

CHAPTER 5

SOME OF THE CRITERIA BY WHICH ALL REAL CHRISTIANS WILL BE JUDGED – PART ONE

*What then could I do when God arises?
And when He calls me to account, what will I answer Him?
Job 31:14 (NASB)*

*“I the LORD search the mind
and try the heart,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his doings.”
Jeremiah 17:10 (RSV)*

*great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings;
Jeremiah 32:19 (RSV)*

*Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?
Romans 2:3 (RSV)*

*⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.
Romans 2:9-11 (RSV)*

*And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.
1 Peter 1:17 (RSV)*

*For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.
Matthew 16:27 (RSV)*

*For he will render to every man according to his works:
Romans 2:6 (RSV)*

The criteria by which we are going to be judged

In this chapter I shall attempt to draw together as many as possible of the passages that I see in the Bible which touch upon the question of how we will be assessed. These seem to me to be at least some of the main criteria by which Jesus will measure us. Therefore it surely makes sense for us to know what these criteria are and to ponder them carefully.

We can also attempt to assess ourselves now, ahead of time, by these same criteria, and to get some idea as to how well, or badly, we are doing and how we need to change. That way we may be able to improve the level of our own service and obtain a better assessment, and a greater reward, when the time comes for the real Judgment, which Jesus will conduct.

Criterion Number 1 - Jesus will judge us on the quality and quantity of the fruit our lives produced

Jesus told His disciples that He had appointed them in order that they could bear fruit and of a kind that would last. In other words, bearing *fruit* is a major part of our very purpose for being here:

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.

John 15:16 (NASB)

We will therefore be judged on the basis of how much fruit our lives have produced and also its quality:

O great and mighty God whose name is the LORD of hosts, ¹⁹ great in counsel and mighty in deed; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men, rewarding every man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings;

Jeremiah 32:18(b)-19 (RSV)

There are infinite types of fruit that we could produce for God. It depends on what He has called us to do and what interests, giftings and opportunities He gave us. However, the simplest, most obvious types of fruit are those listed by apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

They are character qualities which we are meant to develop. Those are fruit which we can be quite sure we are all required to produce. However, there are many other types of fruit too, besides these:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)

'Fruit' does not just mean output or productivity, measured objectively, without regard to whether it's what Jesus wanted us to produce. It has to be the things that Jesus *wanted* us to do. Why should He give credit for anything else?

If we race around doing things that He never asked us to do, then how can we expect Him to reward us? Such things would not be fruit, but merely the *litter* or *debris* that our lives generated. Or you could say they are like cancer cells or weeds growing where they are not meant to grow.

They would be purely the product of our own willful ideas or even disobedience, and we cannot expect any reward for those things. What Jesus will look for is how much real, genuine fruit we produced, in *obedience* to Him, and of the kind that He *wanted*.

Criterion Number 2 - We will also be judged on the basis of the use we made of our talents - i.e. what we did with what we were given

This criterion shows the absolute fairness of the judgment. There is no competitive advantage given to those people who happen to have great talents, wealth, ability, possessions, education etc. All of those things may appear to be advantages, but Jesus will then apply suitable discounts or multipliers which will cancel out any such privileges or advantages.

By doing so He will get all of us, in the end, on a level playing field. So, for example, if person A has 100 units of ability and produces 100 units of fruit, and person B has 10 units of ability and produces 10 units of fruit, then they have both achieved the same result. That's because the *proportions* are the same and they have the same *rate of return*.

However, if person B had produced 11 units of fruit then he would have done better than person A in *relative terms*, i.e. when the differences in their respective levels of talents are taken into account and allowed for. Jesus states part of this principle in the next passage from Luke:

... Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."

Luke 12:48(b) (ESV)

Jesus then expands on this theme in this next passage from Matthew:

¹⁴"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

²²And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' ²³His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.

Matthew 25:14-28 (ESV)

The above passage from Matthew illustrates the principle of *proportionality*, i.e. that each person will be judged on the basis of what they did with what they were *given*. It is the *relative* proportions, or the percentage rate of return on God's investment in us that will count, not the amount we achieve in absolute terms.

So the man who has been given five talents to begin with is expected to make five more. Therefore more is expected of him, in absolute terms, than of the man who only had two talents to begin with. But the same is expected of each of them in relative or proportional terms.

Thus, in the end, the man who began with five talents and used them to make five more is treated exactly the same as the man who only had two talents at the outset but produced two more with them. They both achieved a 100% return on their capital and so they were equally praised.

Moreover, it would appear that they received the very same reward. At any rate, both are told the exact same words: "*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master*". Therefore it seems clear that God will be equally pleased with each of them.

