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Fear of Man and Fear of God (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the fear of man versus the fear of God. He points out that fearing man over God can harm one eternally, while fearing man cannot hurt one physically. He emphasizes the importance of spiritual well-being over bodily well-being and warns against succumbing to hypocrisy and covetousness. He encourages listeners to lay up treasures in heaven and to prioritize serving the kingdom of God over worldly possessions.

Transcript

When there are people around who might disapprove of your behavior, you put on a totally different air. Religious people, of course, are not exempt from this. In fact, it's probably, as I say, most obnoxious and most visible and most publicized when it is found among religious people.

And that's why the hypocrisy of the Pharisees is mentioned. There were no doubt other hypocritical people in Israel at this time, but the Pharisees were religious hypocrites. They wanted the disciples to avoid that.

If you live in the fear of God and not the fear of man, then you will not pretend to be more religious than you are in the company of others, and you will not think yourself free to be less religious than you are when no one is around. Because God, who sees everything, will always expect you to behave the same way. And therefore, to be a hypocrite is to neglect the fear of God and to opt for the fear of man, which is no doubt why Jesus says in verse 4, and I say to you, my friends, do not be afraid of people.

Those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I'll show you whom you should fear. Fear him who, after he is killed, has power to cast into hell.

Yes, I say, fear him. In other words, again, don't be afraid of harm that can only affect you in time, that can only affect your bodily well-being, because your body is not going to be here forever anyway. It's going to die.

It's going to get old, weak, and die. Whether that happens sooner or later makes little

difference in the longer scheme of things. Be concerned about your soul.

Be concerned about eternity. And if you are concerned about eternity, then of course you'll fear God, and you won't be anywhere near so concerned about what people think. Now, I want to comment on something here just on this side, because in verse 4, Jesus said that people can kill the body, but beyond that, there's nothing more they can do to you.

That obviously means they can do nothing to your soul. That's the contrast between them and God. God can cast your soul into hell.

But people can't hurt your soul. People can only hurt your body. This is very important to note, because Jesus makes a distinction in the importance of bodily well-being as over against spiritual well-being.

Spiritual well-being should be your concern. Physical well-being, not a concern. Not an issue.

Now, this of course lends itself easily as an illustration of the error of, and I know I bring this up a lot, but I bring these kinds of things up whenever the time is appropriate. The Word of Faith people try to equate the negative aspects of sickness with the negative aspects of sin. In other words, they act as if God is just as concerned that we be not sick as that we be not sinful.

Therefore, they would say God atoned us or redeemed us from both sickness and sin. Well, you know what I think about that, and I've spoken on it many times before. I will not go off on a tangent this time.

But I will say this. Jesus makes it very clear that physical well-being is a non-issue compared to spiritual well-being. Fear the One who can harm you eternally, but don't fear the One or anything that can only hurt you physically.

Sickness is one of those things. The person with AIDS, the person with the plague, don't fear that person. They can kill your body by transferring the disease to you, but that's not anything for you to be concerned about.

It certainly shows that Jesus is nowhere near as concerned about bodily well-being and tells us not to be as about spiritual well-being. Now, another aspect of this is that in our modern psychological society, the assumption is almost universal that people have the power to ruin your contentment, your psychic well-being, that people have the power to embitter you. They have the power to ruin your relationships in the future.

For instance, if you're molested by your father, by an uncle or by a brother, they say that's bound to ruin your relationship with your husband or something later on. Or if your parents neglected you, you'll have trouble believing God and trusting God. And the early

childhood experiences that people have done to you, so it is argued, are the cause of your present bad moods, your depression, your anger, your resentment, your bitterness, your sexual hang-ups, your anxieties.

All of these are the things that if you go to most counselors, including most Christian counselors for, they'll do some probing into your past. Say, now, let's get to the bottom of this. Where did this start? There must be somebody who did something to you.

You might have repressed it. You might not even retain it in your conscious mind, but it may be repressed in your subconscious. And we can dig that out through hypnosis, or if it's a Christian counselor, how about a word of knowledge? We'll use one of those instead.

But the fact is, someone back there has done something to you, and if someone hasn't, we'll fabricate a memory that says someone did. And you may be savvy enough about this field to know that there's a great deal of publicity now being given to the fact that there are false memories being created by psychological counselors. False memories of child abuse that never occurred.

