

HARD QUESTIONS

THE LORD'S DAY

JULY 10, 2024

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Where will the next generation be spiritually in 20-30 years? Where will your children and grandchildren be in 20 years as it relates to their faith? Is faith and faithfulness important? One does not have to look very far to see the diminishing role of faith in the culture and/or in the personal lives even of those who claim to be "Christian."

In this lesson, we will evaluate the challenges of reaching and discipling the next generation. Facing tremendous pressure, how can believers confront the idols in our culture and live faithfully? How can believers face the challenges in culture that compete for priority over God in their lives?

The priorities of a person's life will reveal their understanding of what scripture teaches about:

1. Salvation
2. Discipleship (the cost)
3. The Church
4. The role of the church in the life of the believer
 - Worship
 - Discipline
 - Spiritual growth
5. The priority of the gospel

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; NASB95)

THE PRINCIPLE OF FIRSTS

Throughout the Bible, God continually illustrates, teaches, and commands the "principle of firsts." The word FIRST features in the Bible multiple times in both the shadow of the Old Testament and the reality of the New Testament.

"First" fruit in the Hebrew is *rê'shîyth*, and it means first, chief, or choice part. It means that which is choicest and foremost. Below is a quote from the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and the Complete Word Study Dictionary. Read both carefully:

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The primary meaning of this root is “head.”¹

H7225 (Strong)

תִּשְׂאֵר | rē'shîyth | ray-sheeth'

From the same as H7218; the first, in place, time, order or rank (specifically a firstfruit): - beginning, chief (-est), first (-fruits, part, time), principal thing.

H7225 (Word Study) תִּשְׂאֵר

rē'shiy: A noun meaning the beginning, the first, the chief, the best, the firstfruits. Occurring fifty-one times in the Old Testament, this term holds the honor of being the first word written in the entire Bible (Gen 1:1). On other occasions, the term signifies the highest of anything, i.e., the best or most excellent, such as the choicest parts of offerings (1Sa 2:29); the best of the spoil (1Sa 15:21); or the finest in oils (Amo 6:6). Elsewhere, the word designates the earliest or first products or results of something. It refers many times to the first products of a harvest (Lev 23:10; Deu 18:4; Neh 12:44); and sometimes to the first product, i.e., the firstborn of a father (Gen 49:3; Deu 21:17). Both this term and the noun rōš (H7218) are derived from the same unused verbal root.

Old Testament

Creation

The entire bible begins with this word (Gen. 1:1) — תִּשְׂאֵר | rē'shîyth | ray-sheeth'. God always has the first place. When we speak of creation, we always see who is first or alpha, and that is God.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Revelation 22:13; NASB95) [Isa 44:6; Isa 48:12]

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1; NASB95)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1; NASB95)

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:4)

First Born (Exodus 11; Exodus 13:2, 12, 15; 34:19; Numbers 18:15)

First Fruits (Exodus 23:16, 19; 34:22; Leviticus 23:10, 17; 27:30; Numbers 15:21; Deuteronomy 18:4, 26:2, 10; Nehemiah 10:35, 37; Proverbs 3:9)

New Testament

The Person of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

The Preaching of Jesus

- Priority - Matthew 6:33

¹ White, W. (1999). 2097 תִּשְׂאֵר. In R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr., & B. K. Waltke (Eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed., p. 825). Moody Press.

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The Greek word translated “first” in Matthew 6:33 is transliterated *prōtos*. It means “first in a line of more than one option.” This carries the idea of “priorities.” A biblical illustration may add insight. Luke 10 records the story of Jesus’ visit to the home of the two sisters named Martha and Mary. Martha welcomed Jesus into their home and immediately busied herself with the responsibilities associated with being a gracious host. In contrast, Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching” (Luke 10:39 ESV). Mary’s priority thoroughly ticked Martha off. So, she commanded Jesus to tell Mary to help her! I love Jesus’ reply: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42 NKJV). Did you catch it? “One thing is needful” or “first in a line of more than one option.” In this case, that “one thing” was worship. In Matthew 6:33 Jesus calls His followers to a single-minded, passionate pursuit of His kingdom and His righteousness.

- Priceless treasure – Matthew 13:44-46

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that God is the greatest, most valuable, most precious thing in the universe. When we don’t put God first, it’s like finding a priceless treasure in a field. But instead of selling everything we have so that we can buy the field, we bury the treasure and never think about it again. It’s treating treasure like trash.

- The rich young ruler – Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-27

The Picture of the Church

If you are born again, you are part of the body of Christ or the Ecclesia of God. Our description in Scripture is “...the church (assembly) of the Firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23).

The Lord Jesus “...is the Head of [His] body, the church; seeing He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead...” (Colossians 1:18).

