



Actions

Develop

Works

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Forward

God will separate his obedient followers from pretenders and unbelievers. The real evidence of our belief is the way we act. To treat all persons we encounter as if they are Jesus is no easy task.

What we do for others demonstrates what we really think about Jesus' words to us—feed the hungry, give the homeless a place to stay look after the sick. How well do your actions separate you from pretenders and unbelievers?

Jesus used sheep and goats to picture the division between believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats often grazed together but were separated when it came time to shear the sheep. Ezekiel 34:17-24 also refers to the separation of sheep and goats.

When someone claims to have faith, what he or she may have is intellectual assent—agreement with a set of Christian teachings—and as such it would be incomplete faith. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. If our lives remain unchanged, we don't truly believe the truths we claim to believe.

We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God. But such actions show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ.

While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds. Paul speaks against

those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

Chapter 1



Children copy their parent's actions.

Genesis 26:7-11

And when the men there asked him about Rebekah, he said, "She is my sister." He was afraid to admit that she was his wife. He thought they would kill him to get her, because she was very beautiful.

But some time later, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out a window and saw Isaac fondling Rebekah.

Abimelech called for Isaac and exclaimed, "She is obviously your wife! Why did you say she was your sister?"

"Because I was afraid someone would kill me to get her from me," Isaac replied.

"How could you treat us this way!" Abimelech exclaimed. "Someone might have taken your wife and slept with her, and you would have made us guilty of great sin." Then Abimelech made a public proclamation: "Anyone who harms this man or his wife will die!"

True repentance is revealed by our actions.

Exodus 9:27-34

Then Pharaoh urgently sent for Moses and Aaron. "I finally admit my fault," he confessed. "The Lord is right, and my people and I are wrong. Please beg the Lord to end this terrifying thunder and hail. I will let you go at once."

"All right," Moses replied. "As soon as I leave the city, I will lift my hands and pray to the Lord. Then the thunder and hail will stop. This will prove to you that the earth belongs to the Lord.

But as for you and your officials, I know that you still do not fear the Lord God as you should."

All the flax and barley were destroyed because the barley was ripe and the flax was in bloom. But the wheat and the spelt were not destroyed because they had not yet sprouted from the ground.

So Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. As he lifted his hands to the Lord, all at once the thunder and hail stopped, and the downpour ceased. When Pharaoh saw this, he and his officials sinned yet again by stubbornly refusing to do as they had promised.

After promising to let the Hebrews go, Pharaoh immediately broke his promise and brought even more trouble upon the land. His actions reveal that his repentance was not real. We do damage to ourselves and to others if we pretend to change but don't mean it.

What marks you as a follower of God?

Exodus 13:6-9

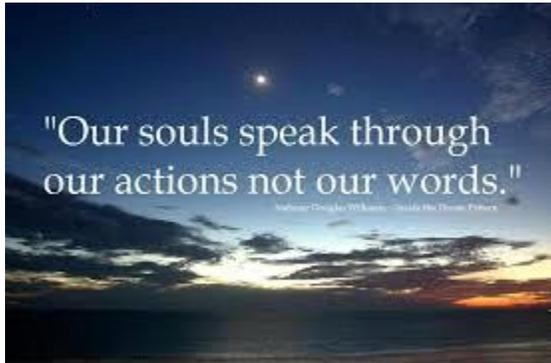
For seven days you will eat only bread without yeast. Then on the seventh day, you will celebrate a great feast to the Lord.

Eat only bread without yeast during those seven days. In fact, there must be no yeast in your homes or anywhere within the borders of your land during this time.

"During these festival days each year, you must explain to your children why you are celebrating. Say to them, 'This is a celebration of what the Lord did for us when we left Egypt.' [9] This annual festival will be a visible reminder to you, like a mark branded on your hands or your forehead. Let it remind you always to keep the Lord's instructions in your minds and on your lips. After all, it was the Lord who rescued you from Egypt with great power.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread marked the Hebrews as a unique people—as though they were branded on their hands and foreheads. What do you do that marks you as a follower of God? The way you raise your children, demonstrate love for others, show concern for the poor, and live in devotion to God—these actions will leave visible marks for all to see. While national groups are marked by customs and traditions, Christians are marked by loving one another (John 13:34-35).

Chapter 2



Balancing prayer with action.

Exodus 14:15

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the people to get moving!"

The Lord told Moses to stop praying and get moving! Prayer must have a vital place in our lives, but there is also a place for action.

Sometimes we know what to do, but we pray for more guidance as an excuse to postpone doing it. If we know what we should do, then it is time to get moving.

Think before you act.

Exodus 21:1

"Here are some other instructions you must present to Israel:

These laws were given because everything we do has consequences. It is vital to think before acting, to consider the effects of our choices. Think

of your plans for today and consider what their long-range results will be. As we deal with others, we should keep the principles of these laws in mind. We should act responsibly and justly with all people—friends and enemies alike.

Complaining versus acting on problems

1 Samuel 7:2-3

The Ark remained in Kiriath-jearim for a long time—twenty years in all. During that time, all Israel mourned because it seemed that the Lord had abandoned them.