False memories of satanic ritual abuse that never occurred. There's more and more cases of this. Just a few weeks ago in the news, there was a Roman Catholic priest who was finally vindicated after, I think, about a year and a half of enduring false accusations.

This young man was accusing this priest, this older priest, of having repeatedly sexually molested him in his childhood. And finally, after some period of time of this priest's agony of trying to defend his reputation against this lie, the accuser finally dropped the charges because he said he felt like he didn't have enough evidence because he had never remembered it until a psychologist had put it into his mind that it happened. So this priest gets his reputation ruined for a long time.

A lot of people who heard about the molestation probably will never hear about him being vindicated because it is assumed that there's an awful lot of molesting going on out there. Maybe there is. Maybe there is a lot.

But the further assumption that because this person molested me, I must necessarily bear scars that show in my bad behavior and bad moods for the rest of my life, bad relationships for the rest of my life, is to deny what Jesus said. Jesus said people can kill your body, that's about the worst they can do, but they can do nothing more. They can't touch your soul.

Now I'm not saying they can't sorely vex you and try you. People can certainly try your patience, but you decide whether you'll be patient or impatient. You and the Holy Spirit together.

Or maybe you and your flesh together, depending on which decision you make. But the

point is, the decision to become angry and unforgiving and bitter, the decision to be impatient, the decision to fly off the handle, the decision to panic, the decision to have a lack of warmth in relationships with other people who remind you of somebody who did something wrong to you, those decisions are all yours. No one can make you make those decisions.

Circumstances do not dictate them. Circumstances are stimuli that tempt you to make wrong decisions in those areas. But in every case, no matter, if you took every case of anyone who's ever been embittered or carried with them a sense of having been wounded or hurt and has allowed that to affect their life negatively and their moods negatively, you can find on the same planet, probably in the same town, people who have experienced exactly the same kinds of abuse, exactly the same kinds of circumstances, but who did not make a decision to be unforgiving and so forth that these people have made.

The circumstances do not dictate it, just like I've said before when we talked about divorce. Counselors say, well, the most frequent causes of divorce are sexual incompatibility, economic stress in the marriage, and problems with children. No, none of those things are causes of divorce.

No one ever got divorced because of sexual incompatibility or because of financial pressures or because of differences about children. Those things may have been the temptation. A person got divorced if they did so for one reason only.

They decided not to keep their promise. They decided to be unfaithful to vows they made before God and man. They were simply making the wrong decision.

And the fact that neither the sexual or financial pressures had anything to do with really making that decision for them is seen by the fact that many marriages have those same pressures and don't end in divorce. The parties who are enduring those temptations do not decide for divorce. They decide to keep their word.

Therefore, misbehavior is the result of sin. Bad moods are the result of sin. They're not the result of somebody's mistreatment of you at some form or time.

And that is, of course, obvious if you really consider all the facts seriously, but it's also taught in scripture. Men can kill your body, but they can't kill your soul. They can't taint your soul.

They can't corrupt your soul. They can tempt you, but you will not become corrupted unless you make a decision to succumb to temptation. And you are never forced by man to do that.

That's your own choice. You may be under pressure, but they can't make you do it. All right, now, Jesus says in verses 6 and 7, things that we also encountered in the Sermon

on the Mount, that you're worth more than birds and that the hairs of your head are nothing to worry about.

In other words, God is paying close attention. Then, in verse 8, also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him, the Son of Man, also will confess before the angels of God, but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. Very clearly continuing to teach about the fear of man and the fear of God.

You want to be rejected by man, or do you want to be rejected by God and His angels? You got a choice. You can confess Me before men. Of course, that is at the risk of being rejected by men.

In fact, it's not only a risk, it can actually happen and very frequently does. You can choose to be rejected by men, or you can choose not to be rejected by men. You can choose to deny the Lord before men and avoid the ostracism that may come with acknowledging Him, and then you have nothing to fear but God Himself and the angels, because you will be denied before God and the holy angels if you deny Jesus.

So, the idea here again is the same. Fear God, don't fear man. Now, in that context, he has a word to say about the unpardonable sin, which we've talked about on another occasion.

