

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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**Grades 9-12
Year 2
Quarter 3**

THE LIFE OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew 5:1-16

Lesson Aim

To communicate the summary of Christian character given by Jesus in Matthew 5:1-16 and challenge professing Christians among your students to strive for conformity to the given pattern.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:1-2 - "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Lesson Background

We begin this week a new series of studies in the Sermon on the Mount. This longest of Jesus' recorded sermons gives an extended description of what it means to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. Though Jesus' words are intended for Christians, they may be used to pose a challenge to anyone making a profession of faith, and the contrast with the attitudes of the natural man that is clearly set forth in the passage provides the basis for confronting unbelievers with their own need, as well.

The first lesson in the series focuses on the Beatitudes. These consist of eight character qualities that gain for their possessors the favor of God. It is vitally important that you communicate to your students that these character traits are not natural. In fact, the attitudes of the sinner are diametrically opposed to what this passage emphasizes. Thus, these eight characteristics are manifested, not by human effort, but by the grace of God alone. You must make it clear to your class that for God's children, these are qualities to which we ought to conform, but that such conformity is only possible by God's help. Unbelievers must be made to see that the traits described in the Beatitudes are totally inaccessible apart from Christ.

The Beatitudes deal with internal attitudes and external behavior, with the Christian's relationships with both God and man. The verses that follow then serve to emphasize that the contrast between the Christian lifestyle and that of the world is not merely a cause for smug satisfaction, but is to be the means of making an impact on the ungodly.

Lesson Procedure

The Sermon on the Mount was preached at almost the exact mid-point of Jesus' three and one-half year public ministry, shortly after He had formally chosen the twelve men who were to be His disciples. Scholars suggest that it may have been on the Horns of Hattin, a mountaintop plateau in Galilee, where Jesus spoke these words. At any rate, Jesus addressed the sermon to His disciples, but it was heard as well by the crowd that had been following Jesus around.

Today's lesson may be divided into three parts. We will look first at the Christian's character, then at the Christian's reward, and finally at the Christian's impact.

1. The Christian's Character

Begin this section by asking your class about the meaning of the term "blessed." You may find that they have no idea what it means, or at least are not able to express it adequately. The whole concept of "blessing" conveys piety but no content to most teenagers, and thus must be fleshed out. The modern rendition "happy" found in some versions is insipid - someone who is being persecuted may be joyful, but is not often happy. The term is intended to communicate the bestowment of God's favor - God is pleased with those who are characterized by these traits.

The passage before us today is extremely familiar, but, as with many familiar sections of Scripture, its meaning is not well understood by many Christians. Ask your students to take a few minutes to write down in one sentence what is being commended by Jesus in each of the eight Beatitudes. As you go through them in the next part of the lesson, have various students read their ideas before discussing each Beatitude. As you examine each of these eight statements, be sure to contrast the attitude advocated by Jesus with what is commonly practiced in the world at large. The following ideas should be brought out:

A. "The poor in spirit"

Spiritual poverty is the common lot of everyone born into this world, but most, like the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:17), are blissfully unaware of their desperate condition. The Pharisees of Jesus' day saw spiritual need in others, but not in themselves (John 9:34). It is only those who acknowledge their hopeless condition who are in a position to seek a remedy.

B. "Those who mourn"

It is not sorrow in general that is here being praised, but sorrow for sin. In short, Jesus is advocating repentance, that turning away from sin that also involves turning to God (II Corinthians 7:10).

C. "The meek"

God does not honor the assertiveness and self-aggrandizement so prized by the world, but rather the quiet submission to Him and preference for the good of others that was so characteristic of Christ Himself.

D. “Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”

Hunger and thirst are basic drives. The Christian is one who wants more than anything else to be like Christ. His food is to do God’s will (John 4:34), and his cravings will be satisfied (John 4:14). The world, meanwhile, expends its energy for that which is neither lasting nor satisfying.

E. “The merciful”

God’s grace involves favor shown to those who deserve exactly the opposite. The Christian is to treat people, not as they deserve to be treated, but as God would have them treated (Matthew 5:43-48).

F. “The pure in heart”

The idea here is one of sincerity, of unmixed motives. The believer has no hidden agenda, but is what he appears to be. Chameleons, not Christians, change to blend in with their environment.

G. “The peacemakers”

This implies not only lack of belligerence, but an active role in reconciliation, both on the interpersonal and spiritual levels (Romans 12:18; II Corinthians 5:16-21).

H. “Those who are persecuted because of righteousness”

Note that this, too, speaks of Christian character. Only the righteous are persecuted because of righteousness. The Christian is to be one whom the world cannot overlook or ignore.

2. The Christian’s Reward

The manifestations of God’s favor associated with the Beatitudes should not be seen as totally distinct from one another (“peacemakers get this, the meek get that, etc.”), any more than the character qualities themselves may be divided up as if each were possessed by a different group of individuals. In fact, the rewards associated with the first and last of the Beatitudes serve as a sort of “sandwich” that incorporates the whole - the Kingdom of Heaven is its own reward. God’s people receive all that God has to give, whether those things that they consciously seek (verses 4, 6, 8) or those that they would never dream of seeking (verse 5).

3. The Christian’s Impact

We have seen that the Christian is radically different from the world. The result of that radical difference is not to be monastic isolation, but rather the kind of confrontation that brings change to the world. Jesus uses two images to make this point.

A. Salt

Salt makes palatable what is naturally bland and preserves what is prone to decay. God uses His people to restrain the spread of evil in the world. Salt that has been contaminated is unable to perform its function and is worthless.

B. Light

Jesus, of course, is the true Light of the world (John 8:12), but His people are like the moon, which gives light by reflecting the light of the sun. When light meets darkness, the darkness is banished. That light should never be hidden, but rather shining for all to see.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE LIFE OF THE KINGDOM

The book of James shares many ideas in common with the Sermon on the Mount. Read through the book of James and list verses that correspond to the ideas expressed in each of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12).

BEATITUDE	RELATED VERSES IN JAMES	ATTITUDE COMMANDED
“the poor in spirit”		
“those who mourn”		
“the meek”		
“those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”		
“the merciful”		
“the pure in heart”		
“the peacemakers”		
“those who are persecuted because of righteousness”		

JESUS AND THE LAW

Matthew 5:17-20

Lesson Aim

To clarify the relationship of Jesus to the Old Testament law and impress upon students their responsibilities in the light of that law.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:3 - "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

Lesson Background

The remainder of Matthew 5 contains an explanation by Jesus of the true extent and application of the Old Testament law, set forth in contrast to its corruption by the religious leaders of the day, particularly the Pharisees. Today's passage serves as a general introduction to the specific applications Jesus makes throughout the rest of the chapter.

Two cautions must be observed by the teacher in dealing with this section. The first is related to the general nature of the material. Special care must be given to make application to your students' lives, or the lesson will degenerate into empty theory. Be sure to emphasize for the sake of unbelievers in your class that Jesus' fulfillment of the law underscores the failure of sinful men to meet the law's demands.

The second caution derives from the brevity of the text itself. This passage would make excellent material for a sermon, and you as the teacher could easily fall into the temptation of preaching one. Concentrate on getting your students involved in the lesson, or else they will get lost in lecture. Background

material associated with the text is incorporated into the lesson itself, as it should be of some interest to the students.

Lesson Procedure

The lesson falls neatly into four parts, corresponding to the four verses of the passage. We will be looking at the Fulfillment of the Law, the Permanence of the Law, Obedience to the Law, and the Standard of the Law.

1. Fulfillment of the Law (verse 17)

When Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets,” He does so because some people must have been thinking exactly that. What would give anyone that impression? Matthew’s narrative, which is in many instances non-chronological, does not provide much help here, but Luke, who gives a condensed version of the Sermon on the Mount in Luke 6, does allow us to answer this question. Divide the class into four groups, assigning to each group one of the following passages: Luke 5:17-26; Luke 5:29-39; Luke 6:1-5; Luke 6:6-11. Have the group determine what in the incident before them could have given people the idea that Jesus had the intent of abolishing the law. After the groups come back together, have them report on their findings. Then ask them to explain why the Pharisees’ interpretation of Jesus’ actions was unjustified - if Jesus was not opposing the law, what was He doing? Hopefully your students should be able to see that it was the traditions, the Pharisees’ interpretation of and additions to the law, that Jesus was opposing, and not the law itself. This distinction between law and tradition is vital for understanding the remainder of this chapter.

If Jesus did not come to destroy the law, what did He mean when He said that He came to fulfill it? First of all, it should be noted that the phrase “the Law and the Prophets” was a Jewish idiom for the Scriptures. Jesus is not here referring to certain types of Scriptures, but to the Old Testament as a whole. The concept of fulfillment can be seen as conveying at least three distinct ideas.

- Bringing a prediction to pass - Matthew, in particular, stresses the fact that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. What the Scriptures said the Messiah would be, Jesus was. The emphasis here is on finality.
- Bringing a symbol to realization - The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, as the book of Hebrews makes abundantly clear, were symbols pointing to the reality accomplished by Christ. He fulfilled everything toward which the sacrificial rituals pointed. The emphasis here is on completion.
- Bringing a standard to life - The law had been given, but never kept. Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures in that He lived in absolute obedience to God’s Word. The emphasis here is on perfection.

