

Studies in the Sermon on the Mount - Part 2

by Oswald Chambers

Oswald Chambers emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing God and trusting Him in all aspects of life while cultivating a loving and discerning spirit among believers.

Scripture: Matthew 7:16-24

Topics: "Spiritual Discernment", "Obedient Faith"

Description

Oswald Chambers preaches about the importance of discerning between appearance and reality in the Christian life, emphasizing the need to test teachers by their fruit and to focus on doing the will of God rather than just professing faith. He warns against pretence, over-zealousness, and the danger of relying on labels or external appearances. Chambers highlights the significance of building spiritual foundations by hearing and obeying the words of Jesus, ensuring that our faith is rooted in genuine obedience and not just superficial profession.

Transcript

INCARNATE WISDOM AND INDIVIDUAL REASON 59

in, we will not trust what we cannot see, we will not believe

what we cannot trace. Then it is all up with my dis-

cipliship. The great word of Jesus to His disciples is

" Abandon." When God has brought me into the relation

ship of a disciple, I have to venture on His word, to trust

entirely to Him and watch that when He brings me to

the venture, I take it.

Jesus sums up common sense carefulness in a person

indwelt by the Spirit of God as infidelity. After you have

received the Spirit and you try and put other things first

instead of God, you will find confusion. The Holy Spirit presses through and says Where does God come in in this new relationship ? in this mapped-out holiday? in these new books you are buying ? The Holy Spirit always presses that point until we learn to make concentration on God the first consideration. It is not only wrong to worry, it is real infidelity because it means I do not think God can look after the little practical details of my life, it is never anything else that worries us. Notice what Jesus said would choke the word He puts in the devil ? No, the cares of this world. That is how infidelity begins. It is the little foxes that spoil the vines, the little worries always. The great cure for infidelity is obedience to the Spirit of God. Refuse to be swamped by the cares of this world, cut out non-essentials and continually revise your relationship to God and see that you are concentrated absolutely on Him. The man who trusts Jesus in a definite practical way is freer than anyone else to do his work in the world, free from fret and worry, he can go with absolute certainty into the daily life because the responsibility of his life is off him and on God. Once I realise the revelation Jesus gives that God is my Father and that I can never think of anything He will forget, then worry is impossible.

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(d) Concentrated Consecration, w. 33-34.

" Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." " Seek ye

first the Kingdom of God " " But, supposing I do, what about this thing and that ? who is going to look after me ? I would like to obey God, but don t ask me to take a step in the dark." We enthrone our common sense as almighty God and treat Jesus Christ as a spiritual appendage to it. Jesus Christ hits desperately hard at every one of the institutions we bank all our faith in naturally. The sense of property and of insurance is one of the greatest hindrances to development in the spiritual life. You cannot lay up for a rainy day if you are trusting Jesus Christ.

Our Lord teaches that the one great secret of the spiritual life is concentration on God and His purposes. We talk a lot about consecration, but it ends in sentimentalism because there is nothing definite about it. Consecration ought to mean my definite yielding of myself over as a saved soul to Jesus and concentrating on that. There are things in actual life that lead to perplexity, and I say I am in a quandary and I don t know which way to take.

" Be renewed in the spirit of your mind," says Paul, concentrate on God, so that you make out what is His will. Concentration on God is of more value than personal holiness. God can do what He likes with the man who is abandoned to Him. God saves us and sanctifies us, then He expects us to concentrate on Him in every circumstance we are in. " Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." When in doubt, haul yourself up short and concentrate

on God, and every time you do, you will find that God engineers your circumstances and opens the way perfectly

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securely, the condition on your part is that you concentrate on God.

" Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you." At the bar of common sense Jesus Christ's statements are those of a fool ; but bring them to the bar of faith and the word of God, and you begin to find with awestruck spirit that they are the words of God.

STUDY No. 4.

CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.

Matthew VII. 1-12,

(1) CHRISTIAN CHARACTERISTICS, w. 1-5.

(a) The Uncritical Temper, v. 1.

(b) The Undeviating Test. v. 2.

(c) The Undesirable Truth Teller, w. 3-5.

(2) CHRISTIAN CONSIDERATENESS. vv. 6-11.

(a) The Need to Discriminate, v. 6.

(b) The Notion of Divine Control, vv. 7-10.

(c) The Necessity for Discernment, v. 11.

(3) CHRISTIAN COMPREHENSIVENESS.

(a) The Positive Margin of Righteousness.

(b) The Proverbial Maxim of Reasonableness. > v. 12.

(c) The Principal Meaning of Revelation. J

" And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith

virtue, . . ." Peter is writing to those who are the children of God, those who have been born from above, and he says Add, give diligence, concentrate. " Add " means all that character means. No man is born with character ; we make our own character. When a man is born from above he has a new disposition given to him, not character; neither naturally nor supernaturally are

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we born with character. Character is what a man makes out of his disposition as it comes in contact with external things. A man s character cannot be summed up by what he does in spots, but only by what he is in the main trend of his existence. When we describe a man we fix on the exceptional things, but it is the steady trend of the man s life that tells. Character is that which steadily prevails, not something that occasionally manifests itself. What we do steadily and persistently makes character, not what is exceptional or spasmodic, that is something God mourns over " thy goodness is as a morning cloud," He says. In Matthew VII. Our Lord is dealing with the need to make character.

(1) CHRISTIAN CHARACTERISTICS, vv. 1-5.

(a) The Uncritical Temper, v. 1.

" Judge not, that ye be not judged." Criticism is part of the ordinary faculty of a man, he has a sense of humour, i.e., a sense of proportion, and he sees where

things are wrong and pulls the other fellow to bits ; but Jesus says, as a disciple, cultivate the uncritical temper. In the spiritual domain, criticism is love gone sour. There is no room for criticism in a wholesome spiritual life. The critical faculty is an intellectual one, not a moral one. If criticism becomes a habit it will destroy the moral energy of the life and paralyse spiritual force. The only Person who can criticise human beings is the Holy Spirit. No human being dare criticise another human being, because immediately he does he puts himself in a superior position to the one he criticises. A critic must be removed from what he criticises. Before a man can criticise a work of art or piece of music, his information must be complete,

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he must stand away from what he criticises as superior to it. No human being can ever take that attitude to another human being, if he does he puts himself in the wrong position and grieves the Holy Spirit. If a man is continually criticised, he becomes good for nothing, the effect of the criticism is to knock all the gumption and power out of him. Criticism is deadly in its effect because it divides a man s powers and prevents his being a force for anything. That is never the work of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost alone is in the true position of a critic, He is able to show what is wrong without wounding and hurting.