It was the man who did nothing with his one talent who was rebuked. Less was expected of him in *absolute* terms, but he was still under a duty to try to achieve the same results as a *proportion* of what he had started with. If he, like the others, had doubled what he had been given, then it seems clear that he would have received exactly the same praise and reward as them.

This tendency to do nothing with their abilities and opportunities is frequently found among those who think they have not got much to begin with. They imagine that they do not have anything worthwhile to offer. So they choose to do nothing at all with their small or solitary talent. That said, there are also lots of highly talented people with multiple gifts who don't use what they have, or who don't use their talents to produce the right kind of things that Jesus wants.

They too are in danger of being rebuked at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In short, we are all in the same boat. We must all fully use whatever talents and opportunities we have, regardless of how big, or small, or few, these happen to be. Therefore, none of us are in an advantaged or disadvantaged position in relation to anybody else when it comes to measuring our fruitfulness.

So, whatever type or quantity or level of talent you have been given, God wants you to use *all* of it to serve Him and to serve other people. It also needs to be said, for the avoidance of doubt, that nobody will be rewarded simply for being talented, clever or gifted. Such abilities, purely in themselves, are nothing to do with us.

Therefore we cannot possibly hope to be able to claim any credit for them. It would be like expecting Jesus to reward you for having beautiful blonde hair, or for having perfect pitch, or for being tall. Such features as those, if we have them, were simply given to us as a gift. They are not something that we have earned or made for ourselves.

In themselves, therefore, they cannot be any basis for rewards. Neither can their absence be any basis for criticism. All that Jesus will reward or rebuke us for is the *use, misuse, or non-use* that we make of those gifts. When you come to think about it, how could it be otherwise? Look how apostle Paul expresses this point:

.....What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

1 Corinthians 4:7(b) (ESV)

Criterion Number 3 - We will also be judged according to whether we studied God's Word and whether we obeyed the parts of God's Word that we knew

We will also be judged and rewarded on the basis of the extent to which we made the effort to study God's Word. We are repeatedly commanded to do this throughout the Bible, such as here:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

We are also told by Jesus Himself that His Word, which is now in written form within the Bible, will be our judge on the last day. In other words, we will be judged *according to* God's Word and by the *standards of* God's Word.

We will also be judged by reference to the degree to which we have listened to and taken note of God's Word. Therefore, in a very real sense, God's Word will itself be our judge. Accordingly, by reading it now and taking it seriously, we can become aware of how we will be judged, and by what standards and criteria:

⁴⁴ *And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.*
⁴⁵ *And he who sees me sees him who sent me.* ⁴⁶ *I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.* ⁴⁷ *If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.* ⁴⁸ *He who rejects me*

and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. ⁴⁹ For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me.”

John 12:44-50 (RSV)

In fact, the degree to which we love Jesus is clearly shown by the extent to which we obey what He says. Jesus Himself said that if we love Him we will keep His words, and if we don't love Him, then we won't:

²¹ He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

John 14:21-24 (RSV)

The truth is that your love for God Himself is no greater than your love for, and devotion to, His written Word, the Bible

Therefore, there is no point in your claiming to love Jesus while ignoring or rejecting His written Word, the Bible. As I was writing this chapter I was in conversation with a person who made that very claim, i.e. that they love Jesus. Yet this person clearly has no regard for the Bible and refuses even to study it, let alone abide by what is said in it.

They feel free to believe whatever they want to believe in place of what the Bible says. The person in question is 'religious' and a 'churchgoer' but sees no reason why they should be bound by what the Bible says. They said: “*If we love God then He will accept us and forgive us.*”

However, that approach is profoundly mistaken. There is no such thing as a love for God which exists apart from reverence for, and obedience to, His *written Word*. To imagine otherwise is self-delusion. In this regard, consider also what Jesus Himself said in Matthew's gospel about how a wise man who hears Jesus' words and does them is like a man who builds his house on the rock:

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; ²⁵ and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; ²⁷ and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”

Matthew 7:24-27 (RSV)

It would be difficult for Jesus to be any clearer in saying that He wants us to read and study the Bible carefully in order to:

- a) *know* what He said and what He caused His prophets and apostles to say on His behalf
- b) *understand* what was said

Given that He has been so plain in telling us all of this, we must expect to be judged according to the extent to which we have read, studied, listened to, understood and obeyed His Word. Consider also this passage from Deuteronomy which sets out all the blessings which, under the Law of Moses, would come to the Jewish people if they would “.....*listen to the voice of the LORD....*”

