

KINGDOM LIVING
(The Commands of Christ)
a blog series by Curtis Sergeant

2016

Commands of Christ

1. Live by God's every word, not merely by food.
2. Do not put God to the test.
3. Worship and serve God alone.
4. Make my house a house of prayer for the nations and do not make it into a market or a den of thieves.
5. You must be born again.
6. Repent and believe the good news.
7. Go and learn what it means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."
8. Do not be amazed at My authority.
9. Rejoice when you are persecuted for My sake.
10. Let your good deeds bring glory to God.
11. Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or Prophets. I came to fulfill them.
12. Do not be angry with a brother.
13. Reconcile before you pray.
14. Lust is adultery. Radically protect yourself from it.
15. Do not divorce. Do not separate what God has joined together.
16. Do not swear.
17. Do not resist evil people who abuse you.
18. Give to the one who asks. Do not turn away from those who want to borrow. If someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back.
19. Love your enemies.
20. Take care not to do your righteous deeds in order to receive glory from men.
21. Pray like this...
22. Do not hoard treasures on earth, but in heaven.
23. Do not worry about your life or food or clothing but seek God's Kingdom and righteousness.
24. Do not judge.
25. Deal with your own sin before judging another.
26. Do to others as you would have them do to you.
27. Enter through the narrow gate.
28. Beware of false prophets.
29. Do not give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls to swine.
30. Ask, seek and knock in prayer.
31. Be merciful and perfect as your heavenly Father is merciful and perfect.
32. Forgive and you will be forgiven.
33. Listen! (Usually in reference to one of His teachings or parables.)
34. Give and it will be given to you, abundantly.
35. Take care what you listen to and what you do with it.
36. Come to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.
37. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.
38. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, drive out demons.
39. Proclaim that the kingdom of God is near.
40. Freely you have received. Freely give.
41. Shake the dust off your feet where no one receives you or listens to you.
42. Go, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, so be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.
43. Do not worry about your defense when you are arrested for My sake.
44. Do not fear man, but fear God.
45. What I speak to you quietly, announce loudly.

46. Do not think that I came to establish peace on earth.
47. Look up and see the fields ripe for harvest.
48. Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures eternally.
49. Look out for the teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees.
50. Anyone who wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.
51. Become like children.
52. Do not hinder anyone just because they are not in your group.
53. Resist temptation radically.
54. Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.
55. Deal with a brother who sins.
56. Forgive 70 times 7 times.
57. Do not judge by appearances, but judge justly.
58. Come to Me and drink.
59. Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.
60. Do not rejoice at power over demons, but over eternal life.
61. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.
62. Be generous to the poor.
63. Beware of all greed.
64. Do not fear.
65. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.
66. Be ready and watching for My return.
67. Humble yourself.
68. Exalt the humble and serve them.
69. Use temporal wealth for eternal purposes.
70. When you have done all you were asked to, say, "we are unprofitable slaves, we have only done our duty."
71. Remember Lot's wife and do not try to preserve your life.
72. Be wholesome in your speech.
73. Let children come to Jesus and do not despise them.
74. Keep the commandments.
75. Serve others.
76. Have faith in God.
77. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.
78. Beware of the scribes and do not imitate them.
79. Watch out that no false Christ deceives you.
80. When you see signs of my return, do not be terrified, but take heart.
81. Be alert for My return.
82. Follow and serve Me.
83. Love each other.
84. Take, eat, drink. Do this in remembrance of Me.
85. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and in Me.
86. Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.
87. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.
88. Remain in Me and in My love so you can keep My commands and vice versa.
89. Pray in My Name.
90. Take courage.
91. Receive the Holy Spirit.
92. Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.
93. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all My commands.
94. Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Kingdom Living

I am going to start a series of blog posts on the commands of Christ. This is an exceedingly important topic. In fact, the Great Commission describes the process of making disciples as baptizing people and *teaching them to obey all Christ commanded*. There are a number of lists of the commands of Christ. I will add one more. This series of posts will primarily be based on my list.

Perhaps the most well-known list of the commands of Christ summarizes them in just seven commands. I feel there is value, however, in a more complete look at the topic. If we want the simplest list possible then we should probably just limit ourselves to the Great Commandment (and the Second) as Jesus did. If we love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourselves then all the other commands will be fulfilled. In fact, Jesus equated loving Him with obeying Him. That is another way we can look at it.

Obedience to the commands of Christ has nothing to do with legalism or with somehow earning salvation. It is the response of our grateful heart in love to the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. It is done in the power of the Holy Spirit Whom He has given us. It is evidence of our new life in Him. It is the expression of our love for Him. As it says in **1 John 5:3**, “this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.” It is not an onerous duty but an overflow of loving gratitude.

Christ is our King. His desire is our aim. He has specific plans for what He wants to do in us in conforming us to His image. He has specific plans for what He wants to do through us as we are told in **Ephesians 2:10**: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” We want to please Him. We want His will to be done. That is what life in the Kingdom is all about. Kingdom living is about seeing His will done on earth as it is in heaven. That starts with obeying Jesus’ commands.

Luke 10:25-28 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 6:9-10 “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...”

Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

John 14:15 “If you love me, keep my commands.”

The Commands of Christ

Many people have compiled lists of the commands of Christ. There are actually a lot of “judgment calls” that are required to do so. You need to make some decisions about whether He was making a generalized command or a specifically limited command that was only applicable to the specific person in the specific situation. There are many places where He gives a command which is clearly aimed at a specific situation but there is evidence from other Scriptures that the command can and often does have broader application. There are also commands that were given multiple times in different contexts and one must determine whether to count that as a single command or multiple commands. One must also decide whether or not to include passages where Jesus is quoting the Old Testament.

With all that said, I have made my own list. It has 94 commands.

Why have so many people (including me) gone to the trouble to make such a list? I cannot speak for everyone, but I (and I suspect many others) have done it because of Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission. In that verse, Jesus commands His followers to make disciples. There are several participles in that verse in addition to the primary (imperative) verb. In one of those participial phrases, Jesus describes the act of making disciples as including “teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.” In other words, every follower of Christ is to seek to get others to follow Jesus, and that includes getting them to obey all His commands. Since that is the case, it is pretty important that we have a clear idea of exactly what His commands are.

A German friend of mine, Wolfgang Simson, compiled his own list. He describes it as “the constitution of the Kingdom (of God).” I believe that is a helpful way to think of it. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is King. His commands are the constitution, the laws, the principles, the standards, the practices for living in that Kingdom. With that in mind, I am starting a series of blog posts which look at the commands of Christ. You may differ with me on the inclusion of some of the commands. That is fine, but don’t lose the larger narrative that **our lives should be characterized by what Jesus commanded AND as His followers we should be getting others to love (and thus obey) Him as well. This is not optional or for extra credit. It is the very essence of what it means to be His follower.**

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

Commands of Christ: 1

Live by God’s every word, not merely by food.

Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” Luke 4:4

He said in reply, “It is written: ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4

This has many implications. For starters, it implies that God is speaking to us and that we need to be listening to Him. This requires intentionality on our parts. It implies that this listening needs to be a continual state and that our very lives depend on it. This is a deep subject, but rather than write voluminously on it, I will simply refer to some relevant Scriptures:

“Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” John 8:47

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:27-28

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.” John 16:13-14

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Romans 8:14

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. 1 John 2:3-6

Commands of Christ: 2

Do not put God to the test.

Jesus said to him in reply, "It also says, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" Luke 4:12

Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.'" Matthew 4:7

We are not to go off in pursuit of anything, including the Kingdom, and expect the Lord to bail us out. If He leads us into a risky situation, we are to enter it willing to sacrifice everything and risk anything. He may choose to deliver us for His glory. He may choose to let us suffer and sacrifice and die for His glory. Difficult situations are meant to be a test of us and not of God.

Commands of Christ: 3

Worship and serve God alone.

Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'" Luke 4:8

At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.'" Matthew 4:10

Whom or what are you living for? How do you decide how to spend your life, time, energy, money, and other resources? What is your motive for life? Your purpose? If the answer is anything except God, then that is the wrong answer.

Commands of Christ: 4

Make my house a house of prayer for the nations and do not make it into a market or a den of thieves.