The temper of mind that makes me lynx-eyed to see

where others are wrong does not do them any good, because the effect of my criticism is to paralyse their powers, which proves that the criticism did not come from the Holy Ghost. I have put myself into the position of a superior person. Jesus says a disciple can never stand off from another life and criticise it, therefore He advocates an uncritical temper, " Judge not." Beware of anything that puts you in the superior person s place.

The counsel of Jesus is to abstain from judging. This sounds strange at first because the characteristic of the Holy Spirit in a Christian is to reveal the things that are wrong, but the strangeness is only on the surface. The Holy Spirit does reveal what is wrong in others, but His discernment is never for purposes of criticism, but for purposes of intercession. When the Holy Spirit reveals something of the nature of sin and unbelief in another, His purpose is not to make me feel the smug satisfaction of a critical spectator Well, thank God, I am not like that ; but to make me so lay hold of God for that one that God enables him to turn away from the wrong thing. Never

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ask God for discernment, because discernment increases your responsibility terrifically ; and you cannot get out of it by talking, but only by bearing the life up in intercession before God until God puts him right. " If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not

unto death." (1 John V. 16.) Our Lord makes no room for criticism in the spiritual life, but He does make room for discernment and discrimination.

If we let these searchlights go straight down to the root of our spiritual life we will see why Jesus says Don't judge, we won't have time to. The whole of the life is to be lived in the power of God so that He can pour through the rivers of living water to others. Some of us are so concerned about the outflow, that it dries up. We continually ask Am I of any use? Jesus tells us how to be of use Believe in Me, and out of you will flow rivers of living water.

" Judge not, that ye be not judged." If we let that maxim of Our Lord sink into our heart we will find how it hauls us up. " Judge not " why we are always at it ! The average Christian is the most penetratingly critical individual, there is nothing of the likeness of Jesus about him. A critical temper is a contradiction to all Our Lord's teaching. Jesus says of criticism, apply it to yourself, never to anyone else. " Why dost thou judge thy brother? ... for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." Whenever you are in the critical temper, it is impossible to enter into communion with God. Criticism makes you hard and vindictive and cruel, and leaves you with the nattering unctiousness that you are a superior person. It is impossible to develop the characteristics of a saint and maintain the critical attitude. The

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first thing the Holy Spirit does is to give you a spring-cleaning, and there is no possibility of pride left in a man then. I never met a man I could despair of after discerning what there lies in me apart from the grace of God. Stop having a measuring rod for others. Jesus says regarding judging Don't judge ; be uncritical in your temper, because in the spiritual domain you can accomplish nothing by criticism. One of the severest lessons to learn is to leave the cases we do not understand to God. There is always one fact more in every life of which we know nothing, therefore says Jesus Judge not. It is not done once for all, we have to be always remembering that this is our Lord's rule of conduct.

(b) The Undeviating Test. v. 2.

" For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." This statement of Our Lord's is not a haphazard guess, it is an eternal law and it works from God's throne right down. (See Psalm XVIII. 25-26.) The measure I mete is measured to me again. Jesus puts it here in connection with criticism. If you have been shrewd in finding out the defects of others, that will be exactly the measure meted out to you, that is the way people will judge you. " I am perfectly certain that man has been criticising me." Well, what have you been doing ? Life serves back in the coin you pay ; you are paid back

not necessarily by the same person, but the law holds good " with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged."

And it works with regard to good as well as evil. If you have been generous, you will meet with generosity again through someone else ; and if you mete out criticism and suspicion to others, that is the way you will be treated.

There is a difference between retaliation and retribution.

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According to Our Lord, the basis of life is retribution, but He makes no room for retaliation.

In Romans II. this principle is applied still more definitely, viz., what I criticise in another I am guilty of myself. Every wrong I see in you, God locates in me ; every time I judge you, I condemn myself. " Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest : for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself ; for thou that judgest doest the same things." God does not look at the act, He looks at the possibility. To begin with, we do not believe the statements of the Bible.

For instance, do I believe that what I criticise in another I am guilty of myself ? I can always tell sin in another man because I am a sinner. The reason I can see hypocrisy and fraud and unreality in others is that they are all in my own heart. The great danger is to call carnal suspicion the conviction of the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost convicts men, He convicts for conversion, that men might be converted and manifest other characteristics. I have

no right to put myself in the place of a superior person and tell them what I see that is wrong, that is the work of the Holy Ghost.

The great characteristic of the saint is humility. I realise to the full that all these sins and others would have been manifested in me but for the grace of God, therefore I have no right to judge. Jesus says Don't judge, because if you do, it will be measured to you again exactly as you have judged. Which one of us would dare stand before God and say My God, judge me as I have judged my fellow men? We have judged our fellow men as sinners; if God judged us like that we would be in hell. God judges us through the marvellous Atonement of Jesus Christ.

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(c) The Undesirable Truth Teller, w. 3-5.

The kind impudence of the average truth teller is inspired of the devil when it comes to pointing out the defects of others. The devil is lynx-eyed for things he can criticise, and we are all shrewd in pointing out the mote in our brother's eye. It puts me in a superior position I am a finer spiritual character than you. Where do you find that characteristic? In the Lord Jesus? Never. The Holy Ghost works through the saints unbeknown to them, He works through them as light. If this is not understood, you will say That preacher or that teacher seems to be criticising me all the time. He is not, it is the Holy Spirit

in the preacher discerning what is wrong in you.

