

YOUR HIGH CHRISTIAN CALLING

12 ²⁸One of the scribes came and heard them debating. Realizing that [Jesus] had given them a good answer, he asked him, What is the greatest commandment? ²⁹Jesus answered, The greatest [commandment] is this, Hear, O Israel; The LORD our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. ³¹The second [great commandment] is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. ³²The scribe said to him, Truly, Teacher, you are right in saying that he is one; and there is none beside him; ³³and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, is more [important] than all the burnt-offerings and sacrifices. ³⁴When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. After that no one dared ask him any question.

³⁵As he taught in the temple, Jesus asked, How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? ³⁶David himself said by the Holy Spirit, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies the footstool for your feet. ³⁷David himself calls him Lord; how then is he his son? And the common people enjoyed listening to him. ³⁸In his teaching [Jesus] said, Beware of the scribes. They like to walk around in long flowing robes, and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹and occupy the most important seats in the synagogues, and the place of greatest honor at banquets. ⁴⁰[But] they devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance offer long prayers. They [are the ones who] shall receive greater condemnation.

⁴¹He sat down across from the place where the offerings were deposited, and observed how the crowd put money into the temple treasury. Many rich people deposited large sums [of money]. ⁴²Then there came one poor widow, and she put into [the treasury] two copper coins that [together] make a small fraction of a denarius. ⁴³[Jesus] called his disciples to himself and said to them, I tell you the truth, This poor widow has given more than all those who are depositing [offerings] into the treasury; ⁴⁴because each of them gave from their abundance; but she out of her poverty gave all that she had, her entire income. (Mk. 12:28-44)

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³therefore, whatever they tell you, do [those things] and observe them. But do not follow [their example], for they teach, but do not [practice what they teach]. ⁴Indeed, they tie up heavy burdens that are painful to carry and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger. ⁵They do all their works for the purpose of being noticed by men. They make their phylacteries big and the tassels of their prayer shawls long. ⁶They love to occupy the highest place of honor at banquets and the most prominent seats in the synagogues. ⁷[They love to receive] respectful greetings in the marketplaces and have men address them as Rabbi. ⁸But do not let yourselves be called Rabbi; for [there is only] one [who] is your teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹And do not address anyone on earth as your father; for [there is only] one [who] is your Father—he who is in heaven. ¹⁰Neither allow yourselves to be called masters; for [there is only] one [who] is your master—the Christ. ¹¹On the contrary, the

one who is greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹²Whoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; but whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.

¹³But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the door to the kingdom of heaven in men's faces; you do not enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those to enter who are trying to enter.

¹⁴[Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows' houses, even while for the sake of appearance you are offering long prayers; therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation.]

¹⁵Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he has become one, you make him two times more a son of hell than yourselves.

¹⁶Woe to you, you blind guides who say, If anyone swears [an oath] by the temple, it means nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.

¹⁷You blind fools; which is greater, the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred?

¹⁸And [you say], If anyone shall swear [an oath] by the altar, it means nothing; but whoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is bound by his oath. ¹⁹You blind men; which is greater, the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰Therefore, whoever shall swear by the altar, swears by it, and by everything that is on it. ²¹And whoever swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who dwells in it. ²²And whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it.

²³Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You tithe mint and dill and cummin, but you have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and integrity. You should have done these things, and not have neglected the other things. ²⁴You blind guides who strain out the gnat, but swallow the camel!

²⁵Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You wash the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶You blind Pharisee, first wash the inside of the cup and of the dish, and then the outside will be clean also.

²⁷Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly they are full of dead men's bones and all kinds of filthiness. ²⁸In the same way, you also outwardly appear righteous before men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

²⁹Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the graves of the righteous, ³⁰and say, If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. ³¹Therefore you testify against yourselves, [admitting] that you are sons of those men who murdered the prophets. ³²Fill up, then, the measure [of the sin] of your fathers. ³³You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the judgment of hell?

³⁴Therefore, I am sending prophets to you, and wise men, and scribes. Some of them you shall kill and crucify; and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues, and pursue from city to city; ³⁵so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel, that righteous man, to the blood of Zachariah, the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. ³⁶I tell you the truth, All these things shall come upon this generation.

³⁷O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets—and she stones those who are sent to her! How often have I desired to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸Look, your house is left to you deserted; ³⁹for I say to you, You shall not see me again, until you shall say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. (Matt. 23:1-39)

Introduction

There is a revolt going on, it is taking place all around you. It is a revolt against quality; it is a revolt against value.

A British educator laments: No one is more sadly aware of this than those who work in the field of education. He points out that if a number of students fail an examination, it is no longer assumed that the students are at fault; it is suspected that the examination is at fault.

The notion that an examination serves the purpose of rigorously sifting and distinguishing those students who are intelligent or industrious from those who are unintelligent or lazy is a notion that is now outmoded. The prevailing concept today is that the vast majority of students, if not all of them, should pass their examinations, regardless of how much the standard of excellence must be sacrificed.

