipleship far outweigh the cost. Think about this... Satan shows us his best and hides his worst, because if we see his worst, he will have none to follow him. Jesus shows us just the opposite. He shows us the worst we will have to face so we can appreciate His best that much more... Jesus has nothing to hide, while the devil has everything to hide!

Count the cost of discipleship beforehand... count the cost now, if your soul should be lost... and then tell me... which is the greater cost?

THINGS YOU CANNOT FIND BY LOOKING FOR THEM

INTRO: One of the most frustrating things in the world is to look for something that you can't find. It drives me crazy to look five or ten minutes for something and still not be able to find it!

But there are really some things that are worth having that you cannot find by looking for them. This morning I would like to talk with you about some things you cannot find by looking for them. And I am not talking about a lost earring or a mate to a sock that you just cannot find anywhere in the house... but there are some very important things in life that just cannot be obtained by a frontal approach... they happen when you are not concentrating your efforts on them at all.

I. THINGS YOU CANNOT FIND BY LOOKING FOR THEM

- A. Humility.** Is a humble spirit important? It is critical (James 4:6; Matthew 13:12). But humility is an elusive quality... once you think you got it, you just lost it!!

Pride may be the motivation that rests at the heart of more sin than any other carnal force. Pride is not just the desire to have something to be somebody. It is the driving lust to have more and be more than anyone else... God included.

Yet arrogance for all its viciousness, is very subtle. It will let you be righteous, as long as you look at others with a self-righteous attitude, full of yourself because of how good you are! And pride is perfectly willing to have you discover it is there, as long as you are proud of being that way, or proud of having realized it, taking smug delight in your newfound "humility".

The humble person is not so much one who has made himself small, as he is one who is fascinated and overcome by something far greater, hardly thinking of itself at all. The best way to find humility is to seek God and come into His presence. His power, holiness, love and grace will quickly drain the old mindless, self-centered vanity away (Luke 5:1-8). *You will be able to look at yourself again.*

You cannot stand before God and remain proud!

- B. Honor.** It is another of those things which cannot be found by actively looking for it or trying to obtain it. Honor cannot be bought or forced. Those who seek passionately to be honored among men always end up in disaster.

In the Old Testament book of Esther, there is a story about a man named Haman, minister to the king of Persia. He lusted so much for the praises of men that he was willing to see a whole race of people annihilated just to rid himself of one pestilent Jew, named Mordecai, who would not bow down and honor him. Haman was elevated at last — but it was by the neck — on the gallows he had made for his enemy Mordecai (Esther 3-6). All because he sought honor he did not deserve!

Jesus warned us about seeking honor among men (Luke 14:7-11). The person who exalts himself may be humiliated to find out that others do not elevate and dignify him in the same way. But even if it does result in honor before men, that is as far as it will go... such a man will not receive honor from God (Matthew 6:1-6).

If we seek simply to please God, the honor will take care of itself, and come from a place that will really mean something (1 Peter 5:6).

- C. **Happiness.** Happiness is another of those things that cannot be found by looking for it. But that is the problem with so many of us... we are really looking for happiness but cannot seem to find it. We look in more money, more possessions, more sex, more pleasure, more entertainment, more recreation, less responsibility, less hours at work, less stressful situations... but we still have not found it!!

Friend, making happiness your life goal will not work, simply because happiness is a by-product of something else. It is not an end in itself, but it comes as a result of doing something else. It comes alongside when you are not looking at all, but busily pursuing something far more important.

The beatitudes make this clear. If you want to know blessedness, then quit trying to be happy and start trying to be what God wants you to be -- poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in spirit, and all those other things (Matthew 5:3-12). The search for happiness is a self-centered pursuit and happiness only comes to those who have turned loose of themselves!

It's not that it is wrong to be happy. The problem lies with wanting to be happy more than anything else... more than being right before God and doing the right thing. If you want to save your life you must be willing to give it up (Matthew 16:24-25). Simply put, if you are not willing to relinquish your own "happiness" to serve Christ, you will never find it!!

CONCLUSION: Sometimes you just can't find the things you need by looking for them. "Seek first the kingdom of God and all His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33) and all the other things you need, and weren't looking for, will come to you! And that is the only way!!

HOW TO LOSE THE CROWD AND SAVE THE LOST

INTRO: Churches all over the land are constantly trying new gimmicks to get people to attend and listen to the message they are preaching. It has come to the point that almost anything goes — from weightlifters, athletes, men who break bricks with their heads, magicians, celebrities, carnivals, fellowship dinners, and a multitude of other drawing cards are used.