The last curse in your life as a Christian is the person who becomes a providence to you, he is quite certain you cannot do anything without his advice, and if you don't heed it you are sure to go wrong. Jesus ridiculed that notion with terrific power " Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye ; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

" Thou hypocrite," literally play actor, one whose reality is not in keeping with his sincerity ; a hypocrite is one who plays two parts consciously for his own ends. When you find fault with other people you may be quite sincere, yet Jesus says in reality you are a fraud. There is no getting away from the penetration of Jesus. If I see the mote in your eye, it is because I have a beam in my own. It is a most homecoming statement.

If I have let God remove the beam from my own outlook by His mighty grace, I will carry with me the implicit sunlight confidence that what God has done for me He can easily do for my brother, because he has only a splinter, I had a log of wood ! This is the confidence God's salva-

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tion gives you, you are so amazed that God has altered you that you can despair of no one. Oh yes, I know God can undertake for you, you are only a little wrong, I was wrong down to the remote depths of my mind, I was a mean, prejudiced, self-interested, self-seeking person, and

God has altered me, therefore I can never despair of you or of anyone. These statements of Our Lord s save us from that fearful peril of spiritual conceit Thank God I am not as other men, and also make us realise why such a man as Daniel bowed his head in vicarious humiliation and intercession I have sinned with Thy people. That call comes every now and again to individuals and to nations.

(2) CHRISTIAN CONSIDERATENESS. w. 7-11.

Consider how God has dealt with you and then consider that you do likewise.

(a) The Need to Discriminate, v. 6.

" Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." Jesus is inculcating the need to examine carefully what you present in the way of God s truth to others. If you present the pearls of God s revelation to unspiritual people, He says they will trample the pearls under foot not trample you under their feet, that would not matter so much, but they will trample the truth of God under their feet. These words are not human words, but the words of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit alone can teach us what they mean. There are some truths that God will not make simple. The only thing God makes plain in the Bible is the way of salvation
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and sanctification, after that my understanding depends

entirely on my walking in the light. Over and over again men water down the word of God to suit those who are not spiritual, and consequently the word of God is trampled under the feet of " swine." Ask yourself In what way am I flinging God s truth to unspiritual swine ? Be careful Jesus says, how you give God s holy things to " dogs," i.e., a symbol of the folks on the outside; don t cast your holy things before them nor give the pearls of God s truth to men who are swine. Paul mentions the possibility of the pearl of sanctification being dragged in the mire of fornication, it comes through not respecting this mighty caution of Our Lord s. Some points in your experience you have no right to talk about. There are times of fellowship between Christians when these pearls of precious rarity get turned over and looked at, but if you flaunt them for the means of converting people without the permission of God, you will find what Jesus says is true, they will trample them under their feet.

Our Lord never tells us to confess anything but Himself.

" He that confesseth ME before men." Testimonies to the world on the subjective line are always wrong, they are for saints, for those who are spiritual and understand ; but your testimony to the world is Our Lord Himself, confess Him He saved me, He sanctified me, He put me right with God. It is always easier to be true to your experience than to Jesus Christ. Many a man spurns Jesus Christ in any other phase than that of his particular

religious ideas. The central truth is not salvation nor sanctification nor the second coming ; the central truth is nothing less than Jesus Christ. " I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Error always comes in when we take something Jesus Christ does and preach it as the

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truth. It is part of the truth, but if you take it to be the whole truth you become an advocate of an idea instead of a Person, the Lord Himself. The characteristic of an idea is that it has the ban of finality. If you are only true to a doctrine of Christianity instead of to Jesus Christ, you drive home your idea with sledge hammer blows, and the people who listen to you say Well, that may be true, but they resent the way it is presented. When you follow Jesus, the domineering attitude and the dictatorial attitude go, and concentration on Jesus comes in.

(b) The Notion of Divine Control, vv. 7-10.

By the simple argument of these verses Our Lord urges us to keep our minds filled with the notion of God s control behind eveiything and to maintain an attitude of perfect trust. Always distinguish between being possessed of the Spirit and forming the mind of Christ. Jesus is laying down rules of conduct for those who have the Spirit. Notion your mind with the idea that God is there. Once the mind is notioned along that line, when you are in difficulties it is as easy as breathing to remember Why, my Father knows all about it. It is not an effort, it comes

naturally. Before, when perplexities were pressing, you used to go and ask this one and that, now the notion of the Divine control is forming so powerfully in you that you simply go to God about it. You will always know whether the notion is at work by the way you act in difficult circumstances. Who is the first one you go to ? What is the first thing you do ? The first power you rely on ? It is the working out of the principle indicated in Matthew VI. 25-34, God is my Father, He loves me, I can never think of anything He will forget, why should I worry ? Keep the notion strong and growing of the control of God behind all things. Nothing happens in any particular unless

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God's mind is behind it, then I rest perfectly confident.

There are times when God cannot lift the darkness, but trust Him. Jesus said God will appear at times like an unkind friend, but He is not ; He will appear like an unnatural father, but He is not ; He will appear like an unjust judge but He is not. The time will come when every thing will be explained. Prayer is not only asking, it is an attitude of heart that produces an atmosphere in which asking is perfectly natural, and "everyone that asks receives."

A man will get from life everything he asks for, because he does not ask what his will is not in. If a man asks of life to make him wealthy, he will get wealth, or he was playing the fool when he asked. " If ye abide in Me," says

Jesus, "and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." We pray piously, our will is not in it, and then we say God does not answer; we never asked Him for anything. Asking means that my will is in it.

You say But I asked God to turn my life into a garden of the Lord, and the first thing that happened was the ploughshare of sorrow, and instead of getting a garden I have got a wilderness. God never gives the wrong answer, He had to turn the garden of your natural life into ploughed soil before He could turn it into a garden of the Lord, He is putting the seed in now. Let God's seasons come over your soul, and before long you will have a garden of the Lord.

We need to discern that God controls what we ask.

We bring in what Paul calls "will worship." Will is the whole man active, there are terrific forces in the will.