This British Christian points out that this example from the field of education reflects a prevailing trend in our culture: “Men are today less prepared to measure their littleness against high objective values, and less willing to discipline themselves for a test of strength in a rigorous objective examination.”

Why is this the case? In the opinion of this particular educator, it is the case “because a philosophy of life has now fully established itself that teaches that man’s fulfillment and success lie, not in steeling himself to meet the demands of a high calling, but rather in molding all that he encounters in service to his needs [and desires].”

He goes on to write, “The modern mass mind not only demands food that can be easily prepared and entertainment that can be easily understood, but also examinations that can be easily passed and status that can be easily won” (Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, Servant Books, Ann Arbor MI, First American Edition, 1978, pp.125-127)

Listen again to this Christian thinker’s observation of contemporary culture:

... a philosophy of life has now fully established itself that teaches that man’s fulfillment and success lie, not in steeling himself to meet the demands of a high calling, but rather in molding all that he encounters in service to his needs.

Could it be that one reason for the tremendous interest in sports today is the fact that there we still find one area of life where men and women must steel themselves to meet the high demand if they would attain success? The best players make the team; the best teams win the championships. There is a high standard that must be attained; it does not sacrifice itself for the convenience of the participants.

In stark contrast to the prevailing view of reduced standards and convenient demands, we read these words of Scripture, the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *"I press on to the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:14.)

As we come to the next passage in the Gospel of Mark, let us consider it in the light of our High Christian Calling.

I. Accept Christ's Definition of Your High Calling (Mk. 12:28-34)

A scribe approaches Jesus with the question, *"What is the greatest commandment?"* He wants to know, What is our responsibility to God? What is our chief obligation? In the words of the Apostle Paul, What is our calling?

Jesus responds with His famous summary of the law: *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Mk. 12:30-31.)

Let us consider Jesus' definition of our high calling. Jesus teaches that we owe a moral duty to God by virtue of the fact that He is the Lord our God. In the words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (the answer to question #44): "Because God is the Lord, and our God and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all His commandments."

Jesus summarizes our whole moral duty to God in one word: love. We are to love the LORD our God—we are to possess and exhibit an affectionate desire for God that expresses itself in self-giving devotion of ourselves to Him in obedience to His commandments.

This love for God is to involve every aspect of our lives and being: we are to love the LORD our God with our heart, with our soul, with our mind, and with our strength. There is no division of life into religious and secular compartments; all of life is lived in the presence of God and is to be lived in devotion to God. This was the significance of the table of showbread (representing the everyday lives of the people) being placed in the Old Testament tabernacle in front of the ark of the covenant, as specified in Exodus 40:22-23, *"Moses placed the table in the Tent of Meeting on the north side of the tabernacle outside the curtain* (i.e.; the table was set right in front of the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tabernacle) ²³*and set out the bread on it before Jehovah, as Jehovah commanded him"* (Ex. 40:22-23.) This placement of the table of showbread was teaching the people of God that their daily life was, indeed, being lived before His

very presence and was to be dedicated unto God as a sacrifice of devotion unto Him. We find the New Testament equivalent in such a passage as 1 Corinthians 10:31, *“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”*

This love for God is to be whole-hearted and genuine. It is to be a God-oriented passion. We are to love the LORD our God with **all** our heart, and with **all** our soul, and with **all** our mind, and with **all** our strength. Consider the personal testimony of the Apostle Paul as an example to us of this love for God and God-oriented passion, he writes, *“to me, to live is Christ”* (Phil. 1:21.)

This love for God must also be extended to those created in His image, our fellow man and our neighbor. As the Apostle John writes, *“If anyone says, I love God, yet hates his brother, he is a liar. Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen”* (1 Jn. 4:20.) This love for our neighbor is to be the same kind of love that we naturally have for ourselves; With regard to our own well-being, the Apostle Paul reminds us, *“no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it”* (Eph. 5:29a.) The love we have for ourselves is a love that seeks to protect and promote our own well-being. Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to exhibit the same love for our neighbor: *“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”* (Matt. 7:12.)

This two-fold commandment of love is the “peg” upon which hangs, or depends, the entire Old Testament law and the exhortations of the prophets (Matt. 22:40.) So much of the ministry of the prophets consisted in calling the people of God to conformity to the law of God as the duty and calling of those who have been redeemed by the LORD their God. Note, for instance, the instruction the LORD gives through His prophet Micah, *“He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does Jehovah require of you? [He requires you] to act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God”* (Mic. 6:8.)

