

(Matthew) ch.12:31-13:13

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, not retaining grudges, and being careful with our words, as every careless word will be accounted for in the day of judgment.

Duration: 54:46

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Christian Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the importance of being mindful of our words and actions as Christians. He compares our memory to a videotape that records everything we do, say, think, and our attitudes and motives. The sermon focuses on the parable of the sower, where Jesus explains the different types of soil that represent people's hearts and their receptiveness to the word of God. The preacher emphasizes the need for spiritual understanding and obedience, rather than just intellectual knowledge. He concludes by highlighting the importance of having a good heart, as it is the foundation for producing good fruit in our lives.

Transcript

Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel and chapter 12 and verse 31. We find here Jesus speaking to the Pharisees who had just said that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. And in response to that we considered in our last study how Jesus spoke about Satan not being divided against himself.

And then he said these words concerning the words they had just spoken, accusing him of being in contact with Beelzebul. Therefore I say to you, Matthew 12, 31, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him.

But whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. It's amazing to see Jesus' attitude towards these people who accused him of being influenced by demonic power in the miracle that he did. He was not upset.

He had come to inaugurate a new covenant. Under the old covenant, those who spoke against Moses were judged severely. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, when they rose up in rebellion against Moses, as we read in Numbers chapter 16, the earth opened up and swallowed them alive into hell.

In Numbers chapter 12 we read when Miriam spoke against Moses, she was struck down with leprosy. But when Jesus, who was far greater than Moses, as much greater than Moses as heaven is above the earth, when someone spoke against him and accused him of something far more serious than what Miriam had accused Moses of, it's amazing to see that the Pharisees were not struck down by leprosy, neither did the earth open up to swallow them up, because Jesus had come to inaugurate a new covenant, and his response to that evil accusation was, verse 32, Have you spoken a word against me? You're forgiven. Even before they repented, even before they asked for forgiveness, they were forgiven.

This is the attitude of all who enter into the new covenant, who become disciples of Jesus. If you desire that God should judge someone who speaks against you, you are a follower of Moses. You deserve to be in Numbers chapter 12, not in Matthew chapter 12.

There is a world of difference between these two chapters. There is a world of difference between being a disciple of Moses and a disciple of Jesus. The mark of the disciples of Jesus, one mark anyway, is this, that when people speak evil about them, even if they call them the devil, they say, You're forgiven, even before the person repents or asks for forgiveness.

And it's amazing to see how many Christians retain grudges and bitternesses against others and yet claim to be disciples of Jesus. They are only deceiving themselves. It is impossible to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to retain a grudge or a bitterness against anyone for any reason, whether the person has harmed you physically or spoken evil against you.

Take that seriously, dear friend. If you have not forgiven someone for what that person has said or done against you, you're not a disciple of Jesus Christ. And of course, as we considered earlier, God won't even forgive you because He doesn't forgive those who don't forgive others.

But look at the response of Jesus, how quick He was to say, Have you spoken a word against the Son of Man? You're forgiven. He only said, Be careful that you don't speak against the Holy Spirit. Jesus was here as a man and He did not take His prerogative as God.

He said, You're speaking against the Son of Man. I'm here as a man. You're forgiven.

But be careful that you don't speak against the Holy Spirit, because if you speak against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. What does this mean, to speak against the Holy Spirit? For it is the one sin that Jesus said can never be forgiven. The blood of Jesus can never cleanse this sin.

It's a sin that cannot be forgiven, either in this age or in eternity. And therefore, a person who commits this sin obviously goes to hell forever. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

It is when a person knows for certain that a certain work or a certain action or a certain ministry is of the Holy Spirit, purely of the Holy Spirit, as it was in the case of Jesus. And knowing that, knowing it for certain, like these Pharisees did deep down in their heart, yet to call it the work of the devil is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that we should not question or exercise our discernment in a lot of ministries today that are claiming to be of the Holy Spirit.

We are to assess false prophets. Jesus said that in Matthew chapter seven, Discern whether a prophet is true or false, and apply the tests of Scripture. By their fruits you shall know them.

For example, if a man asks for money in a healing ministry, it is absolutely certain that that is not of the Spirit of Christ, because Jesus never asked for money. And we can say without any doubt that that ministry of asking for money is not led by the Holy Spirit. That is impossible.

