

What Does the Bible Say is Important to God

Introduction

Several places in the Bible, we see reference to more important issues (weightier matters, the whole duty of man, the most important commandments, etc.). While we need to be careful not to neglect the other matters the Bible teaches us, I want to use this lesson to look at some of what the Bible labels as important matters.

Weightier Matters - Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness

Matthew 23:23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Micah 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

We are cautioned not to neglect the other matters. In the example above, the other matter was giving. We see in the next verse how serious problems with giving were considered.

Malachi 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

Here the Bible compares it to robbing God. While those matters were very visible, and very direct, the weightier matters are much more focused on our heart, instead of just actions (Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness require changes to what we are, not just changes to what we do). We see other verses that emphasize this (Matt 12: 34,35 out of the heart man speaks and Eph 6:6 doing the will of God from your hearts). Perhaps part of this temptation to focus on visible acts is to be seen of Men. In Matt 6:1 we are warned against doing our righteousness before men.

Justice

One of the weightier matters was justice. Justice involves what is fair, what is right, what is in accord with God's plan.

Exodus 23:2 You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.

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We can't base our choice on what is right on what the crowd chooses, nor even just follow along with them. Right isn't chosen on a majority-rule democratic basis. God determines what is right.

Exodus 23:6-7 You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.

Justice also isn't selected on the basis of who is to receive it. Here we are cautioned about denying justice to the poor.

We also can't base our sense of justice on what seems right to us either. We need to depend on what God's word says.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Psalms 89:14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.

We should rejoice at justice. Part of our being righteous, should cause us to want to see justice.

Proverbs 21:15 It is a joy for the just to do justice, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity.

Mercy

The second weightier matter was Mercy. Mercy is forbearance, compassion, and leniency.

In order to receive mercy and forgiveness, we must also show mercy and forgiveness. The beatitudes call the merciful blessed (happy).

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

As we realize how much we have been forgiven, that should motivate us to be merciful. As we read the parable in Matt 18 about the unmerciful servant, even our own feelings tell us that those who receive mercy should show this same mercy to others also.

Matthew 18:32-35 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

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Mercy isn't only to those who have done wrong, though. In the story of the Great Samaritan we see him described as "the one who had mercy on him". This illustrates the compassionate side of being merciful.

Luke 10:36-37 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.

We are even commanded to be merciful to those who doubt and are stained with sin.

Jude 1:21-23 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

The mercy we show must be sincere. We are commanded to show mercy cheerfully (our human nature seems to want to show it very grudgingly).

Romans 12:8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Faithful

The third weightier matter was faithfulness. Being faithful involves being loyal, reliable, honorable, exact. Faithfulness is also one of the fruits of the spirit that we are to develop.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Faithfulness comes by testing. We see this in the parable in Matt 25, that we must be faithful in small things before we will be given responsibility for larger things. Sometimes we seem tempted to ignore the smaller matters, but instead must realize they are a critical beginning.

Matthew 25:23 His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Faithfulness isn't a one time task, but an ongoing effort. We must be faithful all of the time, not just when we think we are being watched (God sees everything we do, all of the time).

Matthew 24:45-46 Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

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The Whole Duty of Man

Fear God and keep His commandments

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?

In both of these verses (about the whole duty of man and about what God asks of us), we see the same pairing of ideas. We see that we should fear God and follow his commandments. Fearing God means letting him reign in our hearts, showing a reverence to his majesty, and a deference to his authority. It is realizing who God is. It seems natural then that after this we would follow what God commands.

We see also in the above verse the idea that God's commands are for our own good. That idea is repeated in 1 John 5 where we are told that God's commands are not burdensome, they weren't given to us to be a burden to us.

1 John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

Deuteronomy 5:29 Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

The proper respect for God causes us to acknowledge that his ways and thoughts are higher than our own. So instead of trusting our own ideas, we know that God knows better.

Isaiah 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

Psalms 34:9-10 Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.

The proper respect for God is the beginning of wisdom. If we don't have that part right, nothing else will fall into place.

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Psalms 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

Psalms 147:11-12 The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, In those who hope in His mercy. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!

Fearing God isn't always an easy task. We may face situations that test our trust in God.

Genesis 22:12-13 And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

Most Important Commandments

Mark 12:28-35 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these. So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." So when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared question Him. Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David?"

Love is a very important characteristic. If we do great things, but don't have love it is worthless.

1 Corinthians 13:1-4 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

Love isn't just words, but must be put into action to be real.

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1 John 3:16-19 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

Pure Religion

Help others and stay unspotted from the world

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Matthew 25:34-41 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

First Importance - Jesus Christ

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

John 6:28-30 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?"

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Conclusion

We see that God requires more from us than just avoiding a short list of "thou shalt not's". God wants us to give ourselves completely to him, a living sacrifice, so that our whole heart, our whole being is his. As it says in Romans 6, We need to die to ourselves, be buried with him in baptism, and arise to walk a new life.

December 1997, Mark May