And he said to them, "It is written: 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of thieves." Matthew 21:13

Then he taught them saying, "Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'? But you have made it a den of thieves." Mark 11:17

And to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." John 2:16

It is one thing to recover expenses when charging for goods and services related to the Kingdom, but there is a lot of profit made through the sale of "spiritual" products. I believe we should be VERY careful about this. All we have, all our knowledge and insight and experience and resources are from God. Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:8b) It is also a severe indictment that the VAST majority of the income of the Church is spent on herself in one way or another. That is in addition to a tremendous amount of graft.

Commands of Christ: 5

You must be born again.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?" Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.' John 3:3-7

This is obviously not something that can be achieved by human effort. This is by the will and power of God. The Holy Spirit is the means and the evidence of this new birth. The life of the Kingdom cannot be lived through the flesh. The indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit is the gift that keeps on giving. We must enter the Kingdom by Him and live the Kingdom life by Him. The fruit of the Spirit and one or more gifts of the Spirit will be evidence of it.

Commands of Christ: 6

Repent and believe the good news.

From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4:17

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:15

The Kingdom of God has come to earth through Jesus. His work in restoring creation is now in process. He has begun the process of seeing His work done again on earth as it is in heaven. He commands us to voluntarily change our minds and our lives to allegiance to Him and alignment with His reign. This is good news. He will right all wrongs. He will fix all that is broken. He gives us the opportunity to join Him in ruling the renewed world forever. Our only alternative is to continue in our brokenness and, in the end, be forced to acknowledge His rule and face punishment as His enemies.

Commands of Christ: 7

Go and learn what it means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

“Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” Matthew 9:13

Jesus said this in explanation to why He was spending time ministering to the despised tax collectors rather than “good” people. Those who recognize they are not good and cannot be good and respond to Jesus’ offer to make them good are why He came. He doesn’t want people to cover their brokenness with religious activity without affecting the heart. Instead, he wants them to be changed by His grace and then to offer that same grace to others. He wants humble hearts which in gratitude show mercy to others in the same way they were shown mercy.

Commands of Christ: 8

Do not be amazed at My authority.

Truly, truly, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation. John 5:24-29

Jesus had been explaining that the healings He was performing and, indeed, all His activities were sanctioned and even commanded by God the Father. The Father had given Jesus all authority, including the authority to judge all people who ever lived. He had authority to condemn and punish and authority to justify and reward. He had authority to give life, not just temporarily but eternally. Therefore, we must not be surprised at anything He does. God has given Him all authority.

Commands of Christ: 9

Rejoice when you are persecuted for My sake.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way. Luke 6:22-23

In a broken world, up is down. In the present world, still awaiting full restoration and redemption, aligning ourselves with the righteous and good King of all creation will result in being hated and mistreated. This is actually a good sign. We need to rejoice in such treatment for His sake. It will result in eternal reward that far outweighs our temporary suffering. It demonstrates we are on the right side.

Commands of Christ: 10

Let your good deeds bring glory to God.

Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:16

As children of the good God, we must display His character and be good as well. This will result in good deeds. These must be done in such a way as to glorify our heavenly Father and not to bring attention to ourselves. He is the source of our goodness and must be acknowledged as such.

Commands of Christ: 11

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or Prophets. I came to fulfill them.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:17-20

God’s revelation of Himself and His will in the Old Testament was not abrogated by Jesus. Instead it was amplified, and clarified, and made possible by Jesus. Just knowing about these things is not enough. They must consume us. We can now have intimacy with God and know Him from within and hear Him constantly through His Spirit. We can not just know about His ways but actually live in them through the power of His Spirit.

Commands of Christ: 12

Do not be angry with a brother.

“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Matthew 5:21-22

This is one of those passages that brings to mind the famous Mark Twain quote: “It’s not the parts of the Bible that I don’t understand that bother me. It’s the parts I do understand.” It is very clear. As James puts it in James 1:19-20: “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

Commands of Christ: 13

Reconcile before you pray.

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny. Matthew 5:23-26

It can be easy to forget that our relationship with God has a lot to do with our relationship with others. In fact, it is difficult to separate the two. As John says in 1 John 2:9-11: “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.” Let us do all we can to live at peace with others so our prayers may be unhindered.

As Paul says in Romans 12:17-19: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.”

Commands of Christ: 14

Lust is adultery. Radically protect yourself from it.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. Matthew 5:27-30

In our day pornography has become an epidemic. There may have never been a time when this command has been more ignored. If we are followers of Christ then we need to look at people as Christ did. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 5:1-2: “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”

Commands of Christ: 15

Do not divorce. Do not separate what God has joined together.

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.’ But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Matthew 5:31-32

Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” They said to him, “Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?” He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.” Matthew 19:3-9

But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” In the house the disciples again questioned him about this. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” Mark 10:6-12

Marriage is not an agreement of convenience. It is a solemn vow before God. Divorce is rampant in society today. It is either because we do not understand marriage or because we do not respect God or both. His intention and command are clear. If there is a divorce then the parties should remain unmarried until the spouse dies.

Commands of Christ: 16

Do not swear.

“Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all; not by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make a single hair white or black. Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one. Matthew 5:33-37

We need more people who are like those described in Psalm 15:4b, “who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind”. Unfortunately, it seems there are few people who are that trustworthy. Worse, it tends to be the least reliable people who are most likely to announce their steadfastness. Jesus says not to be like that. Let your word be enough and make sure it is, whatever the cost.

Commands of Christ: 17

Do not resist evil people who abuse you.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand him your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Matthew 5:38-41

This is one of the commands I struggle the most with. It just seems wrong. That is evidence that the Lord still has work to do on conforming me to the image of Christ. It’s a good thing Jesus demonstrated this for us or else He wouldn’t have died on the cross.

Commands of Christ: 18

Give to the one who asks. Do not turn away from those who want to borrow. If someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back.

Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow. Matthew 5:42

Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours, do not demand it back. Luke 6:30

But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Luke 6:35

This command is somewhat difficult with friends. With enemies? He must be kidding! This is another one of those commands we should be extremely grateful that Christ modeled for us. In Romans 5:7-8 we read: “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” In light of that, surely we can part with physical

goods to demonstrate we are His children and give a bit of the love He has lavished on us.

Commands of Christ: 19

Love your enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:43-48

“But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Luke 6:27-29

For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Luke 6:32-35

Wow. That pretty much redefines who an enemy is. It is not someone you hate, because there are no such people if you are truly a Christ-follower. It is someone who hates you. You are loving to everyone equally, just as the Lord is. This reminds me of a quote from Amy Carmichael. (I don’t hate it because it isn’t true. I hate it because it is true and it’s convicting.) “No matter how suddenly you jar a bowl of sweet water, no bitter water will ever spill out.”

Commands of Christ: 20

Take care not to do your righteous deeds in order to receive glory from men.

“But take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When

you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.” Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

The Lord wants us to do righteous deeds, but he is equally concerned that we do them with the right motive. The right motive is that the glory and honor go to Him. Giving to others, prayer, and fasting are all wonderful things, but only if they are done to please and glorify God and not to benefit us or build up our own reputation. The same thing can be said for all sorts of “good deeds” and ministry. In the very next chapter, Jesus makes it clear that there will be plenty of people prophesying and casting out demons and doing miracles in His name whom He does not know or recognize. The heart is deceitful and wicked. We would do well to watch our motives in all we do, including all we are purportedly doing for the Lord.

Commands of Christ: 21

Pray like this...

“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. “This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our

debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Matthew 6:5-13

He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to temptation." Luke 11:2-4

Jesus commanded us to pray. Not any or every prayer will do. There are ways we can pray that will not please Him. We are to pray with right motives. We are to pray thoughtfully. We are to pray in ways that acknowledge God's holiness and fatherhood, and in submission to His will and ways. We are to pray for our needs and forgiveness and protection. Jesus taught elsewhere about prayer as well. Of course Jesus also modeled prayer. Perhaps the most complete understanding of prayer is that it is our communication with God, both speaking and listening. It is something we should be engaged in as a way of life, constantly aware of His presence and alert for His desires and will and purposes in every situation.