The thinking is that if we can get the people in, then we can teach them, and we cannot teach anyone as long as they are not here. But the Bible teaches that the gospel is God's drawing power (John 6:44-45), and the miracle Jesus performed in feeding the five thousand is a perfect illustration of this point. Let's look at John 6 together and draw some lessons from these events.

I. JESUS' DISCOURSE ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

A. Background. The Lord was beginning the third year of His teaching and preaching. From an obscure Galilean teacher he had become the most feared and revered, the most celebrated and most hated name in Israel. His popularity had grown so much it was difficult to find time away from the pressing multitudes even to eat.

For several reasons, it was time to withdraw from the pressing populations of Galilee to a quiet place apart. The confrontations with Herod and the chief priests needed to be cooled. He and the twelve apostles were in desperate need of rest (Mark 6:30-31). Along with other considerations, He and His apostles withdrew by boat to a desert place on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

B. Jesus' Miracle. Then some amazing things happened. These people had somehow learned where Jesus was going, so they made their journey on foot to come to Him (Mark 6:33). As weary and tired and Jesus was, He could not but take time to teach them and heal their sick.

There was a multitude there of 5000 men, along with women and children (6:10). In their excitement to catch up with Jesus, the multitude had come without making provisions for food or any other needs. With compassion, Jesus took the only food among them, five barley loaves and two fish a young boy had brought, and broke them and fed the multitude until everyone was filled and there were 12 baskets left over.

This sudden miracle overwhelmed them. Their former excitement now became a virtual frenzy. It didn't take a very bright fellow to calculate what a man like this could do to provide for their needs, and lead them to freedom from the Roman oppression. They were ready to have a coronation right on the spot. This was the king they had been waiting for and the opportunity to put the crown on His head must not be missed (6:14-15)!

Then something happened that startled the multitude even more than the miracle. Jesus, completely unimpressed with their plans and intentions, walked away from them!! He sent His apostles back to the other side of the Sea, and walking on the water, met them there in the midst of the Sea, having left the crowds behind!

- C. **Jesus' Discourse.** The next morning this puzzled crowd came looking for Jesus in Capernaum. The taste of that delicious bread and fish was still in their mouths... they were delirious with the thought of it, but could not understand why Jesus left them... especially such a large following. When they finally found Him, they even reproved Him a little (6:25).

Then Jesus tells them why He had walked away. They were only interested in carnal things of this world... bread that could fill their bellies and someone who could relieve their sickness. They were short-sighted being fascinated with "the bread that perishes" when they needed to see the real meaning of this miracle... that God had sent them the "bread of life" from heaven, and Jesus could give them the "food which endures to everlasting life" (6:26-27)!!

Still unable to get their stomachs out of this discussion, some in the crowd inquired what greater sign Jesus would do than Moses who gave Israel bread out of heaven in the wilderness (6:31-33). Jesus told them He was the "bread of life" (6:35) and the bread which He gave was His flesh (6:51).

Then finally, with this crowds' stomachs turning as He talked about giving His flesh for them to eat (6:52), He said what many people found too gross and disgusting to stomach (6:53-58).

That was the last straw for many of them (6:60-61,66). The twelve apostles must have be stupefied! They might have turned back too. Was Jesus crazy? He had all these people following Him, in the palm of His hand and He ran them off!! They may not have understood what He did, and why He ran the crowds off, but they knew there was nowhere else they could have gone (6:67-69)!!

CONCLUSION: Do we get the lesson here? The kingdom of heaven is not the kingdom of the belly and Jesus will not be our king of bread! He knows that carnality will attract and hold the carnal crowd... but He will not have their devotion until their hearts are changed... and besides... He is trying to deliver us from our carnal worldly ways... why would He appeal to them!

The churches of our time are some of the most zealous promoters of carnality. They draw people to their number with music extravaganza, concerts, fish fries, bingo, movies, ball teams, gymnasiums, and kitchens. By using a carnival or recreation or food and fellowship, they hold the very multitude that Jesus lost.

Such things will not bring lost souls to salvation and, in the final analysis, they offer a grave insult to the Son of God and the honest souls who hear and respond to His message. They say "We know that the King of kings in all His love and glory is not enough for people".

At the Harrodsburg Church of Christ you will not find us offering such things... Announce Gospel Meeting.

GOD'S POWER UNTO SALVATION

INTRO: This morning we will be beginning a week-long effort to present God's word to all those who are interested in hearing it. If your Bible knowledge is not what it should be, or you are looking for some guidance in your life because you have found that you just don't have the ability to direct your own steps, then, "Boy, do I know the place for you to be this week"

Announce evening worship and morning studies for those who are unable to get out in the evenings.

