

KINGDOM SPIRIT



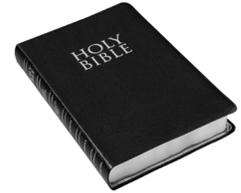
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“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Matthew 6:33



Issue 901

GOSPELS

It appears to me that the ministry of Jesus is a four phase plan. While the four phases may have different starting points, we find that ultimately, at least the first three phases ran concurrently with each other toward the end of His ministry. The general theme and thrust of each was the same: The gospel (or good news) of the Kingdom of God. These phases, at least for the purposes of our study, were, in the order of their beginnings: 1) to establish His authority; 2) to select and train His apostles and disciples; 3) to confront the scribes and Pharisees [their hypocrisy and that which is anti-God]; and 4) to accomplish His death, burial and resurrection.

The primary tool Jesus used initially to establish His authority was healing the sick. He healed all who were brought to Him, and even some, at the request of others, who could not be brought to Him. He healed the cripple, the deaf, the blind, the leper, the paralyzed, the dumb, and those possessed by evil spirits. The ultimate in healing was the raising of people from the dead. He raised several including a man named Lazarus who had been dead four days and was in the tomb.

He did several other types of miracles that helped establish His authority also. These included changing water to wine, telling the Samaritan woman at the well her life history, feeding great multitudes on one person's lunch on at least two

occasions, calming a great storm and even walking on water. The greatest of these miracles was His giving up of His life on the cross, His resurrection three days later and His appearance unto many for forty days thereafter.

As His ministry progressed, His teaching of the multitudes and His rebukes to the priests, scribes, and Pharisees also exemplified His authority. He spoke with authority and manifested His authority as well through His knowledge of law and prophecy. John 10:37-38 says, **“If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me and I in him.”**

Yet, though great multitudes followed Him continually and He became very famous throughout Judea and Galilee, His authority, His power, and His fame did not come from any physical characteristics. Isa. 53:2 prophesied of Him in saying, **“he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”** Jesus would often walk into a crowd and be completely lost to the scribes and Pharisees when they sought to kill Him. Even though He had taught in the temple for nearly a week before His arrest, one of Jesus' own apostles had to betray Him so that those arresting Him, though they had been in the temple with Him for nearly a week, would know who He was.

Many people followed Him and became His disciples, but He chose twelve men to be His apostles. The first He chose were Simon, called

Peter, and Andrew his brother. They were fishermen casting their net into the sea and Jesus said to them, **“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** (Matt. 4:19) That they immediately left their nets and followed Him indicates the commitment these men had to make, leaving all to follow Jesus. John and James, sons of Zebedee, also fishermen, did the same thing when they were called by Jesus. Matt. 10:3-4 completes the list, **“Phillip, and Bartholomew; Thomas; and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.”**

Even with the apostles, Jesus did signs and wonders to affirm His authority and power. Soon after calling Peter, He was using Peter’s boat and sitting in the boat offshore, He taught the multitude on the shore. Then He told Peter to put out into the deep and at Jesus’ command, let their nets down and they caught so many fish that their nets were breaking and they beckoned for James and John to bring another boat. They filled both boats until they were nearly sinking. This humbled Peter very much and tells us much about Peter’s character.

The 5th, 6th, and 7th chapters of Matthew record what is commonly referred to as Jesus’ “sermon on the mount.” This was primarily directed to His apostles and disciples. He began by instructing them to be meek and humble, telling them though they be poor in spirit, they would inherit the kingdom of heaven; they would be comforted when they mourn; inherit the earth if they were meek; be filled with righteousness if they sought it; obtain mercy if they were merciful; see God if they were pure in heart; and be called the children of God if they were peacemakers. He told them that when they were persecuted and reviled for His sake, to rejoice for great would be their reward. Then He told them that they were the salt of the earth, the light of the world—to not lose their savor nor hide their light.

Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets, not to destroy. Matt. 5:18 makes this

very clear, **“For verily I say unto you till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”** It is extremely important we remember that the Pharisees had virtually developed a new law system and then made a religious ritual out of keeping it, to understand fully the importance of what Jesus is teaching here and Paul’s teachings later on. He went on to say that to break one of the least of God’s commandments and to teach men so would cause one to be least in the kingdom of heaven, but to do them and teach men to do so would mean greatness in the kingdom. But one’s righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees for one to even enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus then expressed the same thought that the prophets expressed to Israel time and again. Obedience to God is a heart obedience—not the specific keeping of a ritual. The law said thou shalt not kill. Jesus expanded this by saying being angry with your brother without cause will bring you in danger of the same judgment. The law said thou shalt not commit adultery, but Jesus added that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her had committed adultery with her already in his heart. He continues that if one’s eye or hand cause one to offend, he is better off without it.

