

the peculiar people, the purchased possession (1 Peter 2:4-9), the habitation of God, the light of the world, the salt and wheat of the earth; this is that Church to which the Lord Jesus promises, “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,” and to which he says, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 16:13-18; 28:20).

This is the only Church which possesses true unity. Its members are agreed on all the weightier matters of religion, for they are all taught by one Spirit. About God and Christ and the Spirit and sin and their own hearts and faith and repentance and necessity of holiness and the value of the Bible and the importance of prayer and the resurrection and judgment to come—about all these points they are of one mind. Take three or four of them, strangers to one another, from the remotest corners of the earth; examine them separately on these points: you will find them all of one judgment.

This is the only Church which possesses true sanctity. Its members are all holy. They are not merely holy by profession, holy in name; but they are all holy in act and deed and reality and life and truth. They are all more or less conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. No unholy man belongs to this Church (Heb 12:14).

This is the only Church which is truly universal. It is not the Church of any one nation or people; its members are found in every part of the world where the gospel is received and believed. It is not confined within the limits of any one country, or within the pale of any particular form or outward government. In it there is no difference between Jew and Greek, black and white, rich and poor—but faith in Christ is all. Its members will be gathered from north and south and east and west and will be of every name and tongue—but all one in Christ Jesus.

This is the only Church which is truly apostolic. It is built on the foundation laid by the Apostles, and holds the doctrines which they preached (Eph 2:20-22). The two grand objects at which its members aim are apostolic faith and apostolic practice; and they consider the man who talks of following the Apostles without possessing these two things to be no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

This is the only Church which is certain to endure unto the end. Nothing can altogether overthrow and destroy it. Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, burned; but the true Church is never altogether extinguished; it rises again from its afflictions; it lives on through fire and water. When crushed in one land it springs up in another. The Pharaohs, the Herods, the Neros, the Bloody Marys, have labored in vain to put down this Church; they slay their thousands, and then pass away and go to their own place. The true Church outlives them all, and sees them buried each in his turn. It is an anvil that has broken many a hammer in this world, and will break many a hammer still; it is a bush which is often burning, and yet is not consumed.

This is the only Church of which no one member can perish. Once enrolled in the lists of this Church, sinners are safe for eternity; they are never cast away (John 6:37). The election of God the Father, the continual intercession of God the Son, the daily renewing and sanctifying power of God the Holy Spirit, surround and fence them in like a garden enclosed (Rom 8:28-39). Not one bone of Christ’s mystical Body shall ever be broken; not one lamb of Christ’s flock shall ever be plucked out of his hand (John 10:27,28).

This is the Church which does the work of Christ upon earth. Its members are a little flock, and few in number compared with the children of the world: one or two here, and two or three there—a few in this parish and a few in that. But these are they who shake the universe; these are they who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers; these are they who are the active workers for spreading knowledge of the pure gospel and undefiled; these are the life-blood of a country, the shield, the defense, the stay, and the support of any nation to which they belong.

This is the Church which shall be truly glorious in the end. When all earthly glory is passed away then shall this Church be presented without spot before God the Father’s throne (Eph 5:25-27; Jude 24,25). Thrones, principalities, and powers upon earth shall come to nothing; dignities and offices and endowments shall all pass away; but the Church of the firstborn shall shine as the stars at the last, and be presented with joy before the Father’s throne in the day of Christ’s appearing. When the Lord’s jewels are made up, and the manifestation of the sons of God takes place, this or that church or denomination will not be mentioned; one Church only will be named, and that is the Church of the elect.

This is the true Church to which you must belong if you would be saved. Till you belong to this, you are nothing better than a lost soul. You may have the form and the shell of religion, but you have not the substance and the life. Yes, you may have countless outward privileges: you may enjoy great light and knowledge—but if you do not belong to the Body of Christ, your light and knowledge and privileges will not save your soul.