Commands of Christ: 22

Do not hoard treasures on earth, but in heaven.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be. No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Matthew 6:19-24

Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be. Luke 12:33-34

This command has two parts. First, we are not to hoard treasures on earth. This is not what we are taught in the world. We are taught that for our own security and comfort we must save up however much we will need in order to ensure we can maintain ourselves comfortably until our death. The second part of the command is that we are to hoard treasures in heaven. Part of how this is to be done is through giving to others here on earth. Motive and priority have a lot to

do with this. Are we living for God or for ourselves? Are we living for this life or eternity? Do we value earthly treasures or heavenly treasures? Jesus says it is impossible to “sit on the fence” in regard to this matter. We cannot serve both God and wealth.

Commands of Christ: 23

Do not worry about your life or food or clothing but seek God’s Kingdom and righteousness.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your lifespan? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.” Matthew 6:25-34

He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your lifespan? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides.” Luke 12:22-31

This is another two-part command. First, we are not to worry about our temporal needs. God’s character and nature preclude this. If we understand Who He Is, we cannot and will not worry about these things. If we do worry about them, it

reveals we do not know Him as we should. Even the natural world reveals His faithfulness and power. The second part of the command is that we are to seek His Kingdom and righteousness. The fact that we need not pursue our temporal needs is not to result in our indolence and passivity. On the contrary, the knowledge of the Lord and His care for us is intended to free us to focus all our being and efforts and resources on pursuing His will on earth. Our priority as citizens of the eternal Kingdom is to serve the purposes and desires of the King.

Commands of Christ: 24

Do not judge.

“Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to you.” Matthew 7:1-2

“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.” Luke 6:37

Even Jesus, in His earthly life, did not come to judge. (“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.” John 12:46-48). Our task is not to judge. Our task is to obey the Lord and share His words with others. We are not responsible for what others do with that message but we are responsible to share it. This is our role as citizens of the Kingdom of God...not as judge, but as messenger or representative. If we misunderstand our role then we also misunderstand our relationship with God. We demonstrate the reality of our forgiveness when we forgive.

Commands of Christ: 25

Deal with your own sin before judging another.

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove that splinter from your eye,’ while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:3-5

Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,' when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye? You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye. Luke 6:41-42

This can be a challenge for me. I have a habit, at least in my mind, of comparing my strong points with the weak points of others. I want to value and prioritize my strengths and ignore my weaknesses, while doing exactly the converse with others. It might prove to be motivating to bear in mind that the Lord will judge us in the same way we judge others. I need to show grace to others both for their sake and for my own.

Commands of Christ: 26

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31

This is actually one of the most quoted commands of Christ. I often hear it applied as an issue of commission of negative actions rather than omission of positive actions. In other words, I will hear a parent say, "Johnny, you shouldn't hit people. Would you like it if they hit you?" It is perhaps even more challenging if we think of it in positive terms, such as "You should write a note of encouragement to Sue. Wouldn't you like it if someone wrote you a note of encouragement?" Living a life that is pleasing to God is much more than simply avoiding doing bad things. The life of service and love to which we have been called is one of constantly demonstrating love to those we encounter. All of us like to be treated in that way.

Commands of Christ: 27

Enter through the narrow gate.

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few."
Matthew 7:13-14

Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” He answered them, “Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’ Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!’ And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” Luke 13:23-30

There are not many roads to salvation. Only one. Jesus. There are not lots of ways to please Him. He is pretty specific that only those who love Him will be loved by the Father. All those who love Him will obey Him. The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him. I didn’t say those things, He did. He wasn’t talking about earning salvation. He was talking about the evidence that would be demonstrated by those whom were saved. Our righteousness is only in Him and through the life of the Spirit whom He gave us. We are still to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Resting in the Lord does not preclude laboring for His Kingdom. It is hard work. It is impossible work, but He does it for us, through us.

Commands of Christ: 28

Beware of false prophets.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?’ Then I will declare to them solemnly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.’” Matthew 7:15-23

This is one reason Scripture tells us to examine ourselves to see if we are indeed “in the faith.” Many people, not a few, are deluded in thinking they are members

of God's family. We need to examine ourselves and others with whom we interact, especially those who teach or minister in the church. We must not be deluded or led astray by such people. The evidence will be in their lives (and in our lives). They will be doing God's will. We are not doing them or ourselves any favors by ignoring the evidence. If people are not in the Kingdom of God, they need to know it.

Commands of Christ: 29

Do not give what is holy to dogs or throw your pearls to swine.

“Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces.” Matthew 7:6

This is reminiscent of several verses in the book of Proverbs, including the one about not arguing with a fool. It is not good stewardship of our time, energy, or influence. This leads to the converse principle of focusing our efforts on those who are faithful. This is not only for the sake of the faithful but also for the sake of the unfaithful. Scripture clearly teaches that those who are given much have more expected of them. Hence, we are only increasing judgement on those who are not faithful when we give them truth or guidance.

Commands of Christ: 30

Ask, seek and knock in prayer.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.” Matthew 7:7-11

“And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Luke 11:9-13

This is a clear directive to pray persistently, including praying for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Parents enjoy interacting with their children. Parents like it when their provision for their children is not taken for granted, but rather appreciated and acknowledged. God feels the same way. He wants us to continually seek Him.

Commands of Christ: 31

Be merciful and perfect as your heavenly Father is merciful and perfect.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:36

So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48

I am not particularly fond of any passage that talks about how I am to do or be anything at the same standard that God does or is. Those commands make it quite clear that they are impossible to obey. That is the point. In our own ability, these commands are impossible to follow. These can only be obeyed as we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. They can only be followed if Jesus resurrected life is being demonstrated in our (spiritually) crucified bodies. We must not be satisfied with being better than we were yesterday. Anything short of God's perfect standard needs to result in a holy dissatisfaction. We are to be merciful to the same extent God is. We need to be perfect as God is.

Commands of Christ: 32

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.” Luke 6:37

“If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.” Matthew 6:14-15

Jesus knew a thing or two about motivation. I believe He was pretty serious about us paying attention to this command. I am likely to pay attention if a command is directly linked to how I will be treated, especially if it involves my eternal destiny. This is pretty clear. Jesus was not saying we earn our salvation by forgiving others. He was saying that our attitude toward others is an evidence of the attitude that is required to receive forgiveness: humility. If we truly recognize our unworthiness before Him then when we receive His mercy and

grace, we will be grateful. We will also recognize that others deserve mercy and grace just as much as we did, and seek to see that they get it.

Commands of Christ: 33

Listen! (Usually in reference to one of His teachings or parables.)

“Whoever has ears ought to hear.” Matthew 11:15 (about John the Baptist)

“Whoever has ears ought to hear.” Matthew 13:9 (about the parable of the sower)

“Hear then the parable of the sower.” Matthew 13:18 (about the parable of the sower)

“Whoever has ears ought to hear.” Matthew 13:43b (about the parable of the weeds)

He summoned the crowd and said to them, “Hear and understand.” Matthew 15:10 (about teaching on purity)

“Hear another parable.” Matthew 21:33 (about the parable of the tenants)

“Hear this!” Mark 4:3 (about the parable of the sower)

He added, “Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.” Mark 4:9 (about the parable of the sower)

“Anyone who has ears to hear ought to hear.” Mark 4:23 (about the parable of the lamp)

He summoned the crowd again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand.” Mark 7:14 (about teaching on purity)

“Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.” Luke 8:8b (about the parable of the sower)

“Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.” Luke 14:35b (about the cost of discipleship)

If you are a parent or if you have a parent, you are familiar with the pattern of a parent making sure they have the attention of the child before saying something especially important or urgent. It also helps if the parent makes sure they have eye contact with the child when they do so. This is the function of Jesus’ habit of

asking his listeners to pay particular attention as he does in the passages above. For example, the fact that the parable of the sower occurs in all four gospels and in all four the author notes that Jesus called special attention to the parable leads me to think it is especially critical to hear and understand it. Evidently, it is quite important for us to be committed to being good soil and to look for good soil. I would suggest looking carefully at the passages referenced above and then ordering your life accordingly.

Commands of Christ: 34

Give and it will be given to you, abundantly.

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.” Luke 6:38

Clearly, this often doesn't happen until our eternal reward. That actually makes it just that much greater of a promise. This is one of those commands that has a large “carrot” attached. Who wouldn't want to be treated with grace and mercy and generosity? The fact that when we give temporal gifts or benefits we can reap eternal rewards, demonstrates God's character in a marvelous way and gives us a model for how we should treat others.

