

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (25) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#17b. Three Great Foes: First, the World (part 2)**

Introduction:

Last Lord’s Day we began to address the three great enemies with which the Christian engages spiritual warfare in this fallen world. These enemies are (1) the fallen *world* with its values and ways of thinking, (2) our own sinful *flesh*, which entices us to indulge in things God has forbidden, and (3) the *devil*, that malevolent spirit along with his minions that at times subtly entices us, at times openly withstands us, and always accuses us before others and to ourselves.

We introduced first the enemy that is the fallen world, or rather, worldliness, and the danger it poses to each of us. We pointed out that though the Scriptures use the term, “world”, in a variety of ways, when we speak of the world as the spiritual enemy of the Christian, we are speaking of *the culture of this fallen world, including its ideas, values, and practices that are in opposition to the holy will of God.*

Thinking as the fallen world thinks is natural to us; it is the “normal” way in which we think. We were born into this world worldlings, who believe and think and act and react in worldly ways. It is our nature to be worldly. Worldliness is natural and normal for us. Worldly ways of thinking, and valuing, and evaluating things, people, events, and our own selves, seem at first consideration to be right and true, and perhaps even just. But the world, which again is *the culture with its ideas, values, and practices of the world*, is opposed and contrary to the will and ways of the Lord. This is set forth in the verse we read last week, **1 John 2:15-17**, which read,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Before we were Christians we were enemies of God, for we were on the side of the world opposed to God, and during that time God was opposed to us. But when we were converted, we changed our allegiance. By God’s grace we forsook the world and we joined ourselves to the Lord. When we converted to Christ, we were brought to side with His kingdom against “the course of this world.” Paul wrote of this transference of allegiance that took place due to God’s grace in our regeneration, or new birth. Paul wrote to young Christians at the church at Ephesus:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²*in which you once walked according to the course of this world*, according to *the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves *in the lusts of our flesh*, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:1-7)

By the way, notice that Paul links our three foes together in these verses just as John did in 1 John 2:15-17. Paul wrote of the world, but he also wrote of the flesh and the devil in the same context. There is an interaction and cooperation between these three forces that are opposed to us. They are as a spiritual axis of powers¹ against us, with which we are at spiritual war. There was a time when we sided with the enemy, but we thank God that our allegiance switched to our Lord's side, when God in His grace caused us to be born again.

However, though our heart's allegiance is to the world, and though it is our resolve no longer embrace the world and its ways, worldliness still resonates with us and afflicts our souls. In every Christian there is still present sinful desires that well up within. Sin resides in every Christian as long as he is in this world. And so, because we are still influenced by the world when we think, assess matters, and make decisions, we are often unwittingly overtaken by the world, or we remain conformed to the world. We are like Lot living in Sodom. On the one hand his righteous soul was "greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked", for even as "that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard" (2 Pet. 2:7f); nevertheless, the values, attitudes, and actions within the world of Sodom, to which Lot was exposed daily, influenced his thinking, his desires, his values, and his actions, resulting in his moral compromise, spiritual insensitivity, and great loss to himself and his family. And depending on how well we apprehend what worldliness is, to the degree that we have surrendered ourselves to its thinking and ways, and to the level of our understanding informed and reinforced by the Word of God, we will continue to be confused and in error in identifying and turning away from worldliness in our lives.

Because of the great danger the world poses to us, and because each of us carries with us in our thinking a measure of worldliness, we need constant instruction from the Holy Scriptures and continual application of the truth of the Word of God, to shape and direct our thinking and practice. We read the verse last week that addresses this, which is **Romans 12:1-2**. Paul wrote,

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ²And ***do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind***, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1f)

As we shape our thinking by the Word of God, which involves not only *informing* our minds but also *correcting* our errant thinking and reasoning, we are better able to see the world from God's perspective, according to God's assessment and evaluation of matters. We will then, by the grace given to us by the Holy Spirit, be enabled to live for God and before God in His world.

We began last Lord's Day to address some specific manifestations of worldly thinking and their correctives. There are major principles of the Word of God that tend to run counter to the world, that is, sinful, worldly thinking. We set forth in our notes last week two principles of the Word of God that run counter to the spirit of the world. The ***first*** of these addressed the importance of **living unto Christ under human authority**. We asserted that it is the will of God that each of us humbly serve and obey the human authorities that God has placed over us. The ***second*** principle that we just barely addressed was the importance of **denying self and one's personal rights**. The Word of God teaches us that the Christian is to set aside his personal interests and well-being for the furthering of the will of God and the cause of Christ in the world. But we need not address this to any degree at this time, for we had addressed it directly earlier in this sermon series.²

¹ The "Axis powers" formally took the name after the Tripartite Pact signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan on 27 September 1940, in Berlin, which opposed the Allies in WWII. The world, flesh, and the devil are as a spiritual Tripartite Pact against the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

² See sermons, FBC910 and FBC9111, entitled, "The ABC's of the Christian Life: (4) Following Jesus unto Salvation", both parts 1 and 2, which were given on August 13 and 20, 2017.