It also sets out all the curses that will come upon them if they do not listen and obey. The way this word 'listen' is expressed in the original Hebrew is by the phrase "*listen listening*", i.e. "...if you will listen listening...". That's because the Hebrew form of emphasis, is to say the same word twice. It means to *really* listen, or to *hearken diligently*, as the King James version puts it:

¹And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: ²And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 (KJV)

¹³And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: ¹⁴And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. ¹⁵But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

Deuteronomy 28:13-15 (KJV)

This passage is addressed to the Jewish people. It refers to the need for them to listen to and obey the Law of Moses which had just been given to them. However, although the Law of Moses is no longer in operation, it is reasonable for us to conclude that God equally requires us today to *listen to, read and study* His Word. That does not just mean the Law of Moses, or even the whole five books of Moses, but the whole Bible.

Given that God requires this of us, it also seems reasonable to conclude that rewards will be given at the judgment to those people who do really listen or '*listen listening*', to God's Word. The main way for us to really listen is to read God's Word with a diligent, dedicated desire to learn it. That is what the Psalmist did. Consider his devoted attitude to the Scriptures and the benefits they bring:

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you;

let me not wander from your commandments!

*¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

¹²Blessed are you, O LORD;

teach me your statutes!

¹³With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.

¹⁴In the way of your testimonies

I delight as much as in all riches.

¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts

and fix my eyes on your ways.

¹⁶I will delight in your statutes;

I will not forget your word.

Psalm 119:9-16 (ESV)

*¹Blessed is the man who walks
not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

*²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

³He is like a tree planted by streams

*of water that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.*

In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴*The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

⁵*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

⁶*for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Psalm 1:1-6 (ESV)

Our devotion to God's Word will be assessed by reference to the extent to which we had access to it and whether we made full use of that access

Note also God's view of those who either *reject* or *despise* His Word, and what will happen to them. However, we must not complacently assume that this only applies to the people of Israel. The point being made here would apply to *any* person who despises God's Word.

Moreover, that does not just mean those who reject it outright, or refuse to read it at all. It may also mean those of us, especially in the affluent West, who do not make full use of our freedom and of the virtually unlimited opportunities that we have to study God's Word. The point is that many of us in the West have access to all the best teaching materials, commentaries and MP3s etc and yet we cannot be bothered to use them.

Our study of God's Word will surely be measured by reference to how much access we had to it and whether or not we used those opportunities fully. In this next passage Isaiah expresses how severely God intends to judge those Jewish people who rejected or despised His Word:

*...for they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts,
and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*

²⁵*Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against his people,
and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them,*

*and the mountains quaked;
and their corpses were as refuse
in the midst of the streets.*

*For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.*

Isaiah 5:24(b)-25 (ESV)

Another way in which we can believe in God and yet still despise His Word is when we read it or hear it read, or preached on, but then do not obey it or put it into practice. James tells us in his letter that we must be "*doers of the Word, and not hearers only*".

He is referring to those whose beliefs are merely passive and intellectual. Therefore their beliefs do not produce anything tangible, or result in any action being taken:

²²*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* ²³*For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.* ²⁴*For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* ²⁵*But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.* ²⁶*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.* ²⁷*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

James 1:22-27 (ESV)

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

James 2:14-19 (ESV)

We shall also be judged on the basis of the extent to which we put man made traditions and customs ahead of God’s own Word

It is also very common for us to put our own traditions, customs and familiar practices ahead of what God’s Word says. Jesus confronted this approach when he saw the Pharisees of His day focusing on issues such as the niceties of hand washing and how to wash pots and cups, rather than listening attentively to what He was saying to them and obeying it. We may criticise the Pharisees for this, but we are prone to doing the same thing ourselves:

Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?” ⁶ And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

*‘This people honours me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;*

*⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’*

⁸ You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.”

⁹ And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die’; ¹¹ but you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)— ¹² then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³ thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do.”

Mark 7:1-13 (RSV)

God wants us to respect His written Word and His commands and to take it all very seriously indeed. However, that would not be an accurate description of the way that most of us are, at least in the West. Compare our general apathy and indifference with the wholehearted attitude of the people referred to in this next passage.

Jeremiah is speaking about the descendants of a man called *Jonadab* who commanded his sons not to drink alcohol. They all obeyed him, as did his grandchildren. God contrasts this faithful obedience by that extended family group to the words of their ancestor, Jonadab, with the unfaithfulness of many Jewish people, who did not listen to the things He told them:

¹²Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ¹³“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Go and say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive

instruction and listen to my words? declares the LORD. ¹⁴The command that Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept, and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. I have spoken to you persistently, but you have not listened to me. ¹⁵I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them persistently, saying, 'Turn now every one of you from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to serve them, and then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to you and your fathers.' But you did not incline your ear or listen to me.