Commands of Christ: 35

Take care what you listen to and what you do with it.

He also told them, “Take care what you hear. The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you, and still more will be given to you. To the one who has, more will be given; from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” Mark 4:24-25

“Take care, then, how you hear. To anyone who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he seems to have will be taken away.” Luke 8:18

We are evaluated based on what we know. We are accountable to apply what we know and to share it with others. Failure to do so is a serious matter. From those to whom much has been given, much shall be required. (Luke 12:48) This is a valid principle in responsibilities and rewards, such as in the parable of the talents. It is also valid in terms of punishment. (Luke 12:48)

Our own faithfulness is important. It is also good stewardship for us to invest in others who are faithful with what they learn and receive. We are not doing people a favor if we continually “pour into them” if they are not faithfully applying and sharing what they have already learned.

Commands of Christ: 36

Come to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”
Matthew 11:28-30

This is one of the most encouraging commands I have ever heard. Though He is the King of kings, He is not a harsh taskmaster. He is gentle and giving and understanding of our weakness and is there to help. This is contingent on our taking *His* burden, and not our own. It is contingent on our following *His* instruction and *His* way and not our own. Of course, this is best in every conceivable way. He is wiser. He sees the end from the beginning. He made us and knows us better than we know ourselves. He wants the best for us and has the power to make everything work for our good. What a joy to obey this command to come to Him!

Commands of Christ: 37

Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” Matthew 9:37-38

He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.” Luke 10:2

Many of you will have heard of the 10:02 prayer. It is based on Luke 10:2b. It was started back in the 1990’s by a couple of friends of mine in Colorado, Kenny Moore and John White. They were prayer partners and started praying every day at 10:02 for laborers for the harvest wherever they happened to be. Now, due to their faithfulness (and the faithfulness of those they influenced), many thousands of people around the world pray that prayer daily. Many of us set our watch or phone alarms to remind us. It is remarkable how often we see answers to that prayer. This is a wonderful example of how applying what the Lord

teaches us and passing it on to others can change the world. Set your alarm and share this idea with others you encounter. The alarm going off is a great reminder to share the concept with others in your presence.

Commands of Christ: 38

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, drive out demons.

“Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.” Matthew 10:8a

“Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it.” Luke 10:8-9a

These commands were to specific groups of people at specific times, but seem to be somewhat typical of what Jesus’ followers continued to do in later years. His instructions to the seventy in Matthew and to the twelve in Luke provide at least general patterns for us today as we go to new areas to announce the Kingdom of God. These dramatic signs serve to demonstrate the activity of God among men. They show the concern of God for the plight of men and the power of God to do something about it. We are still to demonstrate these truths as we extend the Kingdom of God to every place and people group on earth where He is not known.

Commands of Christ: 39

Proclaim that the kingdom of God is near.

As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Matthew 10:7

Say to them, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you.’ Luke 10:9b

This is another of the commands Jesus gave as He was instructing the seventy and the twelve in these two passages. In many ways, this is the central command for Jesus’ followers in terms of our task here on earth prior to His return. God’s rule, God’s reign, is the good news we are to share everywhere with everyone. His instruction is for our guidance. His purpose is our direction. His character is our aspiration. His desire is our command. His nature is our inspiration. His promise is our hope.

Commands of Christ: 40

Freely you have received. Freely give.

Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. Matthew 10:8b

We didn't earn or pay for God's marvelous grace to us. We are not to charge others or ask them to earn it as we share it with them. Our service is to be a sacrifice of love in gratitude for all God's goodness and His incomprehensible greatness. When Jesus on two occasions cast out those who were doing business in the temple, He was illustrating this. In the Reformation, the opposition to the selling of indulgences was another. Today there is a huge industry built on profiting from the sale of Christian knick-knacks, books, movies, and so on. I believe a good deal of that is no better than those selling in the temple. When it comes to spiritual blessings and insights, what do we have that we were not given? Certainly, there are costs involved in distributing hard copies of books, but it is free to distribute them electronically. Great fortunes are being built from the sale of these items. One major result is that there are many spiritual resources that are only available to those who can pay for them. This distribution issue is one reason why there is such a strong correlation between places that have the least access to the gospel and those who have the greatest material poverty.

Commands of Christ: 41

Shake the dust off your feet where no one receives you or listens to you.

Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words—go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Truly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. Matthew 10:14-15

And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town, shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them. Luke 9:5

Whatever town you enter and they do not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.' Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand. I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom on that day than for that town. Luke 10:10-12

Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them. Mark 6:11

This seems harsh. This is part of the basis of the old adage that we are only responsible for sharing the good news, not for people's response to it. This can be the merciful thing to do, however, because the more revelation and opportunity a person has, the more severely they will be judged if they do not respond. This also increases the opportunity for those who will respond to hear the message since the message-bearers will not be absorbed with the unresponsive for long periods of time. Also, those who fail to respond now may well become more responsive later, and some of the people who do respond now may be the ones to take the message to them at that time.

Commands of Christ: 42

Go, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves, so be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves.

“Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans.” Matthew 10:16-18

“Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves.” Luke 10:3

Welcome to the upside-down Kingdom. This is the Kingdom where the King sacrifices Himself for His subjects rather than the other way around. This is the Kingdom where the path to life is through dying to yourself. This is the Kingdom where the “soldiers” go out to be like lambs among wolves. As ambassadors for the Kingdom, we are to be wise, but for the purpose of blessing others rather than for protecting ourselves and our own welfare. We will be punished for being blameless and selfless and good. Despite this, we are to carry the King's message and deliver it to everyone, including those who will even kill us. The King is worth it. The life He gives is worth it. Our eternal hope of the Kingdom prevailing in the end, forever, is worth it.

Commands of Christ: 43

Do not worry about your defense when you are arrested for My sake.

“When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Matthew 10:19-20

“When they take you before synagogues and before rulers and authorities, do not worry about how or what your defense will be or about what you are to say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say.” Luke 12:11-12

“They will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.” Luke 21:12b-15

It is interesting that Jesus assumed His followers would be arrested and persecuted by authorities. It is also interesting that He specifically instructed them not to plan or prepare ahead of time for making a defense. He knew that His followers would have the Holy Spirit within them. He would speak to them moment by moment instructing them. This must have seemed strange to the ears of the disciples, since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. This is a great comfort to us, however. Because of Jesus’ promise that He would give us irrefutable wisdom, we do not have to concern ourselves with the need to be the smartest person in the room. We simply need to listen and obey.

There are few testimonies more moving than those of disciples who have had opportunities like Jesus described. In 2 Timothy 3:12 Paul tells us that everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. While persecution takes different forms in different societies, this continues to hold true today. May each of us be living lives filled by the Holy Spirit and sensitive to His leadership so we will be ready every time such opportunities arise for us.

Commands of Christ: 44

Do not fear man, but fear God.

“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more. I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one.” Luke 12:4-5

“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28

People have a tendency to become absorbed by the things of this world. They desire things of this world. They fear things of this world. They are proud of things of this world. This is a grave mistake. This world is temporary. The Kingdom of God is eternal. The new heavens and new earth which will be fully

renewed under God's uncontested reign are of far more value and importance. Hence, Jesus commands to desire those eternal things, and here, not to fear temporal death or loss. As Jim Elliot so eloquently put it before being martyred, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Therefore we need to seek the Lord and His will. Live for His purposes and Kingdom. Fear no opposition or loss.

Commands of Christ: 45

What I speak to you quietly, announce loudly.

"What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." Matthew 10:27

Jesus said this in the context of instructing His followers not to be afraid as He sent them out for ministry. He was telling them to be bold in their service of the Kingdom. He had just told them that they were being sent out as lambs in the midst of wolves. He had told them they would be beaten and arrested for identifying with Him. He said they would be betrayed even by family members.

He was about to tell them not to fear death. He was about to tell them they had to love him more than parents or siblings or children. He was about to tell them they had to be prepared to die for Him.

In this passage Jesus tells His followers that their public and bold acknowledgement of Him was tied to His public acknowledgement of them by Him before God the Father. It is interesting that in the book of Acts, the most frequently mentioned result of people being filled with the Holy Spirit is boldness. If we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. Be bold in living for the Lord!