It's not taken up in any of the major discourses in Matthew. That is, it's not in the Olivet Discourse or the Sermon on the Mount or anything like that, but it is found in Matthew, Matthew chapter 12, and we covered it on a previous occasion when Jesus had cast a demon out of a man, and people were saying, wow, this has got to be the Son of David, the Messiah. The Pharisee said, whoa, wait a minute, let's not jump to conclusions.

This man is not doing this by the power of God, he's doing it by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. And Jesus responded to that, that this wasn't so, that the argument was stupid, because a saint wouldn't resist himself in this manner, and then he said the same thing as we read here about the unpardonable sin. Now, here, I just want to read it again.

Verse 10, he says, and anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him. But he who blasphemes the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven. Now, this we talked about before, and I don't want to go into it in detail again, just because it is a rabbit trail that can take a very long time.

I know it's of interest to many people, and there are many interpretations of what is the unpardonable sin. But just by way of a summary, let me just say, I reject every interpretation that identifies some particular act performed once as an unpardonable act. I don't believe that Jesus is saying there's some sin which he neglects to mention, except to call it the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which is difficult to know exactly how

that's meant.

That there's some secret, some vague act, which once you've committed it, just once, you're out of there, and you can't ever be pardoned in this age or in the age to come. Rather, he's talking about something more persistent in the life, something more consistent in the life. It has to do with the whole slant of one's disposition.

And when Jesus said concerning the Pharisees who had accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, that they were in danger of or had blasphemed the Holy Spirit, of course, it wasn't the simple act of saying that the Holy Spirit was the devil, which is what they did. But the fact that they had such a posture against God, against Christ, and against the Holy Spirit, that they could make such an accusation, they could make such a blasphemous statement, is the problem here. See, many people have felt that at some time in their life they have maybe blasphemed the Holy Spirit, because they're not quite sure what it is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

I mean, a lot of people blaspheme God in their un-Christian years. Some may have even blasphemed the Holy Spirit in the sense of using his name in some sort of irreverent language. But that is not necessarily, in my opinion, what is referred to here as the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I realize that Jesus said he compares it with speaking a word against the Son of Man. But that doesn't necessarily mean speaking it only once, but basically living a life of denial of him before men. Now, he said that will be forgiven.

But blasphemy of the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Let me suggest to you a possible meaning of this that has occurred to me. I think I read it somewhere, and I'd never heard it in all my years of studying commentaries on this.

Some guy made this point, and it seemed to make some sense. I don't know that I go all the way with it, but it's rather an interesting suggestion. Namely, that during Jesus' lifetime, people were deciding whether to speak well of him or to speak evil of him.

While he was on the planet, God was appealing to them through him, the Son of Man. And even those who spoke evil of him during his lifetime could be forgiven later, because after his going away, there'd be another opportunity, namely the age of the Holy Spirit, the age of the Church, when the Holy Spirit came down and began to minister through the Church. And essentially what I could see this as possibly saying is that if you reject me during my lifetime here, Jesus is saying, there is at least another chance.

There is the age of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will continue to speak to you, and you will have an opportunity to be forgiven. You'll have an opportunity to repent after I'm gone.

However, after the age of the Spirit, there'll be no more chances. If you reject the testimony of the Holy Spirit for the entirety of his working upon you, then there's no

chance after that. There's no opportunity following that.

You see, the lifetime of Jesus was a little segment of God's appeal to man. The age of the Church is a much longer one. But it could be saying that the Son of Man, while he's on earth, is making his appeal, and some people are against him.

Some people are unconvinced that he's the Messiah. But that can be forgiven them. After he's gone, many of them will live on and have other opportunities to change their mind, and many of them did at the day of Pentecost, it would appear, and in subsequent preaching of Peter in the early days of the book of Acts.

But if one continues to speak against the Holy Spirit's testimony, and rejects his testimony, then that person, there's not another age after the age of the Spirit. There's not another opportunity after that. This is the last chance.

The speaking of God through his Church, through the Holy Spirit, is his last appeal. Jesus was not the last chance people were going to have to hear the truth, because after his going, the Church would carry on his mission. But after the Church, there's no other opportunity.

And after the Holy Spirit's witness has been rejected finally in the Church age, or through the testimony of the Church speaking by the Spirit, then there's no forgiveness. There's no chance. There's no other opportunity.

