

Seek Ye First... Matthew 6:33

by **Leon O. Poole**

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This teaching book, *Seek Ye First... Matthew 6:33*, by Leon O. Poole, provides insightful background into, and reveals the true meaning of, a well-known, but often misunderstood, Bible verse, concerning Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 6:33.

Matthew 6:33

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

It is my sincere desire to encourage believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, especially young, or new believers, to set this text as a goal in their life. It will produce for you far greater blessings than what you may realize at this time in your Christian life. As a believer, you have already entered into the righteousness which is of God by faith, according to Romans 3:22, through your new birth. That brings us into right standing with God, but then we need to commit ourselves to right DOING, i.e., the daily choices we must make, NOT to become saved, but because we ARE saved, and we seek to do what is right before God in obedience to His Word.

As an example, consider Romans 6:13: *"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."* That has to do with our daily activities in thought, word, deed and purpose. It needs to be our constant aim to please the Lord, and to seek to carry out His will in our life. Notice Philippians 2:12-13: *"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."*

That is a concise a statement concerning Christian discipleship; an amplification of what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 16:24: *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."* Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, means more than a passive, casual desire. It means more than hoping to go to heaven some day. It means a purposeful, sustained, and determined effort to live in His kingdom now, and to help forward the expression of His kingdom on the earth now.

Of course, we know there is the literal coming of His political kingdom in the future. But for the time present, we are to seek to advance His kingdom within the hearts of mankind. That often involves sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people we have contact with in daily life. It is also the living of a God-pleasing life each day.

It is what Jesus said: *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* Matthew 5:15.

In this way, we are to realize that the prized Kingdom of God which we seek, is not just 'pie in the sky, bye and bye.' It is an effort that often calls upon us to wrestle against the spiritual powers, and principalities; against temptations, and stresses that try the true followers of Jesus Christ. It means to fight the good fight of faith, and to be salt in the earth, by affirming things that are right before God and man. It is to have a positive effect for good on the society in which we live.

There are rich rewards for such godly living, even in this world, and in the world to come, there are eternal rewards. For instance, consider Proverbs 11:4. *"Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death."* How often do people who act wickedly get into trouble! But those who live in righteousness before God need never fear dying of alcoholism, or of drug addiction. They will avoid sexual promiscuity, and thus sexually transmitted diseases! Living right before God will keep one out of such snares. Notice Psalms 91:14-16: *"Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation."*

It is well worth while to serve the Lord Jesus. It is divine counsel to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is wonderful to have the Lord in constant attendance to us, as His children, and to be in constant fellowship with Him. In Him is hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is able to make all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. He will lead us in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Only with our eyes shall we see, and behold the reward of the wicked. But He will show us the path of life.

As regards to riches, by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, He will cause His grace to abound towards us. Notice 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. *"But thus I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*

Verses 9-11. (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; He hath given to the poor; his righteousness remaineth forever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) being enriched in everything to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God."

The key to God's righteousness in regards to finances is found in verses 9-11 above. Notice how righteousness accrues to those who disperse abroad and give to the poor. Notice how God ministers seed (money, in this case, to sow abroad), supplies bread for your food, and multiplies your seed sown, so that you receive a great harvest, and increases the fruits of your righteousness.

That is such a rich passage of Scripture. It is filled with Divine promise of blessings that make life worth living in this present world, and in the world to come, provides rewards that shall endure forever. There are other Scriptures that are akin to that of 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 in nature and promise, and they also have to do with seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

One of the problems that people deal with is the concept of avoiding serving mammon. We all have to have money, and God knows that we need things, according to the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6:32. But God's Word shows how to avoid the snare of being so bound to the necessity for money that we fall into serving mammon. Indeed, some have tried to live without working at all, and have fallen into a snare of a different kind, but a snare nonetheless.

Observe 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12: *"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."* Note the **command** to work in order to provide for our material needs.

It is clear from this passage that working for our livelihood does not constitute serving mammon. But some fall into a trap of being greedy for money and for the things that it can buy in today's markets. Paul bade to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

There is another way of dealing with mammon so as not to be condemned by it. Notice Colossians 3:17 and 22-24. *"And what soever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ."*

According to these Colossian verses, by faith we can offset the servitude to mammon by rather giving our allegiance to Jesus, and serving as unto Him. The person (or company) we work for signs our paycheck, but our Employer is really the Lord Jesus Christ! That enthrones Jesus Christ in our heart and affections rather than being subservient to mammon. It should also preclude grumbling, fault finding, and poor fidelity to our employer. By faith, we serve for their best interest and benefit, and then rightly receive the reward that is due us.