Commands of Christ: 46

Do not think that I came to establish peace on earth.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man 'against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's enemies will be those of his household.' Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and

follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matthew 10:34-39

“Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and a son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother, a mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” Luke 12:51-53

Be assured, Jesus is offensive to anyone who wants to live for themselves. He brings division to any group that has any agenda other than His Kingdom and glory. If we view Jesus as some gentle soul who just wants everyone to get along, we misunderstand Him. He deeply desires peace and unity, but a peace and unity under God. Unity on His terms, under His direction, for His purposes. He has drawn a “line in the sand.” Everyone is either for Him or against Him. We need to be very clear on that fact. If we claim we are His, that means our lives are His. Our relationships are His. Our possessions are His. He has all our allegiance and time and energy and resources.

Commands of Christ: 47

Look up and see the fields ripe for harvest.

“Do you not say, ‘In four months the harvest will be here’? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. The reaper is already receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work.” John 4:35-38

Jesus is asking His followers to see things from God’s perspective. In the way that man sees grain to be harvested and gathered into barns, God sees the souls of men to be brought into His Kingdom. That harvest has eternal consequences. God has been at work, preparing the harvest. Other servants of God have labored greatly in removing stones from the field, preparing the soil, sowing seed, providing tools, and so on. Where and when the harvest is ready, we must reap. We are responsible to watch for that readiness and take advantage of it so the harvest is not wasted, rotting in the field. We need to look up, away from our own personal concerns, to be alert for such opportunities.

Commands of Christ: 48

Do not work for food that perishes, but for food that endures eternally.

“Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him the Father, God, has set his seal.” John 6:27

This is very reminiscent of Deuteronomy 8:3, which Jesus quoted at His temptation in the wilderness after His baptism: “man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” This is in the context of Jesus calling Himself the Bread of Life and chastising people for following Him because He fed the multitudes rather than because they recognized who He was.

It seems that people are in the habit of confusing mere physical survival with the abundant life which God intends for us. The former is temporal. The latter is eternal. The former is a pale shadow of the glorious reality of the latter. Let us never be distracted from pursuing the abundant life the Lord promised by concern for meeting temporal needs. That is a mistake of infinite proportions.

Commands of Christ: 49

Look out for the teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Jesus said to them, “Look out, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” They concluded among themselves, saying, “It is because we have brought no bread.” When Jesus became aware of this he said, “You of little faith, why do you conclude among yourselves that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand, and do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many wicker baskets you took up? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? How do you not comprehend that I was not speaking to you about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he was not telling them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:6-12

Meanwhile, so many people were crowding together that they were trampling one another underfoot. He began to speak, first to his disciples, “Beware of the leaven—that is, the hypocrisy—of the Pharisees.” Luke 12:1

He enjoined them, “Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” Mark 8:15

Jesus was telling His followers to be careful what they listened to. On another occasion (Matthew 23:1-11) He warned them that the real problem was not the content of their teaching but the conduct of their lives. In God's eyes, those are connected. Hypocrisy, to do one thing and say another, is a serious matter. The priorities of the Pharisees were out of order. They valued appearance above substance. They valued honor from men more highly than honor from God. This corrupted their lives and therefore their teachings.

We need to be careful to examine our motives and live for an audience of One. Our lives need to match our words. We need to guard our hearts from hypocrisy.

Commands of Christ: 50

Anyone who wishes to come after Me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it." Mark 8:34-35

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct." Matthew 16:24-26

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 10:37-39

"If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:26-27

God's salvation is free, but it costs everything. We cannot receive His gift of life without emptying our hands of anything else that is in them. Giving Him our allegiance means having no competitors for our affections. He is (and must be) of far more importance to us than our lives, than any earthly relationship, than all

our possessions. We are bound to Him entirely, with no reservation. We will obey Him and follow Him no matter what the cost, no matter what the sacrifice or risk. This is not optional. These are the terms which the Lord clearly communicated. Our decision and resolve will be tested. By His power and grace He will enable us to obey and follow through the fire and through the flood, with the temptation to ease and comfort, when alone or in the midst of a crowd going another way, and every other circumstance.

Commands of Christ: 51

Become like children.

He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me." Matthew 18:3-5

Pride is one of the most insidious sins. Jesus' teaching here is in the context of His followers asking Him who (among men) was greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. Essentially, Jesus is saying the God is the greatest. It is nonsensical to ask who is greatest (among men) in the Kingdom. None is worthy. None has power in themselves. Only the humble can enter. Only those who recognize they are helpless can receive God's power. We should rejoice in our relationship with the Lord and glory only in Him. The most humbly grateful soul is the greatest in the Kingdom.

Commands of Christ: 52

Do not hinder anyone just because they are not in your group.

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us." Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, truly, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward." Mark 9:38-41

Then John said in reply, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow in our company." Jesus said to him, "Do not prevent him, for whoever is not against you is for you." Luke 9:49-50

This is reminiscent of what Paul says in Philippians 1:15-18: “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.”

It seems that in our day there are a lot of self-proclaimed servants of Christ who draw the lines more and more tightly in identifying who are legitimate disciples. They make major distinctions based on minor issues, while ignoring major considerations such as love. Pride is rampant, based on comparing themselves with others. Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17 where He prayed for unity among His followers ignored.

Paul says in Romans 14:4, “Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.”

There are lines that need to be drawn. Those lines are between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. There are only two camps. Those who are for the Lord and those who are not. I love the time when Joshua was getting ready to attack Jericho. In Joshua 5:13-14 it tells us, “Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

Whether people are for us or not is irrelevant. The question is, are they on the Lord’s side. Let’s not shoot His allies.

Commands of Christ: 53

Resist temptation radically.

“Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the fiery hell.” Matthew 18:7-9

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” Mark 9:43-49

If we have come to terms with the necessity of dying to ourselves to enter the Kingdom then this command should not even “raise an eyebrow.” Cutting off a hand or foot or gouging out an eye from a dead person is not a painful process. Six times in the gospels Jesus said that whoever wanted to save his life in this world would lose it, but whoever loses their life for His sake will find it for life eternal.

Jesus’ command makes it quite clear that anything that separates us from God must be dealt with severely. It is literally a matter of life and death. Sin is not something to be flirted with. We cannot please ourselves and serve God. If we think we can then we have deceived ourselves and not truly chosen to follow God. In our own strength, we cannot do this, but if we have truly repented and believed in the Lord, then through the power of the Holy Spirit whom He has given us, we can follow. If we have not truly turned to follow God, we must do so, or we will be separated from Him for eternity in hell.

Commands of Christ: 54

Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.

“Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another.” Mark 9:49-50

This is in the context of holiness and purification from sin. Everyone must be purified. None is righteous in themselves. For those who have been purified and made holy, it is a tragedy for them to be defiled. Jesus is commanding us to stay pure and to be at peace with one another within His family.

We will be know by our fruit. Are we peaceable? Are we living holy and pure lives? These are evidences of genuine followers of Christ. This is what He commands.

Commands of Christ: 55

Deal with a brother who sins.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Matthew 18:15-20

I think this is one of the most ignored commands of Jesus. So often it seems that within the church, we respond to sin in every way except this. We will ignore it. We will gossip about it. We will avoid contact with the one who has sinned.

The most loving thing to do for someone in the church who has sinned, is to follow Jesus’ instructions. This is for their sake, the sake of the church, and for God’s sake. Everyone stands to lose if it is ignored or dealt with improperly. It is a serious matter so we need to deal with it directly and decisively. If possible we should limit disclosure of it to others. The process is clear.

The attitude is important as well. In Galatians 6:1 Paul tells us, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”

The purpose of doing this, is the joy and fellowship and restoration of the person who has sinned. Let’s love one another deeply enough to do this for one another.

Commands of Christ: 56

Forgive 70 times 7 times.

Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21-22

“Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times in one day and returns to you seven times saying, ‘I am sorry,’ you should forgive him.” Luke 17:3-4

Jesus must have known this would be one of His commands that might be exceedingly difficult for us to obey. He gave us some extra commentary on this issue. In the Lord’s Prayer, he teaches us to pray for the Lord to forgive us as we forgive others. He then makes sure we understand by adding, “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

Jesus also told a parable about an unforgiving servant which puts the matter quite clearly. Anything we may be called upon to forgive in others pales in comparison with what God is willing to forgive in us. Because of His infinite holiness, the “smallest” sin is infinitely unacceptable. As recipients of His grace and mercy we are called upon to reflect that grace and mercy when others sin against us.