I. MAN IS LOST

- A. Something Should Frighten Each Of Us** — the fact that all accountable persons (you and me included) have sinned fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:9-10,23). Because of imperfect knowledge, carelessness, weakness of the flesh, and sometimes outright rebellion, we have fallen short of the glory of God. Because of that, there hangs over each of us the penalty of death (Romans 6:23; James 1:15).
- B. It Is Not Possible For Us To Pay For Our Own Sins** — and survive the penalty so God has made arrangements (Romans 5:8). The blood of Christ was "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Then by submitting to God's will we can meet conditions to receive the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38).
- C. No Person Can Earn Salvation** — by being a good father, mother, citizen, neighbor, or anything like that. Some of the best people, humanly speaking, have strayed from God. No one can please God through a humanly devised system of righteousness. In order to be forgiven, sinners must submit themselves to the righteousness of God... God's system for making them righteous (Romans 10:1-3).

II. THE REASON FOR PREACHING

- A. That Is Why God Chose Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18,21).** And the Bible places a great emphasis on preaching (Romans 1:15-17; Mark 16:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:2). Without the gospel men are lost in sin and there is nothing else that can seek and find them... nothing else that can tell them how to come back to God... nothing else that can save their souls.
Faith is the backbone of the Christian system, but without someone to tell another about Christ and God's will for him, there is no way that person can call on God (Romans 1:13-17).
- B. Responsibility Of Christians (2 Corinthians 5:11,14).** The knowledge of God's goodness and His wrath compels us to tell others about the Saviour. Teaching and preaching is the responsibility of every Christian to the extent of his ability and opportunity.
- C. Responsibility Of Churches (1 Thessalonians 1:7-8).** Collectively, evangelism is the responsibility of every church of Christ. Churches

in the New Testament saw a need to spread the gospel in their own communities and to other areas as well, as much as they had the ability to do so.

Naturally, the spread the gospel in their own area, but the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to spread the gospel (Acts 11:19-26). They saw a responsibility to every lost soul they could possibly help and reach with the gospel message. Later on, the Antioch church sent preachers to other areas too to plant the seed of the gospel and reap the harvest of souls (Acts 13:1-3).

1. One arrangement that the Harrodsburg Church of Christ has used over the years to proclaim the gospel within the community is through the gospel meeting.

Such an effort can help people who are interested in learning God's word find answers they have been searching a long time for... help encourage people who are already trying to follow God... and build up the church where such worship and Bible instruction is going on.

We are looking forward to accomplishing all these things this week. And we truly hope that if you are listening out there this morning that you will plan to come and be with us at least one time! Friend, this may be the only chance I have to invite you to come, and I would like to do that from the bottom of my heart.

Announce meeting again... give details.

CONCLUSION: When the gospel is preached, good is done. A gospel meeting provides an opportunity in a busy world for just about anyone to "find time" to attend and be blessed.

The soul of every man is so precious that we must do all we can to save it (Matthew 16:26). Please join us this week as our honored guest!

IMPORTANT WORDS IN MARRIAGE

INTRO: There is great power in words. Often our words, or lack of them may say a great deal about our attitude toward our mates. In this society we have neglected to use, or perhaps to take seriously, the words that embody important concepts essential to a successful marriage relationship.

And what a price we have paid for it -- rampant divorce, maladjusted children, unhappy relationships, and worse! Even Christians have been affected by the changes in our culture. Marriage problems are often a factor in many people departing from the faith. And where homes are unhappy the possibilities of children being led to the Lord are dramatically decreased!

Let's think for a little while this morning on some of the most important words we should use in marriage. Apply them daily and your marriage cannot help but be a blessing.

I. IMPORTANT WORDS IN MARRIAGE

A. The Single Most Important Word — "God". Many people never consider God in their marriage at all. But God is really the key to having successful marriages and families (Psalm 127:1; 128:1-4).

For decades people have been telling our children that they are the result of a cosmic accident, the chance offspring of impersonal evolutionary forces. In that context, marriage could be considered nothing other than an evolutionary and man-made social arrangement.

Why should we be surprised to see these same children so freely advocate easy divorce and "alternate lifestyles". What man has made, man can easily change or improve!

But if man was created by God and marriage was designed by Him, then we are obligated when we enter that relationship to laws He has made which govern it. God is the creator and regulator of marriage (Matthew 19:4). If so, then we are accountable to His will in our marriages!!

B. The Two Most Important Words — "Thank You". Maybe we take for granted the blessing God gives us when He gives us a godly companion! We need to thank Him for our husband or wife (Proverbs 19:14). And we need to thank each other!

