

Praying for you - God bless you

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Gospel of Matthew 25:14~30

The Great and Terrible Division!



One final word to mothers on this Mother's Day and it applies to all parents as well. You don't have to seek to be a better parent, as most of you are. You need to seek a closer walk with Jesus! Your children cannot be your first priority, or you will fail them! Your first priority is Him. You serve Him first, not them first! In serving Him first you become the type of person anyone would want for a mother. No one needs a mother who can do more, but we all need mothers who are perpetually growing into more *on the inside*! We all need mothers who are being filled with the sweetness of the Holy Spirit of God. God is giving out inner beauty treatments every day! It is not superficial makeup that we apply to our outward behavior or appearance! No, it is the beautification of our soul. It is what He does! It is His gift to us. ***"Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be added to you as well"*** said Jesus (Matthew 6:33) Love Him. Love Him by serving others – (the lesson of today's text) – and not just your children, family or friends! Did you notice the word "stranger" in the words of Jesus today?! Include your children in loving someone not connected to you by blood or ties of friendship at all! Let them see what compassion looks like – the compassion that the Spirit of Jesus has given you! He is changing you, turning your heart from yourself to reaching the world for His sake and sharing the love of God with them! Let children see what it looks like when someone purposefully makes room in their life to love others that "normal" people are not expected to love and care for! Let them see Jesus as He really is!



We divide people into categories all the time. It is how our mind functions best – categorizing. There is a racial divide. I am still asked what my race is on various applications – white, brown, black, Asian, Native American? Or whether I am married or single. What age am I? Out in society, people are divided by their size – tall, average, short; or the other way - rotund, average, or thin. We view people as strong or weak, good-looking or *not* looking too good. There are good people or bad, nice people or mean. There are men *with* hair and men with *some* hair, and men *without* hair. The people with hair have long, medium, or short hair. And hair can be categorized in different colors – red/orange, yellow, brown (brunette), black,.. People are actually referred to as a redhead, or a blond, or a brunette, raven, or a grey. People are categorized as smart or stupid, wise or foolish, honest or dishonest, funny or serious, optimistic or pessimistic,.. and I could go on and on, but you get what I’m getting at. On Mother’s day, mothers are categorized too by how good of mothers they are. They are a good mother or a bad mother based upon what people see in their interaction with their kids. Mothers that yell and scream threaten and hit their kids all the time make it pretty obvious to the rest of us that they were both mothered poorly themselves and are duplicating their mothers mistakes and sins against their children. Those sins will continue to be passed on from generation to generation. What I am saying is that we all kinds of ways of dividing people into literally 100s of different categories (I didn’t bother to count).



God categorized also. But He doesn’t seem to care one bit about physical traits, social status, or mental ability when He is doing it. He cares not one bit about the outside characteristics that humans are so obsessed about. No, He cares about character **traits** – the stuff that comes from the inside of a person! He cares about the human heart, our core being! He cares about the **WORDS** that come out of our mouths! Those words represent our **thoughts, intentions, reactions, attitudes, judgments, and values**! He cares about our **ACTIONS** and motives behind them – the choices we make about what we do or neglect doing, for good or for bad, and especially the thought process that we go through to make those choices! In regard to the process of making choices, *I remember when I was first learning “math”, and learning that it was different from “arithmetic”. I could not understand why my work was not right if I got the right answer but followed the wrong equation process to get there! The teacher seemed equally interested in the process as he was with the answer. Likewise, Jesus is revealed as one that cares about our thinking and decision-making process. He cares about whether we are acting **according to** how He has invested in us in Jesus the Christ – His life, His death, His example, His teachings – or whether we are acting **outside of** His very costly investments in us and outside of His pattern!

Vs. 25:32 - In the book of Matthew, an obviously extremely complicated and advanced God, a God who invented and put into place all the complexities of the laws of physics, has brilliantly simplified things for us. In the end, all individual people are separated into two categories - not even three, or four. But just two! The wording here tells us that He does not deal with the nations as nations but with the people of the nations *as individuals*. God separated individuals by whether we are to be saved, or whether we are to be damned! Whether we are saved or damned depends upon one thing - it depends upon how we as individuals have responded to His Son Jesus and His story – the Gospel! Much of the Gospel of Matthew records Jesus illustrating how people responded to Him personally and to His teachings. The Pharisees and priest responded by hating Him - while the poor, the sick and disabled – who he healed indiscriminately, and those who were simply intrigued by His teaching,.. well, they just absolutely loved Him! The **religious**, especially the men in charge of the leadership of the religion Judaism, that presided over the land and who were considered “the **righteous**” - *they* responded to overwhelming eyewitness evidence Jesus was the Messiah with *jealousy, outrage, derision, slander*, and ultimately *murder*; while the **irreligious and sinners**, and those **searching** for spiritual truth, responded with *belief, praise, loyalty, and even worship*! The writer of Matthew emphasizes this extreme division of people again and again throughout his record of the activities and teachings of Jesus during His life and ministry. Jesus says that God divides people like we divide sheep and goats! Here is says that all people will be divided into one of two categories in the end. The sheep will live with Him forever, and the goats will be banished from His Presence!



