

The Christian And The World (Part Eight)

Friend of World, Enemy of God

John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

Given 14-Mar-98; Sermon #330

In the previous sermon we looked at Matthew 6:24, which says that no man can serve two masters. No man can serve two masters equally. Having this concept of serving two masters equally is a delusion that we can somehow successfully straddle the fence and have the best of both.

This way of life—God's way of life—requires a great deal of dedication, or we risk committing idolatry through neglect. We saw at the beginning of that sermon that anyone who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God. That came out of James 4:4. This world is a reality that we have to face day by day, and part of that reality is that humans find it very difficult to resist it. This is because this world—meaning the cultures of this world—is the creation of human nature, and human nature is nothing more than a reflection of Satan's nature.

Jesus arranged these concepts—these thoughts, these elements—into a neat package by personifying "mammon" in Matthew 6:24, so that we would understand that when we serve this world, we are in reality serving Satan. We find in I John 5:19 that the whole world lies under him. This means that it is influenced by him, controlled by him. It is as though the world has been pinned by a wrestler, and the world lies under the evil one. And so once again we find that idolatry rears its ugly and defiling head.

Finally toward the end of the sermon we saw that Laodiceanism fits right into this scheme, because it, too, is idolatry. It is a form of worldliness in which God is gradually pushed off into a small corner of one's life, and while that is happening, the Laodicean's faith, his trust, is subtly shifted to materialism. Faith gradually shifts to created things, even though God is acknowledged. That is something that we have to grasp—a Laodicean is not outwardly anti-God. The Laodicean is in all likelihood attending services regularly, and unbeknownst to him his faith has shifted to materialism.

I wrote a booklet very early in the life of the Church of the Great God called “Prepare To Meet Your God,” and it was largely extracted from the book of Amos. We are going to begin this sermon there in the book of Amos, Chapter 6, and in verse 1. I want you to see this because I think that the book of Amos is a very clear example in this case of an entire nation that went Laodicean. God faithfully recorded what was happening within the nation, and those things are scattered throughout the chapters of the book of Amos. I picked this particular place because it is vividly clear in regard to this principle of Laodiceanism, and it even begins in verse 1.

Amos 6:1 Woe to them that are at ease in Zion...

I think you understand that throughout the Bible, beginning, let us say at the time of David, Zion becomes a type of the Church. It was the area in which the Temple was built.

Amos 6:1 ...and trust in the mountain of Samaria. . .

In this case, trust is in the material strength of the diplomacy, the armies, and the economics of Samaria, the capitol city of the Ten Northern Tribes

Amos 6:1 ...which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!

Amos 6:3 You that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near.

The Laodicean’s efforts are aimed at this world, and in so doing he is telling God that he is making all his preparations for this world rather than for the Kingdom of God. And so the Laodicean may not be actually saying, “Well, the coming of Christ is way far off.” But, by his works, that is what he is saying. His time, his energies, his efforts, his intelligence are all going in the wrong direction.

Amos 6:4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall.

None of these things are inherently evil in themselves, but the attitude that was driving them to do these things (being at ease and not all wound up, as it were, for the achievement of God's purpose)...

Amos 6:5-6 That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

That is a good thing to consider as being significant, because it is those who sigh and cry for what is going on in the midst of the city that are going to be marked as those who are not to be destroyed.

Amos 6:7 Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.

These are those who have stretched themselves at ease and are not geared up to get prepared for Christ's return. They have gone to sleep spiritually. The Laodiceans are not all wound up for God's word.

Amos 6:8 The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, says the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.

If you read Amos with this thought in mind, you will see an entire nation that went Laodicean. Self-indulgence and mammon-worship prevailed, and there is a very close parallel between the contents of the book of Amos and what happened in the church spiritually.

As a church we became rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. All the while we were going to the Feasts and doing the sacrifices, we called out "Lord! Lord!" (this is in Chapter 5 of Amos, by the way), but our heart was far from Him; and in the conduct of our daily lives, we were showing Him that we did not need Him.