The man who gains a moral victory by sheer force of will is the most difficult man to deal with afterwards. The

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profound thing in man is his will, not sin. Will is the essential element in God's creation of man; sin is a perverse disposition which entered into man. At the basis, the human will is one with God, covered up by all kinds of desires and motives, and when we preach Jesus the Holy Spirit excavates down to the basis of the will, and the will turns to God every time. We try to attack men's wills;

Jesus says Lift Me up, and I will push straight to the will. When Jesus talked about prayer He never said If your human will turns in that direction. He put it with the grand simplicity of a child Ask. We bring in our reasoning faculty and say Yes, but, . . . Jesus says " If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

(c) The Necessity for Discernment, v. 11.

"I f ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him ? "

But remember that you have to ask things that are in keeping with the God whom Jesus Christ reveals, things in keeping with His domain. God is not a necromancer, He is after the development of the character of a son of God. If I want to know the things of a man, I can get at them by the " spirit of man which is in him," but the things of the Spirit of God are " spiritually discerned."

The discernment needed here is the habitual realisation that every good thing I have has been given to me by the sheer sovereign grace of God. Jesus says Get this reasoning incorporated into you How much have you deserved? Nothing, everything has been given to you by God. Then may God save us from the mean accursed economical notion that we must only help the people who deserve it. One can almost hear the Holy Ghost shout

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in the heart Who are you that you talk like that, did you deserve the salvation God has given you, did you deserve to be filled with the Holy Spirit ? It is all done by the sheer sovereign mercy of God, then be like your Father in heaven, says Jesus, have a perfect disposition like His. " Love as I have loved you." It is not done once for all, it is a continual stedfast growing habit of the life.

Humility and holiness always go together. Whenever hardness and harshness begin to creep into the personal attitude towards one another, we may be certain we are swerving from the light. The preaching must be as stern and true as God s word, never water down God s truth ; but never forget when you deal with others that you are a sinner saved by grace, no matter where you stand now.

If you stand in the fulness of the blessing of God, you stand there by no other right than the sheer sovereign grace of God. Then, says Jesus, if you, an evil being, saved by grace, can do such kind things to others, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?

Over and over again we blame God for His neglect of people by our sympathy with them, we may not put it into words but by our attitude we imply that we are filling up what God has forgotten to do. Never have that idea, never allow it to come into your mind. In all probability the Spirit of God will begin to show that it is

because we have neglected what we ought to do that people are where they are! The great craze to-day is socialism, and men are saying that Jesus Christ came as a social reformer. Nonsense ! We are to be social reformers, Jesus Christ came to alter us, and we try to shirk our responsibility by putting our work on to Him. What

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Jesus does is to alter us and put us right, then these principles of His will instantly make us social reformers. They will begin to work straightway where we live, in my relationship to my father and mother, to my brothers and sisters, my friends, my employers or employees. Consider how God has dealt with you, says Jesus, and then consider that you do likewise to others.

(3) CHRISTIAN COMPREHENSIVENESS, v. 12.

Christian grace comprehends the whole man. " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

Salvation means not only a pure heart, an enlightened mind, a spirit put right with God, it means that the whole of man is comprehended in the manifestation of the marvellous power and grace of God; the whole man, body, soul and spirit is brought into fascinating captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. An incandescent mantle illustrates the meaning, if the mantle is not rightly adjusted, only one bit of it glows, but get the mantle adjusted exactly, and when the light comes the whole thing is comprehended

in a blaze of light ; and every bit of our being is to be absorbed until we are one glow with the comprehensive goodness of God. " The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Some of us have goodness in spots.

(a) The Positive Margin of Righteousness.

The limit to the manifestation of the grace of God in me is my body, and the whole of my body. We can understand the need of a pure heart, of a mind rightly adjusted to God and a spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but what about the body ? That is the margin of righteousness in me. We make a divorce between a clear intellectual understanding of truth and its practical outcome. Jesus never made such a divorce, He takes no notice of our fine intellectual conceptions unless their practical outcome is shown in reality.

There is a great snare in the capacity to understand a thing clearly and to exhaust its power by stating it. Over much earnestness blinds the life to reality, earnestness becomes our god. We bank on the earnestness and zeal with which things are said and done, and after a while we find that the reality is not there, the power and presence of God are not being manifested, there are relationships at home or in business or in private that show when the veneer is scratched that we are not real. To say things well is apt to exhaust the power of doing them, so that

a man has often to curb the expression of a thing with his tongue and turn it into action, otherwise his gift of facile utterance will prevent his doing the things he says.

(b) The Proverbial Maxim of Reasonableness.

" Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Our Lord's use of this maxim is positive, not negative. Do to others whatsoever ye would that they should do to you a very different thing from not doing to others what you don't want them to do to you. What would I like other people to do to me ? Well, says Jesus, do that to them ; don't wait for them to do it to you. The Holy Ghost will kindle your imagination to picture many things you would like others to do to you, it is His way of telling you what to do to them " I would like people to give me credit for the generous motives I have ; " well, give them credit for having generous motives. " I would like that people should

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not pass harsh judgments on me," well, don't pass harsh judgments on them. " I should like other people to pray for me ; " well, pray for them. The measure of my growth in grace is my attitude towards other people.

" Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," says Jesus.

Satan comes in as an angel of light and says But you must not think about yourself. The Holy Spirit will make you think about yourself, because that is His way of educating you as to how to deal with others. He makes you picture

what you would like other people to do to you, and then says Now you go and do those things to them. This verse is Our Lord's measure for practical ethical conduct. " Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Never look for right in the other man, but never cease to be right yourself. We always look for justice in this world, but there is no such thing as justice. Jesus says Never look for justice, but never cease to give it. The stamp all through Our Lord's teaching is that of the impossible unless He can make me all over again, and that is what He came to do. He came to give any man a new heredity to which His teaching will apply.

(c) The Principal Meaning of Revelation.

Jesus Christ came to make the great laws of God incarnate in human life, that is the miracle of God's grace. We are to be written epistles, "known and read of all men." There is no room whatever in the New Testament for the man who says he is saved by grace but who does not produce the graceful goods. Jesus Christ by His Redemption can make my actual life in keeping with my religious profession.

