

# **GOD'S CALL**

## **Major themes in the Scriptures**

### **Quality of being (20)**

#### **The highest quality of being**

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The Lord willing, today we will consider the subject, “Quality of being”, the twentieth message, in seeking to appreciate major themes in the Scriptures.

A short summary of today's message:

The highest quality of being is not just a state of very good moral values in our understanding and desires. It is a state of active meaning in the heart that has been completely given for the highest quality of moral meaning and lived out in each situation according to that meaning in the heart. It is a living moral being of the highest quality and not a beautiful lifelike statue of a living being of the highest quality.

We will seek the Lord to appreciate more of what this means.

As we consider this major theme in the Scriptures, quality of being, we all know that those who genuinely love God will always seek to develop quality in our being and surely, we would want to develop the highest level that we can, so that our whole life will be lived with meaning and purpose and fruitfulness, and we can fulfil God's call in our lives.

First, let us consider the highest quality of being that we know. We all are conscious that we can see this clearly in the being of God. In the being of God, we can behold the highest quality of moral being. So what is it in Him that helps us to appreciate this?

As I appreciate it, I see that we can primarily see this in the quality of His heart and His actions; and we also see this lived out in our context as a Man in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we see the highest quality of being in God and not only that – in terms of what He has done in history – but also when He came into this world to live amongst us so that we can behold such a quality of life lived as a Man. There are two aspects that we can ponder about.

The first is that we can see that all His values and motives are pure and perfectly good in the moral and spiritual realm. Values and motives determine what is the meaning within our heart: What kind of quality of heart we have is determined by the values that we hold and the motive with which we do the things that we do.

The second aspect that is very important, which may not be sufficiently appreciated, is: He actively lives out that meaning – the meaning of these values and motives – in the things He has done, is doing and continues to do. He actively lives out the meaning of these values and motives. Whatever He does arises from these values and motives that are pure and perfectly good.

So we see in the being of God: For example, we ponder over His creation of man in His image. Why did He do so? What motivated Him?

He did so because He valued moral quality of being. He wanted man to be like Him, so He gave man the potential to develop that kind of quality in his being. God created man in His image. What was His motive? We are told that God created us in love – because He loved us, He wanted to give us the very best. He created us with this motive: to give us the potential, that we can find true fulfilment in life, we can experience moral quality of being and develop a deep fellowship with Him.

We see His values and His motive in the way He planned the event of the cross: He knew that man would fail if God were to create man and place him in an environment that would be difficult, but God did so because He wanted the highest quality of being that we can develop. And so, He placed us in an environment that is very difficult. That being the case, He knew that we would fail; He knew that we would rebel, we would sin against Him, and there would be consequences. God being holy, He has to judge us and in order to express His love for us, His compassion for us and to help us, He knew what it would cost Him: He would have to go through the event of the cross – the most painful, agonizing, and the most difficult event that He could ever go through. But God chose that path. His motive was to give us an opportunity to become the very best that we could ever be, so He was prepared for that.

And we see that God took action. He did not just desire it; He did not just think: It is a good idea. But He took action, knowing the cost of it. He moved in that direction.

He had compassion for us, He had good intention for us, but He Himself had to go through the pain in order to bring it about. And so we see His eternal purposes for the good of the moral universe: All that He has planned and all that He has purposed, all these arise from His love and His righteousness. God will ultimately judge the whole moral universe in justice, in love, in compassion and in holiness.

We see the same issues expressed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why did He come into this world? He came because of love. The apostle Paul said, "He loved me and gave Himself up for me." He came into this world of His own accord, voluntarily, willingly, to give Himself to save the world from moral destruction. He gave up His rights, His glory, His majesty in heaven in order to become Man: despised, forsaken, ridiculed, mocked, crucified.

He suffered for our sake because of love and righteousness. Again, we see the Lord Jesus offered Himself to be a sacrifice for us. He was not compelled. Right until the very last moment, He could have called upon the Father and He could be delivered from death. He need not have gone through the cross, but He chose it: action, living, a life lived out according to the highest values and motives.

As we read through the Scriptures, it is good for us constantly to think about who God is: His values, His motives and how He worked these out in situations. God planned the creation of this universe and He took action. God planned the creation of man and He took action. If we appreciate that, then we should also ponder over what this should mean to us.

How are we to respond when we appreciate God and we appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ?

Let us turn to **Matthew 5: 43-48**.

**Matthew 5: 43-48**

- 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'
- 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,  
45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.
- 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
- 47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
- 48 "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The Lord Jesus said these words to help us understand something of the wonderful realm of moral quality. God loves us even though we may be evil, even though we may be unrighteous, selfish and negative. He is prepared to care for us, to provide for us, to help us, to speak to us because of His love and compassion. And that is why He says, "love your enemies... pray for those who persecute you" – the kind of love that is not self-centred, that is not reactive because we are concerned for the well-being of others.

But bear in mind that this love is not just an emotional, sentimental love. While God loves us and is prepared to go to great lengths to help us for our well-being, God will also judge, He will also punish, He will also keep His distance from those who do not wish to follow Him. So we need to appreciate God in His righteousness, holiness and love.