Now just like these ancient people, we have sown the wind, and we are reaping the whirlwind. I would suggest to you maybe that you re-read that booklet, and go through it with that thought in mind, because that was the intention behind writing it. Jesus made it clear that resisting the pulls of the flesh and the world requires an act of devotion, at the base of which is this concept that Christ and God's purpose must have first priority in our lives. I think you realize that the end of Matthew the 6th chapter says, "Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

A side bar to this is that doing it the way Christ commands in Matthew 6 is the only way that we can have the best of both worlds. We cannot have it if we are chasing after materialism, because it simply does not have it within its power to produce the abundant life that we want. We can have a lot of things, but our own lives will not really be abundant. Our lives can be abundant if God is put first in our minds, in our hearts, in our actions; and we are devoted to the things that He wants us to be devoted to. We can have far less materially, and yet we will have the best of this world. We will have the best of God's purpose and the best of this world.

In this sermon, we are going to see that faith is shown as the foundational element in accomplishing this. Let us go back to Matthew 6 again, this time in verse 25. I hope you will never lose sight of what Jesus is doing here. He is laying down His prescription for resisting this world. If anybody knew how to resist the world, it was Him, and you can get the overall concept that by our will, by faith, by committing ourselves to this way, we turn our devotion over to God and leave the world behind.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink: nor yet for your body what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment [or clothing]?

As Jesus continues to set before us the standards of His Kingdom, what we have here is another incredibly high one. All of us are to some degree guilty of anxiety regarding material things, but who, without the clear instruction of Jesus Christ, would ever think that inordinate affection for earthly things is a

sin? This is not a mere trifle. I mean, this is foundational. It is right at the beginning of His instruction. He is not dealing with trifling things in the Sermon on the Mount. They might be basic, but they are not trifling. They cannot be sloughed off as being of no consequence. To be fearful about God supplying our future needs is unbelief. I mean, it is faithlessness in action. “Whatever is not of faith is sin.”

Much is written during Israel's journey through the wilderness and their problems with this circumstance. If we are guilty of it, we need to confess this before God and to seek His forgiveness. You will recall—reading in Exodus and Numbers especially—that much grumbling arose from their unbelief over whether God would supply their needs.

Now what was God's reaction? It spurred His anger, because what they were doing was questioning the goodness and care of our Creator. That was manifesting a lack of faith in His wise and gracious providence. It was betraying doubt of His love for us. Such a concern and distraction is in reality the workings of covetousness. All that you parents need to do is think about your feelings when maybe your children do not trust you. It hurts. What if your mate does not trust you? How does that make you feel?

We are dealing with somebody who is absolutely perfect in His character, and if He says He will take care of us, He will take care of us. When we doubt and we fret, and we get overwrought and overanxious, it does not make Him feel too good about our relationship.

Inordinate care for the things of this life is the very tap root of covetousness. This is no small matter, and if we are going to judge the importance of this subject by the amount of time and space Jesus gives to it right at the very beginning—laying the foundation for His Kingdom—I think that you are going to see that He spent more time on this subject—faith, works—than any other single subject in the Sermon on the Mount.

In fact, one author that I researched said that he believes that this is the part that Christ was aiming for in the whole Sermon on the Mount, because it gets right to the heart of the issue of faith, and in regard to the things of this life—covetousness, and covetousness is idolatry. This one concept—take no anxious thought—is important enough, that even before this chapter is over

(in fact in the last verse in the chapter) He comes right back to it as though it is the conclusion: Take no anxious thought.

You might believe that you could not possibly be in any danger because so little of this world's riches come your way that you barely have the necessities of life. But, brethren, the fear of poverty in the poor and worrying about the future can ensnare and distract you just as surely as the love of wealth ensnares and distracts the rich. Before we get confused, we have to understand that there is a balance required of us by God in regard to the things of this life. We are going to spend just a little bit of time on this so that we might see the other side of the coin.

Proverbs 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

You might get the thought from the way that I have been giving this sermon that God does not want us to think about taking care of ourselves at all—that He does not want us to think about possibly working hard enough and accumulating a reserve that we might have in terms of money in a bank, or a reserve in terms of what we might have in our pantry in the way of food. No. God requires that we work, and God requires that we work hard at achieving things—material things in this life. Now, here, the example is taken from the ant. “Go to the ant, you sluggard: consider her ways, and be wise.” Consider what the ant does.

Proverbs 6:7-9 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,
Provides her meat [or food] in the summer, and gathers her food in
the harvest. How long will you sleep, O sluggard?