A man who projects himself to be, as it were, a lord over other people, whatever gift he may have, his fruits do not indicate a ministry of the Holy Spirit. Even the devil has supernatural gifts. So we have every right to question every ministry, even if it comes in the name of Christ.

For Jesus said, Many will come in my name and say, Lord, Lord. They will cast out demons, they will prophesy, they will heal the sick, and they will stand in the final day before the Lord and say, Lord, in your name I did all this. And the Lord will say to them, I never knew you.

Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. So there are people who do miracles in the name of Jesus who are actually workers of iniquity, in whom the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of a Christlike life is not seen. And therefore we have every right to question such ministries, to exercise our discernment and show that that is contrary to the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the apostles that we read in the New Testament.

And I believe one of the clearest ways we can distinguish is by their attitude towards money. If they ask and beg for money, that is not of the Spirit of Christ, because neither Jesus nor the apostles ever asked anyone for a single pie, either for their own support or for their own ministry. Paul asked the saints in Corinth and Macedonia for money to help the poor saints in Jerusalem, but never for himself or for his own ministry.

And that is one test by which we can find out, and we can expose a ministry as not being of the Holy Spirit, even though the miracles are done in the name of Jesus. So this does not mean that we should not question, but where we know for certain and definitely that a ministry is of the Holy Spirit, and we question it and say it is of the devil, even though we know for certain that it is of the Holy Spirit, we are convinced that there is the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of a Christlike life coming out of that, and yet because it is unpalatable to me or it exposes my own failures, I reject it, saying it is not of the Holy Spirit, and I go beyond that and blaspheme and say it is of the devil, then such a person is in danger of sinning against the Holy Spirit, and that sin will not be forgiven. But one proof of that will be that such a person has no more any desire for repentance, he gets hardened, and so any one of you who have a desire to repent of your sins can be certain that you have not yet committed that sin.

And then Jesus said a word further about this matter of speech. He said, Either make the tree good, verse 33, and its fruit good, or make the tree rotten and its fruit rotten, for the tree is known by its fruits. He says, In other words, speech is the fruit of the tree, the tree is in the heart.

It is an attitude, a nature that you have partaken of, and it is no use just changing the words, no use just hanging good fruit, good words on a bad tree. He said, Change the tree itself, if the tree is rotten, the fruit is going to be rotten, you can cut off the rotten fruit and hang good fruit there to fool people, but you're not really fooling God. The important thing is not just to appear good, the important thing is to be actually good.

And so it's not just a question of putting on good fruit, good words, good speech, not to be deceived by that, but of making the tree itself good. He said, Make the tree good first, not the fruit. Make the tree good, and the fruit will become good.

In other words, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. As we see here further down, in verse 35, The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good. Let's read verse 34.

You brood of vipers, how can you being evil speak what is good? In other words, if the tree is evil, how can good fruit come out from it? The problem is not with the word, the problem is with the tree. For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. In other words, what's in your heart will overflow through your mouth.

If your heart is full of good attitudes towards people, then only good will come forth from your mouth. But if your heart is retaining evil attitudes towards others, sometime when you're off your guard, you'll find those evil words come out to someone who is sympathetic to listen to your gossip. You may be on your guard against that with certain people, but when you're off guard, then what's really in your heart comes out.

So the solution is not just to purify our speech. Some people try to do that, but that's just hypocrisy. Jesus said, Make the tree good.

Let the change come from deep within. There. Go into the dying of Christ.

Deny yourself, take up the cross and partake of God's nature. Then the tree will be good and the fruit will be good as well. Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel, chapter twelve and verse thirty-four.

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees who had just accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. He says to them, You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? Matthew twelve thirty-four. For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

And as we were considering in our last study, speech is the fruit and the nature we have within our heart is the tree. The fruit cannot be good, as Jesus said in verse thirty-three, if the tree is not good. So if our problem is with our speech, that we lose our temper or that evil words come forth, gossip comes forth from our mouth, the solution is not just to control gossiping or to control our anger by self-control.

That is not the message of Christianity, an external self-control that leaves the heart in the same condition. That would be like chopping off all the rotten fruit from a rotten tree and tying up some good fruit on it so that the tree looks good to others. That would be merely to receive the honor of men.