Let us accept Christ’s definition of our high Christian calling:

... you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. ³¹The second [great commandment] is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. (Mk. 12:30-31)

II. View the Pharisees as an Intolerable Contradiction to Your High Calling (Mk. 12:38-40; Matt. 23:1-39)

In contrast to this one scribe (Mk. 12:28,) Jesus has strong words for the majority of the scribes (vs. 38-40.) He first accuses them of **religious pride** (Mk. 12:38-39.) They enjoyed walking around in long flowing robes; they desired to receive respectful greetings in the marketplace (i.e.; they wanted to be

acknowledged as very religious men to be admired and respected); and they wanted to occupy the places of honor both at the synagogue and at feasts. Jesus accuses them of parading their religion in order to gain the admiration and reverence of men and for their own personal advantage, as a means of gaining prestige and honor. Second, Jesus accuses them of **exploiting the helpless** (Mk. 12:40a.) They are guilty of devouring widows' houses. These men took full advantage of the hospitality of the poor and received their donations as a source of income for themselves—with a pious pretense, they exploited the poor for their own selfish benefit. Third, Jesus accuses them of **hypocrisy** (Mk. 12:40b.) For a pretence they would make long prayers. Here was a great display of piety and communion with God, not out of devotion to God, but to gain the admiration of men.

In Matthew 23:13-36 the Lord Jesus condemns the religion of the scribes and Pharisees. They not only refused to respond to Christ themselves, but they sought to deter others from responding to Him as the Lord and Messiah (vs. 13.) May we never be found discounting, disparaging, or even opposing a living, vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ; on the contrary, may we model such a relationship and encourage others to enter into His fellowship. They so fanatically promoted their own religious sect that their converts became more hardened in spiritual darkness than they themselves (vs. 15.) May we never revere a denomination or even a particular body of doctrine at the expense of Christ Himself and the unity of His body, the church. Paul exhorts Timothy to hold the pattern of sound doctrine in connection with a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, not in place of such a vital spiritual relationship, he writes, *"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus"* (2 Tim. 1:13.)

The scribes and Pharisees invented convenient loop holes and excuses to avoid fulfilling obligations and commitments to God—at the same time placing greater value on material things and greater reverence for such things than for the LORD and for that which was sacred unto Him (vs. 16-17.) They displayed a pre-occupation with those things that are of secondary importance, while neglecting the truly great matters of true religion (vs. 23-24.) By way of contemporary example, it would like a professing Christian making sure to diligently tithe every portion of whatever income or monetary gift he received, but neglecting a starving Christian sister, or ignoring an injustice perpetrated against a poor and defenseless member of society.

They were diligent and very concerned to present a publicly respectable and reputable spiritual life, but they disregarded the state of their hearts and their personal lives (vs. 25-26.) Again, a contemporary example would be that of a professing Christian attending church twice a Sunday, but viewing pornographic movies in the privacy of his own home. Their religion was limited to the external and served as a veneer that concealed a putrid contradiction (vs. 27-28.) A contemporary example would be making a Christian profession of faith with the

mouth, but not truly giving Christ the heart; or attending worship services for personal benefit, not out of devotion to the LORD our God. Addressing the church in Sardis, Jesus declares of such people, “you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1.)

They lived lives characterized by a self-deceiving self-righteousness (vs. 29-31.) They protested that they would not have joined their forefathers in murdering the righteous prophets, and yet they sought to murder the Lord Jesus Himself. Perhaps a contemporary example would be that of a professing Christian taking confidence in the fact that he has not physically murdered anyone, while entertaining murderous hatred toward someone, especially one who brings the Word of God to bear upon his life.

Let us be sure to view the life and religion of the scribes and Pharisees as being a hideous, unthinkable contradiction to our high Christian calling.

III. Consider the Poor Widow as a Model of Your High Calling (Mk. 12:41-44)

After finishing His teaching, Jesus sat down by the temple treasury box and observed the worshipers bringing their offerings. Many rich men passed by and deposited their offering; they contributed some very substantial monetary gifts. Then along came one poor widow; monetarily, her offering amounted to little more than a few cents.

But upon observing this widow deposit her offering, Jesus called His disciples around Him and drew their attention to the magnitude of this woman’s gift. Jesus declares that the offering made by this one poor widow was greater than any of the other offerings—indeed, greater than all the other offerings combined! Each of the others merely gave of their excess. It was not even a matter that they gave what they could afford; they gave only what they could afford to miss! But this widow gave all that she had: she put **both** coins into the treasury when she could have legitimately withheld one for herself.

This widow’s offering amounted to only a few coins, but those coins added up to a tremendous offering. In a very practical and radical way, she was exhibiting that very love for God that is the essence of the whole law (Mk. 12:30.)

Let us consider the poor widow as modeling our high Christian calling. Whenever we place our commitment to God above our own interests—even above our own well-being—we are in the process of fulfilling this great commandment. Whenever we give that love and devotion to the LORD our God we can be sure that He sees it and receives it as precious in His sight—just as the Lord Jesus observed this poor widow and her offering of love, devotion and godly confidence in the LORD her God.

Conclusion

Let us accept Christ's definition of our high Christian calling: *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with your strength"* (Mk. 12:30.) By the grace of our Lord Jesus Himself, let us seek to be faithful to our high Christian calling and increasingly bring our lives into conformity with that calling.