God requires that we attend very dutifully to the responsibilities that we have of taking care of our families. Let us go back to the New Testament, this time to II Corinthians 12 and in verse 14.

II Corinthians 12:14 Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you; for I seek not yours, but you: for [Notice this principle.] the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but parents for the children.

The parents are to work hard enough in taking care of their responsibilities to their children that they actually lay up for their children. We will take one scripture that is very clear.

I Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

I think that it is quite clear that there is a lawful care to be taken even for the things of this life, and there is no conflict with Christ's word in Matthew 6 in these scriptures that I have just read. There are degrees of care. There is a godly and a moderate one. There is a distrustful one and an inordinate one.

So I think that these three verses that we have just read clearly show that there is a duty that we owe to God and to the affairs of this life. We are to be diligent in our business in providing for ourselves and our family. It is interesting that God, at the very beginning of the Book (in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of Genesis), when He put Adam and Eve in the Garden, said that they were to dress and keep it. This means they were to embellish it. They were to add to it, and they were to guard it from deterioration.

That is part of our responsibility—to be diligent in doing our job for our employer. We are to be careful that what we have is not squandered and wasted. We are to look ahead and plan to provide for future demands, taking into consideration that there will be emergencies like accidents, illness, death, natural disasters, and we are to prepare for such things.

If we do not do that, that is not faith that "God will provide," but rather presumption and irresponsibility in throwing all the responsibility on God while we ignore ours in failing to fulfill what God also tells us to do. There is much to be learned toward God's Kingdom and getting prepared for God's Kingdom by a careful use of our resources. The danger lies in our very human proclivity of tending toward extremes.

The most common is following human nature's inclination to be overly concerned about the things of this life and devoting too much time and energy to this because of what is translated here in Matthew 6 as an anxiety, being anxious. "Take no anxious thought."

Now Jesus' first point is that attention to the needs of this life must be subordinated to seeking after the welfare of things spiritual and eternal. Do you see that He is arranging them in order of priority? The Kingdom of God comes first, but we also have to take care of the things of this life, and if push ever comes to shove between the two in the use of time and energy, the spiritual comes first.

His second point is that while we are diligent in following through in fulfilling our earthly duties to God, we must deal uprightly and honestly with men while seeking to acquire those things that are needful. If you want a Psalm to read in regard to this, Psalm 37 is appropriate. We just sang it here as one of the hymns at the beginning of services; and as we were singing through it, I almost brought the hymnal up with me, because I wanted to read Dwight Armstrong's interpretation of a portion of that Psalm. Maybe if you would just get out the hymnal later on and read through it, you will understand what that Psalm is about.

It is about, or it gave birth to, this teaching in Matthew the 6th chapter. You might also read Psalm 73 in this regard. There is a priority. The Kingdom of God comes first. While we are also being diligent in meeting the requirement of God to our employers and so forth, we must deal uprightly and honestly with men. Do not let covetousness dominate you so that you begin breaking the law of God.

And third and very important is that in our work we must leave the issue or success of our labor to God. Let Him determine the degree of our material prosperity. Our responsibility is to be diligent, to not be covetous, to not be anxious. Let Him determine the level of prosperity. Our responsibility is to use what He does supply to the very best of our ability. And His responsibility as Father is to bless us as He deems best.

So Christ is not forbidding foresight in making careful provision, but He is forbidding foreboding. There is a difference because foreboding leads the mind so that it is constantly occupied and distracted over, in many cases, what may never come. Look at all the energy we wasted, and how we fretted because we were not showing faith to God that we believe Him that He will take care of us.

Let me illustrate it this way. Here I am, looking out over the ocean in Hawaii. The wind is blowing wonderfully out there. Suppose you are out there sailing. Is it not foresight of the storm that you might see coming on the horizon...so then you take in your sail while there is yet time. God is not against making preparations that way. But, after you have taken in the sail...to be constantly looking at the horizon with such fear and unbelief, that you are distracted from discharging your more important duties, is being anxious.

To be distracted about the future is unworthy of our relationship with God. That is why there is so much written about the Exodus and the journey through the wilderness. That is why there is so much written in the Sermon on the Mount about it. The word, therefore, at the beginning of that verse is a connecting statement to the previous thought. The previous thought was that no man can serve two masters, and "therefore" then leads to the conclusion.

