
Making Your Call and Election Sure



A Five Lesson Series of Sermons to Help Make Your Salvation and Heart Secure

Gene Taylor

Preface

This series, *Making Your Call and Election Sure*, focuses on those things the Scriptures tell us that as Christians we need to do to make certain our salvation. The apostle Peter wrote, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:10-11)

To help make “our call and election sure” and secure our hearts before God, these lessons suggest we should “Put on the Armor of God,” “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself,” “Choose Good Companions,” “Use Your Talents Wisely,” and “Grow in Jesus Every Day.”

These sermons may be presented as a series or independently for each lesson is complete in and of itself and does not build on previous lessons.

Gene Taylor

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Put on the Armor of God

Introduction

1. Near the end of his life, Paul was constantly surrounded by Roman soldiers.
 - a. He lived in the presence of the greatest military power ever known.
 - b. Night and day a soldier was with Paul to ensure he would not escape.
 - c. The Roman legion is considered to be the world's first professional army.
 - d. Their armor was distinctive, and with it they subdued the world.
 - e. Paul used figures of speech which reflected what he saw daily.
 1. He told Timothy to "wage the good warfare." (1 Tim. 1:18)
 2. Paul also told Timothy to "endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3)
2. Christians are to put on the "whole armor of God." (Eph. 6:10-17)
 - a. "Panoply" was the whole armor of the heavily armed Roman soldier.
 - b. We must position ourselves to stand for the truth. (Eph. 6:11, 13, 14)
 - c. We must possess unblemished character; zeal tempered with wisdom; and knowledge of Word.
 - d. The welfare of the cause of Christ depends upon us making a stand.
 - e. Since we are not fighting a fleshly battle, our weaponry must not be carnal. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

I. The Armor Of God (Eph. 6:10-17)

A. Girdle of truth.

1. This was not an ornament—it bound the other pieces together and gave the soldier freedom of movement.
2. We move about this world more freely because we know the truth!
3. The center of our armor is truth. (John 17:17)
4. The New English Bible renders this clause, "Buckle on the belt with truth."

B. Breastplate of righteousness.

1. On first century reliefs only the centurions had metal cuirasses (breastplates); the common foot soldier had a leather corselet with leather shoulder pieces.
2. The breastplate of a Roman spear man was used to protect the heart and other vital organs.
3. Our heart is to be covered by righteousness. (Psa. 119:11)
4. Words are no defense against accusations, but a righteous life is.

C. Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

1. "But most important of all were his heavy boots (*caligae*), or rather sandals, which were in many ways more serviceable than modern army boots. Their soles, made of several layers of leather and heavily studded with hollow-headed nails,

varied considerably in thickness; perhaps three-quarters of an inch was about the average. Strips of cloth or fur were sometimes placed inside the sandals, and they were fastened to the foot by ankle thongs." (Michael Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, p. xx).

2. These boots would give the soldier a firm footing during battle.
3. They were designed to make it difficult to walk backwards.
4. Our footing must be supplied by the gospel of peace (Rom. 10:15) and we should never retreat (Heb. 10:38-39).

D. Shield of faith.

1. Roman shields were composed of leather or wicker.
2. The normal size was four feet high by two and a half feet wide.
3. "The word Paul uses is not that for the comparatively small round shield; it is that for the great oblong shield which the heavily armed warrior wore. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the fiery dart. It was a dart tipped with tow dipped in pitch. The pitch-soaked tow was set alight and the dart was thrown. The great oblong shield was made of two sections of wood, glued together. When the shield was presented to the dart, the dart sank into the wood and the flame was put out. Faith can deal with the darts of temptation. With Paul, faith is always complete trust in Christ. When we walk close with Christ, we are safe from temptation." (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 183)
4. "Early legionary shields were oval in shape but in the 1st century they became rectangular, although curved to fit the body. A legionary shield (scutum) was made of thin sheets of wood glued together and bound round the edges with wrought iron or bronze. The center was hollowed out for the hand grip which was protected by a metal boss. The outer surface of the shield was covered with leather on which were fastened decorative bronze plates." (Leslie and Roy Adkins, *Introduction to the Romans*, p. 39)
5. The change from small round to large rectangular shields meant the soldiers no longer needed to wear greaves (shin-pieces), and thus their mobility greatly increased.
6. Our enemy does not always attack directly. (Heb. 11:32f)

E. Helmet of salvation.

1. This headgear was generally of bronze, fitted inside with an iron skullcap lined with leather or cloth.
2. We are to take this helmet from God—it is our salvation. (Eph. 2:8-9)

F. Sword of the Spirit.

1. "The offensive armor, as described by Josephus, consisted of the *pilum* or throwing-spear, the *gladius* or Spanish sword, and the *pugio* or dagger slung on the left and right sides respectively." (H. M. D. Parker, *The Roman Legions*, p. 251)

