

Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

The Relational Repercussions of Not Trusting the Power of our Lord Jesus

Rome Burned While Nero Fiddled

The biblical truth of *sanctification*—being set apart to be made holy for God’s use—is largely ignored throughout western Christendom. People have become so self-absorbed in their spiritual thinking that they give little thought to how Lord Jesus would use them to *sacrificially serve others in love*. Yet we live in a period in which the society around us is disintegrating morally, spiritually and economically.

We’re going to discuss certain sin-based attitudes that make today’s self-serving “Christians” look like Nero fiddling while Rome burned from the perspective of those who desperately need their help. *Insensitivity to human need* stands in stark contrast to the *love for God* by His own that leads to considerate and active response toward others. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) Jesus clearly distinguishes between the *self-sacrifice* which authentic love produces for another versus the *self-love* which puts personal interest first.

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7).

By refusing to intentionally *hear and obey* the voice of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, you’re resisting transformation into His character and shutting out His power to use you to do Father’s will. Disobedience always results in negative consequences, repercussions that will hurt your relationships in some way. You may



have already manifested some bitter relational fruit through your negligence:

- You repeatedly fail to emotionally and affectionately undergird others in their time of need.
- You often act in ways that reveal your lack of consideration for the dignity of others.
- Your elevated sense of self-importance puts your own interests ahead of other people’s.

Just keep in mind that you’re not only hurting others by your resistance. You’re also sinning against our Lord when you refuse to humble yourself to be transformed in each area that His Spirit reveals. Yet consider this awful reality: While you claim to belong to Lord Jesus, you defame Him in the eyes of others by your unChrist-like treatment of them.

Let’s look at the contrast in the lives of people who refuse to turn to the Spirit of Jesus within them and those who do. One goes on hurting others and letting them down; the other is our Lord’s blessing to them.

1. Pride vs. Humility

Are you vain, considering yourself better than others?	Or, do you undergird others by sacrificially serving them without grumbling?
	

“If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Galatians 6:3).

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5; see also James 4:6).

Scripture doesn’t offer an outline of what “humble actions” look like. But

there are constant reminders about a *heart motive of humility* which then results in Christ-like response. And, if your attitude is becoming the same as that of Jesus, your actions will be like His—and others will be blessed by your obedience!

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10).

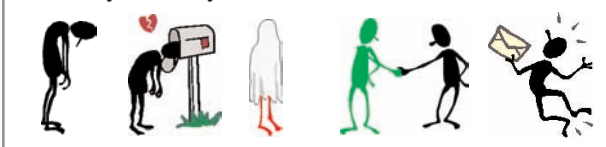
“I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Romans 12:3).

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited” (Romans 12:16).

If we embrace the servant/slave facet of our relationship to our Master, we aren’t surprised by our need to keep our hearts humble. It’s our *privilege* to obey the One we love and serve: *“So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are **unworthy slaves**; we have only **done our duty**’”* (Luke 17:10).

2. Affectionate Concern vs. Insensitivity

When you see others dejected, lonely, or in deep need, do you hide yourself? Or, do you reach out to them with the genuine concern Jesus would have?



“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15).

“Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27; see also James 2:14-16).

Throughout both the Older and Newer Testaments many of the commands are focused on *interpersonal responsibilities* to

one another as people made in God’s image (see Ephesians 4:25-32, for example). God has created humanity with a need for dignity. And, it’s through the loving support of others that dignity is upheld. Many within Christendom enjoy doing acts of kindness; they feel good about themselves when they do good deeds. Many, however, tend to avoid situations which involve sorrow, deep need, or ongoing intervention that would require more time, effort or resources than they’re willing to give.

God set the pattern for humanity to be mutually interdependent beginning with Adam and Eve. This is even more evident when it comes to using our spiritual gifts to mutually edify one another. But often serious trials such as cancer or other catastrophes occur in a relationship that tests the depth of commitment. It’s during these ongoing seasons of struggle that the depth of sacrificial love (or lack of) is made clear.

Wisdom teaches that *“Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest”* (Proverbs 14:4). Oxen help a farmer be far more productive than he could be without them. But along with oxen comes the responsibility to feed them, to treat them when they’re injured or sick, and to clean up their mess in the manger.

Relational responsibilities are a lot like the positives and negatives between oxen and farmers. In Christ our relationships must go much deeper than just the good times we have with others. When someone encounters a deep need, our hearts must be open to His Spirit to respond accordingly in some tangible way (Matthew 25:35,36).

The consequences for consistently turning away from the people in need

that He places before you will be severe at the Judgment Throne: *“Whatever you **did not do** for one of the least of these, you **did not do for Me**”* (Matthew 25:41-46). Does obedience to Him mean we’ll be inconvenienced? Most likely. But because of the love and power of His Spirit to work in and through us when we willingly yield to Him, our Lord certainly isn’t asking too much of us to get outside ourselves to be there for others as He would be.