A slight translation error makes Matt. 5:31-32 a little confusing. Apparently it had become an accepted practice that if a man wanted to put away his wife, he simply did so. But Jesus quotes them the complete law in verse 31 and then tells them in verse 32, (the word “divorced” (KJV) should be translated “put away”) that they were causing their wives to commit adultery by putting them away and that he that married her would also commit adultery. The complete law, including the bill of divorcement must be adhered to He is saying.

He told them not to swear by anything but to keep their communication yea, yea or nay, nay, for any more than this cometh of evil. Then we find the “turn the other cheek” teaching in verse 38. Keep in mind the context of what Jesus is teaching. He quoted the eye for an eye and the

tooth for a tooth law. If we look back at Ex. 21:24, Lev. 24:20, or Deut. 19:21 where we find this law, we will see that these are judgments of the court. The “turn the other cheek” teaching is in this same setting. If the court rules against you, even if it is evil, He is saying to resist it not. Give more than the judgment declares you owe.

Not only were they to love their neighbors, but also they were to love their enemies, as well, He tells them. Be perfect as the Father is perfect.

Do not make a show of your alms giving or your praying, but He instructs them to do it in secret. God will reward you openly. Then He gives them a sample prayer in Matt. 6:9-13. We are to praise His name, then pray for His kingdom to come that His will be done here on the earth as it is in heaven. We are to ask for our daily needs and for forgiveness, but this is to be in accordance with our own forgiveness of those trespassing against us. We need deliverance from temptation and are to ask for it. We are to give God all the credit and acknowledge the Kingdom is His.

Jesus continued to instruct his disciples and apostles by telling them to take no thought of their needs, God will provide as He has for the birds and flowers but to **“Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”** (Matt. 6:33). Jesus told them that they would be judged as they judged. Before they could correct a brother they would first have to correct themselves.

They were not to give that which was holy to the dogs or cast their pearls before the swine, referring to that which was set apart for, and is precious to, God. The dogs and swine refer to people who are unreceptive to God’s Word.

As they would not refuse to provide for and give gifts to their children, so God will not refuse them if they would but ask. **“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”** (Matt. 7:12)

Jesus warned them that strait was the gate and narrow the way and few that would find it.

They were to beware of false prophets in sheep’s clothing. He said they would know them by their works. Not every one saying Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather he who does God’s will.

The apostles also witnessed the healing Jesus did and the message of the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached. When Jesus made the selection of the twelve apostles, He instructed them as to their preaching and teaching and gave them the power to heal. They were not to go to the Samaritans or to the Gentiles (nations), but were to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This was in reference primarily to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel. These were now located throughout Europe and Asia Minor. He sent them to go preach saying, **“the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils;”** (Matt. 10:7-8). On this sending forth, He told them to not take money or extra clothing for a worker is worthy of his meat. If they were received they were to stay and preach and heal, but if not, they were to shake the dust of the city from their feet and leave. They were to be wise, yet humble for they were sheep in the midst of wolves, He told them.

Later, He sent 70 other disciples two by two also to preach and He instructed them much the same way. He told all of His disciples, **“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”** (Luke 12:1)

They were cautioned to continually be ready for His return. Being ready meant to be working the work God gave them to do, continually.

Jesus taught often in parables, especially when the scribes and Pharisees were present, as He told His disciples He did not want the scribes and Pharisees to understand. But this required special instruction to the disciples and apostles so that they would understand. One such time was following the parable of the sower. (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23)

He then began to teach of His coming rejection, arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Peter, James and John were taken by Jesus up into a high mountain where they saw the vision of the transfiguration and of Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus. Also they heard the voice from heaven declare, **“This is my beloved son, hear him.”** (Mark 9:7)

Following a dispute among the disciples as to who would be the greater, Jesus took a child and told them, **“verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matt. 18:3) They were to become as humble as a child to be great in the kingdom, to receive the little ones in His name and not offend one that believed in Jesus.

