

DILIGENTLY SEEKING THE LORD

The Elements That Produce Genuine Devotion To The Lord

Introduction

“Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered your house;

You gave Me no water for My feet, BUT she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.

You gave Me no kiss, BUT this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in.

You did not anoint My head with oil, BUT this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.

Therefore I say to you, **her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little**” (Luke 7:44-47 NKJV).

1. Many people believe and obey the gospel but not all continue as true disciples of the Lord (Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23).
 - a. Some people never rise above the level of nominal Christianity. These are people who have covered themselves with a thin veneer of Christianity. Their involvement in Christianity is enough to afford themselves a *measure* of inward peace, and a *measure* of respectability among their peers. These are people who have no desire to be anything other than nominal Christians. Any encouragement or admonition falls on deaf ears. These are likely to fall away because...
 - 1) ...they have no root in themselves (The health of a plant depends upon the moisture and nutrients it receives from the root. Spiritually speaking, the essential nourishment a Christian requires comes from the word of God – 1 Peter 2:2); **their faith is shallow, and this is exposed when personal hardships and persecution comes** (Matthew 13:20-21).
 - 2) ...they allow the influence of God’s word to be choked out by the cares of this world (these are people who are anxious over their personal welfare), **the deceitfulness of riches** (these are people who chase after wealth in the belief that it will bring happiness, peace, and meaning to their lives), and **pleasures of this life** (these are people whose main focus in life is to enjoy all that this world has to offer) (Matthew 13:22; Luke 8:14).
 - b. There are others who have all the appearance of being nominal Christians, but who will respond to encouragement and admonition. The brethren at Corinth were still carnal - evidenced by the envy, strife, and divisions among them (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) – and in Hebrews we read of those who had not grown in their knowledge beyond the basics (Hebrews 5:12-13). Yet Paul and the author of Hebrews were confident of a positive response (2 Corinthians 7:8-11; Hebrews 6:9; 10:39).
2. What, then, will motivate us to seek the Lord more diligently? What are the elements that produce real disciples: people who are deeply devoted to Christ?

I. GENUINE HUMILITY AND PENITENCE

Genuine humility and penitence move one to seek God and hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

A. Humility and penitence.

1. **Humility** is essential to spiritual progress.

“Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:3-6 NKJV).

- a. Pride and humility cannot dwell in our hearts together – one has to go! Pride manifests itself in various forms...some so subtle that we may not realise just how much pride remains in our hearts. Pride manifests itself in a myriad of ways: denial, defensiveness, blaming others, avoiding the truth, self-sufficiency, complacency, etc.

- b. Spiritual progress can only be made when we truly humble ourselves before God (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6-7). To be “lifted up”, to progress spiritually, it is essential to acknowledge our emptiness and brokenness before God.

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (Psalms 42:1).

- 1) Emptiness: All human beings have a void in their hearts; a longing that cannot be satisfied by anything the world has to offer; it is a void and longing that can only be filled and satisfied by God (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
- 2) Brokenness: All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and we all carry a burden of guilt that is far greater than we can imagine (whether we feel it or not). It is essential that we come to recognise and acknowledge our guilt and allow God to remove it (Matthew 5:3-4).

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart - These, O God, You will not despise” (Psalms 51:17).

2. Genuine humility before God produces a profound **penitence** in our hearts: Paul said, “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). The Corinthians’ repentance was evidenced by what it produced in them (2 Corinthians 7:11).

- B. It is humility and penitence that move one to seek God; **realising and acknowledging his spiritual bankruptcy and burden of guilt, he hungers and thirsts for the righteousness of God** (Matthew 5:3-6; cp. Romans 1:16-17).

II. ACCEPTANCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS

One who genuinely humbles himself before God and experiences godly sorrow that leads to repentance will seek and accept God’s forgiveness. If the reality of God’s forgiveness is not fully accepted, then how can we have the gratitude and love that should flow from this acceptance?

- A. Paul tells us that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16-17). It is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8).

1. One who is a sinner must hear the gospel, believe the gospel, repent of sin, confess that Jesus is Lord, and be baptised for the remission of sins (Mark. 16:16; cp. Acts 2:14-41).
2. One who is already a Christian and sins must confess his sin and repent (1 John 1:9; cp. 2 Corinthians 7:10; Acts 8:22).

- B. We must truly believe that God has forgiven us of our sins.

1. There are two things that may hinder us:

- a. Dwelling on our sins: (i) we may not truly believe that we have been forgiven because of the heinous nature of our sins, (ii) we may question the genuineness of our repentance; we may not see God’s grace and mercy as present realities that are truly ours.
- b. Looking to the future: we may not be sure of our eventual salvation in heaven; we may be haunted by uncertainty that God will ever accept us.