¹⁶The sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have kept the command that their father gave them, but this people has not obeyed me. ¹⁷Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, because I have spoken to them and they have not listened, I have called to them and they have not answered.'" ¹⁸But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father and kept all his precepts and done all that he commanded you, ¹⁹therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me."

Jeremiah 35:12-19 (ESV)

Those who heard the prophets in person, and even heard Jesus Himself, will be judged more strictly, and so will we be, because of the ease with which we can have access to God's Word

It would have been a major advantage to have lived at the same time as Jesus or the apostles or the prophets. To have met even one of them and to have sat and heard teaching coming directly from any of their mouths would have been a great privilege. However, it would also have created in us a greater level of responsibility too.

Consider what the prophet Jeremiah said to those who had lived during the years of his own public ministry. They had heard him speaking the truth about what God was saying to that generation. However, they did not listen to Jeremiah. He therefore makes clear in this next passage how God views their failure, or refusal, to listen:

¹The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), ²which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ³"For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. ⁴You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, ⁵saying, 'Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. ⁶Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.'

⁷Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. ⁸"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, ⁹behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Jeremiah 25:1-11 (ESV)

What is even clearer, and more alarming, is what Jesus said to the towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, all of which were on the shores of Lake Galilee. The people of those towns had heard a lot of Jesus' teaching and had even seen His miracles. Yet many of them still rejected Him and would not repent or believe in Him.

He therefore warns them of the even more severe judgment which lies ahead for them, in comparison with the people of other towns where He had not been. They will be judged more severely for their unbelief and lack of response to Him, because they had the advantage of having seen and heard Him in person:

²⁰Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴ Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.”

Matthew 11:20-24 (NASB)

Obviously, that passage primarily relates to the unsaved, unbelieving people from those towns. Such people will go to the Great White Throne Judgment. However, it would be wise to assume that the same principle (though not the same outcome) also applies to those who will go to the Judgment Seat of Christ.

We will each be judged on the extent to which we obeyed that proportion of God's Word which we personally knew and understood. So, there are certainly advantages to be gained, and rewards to be obtained, from making the effort to study the Bible.

However, once we have done so, and have acquired some knowledge, we will each then be judged on whether we obeyed and put into practice whatever we have learned. So there's no room for complacency, no matter how well we know the Bible. The more we know, the more strictly we will be judged:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

James 3:1 (ESV)

Criterion Number 4 - Jesus will also assess whether what we did was done in His Name, or in our own name. In other words, was it done in the Spirit, or in the flesh?

Many people give the impression of being successful, because they charge around, achieving lots of things wherever they go. However, they will only be rewarded if those things are what Jesus *asked* them to do. They will not be rewarded, or even praised, if they are just implementing their own ideas.

If so, then what they do is just the product of their own imagination or preferences. All that will really count in the end is that which was done in obedience to what we were *told* to do. Anything else is *sin* because it means we have done our own thing. If we do that, then, by definition, we have fallen short of God's standards:

*“Ah, stubborn children,” declares the Lord,
“who carry out a plan, but not mine,
and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit,
that they may add sin to sin;*

Isaiah 30:1 (ESV)

Another way to put it is to say that you must build on the right foundation, which is Jesus. Try to make sure you do that, rather than building impulsively on the foundation of your own ideas or opinions, or out of a desire for independence:

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NASB)

Therefore, if we lay any foundation other than Jesus, then whatever we build on it will not last and will not be rewarded. Everything must be done in Jesus' name, for His sake, and in response to His orders. Nothing must be done on our own authority, by our own initiative or in our own name. If we do, then it has no legitimacy.

We must therefore find out what God wants, and how He wants it done. Then we must limit ourselves to doing just those things. Anything else is a work of the flesh and we know that those who are in the flesh “cannot please God”:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Romans 8:5-8 (RSV)

It may be that He will want us to focus on fewer things than we currently get involved in. It could be that although we are busy doing lots of things, we haven't even started yet to do the things that He wants. Some of our current activities may therefore have to go in order to make time for what He does want.

If so, then do it – cut out whatever things He did not tell you to do. Instead, focus solely on what He does want you to get involved in. It is likely that many of the deeds that we consider good will gain us no reward because they were done presumptuously, independently, and of our own accord, rather than because God told us to do them.

That has been true of me countless times. I have tried to "help" God by doing what looked like good things, but they were things that He had never asked me to do. So, even if they were good, they will probably count for nothing and gain me no reward. Moreover, such things as those usually fizzle out and fail, whereas the things God asks us to do generally succeed and remain.