It should be noted at this point that the different aspects of fulfillment indicated above apply to different areas of Scripture. For prophecy, we no longer anticipate further fulfillment of those predictions carried out by Christ in His first advent and look forward confidently to the carrying out of the promises made in connection with the Second Coming. For ceremony, we understand that the symbol is no longer to be practiced now that the reality has arrived. For morality, we see Christ’s perfection as unique, setting before us both a standard for which to strive and an awareness of our inability to reach that standard. Take a few moments to emphasize the importance of an awareness of sin, for both Christian and non-Christian alike.

2. Permanence of the Law (verse 18)

The NIV does a fine job of clarifying what the King James Version renders as a “jot” and a “tittle,” but complete understanding can only come with some insight into the Hebrew language. The “jot” is in reality a *yodh*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which looks something like an apostrophe (the letter on the far right in יהוה, Yahweh, one of the names of God). The “tittle” is a marking that distinguishes similar Hebrew letters, such as the overhang that differentiates a *daleth* (ד) from a *resh* (ר).

Christians are often criticized for insistence on the verbal inspiration of Scripture - the teaching that every word of the Bible is exactly what God intended. Here Jesus goes much further than this, insisting on the permanent validity of the text down to the very letters, and even parts of letters! Jesus thus gives us the ground for total confidence in the Scriptures.

3. Obedience to the Law (verse 19)

Jesus is not here teaching salvation by obedience to the law. Remember, He is speaking to those who already profess to be His followers. Instead, He is countering any libertarian sentiments among His followers by insisting that, for those in His kingdom, God’s law continues to be the standard by which conduct is judged. Paul presents a similar argument in Romans 6:1-2. Your students should see that Christians are judged, not only by their own obedience to the law, but also by the influence for good or evil they exert on others.

4. The Standard of the Law (verse 20)

The Lord now turns from the standard by which members of the kingdom are evaluated to the standard required to enter the kingdom. Imagine the shock of His listeners when Jesus told them that the righteousness demanded was far in excess of that displayed by the religious leaders, the pious Pharisees and scholarly scribes! Throw this one open to your students, asking them what they think Jesus meant. In the ensuing discussion, two concepts should be brought out:

- The obedience of the religious leaders was purely external. God demands heart-righteousness. This will be the major thrust of next week’s lesson.
- The obedience of the religious leaders was partial. God demands perfect righteousness. This concept will be a major emphasis in the lesson two weeks from today.

Conclusion

For now, students should be made to see the impossibility of entering the kingdom on the basis of their own righteousness. Only the unique obedience of Christ will suffice, and that may not be earned, but is a free gift of His grace.

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE LAW, Part I

Matthew 5:21-32

Lesson Aim

To confront believers and unbelievers alike with the extent of their violation of God's law and challenge believers to obedience in the specific areas of anger and lust.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:4 - "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?"

Lesson Background

In last week's lesson, we saw the importance Jesus placed upon the law for those who would be His disciples. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, Jesus seems to be contradicting the law. It is essential to realize, however, that the repeated formula, "You have heard that it was said," does not refer to the law itself, but to what the Pharisees and scribes had taught concerning the law. Thus, Jesus is not enunciating a new law to replace the old, but rather giving the true interpretation of God's law in contrast to the false interpretation given by religious leaders.

This false interpretation had its roots in the desire of the very conservative Pharisees to preserve the law against the liberal Greek-oriented incursions favored by the Sadducees. Such conservatism had two major manifestations. One was a legalism that concentrated on external, observable behavior. The other was a technique known as "fencing the law," by which traditions would be added to the laws of God for the express purpose of keeping people out of situations in which it would be possible to violate God's law (for example, see next week's exposition of verses 33-37). Whether by restricting it to observable behavior or

expanding it with humanly-devised traditions, the Pharisees were distorting the true intent of the law, and it is against that distortion that Jesus speaks.

Lesson Procedure

Begin by going over with your students the information in the Lesson Background so that they understand what Jesus is trying to accomplish in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. Ask them how this ties in with the passage we studied last week.

In today's section, Jesus deals with the Pharisees' misinterpretation (and thus misapplication) of the Sixth and Seventh Commandments of the Decalogue. Our lesson will similarly be divided into two sections.

1. The Sixth Commandment (verses 21-26)

A. Pharisaic Perversion (verse 21)

The Pharisees had restricted the sixth commandment to a narrowly literal application, insisting that it applied only to the act of murder. The phrase, "anyone who murders will be subject to judgment," indicates that they had made a de facto identification of the moral with the legal, typical of those who measure morality purely in terms of observable behavior. (Ask students for examples of behavior that is immoral but not illegal, thus helping them to see the difference.)

B. Broad Application (verse 22)

Jesus insists that the Sixth Commandment, rightly understood, regulates attitudes and speech as well as conduct. The following points should be noted from verse 22:

- Jesus notes that violators of the commandment are subject to spiritual as well as legal penalties.
- The prohibition against anger indicates that the attitudes of heart that eventually lead to murder are violations of God's law even if the ultimate outworking of that anger never occurs.
- The inclusion of the phrase "without cause" in some manuscripts, whether original or not, recognizes the fact that some anger is legitimate. God exercises wrath, and Ephesians 4:26 indicates that anger may be without sin. Have your students discuss what differentiates legitimate anger from sinful anger. They should conclude that the difference is the motive - God's glory is a legitimate motive, while selfish responses to personal affronts are not.
- *Raca* means "empty head," and may legitimately be applied to any insult. Verbal assassination is as much a sin as physical mayhem.
- The Sanhedrin was the ruling religious body in Jerusalem, composed of seventy men, equally divided between Pharisees and Sadducees. They served as a supreme court for religious affairs.

C. Settling Disputes (verses 23-26)

Tracing things back even further, Jesus next notes that the disputes between people that generate anger should be resolved as soon as possible. Whether the disputes are personal (verses 23-24) or legal (verses 25-26), immediate resolution is the goal. Though both of the situations described here refer to the guilty party as initiating reconciliation, comparison with Matthew 18:15 makes it clear that both parties in any dispute bear equal responsibility for seeking a settlement. Ask your students to think of some reasons why people on both sides of disputes are reluctant to initiate reconciliation. Then challenge them to obedience to Christ in this area, noting Jesus' teaching that one cannot properly worship God while involved in a dispute with his brother (Why not?). For the sake of non-Christians in your class, it should be pointed out that any attempts at reconciliation with others will be futile apart from reconciliation with God.

2. The Seventh Commandment (verses 27-32)

The material on the Seventh Commandment treats three subjects related to it - lust, temptation, and divorce.

A. Lust (verses 27-28)

Jesus makes much the same point here that He did in relationship to the Sixth Commandment, namely that the attitude of heart that generates the sinful action is every bit as sinful as the action itself. This, again, was in opposition to the narrow literalism of the Pharisees, who restricted the application of the commandment to the overt act. When President Jimmy Carter remarked to an interviewer from *Playboy* magazine that he had at times lusted in his heart, he was expressing biblical truth, though he was widely ridiculed for the comment.

It is important that the teacher defuse at this point a common fallacy derived from Jesus' teaching. Many have suggested that, if "thinking it is as bad as doing it," those who have lusted, having already sinned, might as well carry that lust to its logical conclusion. Two points should be made in rebuttal. The first is that there is no benefit to be gained by compounding one sin on top of another. The second is that, while all sins bear the equal consequence of separating man from God, all sins do not yield the same results on the level of human interaction.

B. Temptation (verses 29-30)

Ask your students what kind of behavior Jesus is advocating in these verses. It is obviously not self-mutilation. Jesus here indicates that there may be some things in our lives that are in themselves good and useful, but that for one reason or another are continually leading us into sin. Such things, though not sinful in themselves, must be excised for the good of one's spiritual condition. Ask your students for examples of things that might fit into this category. Stress that these are things good in themselves, and that they will differ from person to person. Some examples you may bring out could include television, popular music, sports, certain friends, etc. One must be honest before God in evaluating what influences his life would be better without, even though they may not be sinful in themselves.

C. Divorce (verses 31-32)

We do not have time here for a thorough treatment of the biblical teaching on divorce, but we should note the connection Jesus makes between divorce and violation of the Seventh Commandment. Leaving aside at this point Paul's teaching on the subject in I Corinthians 7, we find that divorce always results from

or causes adultery. According to Jesus, the only legitimate reason for divorce is marital unfaithfulness. Any other divorce causes adultery because any subsequent marriage would be an adulterous union. Since women in the first century could not support themselves independently (with the exception of prostitution), a divorced wife had to remarry to survive, and thus a man who divorced his wife illegitimately was forcing her into adultery. Jesus here is arguing against the loose interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1 by the Pharisees, and what He says is doubly appropriate in the sexually permissive culture in which we live.

**FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE TRUE MEANING OF
THE LAW, Part I**

1. Take the interpretive procedure Jesus used in today's passage and apply it to the Eighth and Ninth Commandments. What, would you conclude, would be equally as sinful as stealing and lying?
2. Spend time this week thinking about some things in your life that frequently lead you into sin. Would you be willing to remove these things from your life for your own spiritual good?
3. Go to someone you have offended and seek reconciliation. Why is it important that this be done as soon as possible?
4. We live in a sexually permissive society. List some of the influences around you that tend to generate lustful thoughts and plan a strategy for combating those influences in the coming week. Remember, evil influences must be replaced, not just removed (cf. Matthew 12:43-45).

THE TRUE MEANING OF THE LAW, Part II

Matthew 5:33-48

Lesson Aim

To challenge the students with the humanly impossible demands of God's law, and thus make clear to them their need of Christ.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:5 - "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Lesson Background

Today we complete the section of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus deals with the Old Testament law and its proper interpretation. As we saw last week, a proper understanding of the misinterpretations current among the religious leaders of Jesus' day is essential in order to comprehend the meaning of Jesus' admonitions. Since this background material must be conveyed to the students, it is incorporated in the body of the lesson.

In no part of the Sermon on the Mount is the impossibility of living up to God's standard more obvious than in the passage before us. It is important for you as a teacher to make this clear to the students. If this impression is to be conveyed, it is essential that no requirement spoken by Jesus be minimized. It is all too easy for verses like verses 39, 42, and 48 to lose their convicting power by dying the death of a thousand qualifications. The non-Christian student must be confronted with the impossibility of meeting God's requirements, while the Christian should be made to see God's great grace in saving him, as well as his need for daily dependence on Christ.

Lesson Procedure

In today's passage, Jesus deals with three subjects - telling the truth, taking revenge, and loving your enemies. The lesson will be divided into three parts corresponding to these three topics.

1. Telling the Truth (verses 33-37)

Though the passage directly addresses the matter of taking oaths, telling the truth is the real issue.

A. Old Testament teaching on the taking of oaths

The Old Testament without variation places great emphasis on the importance of keeping an oath once it has been taken (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5; Psalm 15:4 are two examples; also see the tragic vow of Jephthah in Judges 11:30-40).

B. Pharisaic perversion of the Old Testament teaching

The Pharisees, with their narrow literalism, had restricted the Old Testament teaching to oaths taken in the name of God. In fact, they had developed a whole hierarchy of oaths, so that while oaths taken in God's name were absolutely binding, oaths sworn by lesser things ("by heaven," "by Jerusalem," "by my head," etc.) were less binding. As a result, when an oath was sworn, it served to weaken rather than strengthen the affirmation it accompanied.

C. Jesus' response to the Pharisees' misinterpretation

Jesus indicates that one should not swear at all, and gives two reasons. The first is that all oaths are equally binding - one avoids nothing by swearing by something less than the name of God. The second is that a Christian should have a reputation for truthfulness that renders swearing superfluous - he should mean what he says, whether it be yes or no.

D. Applications

Raise the following issues for your students to discuss:

- Does this mean that oaths today, such as those taken in a courtroom, are wrong for Christians? The answer here must be no, though some disagree. Jesus is banning the taking of oaths in a cultural context in which the taking of oaths was a way of avoiding the truth. If the prohibition were absolute, God Himself would be guilty of sin (cf. Hebrews 7:20-22).
- Jesus indicates here that replacing the name of God with other words in no way lessens the guilt of the speaker. Are there ways in which we make substitutions for the name of God today? The application to be considered here is the use of circumlocutions, or "minced oaths," such as gosh, golly, gee, darn, heck, etc., which are corrupted forms of the names of God or Jesus, or replacements for "damn" or "hell." Students should be warned that the guilt is not lessened simply because the form of a word is changed.

2. Taking Revenge (verses 38-42)

A. The Old Testament teaching in question

The phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” sometimes referred to as the *lex talionis*, occurs many times in the Old Testament. To the modern mind it often implies brutal barbarism, but in its essence it says no more than that the punishment should fit the crime.

B. Pharisaic perversion of the Old Testament teaching

The Pharisees had taken the fundamental principle of Old Testament civil justice and applied it to the area of interpersonal relationships. Instead of letting the magistrates deal with offenders, the Pharisees were advocating vigilantism - taking the law into one’s own hands.

C. Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ misinterpretation

Jesus indicates that, quite contrary to what the Pharisees taught, a Christian is to answer evil with good and hatred with love. He then gives four specific examples:

- Physical violence - The Christian is not to respond in kind to violence. The power of such an approach is seen in the many conversions resulting from the persecutions in the early centuries of Christian history.
- Lawsuits - Someone who feels wronged by a Christian should be met with a love that repays beyond what is demanded.
- Oppression - The Roman army of occupation had certain privileges that the local Jewish population found odious in the extreme. A soldier had the right at any time to conscript a civilian to carry his heavy military pack for a distance of a mile. Rather than meeting such an unpleasant demand with resentment, Jesus indicates that His followers are to show love by doing twice as much as is demanded.
- Taking advantage - We all know people who are careless and irresponsible in dealing with other people’s things as well as their own. Yet Jesus says that His followers should give and lend freely, showing a loose attachment to material possessions.

D. Applications

This is a good time for some open discussion. All of us tend to be more than willing to take the edge off these applications made by Jesus. Are Christians to be doormats? Is self-defense ruled out? Are we to be patsies for every bully and moocher we meet? The emphasis should be placed on responses of selfless love rather than defensiveness.

3. Loving Your Enemies (verses 43-47)

A. Pharisaic perversion of Old Testament teaching

The Pharisees concluded, very logically, that if the Old Testament commanded one to love one's neighbor, then those who were not neighbors were not to be loved.

B. Jesus' response to the Pharisees' misinterpretation

The religious leaders apparently shared this particular misconception rather widely, and Jesus' response is similar to that found in Luke 10:29-37. He indicates that even our enemies are our neighbors and thus are to be loved. God is set forth as an example of such love, providing the basic needs of those who are in open rebellion against Him. The unnatural nature of this love is indicated by the fact that it is contrasted with the love shown by "even the tax collectors."

C. Application

The main application to be made here is that the kind of love Jesus requires is active, not reactive. It is totally independent of the responses of those toward whom it is directed.

Conclusion

Christ demands nothing short of divine perfection (verse 48). It should be clear to your students that nothing could be more impossible. Be sure to impress upon them that only Christ's righteousness can satisfy such a requirement.

GIVING

Matthew 6:1-4

Lesson Aim

To teach students to define and recognize hypocrisy and learn to give to God with proper motives.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:6 - “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.”

Lesson Background

Jesus spent considerable time in chapter 5 emphasizing that obedience to God was a matter of the heart rather than simply consisting of outward conformity. In chapter 6, we find the same principle applied to three areas of worship - giving, prayer, and fasting. This week we will look at giving, with prayer and fasting being considered next week.

In the same way that one who is not a Christian can in no sense keep the law, it must also be affirmed that one who is not a Christian cannot worship. This is as true of giving as it is for any other act of worship. This lesson will give your students the opportunity to think about the true nature of giving and the attitude that should accompany it.

The lesson also includes a discussion of hypocrisy. Teens are quick to point out hypocrisy in others, but are often slow to recognize it in themselves (the same is true of adults, of course). The subtlety and pervasiveness of hypocrisy should be brought clearly before your students.

The third part of the lesson deals with some practical implications of Jesus' teaching. The value of this section will come more from the discussion itself than from the conclusions that are reached. Not all of these issues necessarily have clear-cut answers. The important thing is that your students be encouraged to think biblically and make their decisions based on Scripture rather than common practice or emotion.

Lesson Procedure

Jesus indicated clearly in the first part of the Sermon on the Mount that obedience was to be from the heart. In chapter 6, He shows that worship similarly must be righteous in motive as well as in practice. Today we will be looking at Matthew 6:1-4, which deals with giving.

1. The True Nature of Giving

Tom knocks on the door of his neighbor after a large snowstorm and asks if he may shovel his driveway for \$20. The neighbor agrees, the job is completed, and Tom is paid. In the next block, Bill knows that his neighbor has recently come home from the hospital. After finishing his own driveway, he continues on and shovels the snow from his neighbor's drive as well. What is the difference between the jobs done by the two boys?

Hopefully, your students will quickly point out that Tom did his work in exchange for money, while Bill worked without anticipating anything in return. While Tom was conscientious, he could not be said to have given anything, while Bill's effort was truly a gift.

Next look at today's passage. The "hypocrites" are described as giving in a very public and ostentatious way. According to the definition established above, why may it be said that such people are not really giving at all? Your students should be able to discern that psychological rewards are just as much "payment" as the \$20 Tom got for shoveling his neighbor's drive. One whose giving is motivated by the desire for esteem in the community or admiration from his peers is not really giving at all. He is simply using material things to purchase intangible goods. He has received his reward in full.