Jesus explained that He was come to save that which was lost. Then He told them that if a brother trespassed against them they were to go tell him of the offence privately, but if he would not hear them, they were to take one or two witnesses and if he still would not hear the matter, he was to be brought before the congregation. If he still would not hear, he was to be to them as a publican, or a non-brother (another race). He also taught them forgiveness and in answer to Peter’s question as to how often should one forgive his brother and suggesting a limit of seven times, Jesus answered **“seventy times seven.”** (Matt. 18:22) JRL

FORGIVENESS

We want to continue our discussion of the subject of “forgiveness” this issue. I would suggest that before reading this, that you re-read the discussion on this subject in our last issue so you have the foundation we tried to lay in that issue for this discussion.

We discussed the difference between “sanctification” and “justification,” something that we need to expand on a little further as we continue. The simplistic teaching, that those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven and everyone else will go to hell, has deterred many from studying any further. Under this teaching, it is assumed

that everyone in either category is treated the same, i.e. everyone going to heaven has the same reward and everyone going to hell has the same reward. The Bible does not teach this. For example, Luke 19 relates the parable of the pounds. Note first of all that all the men in this parable are servants. I believe this tells us that all were Christians. We are not talking about some being Christians and some not, or one losing his justification. We are talking about what the Christian does and his reward. The servant that multiplied his pound into ten pounds is told that he will have authority over ten cities while the one multiplying his pound into five pounds is to have authority over 5 cities. The one who buried his pound instead of multiplying it, lost the pound that he had. This tells us that the rewards will vary. Again, we are not talking about immortality, which is, of course, a reward that all who have it will share equally in it. It is more than this, it is the degree of responsibility and authority given. But the question is, what is involved in multiplying the pound given to the servant. This is what we want to discuss.

Revelation 20:6 speaks of a group of people who have part in the first resurrection, Paul, in Philippians 3:14 speaks of the prize of the high calling, Hebrews 11:35 speaks of a better resurrection, and John, in Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26 and 3:5, 12, and 21 speaks of he who overcomes. All of these are talking about the same thing, a group of people who have overcome the world and are chosen by the Father to rule and reign over the earth with Christ. These have become known by many of us as overcomers, that we believe are the people spoken of in the above mentioned parable who have multiplied their pounds to whom will be given authority over cities. The problem with most of us is that when we think of authority over someone or something, we think in terms of the world rather than in the terms of Christ.

Matt. 18:3 tells us, **“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”** In the gospel of John

13, Jesus, at the last supper, when the meal was finished, took a basin of water and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. Peter objected until Jesus told him in verse 8, **“If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”** When He had finished, He explained in verses 13-16, **“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.”** This was done as an example of serving, the manner in which the overcomers will rule. Humbleness and an attitude of serving are key to being in this group we call overcomers. For this reason, in teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus told them in Matt. 6:12 to ask, **“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”** and then followed this up with the explanation, **“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”** As I said in our last issue, I believe this is talking about the same thing as Matt. 12:31-32, **“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.**

Blasphemy is speaking to injure someone. Please read the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt. 18:23-35. Note how the king who had forgiven much of his servant was hurt when that servant refused to forgive a little of a fellow servant. I believe this is the same as speaking against the Holy Spirit. In the scripture we quoted above that Jesus said **“it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”** The word “world” should be translated “age.” So He is saying that the man would not be

forgiven in this age or the next. If we go to Rev. 20, we see that the overcomer is to rule with Christ for a thousand years, i.e. the next age, then follows the second resurrection and the great white throne of judgment and another age. A person, though a Christian, who does not forgive in this life, will not be forgiven in this life, nor will he be privileged to have part in the next age, the thousand years of Christ’s reign before the judgment, but will, as Jesus taught in Luke 12:46, be given his portion, or his reward, with (at the same time as) the unbelievers. So, whatever else may be required to be an overcomer, being forgiving is at the top of the list.

We need to learn when and how to forgive. Because our man-made judicial system is so out of sync with the Divine judicial system, most of us are out of sync as well, as we look to our own system for guidance rather than the Divine system. For example, in the man-made system, the judge supposedly has the power to forgive men of their trespasses. In the Divine system, only the victim has that power or authority. The judge only has the authority to determine the guilt or innocence of a person and then pass a predetermined sentence based on the circumstances of the trespass. As a result of our misplaced emphasis on the man-made system, the victim is very often not considered at all. In discussions that I have participated in in the past, the discussion will almost always turn to forgiving some famous criminal such as O. J. Simpson or Ted Bundy. I feel that this is usually a distraction that we perpetrate to keep from dealing with our own grudges. It is not our place to forgive these famous criminals as we are not their victims. This is up to the victims, or families of the victims. People are often quite willing to forgive someone who has done something to someone else, but it is our own private grudges we need to deal with.