That's because He blesses them, whereas if we do something that is just our own idea, He probably won't bless it. It is like building a house without getting planning permission. It could be a good quality building, but it will still have to be knocked down by the council because they never authorised it in the first place.

Or imagine that you were a building contractor working on a large and complicated building site under the direction of an architect. Imagine that an architect had specifically told you *what* to build and *when* and exactly *where* he wanted each thing to be.

How would he react if you chose instead to make extra things, or larger things, or to put them in different places from where he had asked you to put them, or to build them in a different sequence from what he had specified? He would not be pleased, to put it very mildly. Far from rewarding you,

he would quite possibly have to tear down what you had made and start again, either through you or someone else.

Therefore why should we expect God to react any differently if we charge ahead and do our own thing, rather than obeying His instructions? Accordingly, God will, in the end, have to tear down everything that was not built on His orders and with His approval.

All of this therefore begs the questions *how* can we avoid acting in the flesh and doing things in our own strength and how can we learn instead to hear God's voice and do what He wants? Please see chapter 8 below for a fuller discussion of these issues.

Criterion Number 5 - Jesus will judge us by the same standards that we have used to judge other people. He will also forgive us to the same extent that we have forgiven other people and He will show grace and mercy to the same extent that we show grace and mercy.

Jesus will also weave into His already complicated judgment the general principle that He will use the same standards to judge us that we have used to judge other people. So, if we strictly condemn certain attitudes or behaviour in others, then He will strictly condemn those things in us. However, if we adopt a more lenient, generous, forgiving approach towards others, then He will do the same with us:

¹"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. ²"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Matthew 7:1-2 (NASB)

And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

Mark 4:24 (ESV)

However, if we show little or no mercy to other people now, in our daily dealings with them, then little or no mercy will be shown towards us at the Judgment Seat:

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:13 (ESV)

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Matthew 5:7 (RSV)

So, if we are harsh, unyielding and unmerciful with others, demanding high standards from them and not allowing them any scope for error, or time to learn, then we can expect little or no mercy to be shown to us at the Judgment Seat. Therefore, when you are dealing with other people now you should look for all possible ways to be gracious.

Go out of your way to show other people mercy, to give second (and third) chances, and to allow flexibility and leeway. If we take that gracious and merciful approach with them, then we can expect the same approach to be taken with us by Jesus.

That said, it will not always be appropriate, or wise, to be entirely accommodating, or to show mercy or grace to the fullest conceivable extent on every issue. Sometimes wisdom will require us to be more guarded and to refrain from showing grace or mercy on certain points. Or it may be appropriate to show some grace and mercy, but only to a limited extent. It depends on all the facts and circumstances.

Nevertheless, having said all that, it remains true that, as a general rule, by being gracious and merciful with others now, we can set ourselves up for a less strict, more merciful, Day of Judgment. Therefore, we would be wise to take every reasonable opportunity to treat others today with the same type, or level, of leniency, forbearance and patience that we want to be shown to us on Judgment Day:

³⁵"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. ³⁶"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. ³⁷"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned. ³⁸"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

Luke 6:35-38 (NASB)

Paul gives some very troubling warnings in Romans to those of us within the Church who are self-righteous and hypocritical

What Paul has to say in his letter to the church in Rome is rather troubling. Remember that it is a letter written to people who are already Christians, or who claim to be. Yet it warns them against hypocrisy in judging others for doing things which they do themselves. It also warns them against being complacent or hard-hearted about the Judgment that is coming for themselves.

Furthermore, it indicates that people who adopt such hypocritical, self-righteous attitudes about the sins of other people, while ignoring or denying their own sins in the very same areas, are storing up God's *wrath* for themselves when the Day of Judgment comes. In saying all this Paul is also speaking to *real* Christians, not just to unbelievers or apostates. So none of us can say that he does not mean us:

¹Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ²We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³Do you suppose, O man--you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself--that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

⁵But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Romans 2:1-8 (ESV)

We therefore need to take time to consider carefully whether we are treating others hypocritically, unmercifully or ungraciously and, if so, how? Also, from now on we need to think carefully before making pronouncements about how other people ought to behave, or how wrong or sinful they are.

Our own words about others and the wrong things which they say and do will be recorded and used as part of the basis for judging us. They will become part of the set of criteria by which we will be judged ourselves. Jesus may choose not to make any allowances, and not to take account of any mitigating factors that we, in this life, refused to apply to others who crossed us or disappointed us.

Therefore we would be well advised to start to demand less of others and to tolerate more. If we do, we have a reasonable basis to expect Jesus to take an equally patient and tolerant approach with us. The things spoken of above are generally actions and attitudes which go *beyond forgiveness*, i.e. by its narrowest definition.