What is to be done, then, with Jesus' statement that one who gives privately will be rewarded by God? Is not this just as much of a trade-off as the first example? It is if one thinks of God's reward in some crass form, e.g., one who gives will receive financial rewards in this life, or more crowns or a bigger mansion in heaven. But if we remember that all we receive from God is of grace and cannot possibly be merited, then the offer of reward is in no sense a payment or exchange, but the assurance that God will not overlook the service done by His people out of love for Him.

2. The Sin of Hypocrisy

If you ask your students to define what a hypocrite is, you will probably get the rather shallow "someone who says one thing and does something else." Instead, begin by asking each student to write down a brief description of an act of hypocrisy, making it as specific as possible. Then collect the descriptions and read them aloud (or have each student read his or her own), and have students discuss the common elements found in all the examples.

The following should be brought out. The term "hypocrite" is taken from the Greek theater and refers to one who wears a mask. Greek plays were presented in huge amphitheaters with fantastic acoustics and terrible visibility (imagine watching a football game from the Goodyear blimp!). Consequently, the

actors carried huge masks in front of them so that even the spectators in the last row could tell one character from another. These mask-wearers were “hypocrites.”

The commonplace definition given in the first paragraph is inadequate because speaking and doing are both overt and observable. The Greek actors spoke and moved without contradiction. Their hypocrisy, which is characteristic of all good actors, lay in their ability to convince their audience that they were something other than what they really were. The contradiction was not between speech and action, but between the inner self and the person presented to the outside world. A hypocrite, then, is one who pretends to be something he is not. Be sure to emphasize to your students the extent to which all of us do this. Point out that it is impossible for an unbeliever to give without hypocrisy, and explain why.

3. Specific Applications

Depending on the time available to you, discuss and evaluate some or all of the following on the basis of today’s passage:

- A businessman donates money to add a new wing to a hospital. The wing is then named after him.
- A politician’s campaign manager leaks to the media the amount of a contribution made by the politician to a local charity in a district where he needs votes.
- A family carefully keeps records of their tithes and offerings in order to take the permitted income tax deduction.
- A Christian non-profit organization publishes in its quarterly newsletter a list of those who have made large contributions to the organization.
- A Christian broadcaster offers to send a book to anyone who contributes a certain amount of money to his ministry.
- A church solicits written pledges for a building fund drive.

In discussing these situations, be sure to emphasize biblical evaluation, while not necessarily always arriving at hard-and-fast conclusions.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

GIVING

1. How does the emphasis of Matthew 6 relate to that of Matthew 5?
2. How does the “generosity” of the manager in Luke 16:1-9 differ from that advocated by Jesus in Matthew 6:1-4?
3. Find and describe at least three examples in Scripture of people whose giving followed the guidelines set forth by Jesus.
4. What do you need to change in your giving to bring it into line with Jesus’ teaching on the subject?

PRAYER AND FASTING

Matthew 6:5-18

Lesson Aim

To distinguish between prayer that is honoring to God and that which is not and to encourage the students to examine their own prayer lives on the basis of Jesus' teaching.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:7 - "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

Lesson Background

In this week's passage, Jesus deals with prayer and fasting. The former is an exercise with which we are very familiar, often to the point of taking it for granted, while the latter is something totally foreign to many Christians.

Jesus' teaching again is placed in opposition to the abuses of His day, but these abuses readily find modern counterparts. Like the people in Jesus' day, we all need to consider the importance of worshiping God from the heart. In the section on prayer, be sure to distinguish between the believer's communication with his heavenly Father and the unbeliever's attempts to gain merit through ritual. After all, you may have some students who fit into the latter category. As far as fasting is concerned, be sure to emphasize its positive values while avoiding imposing legalistic requirements not demanded in Scripture.

Lesson Procedure

The passage this week can be divided into three sections dealing with the practice of prayer (verses 5-8), the pattern for prayer (verses 9-15), and the preparation for prayer (verses 16-18). Open this week's lesson by asking the students what they think prayer is. The obvious response ought to be that it is communication with God. Point out that for many religious groups, prayer is not understood as communication, but as a meritorious ritual. Such an approach to prayer may be found anywhere from the prayer wheel of the Buddhist to the ritual prostration of the Muslim as he faces Mecca five times daily to the rosary beads of the Roman Catholic. If we really believe that prayer is communication with God, however, we must not permit it to degenerate into mere ritual. It is thus essential that prayer have its source in the heart.

1. The Practice of Prayer (verses 5-8)

Jesus here warns against the potential abuses inherent in public prayer and repetitious prayer.

A. Public Prayer (verses 5-6)

Ask your students if Jesus is in these verses forbidding public prayer. They should quickly answer that He is not, but force them to substantiate their response. The best way to support this conclusion is through examples of public prayer in Scripture, which are numerous, and include instances of public prayer by Jesus Himself.

If Jesus is not condemning public prayer, what, then, is He saying? The main thrust of these verses is that prayer is to be directed to God and not to other people. [NOTE: How often when we pray do we use language calculated to impress others or communicate a message to the students in the class?]

Another issue that must be considered is the purpose of public prayer. If prayer is talking to God, what is the rationale for praying aloud at all? The purpose of public prayer is to vocalize to God the praise and requests of the group in which one is praying. Thus it is essential that those in a group where prayer is being offered should think along with the one doing the praying, thereby participating mentally in his prayer.

B. Repetitious Prayer (verses 7-8)

In dealing with repetitious prayer, it is far too easy to aim criticism at practices that are far different from our own. Certainly this passage condemns rosaries and prayer wheels. But what of our own abuses in this area? Discuss the following:

- Is all repetition in prayer wrong? Of course not - Jesus commends persistence in prayer. It is specifically empty or meaningless repetition that is condemned.
- Is it wrong to recite the Lord's Prayer or other memorized prayers? Again, the issue is meaning and sincerity. Though recited prayers often tend to produce empty repetition, it is not necessary for them to do so.
- Is a frequent prayer more likely to be answered than prayer offered once? No, persistence is encouraged for our benefit, not because God gives in under increased pressure.

- Point out the danger of meaningless babble in our prayers when we use cliches and punctuate sentences with the name of God, uttered thoughtlessly.
- If God knows what we need before we ask Him, why do we pray at all? Prayer, of course, is more than asking, as the following model indicates. In addition, the one who prays benefits from the act of prayer by verbalizing his dependence on God and his concerns for those for whom he is praying.

2. The Pattern for Prayer (verses 9-15)

What is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer was given by Jesus to His disciples as a model. Luke's version of this prayer sets it in a context where the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. All too often, our prayers consist of little more than asking, and that of a rather perfunctory sort. Yet we note that the prayer given as a model by Jesus incorporates praise and confession as well. In analyzing the prayer phrase by phrase, indicate both the type and meaning of each petition.

A. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"

This is praise, exalting the name of God as holy while at the same time addressing Him as "Father."

B. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

A request, yet totally God-centered in content. God's kingdom comes as His will is carried out on earth as it is in heaven.

C. "Give us today our daily bread"

A request for needs, not wants, which acknowledges dependence on God for life itself and seeks security in God's daily provision rather than a superabundance of material goods stored up for the future.

D. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"

Confession of sin and a plea for pardon that disavows hypocrisy, not harboring grudges against others while seeking forgiveness from God (cf. verses 14-15).

E. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"

Having asked forgiveness for past sins, the prayer now turns to the prevention of future sins, recognizing that this, too, is a result of the grace of God.

F. "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Some later manuscripts end the prayer with these words of praise. [NOTE: Be sure that your prayers in Sunday School today reflect the pattern given here by Jesus.]

3. The Preparation for Prayer (verses 16-18)

Fasting is not frequently practiced today and is nowhere commanded in Scripture, but many examples couple it with periods of intense prayer. It is seen as a way of expressing repentance or sorrow, or as a means of concentrating on spiritual matters for the purpose of expressing a fervent plea or receiving divine guidance or help. The wording used in these verses (“when” rather than “if”) expresses the assumption that Christians will at times fast despite the fact that it is not required.

As with the earlier portions of the chapter, the emphasis is placed on God-directed worship rather than hypocritical attention-getting. One who goes out of his way to appear holy surely is not.

Conclusion

If a significant proportion of the students in your class are Christians, it might be appropriate to close your lesson with a round of prayer, keeping Christ’s instructions in mind. If many of your students are in your judgment unconverted, do not foster hypocrisy, but be sure to indicate that the only appropriate prayer for an unregenerate man is one seeking mercy.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

PRAYER AND FASTING

The acronym ACTS is a useful aid in remembering the components of prayer. Analyze the following biblical prayers by indicating the parts of each that reflect the four essential components of prayer [NOTE that “adoration” is praise and “supplication” is asking]:

	ADORATION	CONFESSION	THANKSGIVING	SUPPLICATION
Genesis 18:22-33				
Psalm 51				
Daniel 9:4-19				
Luke 1:46-55				
John 17				

KINGDOM PRIORITIES

Matthew 6:19-24

Lesson Aim

To impress upon students the incompatibility of the values of this world with those of the Kingdom of God.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:8 - “For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Lesson Background

In chapter 5, Jesus contrasted the external conformity of the religious leaders with the true obedience from the heart required by the law. In the first part of chapter 6, the same contrast is applied to worship. In the remainder of the sixth chapter, Jesus emphasizes the absolute dichotomy between the attitude that pleases God and that which does not.