Jesus said in verse thirty-three, Make the tree itself good first. In other words, begin not with your speech, but with your nature. We're called to partake of God's own nature.

Second Peter one-fourth says that God's wonderful promises are so that we might partake of His nature. And that nature is what produces good fruit, for God is good. And our speech comes out of that which fills the heart.

So we must work on our salvation, work out our salvation in our heart and not just in controlling our tongue. For when the heart is good, what is filling the heart will naturally flow forth from the tongue and then the speech will also be good. But if, like these Pharisees, we have a hypocritical nature, such that Jesus would call us a brood of vipers, being evil, then of course it is impossible to speak what is good.

Of course we can be on our guard and speak what is good, but in an unguarded moment the evil will still come out. The good man, verse thirty-five, out of his good treasure brings forth what is good. The evil man, out of his evil treasure, brings forth what is evil.

In other words, if evil comes forth from our tongue in our unguarded moments, it is an indication that in our heart we are evil. And we should not be evil in our heart, we should be good in our heart. The Bible doesn't say nothing good dwells in the heart of the converted person.

It's true that of the unconverted person, Jeremiah seventeen, verse nine, is true, the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. But the promise in Ezekiel thirty-six is that under the new covenant, God would take away that heart and give us a new heart. If a person has not got a new heart, he's not born again.

If a person's heart is still deceitful and desperately wicked, he needs to be born again. He's unconverted. He's still got the old man.

The old man is to be crucified and put off. But when we are born again, we get a new heart, a heart that's good. And it is the flesh which remains evil.

Romans seven, eighteen, Paul says, I know that is in me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing. Not in my heart, notice. Romans seven, eighteen says, in my flesh.

That is, the lusts that dwell in our flesh that tempt us, they are all evil. But none of those lusts need come into our heart. Temptation is when the flesh knocks at the door of the heart and says, let me come in.

And if you exercise your will and allow those dirty, evil attitudes and thoughts to come into your heart, then you sin. Then, of course, your heart becomes dirty, even if you are born again. And your heart can become evil progressively, more and more, so that even if you are born again, you can still be gossiping.

Gradually, it's possible even that you can lose your salvation at that rate. For if you live after the flesh, you will certainly die. That's very clear.

Brethren, we're not under obligation to the flesh. But, brethren, Romans eight, thirteen, if you live after the flesh, if you, brethren, born-again brethren, live after the flesh, you will die spiritually. You'll be lost eternally in hell.

But we need not live after the flesh. In other words, we need not keep opening our heart to the lusts of the flesh. God gives us the power of the Spirit to keep that door shut, so that evil, though evil dwells in our flesh, it never enters our heart, so that our heart is kept pure.

And then we can fall into the category of those spoken in the first part of verse thirty-five. The good man, out of his good treasure in his heart, brings forth what is good. But what treasure fills our heart depends entirely upon us, whether we open the door in the moment of temptation to evil thoughts, attitudes, bitternesses, grudges and a hundred and one evil things with which the devil, through the lusts in our flesh, seeks to enter our heart.

And I say to you, these are very serious words. Verse thirty-six, Jesus said that every careless word, or useless word, or idle word, or non-working word that men speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. I wonder how many Christians believe this.

Many people feel, well, I've accepted Christ, so I'll be perfectly all right in the day of judgment. Not at all. Second Corinthians five, verse ten says, we shall have to render an account in the day of judgment for all the things that we did in our body.

Every word that we spoke, according to Matthew twelve thirty-six, careless word, useless word, evil words, words that were spoken to hurt others, even though we could justify it in a court of law, words that were spoken to injure, words that were spoken to damage the reputation of others, evil words, idle words, judgmental words, critical words, every idle, useless, careless word, we shall have to give an account for in the day of judgment. Useless words, words that don't build up, rotten words, words that don't edify, that don't minister grace to the hearer. Think of the amount of gossip that goes on among Christians, the backbiting and criticism.

Every single word spoken, the Bible says, an account will have to be given in the day of judgment. We can say that our memory is like a videotape, in which everything we do, say, think, attitudes, motives, are all recorded faithfully on that tape, and that tape is running all the time. It started running the moment we were born, and it's running all the time, all the time, even when we are asleep.