2. "Weapons for attack included the pilum or javelin, two of which were carried by each man. The *pilum* was 7 ft. long, the top 3 ft. being of iron. The sword (*gladius*) was a double-edged weapon about 2 ft. long and 2 in. wide. Carried in a scabbard attached to a belt on the right-hand side of the body, it was a stabbing rather than a slashing weapon and designed for use in close fighting. The scabbard was usually made of wood and leather held together by bronze. On the left-hand side of the body there was a dagger (*pugio*) in a bronze or iron scabbard suspended from another belt. Daggers seem to have been withdrawn from the legionary armory by the end of the 1st century." (Leslie and Roy Adkins, *Introduction to the Romans*, p. 39)
 3. "Weapon training was most important. The intelligent use of the sword is mentioned particularly in a surviving Roman training manual. The method taught was to thrust, rather than to slash at an opponent; for a slash-cut rarely kills, but a thrust makes a deep penetration of the vital organs. The Roman short sword was clearly designed for stabbing, with its sharp angled point, though it could be, and certainly was on occasion, used to effect cutting strokes. The skulls belonging to the hapless defenders of the great Durotrigian fortress of Maiden Castle in Dorset, England, show the appalling fatal wounds inflicted by the soldiers of LEGIO II AUGUSTA against adversaries who were most probably unhelmeted." (Michael Simkins, *Warriors Of Rome*, p. 28).
 4. Our only offensive weapon is the Word of God. (Heb. 4:12)
 5. Christ fought Satan in the desert with this weapon. (Matt. 4:1-11)
 6. We are never wasting our time when we are sharpening our swords—do not let it get rusty.
- G. The armor must be put on properly.
1. It is to be donned with prayer. (Eph. 6:18; Acts 4:29-31)
 2. Pray always—pray intensely—pray for others.
 3. Always remember, we are foot soldiers—God is in control.

II. A Lesson From Rome

- A. The Jewish priest and general Flavius Josephus lived during the zenith of Rome's military glory.
1. He was made a citizen by Vespasian and traveled with the legions.
 2. Roman soldiers always carried their weapons with them—even in peace.
 3. "Every soldier is every day exercised, and that with great diligence, as if it were in time of war, which is the reason why they bear the fatigues of battle so easily." (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book III, Chap. 5)
 4. "This vast empire of theirs has come to them as the prize of valor, and not as a gift of fortune. For their nation does not wait for the outbreak of war to give men their first lesson in arms. They do not sit with folded hands in peace-time only to put them in motion in the hour of need. On the contrary, as though they had

been born with weapons in hand, they never have a truce from training, never wait for emergencies to arise. Moreover their peace maneuvers are no less strenuous than veritable warfare. Each soldier daily throws all his energy into his drill, as though he were in action. Hence that perfect ease with which they sustain the shock of battle. No confusion breaks their customary formation, no panic paralyzes, no fatigue exhausts them. And as their opponents cannot match these qualities, victory is the invariable and certain consequence. Indeed, it would not be wrong to describe their maneuvers as bloodless combats and their combats as sanguinary maneuvers....By their military exercises the Romans instill into their soldiers fortitude not only of body but also of soul. Fear, too, plays its part in their training. For they have laws which punish with death not merely desertion of the ranks, but even a slight neglect of duty. And their generals are held in even greater awe than the laws....This perfect discipline makes the army an ornament of peace-time and in war welds the whole into a single body—so compact are their ranks, so alert their movements in wheeling to right or left, so quick their ears for orders, their eyes for signals, their hands to act upon them.” (Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book III, Chap. 5)

5. If only we could become as familiar with our weapon. (Acts 17:11)
- B. What caused their military downfall and finally the downfall of Rome?
1. Nearly all historians agree Rome brought about its own downfall.
 2. “It is the just and important observation of Vegetius, that the infantry was invariably covered with defensive armor, from the foundation of the city to the reign of the emperor Gratian. The relaxation of discipline, and the disuse of exercise, rendered the soldiers less able, and less willing, to support the fatigues of the service; they complained of the weight of the armor, which they seldom wore: and they successively obtained the permission of laying aside both their cuirasses and their helmets. The heavy weapons of their ancestors, the short sword, and the formidable pilum, which had subdued the world, insensibly dropped from their feeble hands. As the use of the shield is incompatible with that of the bow, they reluctantly marched into the field; condemned to suffer either the pain of wounds, or the ignominy of flight, and always disposed to prefer the more shameful alternative. The cavalry of the Goths, the Huns, and the Alani, had felt the benefits, and adopted the use, of defensive armor; and, as they excelled in the management of missile weapons, they easily overwhelmed the naked and trembling legions, whose heads and breasts were exposed, without defense, to the arrows of the barbarians. The loss of armies, the destruction of cities, and the dishonor of the Roman name, ineffectually solicited the successors of Gratian to restore the helmets and cuirasses of the infantry. The enervated soldiers abandoned their own, and the public defense; and the pusillanimous indolence may be considered as the immediate cause of the downfall of the empire.” (Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol.III, pp. 271-272)