The Pharisees were not just confused or misguided. Their approach to God was not “on the right track.” The problem was not that they had the right idea, but just didn’t go far enough. Quite the opposite was true - the external focus of the Pharisees was totally incompatible with the Kingdom of God. In the passage before us today, Jesus makes it clear not only that it is impossible to make one’s home simultaneously in the Kingdom of God and in this world, but also that there is no neutral middle ground between the two that a man may inhabit.

This issue presented in this passage is a particularly difficult one for teenagers, though of course not restricted to that age group. Peer and media pressures are enormous in forcing conformity. You must

impress upon your students today that it is impossible to live in both worlds. Being a citizen of the Kingdom requires the rejection of this world's values and priorities.

Several explanatory notes need to be made at this point. The first regards the treasure mentioned in verses 19-21. The simplistic explanation generally used here can be misleading. If the earthly treasure is understood as referring to material goods, it could lead to the conclusion that having a savings account or doing financial planning of any kind is wrong. Similarly, if the treasure in heaven is thought to be works done for the cause of Christ, one could easily conclude that such works were meritorious. Instead, these "treasures" must be seen as priorities - what is really important to a person. Material possessions are not wrong, but giving them a place of priority certainly is. In addition, those heavenly treasures that are to be the priority of the Christian are not the fruits of our own labors, but rather the gracious gifts of God (cf. II Corinthians 4:7; Colossians 2:3).

The second note of explanation deals with the reference to money in verse 24, which the NIV capitalizes. The KJV uses Mammon, which is a transliteration rather than a translation. Mammon was a Syrian god who was thought to bring prosperity. The term gradually came into common use as a synonym for money, in much the same way that the name of the main character in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has become synonymous with a grouchy, miserly person.

Lesson Procedure

Bring a board from a Monopoly game with you to class today. Start the class by putting the board on the table in front of your students. Discuss the goals and strategy of the game, emphasizing the accumulation of money and property and the necessary corollary, the impoverishment of the other players. To what extent does the game accurately reflect the philosophy of life espoused by the world around us? To what extent may a Christian participate in this world's game of Monopoly? Why are the values implied by the game innately anti-Christian? What Christian values are ignored by such a worldly philosophy?

At this point turn to today's passage. Indicate to your students how this section relates to the portions of the Sermon on the Mount we've already covered (see Lesson Background). Note then that Jesus makes His point about priorities by using three illustrations - a treasure, an eye, and a slave.

1. The Treasure (verses 19-21)

If possible, read the description of Smaug and his horde from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (Ballantine Books, 1973, pages 206-208), and compare it with Jesus' story about the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13-21. What is wrong with the values of these two very different characters? Contrast these with the attitude of Moses described in Hebrews 11:24-26. On the basis of these examples, discuss what Jesus means by laying up treasure in heaven rather than on earth. Be very careful that students are not left with the conclusion that meritorious works produce eternal rewards.

Earthly and heavenly priorities may also be contrasted in terms of the ease with which they may be lost. Using a blackboard, list in two columns what types of things the world considers valuable and ways in which those things may be lost, such as:

<u>Treasure</u>	<u>Threat</u>
Food	Decay, insects, mice
Clothing	Wear, moths, style changes
Money	Spending, poor investments, thieves, taxes, inflation
Cars	Rust, wear, thieves
Reputation	Slander, foolish actions
Fame	Time, success of others

Be sure to point out that all of these things are lost at death. Even though intangible things may remain after a person's death, they do him absolutely no good. Note also that when Jesus says that a man's heart is where his treasure is, He is indicating that a person cannot claim to be obeying or worshiping God (cf. earlier lessons) if his priorities involve material things.

2. The Eye (verses 22-23)

The image here is a little difficult, but an illustration should help clarify it. The point is that the eye is the only way in which the body can detect light, and thus the eye must be functioning properly if the body is to be sensitive to light. Thus someone whose priorities are those of the world is like a blind man, unable to respond to light. Similarly, someone who tries to maintain spiritual and worldly priorities simultaneously is like a cross-eyed person, who receives light in conflicting forms and is unable to function.

3. The Slave (verse 24)

Two points should be made here:

- Slavery is a singularly appropriate image here. Material possessions do not bring freedom, but slavery. The more you have, the more you must do to maintain it - repairs, protection, payments, etc. A large house takes more time and work to maintain. A newer car requires more insurance and more security against theft. It is not surprising that the professing believer represented by the thorny soil in the Parable of the Sower has the Word of God gradually pushed out of his life by the seductiveness of material things. The only way to avoid being possessed by your possessions is to realize that they are God's, not yours.
- Slavery is a full-time job. Divided allegiance is impossible. It should also be noted that everyone fits into one of these two categories. No one is a free man - everyone is either in the service of Satan or the service of God, which alone is true freedom. One of the best examples in Scripture of one who sought to serve two masters simultaneously is Judas Iscariot. Under pressure, however, he betrayed one master in order to serve the other. Be sure to point out that, like Judas, one who tries to straddle the fence always falls off eventually, and invariably falls off onto the world's side.

Conclusion

Close by challenging your students to examine their own priorities and consider carefully where they stand in relationship to the Kingdom of God.

GOD’S PROVIDENCE

Matthew 6:25-34

Lesson Aim

To demonstrate that a biblical ordering of priorities by a Christian is backed up by God’s promise of provision, while those who make worldly things the goal of their lives never find what they seek.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:9 - “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?”

Lesson Background

In last week’s lesson, we talked about priorities. Jesus continues with that same theme as we finish the sixth chapter today. This week’s verses make clear what happens when Christians get their priorities confused - they worry. We tend to think that worry is largely the province of the adult world, with its weighty responsibilities. But teenage suicide statistics indicate that young people suffer terribly from anxiety associated with the need for security and acceptance.

Jesus does not simply single out worry as the result of misplaced priorities, however. He also gives several reasons why the Christian should not worry, all of which are bound up in His providential care for His children.

This is a lesson where differences between speech and life must be challenged. One may say he is putting God first, but if he is wracked with anxiety, that obviously is not the case. Furthermore, it is vital for the teacher to point out the extent to which these promises of providential care do and do not apply to unbelievers, lest any presume upon the goodness of God.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by having each of the students make a list of five things high school students worry about. Then compare lists and try to get the students to reach a consensus about which items on the list are the most frequent causes of worry among teenagers. Next, spend some time talking about why these particular items are sources of worry. Ultimately, the class should be able to reach the conclusion that the root of worry is a lack of or desire for security. In the passage before us today, Jesus deals with the problem of worry, talking first about reasons for worry (verses 25 - 30), then about the remedy for worry (verses 31 - 34).

1. **Reasons for Worry (verses 25-30)**

Jesus here points out the reasons why people worry by asking a series of rhetorical questions, which require no answers because the answers are obvious.

A. People worry because they think that life consists of only that which can be seen (verse 25)

Those who view life purely in terms of “food and clothing” will seek security in the accumulation and guaranteed supply of those things. Yet worry is inevitable in those circumstances, since material things are by nature perishable and impermanent (cf. verse 19).

B. People worry because they forget that God’s children are special to Him (verse 26)

When Christians think that their security is totally dependent upon their own labor, they worry. But in so doing, they forget that God cares for a vast universe and all the creatures in it, yet has a special concern for His people. It should be noted that non-Christians are cared for just like the birds, but can claim no more from God.

C. People worry because they try to influence things that are beyond their control (verse 27)

The most destructive aspect of worry is that it tends to focus either on present circumstances that cannot be changed or on anticipated future circumstances that usually never happen anyway. Expending energy in worry is about as productive as expending energy in trying to make yourself grow.

D. People worry because they don’t trust God (verses 28-30)

Jesus accuses worriers of lacking faith. A Christian who worries is a “practical atheist” because he is living as if God did not exist. There is a gap between profession and practice that must be closed if the profession is to be upheld. To a Christian who worries consistently, God is no more than a word.

At this point, spend a few minutes relating these reasons to the items on the list compiled at the beginning of class. Which of these reasons is the greatest problem for your students?

2. Remedy for Worry (verses 31-34)

In order to deal with the problem of worry, two things must be noted:

A. Worry is related to misplaced priorities (verses 31-32)

As indicated last week, a Christian cannot make the things of this world his priorities in life. The first step that must be taken in dealing with worry is recognizing that it indicates misplaced priorities. A Christian who worries about material things is no different from those who are outside of Christ in terms of his pattern of thinking.

B. Security may be obtained only as a by-product, never as a goal (verses 33-34)

Jesus here concludes with the ironic truth that those who seek security never find it. While the pagans strive mightily to insulate themselves against any eventuality, they grasp at air because the things in which they trust disintegrate before their eyes. This is one of the reasons why the materialist must always have more and is never satisfied - because he never feels safe.

Jesus tells His followers, however, that security is the freely-given privilege of the child of God. One who puts self-centered priorities aside and seeks the righteousness of the Kingdom of God finds that God gives him "all these things," which all of his earlier striving had been unable to guarantee.