Realizing the magnitude of the forgiveness we have received from God is important because, “Whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” (Luke 7:47b) The more we realize the magnitude of our sin against God, the more we love Him. The more we love Him, the more we will forgive others who sin against us.

Commands of Christ: 57

Do not judge by appearances, but judge justly.

“Stop judging by appearances, but judge justly.” John 7:24

This command is given in the context of Jesus being rebuked by the religious leaders for healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by admonishing them to live by God’s character, nature, purposes, ways, and desires rather than merely legalism. This is a contrast between living according to Law versus living by the Spirit.

“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7b) When God told this to the prophet Samuel, there was a fairly dramatic illustration given. The current king of Israel, Saul, was outwardly impressive, but proved to be immature and unfaithful. When Samuel, according to God’s instruction, was choosing a new king from among the seven sons of Jesse, he was inclined to select the most impressive one. God, however, saw deeper than that. God chose the

younger and less impressive David because of his heart, which was like God's heart.

Let us press on to know God more fully and intimately in order that we may understand his character, nature, purposes, ways and desires. Let us live according to the Spirit rather than according to the Law.

Commands of Christ: 58

Come to Me and drink.

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" He said this in reference to the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified. John 7:37-39

This is reminiscent of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria in John 4. In verse 10 Jesus told her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." This is the sort of command which it is an obvious and immediate joy to obey. We have thirst. In this fallen world, there is so much unfulfilled desire, so much difficulty, so much heartache. Jesus commands us to come to Him to find fulfillment. He is the answer to the questions. He is the provision for the need. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we receive the downpayment on eternal, redeemed, full life. Come to Jesus. Drink.

Commands of Christ: 59

Follow me and let the dead bury their own dead.

"Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead." Matthew 8:22b

And to another he said, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Luke 9:59-60

The word "disciple" essentially means "follower". To follow Jesus means not following anything else. He is the exclusive determinant of what we do, where, when, and how. Jesus expounds on this idea in Luke 14:25-35. In verse 26 of that chapter, He says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple." The point is that there is no comparison between

the level of commitment we have for anything or anyone and our commitment to Christ.

Our overwhelming and overriding focus is on living as citizens of the Kingdom of God. We are to follow our King at all times, in all places, without reservation or exception. That is what Jesus commands.

Commands of Christ: 60

Do not rejoice at power over demons, but over eternal life.

I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Luke 10:19-20

This command was in the context of debriefing ministry with the 72. When they returned from their ministry they were particularly impressed by the authority the Lord had given them over demons. Jesus was commenting here that they were missing the point. In the big picture, this authority was simply a nice side benefit. The big picture was their relationship to God and their place in His Kingdom. That was the news. That was the impressive fact. That was the point of their ministry, to bring others into an awareness of and participation in this relationship and identity.

Commands of Christ: 61

Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:28-31

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and

your neighbor as yourself.” He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.” Luke 10:25-28

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a scholar of the law, tested him by asking, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:34-40

According to Jesus, this command, known as the Great Commandment, summarizes God’s revealed will in the Old Testament. That is an impressive statement. Jesus tells us in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:17-20, that following Scripture is a serious issue which His followers should pay close attention to. In its Old Testament context, this is the command which God’s people were commanded to be in constant awareness of. They were to speak of this constantly in their conversations at home and outside. They were to put reminders on their clothing and their doorposts to continually make them aware of it. This was the defining characteristic of their lives in every activity at every time. It needs to be the same for us today.

Commands of Christ: 62

Be generous to the poor.

Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Luke 11:39-41

This command is reminiscent of the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament. God continually shows concern for the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged, the disenfranchised. He commands His people to care for them. This is not to earn favor with God by our pious actions. It is to honor Him and demonstrate our love for Him and others, displaying His character and His nature in our daily conduct and generosity and concern.

Commands of Christ: 63

Beware of all greed.

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Luke 12:15

Jesus illustrated this command by telling the parable of the Rich Fool. Jesus made it clear that no matter how comfortable and pleasurable and easy you may be in this life, it will mean absolutely nothing if you are miserable and suffering for all eternity. He made it clear that being rich toward God is quite different than being rich in this world. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says we cannot serve both God and wealth. It is one or the other. They are mutually exclusive as a goal or a motivator. We will definitely be called upon many times to sacrifice our own comfort and pleasure in this life in order to serve the purposes of God.

Commands of Christ: 64

Do not fear.

Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. Luke 12:32

We have a faithful and gracious and omnipotent God who provides us eternal and abundant life. What is there to fear? Any suffering or deprivation or sorrow is temporary and transient. Redemption and fulfillment and joy are our eternal destiny. Therefore, Jesus commands us not to fear. We are to keep our eyes fixed on the Kingdom of God rather than on this world.

Commands of Christ: 65

Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

An official asked him this question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother.'" And he replied, "All of these I have observed from my youth." When Jesus heard this he said to him, "There is still one thing left for you: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when he heard this he became quite sad, for he was very rich. Luke 18:18-23

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the

commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother’; and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” The young man said to him, “All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Matthew 19:16-22

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Luke 12:33

I find it interesting that every time I have heard anyone teach on the Luke 18 or Matthew 19 passages above, they are quick to point out that the Lord is asking that particular individual to do this, and it isn't intended for others. The Luke 12 passage above, however, is a general teaching given to His disciples. It seems clear from that passage that Jesus is instructing us not to accumulate wealth but rather to be generous in giving our surplus to those in need. This command comes with a promise of wealth in heaven in all three passages. Our hearts are where our treasure is. To say it differently, what we treasure is what we value. If we value the principles and purposes of the Kingdom it will be reflected in how we use our lives and our resources.

Commands of Christ: 66

Be ready and watching for My return.

“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?” The Lord answered, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose the servant

says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:35-48

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 24:42-51

"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'" Mark 13:28-37

He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will

never pass away. Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:29-36

This command of Jesus is both important and urgent. He calls for vigilance. He calls for faithfulness. He calls for consistency. He warns against selfishness, laziness, and distracting anxiety. We are to live in a state of service to our King. It is not that we can thereby earn our salvation, but it is evidence of whom we serve. There are evidently those who claim to serve the Lord, but their lives betray the fact that they are actually serving themselves. They will be cast out by the Lord when He returns. As His servants, we are to constantly be about carrying out His instructions and His desires so we will be ready for His return at all times.

Commands of Christ: 67

Humble yourself.

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, ‘My friend, move up to a higher position.’ Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14:8-11

With people, sometimes the proud are allowed to exalt themselves, but this never happens with God. In the end, everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled. Scripture repeatedly tells us that “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” There are numerous examples of that, psalms and proverbs about it, and Jesus’ own teachings and illustrations such as His story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Pride is the complete anti-God state of mind. It is the primary sin of Satan. C.S. Lewis called it “the cardinal sin.” It is insidious and deceptive.

The root of pride often comes from comparing ourselves with others. If we are going to compare ourselves with anything else, it needs to be with God Himself and His standards. That will lead us to humility and to dependence on God and worship of God and gratitude to Him.

Commands of Christ: 68

Exalt the humble and serve them.

Then he said to the host who invited him, “When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:12-14

Jesus isn't saying we shouldn't seek reward for our actions. He is saying we should seek reward in eternity rather than in the “here and now.” He is saying we should seek reward that is truly valuable because it endures rather than deceptive and temporal reward. It is a sign of maturity and wisdom to understand delayed gratification. God is concerned to exalt the humble and to serve and bless them. He asks us to do the same. He sacrificed His very life to serve others, including us. He sends us to do the same, to live a life of sacrificial service. He will reward His children who live in that way. Do not be deceived, there are degrees of reward in heaven. That is a clear teaching in Scripture and the subject of several of Jesus' parables. Aspire to please God and hear Jesus say, “Well done, you good and faithful servant.”

Commands of Christ: 69

Use temporal wealth for eternal purposes.