The writer to the Hebrews based his command on that understanding—to put ourselves in the place of those who are suffering for the Name of Jesus and respond as the Spirit quickens and empowers you to:

“Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Hebrews 13:3).

Are you sensitive to **limited capacity** in others close to you? When someone around you is sick or exhausted or emotionally fragile or putting in extra effort to accomplish a particular task, do you adjust your priorities to support that person? If you do, is it with a **“martyr attitude”** that draws attention to how inconvenienced you are?

Let’s see what “limited capacity” can mean. (Mike): During my three deployments off Vietnam with a helicopter detachment onboard various ships, we’d send weekly reports back to our squadron in San Diego. The reports detailed to the squadron any areas of reduced capability that could hinder us from completing our missions. For example, a helo might be able to fly day missions, but one or more of the instruments needed for night flight or instrument flight weren’t working. So, although we had a helicopter, it had limited capacity. Or, as another

example, one or more personnel might be sick and unable to perform their duty.

Limited capacity, whether permanent or temporary, can often be overlooked in relationships. Someone may have a long-term disability or chronic suffering that others around them are unable to empathize with. Other times it may be just a brief setback due to bad news or a sudden virus. Relational sensitivity to reduced capacity is authentic evidence of heartfelt compassion. It goes much deeper than just showing someone kindness. Relational sensitivity helps carry the burden of the one who is suffering as if you yourself were that person.

3. Fighting For Your Own Rights vs. Being the Loving Servant to Others

Do you rob others of their joy because you get easily frustrated with people and/or responsibilities?

Or, are you an encourager who contributes to the joy of others?



When others need your help and cooperation, do you just keep doing your own thing?

Do you readily set aside your own priorities to provide the support they need?



“The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other” (Galatians 5:14,15).

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1Peter 4:10; see also Romans 12:20).

If you find yourself getting frustrated or feeling imposed on by others when they interrupt your space or time, know that frustration is God's means to show you that you're exercising a right He hasn't given you. Like the nerves on your finger feeling the heat of a burning stove so you can pull your hand away, feelings of frustration are God's early warning for you to relinquish any perceived right. If you don't, your frustration can turn to anger which in turn may lead to regrettable words and destructive actions.

Because of the Spirit in you and your role as His beloved child, our Lord expects you to *bear the cost* of your relationships with other people. Willingness to be inconvenienced by their untimely needs is a true sign of a humble heart when it's done with the attitude Jesus would have you express. Availability to be intruded on when appropriate is a key character trait for those in positions of leadership, especially parents. Underlying leadership is a *heart which serves others*. Is it any wonder Jesus tells us, "*The greatest among you will be your servant*" (Matthew 23:11); and, "*For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest*" (Luke 9:48)?

"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God" (1Corinthians 4:5).

One of the most common frustrations among Christians is their **focus on what's wrong in other people**, especially when they criticize with an *unredemptive attitude*. Worse, their criticism hides behind a veneer of self-righteousness. We who follow Jesus in love and obedient trust must cast aside judgment and false expectation about others, especially in

people who aren't yet born of His Spirit.

Looking down on them because they are blind to their sin and thinking you're better than they are may mean that you've forgotten what *you've* been forgiven; or, that you've never repented of the pride and deceit in your own heart. Both responses indicate a profound *lack of humility*. After all, Jesus made clear His target: "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32).

Irritation can pour too freely from our mouth when we don't have all the facts:

A famous Christian teacher related a time he boarded a subway car very early one Sunday morning. At the next stop a father and his four young children got on. The dad sat silently with his head in his hands as the kids ran all over the subway car. Feeling annoyed, the Christian teacher spoke up, "Can't you control your children?" The man lifted his head, eyes filled with tears. "Sir, we just left the hospital where the children's mother died an hour ago. I'm not sure what we'll do now."

If other people stir up negative emotions in you, be sure you first look to the motives of your own heart and be sure they are the same as Jesus would have: **redemptive!** If you keep seeing what's wrong with other people, most likely you are evaluating them through unChrist-like motives within you. Again, this fault-finding disapproval is intolerable to our Lord:

"You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Luke 6:42).

A sign that Christ-like transformation is taking place in you is that when you do discern a wrong in others, you're filled with the redemptive desire to help them.

It's also important to recognize that you're called to **bear the cost** of the spir-

itual gift(s) which the Holy Spirit has apportioned you. Does that sound strange? Some gifts such as prophecy face repeated rejection. Others like mercy or service may require long periods of being inconvenienced. The Holy Spirit specifically earmarked the spiritual empowerment you have, and He's well aware of the cost you'll bear. Wonderfully, He also gives the grace you'll need to bless others through your gifting. It's not you but *He in you* Who is doing the blessing. You're just His willing vessel!

you don't keep your commitments.