That tape is running, the tape of memory, and all God has to do is rewind the tape and play it back in the day of judgment, and it'll be our own memory testifying against us. Our own memory will be the book that God opens to testify against what we have thought, the attitudes we have had, the words we have spoken, and we cannot complain against our own memory. If somebody else were accusing us of something, we could always say, he's not put it correctly, that's not exactly what I said, but our own memory, which is recording our own words and attitudes and thoughts, we can't fool that, and that's a faithful record, and for every word we have spoken, we shall give account in the day of judgment.

He said that particularly to the Pharisees in the context of their criticizing Him, who was the true servant of God, Jesus, and He said, be careful, for every word you speak, you'll have to account for it. You'll have to stand before God and say why you said it, with what motive, was it with a good purpose, was it to build up the church, was it to glorify God that you said it, or was it just because you had a grudge or a bitterness? Be careful, dear friends, about the words that you speak, because a tremendous lot depends upon it. For it says in verse 37, by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.

Now, we've understood justification by faith. Romans chapter five says we're justified by faith, we're justified by the blood of Jesus Christ. James chapter two also says, if you read James two carefully, that we're justified by our works.

Not dead works, we have to repent of dead works, Hebrews six, verse one and two tell us that, but works that are the product of faith. The works that James speaks of in James chapter two, when he says a man is justified by works in James 224, he's speaking about the works that are produced by faith in James 218. I will show you my faith by my words, and it is in connection with that that we have to read here also in verse 37 of Matthew 12, by your words you shall be justified.

So how are we justified? We're justified by faith, we're justified by our works, justified by faith, Romans chapter three and Romans chapter five are very clear, justified by our works, the works of faith, as James chapter two, verse 24 is very clear, and also justified by our words. Matthew 12, 37 is very clear, the words of Jesus himself. In other words, if we have a living faith, it'll change our works and it'll change our words.

If it doesn't change your works and it doesn't change your words, your speech, your faith is a dead faith, and by your words you'll be condemned. In other words, Matthew 12, 37, the words you speak are going to be an indication of what's in your heart, as Jesus said in verse 34, and therefore God will judge your heart by the words you speak, and you can be condemned or you can be justified in the final day. So what shall we do? Control our tongue? No, begin with our heart, judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves there,

and then our speech will be pure.

Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel, chapter 12, and verse 38. Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you. They had just accused him of casting out demons in the power of Beelzebul, and Jesus had spoken some very serious words about being careful concerning our speech in the previous verses, and it's a very sad fact to notice that the Pharisees did not repent, even though Jesus spoke to them, about the seriousness of sinning against the Holy Spirit and how we would have to give an account to God of every word we spoke.

There's no evidence that there was any repentance there on the side of the Pharisees, no evidence that they asked him for forgiveness. They just changed the subject, so very much like many Christians who hear a word that convicts them, and instead of repenting, they just go on to listen to another message. They would like to see a miracle.

We want to see a sign from you, and he answered and said to them, An evil and adulterous generation, a generation that does not repent at what God has spoken to it through his word, craves for a sign. God's word is enough. Why do we need a sign when God has spoken that you have to give an account for every word that you speak? There is no need for a sign.

And Jesus went on to say, No sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. Even today we have scribes and Pharisees who are longing for a sign, today in today's world. But he answers, Jesus answers even today and says, An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign.

Do you crave for a sign when God has given you his clear word? Then you belong to this evil and adulterous generation that Jesus spoke of. We can be redeemed from it. Where we don't need a sign, for God's word is enough.

And even if you crave for it, Jesus says in verse 39, No sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet, a word that we need to bear in mind in this day. No sign, no attesting miracle will be given to this generation. God gives attesting miracles in his sovereign power as he wills and when he wills.

We cannot dictate to God. There are people who would almost dictate to God that he should give attesting miracles whenever they want it. Notice this word, No sign will be given but the sign of Jonah the prophet.

And what was the sign of Jonah the prophet? Just as Jonah, verse 40 of Matthew 12, was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish. He was alive during those three days and three nights in the belly of the fish.

Even so, the son of man would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, not in the grave, for he was dead physically. It was only his body that was in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea. But he himself, the son of man, Jesus himself, where was he? He had left his body when he died on the cross.