Alas, for the ignorance that prevails on this point! People imagine they can join this church or that church, and become communicants, following certain forms, and all will be well with their souls. It is an utter delusion, a gross mistake. All were not Israel who were of Israel (Rom 9:6), and all are not members of Christ’s Body who profess themselves Christian (Matt 7:21-23). Take notice: you may be the most faithful church-goer in the community, and yet not belong to the true Church. And if you do not, it were better at last if you had never been born. □

—J. C. Ryle

Living for Jesus

Jesus says to all who come to him for salvation, “Take up thy cross, and follow me” (Matt 16:24). The apostle Paul asserted that Christ died so that all his people should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them (2 Cor 5:15). If you have indeed come to Christ for salvation from your sins, you must live a life that pleases him and not yourself. Because he loved you first, you must love him and his people fervently and obey his word keeping his commandments (1 John 2:1-5; 4:7-11,19-20).

What are the commandments of Christ? How can I know what pleases him? The greatest command of our Lord is love. Paul said that by bearing the burdens of others, we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). The law of Christ was stated by Jesus in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” All his commands flow out of this singular law to love others (John 15:10-13). It is summed up in this, “Walk in love” (Eph 5:2).

What shape will a life of love take? The best answer is found in Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5-7 (also Luke 6:20-49), where Jesus gives important teachings to his disciples, commonly called *the Sermon on the Mount*. There is much evidence to suggest that in the early church, Matthew 5-7 was used as a “handbook” to teach converts how to please the Lord in their daily walk with Christ. From this passage we can glean at least ten major points concerning our life of loving obedience to the Lord.

(1) In order for our worship of God to be valid, we must first be sure we are reconciled to our brothers and sisters in Christ (Matt 5:21-24). If we know or sense that there is a rupture in our relationship with another believer, it is our responsibility to go and seek reconciliation. Jesus said that this duty is so important that acts of worship must be interrupted in order to pursue the repairing of a broken relationship. This illustrates that we are deceived if we think we can have a deep relationship with God while our relationships with other believers are unreconciled (see Matt 6:14-15).

(2) It is not enough to abstain from the outward acts of sin, like adultery. Our innermost thoughts must be pure, that is, we must not even look on others with lust. We must take sin very seriously, and mortify the deeds of the flesh (Matt 5:28-30; Rom 8:13). In Christ’s day there were many religious leaders who prided themselves in how outwardly pure they were. But Jesus pointed out that inwardly they were filled with lust and evil thoughts, and that the “sinners” they condemned, would enter his kingdom instead of them. Jesus pronounced “blessedness” on the pure in heart, not upon those who strictly conformed to an outward code.

(3) Disciples of Christ are to be marked by truthful speech (Matt 5:33-37) as Jesus said: Let your “Yea” be “Yea” and your “Nay” be “Nay.” Societies use the oath as a way of supporting truth and discouraging the lie. But all that is unnecessary for disciples of Jesus. Simple truth itself is the rule. Jesus would have us at all times to be direct, clear and simple in our speech, saying what we mean, no more and no less. Anyone who wants to be a disciple and participate in the life of Christian fellowship must earnestly desire and intend to speak the truth from his heart.

(4) In a world filled with violence and schemes for revenge, Christ’s people are to love, do good and pray for their enemies (Matt 5:38-39; 43-48). When wronged we all have a tendency to strike back at those who hurt us. The way of Jesus requires that we never render evil for evil, or seek revenge, but instead overcome evil by doing good to our enemies (Rom 12:17-21).

Nothing characterizes our world more than conditional relationships: “I will be good to you only as long as you are good to me; I will help you only as long as you help me.” But those who follow Christ are to show a new way of love with no strings attached. “If you mistreat me, I will give you food and drink; I will give to you with no concern about receiving anything back; if you curse me, I will return words of kindness; I will show love to you even if you continue to hate me.” This lifestyle displays God himself. He shows innumerable kindnesses to those who hate him and are ungrateful. In spite of the wickedness of humans, God persists in his kindness to them (Luke 6:35). Thus Jesus exhorts his disciples: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

(5) Christ’s disciples must do good works in the presence of God, not in order to be seen of men (Matt 6:1-8,16-18). Jesus taught that when we give to others in need, or when we pray or fast, we must never do these things to impress onlookers, but we must act as those under the eye of God “which seeth in secret” and rewards accordingly (Matt 6:18).

(6) The community of believers is to be a place where forgiveness can be found (Matt 6:12-15). When we ask God to forgive our sins, a question then confronts us: Have we forgiven those who have sinned against us? Jesus stated that if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. In order for us to be freely forgiven by God, we must first forgive those who wrong us. This again shows how important it is to maintain our relationships with those around us. We cannot harbor hatred and bitterness toward other people and expect to have fellowship with our Lord. We must not allow the sun to go down while we are still angry (Eph 4:26).