The husband of the worthy woman praises her (Proverbs 31:29). None of us suffer from hearing too many good things about us, or edifying words from the person we love most in this life. You can't be appreciated too much, and at the same time, we all know the discouragement of too much criticism!

Let's be grateful for each other!!

C. The Three Most Important Words — "I Love You". Couples need to express their love for one another. Don't just take for granted that your husband or wife should already know. Don't take the attitude with him/her that if I ever stop loving you I will let you know, but as long as I don't say anything you know I still do!

Do you also want to show your love for your spouse? Then find out what God requires of you in the relationship, and do it (1 John 3:18; 5:2).

- D. **The Four Most Important Words — "Will You Forgive Me?"**. Even though we have chosen our mates because of common characteristics, shared interests, and basic compatibility, how could two people live continuously together without occasional conflict?

God's word teaches us how to handle our anger. The right thing to do is not internalize it (Ephesians 4:26; Ecclesiastes 7:9)... nor is it to ventilate it (Ephesians 4:26; Proverbs 29:11)! The right way to handle anger is to be "slow to speak" and lovingly seek reconciliation (James 1:19; Matthew 5:23).

When we wrong our partner, let us seek their forgiveness. And when we acknowledge wrong let us truly repent, not merely try to temporarily appease their anger. And let those who are wronged, truly forgive and forget as God does (Hebrews 8:12)!

- E. **The Five Most Important Words — "Till Death Do Us Part"**. More and more people are entering their covenant with vows of permanence that they do not intend to keep if they become too difficult. When we make a vow before God, He holds us accountable to keep it (Ecclesiastes 5:2-5). And besides, those words embody the teaching of God's word on the permanence of marriage (Matthew 19:6).

This being true, divorce is wrong and sinful (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). There is only one exception in the Bible which allows an innocent person to remarry after their spouse has been unfaithful.

These simple, forthright statements are not hard to understand... they are just hard to do and accept by many! However, they are God's will for married couples and we have no choice other than accepting and obeying them (Matthew 19:11-12)!!

CONCLUSION: Dear listeners, think often about these words. So then, think often about these words. Say them often. Live by them always. And as you do, the Lord's blessings will be upon your relationship.

Then your home will be one of love, contentment, joy and peace. And isn't that what we all really want? It is what God really wants for us!

A WHOLESOME RESPECT FOR TEMPTATION

INTRO: There is a very real danger at all times for us that we will fall away from Christ through sin. But we are given words of encouragement about the temptation that comes our way (1 Corinthians 10:13).

We need to know two things about temptation — that it is a serious and dangerous business not to be toyed with... and that it is possible to resist and defeat temptation if we act wisely.

Temptation is not sin! The sinless Son of God was tempted (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21-22). But temptation is a serious occasion for sin and playing with it is an invitation to disaster.

I. RESPECTING THE POWER OF TEMPTATION

A. Looking For Trouble. Some people are looking for trouble by putting themselves in tempting or compromising situations!

1. Foolish Young Man (Proverbs 7). Solomon sees from his window a foolish young man who is seduced by an adulteress. One could almost feel sorry for this naive youth who is completely overcome by the charm of this wily seductress, except for one fact.

He was not on this street accidentally (7:6-9). And he did not go by her house by chance. This young man was titillating himself with temptation, putting himself squarely in its way, and daring it to take him.

2. That is much like the boy who, having been warned by his father not to swim in a certain stream, came home one day trying to conceal his wet swim suit.

"Why did you disobey me?" his father asked him. "I didn't mean to but I was suddenly tempted" the boy said. "But why did you have your swim suit with you?" the father continued? "Oh", the boy answered, "I took it along just in case I was tempted".

B. The Lord Promises A Way Of Escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). From every temptation, every trial — a way to endure it. But there will be no escape for those who approach sin's invitation with interest rather than fear!

Satan is seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). It makes no sense to put your head in the lion's mouth!

1. Young people do this by hanging around the drug crowd or militant young rebels (1 Corinthians 15:33).
2. Husbands and wives do it by developing a too easy and carefree relationship with friends of the opposite sex.
3. Preachers do it by carelessly counselling women alone and in private.
4. Christians vulnerable to covetousness do it by collecting too many

"things" and gathering associates and friends whose whole world revolves around money.

It is a dangerous thing to hold long conversations with the devil like Eve did. One is apt to find himself in a position close enough to a hungry and raging lion that he will be consumed!

C. What Should We Do? We better take young Joseph's example and run from the presence of temptation as fast as our legs will carry us.