- C. Is the gospel armor too heavy for you?
 - 1. Do you “earnestly contend for the faith,” or apologize for it? (Jude 3)
 - 2. Our weapons are for pulling down strongholds. (2 Cor. 10:3-5)
 - 3. We must attack the citadels of error—not just hold our own.
 - 4. When General MacArthur was called home from Korea he reminded congress that “war’s very object is victory, not prolonged indecision.”
- D. Sometimes brethren need a course in enemy recognition.
 - 1. Gun shows have trading cards from WWII that were used to identify enemy armor.
 - 2. Jesus declared the man who is not with Him is against Him. (Matt. 12:30)
 - 3. The Devil does not attack under his own banner; sometimes he advances under a flag of truce. (2 Cor. 11:14)

Conclusion

- 1. The welfare of the cause of Christ depends upon your willingness to stand.
- 2. The example of Confederate General Thomas J. Jackson.
 - a. He was one of the commanders at the first battle of Bull Run.
 - b. When both right and left flanks of the confederate army fell back, Jackson’s troops held firm.
 - c. General Barnard S. Bee rallied his disorganized men by saying: “There is Jackson standing like a stone wall.”
 - d. This did not mean that Jackson stood there useless like a stone statue—it meant that he and his men stood firm.
 - e. The key to Gen. Jackson being able to stand: “Jackson is remembered as a great general and as an earnest and religious man. On the march he carried two books: Napoleon’s ‘Maxims of War’ and the Bible. In the thick of battle his men often saw him move his lips in prayer.” (*Compton’s Encyclopedia*).
- 3. Christians are engaged in a great spiritual warfare.
 - a. Sometimes we think we are waging war when all we are doing is running around and making a lot of noise.
 - b. We have to take a firm stand for the truth and against the advancing enemies of truth.

(A good portion of this outline is by David Padfield)

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Introduction

1. There can be no plainer teaching in the New Testament than that of the necessity of love. We are to love:
 - c. God and Christ. (Matt. 22:37; John 14:23)
 - d. Our brethren and our fellow man. (1 John 4:19-21; Matt. 22:39)
 - e. Even our enemies. (Matt. 5:43-48)
2. Love is the great underlying principle of the universe.
 - a. God, the greatest being, is love (1 John 4:8), therefore, the laws of the universe are the manifestations and outgrowth of His love and His word is undergirded by it. (Matt. 22:35-40)
 - 1) The “golden rule.” (Matt. 7:12)
 - 2) “Love your enemy.” (Matt. 5:43-48)
 - b. We are most like God, the greatest being, when we love.
 - 1) We love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)
 - 2) To love is to conformed to His laws. (John 14:15)
3. God’s law commands each of us to “love your neighbor as yourself.”
 - a. We are to “esteem others better than self” (Phil. 4:3).
 - b. We are to look out not only for our own interests but also “for the interests of others.” (Phil. 4:4)
 - c. This love is *agapao*, benevolent good will.
 - d. This lesson will examine this principle and seek to instill it in every one of us.

I. The Scene in Luke 10:25-37

- E. Jesus was in Capernaum in Galilee.
 1. The seventy He had sent out returned with news of all the wonderful things that had happened to them. (Luke 10:17)
 - a. He rejoiced at the good things He heard from them. (vv. 18-21)
 - b. He prayed with thanksgiving to the Father (vv. 21-22), then privately told the disciples how blessed they were for the things God was allowing them to see and hear. (vv. 23-25)
 2. A lawyer, a teacher of the law, arose and asked Him a question to test Him. (v. 25)
- F. The lawyer’s question and Jesus’ response. (Luke 10:25-29)
 1. The lawyer’s question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 25)
 - a. “How to obtain eternal life was a standard question for theological discussion in those days.” (*Adult Bible Quarterly, Autumn ‘84, 20th Century Christian, Parables on Kingdom Living*, p. 35)
 - b. His motive was not pure, like that of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17), but his intent was to test Jesus.