We therefore need to forgive others, at least in the narrowest sense of the word, whereby we ‘recuse’ ourselves, step aside, and let Jesus judge the person, instead of judging them ourselves

At its most basic level, to ‘forgive’ another person for a wrong they have done to us simply means *stepping aside*, and refraining from judging or punishing them ourselves. It means leaving it to Jesus to judge them, instead of us.

We could call it ‘*recusing ourselves*’, as when a judge recuses himself by having a case transferred from his own list and onto the list of another judge. He would do that if he feels he is not the right person to try that defendant because, for example, he knows him, or has a personal interest in the outcome of the case.

So, in speaking of our need to show clemency, grace or mercy or to be magnanimous, etc we are speaking of things which are distinct from, and go further than, our *basic* duty to forgive others in the narrowest sense. By that narrow sense, I mean ‘recusing’ ourselves, by getting out of the Judge’s chair, and handing the case over to be judged by Jesus, instead of by us.

So, in this section I am speaking of more than just basic forgiveness, i.e. as it is narrowly defined. I am also addressing these other things, which are linked to forgiveness, but go further. The more we can show these additional qualities, which go beyond mere forgiveness, in our dealings with others, the more they will be shown to us by Jesus when we are judged.

In other words, the further we can go beyond basic, narrowly defined, forgiveness and progress into showing grace and mercy in a host of different ways, the better it will be for us. Now we come to an even more troubling part of this section. We need to look at what Jesus said about our specific duty to forgive other people and the fact that He will not forgive us if we do not forgive others:

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

Luke 6:37 (RSV)

¹⁴ “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NASB)

Moreover, He said we are to go on forgiving others (by the narrow, most basic definition of forgiveness) even when they wrong us repeatedly:

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:21-22 (RSV)

The parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18 is very troubling and is directly relevant to us as Christians

What is even more troubling is the parable that Jesus told them in response to Peter’s question. It concerns an *unmerciful* servant who refused to forgive his fellow servant a small debt. Consequently his own master refused to forgive him a much larger debt.

Moreover, the master then hands him over to the jailors until he pays the debt himself. Alarming, Jesus tells us that His Father will do the same with us if we do not forgive others:

²³ *“Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents;²⁵ and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’*

²⁹ *So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’*

³⁰ *He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; ³³ and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers till he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

Matthew 18:23-35 (RSV)

For a much fuller discussion of what forgiveness is (and what it isn't), why it matters, and how to do it in practical terms, please refer to Book 2 in this series. It contains a number of chapters on forgiveness which define forgiveness and examine, in some detail, the various different levels at which it can operate.

Those chapters in Book 2 also address other associated concepts, such as grace, mercy, clemency, magnanimity, peace, trust, reconciliation etc and distinguish these from basic forgiveness. These are all linked to forgiveness but they are also distinct, separate things in themselves and may not necessarily be required in order for our forgiveness of others to be genuine and complete.

Criterion Number 6 - We will also be judged on the basis of whether we have kept the vows we made. Therefore be very careful about making any vows at all, or even giving promises.

We need to be very careful about what we say, particularly about the vows we make, whether they are made to God or to other people. He will hold us to our word and expect us to comply fully with every statement we make. If we had not made any vows at all He would not have required us to comply with them. However, if we do, then He will.

Therefore think long and hard before you speak. Otherwise you may say something which will later bring God's judgment upon yourself, purely as a result of your failure to keep your word. God regards that as oath-breaking, even if you don't view it that way and even if you don't take it very seriously:

When a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

Numbers 30:2 (RSV)

²***Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.***

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (ESV)

⁴***When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶ Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?***

Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 (ESV)

⁴They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

Hosea 10:4 (ESV)

So, for example, if we promise to pray for someone, but do not actually do so, then we have broken a promise. That might be viewed by God as a vow. However, even if it isn't, it is still very important and God will expect you to abide by your promise. Therefore don't promise to pray for people. Just pray, for them, without ever promising to do anything.

However, if you do have to say something, to them, then just keep it low-key and don't make any promises. Nevertheless, if you have spoken, or have promised something, then it is a good idea to keep your word and do whatever you promised immediately. Do it *there and then*, while it is still fresh in your mind, and before you forget. That is what I now try to do.

Likewise, if you agree to give a gift of money, then make sure you give it. Don't forget, or fail to pay. Don't even delay paying. God will hold you accountable to pay in full and on time. For that reason, I do not like to enter into any longstanding commitments to give monthly or on any other regular basis.