THE PROBLEM WE FACE (THE SIN OF IDOLATRY)

We tend to think of idols in terms of statues of false gods. But the reality is that anything we love more than God is an idol.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20:4–6; NASB95)

“For you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” (Exodus 34:14; NASB95)

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” (1 Corinthians 10:14; NASB95)

- The enemy of true worship is idolatry.
- Idolatry is often seen in the Bible as spiritual adultery – unfaithfulness – betrayal.
- The opposite of worship is idolatry. (see Romans 1:25)
- At its heart, idolatry is really just making God less than He is.
- Idolatry is libel on the character of God (making Him something He is not).
- Idolatry is worshiping God in the wrong way.
- Idolatry is worshiping any image.
- Idolatry is any idol in your heart. (see Ezekiel 14)

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“The essence of idolatry is a desire to get” (William Barclay). The root cause of all other manifestations of sin is the sin of idolatry.

What is an idol? **Anything that we place ahead of God in our lives, anything that tugs at our hearts more than God. Such as possessions, careers, relationships, hobbies, sports, entertainment...**

“They made Him jealous with strange gods; With abominations they provoked Him to anger.” (Deuteronomy 32:16; NASB95)

Human Jealousy- The Fruit of Suspicion
Holy Jealousy- Pain of Wounded Love

“We must never allow anything to injure our relationship with God; if it does get injured, we must take time and get it put right. The main thing about Christianity is not the work we do, but the relationship we maintain and the atmosphere produced by that relationship. That is all God asks us to look after, and it is the one thing that is being continually assailed.” (My Utmost, Oswald Chambers)²

THE PRACTICE OF PUTTING GOD FIRST

(Matthew 6:33; Galatians 2:20; Luke 9:23; Galatians 5:24; Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:35; Romans 12:1–2; 1 John 2:25)

“Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything we have. The rich young ruler wanted no scars. He probably would have been a member of the average church today. But in John 6, when great multitudes went after Jesus, He told them three times that unless they were willing to pay the price they could not be His followers.” (Billy Graham)³

- Putting God first means that we keep the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).
- Putting God first means we keep our lives free from idolatry in all its forms: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).
- Putting God first means that we strive to follow in Jesus’ steps (1 Peter 2:21). Jesus’ life was characterized by total submission to the Father’s will, service to others, and prayer. In the garden, faced with unthinkable agony, Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).
- Jesus taught us to “seek the Kingdom of God above all else” (Matthew 6:33, NLT). We are to seek the things of God over the things of the world. We are to seek the salvation that is inherent in the kingdom of God, considering that of greater value than all the world’s riches combined (see Matthew 13:44–46). Associated with this command, God promises that by putting Him first, “He will give you everything you need.”
- Putting God first will cause you to stand out from the rest of the world.
- Putting God first means you obey God’s commands (John 14:15).
- Putting God first means you will take up your cross and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23).
- Putting God first means you will not forsake your first love (Revelation 2:4).
- Putting God first means you will give God the firstfruits, not the leftovers.

The Christian life is characterized by moment-to-moment selfless service to God that flows from love for Him and His people.⁴

² Chambers, O. (1986). My utmost for his highest: Selections for the year. Grand Rapids, MI: Oswald Chambers Publications; Marshall Pickering.

³ <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/blog-service-sacrifice-and-freedom/#:~:text=But%20Christ%20said%20the%20world,discipleship%20costs%20everything%20we%20have.>

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/putting-God-first.html>

NOTES

The debate is not over sports, traveling teams, going on vacation, going to the lake, sleeping in on a Sunday, or any myriads of other things. The question is not, “How many times can I miss attending church and still be a faithful Christian?”

The real questions are:

1. Does Biblical truth define and determine my convictions?
2. Do I have biblical convictions that overrule preferences and cultural pressures?
3. Am I willing to suffer loss to live my convictions?
4. Does the next generation see my life being ordered by true, genuine, biblical convictions?

“Many people have religious preferences, but God expects His people to have firmly held convictions. Are your beliefs convictions or preferences?”

What’s the difference between a preference and a conviction?

A preference is something that you prefer, and it can change depending on the circumstances. A conviction, on the other hand, is unchangeable no matter the circumstances. Many in today’s world hold religious preferences, not religious convictions.

In 2004, the Barna Group compared the behavior of nonbelievers and believers. The results showed that faith had little impact on most people’s behavior. In other words, researchers couldn’t detect a difference between a believer and nonbeliever by looking at the moral choices they made.

Develop biblical conviction

True Christianity is to be believed and practiced with conviction. Biblical convictions can’t be passive or just preferences. They must be deeply held and internalized. Those convictions should not just exist in our head, but be displayed in how we live life on a daily basis. True Christianity is a way of life practiced because we deeply believe in God and the authority of His Word. Our conduct should be driven by a genuine and unyielding desire to please God. Our beliefs must be proven from God’s Word and strongly held. And we must be able to explain and defend those beliefs if challenged.⁵