Today let us consider another principle set forth in the Word of God that is contrary to the spirit of the fallen world in which we live.

3. Principle: We are not to give chief regard to the outward appearance of people, rather, we are to value highly godly character and holiness in others.

The spirit of worldliness tends to look upon and value the outward appearance of people more than, even in the place of, an evaluation of godly character. We live in a world wholly enamored with the image, with what appears to be attractive and winsome. But whereas man looks on the surface of things, on the outward appearance, God is concerned about the inward, spiritual condition of a person. “For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

We could consider any number of places in the Scriptures to substantiate this principle, but we have chosen to look at story in which *God’s choice for king of Israel would be David rather than king Saul, who was the people’s choice.*

1) God looked upon the heart of David, when He chose him to become king of Israel; whereas, the people (“the world”) looked upon the outward appearance of Saul, choosing him as their king.

The story is recounted for us in **1 Samuel 16:1-13**. This passage reads:

Now the LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.”

²And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.”

But the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’³ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you.”

⁴So Samuel did what the LORD said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, “Do you come peaceably?”

⁵And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before Him!”

⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. ***For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.***”

⁸So Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ¹⁰Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.” ¹¹And Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all the young men here?” Then he said, “There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.”

And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him. For we will not sit down till he comes here.”¹² So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!”¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah.

God had told the prophet Samuel that he had rejected Saul as king of Israel. He told Samuel that one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem would be the new king. Samuel was to go to Bethlehem and anoint the man of God's choosing. After Samuel arrived, he had the seven sons of Jesse appear before him. Samuel could not immediately discern God's will. Samuel assumed it would be the oldest, and therefore the wisest (more experienced), perhaps he was also the largest of the seven sons that were brought before him. None of these seven sons would become the king of Israel. It was the youngest son, the eighth son, who was not even present. Apparently Jesse himself did not think it needful to bring in David from the fields where he was performing the most menial of jobs of the day, that of a shepherd.

We tend to be as Samuel when he first came into the house of Jesse and his sons. God had to tell Samuel with respect to Jesse's first born, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). You see, as it was with Samuel, it is with all of us. *It is natural for us to value the appearance of things above the true nature and character of matters.* This is worldliness and we must resist it.

This is how Israel first brought trouble to itself with regard to their present condition reflected in this passage. The people of Israel had rejected God as their King, who had ruled over them through intermediaries that were called judges. The people wanted a king they could see, rather than God as their King whom they could not see. They wanted a king like the other nations to lead them (1 Sam. 8:19, 20). So they demanded of Samuel to give them such a man. We read of the people's choice in **1 Samuel 9:1-3**.

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. ²And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people. ³Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. And Kish said to his son Saul, "Please, take one of the servants with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys."

Saul was tall, handsome, and strong. The people naturally looked upon this man with high regard; he would be one that elicited their respect. They would follow him. The problem of course was this: although they would begin to follow him, he would fail to lead them rightly. But the selection had been made and the people were excited about the future.

Right from the beginning, however, there was something wrong, something missing, in Saul's character. It came to the surface when a crisis arose. *It is often in times of crisis the nature of one's true (internal) character will be revealed.* **1 Samuel 13:5-10** tells the story.

⁵Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven. ⁶When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. ⁷And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. ⁸Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. ⁹So Saul said, "Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me." And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

The time came that Israel's enemies gathered. The people were frightened and distressed. They began to run to the hills. God had given instruction to Saul through the prophet Samuel that he was to wait until seven days had transpired when Samuel would arrive to offer sacrifices to God before going to battle. This would result in the blessing of God would come upon the king and the army. But Saul did not obey God. He took matters into his own hands and he did something that was in clear violation of the will of God. Saul himself performed the sacrifice, something that only a priest was to do. This incurred God's judgment upon him in that God rejected Saul as king over Israel. We read of Saul's lame reasoning and excuses in **verses 11 and 12**.

¹¹And Samuel said, "What have you done?"

Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, ¹²then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering."