2. We must come to the point where we have accepted God’s forgiveness emotionally as well as intellectually. Grace must be real to us: We must be able to say, “Yes, I am really and truly forgiven. In Christ, God accepts me!”

- a. The importance of this point must not be underestimated. **If the reality of God’s forgiveness is not fully accepted, then how we can have the gratitude and love that should flow from this acceptance?**

- b. How can I be certain that God has really forgiven me? How can I be certain that I am going to heaven? Consider:

- 1) What does God say He will do if I confess my sins? God says He will “forgive us our sins” and “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Does God lie? The writer of Hebrews says, “It is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18).

- 2) What has the Lord promised you who believe? Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life” (John 6:47). Did Jesus tell a lie? Certainly not! The Hebrew writer assures that he was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15; cp. 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1 NKJV).

III. GRATITUDE AND LOVE

If the reality of God’s forgiveness is fully accepted, then genuine gratitude and love will flow from it.

A. Gratitude and love:

1. Gratitude:

- a. Gratitude to God is in proportion to how much we recognize the enormity of the debt He has cancelled in our case (Luke 7:47). (i) We will not be grateful if we fail to see the *seriousness* of our own sins, (ii) We will not be grateful if we have not truly *accepted* God’s forgiveness as a reality.
- b. Gratitude for forgiveness is prompted by a consciousness of the *specific* sins that we have committed. If we have no more than a generic sense of sin - “I know I’ve done wrong” – then we will certainly not see the seriousness of our sins or the enormity of the debt that needs to be forgiven (cp. Luke 18:9-14). It is those who mourn over the *specific* sins they have committed and realise the enormity of their debt that will be gripped by deep gratitude when they are forgiven (cp. Acts 9:1-9; 1 Timothy 1:12-17).

2. Love.

- a. Our love for God will be in proportion to our gratitude to Him (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). If we have been forgiven much, we will love much (Luke 7:47).
- b. Now here’s the thing: the more we learn about the holiness and goodness of God, the more we begin to see ourselves as we really are; the more we begin to see that every single person has been *forgiven much*. Therefore, every one of us ought to *love much*.

- B. Just to clarify: the gratitude and love we express will be in proportion to how much we have been forgiven. **We each need to realize that we have been forgiven much.**

IV. SERVICE AND STEADFASTNESS

A. Service.

1. What is it that will move us beyond *nominal* Christianity to *fervent* discipleship? It is genuine love for God (Matthew 22:35-40), and if we have been forgiven much, we will love much (Luke 7:47).
2. If we do have a genuine love for the Lord, then it will be seen in our complete obedience to His commandments. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15), and John says, “But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (1 John 2:5).

B. Steadfastness.

1. Just as we will labor diligently, we will also endure steadfastly if we love God (2 Timothy 1:12).
2. Love for God is the key to resisting temptation (James 1:12), overcoming bad habits (John 8:10-11), enduring persecution for the Lord (2 Timothy 1:12), and the steadfast faithfulness to finish our course with joy (Acts 20:24).
3. If we do not remain faithful, then we may have “forgotten” that we were forgiven of our sins (2 Peter 1:5-11).

Conclusion

1. Many people believe and obey the gospel but not all continue in the faith. Some fall away when persecution comes, and some because the word is choked out by the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the pleasures of this life (Matthew 13:20-22).
2. There are some who continue in the faith but fail to grow in knowledge and mature in their behavior; they lack commitment and devotion to the Lord. If we fall into this category, then what will motivate us to diligently seek the Lord? What are the elements that will produce genuine discipleship?
 - a. We must humble ourselves before God. This takes place when we come to realise that we are spiritually bankrupt - poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3; Psalms 51:17) - and the great debt of sin we owe – mourn over our sin (Matthew 5:4). This will cause us to diligently seek the Lord – hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6).
 - b. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will find it in the hearing of the gospel (Romans 1:16-17). Christians sin, too, but John assures us that, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It is essential, though, that we accept the reality of God’s forgiveness. How can we express genuine gratitude and love toward God if we doubt God’s forgiveness!
3. If we accept God’s forgiveness, then gratitude and love will flow naturally. Such will be evidenced by our faithful service to the Lord (John 14:15) and steadfastness in the faith (Revelation 2:2-5, 10; 2 Peter 1:5-11).

When we honestly face our own emptiness and brokenness, genuinely accept God’s forgiveness, and learn to appreciate God’s grace at a deeper level, then we will rise above the level of “nominal” Christianity - and remove ourselves from vulnerability to temptation, discouragement, and defeat.