

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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## NEW YEAR'S PRIORITIES: HOW TO FIND SECURITY

How are we to order our lives?" asks B.B. Warfield in his masterful handling of our text. "How are we to provide for our households--or, for our own bodily wants? Is it true that we can trust the eternal welfare of our souls to God and cannot trust to Him the temporal welfare of our bodies? Is it true that He has provided salvation for us at the tremendous cost of the death of His Son, and will not provide food for us to eat and clothes for us to wear at the cost of the directive word that speaks and it is done? Is it true that we can stand by the bedside of our dying friend and send him forth into eternity in good confidence in God, and cannot send that same friend forth into the world with any confidence that God will keep him there?"<sup>1</sup> One of our well-known contemporary Bible expositors picks up on this refrain and says, "We all have to admit that worry is a common temptation in life. It is a favorite pastime for many. It can occupy one's thoughts for a great portion of the day. However, worry cruelly inflicts a severe toll. But far beyond the need to avoid its psychological and physiological effects is the reality that Jesus commands us not to do it, thus making it clear that worry is a sin. The Christian who worries is really saying, "God, I know You mean well by what You say, but I'm not sure You can pull it off." Anxiety is blatant distrust of the power and love of God. In spite of its lack of subtlety, we fall into it so easily and so often"<sup>2</sup>

**THE CONTEXT:** Beginning in 6:19, Jesus warns his disciples about the folly of pursuing earthly treasure and seeking to serve two masters. The great question that confronts us here is this: what is our ultimate concern? What is it that we live for? What is *distinctive* Christian living? "Jesus' disciples must live lives qualitatively different from those of people who have no trust in God's fatherly care and no fundamental goals beyond material things."<sup>3</sup>

### I. OUR LORD'S APPEAL

6:33 begins with the positive counterpart to the negative warnings of 6:25, 28 and 31. The language of the text serves to indicate an action (*seek first*). This priority is not one that merely tops the list but actually governs everything else in our lives.

A. **Seek.** This word ΖΕΤΕΩ has a fairly wide range of meaning, but it primarily means to actively pursue or strive after (note v. 32 where the pagans are said "to run after" these things. The word is ΕΠΙΖΕΤΟΥ a strengthened form of ΖΕΤΕΩ). The term underscores not simply an activity but an attitude. Christ's disciples are to be controlled by this mind set and are to be driven in pursuit of one ultimate quest.

### II. OUR LORD'S PROMISE

If we do seek first and foremost His Kingdom and righteousness then He will *add* all these things. The righteousness spoken of in this text has reference not to justification but to the pursuit of righteousness of life (as in Matt. 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1) in full submission to the will of God. Anything less than this is considered by Jesus to be pagan--i.e. to be ambitious only for personal interest.

A. **Things Given.** Our text promises that God will *add* (ΠΡΟΣΤΙΘΕΜΙ) provisionally those material

things that we have need of. A word of caution is needed here. The text does not say, as Warfield points out “‘and all these things shall be your reward.’ It does not propose to pay us for seeking God’s Kingdom and righteousness by giving us earthly things. It says: ‘and all these things shall be added unto you.’ The Greek word is not the word for pay, reward, but for the small gratuitous addition to the promised wages, given as we should say ‘in the bargain.’ The worldly goods that come to us are in a word here represented not as our reward, but as something ‘in the bargain.’ The appeal of the passage is made to rest elsewhere; that is, in the contrast between goods earthly and goods heavenly.”<sup>4</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** There is a very real danger that we face as Christians and that is the danger of living like practical atheists. The Bible describes the folly of the person who *says* “there is no God” (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). Practical atheism does not *say* there is no God. Rather the practical atheist *lives* as if there were no God. The practical atheist is guilty of the heinous sin of forgetting the God it professes to believe in. This, I say again, is a grave danger we all face. “How prone we are to limit and circumscribe the sphere in which we practically allow for God! We feel His presence and activity in some things but not in others; we seek His blessing in some matters but not in others; we look for His guidance in some affairs but not in others; we can trust Him in some crises and with some of our hopes but not in or with others. This too is a practical atheism. And it is against all such practical atheism that our passage enters its protest. It protests against men living as if they were the builders of their own houses, the architects of their own fortunes. It protests against men reckoning in anything without God”<sup>5</sup>

I close with these words of wisdom from Lee Irons, a friend and graduate from Westminster Seminary.

“Whether or not you are into new year’s resolutions, consider making this year a year in which you develop a closer relationship with Christ. By that I don’t (merely) mean that you will study the Bible more, attend church more faithfully, work on some besetting sin, or strive to be a better father/mother, husband/wife, employee/boss, etc. These are all good and necessary things, but a person can do them and still not be any closer to Christ. Moralism is not a substitute for spirituality. By developing a closer relationship with Christ I mean talking with him about your life, your problems, your anxieties, and your hopes. Laying before him your difficult relationships. Appealing to him for strength in the battle for personal holiness and for fulfilling your responsibilities. Asking him to guide you in your decisions. Reaching out to him in your times of need.

Personal Bible reading and attendance on the public means of grace play a role in this, for it is as you get to know Christ better through the word and sacraments that you grow in Christ. You can only have a personal relationship with someone you know, and you can only know who Jesus is through the Scriptures. But – it is possible for someone to know a lot of doctrinal facts about Christ and yet not have a living relationship with him. As Reformed people that is a constant danger for all of us. We are always in danger of becoming Pharisees, a people who honors the Lord with our lips, but our hearts are far from him (Matt. 15:8).”<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Faith & Life* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust 1990), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> J. MacArthur, Jr., *Anxiety Attacked: Applying Scripture to the Cares of the Soul* (Victor, 1993), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew: The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> Warfield, op.cit. p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.upper-register.com/blog/Jan. 1, 2008>.