- c. "Test:" "*ekpeirazo*," an intensive form of "*peirazo*," which means "to test, try, prove...attempts to ensnare Christ in his speech..." (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words*)
 - 2. Jesus asked him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" (v. 26)
 - a. Jesus "turned the tables" on this man and put Him on the spot.
 - b. In essence He was saying, "You are supposed to be an expert on the Law, what do you think?"
 - 3. The lawyer replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (v. 27)
 - a. Jesus told him he answered rightly and that if he would do that he would live. (v. 28)
 - b. The lawyer wanted to "justify himself" so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29)
 - 1) This was a typical attitude of the Pharisees. (Luke 16:14-15)
 - 2) "Justify:" "*diakaioo*,...to declare to be righteous, to pronounce righteous." (Vine)
 - 3) He seemed to want to make himself look good in the eyes of the crowd possibly thinking that Jesus' reply would be far too conclusive.
- G. Jesus' answer consisted of the parable of the good Samaritan. (Luke 10:30-35)
 - 1. Some background information.
 - a. From Jerusalem to Jericho.
 - 1) Jericho is about 18 miles from Jerusalem.
 - 2) The road between the two cities goes through a rocky and desolate region.
 - 3) Jerome, who lived in Palestine for several years, said a certain part of that road was called "the red way" because of the number of victims whose blood had been shed by robbers.
 - b. The Samaritans.
 - 1) They were a mongrel race that was despised by the Jews.
 - 2) They practiced circumcision and accepted part of the Old Testament, but had broken off and apostatized from the Jewish religion.
 - 3) One can get a fair concept of Jewish-Samaritan relationships by reading the account of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. (John 4:1-42; esp. v. 9)
 - 2. The parable.
 - a. A "certain man" going from Jerusalem to Jericho was robbed, beaten and left for dead. (v. 30)
 - b. A priest saw him but did not stop to help but rather "passed by on the other side." (v. 31)
 - c. A Levite reacted in the same manner as the priest. (v. 32)

- d. A Samaritan came to where the wounded man was and “had compassion” on him. (v. 33)
 - 1) He attended to his wounds and then brought him to an inn and took care of him. (v. 34)
 - 2) On the next day, before he left, he gave the innkeeper money and said, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.” (v. 35)
- H. At the conclusion of the parable Jesus asked the lawyer, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (v. 36)
 - 1. The lawyer responded, “He who showed mercy on him.” (v. 37)
 - 2. Jesus charged him to, “Go and do likewise.” (v. 37)

II. The Application of the Parable of the Good Samaritan: “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

- A. The Biblical principle known as the golden rule, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them...” (Matt. 7:12), is illustrated by this parable.
 - 1. One of the great things about the Bible is that it not only provides the rules but also the illustrations of that rule.
 - a. When studying a new principle in math, the book states the rule then gives some sample problems to illustrate it.
 - b. The Bible does the same.
 - 2. The parable of the good Samaritan gives some sample problems and illustrations, both negative and positive, on the “golden rule” and one’s attitude toward others.
- B. The thieves are those who live for self and will harm others to get what they want.
 - 1. They loved money but not their fellow man. (Luke 10:30; 1 Tim. 6:16-17)
 - a. They did not care if he was a family man.
 - b. They did not care how many hearts would be broken if they killed him.
 - c. They were not concerned about their moral responsibilities.
 - 2. Their philosophy: “What I want I’ll take.”
 - a. Love does no harm to a neighbor. (Rom. 13:9-10)
 - b. They felt they had the right to do whatever they had the power to do.
 - 3. They were selfish. (2 Thes. 3:10; Eph. 4:28)
 - 4. They were characterized by unbridled lust and avarice. (1 John 2:15-17; Luke 12:15)
 - 5. Their reward? Not eternal life. (Luke 12:33, 1 Cor. 6:10)
- C. The priest and the Levite are those who “do not harm others” but are not involved with others.
 - 1. The majority of people are like this. Many who claim to be children of God are this way—they do not do anything to hurt anyone but they do not help anyone.
 - 2. They loved ease and their station. (Amos 6:1; 1 Cor. 10:12)
 - 3. Their philosophy: “What’s mine is mine.” (1 John 3:17; 1 Cor. 10:24)

4. These kind of people are usually too busy with their own lives and too selfish with their resources to think of others. (Jas. 2:14-17; Matt. 7:21)
 5. They never look for opportunities to do good to others and they neglect those opportunities which confront them. (Heb. 2:2-3; Gal. 6:7-10)
 6. Their reward? Not eternal life. (Jas. 4:17; Matt. 25:34-36)
- D. The Samaritan represents those who properly love their neighbor.
1. He allowed the “golden rule” to guide him in human relationships.
 2. He loved his fellow man. (Heb. 13:1-2; Gal. 6:10)
 3. His philosophy: “I will help others.” (Acts 11:29; Eph. 4:28)
 - a. He was probably in as great a hurry as the others but he took time to help. (Eph. 5:16; Rom. 12:10-13)
 - b. He probably had no more money than the others.
 4. He is an example to all. (Luke 10:37; Acts 10:38)
 5. Final reward? Eternal life. (1 Cor. 15:58; Matt. 25:21)

Conclusion

1. There is no end to the practical applications that could be made from this teaching.
2. We often have opportunities to do good for others, do we take advantage of them?
3. It is easy to talk about loving our neighbors but do we do it?
 - a. Do we practice the “golden rule” with our family, friends, on the job, or with our brethren?
 - b. Do we use excuses such as lack of time, lack of money, etc., to rationalize our lack of concern for others?
4. Remember the principle stated in Romans 13:10: “Love does no harm to a neighbor.”
 - a. Someone has said, “It is no chore to love the whole world, my real problem is my neighbor next door.”
 - b. If we love our neighbor, we will seek his benefit, whether physical or spiritual, and we will not cheat him, covet his possessions, lie about him, etc.
5. If you are thinking that you wish more people would practice this and start being more neighborly to you, you have missed the point.
 - a. The Lord puts us on the giving, not the receiving, end.
 - b. “Go and do likewise.”

