

THE RIGHT DEVOTION

The Right Devotion – [Matthew 6:19-24](#)

It's been a number of weeks since we've been in Matthew, so let's do a little review of [Matthew 6](#).

Jesus opens [Matthew 6](#) with a foundational principle:

[Matthew 6:1](#) (2016 ESV) — 1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

He goes on to describe what He means by “practicing your righteousness” by talking about giving, prayer, and fasting. If we do these things to receive praise from people, we will have no reward from our Heavenly Father. If we do these things for the glory of our Heavenly Father, He will reward us.

Jesus doesn't want us simply going through the motions in ignorance. He wants us to understand how our relationship with the the Father affects every aspect of our lives. And so He continues in [Matthew 6](#) to speak of our heart's devotion, that which really has our attention and affection and allegiance, and our heart's ambition. Today we're going to talk about our having the right devotion, and next week we'll talk about having the right ambition.

Let's turn to [Matthew 6:19-24](#).

RIGHT DEVOTION MEANS HAVING RIGHT VALUES

[Matthew 6:19-21](#) (2016 ESV) — 19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The first principle of devotion is found in [Matthew 6:21](#): *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* ([Matthew 6:21](#)).

This just makes sense. Whatever we invest ourselves in and give ourselves to will become an object of love and adoration and hope and comfort.

What is treasure? Treasure is not just money, but anything that has value to us: honor, respect, power, comfort, security, excitement, respectability, enjoyment, pleasure – the list goes on and on. Solomon did a lot of “treasure building,” and reports on his findings in Ecclesiastes. He says that he pursued wisdom, knowledge, and pleasure. He built houses and planted vineyards, created gardens and parks and orchards.

Ecclesiastes 2:9–10 2016 ESV

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

And what did Solomon learn from all of this effort?

Ecclesiastes 2:11 2016 ESV

Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

It was empty – vanity. It was pointless – striving after wind. It was profitless – nothing was gained by it.

Jesus commands us to not have the wrong values. *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.* It’s not because He is denying us something real and valuable, just so that we’re unhappy. It’s because no earthly treasure last very long at all: *moth and rust destroy them, and thieves break in and steal them.* Even the best earthly things will never have heavenly qualities. They can’t last forever; some can’t last a week or a month. It’s true that sometimes WE decay before earthly treasures do. But when we die, we leave everything we’ve accumulated behind.

Jesus commands us to have the right values. *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* Heavenly treasures don’t decay. They don’t rot. They can’t be stolen. [First Peter 1:4](#) describes our heavenly inheritance as *imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.* I think the same could be said for our heavenly treasures. They are safe and protected there.

How do we lay up treasures in heaven? Remember, Jesus has just spoken about giving, prayer, and fasting.

When we give, are we giving for earthly returns, or for heavenly use? You know, the current White House administration, along with the House and Senate, might try to eliminate non-profit status for groups that don't submit to their ideologies. What happens to churches and non-profits if no tax deduction can be taken? The enemies of the church think that churches will wither up and die if there are no tax deductions. Are they right about that? If we give for the sake of God's glory, in obedience to His Word, we lay up treasures in heaven.

When we pray, is it for safe travels, or for the glory of God? Are we praying about better jobs, safe travel, good visits with relatives, or for stronger faith, greater knowledge of God, the salvation of our loved ones, the advance of the Gospel? When we pray for the sake of God's glory, that His people would be strong and faithful, that we would be like Jesus Christ, we lay up treasures in heaven.

When we fast, is it so that we can benefit in some way now, or so that we grow in faith and reliance on the Lord? When we fast to remind ourselves that we are mortal, and that the food we really need is the Bread of Life and the Water of Life, we lay up treasures in heaven.

We must be rightly devoted to God, and that right devotion requires having the right values.

RIGHT DEVOTION REQUIRES RIGHT UNDERSTANDING

Matthew 6:22-23 (2016 ESV) — 22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, **23** but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Here's the second principle of devotion: *you will be like what you give your attention to.*

What do you spend your time looking at, concentrating on, focusing on? What holds your attention? What engrosses you? I read about a lot of different things, because I'm interested in a lot of different things. Over the past month or two I've read about carnivals, the memoirs of an airline pilot, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the canon of Scripture, the book *1776* by David McCulloch, Christian martyrs through history, the book *State Fair* (which the musical was based on), and *The American Puritans* by Dustin Benge and Nate Pickowicz, which I highly recommend.

But my anchor is Scripture. The Bible and its doctrines have had my attention for all of my adult life. That isn't because it's my work; I'm truly grateful that being a pastor allows me time in the Word that few people have. But I was devoted to the Word before I entered ministry. I became a pastor because of my love and devotion to the Scriptures.

What we take in will determine our devotion. We will become like that which we see. Jesus uses the example of the human eye, which opens up the world to us. A blind eye reveals nothing; a seeing eye reveals everything.

A bad spiritual eye – Jesus uses the word evil – is not fully blind, just blind to God and His Word. Bad spiritual eyes take in all kinds of philosophies and religions and ideas and concepts, covering every possible subject known to man. But people with bad spiritual eyes are utterly and completely blind to the things of God, and because of that, [Matthew 13:15](#) says, they cannot understand the truth.