Saul, although impressive to the people outwardly, was inwardly an unstable coward. He was a worldly pragmatist. When the pressure was turned up, he would do his will rather than God's will. He was not a man after God's own heart, one who would obey God regardless of the appearances of things and the circumstances in which he found himself. Saul's religion was one of externals and convenience. He lacked a true inward drive to honor and obey God. But because the people also valued most outward appearance and they did not look to the qualifications of his character before God, they had chosen him to be their king. We are not to be like them, and we are certainly not to be like King Saul. ***It is the will of God that we resist pretense, but rather, we are to be true and genuine Christians, sincerely zealous to believe and obey God in all things at all times.***

What was it that primarily motivated Saul's decisions and actions? The answer is that Saul was more concerned of what people thought of him than what God thought of him. Saul was concerned for the glory of Saul, not the glory of God. This became apparent in a later episode—**1 Samuel 15:1-34**.

Samuel also said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. ²Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. ³Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'"

⁴So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. ⁵ And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.

⁶Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. ⁷And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. ⁸He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

¹⁰Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ¹¹"I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. ¹²So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." ¹³Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD."

¹⁴But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

¹⁵And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

¹⁶Then Samuel said to Saul, “Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night.”

And he said to him, “Speak on.”

¹⁷So Samuel said, “When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? ¹⁸Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ ¹⁹Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?”

²⁰And Saul said to Samuel, “But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. ²¹But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.”

The time had arrived that God determined to judge the nation of Amalek for their sins. God has always used nations to punish other nations for their sins. Israel was to act as God’s instrument to punish Amalek. King Saul initiated this campaign, but obeyed God only in a measure (vs. 7-9). God then informed Samuel about the matter and its consequences. God told Samuel to go and confront Saul, which he did.

Notice Saul’s behaviour and his welcome of Samuel and his claim of obedience (vs. 12-13).

And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself. . .”
And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord.”

Samuel’s response to Saul was, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

Saul had a ready answer, “They (the people) have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

This did not pass the “smell test” with Samuel. Samuel responded, “Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?” (1 Sam. 15:19). But Saul continued to justify himself,

“I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But *the people* took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.”

Samuel in essence said, “Nonsense.” **1 Samuel 15:22-23** reads,

“So Samuel said:

‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.

²³For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,
And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
He also has rejected you from being king.”

Finally, after it was too late and Saul knew his fate, and he regretted the consequences of his actions, the true nature of his heart comes forth in **verses 24ff**,

²⁴Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD.”

²⁶But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.”

²⁷And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸So Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. ²⁹And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent.”

³⁰Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.” ³¹So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

³²Then Samuel said, “Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.” So Agag came to him cautiously.

And Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”

³³But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

³⁴Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Saul would have been a king governed by polls, if they were available. He would cast himself into whatever role the moment seemed to dictate in order to impress the people and secure their approval. He would be religious, if that was what would gain the approval of people. He would let them sin, if that is what they wanted. He would not stop them, but encourage them in their rebellion. He was more concerned for the approbation of man rather than the words, “well done”, from God.

To Saul, the image was dominant. It had served him well. He had impressed people with his stature and strength. His personality was winsome and engaging. But when “the crunch time” came, the people then knew and he himself knew he was both ill equipped and unwilling to deal with the matter.

But God looks on the inward heart of a person, valuing his devotion and resolve to obey. In contrast to the world’s way of assessing people, God looks on the inward heart condition. **1 Samuel 16:7** reads,

⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the LORD does not see as man sees*; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

This is why God had set David as King. Here was a teenage youth that would purpose to seek God all his days, ordering his life according to the will of God. Moreover, because this was the very essence of David’s nature, David would see to it that those he could influence or lead, that he would lead them in that path of faith and obedience. God would make David king. God knew that David

would always be faithful to rule over Israel not according to his own will and for his own purposes, but that David would be dedicated to ordering the life of the nation according to the will of God.

Everywhere in Scripture, the Lord underscores the lesson that is found here. God requires true, sincere faith and obedience. He will not tolerate pretense of religiosity or partial obedience. The Lord Jesus said, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). Theirs was an outward show with no internal reality. He said to them,

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matt. 23:27)

Outward religion may pass before people, but God will by no means approve it. As the Scriptures declare:

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; *whose praise is not of men, but of God*” (Rom 2:28).

The world tends to look to externals when assessing people. Because of this, people of the world tend to seek for others’ approval and esteem. They seek to exalt themselves before others. They strive to obtain that which will gain the world’s approval or envy. They seek to formulate and present an image of themselves that others will take notice of and for which others will esteem them highly.