Choose Good Companions

Introduction

1. Solomon addresses one of the most important choices a young person can make, i.e., their choice of friends. (Prov. 1:8-19)
 - a. It is unfortunate that important decisions in life have to be made by those who lack the experience and wisdom needed to make the proper choices.
 - b. This is why parents need to help their children choose their friends.
2. Choosing the wrong sort of friends is worse than having no friends at all.
 - a. The principle that “evil company corrupts good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33) is true because their ideas soon become ours.
 - b. Solomon expressed the same thought when he said, “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.” (Prov. 13:20)
6. This lesson will consider a number of Biblical principles that will allow us to choose our friends wisely and to help our children make wise decisions when it comes to who their friends will be.

I. The Need for Close Friends

- A. We need the close association of others.
 1. We cannot happily or meaningfully live our lives to ourselves.
 - a. We need to be with other people.
 - b. Man was created a social being. (Gen. 2:18)
 2. No one lives to himself. (Rom. 14:7)
- B. We need the love our friends have for us.
 1. Life is much more pleasant when we have those who care for us and our welfare.
 2. We need to know someone loves us no matter what may come our way or theirs. (Prov. 17:17)
- C. We need someone to share our joy and happiness. (Rom. 12:15)
- D. We need someone to help us when we need cheering. (Prov. 27:9)
- E. We need relaxation and recreation from the routine and pressures of life so we enjoy visiting with friends.
- F. There are almost infinite reasons why we need friends.

II. What Is a Friend?

- A. Definitions.
 1. Simply, a friend is one with whom you associate.
 2. *Webster's Dictionary* defines friend as “a person who has a real liking for and confidence in another person.”
 3. W.E. Vine says it is one who is “loved, dear.” (*Expository Dict. of NT Words*)
 4. The term itself suggests a companion.

- B. The word “friendship” occurs only once in the New Testament in James 4:4.
1. It comes from *philia* which is akin to *philos* which is translated “love.”
 2. Vine says it suggests “loving as well as being loved.”
 3. Biblical examples of friendship illustrate the idea of loving and being loved.
 - a. David and Jonathan. (1 Sam. 18:1-2)
 - 1) Theirs is a classic example of friendship.
 - 2) Their love for and confidence in one another is a lesson for any who would have friends.
 - b. Paul and Timothy developed a liking for and a confidence in one another. (2 Tim. 1:3-5)
 4. The term means the same today—our close friends are those whom we love and are dear to us.
 - a. Not only do we love them but if they are friends then they hold us dear and love us.
 - b. We should be grateful often for those who consider us their friends.
- C. Friends fall into two categories: good and bad.
1. Good friends are those who are not just good to us but good for us.
 2. We need to be careful not to choose friends who will lead us astray or allow our children to choose friends who will lead them to evil for peer pressure is great.

III. Peer Pressure

- A. The young seem particularly concerned with the need for approval from their peers.
- B. Why peers can pressure us.
1. God made man a social creature, not a loner. (Gen. 2:18)
 - a. He needs another to fully complete himself—he needed a peer to fulfill his social needs.
 - b. A “peer” is one regarded as having equal standing.
 2. It is natural for man to love his own flesh (Eph. 5:28-29) and to love a consenting opinion from those of like flesh.
- C. Since God made man with a desire for social approval, He also gave Him a standard upon which to give and receive that approval.
1. As long as approval is given and withheld based upon God’s approval, the innate societal needs of man serve him well.
 2. But as with all other God-given human desires, man can choose to fulfill that desire to his harm.
 - a. By refusing to fully accept God’s standard of “good”:
 - 1) Eve sinned then exerted pressure, as a peer, and invited Adam to become like her.
 - 2) Adam chose her approval rather than God’s.
 - b. Eve and Adam began a societal pressure which works contrary to the good of man.