In our study of the Sermon on the Mount it would be like a baptism of light to allow the principles of Jesus to

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soak right down to our very make-up. His statements are not put up as standards for us to attain ; God re-makes

us, puts His Holy Spirit in us, then the Holy Spirit applies the principles to us and enables us to work them out by His guidance.

STUDY No. 5.

IDEAS, IDEALS, AND ACTUALITY.

Matthew VII. 13-29.

(1) TWO GATES, TWO WAYS.

(a) All Noble Things are Difficult.

(6) My Utmost for His Highest, ivv. 13-14.

(c) A stoot heart tac a stae brae. /

(2) TEST YOUR TEACHERS, vv. 15-20.

(a) Possibility of Pretence, v. 15.

(6) Place of Patience, v. 16.

(c) Principle of Performance, w. 17-18.

(d) Power of Publicity, vv. 19-20.

(3) APPEARANCE AND REALITY, w. 21-23.

(a) Recognition of Men. v. 21.

(b) Remedy Mongers, v. 22.

(c) Retributive Measures, v. 23.

(4) THE TWO BUILDERS, vv. 24-29.

(a) Spiritual Castles, v. 24.

(b) Stern Crisis, v. 25.

(c) Supreme Catastrophe, vv. 26-27.

(d) Scriptural Concentration, vv. 28-29.

An idea reveals what it does and no more. If you read a book about life, life looks simple ; but go out and face

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the facts of life and you will find they do not come into the simple line laid down in the book. An idea works like a searchlight, lighting up what it does and no more ; but daylight reveals a hundred and one facts the searchlight had not taken into account. An idea is apt to have the ban of finality about it the " tyranny " of an idea.

An ideal embodies our highest conceptions, but it contains no moral inspiration. To treat the Sermon on the Mount as merely an ideal is misleading. There is nothing of the ideal about it, it is a statement of the working out in actuality of Jesus Christ s disposition in the life of any man. A man gets ashamed of not being able to fulfil his ideals, and the more upright he is, the more agonising is his conflict I won t lower my ideals, he says, although I can never hope to make them actual. No man is so laboured as the man with ideals he cannot carry out. Jesus Christ says to such " Come unto Me, and I will give you rest," i.e., I will " stay " you, put something into you which will make the ideal and the actual one. Without Jesus Christ there is an unbridgeable gap between the ideal and the actual, the only way out is a personal relationship to Him. The salvation of God not only saves a man from hell, but alters his actual life.

(1) TWO GATES, TWO WAYS. w. 13-14.

Our Lord continually used proverbs and sayings that were familiar to His hearers and put an altogether new

meaning into them. Here He used an allegory that was familiar in His day, and lifted it by His inspiration to embody His patient warnings.

Always distinguish between warning and threatening.

God never threatens ; the devil never warns. Warning is

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a great arresting statement of God's, inspired by His love and patience. This throws a flood of light on the vivid statements of Jesus, such as those in Matthew XXIII.

Be careful how you picture Jesus when you read His terrible utterances. Read our Lord's denunciations with Calvary in your mind. Jesus is stating the inexorable consequence " How can you escape the damnation of hell ? " There is no element of personal vindictiveness. It is the great patient love of God that puts the warning.

" The way of transgressors is hard." Go behind that statement in your imagination and see the love of God ; God is amazingly tender, yet He cannot make the way of transgressors easy. God has made it difficult to go wrong, especially for His children.

" Enter ye in at the strait gate. ..." If a man tries to enter into salvation in any other way than Jesus Christ's way, he will find it a broad way, but the end of it is distress. Erasmus said it took the sharp sword of sorrow, and difficulties of every description, heartbreaks and disenchantments to bring him to the place where he saw Jesus as the altogether lovely One, and, he says : " When I got

there I found there was no need to have gone the way I went." There is the broad way of reasonable self-realisation; but the only way to a personal knowledge of eternal redemption is strait and narrow. Jesus says " I am the way."

There is a difference between discipleship and being saved. A man can be saved by God's grace without being a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship means a personal dedication of the life to Jesus. Men are saved so as by fire, they have not been worth anything to God in their actual lives. Go and make disciples, said Jesus. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount produces only despair in a

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man who is not born again. If Jesus came to be a Teacher only, He had better have stayed away. What is the use of teaching a human being to be what no human being can be to be continually self-effaced, to do more than his duty, to be disinterested, to be perfectly devoted to God ? If all Jesus came to do was to teach men to be that, He is the greatest taunter that ever presented any ideal to the human race. But Jesus came primarily and fundamentally to regenerate men ; He came to put into any man the disposition that ruled His own life, and immediately that comes into a man, then the teaching of Jesus begins to be possible. All the standards He gives are based on His disposition.

Notice the apparent unsatisfactoriness of the answers of

Jesus. He never once answered a question that sprang from a man's head, because those questions are never original, they always have the captious note about them. The man with that type of question wants to get the best of it logically. In Luke XIII. 24 a certain devout man asked Jesus a question " Lord, are there few that be saved ? " And Jesus replied " Strive to enter in at the strait gate," i.e., see that your own feet are on the right path. Our Lord's answers seem at first to evade the issue, but He goes underneath the question and solves the real problem. He never answers our shallow questions but deals with the great unconscious need that makes them arise. When a man asks an original question out of his own personal life, Jesus answers him every time.

(a) All Noble Things are Difficult.

Our Lord warns that the devout life of a disciple is not a dream, but a decided discipline which calls for the use of all our powers. No amount of determination can give

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me the new life of God, that is a gift ; where determination comes in, is in letting that new life work itself out according to Christ's standard. We are always in danger of confounding what we can do and what we cannot do. We can not save ourselves, nor sanctify ourselves, nor give ourselves the Holy Spirit ; only God can do that. Confusion continually recurs when we try to do what God alone can do, and try to make out that God will do what we alone

can do. We imagine that God will make us walk in the light ; God will not, we must do the walking. God gives us the power to walk, but we have to see that we use the power. God puts the power and the life into us and fills us with His Spirit, now we have to work it out, not work our salvation, but work it out ; and as we do we realise that the noble life of a disciple is a gloriously difficult one a difficulty that rouses us up to overcome it, not a difficulty that makes us faint and cave in.