After six hours on the cross, he left his body and where did he go? This verse tells us that he spent three nights in the heart of the earth and three days. The heart of the earth is where the paradise section of Hades was located. Before the resurrection of Christ, all those who died, the spirits of those who died, went to the heart of the earth, to a place called Hades, which had two sections.

One section was hell, the other section was known as Abraham's bosom or paradise. In the true story of the rich man and Lazarus that Jesus spoke in Luke sixteen, we see that both went to Hades, one to Abraham's bosom and the other to hell. Jesus also said to the thief on the cross, Today you will be with me in paradise.

So we know that paradise was in the heart of the earth when we compare that verse with Matthew twelve forty. But after the resurrection of Christ, he took captivity captive, as we read in Ephesians four, and ascended up and took all those who were captive in the paradise section of Hades into the presence of God. And today we know that paradise, according to second Corinthians chapter twelve, paradise is in the third heaven.

We see that very clearly when we compare second Corinthians twelve verse two with verse four. But before the resurrection of Christ, paradise was in the heart of the earth, the paradise section of Hades to which Jesus went. But Jesus' soul was not left in Hades, in that paradise section of Hades.

As Peter says in Acts of the Apostles, in chapter two, verse twenty-seven, after three days and three nights he came out of Hades, out of the paradise section of Hades, back into that body which was in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea, and came out in that body. That was the sign, the sign of the resurrection. It is the only sign that God has given this evil and adulterous generation, the sign that Jesus conquered death and rose from the dead.

That is why the Apostles frequently said, We are witnesses of what? Not of His miracles, of His resurrection, they said. That was the word which was on their lips. We are witnesses of His resurrection.

They proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus constantly. We need to proclaim that too, His death and resurrection. That is the sign, the one sign that God has given an adulterous and evil generation.

Then he went on to say in verse forty-one of Matthew twelve, The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. They repented when an ordinary person like Jonah preached, but the Pharisees did not repent, particularly of what Jesus had just spoken to them in verses thirty to thirty-seven about their evil speech.

They did not repent, and Jesus said, The men of Nineveh in the day of judgment will condemn this generation. In other words, all people are going to stand before God in the final day of judgment, and the men of Nineveh will be there who lived hundreds of years before Christ. The Pharisees who lived in Christ's time will also be there.

In other words, everyone will be seeing the judgment given to each person, and the men of Nineveh will say, Yes, these Pharisees deserve to be condemned, because we repented when we heard the preaching of Jonah, and these people did not repent when they heard the preaching of Jesus. So we see that to hear the message of the new covenant and not repent is a far more serious thing than to hear the law and not repent. The queen of the south, verse forty-two, shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it.

The queen of Sheba is going to be resurrected, and she is going to condemn that generation of the Pharisees, too, in the day of judgment, when everybody is raised up, because she came from the ends of the earth, right from the southern part, figuratively from the ends of the earth, the known earth at that time,

to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Jesus is greater than Solomon.

And these people had rejected the preaching of Jesus of how much greater judgment would theirs be compared to those who lived in previous generations. But the interesting thing is that the queen of Sheba traveled such a long distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and here these people could not respond to the word which had come right into their midst. They did not have to travel anywhere, and they rejected it.

And then Jesus gave them another warning. He said, When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, I will return to my house from which I came, and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.

Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there, and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation. The unclean spirit that influences a man to speak evil, to do evil, to have evil attitudes, perhaps you hear the word of God and you judge yourself and refuse to have anything to do with that unclean spirit that prompted you to backbite against your brother, to gossip, to speak evil, to do something wrong, to speak something wrong.

You cast it out in a sense, you reject it, and you remove that from your life, but you keep your heart empty. In other words, you don't allow your heart to be filled with the Holy Spirit. You don't allow good thoughts to come and replace the evil thoughts.

You keep neutral thoughts there. What will happen? After a while, more dirty thoughts, more evil thoughts will come in. This is the secret of victory over dirty thoughts.

You want to get rid of dirty thoughts? Don't just fight those dirty thoughts, but fill your mind with good thoughts. You want to overcome bad attitudes towards your brother? Cast out those bad attitudes and don't keep your heart empty. Replace them with good attitudes towards your brother.

You want to cast out bad words that you've spoken against your brother? Here's the secret. Don't just cast out those bad words, but replace them with good words that you speak about them. Think about good things that you can think of others.