Much like humility, then, security is never found when sought, but is a by-product of obedience to God.

TRUE DISCERNMENT

Matthew 7:1-6

Lesson Aim

To help students to discern when exhortation is or is not appropriate, based on the attitudes of both the speaker and the recipient.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:10 - "Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?"

Lesson Background

The first verse of today's passage is one of the most frequently misused in all of Scripture. It is often used to support the totally unbiblical idea that no one has any business saying that the behavior of another person is right or wrong. Not only would such a concept lead to moral anarchy, but it is also clearly contradicted by Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:15-20, where behavior is the basis for judgment.

While unkind and often vicious criticism is common in our day, biblical exhortation is not. It is important for students to see that the opposite of destructive, hypocritical criticism is not a bland acceptance that condones or overlooks the most vile forms of corruption, but rather the kind of criticism that seeks to build up others and that is given within the context of serious self-examination.

If the first five verses of the chapter require constructive speech rather than that which is destructive, the sixth verse recognizes that there are times when silence is appropriate. Here students must learn that, for some people in some situations, the truth will only drive them to greater sin and condemnation, and thus silence is preferable.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the class by asking your students to write a paraphrase of Matthew 7:1 in their own words. In addition to the paraphrase, have them describe a situation that would illustrate the sort of behavior Jesus is forbidding. If your class is typical, many of them will think that Jesus is forbidding the censure of sinful behavior in others. Without attempting to draw any conclusions at this point, look up and discuss the following passages: Proverbs 24:24-25; Ezekiel 3:17-21; Matthew 7:20. How do these shed light on the discussion of Matthew 7:1? Students by this time hopefully will realize that it is not the discernment of good and evil in the behavior of others that is being forbidden, but rather a certain kind of criticism.

The passage now goes on to clarify precisely what sort of discernment is required. Jesus indicates that constructive criticism requires thoughtful examination both of yourself (verses 2 - 5) and of the one to whom you are speaking (verse 6).

1. Criticism Begins at Home (verses 2-5)

Jesus proclaims in verse 2 that the measuring stick that you use to measure others will be used on you as well. This is not an exhortation to judge others lightly, but rather to examine yourself by a stricter standard.

A French proverb says, "To understand all is to forgive all." Apart from the low view of sin implied by the proverb, we must admit that it accurately reflects the attitude we often take toward ourselves. We readily rationalize away our own shortcomings and forgive ourselves all too easily for our failures.

Present the following situations to the students, and ask them what they have in common:

- Fans at a professional baseball game boo a hitter who is in a batting slump.
- A teacher who returns papers weeks after they are turned in deducts credit when students turn in assignments a day late.
- Parents of unruly children loudly criticize a pastor's children when they run in the sanctuary.
- A high school student complains to her friend about what a terrible gossip another friend of hers is.

The students should be able to figure out that in each case a person is applying higher standards to another person than he is to himself. Jesus calls this hypocrisy, and uses a bit of hyperbole (a figure of speech that uses deliberate exaggeration to make a point) to emphasize His statement. Several applications may be drawn from Jesus' illustration:

- One earns the right to administer exhortation by self-examination. A person cannot claim to be concerned about someone else's sin until he has shown concern about his own.
- One earns the right to administer exhortation by establishing a caring relationship with another person. Sawdust may hurt, but a finger in the eye hurts more. I'm not going to allow you to take sawdust out of my eye unless I trust you.
- One cannot effectively deal with the sins of another until he deals with his own. How can sawdust be safely removed with a plank obscuring a person's vision?

- Perfection is not a pre-requisite for administering exhortation. Once you remove the plank from your eye, there may be some sawdust left, but of course someone else can help you get that out.

2. Throwing Pearls to Pigs (verse 6)

Despite the fact that the book of Proverbs has many positive comments about the value of correction, very few people enjoy receiving criticism, constructive or otherwise. In the last verse of today's passage, Jesus points out that there are some people upon whom words are a waste of breath. We must note that Jesus expands the scope of the discussion beyond the realm of criticism, including "what is sacred," a reference to the witness of the Gospel.

This verse is open to abuse, so it is important that the teacher communicate the following points:

- Whether administering exhortation or spreading the Gospel, we should not refrain simply because we think a person will be unreceptive. A person is not a pig until he proves himself to be one. We cannot rationalize keeping silent on the basis of an anticipated response (or would Jesus ever have spoken to Zacchaeus?).
- A person who repeatedly rejects criticism shows himself to be a fool and should not be rebuked further (Proverbs 26:4).
- A person who responds to the Gospel with mockery repeatedly not only increases his own condemnation and hardens his own heart but also exposes the name of God to open shame.

Conclusion

In conclusion, your Christian students must be challenged to discernment, both of their own spiritual conditions and the attitudes of those with whom they deal. Non-Christian students must be reminded that their own attitudes toward criticism and toward the Gospel reveal their need of a Savior. Did you have any pigs before whom you cast your pearls in class today?

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

TRUE DISCERNMENT

1. For one day, keep track of the criticisms you either think or voice about some other person. Then ask yourself this question: “Am I expecting something from that person that I would not expect of myself?”
2. List the people with whom you have a sufficiently solid relationship to allow for open constructive criticism. How often do you lovingly try to help the people on this list? How often do they try to help you? How many times do you criticize in a destructive way the people on the list? Are you the type of person who feels free to criticize people whose names are not on the list? What does that indicate about you as a person?
3. What does it mean to “throw pearls to pigs?” Why is it dangerous?

MOTIVATION TO PRAY

Matthew 7:7-11

Lesson Aim

To motivate the students to pray, knowing that a loving Father hears the cries of His children and a gracious Savior delivers those who call upon Him.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:11 - "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!"

Lesson Background

In chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had warned against hypocrisy and formalism in prayer. Because of the tendency we all have in those directions, those warnings could be discouraging, causing some to shy away from prayer out of fear. In order to counterbalance such a tendency, Jesus in today's passage gives encouragement to pray. That encouragement is expressed in two ways. Christians should pray freely because of the willingness of the Father to hear and answer and because of the wisdom of the Father to give what is best.

The Bible often pictures God as a Father. You should be aware, however, that this image may not have positive connotations for all of your students, especially those who may come from broken homes. They must be made to realize that God is what a father should be; a person's view of God should not be colored by his own family struggles.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking the students how they go about asking their parents for things they want. Get the students to express their ideas about what they would do in each of the following situations:

- Your old winter coat is worn and has holes in it. You want a new one.
- You want to try a new kind of snack that you've seen advertised on T.V.
- You want a new sweater in a popular style that your mother detests.
- You want to visit your friend overnight. Your friend's parents aren't going to be home.
- You want to go on a vacation that your parents cannot afford.

In discussing these and similar situations, make sure the following points are brought out:

- It is necessary to ask for different things in different ways. It is easier to ask for something your parents know you need and will routinely supply than for an unnecessary, expensive frill.
- Parents are not able to give you everything you want. Their resources are limited.
- Parents are not willing to give everything they are able to give. They will often withhold something if they think it isn't good for you.
- Different parents have different ideas about what is good and different amounts of resources for granting their children's requests.

The last time we talked about prayer, we saw the warnings Jesus gave against hypocrisy in prayer and noted the various components of prayer set forth in the model prayer given by Jesus. In Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus talks specifically about asking and encourages Christians to ask God for things. The encouragement He gives can be seen as falling into two categories.

1. The Willingness of the Father to Hear and Answer (verses 7-8)

Jesus first gives the assurance that God does not play cruel games with His people. He does not invite us to ask of Him, then turn a deaf ear. He does not call us into His presence, then slam the door in our faces. He does not sponsor a treasure hunt for which there is no treasure. God encourages His people to pray because He intends to answer.

Of course, there are some who have seen these verses as *carte blanche*, a sort of blank check signed by God. Spend some time discussing with your students the limiting context in which these promises must be understood. The discussion should produce two clear limiting factors.

- The promise is given to Christians. Only those who are children of God have the right to expect this sort of fatherly response. There is only one kind of prayer that God is obligated to answer from one who is not His child, and that is the prayer of repentance and faith, the cry for mercy that begs entrance into the family of God.

- The asking must be done within the boundaries of God's will. It is true that a believer should be growing more and more toward a situation where his will is in accord with the Father's (cf. Psalm 37:4), but it must be acknowledged that often believers ask for the wrong things, or request the right things for the wrong reasons (James 4:3). As we will see in the next section, God will not give stones to those who request bread. He might, however, give bread to those who request stones.

2. The Wisdom of the Father to Give What is Best (verses 9-11)

If God were simply willing and able to give, we would indeed be in trouble. Our folly would lead us to ask for things that would do us nothing but harm. But in the same way that parents do not permit their children to play with matches or eat candy at every meal, God is a wise parent who gives us those things He knows are good for us. (It should also be noted that, as parents sometimes allow children to choose foolishly in order to help them learn wisdom, God may give us things that are not good for us in order to teach us important spiritual lessons.)