1. Flee Youthful Lusts (2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Corinthians 6:18). So, when sin comes asking for a conference, it is time to run, not to hang around and think about it. Running from temptation is running for your life!
2. Run To God (2 Timothy 2:22). You have to do more than just run away from sin. You have to run to God, and find someone else who is going that way too if you can.
When Satan conspires to seduce us, like frightened children, we need to seek our Father's side (Psalm 46:1-2; 36:7; 91:1-2).

CONCLUSION: God is a sure refuge from temptation because He "cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no man" (James 1:13). God is a certain haven from Satan's alluring temptations.

Jesus defeated Satan's temptation by taking refuge in what was written. We too should be so wise as to find strength and answers in God's word!!

DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

INTRO: There are a lot of people who are searching today for a sense of identity. The evidence is all around us. Just take a stroll through a mall on Saturday night and notice the vast variety of outfits on display by the teens gathered together. You will see young people identifying with everything from cowboys to punk rockers! Isn't this evidence of the "identity crisis" we hear about?

And this search for identity is not limited to the young. Older men and women often change jobs, alter their appearance and habits, and even divorce their spouses in order to "find themselves". All of this points to a basic need we have to know who we are and to feel good about what we are.

A Christian is also such a person. A true Christian knows he belongs to God. He is happy with himself because he knows God is happy with him. He feels a sense of belonging not only because he is God's child but also because he has a host of spiritual brothers and sisters who make him feel he belongs (1 Peter 1:1-2).

I. WHO GOD'S PEOPLE ARE

A. God's People Are Those Selected By The Father. Peter describes Christians as the "elect" according to the foreknowledge of God. God not only foreknew the possibility that man would choose to disobey Him, but He also knew from eternity that He would redeem fallen man through the death of His Son on the cross (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20).

And so in keeping with this foreknowledge, God chose the saved. He did not choose the individuals so that they had no choice, but He determined that only those who enter into an obedient relationship with Christ could be saved. They are "the elect".

B. God's People Are Those Sanctified By The Spirit. The word "sanctified" is related to words like "saint", "sanctuary", "holy", and "sanctify". To be sanctified, is to be "set apart, or separated" for holy use. The Holy Spirit sanctifies people through the truth (John 17:17).

One is not sanctified because people centuries have voted on him and decided to call him a "saint" because he had a superior degree of righteousness. Neither is one sanctified by the Spirit in an overwhelming, emotional experience separate from the influence of God's word on his heart, but rather through faith in and obedience to the powerful life-changing gospel of Christ.

C. God's People Are Those Sprinkled By The Blood Of Christ. If you are very familiar with the Old Testament, you may remember the sacrifices of the Law of Moses that involved sprinkling the blood of sacrifices for the purpose of cleansing things.

The old covenant was dedicated with blood (Hebrews 9:19-20). So in a similar way those who come to Christ enter into a covenant inaugurated by the shed blood of Christ (Matthew 26:28). By this blood, the blood of the lamb (Christ) that was without blemish, God's people are redeemed from sin (1 Peter 1:17; Hebrews 10:22).

D. God's People Are Those Submissive To The Commands Of Jesus. Those who

believe that Jesus has died for their sins will gladly relinquish control of their lives to Him. It is in doing so that they are saved from sin and can remain in that condition (2 Peter 1:5-10).

These are those people who have been "born again" (1 Peter 1:22-23). They have been changed. They have heard the truth, believed it, and obeyed it by being baptized into Christ (John 3:3-5).

- E. **God's People Are Those Who Are Sojourning On Earth.** Those who have obeyed the gospel are no longer a part of the devil's domain. Their citizenship is in heaven from which they are looking for their Savior to return (Philippians 3:20-21). And so God's people are nothing more than "strangers and sojourners" on the earth, so it really doesn't matter where they live, their home is still in heaven (1 Peter 2:12).

A true Christian is not living for this world, but for the world to come.

CONCLUSION: So, dear listener, now take a look at yourself. Are you one of God's people? If you will receive him, He will give you the right to become one of His children (John 1:12-13).

Do you have an obedient relationship with Jesus? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb? If so, there resides in you a living hope through the resurrected Savior. You are one of God's children. And for God's faithful children, there is an inheritance awaiting (1 Peter 1:3-5). My friend, is that the hope you have?

FOUR FEARFUL FACTS

INTRO: Few people are willing to hear anything negative about God's dealings with man... much less accept it. But we must consider both God's goodness and severity (Romans 11:22).

Jesus relates to us four fearful facts, which are very narrow by their nature, for our sober consideration (Matthew 7:12-23). Sometimes people tell me that I am very narrow in my outlook on religion... Thank you! Jesus was very narrow too, and if I am going to be like Him, that is the way I must be!! And you too!!