When we think about that which is good, fill our heart with that which is good. That is the surest way to prevent those dirty evil spirits that have influenced us towards evil from coming back and making our condition worse than it was in the beginning. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Let's turn today to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 12, and verse 46. While Jesus was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and His brothers were standing outside seeking to speak to Him. Jesus had now become a popular preacher throughout Israel.

His miracles drew large crowds. We read in John, chapter 7, that His own brothers did not believe in Him, and in a sense, they had nothing to do with Him. But now, when they saw His popularity, they wanted to be known as His brothers.

And it says here that while He was speaking to the huge crowd, it was such a huge crowd that His mother and brothers could not have access to Him. They were standing outside this crowd, and they sent a message up saying, We'd like to speak to you, your mother and your brothers. And someone came up to

Him and said, Behold, your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you.

But He answered publicly in the presence of the multitude, the one who was telling Him, and said, Who is My mother, and who are My brothers? And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, Behold, My mother and My brothers. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother. There we see an amazing word.

It looks as though Jesus was very harsh and rude. The natural man cannot understand the ways of a truly spiritual man. There was a need for Jesus to speak in that sharp way, to make it clear to His mother and to His brothers that that human relationship that He had had with them for thirty years was no longer of any value.

He had come into a new relationship with His disciples who were following Him. And He said, My relationship to My disciples is now closer than My relationship to you who are My natural brothers and sisters and mother. It's amazing that when we come into this new covenant and into this new creation, we come into a relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ, disciples of Jesus, which is the closest relationship on earth.

For we have the opportunity, then, to be a part of the body of Christ, and there is no relationship one to another that is closer than the relationship of the different members in a human body. Even our physical flesh and blood brothers and sisters are not one body with us, but when we are in Christ and disciples of Christ, we become one body with other disciples of Christ. There is a very interesting word in 2 Corinthians 5 in this connection.

Many Christians are familiar with verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 5, which says, If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. All things are passed away, behold, new things have come. But in the same context, many do not know verse 16 or verses 14 and 15 of the same chapter.

And yet remember that verse 17 of 2 Corinthians 5 begins with the word therefore, referring to the previous verse. The previous verse is, Therefore we recognize no man according to the flesh, again referring to the previous verses. Beginning at verse 14, it says, One died for all.

Jesus Christ died for all, but when He died for all, all died with Him. In other words, when a person unites himself with Christ, there is a sense in which the old man that he was dies. That means that old relationship with brothers and sisters, according to the flesh, is dead.

It is finished. He is a new creation. He is born again.

There is a new relationship, and now he is united more closely to those who have come into this discipleship of Christ than in his old relationship. Therefore, because of that, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5.16, We do not recognize any man according to the flesh now. I don't say so-and-so is my brother according to the flesh and I have a special relationship with him.

No, my closest relationship now is with those who are members of the body of Christ. Even with Christ, he says, once we knew Him according to the flesh as a Jew, as a carpenter, but we don't know Him any longer as a Jew. No, He is not a Jew.

We don't see Him as a carpenter. We don't see Him as a Jew. We see Him as the head of the new creation, one who came in our flesh, was tempted like us, but not just a Jew any more.

That old understanding of what a man is according to the flesh goes, or should go, when we come to Christ and become new creation in Him. So this is what Jesus was saying. Who is my brother, sister and mother, the one who does the will of my Father in heaven? Today we can apply that word.

Who is the brother and sister of Jesus? Jesus defined it very clearly. Romans 8.29 says that God has foreordained us, predestined us, that we might be the younger brothers of Jesus, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. When He came to earth, He was the only begotten Son of God.

That's John 3.16. Today He is not the only begotten Son of God. In fact, in the Epistles we don't read of Him as the only begotten. We read of Him as the firstborn.

When He came to earth, He was the only Son. Now, after His resurrection, God has many sons and daughters. And so Jesus has become the firstborn.

The one who was the only Son has become the firstborn. And who then are His younger brothers and sisters? That is very clear in Matthew 12.50, those who do the will of the Father in heaven. Not anyone who says, Lord, Lord.

He didn't stretch out His hand to all the multitude and say, Behold, my mother and my brothers. Jesus did not believe in the universal fatherhood of God or the universal brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. No.