Now, I ordinarily would not understand it this way, except for something that is said immediately after this, in verses 11 and 12. It says, Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say. In other words, the Holy Spirit will speak through you Christians.

Now, in one sense, these verses we read are part of his whole teaching about not worrying, not fearing. It says, Don't worry about what you're going to say. Don't be afraid that you're left tongue-tied and unable to speak under pressure.

Don't worry about that. There's many things he's saying not to worry about in this chapter. Don't fear.

Don't worry. That's what it's all about. Don't be afraid of man, and don't be afraid of your own inadequacies when you stand before man, because the Holy Spirit will speak through you.

And in saying that, it points out that after Jesus is gone, there will be a continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit, appealing to the magistrates, appealing to people, appealing perhaps to some of the same people who had rejected Christ in his earthly career. Which, as I say, because the immediate context of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit in this

particular passage is that the Holy Spirit will be speaking through his people, speaking through his messengers, his church. Then that may be justification for the interpretation I mentioned a moment ago, that God is speaking through Jesus at that time, but would speak through the Holy Spirit through the church later.

To reject God speaking through Jesus is not the last chance people will have, but to reject God speaking through the church is the last chance they'll have, and if they reject that finally, then there's no forgiveness. I would also point out that verses 11 and 12 are brought into the missionary discourse of Matthew, chapter 10, by Matthew. Okay, verse 13.

Then one of the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. Now, this man, we're not told whether this man had a just claim on the inheritance, but I assume that since he appealed to Jesus about it, that he felt like he did. That is, that the man felt like he had his own claim.

Their father presumably had died, this man and his brother's father, and his brother had taken the entire inheritance and was not sharing this brother's portion with him. This was manifestly an injustice if his complaint is valid, and Jesus takes it at face value that it probably is valid. At least Jesus seems to do so.

But the interesting thing is that Jesus doesn't want to get involved in this situation, at least not involved in the way the man's asking. There are courts of law to deal with those kinds of situations. That wasn't what Jesus was coming to do.

He was concerned to teach people to be concerned about eternal realities, not temporal realities. To not fear things that men could do to you, but to fear what God could do to you. Therefore, Jesus doesn't respond the way this guy wants him to.

Now, it's interesting, Jesus does speak up for justice. He says it's one of the weightier matters of the law. In Matthew 23, 23, and also even in Luke 11, verse 42, Jesus said, Woe to you Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs and pass by justice and the love of God.

As they pass by not doing it, they don't do justice. Now, this man was crying out for justice. God wants justice.

Jesus spoke out for justice. This man thought maybe he could get Jesus to come to his aid. Notice that this man is doing essentially the same thing Martha did in the story about her.

She's commanding Jesus to redress an injustice. Jesus said, I mean, Martha said in chapter 10 in verse 40, Lord, do you not care? Aren't you worried? She was worried about many things. He's not worried.

Care is worry. Do you not worry that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me. She represents this as an injustice.

She's left me to work alone. Hey, this is her house. You're her guest as much as mine.

Why should I have to do all the work around here? Jesus, you tell her to do this. And what Martha is saying to do is tell her to do the just thing. Tell her to give me my rights.

Tell her to stop treating me unfairly. And Jesus said, wait a minute, I think you're the one who has this wrong, Martha. Your spirit's not right.

Now, look at this man. He's just like Martha, only the situation is different. This time it's not a sister, but a brother.

Martha's appealing to Jesus on behalf of her rights against her sister. My sister's not playing fair with me. This guy, it's his brother.

My brother's not playing fair with me. Command him. Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

They're giving Jesus instructions about what the just thing to do is. Martha says, tell my sister. This man says, tell my brother.

And they're both commanding Jesus what he's supposed to do with his time and with his breath. But both of them are assuming Jesus will stand with them because he clearly was a man concerned about justice. And they both see themselves as victims of injustice.

But he gives them both the same answer. If you'd paraphrase their answer, his answer is, your spirit's not right. Martha, you're troubled.

You're worried about many things. This is not right. Your spirit's all agitated.

You're neglecting the one thing needful. Mary hasn't neglected that. You need to get your spirit right.

She's got hers right. In this case, Jesus seems to say the same thing to this man. Something in different terms that are more suited to his request.