I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Luke 16:9

Jesus said this in the context of His telling of the parable of the shrewd manager. He followed it up with His statement that whoever is faithful in little will be faithful with much. He clarifies and illustrated that statement by saying,

“So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, “You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.” Luke 16:11-15

Our use of wealth in this life is a test of our hearts and can be a tool to use for eternal purposes. Are we seeking God or wealth? Are we living and serving for the kingdom of this world or the Kingdom of God? Clearly God has a purpose for our use of money other than our own pleasure and comfort. Jesus tells us to use temporal wealth for eternal purposes.

Commands of Christ: 70

When you have done all you were asked to, say, “we are unprofitable slaves, we have only done our duty.”

“Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won’t he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” Luke 17:7-10

I’d say this is a bit counter-cultural and politically incorrect in our day. There are lots of biblical metaphors of our relationship with Christ: slaves, friends, bride, body, etc. I dare say that slave is the least popular. It’s true Jesus told the twelve disciples they were no longer His servants, but now were His friends. Despite this we see later disciples, including the apostle Paul, refer to themselves as slaves of the Lord. In some of His parables, Jesus has a master telling his slaves at the end of their service, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Here, Jesus says that even if we do everything we’ve been asked to, that we have only done the minimum. Let us rather seek extravagant ways to demonstrate our love for Him for all that He is and our gratitude to Him for all He has done. He says that even in regard to our enemies, if they ask for our shirt we should give them our coat as well. If that is to be our attitude toward our enemies then how much more should we go beyond what has been asked of us to glorify our perfect and gracious Lord?

Commands of Christ: 71

Remember Lot’s wife and do not try to preserve your life.

Remember Lot’s wife! Whoever tries to keep their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it. Luke 17:32-33

Here is yet another place where Jesus tells us to live for eternity and not for our temporal life here. If, like Lot's wife, we become enamored with the pursuit of earthly benefits, then we will lose sight of eternal ones, and our lives will be led astray. Our direction determines our destination. If our eyes remain fixed upon the Lord, He will guide us and bring us safely into His presence. If we are distracted by the things of the world and seek them, we will end up with sulphur and fire in the end as Sodom did, and miss out on eternal reward. It is impossible to serve both God and worldly wealth.

Commands of Christ: 72

Be wholesome in your speech.

“Either declare the tree good and its fruit is good, or declare the tree rotten and its fruit is rotten, for a tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you say good things when you are evil? For from the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. A good person brings forth good out of a store of goodness, but an evil person brings forth evil out of a store of evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:33-37

Words matter. Unplanned words reveal the heart. For good or for bad, our words will defend or condemn us on the day of judgment. Amy Carmichael, the great missionary to India had a quote that always impressed me. She said, “No matter how suddenly you jar a bowl of sweet water, no bitter water will ever spill out.” True enough. Let us guard our hearts, ever walking in the Spirit, so our speech might be gracious and suitable for a Kingdom ambassador.

Commands of Christ: 73

Let children come to Jesus and do not despise them.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Matthew 19:13-14

And people were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not accept the

kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them, and when the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. Jesus, however, called the children to himself and said, “Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” Luke 18:15-17

At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father.” Matthew 18:1-6, 10

In the eyes of men, children are of little account. They are often viewed as inconveniences. In the United States, in the name of convenience, we have murdered about 310 million babies through abortion (including chemical abortions) since Roe v. Wade in 1973. Only China, with their one-child policy is worse in this regard.

We ignore children. As a culture we often seek to delegate as much of their care and nurture as possible, through childcare programs, schools, age-specific programs in churches, babysitting, sitting them in front of televisions or computer screens, etc. We consider children a nuisance to be avoided.

Jesus had a very different attitude toward children and He instructs us as His followers, to follow His example. He spent time with them. He paid attention to them. He valued them. They served as an example of His pattern of valuing the last, the least and the lost. In fact, He held them up as an example for us to emulate. Their humility and dependence are a shining example in our world of pride and independence.

Value children. Demonstrate it by loving and investing in them.

Commands of Christ: 74

Keep the commandments.

Now someone approached him and said, “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” He answered him, “Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He asked him, “Which ones?” And Jesus replied, “‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother’; and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Matthew 19:16-19

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’” Mark 10:17-19

An official asked him this question, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother.’” Luke 18:18-20

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In our day, many religious teachers are denying the validity of these commands in the name of “good theology.” It is true enough that we are not under law but under grace. It is true enough that we cannot and will not earn salvation by obeying these commands. But what so many fail to recognize is that if we recognize all that Christ has done for us, and if we walk in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit Whom He gives us, our love and gratitude and Spirit-filled life will result in a life that surpasses these commands. We will not only obey them but we will go beyond them. Obeying them out of love and gratitude is the least we can do. Keep the commandments. Teach the commandments. Do it from a Spirit-filled life of love and gratitude.

Commands of Christ: 75

Serve others.

But Jesus summoned them and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:25-28

Jesus summoned them and said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:42-45

He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. Luke 22:25-27

So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Truly, truly, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. John 13:12-17

God’s Kingdom is upside-down from the world. What king sacrifices himself for his subjects? What great man serves those under his authority? In a world that says, “Do as I say, not as I do.” We are told in Philippians 2:5-11, “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should

bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus tells us that this life is a race to the bottom. The goal is to serve, not to be served. The goal is to sacrifice for others benefit rather than for our own. The goal is not to make a name for ourselves but to serve without recognition. The reward is eternal while the pain is temporary. The reward is far greater than the sacrifice. Be like Jesus.

Commands of Christ: 76

Have faith in God.

In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” “Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Mark 11:20-24

If we are living and walking in the Holy Spirit, we can know that our words and actions and ways are in His will. He is able to bring about anything. We are not serving ourselves, but Him. We are not seeking our desires, but His. Let us not be shy about asking for anything we need to do so. His glory is a worthy cause. It is worth God’s attention and resources. He can and will provide. Have the faith to ask.

Commands of Christ: 77

Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.

They came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion. You do not regard a person’s status but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or should we not pay?” Knowing their hypocrisy he said to them, “Why are you testing me? Bring me a denarius to look at.” They brought one to him and he said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They replied to him, “Caesar’s.” So Jesus said to them, “Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” They were utterly amazed at him. Mark 12:14-17

They posed this question to him, “Teacher, we know that what you say and teach is correct, and you show no partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it lawful for us to pay tribute to Caesar or not?” Recognizing their craftiness he said to them, “Show me a denarius; whose image and name does it bear?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” So he said to them, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” Luke 20:21-25

They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion, for you do not regard a person’s status. Tell us, then, what is your opinion: Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?” Knowing their malice, Jesus said, “Why are you testing me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that pays the census tax.” Then they handed him the Roman coin. He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?” They replied, “Caesar’s.” At that he said to them, “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” Matthew 22:16-21

Be a good citizen of the earthly country in which you reside. More than that, however, be a good citizen of the Kingdom of God. All authority and honor belong to God. All kingdoms of the earth are under His rule. All creation is His, including our own selves. Our lives, our relationships, our possessions, are all His to do with whatever He pleases. We have the option to disregard this now, but if we do so, we will pay the price for eternity, suffering His wrath and punishment as His enemies. Far better, to recognize and honor His reign now and have the benefits of reigning with Him for all eternity.

Commands of Christ: 78

Beware of the scribes and do not imitate them.

In the course of his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and accept greetings in the marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation.” Mark 12:38-40

Then, within the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples, “Be on guard against the scribes, who like to go around in long robes and love greetings in marketplaces, seats of honor in synagogues, and places of honor at banquets. They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation.” Luke 20:45-47

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. They widen their phylacteries and lengthen their tassels. They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have but one master, the Messiah. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of hell twice as much as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If one swears by the temple, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gold of the temple, one is obligated.' Blind fools, which is greater, the gold, or the temple that made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If one swears by the altar, it means nothing, but if one swears by the gift on the altar, one is obligated.' You blind ones, which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? One who swears by the altar swears by it and all that is upon it; one who swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it; one who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who is seated on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. But these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood.' Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out! You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you

will scourge in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, so that there may come upon you all the righteous blood shed upon earth, from the righteous blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. Matthew 23:1-36

Evidently, Jesus was not too fond of people who act religiously for the sake of appearance. He was pretty clear about the fact that those doing religious activities in order to enhance their reputation were not pleasing Him. Our reputation is not the point. His is. Our Christian celebrity culture is a dangerous thing. His Name is to be honored, not the name of His servants.