Look at the four fearful facts Jesus presents in this passage.

I. FOUR FEARFUL FACTS

A. Not Everyone Will Be Saved (Matthew 7:21). Honestly, I wish that wasn't true... but Jesus did not ask me what I wanted!! Not even everyone who honors God... who calls Jesus "Lord" will be saved.

Salvation is not only related to saying but also doing. People are told to simply believe and accept Jesus into your life (Romans 10:9-10). Just call on the name of the Lord and you will be saved (Romans 10:13). But the Bible goes on to explain how a person does that (Acts 22:16). *And these same people will say that if you are baptized you are saved.*

Many religious people who "call on the name of the Lord", by saying something called "The Sinner's Prayer", won't be saved because God's requirement involves more than just acknowledging Jesus. It involves acts of obedience too.

My friend... that is not Rob's plan... or Rob's requirements... that is the requirement of God. And it is frightening to think that there are many religious people who are not going to be saved!

B. More Will Be Lost Than Saved (Matthew 7:13-14). We balk in disbelief at a God who will eternally punish the majority of His human creation... who sets up a standard that most people will not meet... who provided a plan that most people will not take advantage of.

Even more sobering though, is the fact that these are religious people under consideration here — not drunks, adulterers, murderers or such like — but those who are religious teachers (7:15-20) and religious adherents (7:21-23). *Therefore we need to make sure we are among the saved.*

C. Many Believe They Are Saved Who Are Lost (Matthew 7:22). People can be sincerely deceived, yet still be accountable to God. They affirm with all surety their salvation and are offended that anyone would ever question that standing. *... I am standing in the face of God's judgment? ... my hand is clean?*

Even when standing before God, they will think they have a legitimate argument with God, but to no avail. The Judgment Day will vindicate God's opinion... not ours (Proverbs 14:12).

D. No Salvation Can Be Found After Death (7:23). When the final verdict is passed and the last word is said, man's fate will be sealed. It will stand unchangeable.

Abraham sadly told the rich man in Hades that there was no second

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chance (Luke 16:26). There is no "limbo", purgatory, preaching to disembodied spirits — no second chance after death, only the promised judgment (Hebrews 9:27-28).

CONCLUSION: My friend, are you listening? To the faithful Christian, these truths Jesus spoke are not a problem... they just press home the need to work as hard as we can to tell others about God's will.... but woe be to us if we are not following God's will. It would be far better had we never been born than to face the judgment and be separated from God!! (2 Corinthians 6:2; Mark 16:16; Matthew 24:13).

OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

INTRO: There are two things about God that we must know. God is good... and God is severe (Romans 11:22). You already knew that God is good, but did you also know that God is severe against those who disobey Him (Hebrews 10:26-31)? Whew!! That's hot!! You can almost feel the fire and smell the brimstone!!

Maybe you don't understand how God can be that way. Neither did the prophet Habakkuk, and God just said "The just shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). We just have to believe God when He says it.

There are some things that God cannot bear. These are the objects of His Divine wrath, and woe to the man who opposes God!!

I. THINGS GOD CANNOT BEAR

A. False Doctrine. Most of your life you have heard people say "It's good that we have so many different faiths for people to believe in... Everyone has a right to their own beliefs". But you never heard God say that! God is very jealous for the truth and anything which contradicts or opposes it is the subject of God's wrath (2 Peter 2:1-3)

False teaching is a serious offense to God!! We must not be satisfied to allow so many different churches, teachings, doctrines, and interpretations of the Bible.

Demand the truth... God does! As a teacher of God's word that is my responsibility (James 3:1). And as a hearer of God's word, that is your responsibility.

B. Immorality. There is a moral standard! It is not within each man, nor is it situational. That standard is God's word and on matters of morality it is black and white. Society may be permissive, but God is not (Romans 1:18,24-32).

God has wiped out entire nations by the sword for immorality a lot like that which is becoming rampant in our nation (Proverbs 14:34)! Let's not be naive and think He doesn't pay any attention and looks the other way (Acts 17:30-31).

C. Idolatry. When the people of Israel turned to the idols and gods of other nations, God accused them of spiritual adultery — they were joining themselves to other gods while trying to remain bound to Jehovah (Hosea 2:13).

Although too enlightened to worship gods carved out of wood, stone or precious metals, modern man still has his idols which he worships above God — material possessions, success, prominence, pride — things which he will devote all his energy to achieve and accomplish, at the expense of worship and allegiance to God. Anything that stands between us and God is an idol (1 John 2:15-17).

Cast it down... sell it... destroy it. It is not worth the price of your soul (Matthew 19:26)!!