Verse 14, but Jesus said to the man, Man, who made me a judge or an arbiter over you? And he said to them, apparently the crowd, Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses. Now, the man had a problem with covetousness. He was coveting what his brother had.

Now, never mind that some of it might have been rightfully his. Jesus doesn't even address the question of whether this man rightfully deserved some of the money. He's saying, why are you so concerned about money anyway? Watch out for this spirit of

covetousness.

This covetousness is a far greater danger than poverty is. A man in poverty can be happy if he is not covetous. But a covetous man cannot be happy even if he's rich.

So beware of covetousness, not poverty. Again, it's another way of saying, don't be afraid of what men can do to you. Your brother can rip you off of your share of the inheritance, but he can't rip you off of your contentment if you choose it.

If you'll beware of covetousness and don't allow yourself to succumb to it, then whether your brother gives you what you want or not will be a non-issue. Now, these are hard words in a sense, because we generally assume that God would want to vindicate us when we're ripped off by someone financially, when we have a right to something. In fact, many Christians go to court, against other Christians even, to get what they have coming, although Jesus said not to do it and Paul said not to do it.

It's commonly done. Paul's attitude, however, in 1 Corinthians 6-7, when he was talking to Christians who were at fault, going to court against their brothers, he says, why not allow yourself to be defrauded? Why not just let your brother run roughshod over you? Why not give him what he wants? Didn't Jesus say if a man wants to sue you and take your coat, give it to him, give him your cloak also? Give him more than he wants. Now, sometimes when Jesus says these things, we say, well, that's a hyperbole.

And no doubt, when Jesus said some of those things, he does use a hyperbole in order to get the point across, but a hyperbole is there to communicate something. When Jesus said, if he wants your coat, give him your cloak also, this may have been a hyperbole, but it was communicating something. There was something he was trying to say, namely, don't fight for your rights in terms of material things.

If someone wants it, for God's sake, give it to him. And for your own sake, too. Let him have it, don't complain.

Let yourself be defrauded, it's no big deal. It's only money, it's all going to burn. Moth and rust is going to corrupt and thieves can break through and steal.

Anyway, lay up your treasures in heaven. Don't worry about things on this earth. Now, if Jesus was only using hyperbole and nothing more, and didn't expect us to really take this approach when people want things from us, then Jesus was quite callous to this man who was apparently suffering a real injustice.

It should have been the kind of thing that Jesus would get involved in and be concerned about. Presumably, the man's brother would have listened to Jesus, would have been intimidated by a guy like Jesus. But Jesus didn't even get involved.

He said, listen, you got another problem to worry about. Your brother is not your

problem. Your lack of love for your brother.

You love your money more than you love your brother. And that's the problem with covetousness. Covetousness is the love of money or the love of possessions.

And you're commanded by God to love your brother. Now, here's a case where your brother and your possessions are at odds. That is, you have to claim either your possessions at the risk of offending your brother, even though he may be the one in the wrong, or you can release your possessions out of love for your brother.

Say, listen, I really think you've ripped me off, but I care about you more than I care about me. Therefore, I'd rather see you enjoy the money. Now, doesn't that sound like a hard saying? I don't know very many Christians who really want to live by that kind of assumption, but that's essentially what's in Jesus' teaching here.

You don't beware of your brother. Don't beware of poverty. Don't beware of being ripped off.

Beware of loving money too much, especially loving it more than you love your brother. Beware of covetousness. Now, there's two things in this chapter that Jesus says beware of.

In fact, they're both in this chapter, and they're the only things in the whole Bible that Jesus said to beware of, as far as vices or personal vices. On other occasions, he said, beware of men, for they shall drag you before the synagogue and so forth. But there's only two sins, two vices, that Jesus said to beware of.

One was hypocrisy, which is in the first verse of this chapter, and the other is covetousness, which is here in verse 15. Beware of these. Now, Jesus never said beware of committing adultery.

He never said beware of being a drunken party animal. He never said beware of being a blasphemer. He didn't use the word beware in any of those cases.

He did command against all those things. But he never said to beware of them, because beware means watch out. These things sneak up on you.