We make money to become our servant, rather than our master, by paying tithes (ten percent of our GROSS income) to God. Tithes should be paid into the local Church where we are spiritually fed with the things of God. In addition we should assign some of our income to charity, religious works etc., according to 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 as we noted above.

That sounds like a lot of money going out that we could use somewhere else for our own pleasures or needs. But if we do it according to the Scripture, there will be an inflow of funds as God makes things work for us. Notice Luke 6:38. *"Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."* Does that sound like God is going to extract every last coin from you that He can, and leave you a pauper? Hardly!

Well, the biggest hurdle will be to believe that and commit oneself to living in that manner of Christian faith. It is one of the elements of God's righteousness that we are to seek. God is a giver: John 3:16 demonstrates that: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Note that it was by giving to the uttermost that God was able to redeem mankind, and indeed recover the whole of creation from the bondage of sin.

Bottom line on the subject of money and of giving: don't be so bound to money that you are grieved to give some of what is yours away to worthy needs. Don't be so bound to money that you are grieved to give to God what is rightfully His, since He owns everything in the whole universe, but has allotted to you that which you have. Let God's kingdom have its rightful place in your finances. In short, seek to be righteous in your finances. On the subject, be honorable in dealing with your obligations. Pay your debts according to your contracts, if you have any, seeking to meet the requirements of the contract "on time". Make money **your** servant, but don't serve it.

You see, when we walk according to God's Word, there comes into our lives a bold confidence that is absent to those who do not live according to His Word. Such a manner of Christian living becomes the main guard against worry and fear and dread and depression. Notice Romans 15:13: *"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."*

There is another area of Christian living that must concern us, if we would know the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It is found in Matthew 6:12-15: *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

There are several places in the Scriptures that tell us that God forgives sins, trespasses and iniquities. For instance, in Exodus 34:7: *"Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."*. Also in Psalms 103:3 it says that God forgives all our iniquities. In Isaiah 43:25 it says that for His Own sake, God forgives our iniquities and will not remember our sins. None of these preempt the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, Who warned that if we don't forgive others their trespasses against us, God will not forgive our trespasses. Obviously, the Scripture foresees a problem with obtaining God's forgiveness for our trespasses, if we don't forgive others. Yet if we DO forgive others, God WILL forgive us. Through forgiving others we have access to God's **readiness** to forgive. We don't have it if we don't forgive.

At times we may feel unworthy to ask God for forgiveness, because we have failed so grievously. But Matthew 6:14 assures that He WILL forgive us if we forgive others. It is readily active on our behalf, and we need never to beg for forgiveness. God just grants it to us, BECAUSE we forgive others.

Everyone should certainly know that I am not talking about a kind of 'license' to sin at will, and then gain automatic forgiveness with no effort on our part. Rather, habitually forgiving others is an exercise in seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Seek to be right with others in your effort to be right with God. When we do that, we are manifesting the righteousness of God by faith, because we believe and practice what the Lord Jesus taught. No one who lives like that needs to fear that there is some secret sin in their life of which they are unaware. Notice Colossians 1:14: *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."*

In studying the subject of forgiveness, it appears to me that God has established several 'layers' of provision to His forgiveness. In the New Testament, they are all based upon the fact of 1 Peter 2:24: *'Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...'*. Revelation 1:5 states that the Lord Jesus loved us and washed us from our sins in His Own Blood. 1 John 2:2 states that He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, it is not difficult to obtain God's forgiveness. Jesus paid it all for us. But if we refuse, or fail, to forgive others, WE block our access to that forgiveness because of our unrighteousness. As soon as we forgive, access is again available to us, and we can come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God has a history of forgiving sins, even grievous sins. In the New Testament God has established the righteousness of Jesus Christ as the basis of forgiveness. It is available to mankind through faith. Notice again Colossians 1:14: *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:...."*.

We are to gain boldness in receiving forgiveness of our sins and failures, by *believing* the Word of God Who cannot lie. Notice Hebrews 8:12: *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."* That is God's **promise** to forgive.

According to Isaiah 43:25, God **volunteers** to forgive us, for His Own sake. Forgiveness is the provision of God for sinners: it is not the idea of sinners. In Exodus 34:7 God defines His NATURE as being merciful, forgiving, longsuffering. 1 John 4:8 also defines God's Nature as love.

Now shall we be so foolish as to hold a grudge or enmity towards others who have wronged us, and thereby deny ourselves access to a function of God's grace and love? Some may protest that they CANNOT forgive! But they can, when they realize HOW to do it!

First, know that forgiving others does NOT depend on our FEELING forgiveness towards them! Overcoming lack of sincerity to forgive, can be done by realizing what we are doing to ourselves by NOT forgiving!