I prefer to pay lump sums and get it all over with at the outset, so that there is no ongoing obligation or unpaid remainder that I need to remember about. In short, be very careful about what you say and what you promise. Otherwise you may find that when you get to the Judgment, Jesus presents you with a long list of unpaid gifts, broken vows and unfulfilled promises of prayer or support.

Therefore, do all you can now to avoid your own words being quoted back at you, as a basis for rebuking you. Ideally say nothing at all. Just *do* things, without saying or promising anything beforehand. If you must say something then keep it to a minimum and make sure you do what you agree to do.

Otherwise, every idle word that you have spoken (since you were converted) will be a basis for judging you on Judgment Day:

***³⁶I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter;
³⁷for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."***

Matthew 12:36-37 (RSV)

Criterion Number 7 - Jesus will also assess the extent of our faithfulness

Jesus will assess how loyal, dependable, reliable, trustworthy, diligent, wholehearted and enthusiastic we were in following Him. He will gauge whether we were truly faithful to Him, or whether we compromised or let Him down when obedience and loyalty to Him were inconvenient or difficult. However, He is also on the lookout for any kind of faithfulness that He can reward:

The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness....

1 Samuel 26:23 (NIV)

***A faithful man will abound with blessings,
but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.***

Proverbs 28:20 (RSV)

Real faithfulness is very unusual, even amongst mature Christians. Indeed, the Bible implies that it is one of the rarest personal qualities. That has certainly been my experience in business and as an employer, but also in churches. People who can be completely relied upon, and whose word is their bond, are very few and far between. Sadly, that is the case even within churches:

***Many a man proclaims his own loyalty,
but a faithful man who can find?
Proverbs 20:6 (RSV)***

***Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,
look and take note!
Search her squares to see
if you can find a man,
one who does justice
and seeks truth;
that I may pardon her.
² Though they say, "As the LORD lives,"
yet they swear falsely.
Jeremiah 5:1-2 (RSV)***

Therefore, we all need to examine ourselves. Where we see any evidence of unfaithfulness in our lives, then we must admit it, repent of it and ask God to help us to change. (See Book 2 which contains a number of chapters on faithfulness.)

Jesus also wants us to be faithful to other people, not only to Him. For example, He wants us to be loyal to our friends when they need us, even when times are hard, or they are in trouble, such that to stay alongside them is costly, or inconvenient, or may make us unpopular:

***A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.
Proverbs 17:17 (ESV)***

***A man of many companions may come to ruin,
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
Proverbs 18:24 (ESV)***

Jesus also wants us to have integrity with our customers, clients, patients and anybody else we deal with. We must never cheat anyone or take advantage of them:

¹³"You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. ¹⁴You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 25:13-16 (ESV)

***A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
but a just weight is his delight.
Proverbs 11:1 (ESV)***

***Unequal weights and unequal measures
are both alike an abomination to the LORD.
Proverbs 20:10 (ESV)***

We are also to be faithful to our employer. Most of us spend eight or more hours per day at work. That is one third of our life and a half of our waking hours. Therefore it is hardly surprising that the way we do our job and the way we treat our employer is something which God takes a close interest in.

In some ways it is a kind of proxy for how you treat God. We are told by apostle Paul that we are to do all things as if we were doing them for the LORD. Therefore, to be slack in our work, or disrespectful or disloyal to our employer, is to let God down:

²² Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ.

Colossians 3:22-24 (RSV)

We will also be judged on the basis of our faithfulness to our husband or wife

Above all, God wants us to be faithful to our husband or wife and to our children. For one thing, those of us who are married have made a solemn vows to each other in front of witnesses and in front of God. He wants us to keep those vows, even where that is extremely difficult.

God also views marriage as sacred. Therefore it is up to us to work hard at marriage. That needs to be said because, at times, it does involve hard work. It also requires unselfishness, cooperation and an abundance of mutual forgiveness.

Without those things anyone's faithfulness will be stretched beyond its limits. However, with those things, and with God's help, marriage can be made to succeed and to last permanently. That is what God wants. He has told us plainly that He hates divorce:

¹³ And this again you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. ¹⁴ You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless."

Malachi 2:13-16 (RSV)

God also feels very strongly about marital unfaithfulness and adultery and He will judge it:

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.

Hebrews 13:4 (RSV)

When we enter into marriage we become subject to a huge duty of care and also a duty to be faithful. It is of the utmost importance that we avoid any sexual unfaithfulness. However, we must also be faithful to each other in ordinary, everyday matters. We must be loyal in how we speak to and about each other.

We must also support each other in the careers and/or other ventures that either of us may be involved in. That duty to give support to each other and to honour each other is a major part of what marital faithfulness is about. God is watching what we do in all of those day to day areas. He will hold us accountable for the choices we make and things we do or fail to do.