Then Samuel said to all the people of Israel, "If you are really serious about wanting to return to the Lord, get rid of your foreign gods and your images of Ashtoreth. Determine to obey only the Lord; then he will rescue you from the Philistines."

Israel mourned and sorrow gripped the nation for 20 years. The ark was put away like an unwanted box in an attic, and it seemed as if the Lord had abandoned his people.

Samuel, now a grown man, roused them to action by saying that if they were truly sorry, they should do something about it.

How easy it is for us to complain about our problems, even to God, while we refuse to act, change, and do what he requires. We don't even take the advice he has already given us. Do you ever feel as if God has abandoned you? Check to see if there is anything he has already told you to do. You may not receive new guidance from God until you have acted on his previous directions.

Samuel urged the Israelites to get rid of their foreign gods. Idols today are much more subtle than gods of wood and stone, but they are just as dangerous. Whatever holds first place in our lives or controls us is our

god.

Money, success, material goods, pride, or anything else can be an idol if it takes the place of God in our lives. The Lord alone is worthy of our service and worship, and we must let nothing rival him. If we have “foreign gods,” we need to ask God to help us dethrone them, making the true God our first priority.

Chapter 3



Act on what's right.

1 Kings 1:11-14

Then Nathan the prophet went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and asked her, "Did you realize that Haggith's son, Adonijah, has made himself king and that our lord David doesn't even know about it?"

If you want to save your own life and the life of your son Solomon, follow my counsel. Go at once to King David and say to him, 'My lord, didn't you promise me that my son Solomon would be the next king and would sit upon your throne?'"

Then why has Adonijah become king?' And while you are still talking with him, I will come and confirm everything you have said."

When Nathan learned of Adonijah's conspiracy, he immediately tried to stop it. He was a man of both faith and action. He knew that Solomon should rightly be king, and he moved quickly when he saw someone else trying to take the throne.

We often know what is right but don't act on it. Perhaps we don't want to get involved, or maybe we are fearful or lazy. Don't stop with prayer, good intentions, or angry feelings. Take the action needed to correct the

situation

When we must take decisive action

Esther 4:13-14

Mordecai sent back this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that you will escape there in the palace when all other Jews are killed.

If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. What's more, who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?"

Although Esther was the queen and shared some of the king's power and wealth, she still needed God's protection and wisdom. No one is secure in his or her own strength in any political system. It is foolish to believe that wealth or position can make us impervious to danger. Deliverance only comes from God.

After the decree to kill the Jews was given, Mordecai and Esther could have despaired, decided to save only themselves, or just waited for God's intervention.

Instead, they saw that God had placed them in their positions for a purpose, so they seized the moment and acted. When it is within our reach to save others, we must do so.

In a life-threatening situation, don't withdraw, behave selfishly, wallow in despair, or wait for God to fix everything. Instead, ask God for his direction, and *act!* God may have placed you where you are "for such a time as this."

God is not specifically mentioned in the book of Esther, but it is obvious that Mordecai expected God to deliver his people.

While the book of Esther does not mention God directly, his presence fills the pages. Esther and Mordecai believed in God's care, and because they acted at the right time, God used them to save his people.

God doesn't act through those unwilling to act for him.

Esther 4:17-5:1

So Mordecai went away and did as Esther told him.

Three days later, Esther put on her royal robes and entered the inner court of the palace, just across from the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne, facing the entrance.

God was in control, yet Mordecai and Esther had to act. We cannot understand how both can be true at the same time, and yet they are.

God chooses to work through those *willing* to act for him. We should pray as if all depended on God and act as if all depended on us. We should avoid two extremes: doing nothing, and feeling that we must do everything.

Chapter 4



Jesus' actions proved who he is.

Mark 1:1

Here begins the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

When you experience the excitement of a big event, you naturally want to tell someone. Telling the story can bring back that original thrill as you relive the experience.

Reading Mark's first words, you can sense his excitement. Picture yourself in the crowd as Jesus heals and teaches. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples. Respond to his words of love and encouragement. And remember that Jesus came for us who live today as well as for those who lived 2,000 years ago.

Mark was not one of the 12 disciples of Jesus, but he probably knew Jesus personally.

Mark wrote his Gospel in the form of a fast-paced story, like a popular novel.

The book portrays Jesus as a man who backed up his words with action that constantly proved who he is—the Son of God. Because Mark wrote

the Gospel for Christians in Rome, where many gods were worshiped, he wanted his readers to know that Jesus is *the one true* Son of God.

True faith results in actions

Luke 3:8-9

Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. Don't just say, 'We're safe—we're the descendants of Abraham.' That proves nothing.

God can change these stones here into children of Abraham.

Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

Many of John's hearers were shocked when he said that being Abraham's descendants was not enough for God.

The religious leaders relied more on their family lines than on their faith for their standing with God.

For them, religion was inherited. But a personal relationship with God is not handed down from parents to children. Everyone has to commit to it on his or her own.

Don't rely on someone else's faith for your salvation. Put your own faith

in Jesus, and then exercise it every day.

Confession of sins and a changed life are inseparable. Faith without deeds is dead.