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CONCLUSION: We are accountable to God and if unfaithful, we are destined to face His wrath (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Don't let anyone sell you a God who is a grandfatherly kind of Santa Claus who cannot find it in His heart to hurt a fly. He is a God of justice too!!

And His mercy is our only hope of being spared from the fires of hell (Hebrews 12:29).

How can you be delivered from the wrath to come? Only in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:10). How do you get into Jesus? (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Don't delay my friend... Can you feel the heat?

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

INTRO: The class was assembled as the professor entered the room for his daily lecture. On the blackboard behind him, someone had written the words "Question Authority" in bold letters. He paused momentarily and without uttering a word wrote "If Authority Answered, Would You Listen?"

This attitude will spawn a generation which will not submit to authority. Both young and old today are demanding their "rights" of freedom and refuse to allow anyone to dictate their actions!! We see small children mocking and back-talking their parents, teenagers cursing their teachers and verbally abusing their elders. Even adults show no remorse as they break the law and defy restrictions and rules imposed on them by their employers or anyone else.

People flaunt their independence, ignorant of the fact that everyone must answer to some authority greater than himself. The sooner we accept that certainty, the better off we will be.

I. THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST

A. The Authority Of Jesus Christ Is Universal. Following His resurrection, He told His apostles that He had received all authority (Matthew 28:18). When Jesus used the word "all" He did not mean "some" or even "most" — His authority is comprehensive.

1. Peter affirmed Jesus' authority over both Jew and Gentile (Acts 2:29-36; 10:34-36).
2. Jesus' authority extends over all man's activities (Colossians 3:17).
3. He even rules our thinking (Matthew 5:27-28; 2 Corinthians 10:5b).
4. Jesus' authority encompasses both the dead and the living (Romans 14:9). And in the final day He will sit in judgment of every man, woman, and child, and separate each for his reward or destruction (Matthew 25:31-46).

Anyone with that much authority has every right to tell me how to live my life!! Every word He spoke will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Thus, it is imperative that His will govern our lives now.

It is dangerous to reject and despise authority (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8). The Bible identifies those who do by classing them with such apostates as angels who sinned, those destroyed in the days of Noah, and the people of Sodom (2 Peter 2:4-17; Jude 5-11).

Rejecting the authority of Christ and substituting our own is serious business.

B. Jesus Has The Final Word. While people today are morally degrading themselves and establishing their own systems of morality, Jesus has already dictated His will on every moral issue.

1. Jesus alone has the right to regulate sexual activity among men and women (Matthew 5:27-30).
2. Jesus' restrictions on divorce and remarriage should go unquestioned (Matthew 19:3-12).
3. Jesus governs the way we must treat our enemies (Matthew 5:44-48).
4. Jesus is the one who regulates baptism (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:19).
5. Jesus has even spoken in connection with paying our taxes (Matthew 22:17-21).
6. Jesus has the final word concerning the activities of His church. He and His apostles (spokesmen) spoke concerning its organization, worship, and mission. If Christ has "all authority in heaven and earth", then no one else has the power or right to legislate the church's activities. Its members are Christ's servants... not His equals (Matthew 15:9).

CONCLUSION: Jesus was deeply impressed by the faith of one Roman centurion (Matthew 8:5-13). This centurion showed that he knew something about authority. He was a man in authority and under authority at the same time. But he knew that Jesus' authority extended over all, and Jesus need only utter the word for his servant to be healed.

Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith (Matthew 8:10). This man knew something about the authority of Jesus. Sadly, many professed religious people know nothing of subjection to such authority. Jesus will not stand for that (Luke 6:46).

My friend, Jesus offers us a choice now. We can accept His authority, humbly submit to His will, or we can scorn His authority and pursue our own will. But one day every knee shall bow to Him as Lord (Romans 14:10-12).

Why not do it now to your salvation?

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

INTRO: What is this peculiar creature we call a "Christian"? People use that term loosely to identify some religious or good moral person, but that is not the proper Biblical usage.

The word "Christian" is found three different times in the New Testament. Each time it is used, it describes much more than good people. Christians are good people... but good people are not necessarily Christians. Actually, there are very many people who are disillusioned and will be surprised to find out that God never considered them to be Christians.

I. WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

A. A Christian Is A Disciple (Acts 11:26). Those who are disciples of Christ have the privilege of wearing His name. But what is a "disciple"? "A disciple was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher" (An Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words; W.E. Vine, p.308).

A disciple of anyone is an individual who believes, follows and promotes the teachings of his master (John 8:31). Therefore, a Christian is much more than some religious, moral person. He is one who patterns his life after his master, Jesus Christ.