It is always necessary to make an effort to be noble.

Jesus never shields a disciple from fulfilling all the requirements of a child of His. Things that are worth doing are never easy. On the ground of Redemption the life of the Son of God is formed in my human nature and I have to put on the new man in accordance with His life, and that takes time and discipline. " Acquire your soul with patience." Soul is my personal spirit manifesting itself in my body, the way I reason and think and look at things.

Jesus says that a man must lose his soul in order to find it.

We deal with the great massive phases of Redemption that God saves men by sheer grace through the Atonement, but we are apt to forget that it has to be worked out in practical living among men. " Ye are My friends," says Jesus, therefore lay down your life for Me, not go through the crisis of death, but lay out your life deliberately for

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Me, take time over it. It is a noble life and a difficult life.

God works in me to do His will, only I must do the doing ; and if once I start to do what He commands, I find I can do it, because I work on the basis of the noble thing God has done in Redemption.

(b) My Utmost for His Highest.

God demands of us our utmost in working out what He has worked in. We can do nothing towards our redemption, but we must do everything to work it out in actual experience on the basis of regeneration. Salvation is God's "bit," it is complete, I can add nothing to it, but I have to bend all my powers to work out His salvation. It requires discipline to live the life of a disciple in actual things. " Jesus knowing that He was come from God and went to God . . . took a towel . . . and began to wash the disciples feet." It took God Incarnate to do the ordinary menial things of life rightly, and it takes the life of God in me to use a towel properly. This is Redemption being actually worked out in experience, and we can do it every time because of the marvel of God's grace.

" If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments."

Jesus puts that as the test of discipleship. The motto over our side of the gate of life is All God's commands I can obey. I have to do my utmost as a disciple to prove that I appreciate God's utmost for me, and to learn never to allow " I can't " to creep in. " Oh I'm no saint, I can't do that." If that thought comes in, we will be a disgrace

to Jesus. God's salvation is a glad thing, but it is a holy, difficult thing that tests us for all we are worth. Jesus is bringing many sons to glory and He won't shield us from the requirements of sonship. He will say at certain times to the world, the flesh and the devil "Do your worst, I know

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that "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." God's grace does not turn out milksops, but men and women with a strong family likeness to Jesus Christ. Thank God He does give us difficult things to do! A man's heart would burst if there were no way to show his gratitude. I beseech you, says Paul, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice. . . .

(c) A stout heart tae a stae brae, i.e., a strong heart to a difficult hill. The Christian life is a holy life; never substitute the word "happy" for "holy." We certainly will have happiness, but as a consequence of holiness. Beware of the idea so prevalent to-day that a Christian must always be happy and bright "keep smiling." Preaching along that line is merely the gospel of temperament. If you make the determination to be happy the basis of your Christian life, your happiness will go from you; happiness is not a cause but an effect that follows without striving after it. Our Lord insists that we keep at one point, our eyes fixed on the strait gate and the narrow way, which means pure, holy living.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." It seems

an amazingly difficult thing to do to put on the yoke of Christ, but immediately you do put it on, it makes every thing easy. At the beginning of the Christian life it seems easier to drift, to say "I can't," but once you do put on His yoke, you find, blessed be the Name of God, that you have the easiest way after all. Happiness and joy attend, but they are not your aim, your aim is the Lord Jesus Christ, and God showers the hundredfold more on you all the way along.

In order to keep a stout heart to the difficult braes of life, watch continually that worry does not come in.

"Let not your heart be troubled," is a command and it means

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that worry is sinful. It is not the devil that switches folks off Christ's way, but the ordinary steep difficulties of daily life, difficulties connected with food, and clothing, and situations. The "cares of this world," said Our Lord, will choke My word. We have all had times when the little worries of life have choked God's word and blotted out His face to us, enfeebled our spirits, and made us sorry and humiliated before Him more so even than the times when we have been tempted to sin. There is something in us that makes us face temptation to sin with vigour and earnestness, but it requires the stout heart that God gives to meet the cares of this life. I would not give much for the man who had nothing in his life which made him say I wish I was not in the circumstances I am in. "In

the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ;
I have overcome the world " and you will overcome it
too, you will win every time if you bank on your relation
ship to Me. Spiritual grit is what we need.

" Enter ye in at the strait gate." I can only get to
heaven through Jesus, no other road ; I can only get to
the Father through Jesus, and I can only get into the life
of a saint the same road.

(2) TEST YOUR TEACHERS, w. 15-20.

In these verses Jesus tells His disciples to test preachers
and teachers by their fruit. There are two tests one is
the fruit in the life of the preacher, and the other is the
fruit of the doctrine. The fruit of a man s own life may
be perfectly beautiful, and at the same time he may be
teaching a doctrine which if logically worked out would
produce the devil s fruit in other lives. It is easy to be
captivated by a beautiful life and to argue that therefore

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what that life teaches must be right. Jesus says Be
careful, test your teacher by his fruit. The other side is
just as true, a man may be teaching beautiful truths and
have magnificent doctrine while the fruit in his own life
is rotten. We say that if a man, lives a beautiful life, his
doctrine must be right ; not necessarily so, says Jesus.
Then again we say because a man teaches the right
thing therefore his life must be right; not necessarily
so, says Jesus. Test the doctrine by its fruit and test the

teacher by his fruit. " If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed," the freedom of the nature will work out.

" By their fruits ye shall know them." You do not gather the vindictive mood from the Holy Ghost ; you do not gather the passionately irritable mood from the patience of God ; you do not gather the self-indulgent mood and the lust of the flesh in private life from the Spirit of God. God never allows room for any of these moods.

We find that as we study the Sermon on the Mount we are badgered by the Spirit of God from every standpoint, in order to bring us into a simplicity of relationship to Jesus Christ. The standard is that of a child depending on God.