Overcoming unwillingness to forgive rises out of seeking the kingdom of God, and His righteousness. Notice Romans 3:21-22: *"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe:..."*. See, when we seek the righteousness of God, we must seek it by faith. Notice what the Lord Jesus said in Mark 11:22-23: *"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."*

For the believer, THAT is righteousness which is of God by faith. THAT is the means of overcoming our attitude of being unwilling to forgive. We do NOT forgive because we FEEL like doing so, but because we *desire* to be right before God, and because we BELIEVE that what we say shall come to pass! In that case the triumph is out of our faith and believing, and does NOT depend merely on our natural emotions. Do it like this: "Heavenly Father, based upon Mark 11:23 I **say** that I forgive the one(s) (name them before God) who have trespassed against me. Thank you: by faith it is done, amen."

We are NOT implying that the person whom we forgive is not culpable for their trespass. We are NOT implying that they weren't WRONG in doing what they did. We are simply applying the righteousness of faith to the situation, and dropping the offense and the grudge and ill will towards the offender.

That is one way that we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, as opposed to gratifying our desire for redress or revenge. We don't even have to FEEL sincerity, or emotional inclination, but we DO have to SAY IN FAITH, **and not doubt in our heart**, "I forgive (you or them as the case may be)." When we DO that, the offense is gone, and we hold no ill will towards the person(s).

Can you see how far that verse in Matthew 6:33 goes? It will fix things that are without remedy in any other way. That's what God's forgiveness does for us also! Our sins CANNOT be 'fixed' in any other way; we simply must receive God's forgiveness, which is freely given on the basis of His grace, not our deserts!

Likewise, we forgive those who trespass against us on the basis of OUR grace, not their deserts, because we believe God and seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. That means that we are not going to indulge our wounded feelings, or exact revenge, or harbor spite or ill will. Thus, we DENY ourselves, and take up our cross and DO what the Lord Jesus taught us to do. According to Matthew 7:24-27, such self denial makes our 'house' secure against the storms of life.

In summing up our study on the subject of forgiveness, note the following:

First, God is merciful and ready to forgive our sins, Psalms 86:5.

Second, in Christ Jesus we have redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins, Colossians 1:14.

Third, God has promised that He WILL be merciful to our unrighteousness, Hebrews 8:12.

Fourth, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, 1 John 1:9.

Fifth, God has provided the Lord Jesus Christ as the propitiation for our sins, and as our advocate with the father, 1 John 2:1-2.

Sixth, the Lord Jesus said: "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7 and also Luke 11:9). For everyone that asks, receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened. We can receive forgiveness of our sins by asking God to forgive us.

Seventh, 1 John 1:7 provides that if we walk in the light as He is in the light, ...the Blood of His Son Jesus Christ, cleanses us from all sin.

The above items pertaining to forgiveness from God is what I meant before when I said that there are several 'layers' of provision for forgiveness from God. But in Matthew 6:14, the Lord Jesus said that if we don't forgive men their trespasses against us, God WON'T forgive us either, notwithstanding all the provisions of forgiveness which He has effected for us. Our unrighteousness in failing or refusing to forgive others their trespasses against us prevents us from getting them!

Consider then, that there are sins that people commit that prevents them from receiving forgiveness from God. Unforgiveness is but one of them. In Matthew 12:31-32, the Lord Jesus said that the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall NOT be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. That means that is an unpardonable sin.

The failure to believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to repent, becomes a 'kind of an unpardonable sin' because human unbelief prevents God's grace from saving them. If they die without believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they have turned their unbelief into an unpardonable sin! But if they repent before they die, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they can be forgiven for their former unbelief. Thank God!

If we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we need have no dread of hindrances or of impotence or failure in our Christian life. If we do fail, we can repent and come to God's throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need, Hebrews 4:16.

In any area of human life, the most beneficial path to follow is that of seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness. Romans 14:17-18 defines the Kingdom of God that we are to seek in our daily lives. *"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men."*

I freely testify that God gave me grace to begin to seek His righteousness and His kingdom early in my life. There are things that are such a great blessing to me today, that are in place because of God's faithfulness to me, fulfilling the Lord's promise in Matthew 6:33. To God and the Lord Jesus Christ be all the glory. It is not that I have earned by diligent service to God, it is that by God's grace, He permitted me to enter into what He promised by faith. Thus, the results are the working of God's grace alone. The truth is that anyone else who will do what the Lord Jesus said, shall also receive of His faithfulness and grace. Glory and praise to God, Who is faithful to all of His promises.

In closing notice 2 Corinthians 1:20: *"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."* Therefore, dear reader: ***"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."***

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