

First And Foremost

Joe Slater

We sing it. We quote it. But do we comprehend it? *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you”* (Matthew 6:33).

People seek many things, good and evil. Herod **sought** baby Jesus to destroy Him (Matthew 2:13). The Pharisees **sought** “to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him” (Luke 11:54). Bad!

Topping the list of good things to seek are God’s kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus’ command begins with “but,” indicating a contrast with worldly people’s anxious seeking after daily needs such as food and clothing (Matthew 6:32). Since God knows we need them, and since He provides them for the birds, faith requires us to trust Him rather than worry.

Note that Jesus said “seek **first**” (i.e. this is top priority). The New Testament commends seeking other good things too, but God’s kingdom and His righteousness come first and foremost.

What is it to seek God’s kingdom? The church is the current manifestation of it, but you can’t just substitute “church” each time you see “kingdom.” Being in God’s kingdom requires willingly subjecting yourself to His reign over you. And that obligates you to seek God’s righteousness – not meaning His personal quality of goodness, but the process by which He makes sinners right with Himself. Before anything and everything else, you must seek a right relationship with God. That begins by putting your confident trust in Jesus and obeying His Gospel. Then, having submitted to King Jesus, you *“walk in the light”* to have fellowship with Him and enjoy continual cleansing by His blood (1 John 1:7).

Our Balancing Act

"Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 NAU).

Watching a gymnast on the balance beam makes me nervous. I get so tense knowing that she may lose her balance from a very small movement. One small move and the result is devastating. How many times have I seen a great gymnast cry bitterly because she lost her balance.

Author and preacher, Gary Demarest wrote, "There's a dangerous tendency in orthodox circles to focus on doctrine to the detriment of duty. Doctrinal conflict that neglects the duty to love one another becomes destructive of Christian community. At the same time, there's another danger in emphasizing behavior at the expense of doctrine. It can never be a case of either/or - it must be both/and."

When the study of God's word becomes purely academic, everyone loses. Teacher and student seek knowledge for knowledge's sake. Such lifeless study is like breathing air into a corpse. Nothing happens. On the other hand, when God's word is valued as water to a thirsty soul, and as food to a starving man then wonderful things happen to the soul. That's why it it's called "the living word." There needs to be balance.

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)

Greatness Through Service

Ask any teacher and they will probably tell you they’ve been asked, by more than one student, the question: “Is this going to be on the test?” That question stems from a culture that is looking to do just enough to get by! If it doesn’t benefit us right now, or if we don’t receive some sort of recognition or reward, most people view it as a waste of time!

Unfortunately that is the mentality of some people that would call themselves Christians. They have a tendency to focus on those things that draw attention to themselves and they overlook what some consider small tasks which God expects from His servants!

Those small tasks could include things like a phone call to someone who we haven’t seen in worship for a couple of weeks. It could be writing a card or note to a visitor, or to someone who is dealing with health problems or facing other difficulties in their life. It could be that we visit someone in the hospital or take food to their house when they get home. Maybe we take someone to their Dr’s appointment or therapy. These are just a few of the many things that Christians can and should do simply because we are servants! Despite what we see and hear from the world, it’s not the great things that make a person great!

The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:11-12).

It’s a blessing to know that this congregation is filled with those who are willing to serve without being recognized. Many of you realize it’s not about you, but it’s about serving others, as Christ served! ***“even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”*** (Matthew 20:28).

God recognizes when His people serve Him the way He desires. He recognizes when we place the needs of others before our own! Our goal should be to serve Him each day out of love and thankfulness for what He has done for us on the cross! As we humbly serve Him, we will find ways to serve others. May God give us strength and courage to follow the example set by our great Savior, who became the greatest Servant! To God Be the Glory!"

--Billy Claybaugh (Sayre, OK)