

Rom. 14:19
So then let us
follow after
things which
make for
peace, and
things whereby
we may edify
one another.



John 8:32 and
ye shall know
the truth, and
the truth
shall make
you free.

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6
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OUR PRIORITY: SEEKING HIS KINGDOM

by Jim Stauffer

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

The question needing answered by each one who claims to believe in Jesus Christ is whether they are seeking His kingdom as his first priority. That is exactly what He means when He says to seek it first. First means ahead of all the temporal things of earthly life that are mentioned in **verses 24-32**.

Crucial to finding what we seek is eliminating anything that is not the genuine article. Therefore, if we are to seek the kingdom of Christ, we must seek the instruction of Christ, Himself. Setting aside all imitations and tuning out their messages is necessary if I am to hear Him (**Matthew 17:5**). That demands two things. I must first be able to recognize the genuine article. This calls for an understanding of the message of Christ. Remember, He came preaching the gospel of the kingdom (**Matthew 4:23**). He then commanded His disciples to, *...preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.* (**Mark 16:15,16**) Paul, who describes himself as *...one untimely born*..tells us he preached this gospel and that it can be understood by those who read those things he has written (**Ephesians 3:1-5**).

Because God has sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth (**John 16:13**), by revealing His (God's) mind to us (**1 Corinthians 2:10-13**), we can then learn to identify the genuine article. We can know what is truth, the word of God, because it is His word (**John 17:17**). Therefore, when I see men worshiping or serving God in religious actions that do not come from His word, I can know it is not the genuine article and can furthermore know what God thinks of it. *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My*

Father who is in heaven will enter. “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.” (Matthew 7:21–23)

If, indeed there are those who would argue that as long as someone is sincere, his worship and service will please God, read these verses over and over. Further, consider the warning the apostle John gives us, *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1)*

We must objectively seek the genuine article and in doing so must realize Satan and his angels always appear to be doing the good thing as they attempt to deceive us. Paul tells us their method is deception and they can make themselves appear to be actually serving righteousness (**2 Corinthians 11:14,15**).

The obvious path in our search for the genuine article, the kingdom of Christ, is then reading His word. Studying what He says about His kingdom. To view His kingdom which came during the lifetime of his peers (**Mark 9:1**). As we study His church (**Matthew 16:18**), the one He purchased with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**), we can learn what those in His kingdom did to enter it (**Acts 2:38; Colossians 1:13,14**) and how they worshiped (**Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:15; 16:1,2; Ephesians 5:19; 2 Timothy 4:2**). All this we can know and find in His word which will supply our every need in our service in His kingdom *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).*

Beware of Hypocrisy

In **Luke 12:1**, Jesus said to His disciples, *“Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”*

Thayer’s definition of the word used for “*hypocrite*” in the New Testament includes “an actor, stage player” (see *Strong G5273*). A hypocrite in the biblical sense *pretends* to be righteous, but is not. In other words, his service to God is an “acting job.”

The Pharisees of Jesus’ day exemplified this. Jesus rebuked them for doing things that appeared righteous on the outside while failing to be clean within (**Luke 11:39ff**). They didn’t respond with repentance, but with retaliation (**verses 53-54**). This exemplified their hypocrisy.

Hypocrisy can take on several forms. Probably the most common picture of a hypocrite is one who criticizes others’ sins, but overlooks his or her own. Jesus spoke against this in **Matthew 7. Verse 5** of the chapter says, *“You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

The hypocrite pretends to revere God by charging others to obey but doesn’t *really* care about pleasing God, as shown by his or her *own* actions.

Hypocrisy also manifests itself in doing things that appear righteous, but doing so with an unrighteous motive.

Consider those who did all their works *“to be seen by men”* (**Matt. 23:5**). When praying in public, for example, these hypocrites might use *“vain repetitions”* to appear wise, but they didn’t pray from the heart. Such is hypocrisy (**Matt. 6:7**; cf. **Matt. 6:5**; **23:14**). It’s an example of “honoring” the Lord with one’s lips, while the heart is far from Him (**Mark 7:6**).

Another form of hypocrisy is alluded to in **Romans 12:9**. There, the Spirit commands, *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good.”*

Sincere love doesn’t just pretend to love others, but truly cares for their well-being, even when it leads to speaking things from God’s Word that they’d rather not hear. Un-hypocritical love might be viewed as “hateful” in the eyes of a world that believes everyone should just be told to do what makes them happy.

As Jesus walked the earth, though, He never approved (or pretended to approve) of sin. He wasn’t spiteful in His approach, but He didn’t sugar-coat the truth. This showed the sincerity of His love (cf. **Mark 10:21**).

A more general example of hypocrisy is seen when individuals claim to be Christians, but don’t live

Christian lives. “Acting” the part of a Christian only during the assembly of the saints is far from the *lifestyle* of obedience God commands (cf. **Rom. 12:1ff**). Christians are instructed to *lay aside* all such hypocrisies (**1 Pet. 2:1**).