Let's talk about who is categorized where. Some people reacted ambivalently! They could take it or leave it! They never did actually make a real decision to follow Jesus, but they were actually disposed favorably toward Him. Unfortunately, Jesus says that a hard decision had to be made in regard to Himself. Taking a "soft" stand is just not going to cut it! A person can't just have a favorable opinion of Jesus and be considered one of His followers! A requirement of being a true disciple of Jesus was (and is) someone who has true *convictions* regarding Him. *I keep reminding people these days that with all this information flying around regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in our nation and in the world, that it is okay to have an opinion about whether it is a legit crisis, or a political plot, or whether it is *drifting into* a political thing,... but since so many people and so-called experts are differing and there is no way to know for sure - I advise people to hold to a view but to hold it softly, especially publicly. To come out on Facebook, for instance, with one extreme or the other is foolish right now, and will make the people that take a hard stance into fools or geniuses in the end. But half the people posting hard stands are going to shame themselves. I advise people to hold their opinions softly, discuss it with their family or closest friends, but not to get overly bent out of shape about it or to attack those who differ. It will all come out in time! Then we will know for sure what we cannot be sure of at this present time when facts are so sketchy and everyone seems to be skewing the "facts" around in favor of their own narrative. I'm just saying that it is smarter to withhold final judgment, or *hard* judgment.



But when it comes to Jesus, that is not going to work. He is telling us that a "**hard**" decision needs to be made. An opinion about Him must become a committed *conviction*! It has to be something we are staking our lives upon! In fact, we are to burn our bridges to our old life! *There is a story from history that I am sure has been told a million times in public addresses - from political speeches, to sermons, to commencement addresses. But it is still a good illustration. In 1519, Spanish conquistador, Hernando Cortez, sailed from Spain to South America, where, with only 600 men he planned to steal the plentiful gold and silver of the immense and powerful Aztec nation. Cortez knew he and his tiny force would have to fight and conquer that great nation - a virtually impossible task for so small a force against so vast! He was convinced, however, that it could be done - with advanced weaponry (steel against stone), with superior battle strategy and discipline, and with unshakable drive and courage. But many of his men did not share his optimism. When he caught wind of a revolt among the men, he ordered his ships burned, thereby committing himself and his men to remain in South America with no escape possible! He made it a choice to win or die! They went on to carve a large and bloody path through the nation until they reached the large cities and then the emperor and his riches. It was not quite as courageous as some make it out to be. It was men covered in hard armor, with swords, spears and bows, battling unarmored men with sticks and stones, and little battle discipline. They died in vast heaps! It was like tanks against infantry! In the final analysis, they were just thieves, although entirely committed ones!

Jesus has said all along in the gospel of Matthew that it is going to take a total commitment to follow Him. It is the only approach that is worthy of **His** total commitment – the giving of His life – to secure a perfect salvation for us! *A half-commitment to mothering one's children is the commitment of a mother who will do a poor job of mothering her children, for obvious reasons! A mother who is fully committed to doing everything she can to raise her children to be straight and strong in a crooked world, that is someone who will consistently be a good mother! Likewise, a lackluster commitment to follow Jesus and to obey Him formula for a bad follower! Jesus does not need nor want the uncommitted!



A bad follower is not only like having no follower, it is actually worse! A bad follower makes for an inaccurate portrayal of Jesus! He or she is actually counterproductive to the Kingdom-building purposes of God in this world! They will say they are for Christ but then betray Him with ugly attitudes, harsh or untrue words, or ungodly actions! Such a person is divided inside! What kind of an impression does that kind of an avowed Christian leave someone who would otherwise be open to the Gospel? I am afraid that many who claim to be Christians are very busy closing doors in the faces of those who would otherwise be interested – interested, that is, interested until one of these shows them a false and ugly picture of God! God will not do anything for such a divided person! Really – I mean that! **[James 1:5-8]** - A harsh, but real statement!

[Ph'p 3:7,8] – Jesus needs fully convinced and dedicated disciples!

[Matt. 16:24] - People need to commit to their own cross, just as Jesus fully committed to His! That means dying to the old self, renouncing it, and coming alive to the new self that is found only in Jesus!

Let me make clear something important here so that someone does not get the wrong impression. What Jesus uses in vss. 35-45 are not new requirements to get into the Kingdom of God, but examples of the general difference between those who are in the Kingdom and those who are on the outside of it. The requirement for getting in,.. *is faith and trust in Jesus* and in Him alone! He has to deal with our sins because He is the only one that can! **Empathy** for the thirsty, **hospitality** for those in need of shelter, **kindness** for those who need clothes, **compassion** and care for the sick, **mercy** for those in prison. All those internal qualities that result in practical actions are a result of being in a relationship with Jesus. They are elements of the activity of the Holy Spirit inside of a person. It is only a partial list, not a complete one. Their companions in character are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, faith, knowledge, godliness (Christ-likeness), perseverance, among others. These are all evidences that the Kingdom of God resides within a person! When a person is filled with the Spirit of God, there is plenty of evidence! We are called God's "new creation"! When a person is *not* filled with the Spirit of God, there is plenty of evidence for that also and Jesus paints a picture of someone who does little or nothing when confronted with great need! The heart of such a person is a fallen, self-centric entity by nature. They are not moved by the predicaments and needs of others. Of course, from experience, we know that this is a general principle, and not true of everyone. Many who do not love Jesus are compassionate people. Not all the people who risk their life at the Red Cross, or Compassion International or any of a dozen other relief organizations, are Christ-followers. But Christ-followers actually love people for the sake of Jesus! God Himself changes our perspective – the way we look at people. Jesus ends up this treatise by stating that if we reach out to others in need, it is as if we have reached out to *HIM!* He is obviously the King in this example – the King who says that if you reach out to those in need, you have reached out and helped *Him!*