(7) Christ’s people must set their affections on things above (Col 3:2), and not on the things of this life. They must trust in the eternal God whom they cannot see, not in the temporal things that can be seen (2 Cor 4:18). Jesus knew that his followers would be tempted and allured by the things of the world, so he bid them to lay up treasures in heaven.

He let it be known that people must choose between God and money. Believers do not need to trust in or seek the vanities of this life, because the Lord is committed to caring for his flock on earth. Jesus gave these comforting words, “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt 6:25,32). As we seek his kingdom first, he will take care of our daily needs as he sees fit.

(8) In order to minister to others, believers must avoid a judgmental spirit (Matt 7:1-5). If we focus on the faults of others with a critical attitude, and do not deal with our own shortcomings, we remove ourselves from any possibility of ministering to others. If we judge others harshly and strictly, as if we are better than they are, Jesus said we then have cut ourselves off from helping them with their problems. In order for the community of believers to be a place of help and healing, judgmental attitudes must be put away.

(9) Because there are so many false anti-gospel voices, Christ instructed his people to be discerning and observe the fruit in those who profess to lead the church (Matt 7:15-23). We tend to think that because some persons appear to do great things for Christ, that they are stars in his kingdom. But the Lord said, “Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” He said there would be many in the last day who would claim to have taught, to have cast out demons and to have done many other works in his name, but he will say to them then that they were never truly his people and will cast them out. Because of the presence of false teachers and Antichrists, Christians cannot believe every spirit, but must test the spirits to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1).

(10) The teachings of Christ are the only sure foundation upon which to build our lives. Everything in the Christian life must be based on and flow out of what Jesus has done for us in his redemptive work (“as I have loved you”—John 13:34; 15:12) and what he has said to us as LORD (“I say unto you”—Matt 5-7). People who hear the words of Christ and fail or refuse to practice them are headed for a great crash. But his disciples hear his words, practice them, and build their lives upon the rock, Christ Jesus. When Jesus said, “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine” (Matt 7:24), he specifically had in view the cluster of teachings found in Matthew 5-7. It is upon this central core of Jesus’ teachings, *the Sermon on the Mount*, that we must build our lives to the glory of God.

“When Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt 7:28-29). Indeed, Christ calls his disciples to a radical life of loving, unselfish sacrifice. Anyone who seriously seeks to follow his teachings by God’s grace, will be marked as a “different” person, a person refusing to be squeezed into the mold of the world’s ways of doing things. □

Walking in Love

(1) If a man is lost in Adam we must in love exhort him to faith in Christ and repentance towards God.

(2) If a person is a brother or sister in Christ we must love them as Christ loved us (constantly, sacrificially, unconditionally) (John 13:34; 1 John 3:16).

(3) Christians are to edify (build up) one another as functioning priests in a local church (1 Thess 1:1; 5:11,14). Edification is realized through mutual support, encouragement, admonition, and has as its goal our conformity to the image of Christ (Rom 15:14; Heb 3:13; 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10; Rom 8:29).

(4) Christians are to fervently love one another, with a love that covers a multitude of sins, with a love that is quick to forgive, forbear, and that is always kind and longsuffering (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 4:8; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).

(5) In all these duties, our words play a prominent role. Our words are to be used to build up, not to tear down (Col 3:8,16; Eph 4:29,31; 5:4; 1 Peter 4:11; James 3:10). We are to consciously make edification the goal of our speech, and avoid speaking evil of others, when we have not gone to the brother with our reservations. Love “thinketh no evil” (1 Cor 13:5).

(6) We are to strive in our actions and words for things that make for peace (Rom 12:18). We are to pursue peace and make peace in our relationships with men. Being a “peacemaker” means that we will **(1)** follow biblical principles to resolve sinful conflicts and problems; and **(2)** order our lives with a view toward effecting and promoting harmony (Matt 5:9; Heb 12:14).

(7) If a brother in Christ has something against you, you are to go to him and be reconciled (Matt 5:23-24).

(8) If we have something against another brother, we are to go to him and be reconciled (Matt 18:15).