- D. How to deal with a nature that yearns for approval in a society which would destroy you.
1. You must realize that as long as you live in the world its pressures will be upon you. (Rom. 12:1-2)
 2. You must recognize and accept our innate need for approval and begin to look for sanctified ways to receive it.
 - a. Your approval from others should be sought from those who first seek God's approval.
 - b. Even in matters of indifference or opinion, caution must be exercised.
 - 1) Some things, though not wrong in and of themselves, can lead to things that are wrong or can cause others to stumble.
 - 2) On the other hand, there is no merit in being different just for the sake of it.
 3. Though the world exerts a great deal of pressure on you, as a Christian you have a greater pressure at your disposal—Jesus Christ. (1 John 4:4)

IV. Some Guidelines in Choosing Friends

- A. Apply the principle of 1 Corinthians 15:33.
- B. Realize it is better to have a few friends, even just one, who will be the right kind than to have a multitude of the kind who would cause you to lose your soul. (Matt. 16:26)
- C. Choose friends who will be good examples to you and others (It is best to have Christians as your friends.). Choose those who:
 1. Have good morals (1 Cor. 15:33) and whose standard of morality is the word of God.
 2. Are modest. (1 Tim. 2:9)
 3. Abstain from alcohol and strong drink. (1 Pet. 4:3)
 4. Can bridle the tongue. (Jas. 1:26)
 5. Are honest. (Luke 8:15)
 6. Are law-abiding. (Rom. 13:1-7)
- D. Select friends who respect God and things spiritual, who regard spiritual things as more important than material things.
 1. A true friend is one who will strengthen you spiritually and draw you closer to God. (Prov. 27:17)
 2. When a godly friend sees error in your life, he will not hesitate to admonish you.
 - a. Some people get upset when confronted with the truth but those who desire to live for the Lord will rejoice in the fact that another cares for their soul.
 - b. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." (Prov. 27:6)
 - c. "Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend does so by hearty counsel." (Prov. 27:9)
 3. Never be deceived into thinking you can choose otherwise and not be affected.

Conclusion

1. Friends are priceless. (Prov. 18:24) We should thank God daily for the friends we have.
 - a. No amount of money could be enough to replace true friends, especially Christians.
 - b. We can rejoice in their faithfulness and delight in being around them.
2. May the day never come when we do not have friends.
3. Let us all be friends of Jesus.
 - a. We must meet the standard of friendship He has set down. (John 15:14)
 - b. As our friend, He will never forsake us or let us down in any way.

Use Your Talents Wisely

Introduction

1. Immediately after the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), we find Jesus giving the parable of the talents. (Matt. 25:14-30)
 - a. Both parables relate to the kingdom of heaven, and especially in anticipation of the Lord's return, but there are some differences.
 - 1) The parable of the virgins stresses the need to be *prepared*; the parable of the talents stresses the need to be productive.
 - 2) The first emphasizes *watching* for the Lord; the latter, *working* for Him.
 - b. In both parables we learn what should characterize those who eagerly wait for the coming of the Lord.
2. In this lesson we are going to apply what Jesus is teaching in this parable so that we might learn to use our "talents" wisely.

I. The Parable Analyzed

- A. A man, about to go on a journey, distributes his goods ("talents") among his servants. (Matt. 25:14-15)
 1. A "talent" here is a monetary measure, amounting to 6000 denarii, which would take an ordinary laborer twenty years to earn.
 2. The "talents" were given "to each according to his own ability."
- B. The use made of the talents is described. (Matt. 25:16-18)
 1. Two of the servants doubled their talents (money).
 2. One servant simply hid the money. (cf. Matt. 13:44)
 - a. This might seem strange to us, but it was a common occurrence.
 - b. They did not have financial institutions such as we know them, so ordinary people used the ground as the safest place to keep money.
 - c. A man's garden might at anytime become a battleground. Palestine was probably the most fought over country in the world.
- E. The lord of the servants returns and a reckoning is made. (Matt. 25:19-30)
 1. His return was after "a long time."
 2. The first two servants describe how they doubled their money.
 - a. They stand before the lord with excitement (implied in "look").
 - b. Their lord was pleased and praises them for their work.
 - c. He commends them both as a "good and faithful servant."
 - d. He rewards them by promoting them: "you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things."
 - e. He invites them to share in his happiness: "Enter into the joy of your lord."

3. The servant who hid his money then faces his lord. (Matt. 25:24-30)
 - a. He begins by making excuses. (vv. 24-25)
 - b. He seeks to appease the lord by returning what he had been given. (v. 25)
 - c. The lord calls him a “wicked and lazy servant” and tells him at least he should have “deposited my money with the bankers.” (vv. 26-27)
 - d. He takes away what he had, and gave it to the servant with ten talents, with an explanation. (vv. 28-29)
 - e. He has the “unprofitable servant” cast “into the outer darkness” where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (v. 30)