It would seem that our present society has taken this to an extreme. The focus on appearance is a national obsession. Plastic surgery is big business. The shape and size of one’s body is a major driving concern. The personal image that we project to others is set before us as a most important matter! There are businesses that specialize in advising people how to cast themselves in an image of their choosing. You can have your whole self-transformed into the kind of person you want to become, one which you perceive that others will envy and value when they encounter you. You are told that “you can make yourself over.” All of this is one aspect of worldliness that the Christian is not to embrace.

But the point is this, when a person is driven by this worldly spirit to gain the approval of others, he becomes fearful of others and their opinions. When a crisis arises, he will not stand for principle. He will do whatever will be best for his own interests, regardless of the consequences for others. It is in times of crisis that the one with inward faith and with concern for the glory of God, who wins the day. ***But the man who is primarily driven for his own glory and well-being will be directed by the desires of those around him rather than issues of truth, justice, and righteousness.*** The reason for this is that he is driven by what they think of him. He is worldly. May that not be said of any of us.

But let us look at another, even far better illustration of this principle. Let us consider...

2) The example of the Lord Jesus Christ as the One we should admire and emulate.

In contrast to King Saul, the Lord Jesus sought to avoid outward show and personal fame. The Lord Jesus refused the devil’s temptation to exalt himself before the people. The devil would have Jesus seek the acclaim of the crowds by doing something miraculous before them. We read in Luke 4:9, “he (satan) took Him to Jerusalem, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.’” The Lord Jesus would not do so and refused to act so as to tempt God and to exalt Himself in the eyes of the people.

The prophets had foretold this aspect of His holy nature. We read in Isaiah 53: 1-3,

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and *we esteemed Him not* (Isa. 53:2f)

The Lord spoke the truth in whatever place or whatever situation He encountered. Even His enemies acknowledged this. They said to Him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God” (Luke 20:21).

And He certainly was never enamored by the acclamation that the crowds gave to Him. He was not concerned about gaining the approval of notable persons whom he encountered. He confronted evil men with their evil intentions and attitudes, showing no regard to the stature they held in people’s eyes.

The Lord Jesus was never self-serving and He always sought to do His Father’s will. No temptation could persuade Him to take another course, to compromise His convictions or His principles. Our Lord illustrated and demonstrated every quality of holy character in all that He said and did.

But the Lord not only demonstrated these qualities in His own life, He asserted that these qualities must characterize His disciples also. Our Lord will not tolerate pretense of religiosity or partial obedience. The Lord Jesus said, *“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 5:20). The righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees was an **outward** show with no **internal** reality. Jesus denounced their surface only, self-righteousness. He declared,

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.” (Matt. 23:27)

Outward religion may pass before people, but God will by no means approve it. The Word of God declares, “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Rom. 2:28-29). The Lord Jesus in all of His life and in all of His teaching underscored this third principle that we have been asserting: It is the will of God that we resist pretense, but rather we are to be true and genuine Christians, sincerely zealous to believe and obey God in all things at all times. We are not to give chief regard to the outward appearance of people, rather, we are to value highly godly character and holiness in others. We are not to be content with ourselves with a mere outward display of religiosity; we are to desire and seek a heart that is pleasing to the Lord, conformed to His will.

3) Some practical responses that we may have toward this principle.

Let us consider the implications of this matter for ourselves. First, let us avoid the worldliness of being impressed by the appearance of people—physical appearance, talent, wealth, education, and position of power.

Second, let us be busy developing our inner lives and let us manifest that true inner life in outward action, for God is looking on our hearts. But in addition, because we know that He is weighing the condition of our hearts, and because He will one day judge us according to our actions which manifest the condition of our hearts, let us be circumspect with view to the coming of Jesus Christ. The principle is set forth for us in Ephesians 6:5-7:

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; ⁶not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as

bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. (Eph. 6:5-7)

Third, let us not be pretentious. Do not put on a show of religion and do not be impressed by a show from others. Look for what is real in others. And strive to have that which is real in your own being. Do not try and impress others. As our Lord taught us,

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. (Matt. 6:16-18)

Fourth, let us always be mindful that one day the truth of our heart’s condition will be made known. As Saul’s true character became known in time, so will ours. It might not be until Judgment Day, but it will become known.

Fifth, let us value and emulate people for their character, and their love for God and His glory. And sixth, let us not use worldly means in an effort to further the cause of Christ in the world.

Since we have these promises, beloved,
let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit,
bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1)