True forgiveness is simple but certainly not easy. I have often said that the reason that there is a hell in people’s minds, is because too many Christians have someone in mind that they want to send there. Rom. 12:19 expresses the

same thought as a number of scriptures concerning vengeance, **“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”**

Forgiveness needs to be dealt with prudently. There are times when forgiveness needs to be withheld for the benefit of the one causing the problem. An example we can all be familiar with, is with children. If a child disobeys his parents, though the parent is willing and will ultimately forgive the child, it is better to withhold the forgiveness until corrective punishment is administered, so that the child learns not to disobey again. But once the punishment has been administered, it is incumbent on the parent to forgive, i.e. let that be the end of the matter. We may be faced with similar situations in our everyday life. For example, if someone broke into your home and stole some money, you might want to withhold your forgiveness until the thief had made good your loss. Or you might find that the person for some reason, not of his own making, was out of a job and had children at home without anything to eat and his theft was to feed them. If he was repentant, you might wish to forgive him immediately and never press charges. Circumstances need to be taken into consideration.

The person that most of us find most difficult to forgive is not someone who has done physical or material damage to us, but rather someone who has hurt our feelings in some way. Someone may say or do something that offends us, then instead of going to the person to see if it was their intent to offend us, or if the offence was unintentional, we seem to like to brood about it and build it up in our mind to be much worse than it was originally. Then forgiveness becomes more and more difficult. The negative attitude we then develop affects our health negatively. If we turn the situation around and we do something that offends someone, though we may be repentant and would like to make it right with the other person, if that privilege is not allowed by the other person, that too affects our health negatively. So we should know, when we are offended, to try to re-

solve the matter as quickly as we can for the benefit of both parties. It may be that the other person is not aware that he has offended you, but would be more than willing to ask forgiveness if he knew. Of course, there are always those times when the person doing the damage does so intentionally and is not repentant. The victim can offer forgiveness, but can't force the person doing the damage to accept it.

Lev. 19:18 tells us, **“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD.”** I Peter 4:8-9 tells us, **“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”** This is the law, this is the will of God.

Surprisingly, there are often two persons that we seem to find most difficult to forgive. The first is our Father in heaven. Not that He has done anything to us to offend or damage us, but because He did not meet our expectations. I have visited with some people who are very bitter against God because He did not provide something they thought they deserved, or they have lost a loved one, or haven't been healed of a sickness, or a multitude of other reasons. We get so wrapped up in ourselves that we either cannot or will not attempt to look at the big picture. It is difficult for us to understand why things happen, or don't happen, especially at the moment, but when we can see the whole picture, I believe we will see that all has been for our good. I realize this is easy said, but if we study God's Word, I think we will see that though drastic things happened to people, God has a plan that will ultimately put all people in a position that they have not even dreamed about. It is this bigger picture that we need to learn to try to see.

The other person that we find hard to forgive is ourselves. I believe a great deal of the depression we see people suffering with now, is due to a refusal to forgive themselves. Many of us are afflicted with “I should have” disease. We think that if we would have just done this or that

differently, we would be in a much better situation. Again we become depressed and usually try to take it out on someone else. We just need to learn to forgive ourselves and tackle the situation before us to the very best of our ability.

One final thought. If you are having a difficult time forgiving, turn to Luke 23:34 and to Acts 7:59-60 and for a moment, in your mind, put yourself in the position of these men, then look at yourself and do what you need to do. JRL

HEALTHY EATING

I would like to direct this article primarily to young people, particularly in their early teens. I know from personal experience that good eating habits learned and practiced as a young teenager pays great dividends in later life. First off, it is easier for a young teenager to kick bad habits than it is for one later in life. I am convinced that a young teenager, though few know this, has better control over his or her will power than older people. As a teenager, a person is fairly new to making decisions and reasoning, so with some common sense information can, and often will, make the right decisions. Secondly, the sooner that one trains one's body to good habits the better one's health will be as age begins to take its toll. Of course, the opposite is true as well. It is no mystery why cigarette manufacturers, or drug pushers, or purveyors of pornography, or extreme liberal political propaganda, direct their greatest efforts to this age of child. They all know that if they can infect the mind and body of this age of person with bad habits, they have probably got them for life.

