

Bottom-Line Christianity

INTRODUCTION:

1. We live in a society that appreciates the “bottom line.”
 - A. This, of course, refers to the final cost of something we want or need.
 - i. This cost may come in the form of dollars, time, or effort.
 - ii. It usually refers to what is the **least** someone will take, or we will pay, to get what we want.
 - B. Though this kind of thinking is mostly good and reasonable when it comes to material things, to think this way concerning one’s service to God is a completely different matter.
 - i. In other words, if one looks at Christianity in hopes of finding the **least God will take**, the **bottom line**, to receive salvation, they have the wrong attitude from the start.
 - ii. Because, when one seeks the bottom line for salvation, you can rest assured that God’s price is going to be far more than that one **can afford**, or is **willing to pay!**
2. So, let’s talk about bottom line Christianity and what that truly means when it comes to serving God.

BODY:

- **I. The “bottom-line” on obedience** (Mk. 12:28-34 – “One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?”²⁹ Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, o Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord;³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”³² The scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him;³³ and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.”).
 - A. The scribe’s, who was possibly a Pharisee, question:
 1. He asked Jesus after being **impressed** by His answer to the Sadducees (12:28). So, it seems he asked not to trap Jesus, but in hopes of also receiving a satisfying answer.
 - 2. He asked to learn **the foremost commandment** (of the Law) one can **obey** to please God.
 3. Why this question? Possibly because the law, the temple, and Israel’s favored position were the three great ‘planks’ of Judaism. The second and third had been challenged by Jesus since coming to Jerusalem. So, this may have tested his orthodoxy on the first/greatest, the **law**.
 - B. Jesus’ answer: God’s bottom-line concerning obedience (12:29-31):
 1. Jesus begins with what is **foremost** (first in importance):
 - a. The first part is “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord,” quoted from Deut. 6:4 (12:29).
 - i. Though it is a *statement*, the Jews considered it to be the most basic of all God’s *commands*—**faith** in the “real, perfect, unconditioned, independent existence” of God—that He is the God who **IS**.
 - ii. Jesus began here because all service to God **must begin here**. For, acceptable service can and will only flow from one’s **belief in this truth**.
 - b. For, second part is to **commit** one’s **total being** to **loving God** (12:30).
 - i. One must **love God** with **all** of one’s **inner being**—heart, soul, and mind.
 - ii. One must **love God** with **all** of one’s **physical being**—strength/ability/might.
 - c. So, the bottom-line for obedience is devotion to God with the **whole** of **one’s faculties** combined with the **totality** of the **power of one’s being**.
 - d. So, we begin to see why when one looks to the Bible for the **least** that can be done to be saved, he/she will **never pay it** because **they cannot afford it!**
 - 2. The **second** command is to “love your neighbor as yourself,” taken from Lev. 19:18 (12:31).
 - a. This follows because if we love God, we must love those made in the image of God.

- b. This command is so vital to our service that it is used as the **foundation** for the responsibility to **do no wrong** to one's brother (Rom. 13:8-10), for **not biting and devouring one another** (Gal. 5:13-15), and for **not showing partiality** (Jas. 2:8-9) and is said in each to "fulfill the Law."
- 3. So, Augustine was right when he described serving God as: '**Love and do as you like**', for **such love** towards **God** and others **will** in itself **keep us from license** [sin/disobedience]. If we **love others**, we will **do nothing to work them hurt** and, if we **love God**, what we **like** and **choose** will be **to do God's will** and pleasure (Ps. 40:8). That is why Paul can say 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Rom. 13:10)."
- C. Conclusion: There is nothing greater that we can do—and nothing less that God expects of our lives—if we would be part of His kingdom (12:32-34).
 1. The whole commitment of self/life to God in Christ is greater than all/whole burnt offerings and sacrifices demanded by Moses.
 2. Note how the scribe's acceptance of Jesus' words brought him near to God's kingdom, though entrance could only be through surrender to Christ.
 3. So, whether we are willing to **seek for total commitment** of our **being** in serving God is going to determine whether we produce proper fruit to remain in God's kingdom (Jn. 15:1-7).
- **II. The "bottom line" on forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-35).**
 - A. The context of this discussion was Jesus' teaching concerning one's responsibilities to an offending brother (Matt. 18:15-17 – "If your brother **sins against you**, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."").
 1. Here Jesus gave the process to follow when a brother commits a private sin against his brother, which is designed to bring the offender to repentance and reconciliation.
 2. Yet, when that cannot be done, whether individually in private, or with two or three as witnesses, the matter must be brought to the local church.
 3. When the local church cannot persuade the man to repent, public withdrawal, or disassociation from the man, must follow.
 4. Such teaching, especially concerning the final dealings with the impenitent, could naturally lead to questions concerning forgiveness and what is required of a disciple.
 - B. Peter's question (18:21):
 - 1. He asked, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"
 - a. This is a reasonable question that seeks a quantitative answer—a number from Jesus.
 - b. Apparently, this question was debated among the Rabbis, with their recommendation being **three times**.
 2. Peter not only asked the question, but provided his own answer for the Lord's critique, which was "As many as **seven times**?"
 - a. Peter had, apparently, been influenced by Jesus, seeing he **more than doubled** the currently accepted number of times to extend grace and forgiveness to an offender!
 - b. Also, I cannot help to believe that Peter chose the number **seven** because of its association with **completeness**. So, surely **7 times** would completely fulfill one's duty!
 - c. Before we dismiss Peter's answer, I think a reality check is in order!
 - i. How many of us have had to forgive one of our brethren seven times for offenses against us? Think about it!
 - ii. Beyond our immediate family, I think very few of us have had to forgive anyone seven times! Of course, there are exceptions. But they are *exceptions*!
 - C. Jesus' answer: The bottom-line concerning forgiveness (18:22).
 - 1. What Jesus said to him was, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but **up to seventy times seven**."").