Jesus' harshest words were to the respectable religious leaders who lacked the desire for real change. They wanted to be known as religious authorities, but they didn't want to change their hearts and minds. Thus their lives were unproductive. Repentance must be tied to action, or it isn't real. Following Jesus means more than saying the right words; it means acting on what he says.

Do your actions back up your words?

Matthew 3:8

Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God.

John the Baptist called people to more than words or ritual; he told them to change their behavior. "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" means that God looks beyond our words and religious activities to see if our conduct backs up what we say, and he judges our words by the actions that accompany them. Do your actions match your words?

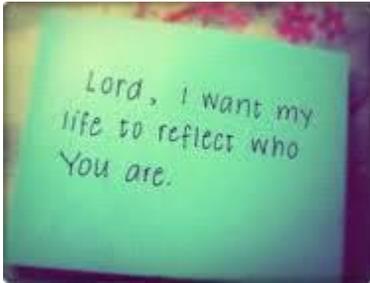
Matthew 21:30

Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.

The son who said he would obey and then didn't represented the nation of Israel in Jesus' day. They said they wanted to do God's will, but they constantly disobeyed. They were phony, just going through the motions.

It is dangerous to pretend to obey God when our hearts are far from him because God knows our true intentions. Our actions must match our words.

Chapter 5



Actions don't always reflect good attitudes.

Matthew 20:20

Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor.

Some of those in the crowd were experts at telling others what to do, but they missed the central point of God's laws themselves.

Jesus made it clear, however, that obeying God's law is more important than explaining it. It's much easier to study God's laws and tell others to obey them than to put them into practice. How are you doing at obeying God *yourself*?

The Pharisees were exacting and scrupulous in their attempts to follow their laws. So how could Jesus reasonably call us to a greater righteousness than theirs?

The Pharisees' weakness was that they were content to obey the laws outwardly without allowing God to change their hearts (or attitudes). Jesus was saying, therefore, that the *quality* of our goodness should be greater than that of the Pharisees.

They looked pious, but they were far from the kingdom of God. God judges our hearts as well as our deeds, for it is in the heart that our real allegiance lays. Be just as concerned about your attitudes that people

don't see as about your actions that are seen by all.

Jesus was saying that his listeners needed a different kind of righteousness altogether (love and obedience), not just a more intense version of the Pharisees' righteousness (legal compliance).

Our righteousness must:

- (1) Come from what God does in us, not what we can do by ourselves,
- (2) Be God-centered, not self-centered,
- (3) Be based on reverence for God, not approval from people, and
- (4) Go beyond keeping the law to living by the principles behind the law.

You will be treated as you treat others.

Luke 6:37-38

"Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you.

If you forgive others, you will be forgiven.

If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over.

Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you."

A forgiving spirit demonstrates that a person has received God's forgiveness.

Jesus uses the picture of measuring grain in a basket to ensure the full amount.

If we are critical rather than compassionate, we will also receive criticism.

If we treat others generously, graciously, and compassionately, however, these qualities will come back to us in full measure.

We are to love others, not judge them.

Chapter 6



Actions must be consistent with attitudes.

Matthew 15:8-9

'These people honor me with their lips,
But their hearts are far away.

Their worship is a farce,
for they replace God's commands with their own man-made teachings.' "

The prophet Isaiah also criticized hypocrites (Isaiah 29:13), and Jesus applied Isaiah's words to these religious leaders. When we claim to honor God while our hearts are far from him, our worship means nothing.

It is not enough to act religious. Our actions and our attitudes must be sincere. If they are not, Isaiah's words also describe us.

The Pharisees knew a lot about God, but they didn't know God. It is not enough to study about religion or even to study the Bible. We must respond to God himself.

Actions demonstrate what we think about Jesus.

Matthew 25:31-46

"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.

Then the King will say to those on the right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.

I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'

"Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink?

Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing?

When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' [40] And the King will tell them, 'I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'

"Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons!

For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me anything to drink.

I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

"Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?'

And he will answer, 'I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."

This parable describes acts of mercy we all can do every day. These acts do not depend on wealth, ability, or intelligence; they are simple acts freely given and freely received.

We have no excuse to neglect those who have deep needs, and we cannot hand over this responsibility to the church or government. Jesus demands our personal involvement in caring for others' needs (Isaiah 58:7).

There has been much discussion about the identity of the "brothers." Some have said they are the Jews; others say they are all Christians; still others say they are suffering people everywhere.

Such a debate is much like the lawyer's earlier question to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29).

The point of this parable is not the who, but the *what*—the importance of serving where service is needed.

The focus of this parable is that we should love every person and serve anyone we can. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for him.

OUR WRONG DESIRES VERSUS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The will of the Holy Spirit is in constant opposition to our sinful desires. The two are on opposite sides of the spiritual battle.

Our wrong desires are:

Evil, destructive, easy to ignite. They are difficult to stifle, self-centered, oppressive and possessive. These attitudes are also decadent, sinful and deadly.

The fruit of the spirit is:

Good, productive, difficult to ignite and easy to stifle. They are also self-giving, liberating and nurturing. They are also uplifting, holy and produce abundant life.

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Holy Bible: King James Translation

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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