(a) Possibility of Pretence, v. 15.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Our Lord here is describing dangerous teachers, and He warns us of those who come clothed in right doctrine but inwardly their spirit is that of Satan.

It is appallingly easy to pretend. If once we get our eyes off Jesus, pious pretence is sure to follow. 1 John I. 7 is the essential condition for the life of the saint " If we walk in the light as God is in the light," i.e., with nothing folded up, nothing to hide. Immediately we depend on

anything other than our relationship to God, the possibility of pretence comes in, pious pretence, not hypocrisy (a hypocrite is one who tries to live a twofold life for his own ends and succeeds), but a desperately sincere effort to be right when we know we are not.

I have to beware of pretence in myself. It is an easy business to look what I am not ; it is easy to talk and to preach, and to preach my actual life to damnation. It was realizing this made Paul say " I keep under my body . . . lest that by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." The more facile the expression in words, the less likely is the truth to be carried out in life. A preacher has a peril that the listener has not, the peril of being able to express a thing, and the expression reacts in the exhaustion of never doing it. That is where fasting has to come in fasting from eloquence, from fine literary finish, from all that natural culture makes us esteem, if it is going to lead us into a hirpling walk with God. " This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Fasting is much more than doing without food, that is the least part, it is fasting from all that manifests self-indulgence. There is a certain mood in us all which delights in frank speaking, but we never intend to do what we say, we are " enchanted but unchanged." The frank man is the unreliable man, much more so than the subtle, crafty man, because he has the power of expressing the thing clean out and there is

nothing more to it.

(b) Place of Patience, v. 16.

" Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles ? " This warning is

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against over-zealousness on the part of heresy-hunters.

Our Lord would have us bide our time. Luke IX. 53-55

is a case in point. Take heed that you do not allow carnal suspicion to take the place of the discernment of the Spirit.

Fruit and fruit alone is the test. If I see the fruit in a life showing itself as thistles, Jesus says you will know the

wrong root is there, for you do not gather thistles off any

root but a thistle, but remember that it is quite possible

in winter time to mistake a rose tree for something else

unless you are expert in judging. So there is a place for

patience, and Our Lord would have us heed it. Wait for

the fruit to manifest itself and don t be guided by your

own fancy. It is easy to get alarmed and to persuade

myself that my particular convictions are the standard of

Christ, and to condemn everyone to perdition who does

not agree with me ; I am obliged to do it because my

convictions have taken the place of God in me. God s

Book never tells us to walk in the light of convictions,

but in the light of the Lord.

Always distinguish between those who object to your

way of presenting the Gospel and those who object to the

Gospel itself. There may be many who object to your

way of presenting the truth, but that does not necessarily mean that they object to God's making them holy. Make a place for patience. Wait before you pass your verdict.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits." Wrong teaching produces its fruit just as right teaching does if you give it time.

(c) Principle of Performance, w. 17-18.

"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit ; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." If I say I am right with God, the

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world has a perfect right to watch my private life and see if I am ; if I say I am born again, I am put under scrutiny, and rightly so. If the performance of my life is to be steadily holy, the principle of my life must be holy, i.e., if I am going to bring forth good fruit, I must have a good root. It is possible for an aeroplane to imitate a bird, and it is possible for a human being to imitate the fruit of the Spirit. The vital difference is the same in each: there is no principle of life behind. The aeroplane cannot persist, it can only fly spasmodically ; and my imitation of the Spirit requires certain conditions which keep me from the public gaze, then I can get on fairly well. Before I can have the right performance in my life, I must have the principle inside right I must know what it is to be born from above, to be sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost,

then my life will bring forth the fruit. Fruit is clearly expounded in the Epistles, and it is quite different from the gifts of the Spirit, or from the manifest seal of God on His own word, it is the "fruit of the Spirit." Fruit-bearing is always mentioned as the manifestation of an intimate union with Jesus. (John XV.)

(d) Power of Publicity, vv. 19-20.

" Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." Jesus makes publicity the test, He lived His own life most publicly (see John XVIII. 20).

The thing that enraged Our Lord's enemies was the public manner in which He did things, His miracles were the public manifestation of His power. To-day people are annoyed at public testimony. There is no use saying Oh yes, I live a holy life, but I don't say anything about it. Then you certainly don't, for the two go together. If a thing has its root in the heart of God, it will want to

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be public, to get out, it must do things in the external and the open, and Jesus not only encouraged this publicity, He insisted on it. For good or bad, things must be dragged out. " There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed ; and hid, that shall not be known." It is God's law that men cannot hide what they really are. If they are His disciples it will be publicly portrayed. In Matthew X. Jesus warned His disciples what would

happen when they publicly testified, but, He says, don't hide your light under a bushel for fear of wolfish men ; be careful only that you don't go contrary to your duty and have your soul destroyed in hell as well as your body.

" Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Our Lord warns that the man who will not be conspicuous as His disciple will be made to be conspicuous as His enemy. As sure as God is on His throne, the inevitable principle must work, the revealing of what men really are.

One of the dangers of the Higher Christian Life movement is the hole-and-corner aspect you must have secret times alone with God. God drags everything out to the sun.

Paul couples sanctification and fornication, meaning that every type of high spiritual emotion that is not worked out on its legitimate level will react on a wrong level.

To be in contact with external facts is necessary to health in the natural world, and the same thing is true spiritually.

God's spiritual open air is the Bible. The Bible is the universe of revelation facts, if I live there my roots will be healthy and my life right. There is no use saying " I once had an experience " ; the point is where is it now ? Pay attention to the Source, and out of you will flow rivers of living water. It is possible to be so taken up with conscious experience in religious life that we are of no use at all.

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(3) APPEARANCE AND REALITY, vv. 21-29.