And while it is true that some of those other things may sneak up on you, you may be caught in a temptation to some of these other areas before you know it's upon you and even succumb, and you should have been more aware of it. But the thing is, once those things have been done, you seldom fail to see them. After you've done something like gone out and gotten drunk, or robbed a bank, or committed adultery, or done something heinous like that, you know you've done it.

And you're not likely to make the mistake of thinking that was okay to do. You're not

likely to make the mistake of thinking yourself to be a good Christian while doing such things. But hypocrisy and covetousness are much more subtle.

And the world is full of Christians who have succumbed to hypocrisy and covetousness and don't even know they have. They still think themselves to be the finest Christians on the planet, though they live in hypocrisy with reference to their life toward God, and they live in covetousness with reference to their life toward man and material things. Therefore, these are sneaky things.

We need to really examine ourselves to see if they're there, because Jesus said, watch out for these. These are much more subtle, much more in danger of falling into them. Now, Jesus tells this parable to illustrate.

He says, in verse 16, Then he spoke this parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully, and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? I could think of some things to do with crops that you have too much to store. How about give them to the poor? That would be a nice thing to do. How about give them to the temple to help support the priest? That wouldn't be a bad idea.

He couldn't think of anything to do with his surplus. So what would he do? He said, I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build bigger barns, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

Wrong answer to his question. His question is, what shall I do? I have more than I can contain. The blessing of God had been upon him.

But he doesn't turn around and bless God with the surplus, or even, certainly doesn't make any sacrifices. Instead, he says, well, I'll just have to get richer. I'll just have to lay up for the future.

I'll have to store up my goods, even though Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. Well, this man did so. And he says, and I will say to my soul, soul, you have many goods laid up for many years.

Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. Now, he speaks to his soul as if that's the only one he has to take counsel with. He doesn't speak to God about this.

He doesn't seek the counsel of God. He says, I'll tell you what, soul, let's just take a break. We've laid up enough goods to last us for a good long while.

Now, let's take several years vacation. Let's retire. Now, what's wrong with that? Where is the sin in this story? Now, we go on, but God said to him, you fool, this night your soul will be required of you.

Then whose will those things be which you have provided? So it is, excuse me, so is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. Laying up treasure for yourself and not being rich toward God. Now, some might say, well, what if you lay up treasure for yourself and you are rich toward God too? Well, a little further down in verse 33 of this chapter, Jesus said, sell what you have and give alms.

Provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Of course, we have that also in the Sermon on the Mount.

But the point here is, Jesus said, you are supposed to lay up treasures in heaven and he did not leave you into any doubt as to how to do it. Divest yourself, give to the poor. Everything you give to the poor is laid up in heaven for you, a reward.

It says in the Proverbs, He that has mercy on the poor lendeth to the Lord and the Lord will repay him. Sorry, I do not know the Proverbs number for that, but that is how it goes. 1917, thank you.

That man is quick. Proverbs 1917. He that has mercy on the poor lends to the Lord.

That means it has been laid up on your account. So, Jesus says, sell what you have, give alms, that is giving to the poor, and you will provide for yourself bags of treasures in heaven, where it matters. And he says, where your treasure is, your heart will be.

So, in verse 21 he says, So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. He is essentially describing two aspects of the same phenomenon. He is not describing, you know, one kind of rich person, as opposed to some other kind of rich person.

As if there is two kinds of people who lay up treasures for themselves on earth, one kind is rich toward God as well, the other is not. No, that is not what he is saying. The person in question, there was nothing in this story that he tells, this parable, that indicates that the man was a sinner, that he neglected to go to synagogue or temple, or that the man was here religious.

The only problem he had was he laid up goods for himself. Period. He laid up for his retirement.

Man, this gets scary. Because, really, there is nothing that this man in the parable did, but that which is assumed to be the right thing for everybody to do in our society. You have got to have a job that is laying away something for your retirement, so you can take your ease, eat, drink and be merry, when you have laid up for many years.

And if you do not have a job where the employer provides that, you are considered negligent if you do not go out and get an IRA or something like that, to make sure that

you have something laid up for the future. And is it really all that bad to have something laid up for the future? It depends. What is it for? Is it so you can take your ease? With the vast number of Americans, it is.