II. The Lessons of This Parable

- A. We are to be faithful in using the opportunities which the Lord has given us.
- B. Diligence is rewarded while negligence is punished.
- C. Whatever we have, whether abilities or opportunities, belong to God. We may possess, but God owns. We are simply stewards. (Matt. 25:14)
- D. The Lord grants opportunities for service in keeping with our ability to make use of them. (Matt. 25:15)
 1. In the day of judgment, the number of “talents” will not matter.
 2. The question will be, “Have you been faithful in your use of those you had been granted?”
- E. Jesus did not expect to return immediately. (cf. Matt. 25:5)
- F. Everything we do should be done with a view of the day of reckoning which is coming! (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10)
- G. Our responsibilities here and now are important, but they will be surpassed by those in the life hereafter. (cf. Rev. 22:3-5)
- H. We will share in the Master’s own joy. (cf. 2 Thes. 1:10-12)
- I. Those who make excuses are “wicked and lazy” servants. (Matt. 25:25-26)
- J. Punishment is reserved for unprofitable servants. (Matt. 13:41-42)
- K. Sins committed by neglect are as bad as those committed by overt acts.
 1. Evil doers will experience everlasting punishment. (Matt. 13:41-42)
 2. The same punishment will be meted out to those who do nothing. (Matt. 25:30)
- L. Many are the lessons that can be gleaned from this parable, but the main lesson is very simple: Be productive when and where the Lord has given you ability and opportunity.

III. The Example of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)

- A. This man had been greatly blessed by God.
 1. Because of his wealth and industry, the people who knew him would have respected him and considered him wise.
 2. God called him a “fool.”
- B. Though he possessed great wealth, industry and opportunity, he had failed to use any of it in relation to spiritual things.

1. He gave no thought to others. (vv. 17-19)
2. He gave no thought to God or his soul. (vv. 20-21; cf. Matt. 16:26)
- C. When death came upon him, he was not prepared to face God.
 1. He had done nothing for God.
 2. He had neglected to wisely use the opportunities that God had given him.

IV. The Use of Our Abilities as God Grants Opportunity

- A. Remember that not all Christians have the same “talents” (opportunities).
 1. The *number* of the opportunities may be different.
 - a. Some may have more opportunities than others.
 - b. The Lord gives “to each one according to his own ability.”
 2. The *nature* of the opportunities may be different.
 - a. Paul made this clear in Romans 12:3-8.
 - b. Some teach, others serve. (cf. Acts 6:2)
 - c. We have “gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.”
- B. Some abilities are easier to determine than others.
 1. In some cases our abilities are evident, but some abilities might at first be “hidden” (both from us and others).
 2. Some abilities may therefore lie dormant, awaiting awakening.
- C. How we can determine our abilities.
 1. Through trial and error.
 2. Try different areas of service to see which ones might come naturally.
 3. Try different areas of service again and again for some abilities may only develop through hard work.
 4. Other people can often see our strengths and weaknesses better than we can ourselves. (Prov. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22; 19:20)
 5. Through such personal diligence and advice from others, one can gain insight into the abilities and opportunities that the Lord has given him or her.

Conclusion

1. The Lord has given all of us abilities in which to serve Him.
 - a. One day, He is coming again and there will be a reckoning.
 - b. If we are going to be prepared, we need to be productive.
2. Are you productive? Or are you like the “wicked and lazy servant?”
 - a. Will the Lord say to you: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord?”
 - b. Or will He say: “You wicked and lazy servant” and consign you to the place of torment?
3. What He will say *then* depends upon your service in the kingdom *now*.

Grow In Christ Every Day

Introduction

1. When one becomes a child of God:
 - c. He is born again spiritually (John 3:1-5), a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - d. He is a spiritual babe who is to grow. (1 Pet. 2:1-2; 2 Pet. 3:18)
2. The process of growth is as essential in the spiritual realm as in the physical. One grows spiritually by:
 - a. Feeding upon the word of God. (Acts 20:32)
 - b. Developing a spiritual appetite in order to hunger and thirst after righteousness. (Matt. 5:6)
3. The goal of spiritual growth is *perfection*. (Heb. 6:1)
 - a. *Teleios*: maturity, completeness, entire, fully developed.
 - b. The Christian is to grow to be like Christ, the perfect Son of God. (Col. 3:10)
4. With respect to growth as a Christian, there are two classes: mature and immature.
 - a. Some are immature because of the fact they are recent converts or novices. (1 Tim. 3:6)
 - b. Others have failed to grow because of neglect or indifference. (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:9-14)