Apostle Paul tells us how wives should treat their husbands, and they will be judged on that basis

Apostle Paul also gave instructions that a wife should conduct herself towards her husband with submissiveness, and respect. Note that Paul doesn't tell wives to *love* their husbands. Presumably that is because he knew that most women already find it easy to give love. It comes naturally, whereas they tend to find it much harder to give *respect*. Yet that is what most men are looking for and what God wants wives to give:

²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

Ephesians 5:21-24 (RSV)

however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:33 (RSV)

God regards a good wife as being very precious:

A good wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

Proverbs 31:10 (RSV)

Consider also this passage from Peter's first letter. In this he sets out what God is looking for from every wife in terms of how they treat their husband and how they conduct themselves generally:

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. ³ Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing, ⁴ but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵ So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you

1Peter 3:1-6 (RSV)

Note that Peter says that God regards it as "very precious" when any woman has a "gentle and quiet spirit". That is the very opposite of the strident, demanding, self-promoting, antagonistic attitude that is displayed and advocated by much of the feminist movement.

In fairness, that is caused, at least in part, by the fact that such women have never encountered any man who behaves towards women as God intends. Many men behave in a selfish, thoughtless, boorish and even brutal way. Thus the error of feminism is, in part, a misguided reaction to those wrongs, which women ought not to have to face in the first place. Instead, husbands should behave as follows:

Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.

1Peter 3:7 (RSV)

Apostle Paul sets the bar even higher for Christian husbands in terms of how they must treat their wives

Apostle Paul sets the bar even higher for husbands, telling them that they must love their wives *as Christ loved the Church*. That is obviously an impossible standard to reach, but it is what a husband is to aim for.

Note the contrast in terms of what is required from the husband as compared to the wife, as we saw above. The husband is told to love his wife. By that Paul means self-sacrificial ‘*agape*’ love. Paul said that because he knew that, all too often, husbands do not love their wives in that way, even if they are believers:

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,

Ephesians 5:25-29 (RSV)

When God gives commands and instructions He expects us to obey them and He holds us accountable for the extent to which we do so. Therefore, every Christian husband and every Christian wife will be judged at the Judgment Seat for the way in which they have each conducted themselves within their marriage.

In particular, He will look at the way they have treated their spouse. That duty to do as God instructs is applicable even if the other spouse is not reciprocating. So, a husband is to love his wife, and sacrifice his own needs and preferences in order to benefit her, *even if she is treating him badly*.

Likewise, a wife should submit to her husband, support him and respect him even if he does not love her in the way that Christ loves the Church. The duties are one way so far as each spouse is concerned. They do not only become operable after the other spouse has complied and done what they are meant to do.

Your duty to treat your husband or wife well is unconditional and so it does not depend on them also treating you well

You therefore must brace yourself and resolve to treat your spouse as God intends, regardless of how they are treating you, even if their mistreatment continues. Jesus will judge us for how we act, and also for how we react. We need to bear that in mind every time arguments or times of pressure arise. Jesus is always watching, listening and remembering.

That thought can, and will, alter the way we behave if we dwell on it and remember it at such times. Quite apart from that, if we choose to do what is right, even where (in our highly biased view) our spouse is behaving badly, then it could eventually influence them. They may notice and then the cycle of bad actions and bad reactions might eventually be stopped and even reversed.

Moreover, we always need to bear in mind that our own perception of “*who started it*” is very subjective and therefore probably unreliable. In other words, you may actually be starting things yourself even though you are fully convinced that you are only responding to what your spouse has said or done. In any case, whoever started it, you must still take the responsibility for being the one to stop it and to react in the opposite spirit:

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Peter 3:9 (RSV)

That duty to react well to provocation and to be restrained always applies to you, whether you are the husband or the wife. But it applies especially to the husband. He must find the self-control to take the lead and be the first to change and the first to humble himself when difficulties or conflicts arise. Given how vitally important the marriage relationship is, we can be sure that it will feature prominently in Jesus' judgment of us at the Judgment Seat.

Likewise, we owe a very important duty to our children. Many men in particular allow themselves to forget this duty and put their careers, or even their hobbies, ahead of the needs of their children. We must not do that and must regularly appraise ourselves, our priorities, and our use of time, to ensure that our children do not suffer because of our career ambitions or other interests.

God will hold the father particularly responsible for what happens within the home and for the way the children are brought up. It is not a matter that can be delegated to the mother or to anybody else. God's instructions about the upbringing and spiritual welfare of children are mainly directed towards the father:

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4 (RSV)