The vast number of Americans, including Christians, who look forward to retirement, the vast majority of them are not looking forward to retirement so they can go on the mission field. They are not looking forward to retirement so they can go out and serve the poor, serve the kingdom of God. They are looking forward to retirement so they can take their ease, eat, drink and be merry and cruise in their RV.

And that is, let's face it, that is exactly this man's flaw. He did not see his goods that God had blessed him with as posing any particular responsibility upon him. He saw it as something merely for himself and since he had enough for himself for a long time, he did not have to do anything else.

Now, he did not see, therefore, his whole life as something to serve God with, nor his possessions as something to serve God with. He just saw his life as, you know, to get his financial security in place as quickly as he could and then enjoy it. And let's face it, that is not a hair's breadth difference than the way many Christians think right now about their finances, about retirement, and so forth.

I personally can't imagine ever wanting to retire from ministry, although if I was working at a place like, you know, Ford Motor Company or something like that, I would look forward to retirement so that I could go about the Lord's business in some other areas that would interest me more and produce more direct fruit perhaps. I would see my working at Ford Motor Company, if that's where I worked, as what God has me doing now to provide money so I could support people who are in the ministry now, but I'd look forward to the time when I was no longer necessary to do that so I'd be freed up to go out and do it myself. There's nothing wrong with retirement if retirement means getting more active, getting, you know, being able to be more fruitful for God.

But unfortunately, our age has succumbed to this very thing Jesus said to beware of. This is covetousness, choosing to hold on to your goods rather than release them. This man who asked Jesus the question didn't want to release his goods to his brother.

He had a right to them and he wasn't going to release it. Jesus said that's a problem with covetousness you've got. This man in the story had covetous problems too.

Although there's not a single reference to him being unjust or dishonest or illegal in the way he got his money, presumably he got it honestly. It's the fact that he loved it, trusted it, he did not see it as belonging to God but to himself, and he saw himself as under no obligation with reference to it to do anything serving the kingdom of God. So, this man was taken from God, and this man's soul was taken from him.

By the way, verse 21 says, "...your soul will be required of you." In the Greek it is literally, "...they are demanding your soul from you." Literally in the Greek it says, "...today, this night, they are demanding your soul from you." Who are they? One commentator thought it was the angels. I think it's more likely to be the demons. In Luke chapter 22 and verse 31, Luke 22, 31, Jesus said to Peter, "...the Lord said, Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you." In other words, actually asked for you in the Greek is stronger than that.

It's more like demanded you. Satan has come to God and demanded Peter to be given to him, or at least to be sifted by him. And Jesus has interceded for him so that Peter might not succumb.

But, if we know that the devil is out making demands on people, then maybe they are demanding your soul from you, is the demons coming to take him away to hell. This man here. It may even be his heirs.

This man was going to die and leave all his goods to his heirs. That's what the question implies. Whose then will these things be that you've provided once you're dead? Well, the setting for this parable was that one of the heirs of such a man was fighting with his brother over the possessions that his father had left behind.

And the question was, in fact, whose will they be? Will they be this man's or his brother's? And the parable raised that question. Whose then will these things be that you've left behind when you die? Well, if they are left to a son who is as greedy as the father, then that son is going to have the same problem the father had. And Jesus says, beware of having that attitude.

Whether you're the one who possesses much or who stands to inherit much, beware of covetousness. The one who has the money or stands to gain it is in the greater peril of succumbing to the temptation. Now, verses 22 through 34 are found in the Sermon on the Mount.

We've covered them before. We won't go into them in detail again. Verses 35 through 46, again I mentioned, are found in the Olivet Discourse.

However, 47 and 48 we need to have something to say about. And that servant who knew his master's will and did not prepare himself or do according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few.

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required. And to whom much has been committed, to him they will ask for more. Now, it's not clear whether this is talking about in hell.

There are degrees of punishment. Those who were willingly rebellious against what they

knew to do will be beaten with many stripes. Whereas those who were just ignorant to the Gospel and still deserve to go to hell, they'll go to hell still.

But they won't be beaten quite as badly. There will be degrees of torment, degrees of affliction in the judgment. That's possible.

Some have taken this even to mean that hell is not eternal. There are Christians, they're in the minority, but there are some Christians who hold that this is saying that in the judgment it is not an eternal judgment, but one of temporary duration. Those who deserve more will get more.