Since transitory earthly treasure cannot satisfy, and setting your heart on them implies forfeiting the Kingdom of God, and since yearning for earthly treasure blurs our spiritual and moral vision, and a clear choice must be made between God and mammon, do not set your heart on material things. They are nice. There is nothing evil about them, but to be distracted by them might indeed cost you eternal life, and it is so important that it is in the Sermon on the Mount.

The *American Revised Version* translates Matthew 6:25 like this: "Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life." It is good to remember who said this. The One who said this is our Creator, who spent all eternity, however long that is, living with the Father. Nobody knows the Father like He does, and He is telling us, Do not worry about it. Be diligent in your work, but do not let worry over food and clothing distract you away from the things that are more important.

Now Jesus Christ is not only our Creator, He is also our Comforter and our Helper. He is the Helper of our joy, and so the care that is being spoken of (here in this verse) is a tormenting one which disquiets, so that we are not at

peace. It distracts. It disturbs the joy of our calling. When concern over making provision for the future leads the heart away from God and produces distrust, it has become sinful.

Foresight must not be allowed to degenerate into foreboding. It is distrust of God which draws the covetous part to unlawful means of obtaining earthly things, and there is the heart of this. When we get anxious about material things, the next step—and it may not be a very large step at all—is covetousness. When the covetousness begins, then what happens? We will lie to make sure we get what we are coveting after. We will steal. Some people will go as far as murdering. Other people will break the Sabbath, you see, and then the first thing you know, all Ten Commandments are involved in it.

In Matthew 6:25 is the beginning of an argument, a piece of logic by Jesus. When He says, “Take no anxious thought,” He is basing that on this thought. It is what is called an argument from the greater to the lesser—since God gave us our life and body in the first place, and since He has called us, He will also sustain us.

Has He given evidence of this? He did it to Israel in the wilderness. God got them out of Egypt. In fact He said, “I called them out of Egypt.” God did great things there: signs and wonders. He divided the Red Sea. Now since He did that, will He then fail to provide them with food and water? The same argument goes for our calling as well. Since He gave us life and breath, and since He called us, then Jesus argues, He will also sustain us. Take no anxious thought for what you will eat, or what you will drink, or what you will wear. So He who gave us the greater—life and body, will also give us the lesser—food and clothing. So Jesus is saying, Do not confuse your priorities.

Now go with me to the book of Romans, chapter 8 and in verse 32. Understanding that this was inspired by God, we can then understand why the Apostle Paul would make the same kind of an argument. We will get back to this principle a little bit later in the sermon; but he, too, argued from the greater to the lesser, in order to what? Increase our faith. Go to Romans 8, verse 31. We will read into this.

Romans 8:31-32 What shall we then say to these things? [Here comes the argument.] If God be for us, who can be against us? [Here comes the greater:] He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, [Here comes the lesser:] how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

This almost sounds like Matthew 6:25 again. From the greater—the giving of the Son, to the lesser—whatever it takes to get us into the Kingdom, God will provide it. Why? Because He is God! God finishes what He starts. God is a God of love. God dresses and keeps, just like He ordered us to do; and so He is embellishing our character, and He is guarding it from deterioration; whatever it takes to do that, He will do it. He will feed us; He will give us drink; He will clothe us. But, there are requirements to meet. We have to diligently do whatever our hand finds to do, with all of our might. That is not hard to understand, but that is Jesus' argument here, and it is Jesus' intention that as we study through Matthew 6 that our faith be increased, because with faith we can meet the criteria that God is laying down here.

Now back to Matthew 6 again, to another thing on this verse—a grammatical thing. Jesus used the present imperative here, which means that it is a very strong command. *Take no anxious thought.* And so implied within that is, “*Do not have this bad habit, or if you have fallen into it, break it. Stop it. Quit being anxious.*” Now anxious in this context means distracted.

Turn with me to the book of Luke:

Luke 10:38-42 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.” And Jesus answered and said unto her, “Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

I do not know whether your Bible has a margin, but my Bible has a little "1" beside the word *careful*, and in the margin it says "distracted." But what it does not say in the margin is that it is the same word that is translated *anxious* in Matthew 6. Anxiety distracts.