And if we’re ever discouraged by someone who claims to be a Christian but doesn’t follow Christ’s steps, we should remember that this isn’t a problem with God or His Word. Rather, it is *in spite of* what God promotes through His Word.

As discouraging as such hypocrisy can be, it’s no excuse for those who witness it to not obey God. The Lord doesn’t call us to follow the hypocrite, but to follow *Him*.

Michael Hickox

LIVING EPISTLES

Matt Hennecke

As best we can determine, there were about 40 writers of the Bible. Moses and several prophets wrote most of the Old Testament books. 8 or 9 men are credited with writing the New Testament. The most prolific of the New Testament authors was Paul who wrote almost half of the New Testament books. John comes in second, followed by the apostle Peter. They were all, of course, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

What is interesting to me is that all of the writers of the Bible were in a sense writing about one event, or to be more accurate, one person: Jesus Christ. The Old Testament writers wrote prophetically while the New Testament writers wrote posthumously.

So, they all wrote about Jesus; But Jesus did not write a single word Himself. Well, that may not be quite accurate. **John 8** records an event when some scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. They tested Jesus by asking, *“Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?”* Do you remember what happened next? Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. This interesting and compelling event has been the subject of much conjecture. What did Jesus write? Barkley speculates Jesus wrote on the ground the sins of those who stood there testing Him. The entire event isn’t even found in the oldest manuscripts.

So, here’s the question: why didn’t Jesus author a single word of scripture? Why? Because He is the word. But this doesn’t mean that Jesus didn’t write. He did write, and He still writes. No, He does not write with a reed pen on parchment. He uses a different stylus on

a different medium.

In **2 Corinthians 3** Paul says something amazing to the Christians there when he commends their faith and says of them, *“You are a letter written by Christ... not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”* In other words, true believers are living letters written by Jesus Christ for others to read. We are meant to be His penmanship, so others see Him in us.

So, Christ does indeed write, is still writing, and we are His parchment, His penmanship, His people. When we get into the word, or more accurately when the word gets into us, Christ is there, writing himself into every part of our inner being. Our will is being overwritten by His will and thus we become His living letters.

The Lord's supper, in a way, is the act of dipping ourselves into the ink of Christ's blood so that by our lives we can be epistles of Christ to the world. While we have no evidence of Jesus authoring anything with pen and ink, He is the author of our salvation. The Hebrew writer put it this way: *“Though He was a son yet He learned obedience from the things which He suffered, and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5: 8,9).* As we partake of the memorial meal, it's important to remember the Author of our salvation. Let us fill our minds with the memory of His body and fill our hearts with the ink of His blood so that others might see His hand, writing and working in us.

A FORMULA FOR OBEDIENCE

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger” (Zephaniah 2:3 NASB). God's own people were without “shame.” They lacked remorse for their rebellions; their “longings” were not for Jehovah. A lion *longs* for fresh meat and acts to feed himself. Israel *longed* for the gods of idolatry and served Baal. They resisted words of warning given by the Lord's prophets. In mercy, God warned about judgment. In mercy, there was hope for those who would seek the Lord.

The Israelites lived in *“the land”* of Promise. God kept His initial promise to Abraham, and through that Patriarch, subsequent generations of God's chosen people lived in the land that flowed with milk and honey. The Jews enjoyed that land, reaping benefits without much effort on their part (**Deuteronomy 8**). Eventually, displacement happened when Israel turned away in rebellion and failed *“to watch”* themselves as Moses had

instructed (**Deuteronomy 4:23**; Assyrian and Babylonian captivity). Now the Lord extends hope to His people.

Israel was to *“seek the LORD”*. The LORD, Jehovah, was their covenant God. *“Furthermore, I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant” (Exodus 6:5).* Israel forgot her promise to keep their end of the covenant; yet they could start again. Israel needed to practice humility before the Lord and needed to see their need to keep God's will. Responses and lives of pride and arrogance reflect no fear of the Lord. Yet, true hearts rejoice to fear, respect, and obey the LORD. *“The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility” (Proverbs 15:33).* Seeking righteousness is a common theme in the prophets. *“But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).* Taking advantage of the poor, the widows, and the orphans, was common among God's people. True righteousness, doing what God commands, is concerned with the disenfranchised. Lacking humility, Israel thought only of herself.

“Perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger.” A righteous, just God, must and will punish sin. The history of the Old Testament says that. Yet, even amid rebellion, there is the possibility of repentance, restoration, and service again as God's faithful. God continued to seek the return of His people. He promised that He would receive them back when they turned away from self, sin, and idolatry and acknowledge Him as LORD (**Deuteronomy 30**). The Lord's righteous anger can be averted.

“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid” (Romans 6:1). God will forgive; but we must not assume that we will always have time to repent. God will forgive; He made that clear at the Cross. The Cross does not mean that our sin will not be punished. Let us not in our idolatries assume that all is well with our souls. All cannot be well until we *“Seek the Lord.”*

Randy Harshbarger

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**Call me, Jim Stauffer at 913-620-0563,
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**We believe in worshiping and serving the
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Psa. 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10