The basic thrust of verses 9 and 10 is that God does not give counterfeits (a stone could be mistaken for a hard roll, the form in which they baked their bread; an inedible snake could be mistaken for an edible eel; a rolled-up poisonous scorpion could even be mistaken for an egg [cf. Luke 11:12]). It should be pointed out to the students that while God does not give counterfeits, Satan does. He routinely holds out things that look attractive (often very much like spiritual blessings, in fact), but in reality are deadly. Spend some time discussing this with your students to bring out specific examples.

In the eleventh verse, Jesus indicates that God is not like earthly fathers, but vastly superior. (In what ways?) This should be particularly comforting to students in your class who come from bad home situations where loving fatherhood is not modeled. Unbelievers in your class should also be told that, in Luke's version of this passage, Jesus promises the greatest gift of all - the Holy Spirit - to all who ask (Luke 11:13).

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

MOTIVATION TO PRAY

1. Under what conditions is it true that “everyone who asks receives” when praying to God?
2. Why is it good that we don’t get everything we pray for?
3. How does Matthew 7:7-11 provide encouragement when a prayer is not answered?
4. What are some of the ways in which Satan gives stones for bread, counterfeiting the things of God?

THE GOLDEN RULE

Matthew 7:12

Lesson Aim

To help students see the Golden Rule as a summary of God's moral law and motivate them to seek by the grace of God to keep it.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:12 - "In everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

Lesson Background

The phrase "the Law and the Prophets" was one way in which the Jewish people referred to their Bible - our Old Testament. Consequently, when Jesus said that what has come to be known as the Golden Rule sums up the Law and the Prophets, He meant that it serves as a capsule summary of the moral demands of the Old Testament.

The major abuse associated with this verse comes from those who profess to govern their lives by the Golden Rule, yet flagrantly violate some of the specific requirements of God's Law. Your students must be made to recognize the distinction between using a general summary as an excuse to ignore specific details upon which it is based and using those specific details to define and give application to the general summary. We will thus spend time in this lesson seeking to define the relationship between this commandment and the law as a whole.

As an aid in understanding this relationship, we will consider two other summaries of the law - that expressed by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40 and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Properly understood, all three summaries mean the same thing, and what they mean corresponds completely with the totality of the law itself. The lesson hopefully should clarify for believing students what it means to keep the Golden Rule, and at the same time undercut any self-righteousness with which unbelievers may be deluding themselves.

Lesson Procedure

“There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet!” This statement of faith is fundamental to the Islamic religion. Would anyone suggest, however, that knowledge of this statement gave one mastery over the totality of Islam? How, then, can Jesus say, as He does in Matthew 7:12, that one simple statement, “In everything do to others what you would have them do to you,” sums up the Law and the Prophets? Our task today will be to understand and accurately apply this command, which has come to be known as the Golden Rule. We will seek to do this by considering five questions.

1. What does the Golden Rule summarize?

Jesus says in Matthew 7:12 that the Golden Rule summarizes “the Law and the Prophets.” Jesus here uses a figure of speech called a synecdoche (si-NEK-de-ki), which involves describing a whole in terms of one or more of its parts. The Jewish Bible (our Old Testament) was divided into three parts, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Jesus is not here saying that His summary takes in only part of the Bible, while not applying to the Writings. Instead, He is saying that the Golden Rule sums up the Old Testament in its entirety. (When the captain of a ship says “All hands on deck,” he is doing the same thing. He obviously want bodies, not just hands.)

2. What does the Golden Rule mean?

The meaning of the Golden Rule may seem to be self-evident: “Treat others as you yourself wish to be treated.” Several questions must be considered if this is to be understood properly, however.

A. Does everyone want to be treated in the same way?

Elicit examples from the class of differences in the ways people like others to treat them. Though some examples may be trivial, it should be noted that such differences are one of the major sources of conflict in many marriages.

B. How can our own desires be the standard for the way we treat others if their desires may differ from ours?

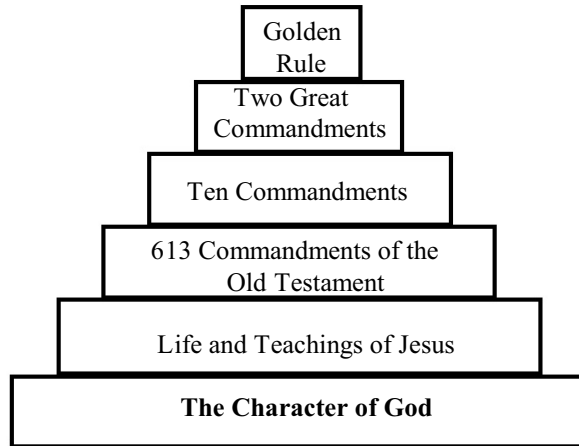
Your students should be made to realize at this point that a subjective, individually-defined standard simply will not work and reduces the Golden Rule to an ineffective, contentless platitude.

C. If the standard for the Golden Rule is not our own individual desires, what is it?

The conclusion toward which you lead your students here should be that, if the Golden Rule is a summary of God’s law, then God’s law provides the content that fleshes out the Golden Rule. In other words, the will of God as revealed in the Bible defines for us what it means to treat others as we wish to be treated. Since human desires are warped by sin, it is only those desires that are shaped by the Word of God that are fit to serve as the standard for our treatment of others.

3. How does the Golden Rule relate to other summaries of God’s law?

There are, of course, other summaries of God’s law to be found in Scripture. The following diagram may be useful in communicating to your students how these relate to one another.



A. The Golden Rule

The simplest summary we have. We live rightly as we act out the image of God in ourselves and respect it in others.

B. The Two Great Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40)

The Golden Rule is rightly practiced as we love God and our neighbors.

C. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)

The first table of the Decalogue tells us what it means to love God, while the second indicates how we are to go about loving others.

D. The 613 Commands of the Old Testament

Jewish rabbis calculated that the Old Testament contained 613 distinct commands. These flesh out and give specificity to the Decalogue, which is in itself a summary.

E. The Life and Teachings of Jesus

Words could never completely reveal the character of God. The final and most complete picture God gave of Himself was in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3), whose life displayed perfectly what it meant to obey God and whose teachings expounded the broad implications of the Old Testament law (cf. Matthew 5).

F. The Character of God

God's revealed will is at the same time a revelation of His character. What is right and good is no more than an extension of Who God is.

4. How is the Golden Rule open to abuse?

People abuse the Golden Rule when they sever it from the other summaries of the character of God and rest it on purely subjective standards. Discuss with your students how each of the following constitutes such an abuse:

- Helping my friend cheat on a test because he didn't have time to study is OK because I'd want him to do the same for me.
- Premarital sex is fine as long as both partners are equally willing.
- Unwanted babies should be aborted rather than being brought into lives of suffering and neglect.
- The terminally ill should be put out of their misery. I certainly wouldn't want to live hooked up to a bunch of machines.

5. How can someone live according to the Golden Rule?

Given the preceding exposition, the following points should be made.

- Christians are dependent upon the grace of God to live according to the Golden Rule. We cannot accomplish it on our own, nor will we ever do it perfectly in this life.
- Those who are not Christians cannot live by the Golden Rule. Any who claim to be doing so are deluding themselves. How many people have fooled themselves into thinking they could earn acceptance with God by "keeping the Golden Rule?" There is no surer road to Hell than this.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE GOLDEN RULE

1. What is the relationship between the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments? the Old Testament as a whole? the life and teachings of Jesus?
2. Why is the Golden Rule easily distorted when it is separated from other summaries of God's law?
3. How do some people use the Golden Rule to justify such things as premarital sex, abortion, and mercy killing?
4. Why is it impossible for a non-Christian to live by the Golden Rule? Why is it impossible for a Christian apart from the grace of God?

THE TWO WAYS

Part I

Matthew 7:13-20

Lesson Aim

To clarify for the students the differences between the broad and narrow ways and to help each one discern which way he is traveling.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:13 - “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.”

Lesson Background

Today’s passage consists of two parts, dealing with the two roads (verses 13-14) and the recognition of false teachers (verses 15-20). Two connections between the two parts can be noted. In the first place, in order to follow the right path it is essential to follow the right leaders. One who follows a “wolf in sheep’s clothing” may unwittingly wind up on the road to destruction. Secondly, it is entirely possible (as we shall see next week) for a person to be deceived as to which road he is traveling. Self-examination in light of the criteria given in verses 15-20 can enable a person to see on which path he walks.

We should also note in passing that today’s passage contradicts the misinterpretation of Matthew 7:1 that we had discussed in Lesson 9. Jesus here insists that His followers discern the rightness or wrongness of the deeds of others. Yet we should not fail to recognize the ambiguity of the situation in which this injunction places the believer. We are commanded to judge, and yet, because we cannot know men’s hearts, our judgment can never be absolute or final. In discerning the spiritual status of another, we need

both the fortitude to insist on the absoluteness of the biblical standard and the humility to recognize the limitations of our own judgments.