Can you think about the job at hand when you are distracted, if several things are impacting on your mind at the same time? Remember, no man can serve two masters. What is going to happen when your mind has two or more things that are impacting on it at the same time? You are going to eventually blot one of them out in order to pay attention to the one you choose to pay attention to. That is the principle here. It is that simple.

No man can serve two masters, and if two things sit on the mind, they cannot be equal. The mind is going to shift gears so that one gets the priority. That principle in relation to the Kingdom of God is that we will pay attention to one or the other, and by making the Kingdom of God our treasure and having a clear understanding and knowing that this principle is at work, Jesus Christ wants us, by faith, to choose to set our will to make the Kingdom of God have first priority. It is something that we have to make the choice to do.

So Jesus said to Martha here, "You are distracted [troubled, worried, anxious] about many things." Now there is nothing wrong with serving, but Jesus is showing, here, that service has to give way to worship; and even if we understand that worship is a form of submissive service, it is notched up several notches higher because it is given to God. And so this is a gentle rebuke by Jesus that Martha should leave her housework for the time and concentrate on the more urgent responsibility, because Christ was only going to be living a little while longer, and Mary had made the right choice.

It does not mean that Mary was any better than Martha, let us say as a person, but in this case Martha had made the wrong choice. God thought this was important enough that He inspired Luke to put it into part of His word so that we would understand this principle. He is not saying that one should do no housework, but rather Martha's failure to follow the higher priority was doing her character damage. There is a time to set aside the service of others in order to serve God. So Mary had a clearer understanding of the circumstance and made the better choice of the use of her time.

So what should we do? Well, the instruction is clear. First, remember that everything in our character begins with our thinking. Let us take Jesus' teaching in this circumstance to its lowest level. He is saying that in the life to which we have been called, food and clothing are not worth worrying about. Again remember that He is not against having normal foresight, but He is against distrust, foreboding, and lust.

We will concentrate on the food for just a second. This does not mean that we can eat just any old thing. That is not what He is saying. We are to have the normal care that He expects us to, in that we are to take care of our bodies and make sure that we eat the right things in the right amount. So normal foresight is not being disregarded here. What the problem is: distrust, foreboding, and lust.

In a few years we will not even need food, because we are going to have life inherent. Neither are we going to need the clothing of this life, because we are going to be clothed with the glory of God. Of what value are these things over which death has dominion? This is what John means when he said that the world is passing away. So why be so foolish as to be concerned over things that are going to perish with the using?

How much worth is our offense against God when we are discontented with what our gracious God provides us with, such that we lust and bend all of our time and efforts in getting something that we have just got to have? What will it matter when life is over and there is no more opportunity to make the choices to do the better thing? "Redeem the time," Paul said, "because the days are evil." What will matter at the end is whether we have fed on the Lamb of God. Remember, He said, "You have to eat of Me. You have to eat Me." He is "the living Word." We have to eat His word. What will matter is how we have fed on the Lamb of God, and whether we are gorgeously robed with righteousness.

Brethren, life is a matter of understanding 'What in the world is going on?' and making the choices to do the important, and setting the will by faith to discipline the self to do it. The purpose is character-building in order to be in the image of God and to glorify God in the doing of it. Some things, brethren, are not relative. They are absolutes.

Let us take another look at the larger context in which this appears, and that is the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus gives the basic fundamentals of His Kingdom. In other words, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry He is in effect saying, "If you get these things right, your future in the Kingdom of God is going to be secure and glorious." This is how you keep the world and its cultures that shaped us into what we were before God called us. This is how you keep them at bay and give ourselves every opportunity to be in the image of God. So why should Jesus instruct on this at this point in His ministry? Because this is a major reason why people fail to grow.

I am going to give you a verse in Matthew 13. I am going to read it to you. You have read this verse many times.

Matthew 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

That is the same concept that we are seeing here in Matthew 6. The only difference is that, here in Matthew 13:22, it is directly connected between cause and effect. The cares of this world make the growing, the spiritual fruit, almost impossible. So, what will we not have if we do not follow Jesus' advice? Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, self-control.

We cannot serve two masters, and if we attempt to straddle the fence, we are going to be unfruitful.

What should we do? Let us go back there to Psalm 37:5. Here is a principle that is shown very frequently in God's word.

Psalm 37:5-7 Commit your way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. [That is an iron-clad promise!] And he shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. [Do you see what precedes that? Faith! Trust Him.] Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him: fret not yourself [do

not be anxious] because of him who prospers in his way; because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass [because he has his heart set on material things].