- a. There is question as to whether the text should read “seventy times seven” or “seventy-seven times,” but to **insist on the number** is to express the attitude that Jesus rejects!
- b. For, 70x7 would be 7 (completeness) x 10 (comp.) x 7 (comp.), while 77 times would be 7 (comp.) x 10 (comp.) plus 7 (comp.).
2. So either way, Jesus’ point is clear. God’s bottom-line for forgiveness is **unlimited grace** for those who offend us.
 - a. Remember how in **John 6** some disciples **stopped walking with Jesus** because they perceived some of his words as a “**difficult statement**” (John 6:60, 66)?
 - b. Well, do not kid yourself. **This** is one of those **difficult statements!**
 - c. And there are many, even today, who **will stop walking with Jesus** because of it!
 - i. They may continue to worship, etc., with all things appearing normal. But, they have stopped walking with Jesus!
 - ii. Why? Because they refuse to follow this command.
 - 1) They do so because wrongs committed against us often cut deeply, causing much emotional pain and suffering.
 - 2) And when **pride**, our “rights,” gets involved, and it usually does, forgiveness becomes quite the scarce commodity!
- D. So, lest anyone dismiss the seriousness of God’s demands, His bottom line on forgiveness, Jesus provided an illustration for clarity.
 - 1. Part 1: The **kingdom of heaven** is likened to a king determined to **settle accounts** with his slaves (18:23-27).
 - a. The first slave brought before him owed 10,000 talents (a **talent** = highest unit of currency, and **10,000** the highest Grk. Numeral).
 - i. So, was no small number. In fact, it was apparently equal to **6 million days wages!**
 - ii. It would be like us saying he owed “a quadrillion dollars.”
 - iii. When it came time to settle with the king, he could not possibly pay, and the penalty of selling him and all that he had was given by the king!
 - iv. Realizing his helpless and hopeless condition, he **humbled** himself, **falling on the ground** and **pleading** for **time to repay**, which he could **never** do.
 - b. **Yet, the king went far beyond the request and forgave the debt!**
- 2. Part 2: After this, however, this slave who had just been forgiven an almost unimaginable amount found his fellow slave who owed him money and **treated him horribly** and **demanding payment** (18:28-34 – see slide).
 - a. So, he humbled himself and asked for time to repay his debt.
 - b. Though this debt was 1/600,000 of what was forgiven him, the first slave **refused** and **put him in debtors prison** until full payment was made!
 - c. When the king heard of this, he summoned and scolded the first slave, now a **wicked** slave, for **failing to show mercy** though **he was shown great mercy**.
 - d. So, he was given over to the torturers until he could pay...which was **never!**
- E. The application:
 1. **We are the first slave**—ones whose **sins** have caused us to owe a debt to God we cannot possibly pay. **For, sin is far worse and costly than we would like to think!**
 2. When a Christian considers the measure of forgiveness he/she has received from God, any limitation on the forgiveness shown to his/her brother is unthinkable.
 3. So, the thought of failing to forgive a fellow slave/Christian whose debt is almost infinitely smaller than what has been forgiven us by God himself, is **ludicrous**.
 - 4. **God will not have it** (18:35). It is just that simple and that demanding!

CONCLUSION:

1. So, whether it be obedience or forgiveness, if one seeks the **least** God will take, the bottom line, in these areas and still provide salvation, that person will never be willing to pay the price.

2. For, the bottom-line concerning obedience for the Christian is our all, our complete dedication, to Him and His will, which includes being willing, as is God, to provide unlimited grace toward our offenders.
 - A. But that should not surprise us, considering what Jesus did for our salvation (1 John 3:16 – “By this we know **love**, because **He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**”).
 - B. But, as is always the case, such commitment will always make your life far better.
3. So, will you come to Jesus in F-R-C-Bp?