He didn't stretch out His hand. We read in verse 49, He stretched out His hand to His disciples. He said, These are my brother and my mother.

Who then is the brother and sister of Jesus today? Those who have come into this life of discipleship. Those who have come to say, Lord, I don't want to do my will anymore in my life, but I want to do Your will. That's what it means to be a disciple.

Jesus said in Luke chapter 14 and verse 26 that one condition of discipleship was that we had to hate our own father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and our own life. Otherwise we couldn't be His disciples. That is so clear in Luke 14.26. This has a very close connection with what Jesus Himself said, for He was the pioneer, and He would certainly not ask us to do something which He was not willing to do Himself.

He Himself adopted that position spoken of in Luke 14.26. What does it mean to hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters? To cut off that human attachment and relationship that we have to our natural loved ones that can hinder us from being disciples of Jesus. That can hinder us from following the Lord. That is what Jesus wanted us to cut off.

For that human attachment can hinder us from doing what God wants us to do. There have been many cases in the history of Christianity where people have been called to be disciples of Jesus, and they don't do what God calls them to do because of their human love for their father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, who may be expecting them to do something else. Then of course we can't be His disciples.

The other thing Jesus said in Luke 14.26 is that we have to hate our own life. We can say our life means our own will. The strength of our life is found in our will.

I want to do this. That is my life. Or I want to do that.

These are my plans for the future. These are my ambitions for my future. That is my life.

And Jesus said in Luke 14.26, I have got to hate that life. I have got to deny it. That is the meaning of taking up the cross that He spoke of in the next verse.

And when I deny my own will, then alone can I do the will of the Father in heaven. And then, according to Matthew 12.50, those who do the will of the Father in heaven, they are brothers and sisters of Jesus. Just think, dear friend, is there a greater privilege that a human being can have on earth than to be a younger brother or sister of Jesus Christ? That Jesus would consider Himself not only as your Savior and Redeemer and Lord and God, all of which He is, but also an elder brother.

Think to have Jesus as an elder brother. That is the relationship we can come into when we become His disciples. So if we read Matthew 12.49 and 50 closely, we see that this relationship is only for disciples, those who fulfill the condition in Luke 14.26 and 27 and 33, to forsake all, to deny their own will, to put Jesus first above all human relationships.

Then we have the privilege of being His younger brothers and sisters. Let's turn today to Matthew's gospel, chapter 13, and verse 1. On that day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. And great multitudes gathered about Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach.

And He spoke many things to them in parables. In this chapter we read a number of parables about the kingdom of heaven. In fact, there is no chapter in the Gospels which has such a complete list of parables as Matthew 13.

It does not cover every parable that Jesus spoke, but it covers a vast majority of them. They were all related to the kingdom of heaven in some way or the other. The first parable He spoke was concerning the sower going out to sow seed.

And as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and devoured them. Others fell upon the rocky places where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away.

And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out, and others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. That expression, he who has ears, let him hear, in verse 9, indicates that not everyone had a willingness to listen to the implications of this parable.

It was not just a question of physical hearing. Obviously that was not the point here, but spiritually Jesus was saying, If you have ears to listen to the message of this parable, then listen to it. And the disciples came and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them, To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

Now this is an amazing statement, that we cannot know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven unless God grants us that ability. Just like physical sight and physical hearing are a gift of God, there are people born blind, born deaf, and they do not have sight or hearing. It is a gift of God.

Very often we take our sight and hearing for granted, but we must not forget that it is a gift of God. In the same way, spiritual sight and hearing is not something we can produce. It is not something that we can get by study, even by study of the scriptures.

No, it is not possible. It has to be granted. And particularly when it speaks about the mysteries or the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

These are secrets that God whispers to those who are close to Him. There is a verse in Psalm 25, verse 14, which says, The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him. That means not everybody can listen and understand God's secrets.

God whispers them into the ears of those spiritual ears of those who fear Him. That means those who reverence Him, those who hate sin, and those who want to please God. It is not a question of the cleverness of our intellect.

It is much more a question of purity of heart. Why did the disciples understand these parables? Why could Jesus explain it to them, but the Pharisees could not? In an earlier study, we considered in Matthew chapter 11 and verse 25 that Jesus said that these things were hidden from the wise and the intelligent and revealed to babes. We can ask ourselves, What is it that a babe has which clever and intelligent people do not have? We do not have to be educated to be clever.