I. The Christian: A New Creation

- A. Many changes are to occur in his life when a person becomes a Christian.
 1. He is to put away the old man and put on the new. (Col. 3:9-10)
 2. God expects him to grow to be the mature Christian he should be in Christ.
 3. He is not to remain like the world in his thoughts and actions.
- B. Some of the changes that take place when one becomes Christian.
 1. He changes from a carnal person to a spiritual person.
 - a. "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6; cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-3)
 - b. This is a change of *mind* brought about by faith. (Rom. 10:17; 1 Cor. 2:9ff)
 - 1) Faith prompts one to have the mind of Christ. (Phil. 2:5)
 - 2) Faith causes one to recognize the superiority of God's thoughts. (Isa. 55:8-9)
 - 3) Faith leads one to a willingness to be led by the Spirit. (Rom. 8:14)
 2. He changes from a person who loves the world to one who loves God.
 - a. The Christian must not love the world. (1 John 2:15-17; Jas. 4:4; Matt. 22:37)
 - b. This is a change of *affection* brought about by God's love. (1 John 4:8, 10, 19)
 3. He changes from a person who follows man's ways and becomes one who follows God's way.
 - a. He realizes he cannot direct his own way so he depends on God's word for directions. (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12; Isa. 55 8-9)
 - b. This is a change of *will* brought about by repentance. (Acts 17:30; 2 Pet. 3:9)

4. He changes from a person who is a friend of the world to one who becomes God's friend.
 - a. One cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God at the same time. (Jas. 4:4)
 - b. This is a change of *allegiance* brought about by confessing Christ. (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10; Matt. 10:32-33)
5. A child of the devil becomes a child of God.
 - a. It is obvious that a person cannot be both at the same time. (John 8:44; 1 John 3:3)
 - b. This is a change in *relationship* that takes place in baptism. (Gal. 3:26-27)
6. One who is a citizen of the power of darkness becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God's Son.
 - a. One is delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God. (Col. 1:13-14; cf. John 12:46; Acts 26:15-18; 1 Pet. 2:9)
 - b. This is a change of *citizenship* brought about by a translation.

II. Measuring Spiritual Growth

- A. As has already been seen, one is to grow spiritually. (2 Pet. 3:18)
 1. Many ask, though, "How can we measure that growth?" "What standards should be employed to gauge that growth?"
 2. As always, the Bible supplies the standards one needs to measure whether or not he is growing the way God would have him to grow.
- B. The "Christian graces." (2 Pet. 1:5-11)
 1. In order to grow as you should, these must be added to your faith.
 - a. They must be incorporated into your life as a Christian because they serve as the foundation upon which to build the rest of your life.
 - b. To properly add them to your life, you must know what they are and why you need them.
 2. Things to be added to one's faith.
 - a. Virtue. The determination to do right.
 - b. Knowledge. Knowledge of the word of God for it tells you what is right.
 - c. Self-control. Application of that knowledge to your life.
 - d. Perseverance. Remaining steadfast to the Lord and His cause.
 - e. Godliness. Being like God, as He would have you to be.
 - f. Brotherly kindness. Tender affection toward brethren in Christ.
 - g. Love.
 - 1) Devotion to God, Christ and your fellow man.
 - 2) It is expressed in obedience to God which causes you to be of service to all.

3. If you are maturing as you should, these things should be abounding in your life.
 - a. If you lack these things, you are blind as to what your life in Christ should be about.
 - b. These things, though, do not come easily. It takes “diligence” on your part.
- C. The fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:16-25)
1. “The Spirit produces fruit by so ruling in and controlling man that it subdues and holds in restraint all the evil passions and lusts that dwell in the flesh, and develops into activity and life the germs of the spiritual life in man.” (David Lipscomb, *Gospel Advocate Commentary on Second Corinthians and Galatians*, p. 270)
 2. The fruit of the Spirit is:
 - a. Love. For God and neighbor, the underlying principle of all. (Matt. 22:36-40)
 - b. Joy. Not based on externals rather “the delight of love satisfied.”
 - c. Peace. With God that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7), peace of the soul.
 - d. Longsuffering. To bear with the mistakes and wrongs which grow out of weaknesses, infirmities and even the evil designs of others.
 - e. Kindness. Gentle toward all, returning good for evil.
 - f. Goodness. Kindly activity for the true good of others.
 - g. Faithfulness. Complete trust and confidence in God.
 - h. Gentleness (meekness). A quiet, forbearing spirit that suffers wrong without resentment but with a firmness and unyielding devotion to right.
 - i. Self-control. Restraining of all passions and desires within the limits of the divine standard.
- D. Other marks of maturity found in Scripture.
1. The ability to take “solid food.” (Heb. 5:14)
 - a. The example of the Corinthians. (1 Cor. 3:1-3)
 - b. This ability is obtained by study and application.
 2. The ability to discern good and evil. (Heb. 5:14)
 3. The ability to control one’s tongue. (Jas. 3:2)
 4. Love for one’s enemies. (Matt. 5:48)
 5. A realization of one’s own imperfections. (Phil. 3:11-15)
 6. If one has gone, sold and followed: If Christ is his all. (Matt. 19:21)

Conclusion

1. We must strive to be mature Christians and have these marks evident in our lives.
2. Christianity is matter of constant growth and application.
3. How do you measure up? Are you growing as a Christian?
4. If you keep reading, studying and applying the word of God with diligent effort and a great deal of prayer, you will become complete, mature and perfect in Christ.



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