(9) If a strong brother partakes of something you abstain from, you are not to judge him (Rom 14:3).

(10) If a weak brother abstains from something you enjoy, you are not to despise him (Rom 14:3).

(11) In all things, weak and strong brethren are to seek one another’s welfare by pursuing peace and edification (Rom 14:19). Paul did not tell the vegetable-eater to start eating meat; nor did he tell the meat-eater to stop eating meat (Rom 14:2-3). Rather, Paul exhorts them both to have a Christ-honoring attitude of respect toward one another (Rom 15:1-3,7).

(12) If a saint falls into sin, we are to care for him by confronting the problem with a view toward his restoration (Gal 6:1-2; Matt 18:15-16).

(13) If a saint who has fallen into sin repents, we are to forgive and receive him (Matt 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4; 2 Cor 2:6-8).

(14) If a professing brother has fallen into sin, has been lovingly confronted (Matt 18:15-16), and refuses to repent, the church must put him out of the assembly (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:2,7). Even this purging out of leaven is done in hopes of the ultimate restoration of the offender.

(15) If we know (or believe) that a brother has something against us, or if we know we have something against a brother, or if we know (or believe) a brother is in some sin, or if we—for any reason—feel alienated from a brother, and we do not go to that brother for healing, we sin against Christ and our brother. The New Testament stresses the bond of fellowship among brethren. If we believe that this bond is broken, we are obliged to go to others and heal the breach. This does not mean that we must all agree on everything. But it does mean that we cannot harbor bad thoughts about others.

(16) If a brother is walking disorderly (“out of ranks”) the brethren are to withdraw from him in order that he might be ashamed (2 Thess 3:6,14). In such cases, the person is to be admonished as a brother, not treated as an enemy (2 Thess 3:15). The goal here is for the brother to be brought back into step with apostolic teachings (2 Thess 3:6,10,14).

These propositions by no means exhaust the demands of love in Christian relationships. But I do believe that they isolate our basic duties to one another. I am convinced that these duties are scarcely practiced as they should be in our churches, and insufficiently reflected upon in our Christian experience. It is hard to go to another saint and deal with a problem. But love cares and love disciplines. We are in fact unloving if we skirt these duties in the name of “peace.”

Brothers and sisters, after you have read over and meditated on these propositions, I trust that the Spirit will move you to take action regarding the general and specific duties given in the New Testament. If we hear, but do not practice, we deceive ourselves (James 1:22). If we hear and do these things, we will be happy and blessed (John 13:17; 15:11). “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3 NKJV). □

—Jon Zens

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The True Church

The one true Church is composed of all true believers in the Lord Jesus. It is made up of all God’s elect, of all those truly converted, and all having the same marks. They are all born again of the same Spirit; they all possess “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21), and holiness of life. They abhor sin, and love Christ. They worship differently; but they all worship with one heart, are all led by one Spirit, and all build upon one foundation—Jesus Christ.

This Church is dependent upon no ministers upon earth, however much it values those who preach the Word. The life of its members does not hang upon church membership or baptism or the Lord’s Supper—although they highly value these things. But it has only one great Head, one Shepherd, one chief Bishop—Jesus Christ. He alone, by his Spirit, admits the members of this Church, though ministers may show the door. Till he opens the door, no man on earth can open it (Acts 2:47).

As a man repents and believes the gospel, that moment he becomes a member of this Church. Like the dying thief, he may have no opportunity of being baptized; but he has that which is far better than any water-baptism—the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). He may not be able to receive the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper, but he partakes of Christ’s Body and receives Christ’s blood by faith every day he lives (John 6:53-58), and no minister on earth can prevent him. He may be excommunicated by ordained men, and cut off from the outward ordinances of the professing church; but all the ordained men in the world cannot shut him out of the true Church.

It is a Church whose existence does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, chapels, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates or any act of favor whatsoever from the hand of man. It has often lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it. It has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have been its friends. Its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and his Spirit; and they being ever with it, the Church cannot die.

This is the Church to which the Scriptural titles of present honor and privilege, and the promises of future glory especially belong; this is the Body of Christ; this is the flock of Christ; this is the household of faith and the family of God; this is God’s building, God’s foundation and the temple of the Holy Ghost. This is the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven (Heb 12:22-24); this is the royal priesthood, the chosen generation,