Our Lord makes the test of goodness not only goodness in intention, but in the active carrying out of God's will. Beware of confounding the appearance and reality, of judging only by the external evidence. God honours His word no matter who preaches it. The men Jesus refers to in v. 21 were instruments, but an instrument is not a servant. A servant is one who has given up his right to himself to the God whom he proclaims, a witness to Jesus, i.e., a satisfaction to Jesus wherever he goes. The baptism of the Holy Ghost turns men into the incarnation of what they preach, until the appearance and the reality are one and the same. The test of discipleship as Jesus is dealing with it in this chapter is fruit-bearing in godly character, and the disciple is warned not to be blinded by the fact that God honours His word even when it is preached from the wrong motive. (See Phil. 1-15).

The Holy Spirit is the One who brings the appearance and the reality into one in me ; He does in me what Jesus did for me. The mighty redemption of God is made actual in my experience by the living efficacy of the Holy Ghost. The New Testament never asks us to believe the Holy Spirit, it asks us to receive Him. He makes the appearance and the reality one and the same thing. He works in my salvation and I have to work it out, with fear and trembling lest I forget to, and, thank God, He does give us the sporting chance, the glorious risk. If I could not disobey God, my obedience would not be worth any

thing. The sinless perfection heresy is that when I am saved I cannot sin, that is a devil's lie. When I am saved by God's grace, God puts into me the possibility not to sin, and my character from that moment is of value to God

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because I can disobey Him. Before I was saved I had not the power to obey, but when He has planted in me on the ground of Redemption the heredity of the Son of God I have the power to obey, consequently the power to disobey. The walk of a disciple is a gloriously difficult one, but a gloriously certain one. On the ground of the perfect Redemption of Jesus, I find that I can begin now to walk worthily, i.e., with balance. John "looked upon Jesus as He walked. . ." Walk is the symbol of the ordinary character of the man, no show to keep up, no veneer. "I perceive that is a holy man of God which passeth by us continually."

(a) Recognition of Men. v. 21.

"Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Human nature is fond of labels, but a label may be the counterfeit of confession. It is so easy to be branded with labels, much easier in certain stages to wear a ribbon or a badge than to confess. Jesus never used the word "testify," He used a much more searching word "confess." "He that confesseth Me before men." The test of goodness is con

fession by doing the will of God. If you do not confess Me before men, says Jesus, neither will your heavenly Father confess you, and immediately you do confess, you must have a badge, if you don't put one on, others will.

Our Lord is warning that it is possible to wear the label without the goods, possible for a man to wear the badge of being His disciple while he is not. Labels are all right, but if we mistake the label for the goods we get confused.

If the disciple is to discern between the man with the label and the man with the goods, he must have the spirit of

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discernment, viz., the Holy Spirit. We start out with the honest belief that the label and the goods must go together, they ought to, but Jesus warns that sometimes they get severed, and we find cases where God honours His word although those who preach it are not living a right life. In judging the preacher, He says, judge him by his fruit.

(b) Remedy Mongers, v. 22.

" Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name ? and in Thy name have cast out devils ? and in Thy name done many wonderful works ? " If I am used to cast out devils and to do wonderful works, surely I am a servant of God ? Not at all, says Jesus. Does my life bear evidence in every detail ? Our Lord warns here against those who utilise His words and His ways to remedy the evils of men while they are disloyal

to Himself. " Have we not prophesied in Thy name . . .
cast out devils . . . done many wonderful works" not one
word of confession of Jesus, one thing only, they have
preached Him as a remedy. In Luke X. Our Lord told
the disciples not to rejoice because the devils were subject
to them, but to rejoice because they were rightly related
to Himself. We are brought back to the one point all the
time an unsullied relationship to Jesus Christ in every
detail, private and public.

(c) Retributive measures, v. 23.

" And then will I profess unto you, I never knew you :
depart from Me ye that work iniquity." In these solemn
words Jesus says He will have to say to some Bible exposi
tors, some prophetic students, some workers of miracles

" Depart from me, ye that work iniquity." To work
iniquity is to twist out of the straight, these men have
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twisted the ways of God and made them unequal. " I
never knew you " you never had My Spirit, you talked
the truth and God honoured it, but you were never of the
truth. " Depart from Me," the most appallingly isolating
and condemning words that could be said to a human soul.

Only as we rely and recognise on the Holy Spirit do we
discern how this warning of Our Lord s works. We are
perplexed because people preach the right thing and prove
that God blesses the preaching, and yet all the time the
Spirit warns No, no, no. Never trust the best man or

woman you ever met, trust only the Lord Jesus. " Lean not to your own understanding ; " " put not your trust in princes ; " put not your trust in any one but Jesus Christ. This warning holds good all the way along. Every character if taken as a guide leads away from God. We are never told to follow in all the footsteps of the saints, but only in so far as they have obeyed God. " Follow my ways which be in Christ." Keep right with God ; keep in the light. All our panics, moral, intellectual and spiritual come along that line, whenever we take our eyes off Jesus we get startled There is another man gone down, I did think he would have stood right. Look unto Me, says Jesus.

(4) THE TWO BUILDERS, w. 24-27.

The emphasis in w. 24-27 is laid by Our Lord on hearing and doing. He has given us His disposition, and He demands that we live as His disciples ; how are we going to do it ? By hearing My words and doing them, says Jesus. I only hear what I listen for. Have I listened to what Jesus has to say ? Have I paid any attention to finding out what He did say ? Most of us don t know what He said. If

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we have only a smattering of religion, we talk a lot about the devil ; but what hinders me spiritually is not the devil half so much as inattention. I may hear the sayings of Jesus, but my will is left untouched, I never do them. The understanding of the Bible only comes from the

indwelling of the Holy Spirit making the universe of the Bible real to me.

(a) Spiritual Castles, v. 24.

We speak of building "castles in the air," that is where a castle should be, whoever heard of a castle underground!

The problem is how to get the foundation under your castle in the air so that it can stand upon the earth. The way to put foundations under our castles is by paying attention to the words of Jesus. I may listen and read, and not make much of it at the time, but by and by I shall come into circumstances when the Holy Spirit will bring back to me what Jesus said am I going to obey it?

Jesus says the way to put foundations under spiritual castles is by hearing and doing "these sayings of Mine."

Pay attention to His words, and give ti

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