Matthew 13:15 2016 ESV

For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

Understanding God and His Word requires a healthy spiritual eye. The only source of Light is Jesus Christ and His Word. The spiritual eye must be healthy and sound to see that Light. So after describing those who are spiritually blind and deaf, Jesus says to His disciples,

Matthew 13:16 2016 ESV

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

How do blind eyes and deaf ears begin to see and hear? Jesus says to Peter in [Matthew 16](#) that the Father opened Peter's eyes to Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. [Acts 16:14](#) says that the Lord opened Lydia's heart to pay attention to what Paul preached. [Acts 13:48](#) says that as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

God must do a miraculous work in the lives of sinners, opening their eyes, unplugging their ears, and granting them hearts that believe. He has done that for every single Christian; it is why we are a Christian in the first place. I once was blind, but now I see, because Jesus gave sight to me. I see His light, and it centers my devotion. I am becoming like Him, because I see more and more clearly. Right devotion requires right understanding, and that right understanding is completely dependent on healthy, sound spiritual eyes that can see the Light of Christ.

RIGHT DEVOTION REQUIRES AN EXCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

[Matthew 6:24](#) (2016 ESV) — 24 “No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.”

Here's the third principle of devotion: *Christians are not free agents, but are under God's authority.*

Oh, we want to think that we can serve whomever we like. Jesus says,

John 8:34-36 2016 ESV

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Jesus says that when He sets someone free, they are free indeed, *from slavery to sin*, but they are still not free and independent moral agents. The Bible says that we are slaves of righteousness, slaves of God. Paul calls himself a slave on many occasions. But this is a different sort of slavery. We are slaves as Jesus Himself was a slave, as [Philippians 2:7](#) says.

We were freed from oppressive, involuntary slavery to sin, in order to be slaves of the Most High God, with all of the privileges and benefits and blessings that such service brings. The word slave is not used to show that we have been subjugated and dominated by force and intimidation, but to make it clear that we have one Master, our Creator-Redeemer God. Earthly slavery brings nothing but misery and pain. Divine slavery brings peace and joy. Having the right devotion to God means that He is our exclusive Lord and Master, Savior and Redeemer, Father and Friend.

There's a very clear picture of this in the Scriptures, and every single one of you know it. The sons of Jacob took up residence in Egypt, where over several hundred years they increased in number until the Egyptians were afraid of them, and enslaved them. Yahweh sent Moses as a spokesman to Pharaoh, but Yahweh Himself did the actual work of delivering His people out of slavery in Egypt. He led them out into the wilderness where He had their undivided attention and explained how everything would work. They would now be His children and servants, responsible to follow His Law and carry out His wishes. If they would trust Him and obey Him – and folks, the only thing that makes the Law of God hard to obey is sin – then He would bless them beyond their ability to comprehend it. In His Law He makes it very, very clear, however, that they would not be permitted to serve two masters:

Exodus 20:1–3 2016 ESV

And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “You shall have no other gods before me.

That's the first commandment. If we don't get that one right, none of the rest matter. It doesn't matter that we don't commit murder or adultery. It doesn't matter that we're nice people. It doesn't matter that people like us. If we are not serving the One True God alone, none of the rest matters. Clearly, there are many in our world who reject Yahweh altogether; there is no allegiance, not even pretend allegiance, to the One True God. But there are also those whose service is divided; we could say that their worship is bicameral. They worship Yahweh, but they also worship money, or pleasure, or their house, or sports, or themselves, or ambition. Jesus says that bicameral worship is impossible, and that they aren't worshipping the One True God at all, but their other gods.

How do you know if someone's worship is bicameral? Yahweh is always given second place. If there's a game on Sunday, the game wins. If there's a television show on Wednesday night, the TV show wins. Every time Yahweh and their other god (or gods) have a scheduling conflict, Yahweh loses. Whenever Yahweh and their other gods have a moral conflict, the assumption is that Yahweh understands why they need to submit to their other gods.

Beloved, right devotion requires an exclusive relationship. Yahweh alone is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home.

There's a lot of trouble in the world today. There's a lot of trouble in politics. There's a lot of trouble in the area of health. And there is a lot of trouble coming for the church. The world demands absolute, unhesitating allegiance. There can be no disagreement, no dissent, no competing ideas.

What are we to do? The reality is that all the Christian life is countercultural; biblical Christianity opposes the cultures and values and dogmas of the world. We are never commanded to submit ourselves to anyone but Jesus Christ, and to no truth but the Scriptures.

And we see that in our passage today.

The world wants to approve your investments and how you spend your time. Jesus says, "No, don't lay up your treasures on earth; lay them up in heaven, where they are secure."

The world wants to feed your mind and heart with its own teachings. Jesus says, "No, you need a healthy, sound eye, so that you can take in the Light of the world."

The world wants your allegiance and loyalty. Jesus says, "No, you cannot serve two masters, whether it's God and money, or God and the government."

This doesn't mean that we are to be in a state of rebellion against the world. We are to be at peace with all, as much as depends on us.

But when the world says that investment in heavenly treasures, a steady diet of biblical truth, and loyalty to Jesus Christ first and foremost, are the characteristics of extremists, or terrorists, or brainwashed people who need reprogramming, then we must firmly, and gently, ignore the world, and continue to lay up treasures in heaven, keep the Light of Christ in our view, and service God alone.