There are many people who are uneducated who are very clever. In fact, most human beings are clever. Clever in the sense shrewd, knowing what is best for them, knowing how to take care of themselves.

What is it that a babe has which clever people do not have? It is purity of heart. There is no one on earth with a purer heart than a newborn babe. And Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven was like this.

Purity of heart is what determined greatness in the kingdom of heaven. It is closely linked with humility. And it is to such people that the mysteries of God's kingdom are revealed, not to the clever.

And so Jesus says in Matthew 13.11 that these parables were spoken so that truths would be hidden from the clever. It is amazing that Jesus spoke in such a way that some would not understand. God's word has been written in such a way that those who want to obey him will understand the truth, and others will not, even though they study it.

Verse 12 of Matthew 13 says, Whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. What does this mean? The implication in relation to the other verses we just considered is this, that if God gives me a truth and I have something and I make use of it, in other words, I apply it to my life, I obey what he tells me to obey, then it says here that more will be given to me.

That means that God will give me more truth, more revelation on his nature and his word and on the principles of his kingdom. But if I have received truth and I do not apply it to my life, I do not obey, I merely accumulate knowledge, then even the little truth I have will be taken away from me. We can take an illustration from the physical realm.

We can say that God's word is like food, but you know that merely eating food is not enough. We can keep on stuffing our stomach with food, but if it is not digested, it is not going to do any good to the body. The food we eat has to be digested.

The digestive system must break down the rice and the curry into the parts of the body, into blood and bone and flesh, and if that is not being done, if the digestive system in a person is not working, then he has what we call indigestion, and that can be a serious problem. And it doesn't help him, it just gets eliminated out of his body, either he brings it up or it can even kill him. Accumulated food in the stomach, which is not being digested, can finally kill a person.

It's amazing. Ordinary good food can kill a person if a person's digestive system is not working. The same thing is true in the spiritual realm.

But if I keep on hearing God's word, and you could hear God's word through a radio program like this or in a meeting or reading a book or reading the Bible, and the more you receive and you don't apply it to your life, you don't obey what you hear, it's like food lying undigested in your stomach. That which is meant to give you life will kill you. And that's exactly what's happened.

Many people who know so much of the Bible are spiritually dead because of only one reason. They keep on accumulating knowledge and they have no obedience. It's knowledge plus obedience that brings life.

But just like in the Garden of Eden, Adam ran for the tree of knowledge, not for the tree of life. Even today, the descendants of Adam and those who have the spirit of Adam are far more interested in knowledge than in life. Far more interested in Bible knowledge than in obedience, which brings life.

Far more interested in going for meetings and increasing their knowledge of scripture, but not sufficiently interested in obedience. The disciples were those who had obeyed. When Jesus called them to leave their nets, they obeyed.

And that was quite a sacrifice for them. To those who were obedient, God would give more. To him who has, will more be given.

But to the one who does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore, Jesus said in Matthew 13, 13, I speak to them in parables, because while seeing they do not see, while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Why don't they see? Because they don't want to see.

They're only interested in knowledge. They don't hear God. They only hear the preacher.

They don't understand spiritually. They understand intellectually. And there's a world of difference between the two.

To understand spiritually, we have to obey. To understand intellectually, we only need a clever mind. We need a pure heart to understand spiritually.

And Jesus says, but this is just a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, Matthew 13, 14, which is being fulfilled, which says, this is a quotation from Isaiah 6, verse 9, You will keep on hearing, but you will not understand. You'll keep on seeing, but you will not perceive. The heart of this people has become dull.

The problem is with their heart. Notice that. It is the heart, not their mind.

The heart has become dull. And the ears of their heart, they scarcely hear with. They have closed the eyes of their heart, lest they should see with those eyes and hear with those ears, and understand with their heart.

Again, the emphasis is on the heart. And repent, and I should heal them. They hear God's word, and they don't repent, because their hearts have been hardened through accumulated knowledge and disobedience.

But Jesus said, Blessed are your eyes, because you see, because you have responded to the word given you, and your ears, because they hear. This, dear friends, is how we can understand the word of God.

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