Many people consider themselves "Christians" who cannot truthfully claim that honor. These do not worship Christ on His day, they do not support the work of the church Jesus died for, they tell no one about the Savior.

My friend, each of us needs to take a close introspection (2 Corinthians 13:5).

B. A Christian Will Pattern His Life After The Example Of Christ (1 Peter 2:21-23). Now wait a minute... is that how you act when people mistreat you? Or do you fight back? What kind of words are found in your mouth? Words of bitterness, animosity, and hatred? Or words of kindness and blessing?

If we are going to be like Christ, we must follow His example in all things. Some will say "Well, that was what Jesus did. I cannot do that!" As if we are not expected to meet that standard!

1. If Jesus turned the other cheek, that is exactly what we must do (Luke 22:63-65; Matthew 5:39)!
2. Jesus forgave those who sinned against Him, and that is what we must do (Luke 23:34; Matthew 6:14-15)!
3. If He loved His enemies, so must we (Matthew 5:43-48)! The standard for the Son of God and us is the same. If He did it, so must we (Matthew 10:25)!

C. A Christian Glorifies Christ In The Name He Wears. He refuses to deny it and may have to suffer as a Christian (1 Peter 4:16). Being a

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Christian demands dedication and devotion to Christ and His words. No one has the right to bear His name who will not bear His cross (cf. Matthew 16:24-25)!!

- D. **A Christian Is Part Of The Church Jesus Died For (Acts 20:28).** The same baptism that puts one into Christ puts him into the church (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:41,47; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

King Agrippa was "almost persuaded" to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). But almost persuaded is still all together lost!!

CONCLUSION: What about you my friend? Are you really a Christian? Your souls' well-being depends on a truthful answer to that question! Don't be deceived like so many are (Matthew 7:21-23). Don't take anything for granted!!

THE STAIRCASE OF FAITH

INTRO: Many people do not comprehend the vast difference between belief and faith in Jesus Christ. The difference is more than just a fine line in semantics.

They do have a connection and correlation with one another, but many believers will be surprised to find that they don't have the saving faith that is necessary to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

I. THE STAIRCASE OF FAITH

- A. "Belief" Merely Involves A Mental Assent.** It is being convinced of the truthfulness of some fact. A man "believes" Jesus is the Son of God when he accepts that concept as being a true one. Certainly "belief" is necessary to please God, but is it enough (James 2:19)? The demons believe strongly, and even confess the Lord's name (cf. Matthew 8:29; Mark 1:23-24; 3:11; etc) yet they are not saved!!
- B. "Faith" Is Based On Conviction Which Results In Conversion.** The life of Abraham depicts such faith (James 2:22). "Faith" always causes obedience!! It caused Abraham to leave his homeland for a place which God did not specify (Genesis 12:1-3). It caused him to offer up his son Isaac on the altar simply because God told him too. *(Genesis 22)*
- C. "Belief" Is Merely The First Step Up A Longer, Steeper Staircase.** Taking one step will not bring a man to the top of the stairs anymore than believing in Jesus will bring him to a level of faithfulness which God demands.
Many other steps must be ascended (James 2:17). Many rulers in Jesus' day believed on Him, but were stuck there on the stairs. Their "belief" was not characteristic of "faith" (John 12:42-43). Their belief did not cause obedience (Hebrews 5:9).
- D. ^{Faith} ~~Belief~~ Is So Intertwined With Obedience That The Two Cannot Be Separated.** Faith and works do not contradict one another... rather they enhance one another! Faith without accompanying works is worthless... they are like two oars of a boat which pull together to propel one to his destination. *(James 2:14-26)*
- E. Examples Of Those Approved By Faith.** Within Hebrews the eleventh chapter, we read of many individuals whom God considered faithful and each was approved through his faith (Hebrews 11:39). Notice that in each case, their faith triggered some sort of action.
1. By faith Abel offered a sacrifice.
 2. By faith Noah built an ark.
 3. By faith Abraham left his homeland.
 4. By faith Sarah conceived a child.

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5. By faith Abraham offered his son Isaac.
6. By faith Moses was hidden by his parents.
7. By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and forsook Egypt.

Faith is the starting point for approval by God — not the finish! Obedience to God's command brings us nearer to salvation than belief alone can do (Romans 13:11). Faith only leaves one stranded on the stairs (James 2:24).

CONCLUSION: Friend, if your life has not been changed to conform to God's commands, then your faith cannot save you by itself!! The proof of a man's faith is seen in his life, not just spoken by his mouth!! Obey God's commands (Acts 2:38). Don't get stranded on the stairs!!