Lesson Procedure

Open class by asking your students, “Why is it hard to be different?” Teenagers who have not yet firmly established their own identities tend to define themselves in the context of their peer group, and one who is different can easily come to think of himself as worthless. Analysis alone will not make the struggles of adolescence disappear, but a student who understands what he is going through may be able to deal with it more effectively. Hopefully this discussion will encourage your students to share some of their feelings in this area.

Next read Robert Frost’s poem, “The Road Not Taken” (readily available online). Ask your students why the poet took the less-traveled road. Why is it that some people revel in being different? Is something to be judged as either right or wrong on the basis of how many people do it? Do those who oppose the majority always do so for noble motives?

These discussions should serve as an appropriate introduction to today’s passage, Matthew 7:13-20. We will divide the passage into two parts, dealing with two roads (narrow and broad) and two trees (good and bad).

1. The Two Roads (verses 13-14)

The two roads pictured by Jesus represent the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this World. Note the following contrasts:

A. Access

The Kingdom of this World is easily accessible. There are many directions from which it may be entered. It is easily found because everyone is born traveling on it. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, is definitely a limited-access highway, having only one on-ramp and no exits. The access, of course, is through Christ Himself.

B. Construction

The world’s road is a multi-lane highway that offers a great variety of speeds and alternate routes. Choice is seemingly endless. God’s road, however, is narrow, and must be followed precisely. Deviation from the path paved by the Road-Builder could prove disastrous.

C. Traffic

The kingdom of this world is a heavily-traveled road, yet traffic seems to flow smoothly. Though the Kingdom of God is a road less traveled, those driving it gain comfort from the fact that all are traveling the same path. This is true despite the constant calls from the busy highway, warning that the minority is following a road leading nowhere, or even suggesting that the pothole-filled path really leads to the same place as the various branches of the broad super-highway.

D. Destination

Here, of course, is the catch. Those traveling the superhighway follow their downhill road like lemmings into the sea of destruction. Those in the Kingdom of God ride an uphill road to glory.

Several applications may be drawn from this rather detailed metaphor:

- Christians will always be in the minority. It is unrealistic to think that society will ever be “Christianized.”
- Christians ought to be distinguishable from non-Christians. The nature of that distinctiveness is brought out in the second part of the passage.

2. The Two Trees (verses 15-20)

Jesus deals primarily in this section with false teachers, using “fruit” as a discerning quality in separating the false from the true. It is also essential, however, that the same standard be applied in examining the validity of one’s own profession of faith. Explain to your students that two major dangers for those who profess Christianity are following the wrong leaders and being mistaken about which road one is really traveling.

A. Following the Wrong Leaders

Jesus warns His people against deceitful men who, like wolves in sheep’s clothing, seek to lead them off the safe path to their destruction. What is the criterion by which such people may be recognized? What does Jesus mean by fruit? We should note that a tree does not produce fruit by effort, but by nature, and that fruit is not in itself reproduction of the tree, though it ultimately leads to that end. Thus good fruit can be seen neither as good works nor as leading others to Christ. The only reasonable explanation is that given by Paul in Galatians 5:19-23. The flesh by its very nature produces corruption, while the Spirit produces a character that the natural man cannot duplicate. Thus Christians should not follow those whose lives do not display the fruit of the Spirit.

B. Mistaking the Road

It is important that students realize that the same criterion by which a leader may be judged as worthy or unworthy of a following must be applied to their own lives to discern the road upon which they are traveling. Only a good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce it. Similarly, only one who sees in his own life the fruit of the Spirit may have confidence that he is on the road to heaven. Be sure to leave this issue firmly planted in the minds of your students. It is the question to which the final lesson of the quarter will in large measure be devoted.

THE TWO WAYS

Part II

Matthew 7:21-29

Lesson Aim

To challenge students to self-examination in the light of the standards set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

Memory Verse

Matthew 7:14 - "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Lesson Background

Today's passage is perhaps one of the most frightening in all of Scripture. Fearful descriptions of God's judgment produce little reaction in a person who is convinced that he will not experience that judgment, but a statement from the lips of Christ Himself to the effect that it is possible for a person to go through his entire life thinking he is serving Christ and yet be lost in the end should be enough to jolt even the most complacent into self-examination.

We noted last week that the fruit of the Spirit is set forth by Jesus as a test to discern the worthiness of prospective leaders. We also saw that the same test should be applied in the examination of one's own profession of faith. It is this latter point upon which today's lesson focuses. In addition, Jesus gives us another test - the test of perseverance under trial and persecution. The story of the two houses is often seen as an exhortation to build upon a firm foundation, but to leave it at that is to isolate it from its context. It is intended as a further test of one's true spiritual status, and as such is closely related to the rocky ground in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13.

As you bring the series to a close today, application is vital. Each student must be pressed to examine the foundation upon which his profession of faith (if any) rests in the light of this passage and the Sermon on the Mount as a whole.

Lesson Procedure

Begin class by asking your students if they think it is possible for someone to be utterly convinced he is going to heaven and yet wind up in hell. They should be able to come up with the fact that many non-Christians are convinced that the good lives they have lived (by their own estimation, at least) will be enough to get them into heaven. Followers of other religions, also, are trusting in those religions to secure their eternal destiny. If your students are on the ball, they may also note that many people are convinced that they are Christians when they really are not. At this point, have them turn to Matthew 7:21-29. Today's lesson will be divided into two parts, The Reality of Self-Deception (verses 21-23) and The Revealer of Self-Deception (verses 24-27).

1. The Reality of Self-Deception (verses 21-23)

Those who are self-deceived concerning their salvation are characterized in a number of ways in these verses. Divide your students up into groups of two and have each pair go through these verses and construct a profile of the self-deceived person. Then have the groups discuss their findings. The following should be brought out:

- These people are verbally committed to Christ (verse 21a). They profess to be Christians and say that Jesus is their Lord.
- Despite their profession, they are not living in obedience to God (verse 21b). This point should be tied in with last week's lesson - "by their fruit you will recognize them."
- These people are characterized by involvement in Christian service (verse 22). This is perhaps the most startling verse in this section. It thus becomes obvious that "doing the will of my Father" in verse 21 cannot refer to service, but must involve the inner character defined by the fruit of the Spirit, which only God can produce in a person.
- These people have no personal relationship with Christ (verse 23). They, no less than the blatantly unregenerate, are trusting their works (even though they are works for Christ) to save them rather than trusting Christ Himself. Jesus thus refers to them as "evildoers" - the best and most noble works a man can do are sin if done from selfish motives. In what way are the works of these people selfishly motivated, though they themselves may not realize it? They are motivated by a desire to *earn* eternal life.

Perhaps the best example of the type of person described in these verses is Judas Iscariot. He accompanied Jesus through almost two years of instruction (Jesus did not formally designate the Twelve until halfway through His public ministry). He, along with the other eleven disciples, traveled around Galilee on a preaching tour and rejoiced that he could heal the sick and cast out demons. He, along with the others, confessed his faith in Jesus as the Son of God at Caesarea Philippi. He, too, accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem, despite being convinced that all of them were facing certain death. Yet the man who had done all these things ultimately betrayed the man he called Master, revealing that his heart had not been with Christ all along. Jesus, of course, knew this from the beginning, though neither Judas himself nor the other disciples recognized it.

At this point, ask the students the big question - “How can I be sure that I won’t get an unwelcome surprise on Judgment Day?” Allow the students to try to answer the question, then turn to an examination of Jesus’ response.

2. The Revealer of Self-Deception (verses 24-27)

We saw last week one way of testing the reality of one’s profession - by using the fruit of the Spirit as a standard against which to compare one’s life. In these verses, Jesus gives us another test - that of trial or persecution. Note the following comparisons and contrasts with regard to the two houses:

- The houses are outwardly indistinguishable prior to the storm. The foundations are not visible to the naked eye. The situation here is the same as that described in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13, where the plant growing in rocky soil looks the same as (if not stronger than) the plant growing in good soil.
- The houses are built on different foundations. One rests only on that which is visible - the sand around it - while the other is firmly established in the bedrock far below the surface.
- The same storm strikes both houses and reveals the nature of the hidden foundation. Christ supports those who trust in Him through trial and tribulation, while those who are trusting their own resources find those resources sadly lacking.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, students should be told that a strong indicator of the reality of their relationship with Christ is the way they respond to persecution and trial. Do they deny their faith? Do they blame God? Do they stand firm? Do they draw closer to God in difficult times? The answers to these questions should tell them quite a bit about their relationship with God.

One more closing thought is appropriate. Verses 28-29 tell us that the people were amazed at Jesus’ teaching. Unlike the scribes, who expounded Scripture by quoting the opinions of various rabbis, Jesus speaks truth, not opinion. We cannot afford to ignore His warnings.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

THE TWO WAYS Part II

1. What is the relationship between the two roads of Matthew 7:13-14 and the two houses of Matthew 7:24-27?
2. Read the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. How is this parable similar to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23?
3. Suppose a person came to you and said, "I think I'm a Christian, but I'm not certain. How can I know for sure?" What would you tell him?
4. Read the book of I John. List the ways John says a person can know he is a Christian. How do these fit in with what you've learned in class during the last two weeks?