

GRACE BIBLE MISSION

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LESSON: WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW

Study 4: SOME THINGS THAT GOD PUTS FIRST

(Scripture Portion: Matthew 6: 25-34)

In this study we are to consider some of the things that God puts first in order of importance. There is a certain excitement about 'first things'. Most of us remember our first day at school, and our parents probably remember the first time we walked or talked! Can you remember the first time you saw your need of the Lord Jesus as your own personal Saviour? – look up Acts 16:30-31; the first time you prayed in public? – look up Acts 9:11; the first time you gave your testimony, led a soul to Christ or preached a sermon – look up John 1:41-42? All these experiences came first in order of *time*: in this study, however, we shall focus upon some things that should come first by our deliberate choice. Concerning these God says, '*Seek ye first...*', for they are His priorities. One of the biggest lessons we have to learn is that of discrimination. Many things clamour for priority, and we need to know how to assess their values in order that we do not give first place to secondary things. For example, the soul is more important than the body (Mark 8:36); the things of eternity are of infinitely greater importance than the things of time (2 Corinthians 4:18; Hebrews 9:27); life itself is far more important than possessions (Luke 12:15,21); and moral strength is far more important than physical strength (Ephesians 6:10). Much of our trouble arises from the fact that we have reversed the order; too often we are 'majoring in minor things, and minoring in major things'. This is true nationally, religiously and individually. Where are we to find guidance in the matter of putting first things first? How are we to know what God would have us to do in this matter? Here, as in every matter of faith and practice, the Word of God is our all-sufficient guide. Study the following 'first things':

1. The first and greatest commandment – Matthew 22:36-38.
2. Why we love Him – 1 John 4:19.
3. The prerequisite to discipleship – Luke 14:28,31.
4. Where giving must begin – 2 Corinthians 8:5.
5. Where piety (consistent living) must begin – 1 Timothy 5:4.
6. Where soul-winning must begin – John 1:41.
7. Where judgment must begin – 1 Peter 4:17.

Turn to the Gospel of Matthew and notice the record of our Lord's five-fold law of priorities.

1. IN MATTHEW 5:23-24 – FIRST YOUR BROTHER, THEN YOUR GIFT.

Read these verses carefully and notice how clear is the divine order – God's order. The Devil loves to sow seeds of discord in the ranks of the redeemed, but here the Lord tells us of the way of victory – the way that commands His immediate blessing. To worship Him, to bring gifts to Him or to enter into His service, are all in vain if we are failing to obey God's requirement in Matthew 5:23-24. God's work is often paralysed, and His servants are frequently powerless, because of an unwillingness to seek and secure the reconciliation that is commanded and that will alone glorify Him and release His blessing. No Christian can be right with God if he is consciously wrong with his fellow-men. If the tides of God's blessing are dammed up in your life, is it because you need to 'first go and be reconciled...'? As you think of the matter at this moment, what is it that you....*remember* (verse 23)?

2. IN MATTHEW 6:33 – FIRST THE SPIRITUAL, THEN THE TEMPORAL.

Here is a most wonderful promise: if we will put God's claims first and seek to do His will first, then we need have no anxiety about anything else, for He will shower upon us His abundant provision, even in days of shortage. Look at verses 31 and 32 which precede this great law of priorities, and notice from verse 33 that we are to seek first not only *justification* (indicated by 'his kingdom'), but *sanctification* (indicated by 'his righteousness'). It is possible to be in the kingdom of God and yet not really seeking His righteousness; to be saved, but not going on with the Lord – look up 2 Peter 3:18. In like manner it is possible to be justified, and to disregard God's call to sanctification – look up 1 Thessalonians 4:3. Thus we see that the promise of Matthew 6:33 is made to the Christian who is willing to go all the way with the Lord. God knows all about our temporal needs, and He waits and wants and guarantees to meet those needs if we will put first things first – look up 1 Kings 17:13-16, and compare Philipians 4:19.

3. IN MATTHEW 7:3-5 – FIRST JUDGE YOURSELF, THEN YOUR BROTHER.

How blind we often are to our own faults, yet how quickly we observe the faults and failings of others! Nearly every time we criticise someone else for a certain thing, we unconsciously criticise them for the thing of which we ourselves are guilty. What solemn and searching words we read in Matthew 7:2 – spoken by the Searcher of hearts Himself (Jeremiah 17:10)! Be careful

how you use your critical faculty, and be sure to look up Galatians 6:1 – and notice the last part of the verse.

4. IN MATTHEW 8:21-22 – FIRST WHAT CHRIST WANTS, THEN WHAT YOU WANT.

'Me first...!' How terrible, and yet how frequently we act in this way! – a disciple, but a 'me first' disciple, a self-centred Christian going his own way instead of the Lord's way. There is only one answer to each of the following seven questions:

1. Why do you allow that doubtful habit?
2. Why do you dress to attract attention?
3. Why do you pursue that harmful friendship?
4. Why do you allow that crooked method in business?
5. Why do you go to questionable places of entertainment?
6. Why do you fail in winning souls?
7. Why do you not obey the voice of the Lord?

The answer to every one of these questions is to be found in the words, 'me first'.

5. IN MATTHEW 23:25-26 – FIRST THE INSIDE, THEN THE OUTSIDE.

The Christian's life is not just an outwardly reformed life; it is primarily an inwardly cleansed life – look up 1 Samuel 16:7, and compare Psalm 51:6 and 10. When the inward cleansing is thorough, the outward transformation is soon evident. God does not want outward profession merely; first He wants inward possession. In concluding this study, get alone with the Lord and read 2 Chronicles 29:15-17.