Humility is the hallmark of the King and His Kingdom and His true servants. Run from anything that seeks to draw you into the limelight. If people are going to follow you, make sure they are following you on the path to service and sacrifice rather than fame and glory.

Commands of Christ: 79

Watch out that no false Christ deceives you.

He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them!" Luke 21:8-9

Jesus said to them in reply, "See that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and they will deceive many." Matthew 24:4-5

Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he,' and they will deceive many." Mark 13:5-6

I suppose it is natural for people to believe what they wish to be true. It is natural for us to desire Jesus' return. Jesus warns His followers, however, not to be misled. When He returns, it will be very clear. Let us wait patiently for His return and not be led astray by our impatient desires.

Commands of Christ: 80

When you see signs of my return, do not be terrified, but take heart.

"When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be

powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky.” Luke 21:9-11

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” Luke 21:25-31

You will hear of wars and reports of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for these things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes from place to place. All these are the beginning of the labor pains. Then they will hand you over to persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name. And then many will be led into sin; they will betray and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and deceive many and because of the increase of evil-doing, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. Matthew 24:6-13

When you hear of wars and reports of wars do not be alarmed; such things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes from place to place and there will be famines. These are the beginnings of the labor pains. Mark 13:7-8

There is a saying, “It is darkest just before the dawn.” Jesus was saying something like that in these passages. There will be tragedies and hard times before Jesus’ triumphant return. We are not to grieve or fear these hardships as those who have no hope. We are to look beyond them to our promised reward and fellowship with our loving Lord for all eternity. Our hope gives us strength. We are not to respond out of fear but out of faith and so remain faithful to the end.

Commands of Christ: 81

Be alert for My return.

“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:34-36

“Therefore, keep watch, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” Matthew 25:13

Stay ready. Pray for strength. Be focused. Guard against distraction. Pay attention. These are instructions from Jesus. This life is preparation for the next. Don't forget it.

Commands of Christ: 82

Follow and serve Me.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me. John 12:25-26

This is the eternally true version of the saying, “You can't have your cake, and eat it too.” We can live for eternity or for this life, not both. We can serve God or material wealth, not both. We live for God or for ourselves, not both. Jesus modeled this. It turned out great for Him in eternity but not so well in this life. Follow His example. It turns out well in the end.

Commands of Christ: 83

Love each other.

“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” John 15:12-13

“This I command you: love one another.” John 15:7

Wow. This is pretty clear. This is the distinguishing mark of a follower of Jesus. We love each other.

How much? The same way Jesus loved us. Enough to die for one another.

Commands of Christ: 84

Take, eat, drink. Do this in remembrance of Me.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me." John 6:53-57

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew 26:26-28

While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many." Mark 12:22-24

Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you." Luke 22:17-20

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

We need reminders of God's goodness and provision and sacrifice. In the same way the Old Testament festivals provided a visible reminder, the Lord's Supper can do so for us. It is also an opportunity for us to proclaim it to others. Let us not fail to do so.

Commands of Christ: 85

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and in Me.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me.” John 14:1

Jesus said this in the context of the Last Supper. He said this to strengthen the hearts of the eleven disciples in anticipation of their confusion and fear at what was about to happen over the following 24 hours. He wanted them to know that none of it would take God by surprise. The future, His future, and their future with Him were assured. We need to take His instructions to heart in the midst of our own dark days when fear and confusion are real temptations.

Commands of Christ: 86

Believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.

“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” John 14:11-14

This is one of the times when I find Jesus' words a challenge to believe. He says that if we believe in Him, we will do greater works than He did. Forgive my incredulity, but really? Yes, really. I may not be able to explain it, but it's true. We will glorify the Lord by doing these works. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. Glorify Yourself in me and in those works. Help me so clearly and fully discern Your will and Your ways that I might recognize the good works You have prepared beforehand for me to walk in, and let me not miss doing a single one of them.

Commands of Christ: 87

Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” John 14:27

Jesus gave this command in the middle of His promise to send the Holy Spirit to live within His followers. In other words, He gives this command in the context of giving us the means to obey it. If we are living in the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, we will not be fearful or have troubled hearts. He is peace just as he is love and joy and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. Abide in Him.

Commands of Christ: 88

Remain in Me and in My love so you can keep My commands and vice versa.

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:15-18

Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. John 15:4-10

In regard to God, love and obedience are inseparable. Love is demonstrated by grateful obedience and obedience is enabled by our grateful love. We remain in God through our obedience because it is the expression of His presence. The same can be said of our love. His presence with us and His living in us are demonstrated by our loving obedience. He is literally living His life and will through us if we are His. The more clearly we hear Him and the more fully we discern His action in our lives, the more fully we can live out this obedient love. This is how we grow in Him and bear fruit by and for and to Him.

Commands of Christ: 89

Pray in My Name.

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” John 15:7-8

“Until now you have not asked anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” John 16:24

We benefit through complete joy when we pray in His name and He answers. He benefits by glory going to God when we pray in His will and He answers. This is evidence of the fact that we are His. What possible reason could we have for not doing this? Let us obey Him in praying in His Name, remaining in His will.

Commands of Christ: 90

Take courage.

“I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.” John 16:33

Jesus gives this command in the context of instructing the eleven disciples about the near future when He would be tortured and killed and things would look dark and hopeless. He was making it clear to them that God was in control, the future was bright, and that He was going to bring good out of apparent evil. He was winning despite all appearances. He wanted them to take the long view and allow that perspective to give them courage. The same thing is true for each of us who follows Him.

Commands of Christ: 91

Receive the Holy Spirit.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” John 20:19-23

This is the first post-resurrection appearance to the inner circle of disciples as a group (except for Thomas). This is a precursor of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given more broadly to His followers. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the

disciples in the context of sending them to continue His ministry of announcing the Kingdom of His grace and peace. This empowering and this ministry were not optional. The Spirit was necessary for carrying out this ministry. The same is true for each of us today. We are called and we are empowered and commanded.

Commands of Christ: 92

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel.

He said to them, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15

Some manuscripts do not include this portion of Mark. In any case, this command is consistent with other passages. Jesus has completion on His mind and in His heart. It needs to be on our minds and in our hearts as well. He is worthy. Every creature needs to know it. His greatness and goodness and grace are news which we need to get to every corner of the globe. Everyone needs to hear it.

Commands of Christ: 93

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all My commands.

Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus tells us when and where to make disciples, as we are going. He tells us how to make disciples, baptizing and teaching to obey all His commands. He tells us who is to do it, the same people to whom His promise of His presence is to...all His followers. He tells us by what authority to make disciples, His (complete) authority. In one sense, this is the primary command of Christ, because in it, all His other commands are included. In making disciples, we are ourselves obeying all His commands and teaching others to do the same. If you have to prioritize one command above all others, make it this one. Make disciples.

Commands of Christ: 94

Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God.” Revelation 2:7

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The victor shall not be harmed by the second death.” Revelation 2:11

“Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna; I shall also give a white amulet upon which is inscribed a new name, which no one knows except the one who receives it.” Revelation 2:17

“To the victor, who keeps to my ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod. Like clay vessels will they be smashed, just as I received authority from my Father. And to him I will give the morning star. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 2:26-29

“The victor will thus be dressed in white, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name in the presence of my Father and of his angels. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:5-6

“The victor I will make into a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave it again. On him I will inscribe the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, as well as my new name. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:12-13

“I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:21-22

These of course are the commands of Jesus in His letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation. Each of these commands gives a promise to those who are victorious in following Him. To those who persevere. To those who listen to the Spirit. These are for our encouragement and motivation. There will be tests. There will be difficult days. It will all be worth it in the end. The rewards are worth the sacrifice. Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Quick Review of “Obedience Verses” Spoken by Jesus

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you.” John 14:15-17

“Jesus answered and said to him, “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love Me does not keep My words; yet the word you hear is not Mine but that of the Father Who sent me.” John 14:23-24

“If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in His love.” John 15:10

“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.” Matthew 5:19

“Everyone who listens to these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of Mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.” Matthew 7:24-27

“To the victor, who keeps to My ways until the end, I will give authority over the nations.” Revelation 2:26

“Remember then how you accepted and heard; keep it, and repent. If you are not watchful, I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come upon you.” Revelation 3:3

“Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.” Revelation 3:10