“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin” (Ecclesiastes 5:2-6; see also Psalms 15:1,4).

4. Offering Assurance Too Quickly vs. Being a Person of Your Word

Do you open your mouth too quickly to assure people of something you'll do—and then not follow through?

Or, are you a person who keeps his word even if it's difficult and costs you great inconvenience?



“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. . .But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matthew 12:34,36).

One of the most common causes of distrust in adults toward God comes from parents who frequently didn't keep their word to them as children. Your words reveal your heart motive. Bitter, angry words are weapons which hurt people. And, unkept promises create distrust. If this is you, search your heart for the darkness that prompts you to do this, especially if it's habitual.

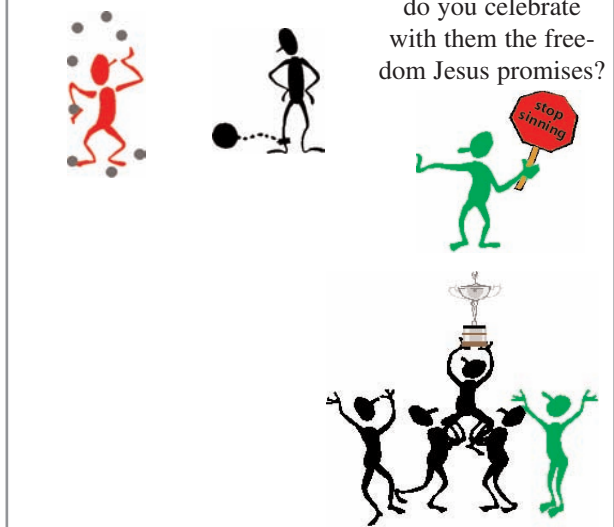
And beware giving “false assurances” to God; your words testify against you if

The best way to discover if your own words are meaningless is to ask those close to you about how well you follow through on what you've said. All too many are self-deceived in this matter.

5. Fearing People and Not Addressing Their Spiritual Darkness vs. Redemptively Confronting It in Love

Do you do a juggling act in your relationships? Are you fearful to stand up for your faith and/or to confront sin in fellow Christians? Are those close to you living in bondage to sin or strongholds?

Or, because you do stand up for your relationship with Jesus and lovingly confront the spiritual darkness in others, do you celebrate with them the freedom Jesus promises?



“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).

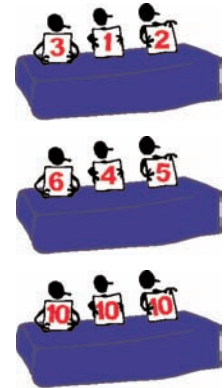
“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:1,2).

During one of the two times Jesus speaks of the “church”, His collective called-out ones, He relates that it’s essential to confront sin in a brother or sister in Him. There’s a sequence to this confrontation: first in private, then with a witness or two, then with the faith family of those who also know that person well. This is our loving responsibility as mutual “body parts”, one that’s critical so that we may maintain communal righteousness for our Father to answer our corporate prayers. Lovingly and redemptively confronting sin reveals that you understand Father’s longing to have fellowship with His children.

Are you willing to lovingly follow through in coming alongside people in your faith family to help them demolish their spiritual strongholds? If so, your obedient responsiveness clearly shows you comprehend the reality of demonic forces battling our Lord for control of that person’s mind, will and emotions. If you’ve been set free, it’s imperative that you don’t shy away from helping others be freed by the power of Jesus’s Name!

6. How would your friends score you on the Christ-like traits we’ve discussed?

Feedback from others helps us get past any deceitful view of ourselves. Review the different comparisons and ask those close to you in the faith to score you. If you’re not a ‘10’ in Christ-like character traits, ask the Spirit and your family and faith family for help. Don’t go on any longer hurting others or letting them down. Make sure people see Jesus at work in and around you!



“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8); ***“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins”*** (James 4:17).

Belonging to our Lord Jesus and earnestly following Him out of love and obedient trust isn’t a matter of just recognizing and exposing any darkness in our own lives or in other Jesus followers. The most important motive is love, demonstrated as a heartfelt quest to become like Him by cooperating with His Spirit within us. Any other motive higher than this hinders His purpose for our lives. For only as His heart and goals become ours will we be his loving and obedient servant/slaves bearing lasting fruit for His glory.

The “good” that the Spirit in us would do on behalf of others will be paltry if we depend on our flesh to bring it about. If we resist the transforming work He would *keep doing* in our character and in our lives, then we are sinning against Him. Only by the grace of His power changing us in each and every area can we keep from being vessels that hurt and let down others. And we need HIS love and perception of each person we encounter to be His blessing to them.

To love others with the love of Jesus, you need to see them as He does.