There are many good habits that I won't attempt to promote in this article, such as moderate eating, balanced diets, moderation of "junk" food eating, vitamin and mineral supplementation, understanding affects of different foods on different parts of our bodies, etc. I would, however, like to direct your attention to the health, or food, laws of God as presented in His Holy Word. Many people treat keeping of these laws as reli-

gious rituals, giving their keeping at least partial credit for their salvation. I would like for us to look at them as God's rules for good health. As a manufacturer provides an owner's manual with his new machine telling how to best use and maintain it for maximum life and efficiency of the machine, so God has given us some rules concerning what we eat to help us have a long and enjoyable life.

Leviticus 11 is especially written for this purpose. Four footed animals used for food is the first category. We're told in verse 3, **"Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is cloven-footed, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat."** This would include cattle, sheep, goats, deer, elk and many other wild game. It would not include a horse, for example, because it does neither chew its cud nor does it have a cloven, or split, hoof. Nor would it include the pig, or swine, though it does have a split hoof but does not chew the cud. An animal such as a rabbit, though it may appear to chew the cud, it does not have a hoof, but has feet with toes instead.

The animals that chew the cud and have the divided hoof have a different digestive system than animals who only have one or none of the two distinguishing characteristics. The cow, for example, has four stomachs, each with its own part in the digestion of food. These stomachs will not digest meat, so the cow is limited to eating grass, hay, and other forage, items that of themselves, do not carry diseases or parasites that can be transmitted to humans. If a cow accidentally eats something that might be poisonous to a human, it will usually kill the animal before it can be transferred to a human through consumption.

The pig is very different in its eating habits. It eats what other animals such as cows, sheep, or goats will not eat and as a result picks up parasites that instead of passing out of the pig in its waste, invades the flesh of the pig where, when eaten by humans it in turn invades the body of the human. For this reason, in a slaughter house, or packing house, where animals are slaughtered and prepared for food to the human's table, even our government recognizes the prob-

lem and will not allow beef to be slaughtered or cut up in the same place as the hog was slaughtered or cut up without a very thorough cleaning of all equipment, tables and floor first. However this extensive cleaning is not required if the beef is handled first and then the hog is handled. Efforts have been made in the swine industry to try to raise hogs in a environment where they are not exposed to parasites, but it has only had limited success, if any. Even thorough cooking does not kill all of the parasites that pigs carry.

The next category dealt with in Lev. 11 is fish and seafood. Verse 9 says, **“These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat.”** These would include trout, salmon, bass and sea fish that I am not familiar with, being a inland land-lubber. But the rules apply to both fresh water fish and salt water fish. Fish that have only fins, or only scales, but not both are virtually always what is referred to as bottom feeders. i.e., they, like the pigs feed off of the garbage that, in this case, settles to the bottom of the river or sea. This is especially true of shell fish who never really get off of the bottom. This is part of the reason that shell fish are considered quite dangerous to eat and why for many people they cause severe allergic reactions. In this day and time when so much human waste, especially drug and medical waste finds its way into our waters, obeying this food law becomes especially important.

The third category is that of birds. We are not given a rule of thumb by which to gauge what birds are clean or unclean like we are with fish and four legged animals except as regards

flying insects. Verse 21 says, **“Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth.”** This would include the grasshopper and the locust. As for the birds, a list is given of unclean fowl, that when studied gives us a reasonable idea of what is clean and unclean. The unclean birds listed are birds whose food consists primarily dead and rotting animal flesh. In other words, they, like the unclean fish and unclean animals are God’s garbage removers.

There are people who believe that God did away with His law, and thus did away with His food laws and they use the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 to prove their point. I suggest that you read Acts 10 yourself and pay special attention to verse 28, as Peter gives the reason for the visions he saw while on his roof top. It was to teach Peter a lesson, not to invalidate His law.

Exodus 29 and Lev. 3, while probably not considered food laws, actually gives us some good advice concerning the eating of animals. We need to realize that with the exception of sacrifices for sin that were to be burnt, the sacrifices were eaten by the priests and the people. But in preparation of the carcass, the priests were to remove the fat off of the rump of the bullock or sheep and the fat on the inside of the carcass along with the kidneys and the fat around them. If you have ever seen a freshly slaughtered animal you know that the fat is quite thick in these areas. They were then to burn the fat as part of the sacrifice. This doesn’t mean that the fat is unclean but it reduces the amount of fat that might be consumed by humans. Today, unfortunately, that fat is mixed with many prepared meat products. JRL