

“Putting Him F.I.R.S.T.!”

Mark 12:28-34

Intro. – Some recent statistics given to show how our nation and world lacks in character: read

The lack of character isn't just evidenced by crime rates. Many who would never think of committing such crimes listed above see nothing wrong with being creative with income taxes. Today, most don't see anything wrong with working one's self into an early grave in order to accumulate wealth and prestige. Our materialistic times applaud workaholicism as a virtue while spouses, kids and parents seek counsel, therapy and divorce. Today, we're being taught a whole new concept – that the family is *disposable*.

Illus. – 1990, first time in US history that over 50% of High School seniors said, “They did not expect to marry one person and stay in that marriage a lifetime.”

Certainly character is lacking in our nation across the board. But is character the *cause* or the *result*? Do we have this character deficit because of something deeper? Is it possible that we are lacking in character because something or someone is being misplaced? Where does God and His two divine institutions (church/home) come into this matter? Do our *priorities* have anything to do with all of this?

In our text Jesus' responds to the question, “*Teacher, what is the most important command?*” by saying “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. Second like it, love your neighbor as yourself.”

Is this dealing with the matter of character deficit? Yes, but it leads to something deeper. It speaks of the *cause* and not just the *results*. It speaks of God's priorities verses mans' priorities.

Illus. – Couple yrs ago, university professors passed out copies of 10 commandments their students. The students were instructed to arrange them in the order of importance. 90% reversed the order – put commandments about how we relate to one another first, and the commandments how we relate to God last.

Purpose: to better see that putting God FIRST is paramount to getting priorities right

3 areas (church, home, individuals lives) will be focal areas of learning to set priorities. Use an acronym spelling out word FIRST form outline. Only by putting God first can you/I learn to get priorities right:

I FOCUS IS A PRIORITY

A. The Church's Focus

1. X established that focus – Matthew 16:18 “...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”; Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...”
2. Peter confirmed this on the day of Pentecost and later in 2 Peter 3:9 “...He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”
3. Early church demonstrated where her focus was... God was first!
4. Examples of “focus” today in the church – Church Growth Movement's main premise out of focus:
 - a. slogans (buzz words) church growth: “seeker friendly”; “audience driven”; “user friendly”; “full-service church”; “unchurched” (note: where in Bible does it say Jesus came to seek and the save the unchurched... or He died for *user friendly church*?)
 - b. 2 great commands church growth: 1) find a need and meet it 2) find a hurt and heal it. Tony Walters “*Modern consumer society is built on grand reversal of Beatles' song: “All You Love is Need”* – Whatever happened to the song “He is All I Need”?
5. Thankful part of movement (Restoration Movement) seeks restore unity basis God's Word alone. Is the plea valid? Yes, because it is Biblical. It's a plea that'll get our focus back where it belongs!

B. The Home's Focus

1. Again, X established that focus – Ephesians 5:22,25 “*Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord... Husbands love your wives just like Christ loved the church...*”
2. So many homes in turmoil because the focus has shifted from sacred to the secular:
 - a. take to town soccer field full on Sun.... schools takes priority... kids' lives engulfed school...
 - b. Illus. – typical home's schedule is ridiculous... but who would dare challenge sports... school... or even busy church schedules as being anything but good?

3. Need of the hour is for parents to *learn* and *teach* their kids to choose the BEST things over good!

C. The Individual's Focus

1. We live in time where the *unholy trinity* (Me, Myself and I) is prominent as ever.
2. X put right perspective: Matthew 10:34-39 *"Do you suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword... Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me... and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."*

Until our focus is sharpened on God first, our churches, homes, lives, will have priorities lead to dead ends.