What does the wicked man do? He commits sin in order to achieve them.

Psalms 37:8 Cease from anger.

Frustration or fretting over the lack of material success is not the issue. It is the kind of attitude that we were in that is the issue with Jesus. People get angry. That shows that the attitude is unsettled and unstable.

Psalms 37:8-9 And forsake wrath: fret not yourself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

Trust. You can go through that whole Psalm 37 because that is the basic premise that runs through it.

Let us try Proverbs 16 and verse 3.

Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works unto the Lord, and your thoughts shall be established.

Another promise. See, committing involves the setting of the will to do what God commands, and that involves faith to do that. Let us try I Peter 5 and verse 7.

I Peter 5:7 Casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you.

The cares of this world—cast them on Him.

Now since we are responsible to God to be diligent and to exercise foresight in how we do our daily earthly affairs, the conclusion of this point is that we must leave a degree of the increase in the hands of the Sovereign God. This

requires the exercise of faith. But if we do not, we are very likely to fall into sin somewhere along the line. Like I said earlier, we have to leave the degree of the success of the issue or whatever in His hands.

Let us go now to Philippians Chapter 4 and verse 6. There must be scores of verses along this line.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep [guard, protect] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Do not be anxious. Be careful. That means do not be full of care. But exercising faith in prayer for God's blessing with thanksgiving, and exercising faith in carrying out our earthly responsibilities lawfully is love toward both God and men.

Brethren, how many seemingly well-off people are that way because they have sinned their way into this? I think the percentage is quite high. We have to anchor our faith in God's promises, which are made to those who depend on His mercy and goodness.

Let us go back to the Psalms again, this time to another very well-known one. We sing this one very frequently. Let us look at this psalm in this regard.

Psalms 127:1 Except the Lord build the house . . .

Listen to this. "Unless the Lord build the house." Now who actually does the labor of building it? Men do. We do. Are you beginning to see the point of this psalm already? Unless the people who are literally building the house—working on it physically—unless they have involved God in their efforts, they labor in vain that build it.

Psalms 127:1-2 Except the Lord keep the city [guard it, protect it], the watchman wakes but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows:

Do you know what he is picturing here? You are sitting up, the candle's burning, you have a tablet in front of you that you are putting numbers, figures, writing things on it, and you are fretting, steaming, percolating, anxious, and distracted. It is vain for you to rise up early, burn the candle at both ends, trying to make a lot of money, and eat the bread of sorrows.

Psalm 127:2-5 ...for so he [God] gives his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.

The inference there is that this is somebody who has been blessed by God. The principle in this psalm then is that all human effort is vain unless we have the Lord's blessings. That means that we have to take active steps to involve Him in every aspect of our lives.

So it is applied here to four areas of life: (1) Building a house, (2) Guarding a city (or security issues), (3) Working long hours, and (4) The rearing of children. There is also the mention of sleep in this psalm. The sleep symbolizes and implies the setting aside of care and a forgetfulness of need. It is indicating that those who put their trust in God are delivered from fretting and fuming, and they are given rest. They sleep secure. They are not all worried and over-wrought.

I think all of us can relate to sleepless nights because we were in a state of anxiety about something. You know, this is even mentioned in the New Testament about Jesus. Remember when the disciples were going across the Sea of Galilee and the boat was pitching about wildly in a storm? And Jesus was asleep! They were hanging on for dear life to the sides of the boat and were ready to do whatever it took. Maybe they were bailing it out. I do not know. He was asleep, and they even said, "Lord, why do you sleep? Save us!"

"Oh! You are worried about something?"

Let us understand something here. It is possible to accomplish these things. I mean, to have many material blessings. It is possible to accomplish these things without God's blessing, but it is not possible to accomplish them within God's calling so that they have eternal value. You recall Jesus, in John 15:5 said, "Without Me you can do nothing." Can you see where Jesus got that principle?

Unless there is the God-connection; and unless we are diligent to give our prayers to God, letting our requests be made known; and unless we are filling those prayers to Him with thanksgiving for what He has given to us; then we are not going to accomplish things toward the Kingdom of God that have His blessing. And so "in vain do they labor," and we do not want to be in that category.