Those who deserve less will get less. Adolf Hitler will burn for a very long time. Mother Teresa, if she's not a born-again believer, will not burn for very long at all.

Now, I don't mean to suggest Mother Teresa is not a Christian. I think she is saved. There are people who raise questions about her.

Her theology is a bit skewed. The point is, someone who is basically a good Mormon, let's say, will go to a very short hellfire. But a person who was Charles Manson will burn for a very long time.

That's how some people understand this. That is, of course, assuming that this is talking about the ultimate judgment. It's not impossible that the reference to stripes refers to chastisement.

Servants were often chastised with stripes. And it could be saying that even prior to death, in God's dealing with His children, those who are openly rebellious can expect severer discipline. And those who are ignorantly in sin, they'll be disciplined, too, because God loves them.

And whom He loves, He chastens. And if they don't know they're doing the wrong thing, He'll teach them. But He won't do it quite as severely.

There are different ways of looking at this. But one thing can be said with certainty. Jesus says that in judgment, in God's judgment, ignorance is taken into consideration.

Ignorance is not something that justifies a person, because the person who is ignorant still got beaten with stripes. The person who does things worthy of stripes gets stripes. But if he did it ignorantly, he gets fewer.

So while we cannot say that a person who is ignorant of God's will is therefore exempt from punishment, and some people would have us say so. Some would say, well, if no one ever heard the gospel, how could they ever be punished? Well, no one can say that they lived their whole life without ever knowingly doing something wrong. But they'll receive lighter penalties than those who have known the gospel and have neglected it.

And by the way, I hate to tell you, when you go through a Bible school, you know a lot more than other people do about things like this. And therefore, to whom much is given of them, much will be required. So I didn't tell you this until this late in school.

I didn't want you to leave. But you are now responsible for a great deal more than a lot of people will be. So don't do things worthy of stripes.

That's the lesson here. Okay? Now, only a couple of other verses remain to be discussed because almost all that's left has parallels elsewhere. For example, verses 51 through 53 have a parallel in the missionary discourse in Matthew 10.

Verses 57 through 59, parallel in Matthew 5, you know, the Sermon on the Mount. And verses 54 through 56 have a parallel of sorts in Matthew 16. Verses 2 and 3. The only thing that doesn't have a parallel is verses 49 and 50.

So let's look at those briefly. I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were kindled already! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished. Almost certainly his baptism is a reference to his own suffering.

On another occasion, when James and John wanted to be at his right and left hand of the kingdom, he said, can you be baptized with the baptism that I have to be baptized with? And they said, yes. And he said, well, you will be, but I can't guarantee you those spots at the right hand and left hand. Almost all would agree the baptism he refers to is his own suffering, and no doubt that's what he's referring to here.

I have to suffer before I cast fire on the earth. He said, I have a fire to kindle on the earth, and I'm eager to do so. I wish I didn't have to look so far in the distance to it.

But I'm eagerly awaiting doing so. Now what is that fire? First he had to suffer. So it's something that happened after his suffering.

There's two possibilities. Tim could be right, who said it's 70 A.D. It could be the fiery judgment on Jerusalem, which John the Baptist spoke of, and Jesus spoke of elsewhere. Or it could be the fire of the Holy Ghost, as it were.

On the day of Pentecost, the flames of fire, of course, kindled the church and started a great, blazing revival, and maybe that's the kind of fire he's talking about. I've heard it taken both ways, and it occurs to me that the wording could allow either interpretation. I don't know which he meant.

But clearly, in fact, there could be both, because in a sense the revival that was sent by the Holy Spirit coming to the church was a precursor of the other, the judgment on the apostate nation. Maybe both are in view, or only one, I don't know. But he says, I have come to cast fire on the earth, to send fire on the earth in how I wish it were already kindled.

But, he says, he first has a baptism to endure, and that is his suffering. He's very distressed until that happened. And we can see some evidence of that distress when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, of course.

When he sweat, as it were, drops of blood, that was the distress he was experiencing as he faced the prospect of that baptism of suffering. Well, there's a few other things I would have said about some of the passages that have parallels elsewhere, but I didn't have time, so I left them out. But we have talked about virtually all the other parts under other contexts, so we'll consider that we've covered Chapter 12 of Luke adequately with that.