II INCOME IS A PRIORITY

A. The Church's Income

1. Lord has always relied on His people to support His work (from Tabernacle, Temple, local ch.)
2. Bingo, rummage/bake sales, outside "contributions" foreign to Bible – only introduced when priorities get messed up... Churches in contrast – know of church got into debt building "Family Life Center"... proposed \$700,000 3 yr payoff. Cost 1.3 million – 4 yrs later moved \$860,000 debt (\$7200 @ \$6000 interest... note: Einstein said, "The most powerful force in the universe is compound interest.")
3. Works both ways... Asked how getting along? "Fine" Found out... learn people do strange things when get in needless debt, churches do stranger things believe me!
4. Contrast, know church no debt, goal 50% missions etc.... mindset is different = priorities different

B. The Home's Income

1. Homes being sold "bum steer" = "it takes 2 incomes to survive" – with lifestyles being lived probably does... point: more to life than things and having parents work all time to have things...
2. Choose a lifestyle that first of all is Christian and one that strengthens the home rather than pulls it apart... budgets are good... don't get into needless debt... Learn contentment...
3. Give to God and His work and He will honor you – Matthew 6:33 *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

C. The Individual's Income

1. As our Lord said in Matthew 6:21, 24 *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also... No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."*
2. Deuteronomy 14:23 speaks of Israel instructed to tithe on grain, wine, first born of herds/flocks *"in order that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always."* Living Bible: *"The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives."*

III RELATIONSHIPS ARE A PRIORITY

A. The Church's Relationships

1. How many times does Bible portray Church = Bride and Christ = Groom?—Emphasis at worship times/assemblies being geared for unforgiven instead of the saints... Why?
2. We get relationships mixed up – right relationship with X (i.e. put X 1st) leads right relationship with others (neighbors/bros/sis) – visitors most interested how we relate to each other...

B. The Home's Relationships

1. Already hit on this = Husband love wife as Christ... Wife submit to husband...
2. Greatest thing husband /wife do for each other and their kids leave no doubt their love for the Lord and each other... greatest things kids can do "honor their parents..." = ACCEPTING ROLES...

C. The Individual's Relationships

1. Our relationship with all others speaks of our relationship with God
2. 1 John 4:20 *"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."*

IV SECURITY IS A PRIORITY

A. The Church's Security

1. Dr J Ellis “Some churches function such a way, that if God ever went out of business, they wouldn’t know the difference.”
2. More churches need to “tap into” the strength available – church’s security is in GOD alone – not her methodology or worldly wisdom...

B. The Home’s Security

1. Evident where “security” is in most homes today = good jobs that provide good things in life...
2. Parents concern for kids clear: school utmost important so they can what? Get a good job...
3. Psalm 127: 1 “*Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain...*” – summary: it’s not the job, bank account, inheritance – home’s security is God first – always has always will be!

C. The Individual’s Security

1. Illus. – Wilbur Fields when asked how put up with nonsense within church? “Good brother, the battle is the Lord’s.”
2. Psalm 27:1 “*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?*”
3. Romans 8:31,31 “*What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?*”

Summary: not looks, education, position etc. – our personal security must first be in God!

V TIME IS A PRIORITY

- Illus. – if I said to Mary, “Honey, want you to know going to be totally faithful and true to you, one day a week”? God certainly not pleased when He receives anything less than 1st place even our time:

A. The Church’s Time

1. Time is of the essence (Ephesians 5:15)
2. Church’s purpose is clear = “make disciples” BUT the time frame which to do this is not!
3. Time for church divine in purpose and pattern to RESTORE that purpose/pattern in local church!

B. The Home’s Time

1. Charles E. Hummel *Tyranny of the Urgent* “Don’t let urgent take place of important in your life”
2. Remember, must learn to choose between not just good and bad but even the best over good!

C. The Individual’s Time

1. Mark 1:35 Jesus rose early to commune with His Father. If our Lord needed quiet time, time to prepare for the day... what make us think anything less is doable?
2. It took me years to learn time is wasted when I forego “my time with God” – devotion/prayer time

Read, memorize, apply His Word – put God first even in your time!

Conclusion: I’ve read in the early stages of navigating the ocean, ships were equipped with two compasses. One was usually on the deck and the other high atop the mast. A captain was asked one day “why?” His response: “... the compass on the deck is affected by its surroundings. The compass on the mast is not as affected... It is safer and more reliable.

Here then is my summary and application. We must accept the priorities God has established for our lives. You and I are affected by our surroundings, but God is not! He alone is unchanging and sure. Accepting and working within His priorities is the only way to live. We must learn to always put Him F.I.R.S.T.!

Focus Income Relationships Security Time