So those called of God can accomplish these things without God's blessing, but their accomplishment will have no eternal value unless they have taken the steps to involve Him in them. That is our responsibility—to open the door for Him to work with us.

God absolutely requires that the just shall LIVE BY FAITH. That statement is at one and the same time both a command and a statement of fact. Doing things without God and His way (in the equation) is the world's way, and that way inevitably, invariably, leads to sin. It is vain. It is useless. It misses the mark.

So God wants us to personally choose to involve Him in our life daily in prayer and obedience, in our activities, as we go about the actual event of our lives. This is another one of those aspects of "this way" to which we have been called. God is far more interested that we experience and learn the benefits of the process, than that we achieve the results in this life.

Now I just wondered, if we were going to God's school, would He allow us to use calculators? I just wonder, because God is so interested that we learn the process—how to actually multiply, divide, add, subtract, and extract the square root. That is what we are talking about—that simple principle. God

wants us to learn the processes of life. He wants us to learn “cause and effect.” He wants us to do it, having invited Him to participate actively in our lives. He will take us through the process.

God, in His wisdom and for His purposes, has deemed it necessary that we experience the process of living by faith on a daily basis. We must not let ourselves feel that we are not a success in life because we do not have a super abundance of this world's material goods, or we think that because we do not have these things that God is somehow against us and is punishing us.

Do you understand that that was a trap that the Jews fell into? They thought that if a person was being prospered materially, that person had God's blessing. Oh, no. Not so. They thought, on the other end of the scale, that because a person was poor, God was cursing that person. Very shallow judgments. That is not how God measures a person's worth.

A person's worth is measured against how much they are like God, how much they are in the image of Jesus Christ, and what their character is like; not whether or not He has permitted them to prosper. Shallow judgments, leaping to conclusions that have no basis except for what is on the outside of a person, because the rich man may be wealthy because he is sinning, and the poor man may be poor because he is sinning.

How are you going to tell the difference? But the rich man may be rich because God is truly blessing him; and the poor man may be righteous, but poor, because God wants him to be poor because it has something to do with what God is preparing him for. You cannot always tell the book by its cover. It is what is in the heart. Now if we do it His way, He will take care of us, and we will always have what we need.

Now turn to Psalm 34, verses 10 through 15.

Psalm 34:10 The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the LORD shall not want [lack] any good thing.

That is a flat-out promise!

Psalm 34:11-12 Come, you children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. What man is he that desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?

Everybody wants this! I want it. I am sure you do too.

Psalm 34:13-15 Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.

Now those are flat-out promises. Do you notice, though, that there is a requirement there? Trust Him. Do good. It is another way of saying keep the commandments; be diligent in your doings; be honest in your doings; do not cheat anybody; do not lie to make money. Those kinds of things.

Let us look at another one here. Go to Isaiah 33, and verses 15 and 16.

Isaiah 33:15-16 He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high; his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.

In this context, rather than food and clothing being promised, it is safety, peace, in the midst of trouble.

Philippians 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

This next scripture will be the last one for today. Go back to Psalm 119, and begin in verse 65.

Psalm 119:65-72 You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord according unto your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed Your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your word. You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes. The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in your law. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

Brethren, being kept from sin is just that important. God knows us far better than we do know ourselves, even as a human parent knows his child far better than the child knows himself. A parent's responsibility is to prepare a child for living in the larger community outside of the family, and thus children have to be taught that work is more important than play, carrying out chores around the house and being disciplined to do homework and practicing on a musical instrument, and responding to mom's and dad's orders in a good attitude and promptly are essential for a child's and the family's and the community's well-being?

The point here is that the child does not understand that. They would far rather play. They would far rather sit mesmerized by TV, or talk on the phone for hours, or listen to inane music while they do nothing but daydream.

Now take that principle. God knows what He is preparing us for far more specifically than we do. We look through a glass darkly. We only know generally what is going on. Are we willing to trust Him, even as we want our children to submit to us for their well-being, for the family's well-being, and for the wider community's well-being? Are we, in like manner—those children of God who have been called to become in His image—are we willing to trust our Father, without griping, without complaining, without law breaking, in a good attitude...To trust His judgment of what is good and needful for us so that we can be in His family, in His Kingdom, and in His community, prepared to do His will? That is the critical issue here.