The Lord Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." We are not to consider our lives in comparison with other people in this world. We are not to set our standards based on how others behave. We are to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. The meaning basically is that God is perfect as He should be. He is holy, righteous, perfectly good. We should also be perfect as we should be.

God has created us with that potential; we should be good to the utmost that we can be in the potential that He has given to us. We are to be perfect; we are to develop the highest quality of our being.

But how do we develop to become like God in His moral perfection? Christians want to be like God in His moral goodness. The Scriptures tell us we are to follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to walk in the way that He walked. It is recorded for us to learn to appreciate how He lived his life. So how are we to do that?

There is a very famous museum in the world which produces and houses very lifelike statues in wax of famous people. They create, they make, statues in wax that look very much like the person who is alive. They are very lifelike and if you look at them at a distance, you may mistake that for the person who is alive. They look like the live person but they are in reality without physical life. They are just statues in wax.

In the moral and spiritual realm, many people appreciate God in His beauty, in His glory. They want to be like Him. The sad thing is that many attempts are made such that in the moral and spiritual realm, we may become like wax statues. We may look like Him in some ways, but the life is not there. There is not that moral and spiritual quality in the being, but the way we behave, the things that we say may seem like the character of God.

Many seek to be like God in His moral goodness and they may also look very much like Him in the way they behave, but it is only external. In reality, they only look like Him but do not have the spiritual life and moral quality that is found in God. Why is that so?

Basically, to be like God is a very difficult path. It is very costly; it requires intense effort and determination to go all the way to develop.

Our heart has to be completely given to God; we have to learn to depend on Him, receive His life, be transformed by Him. We have to deny ourselves; we have to give up the world; we have to reject all that is negative; we have to pursue the path that is good always, in every situation. It is difficult.

And so, we try to find a substitute, something easier. So what we do is we do the outward forms of things: We keep rules and regulations, we read the Scriptures, we attend meetings, we visit hospitals, we do various things that would give us that impression, the implication of moral goodness, but the heart is not fully in it. There may be some degree present, but it is not the wholehearted, full giving of ourselves to live that way.

When God does something good, it comes from the whole being of His heart. When He planned the cross, He gave everything because He loved us with a pure love.

But many would hold back many aspects for themselves. They keep many things which they are not prepared to give up to God. And so, they would do many things for God – this, that and the other – and they may say, “I have sacrificed so much for God. What more are you asking me?”

Well, it is up to us: What is the kind of quality we want to develop? If we want to develop the highest quality of being, then it has to be everything. There is no other way by which it can come about. And it has to be first the values and the motives within us. That has to be pure, it has to be right. That is the first thing that we have to ensure: What are our values, what are we seeking for, what do we want, what motivates us in the things that we want to do. If that is real, if that is true, then it must be lived out in each day, in each situation.

There is no situation where this would not apply. Every moment of our lives, every situation that we go through should manifest these values and these motives that are similar to God. And that is why the apostle Paul says, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you should do all to the glory of God." "To the glory of God" here has the emphasis of manifesting the glory of God and bringing glory to God. God will be pleased as it manifests what is truly good and meaningful.

The Scriptures portray man in different ways, and in the first psalm we are told how man can be likened to a tree, that is planted by the waters, that bears fruit. I want to concentrate on another passage that talks about trees and fruit. And this comes from the words of the Lord Jesus Himself in **Matthew 7: 15-27**.

**Matthew 7: 15-27**

- 15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.
- 16 "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?
- 17 "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.
- 18 "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.
- 19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
- 20 "So then, you will know them by their fruits.
- 21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*.
- 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'
- 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'
- 24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.
- 25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.
- 26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.
- 27 "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."

A tree is known by its fruit. The Lord Jesus likens man to a tree bearing fruits.



This passage is very rich and contains many important aspects of life that we should pay close heed to and ponder over again and again. I will be concentrating on this passage as we go through this subject of the highest quality of being.

The Lord Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." These are the statues of wax. They appear good, they appear harmless, they appear like sheep – gentle, helpful, obedient – but inwardly are ravenous wolves. They come to destroy, to kill and to devour.

"Beware of the false prophets" – Prophets are supposed to speak on behalf of God, to communicate what God wants to say, to transmit the love of God, the commands of God, but these are false prophets. They pretend to speak on behalf of God but in reality, they have their own selfish desires and very often, they are in fact following the path of the evil one and empowered by the powers of darkness in what they do.

This principle of false prophets appearing as sheep but in reality being wolves is a very important principle and we cannot apply this solely to those who are extreme in that form. This principle can happen in many different degrees. When we pretend to be what we are not in order to gain personal advantage in any form, we are following this principle. We want to appear good when actually, we are not, but we have our other motives to gain what we want to gain from others.

The Lord Jesus tells us, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they?" What does this mean? Are all of us either very evil or very good? Is that what the Lord Jesus was saying? "You will know them by their fruits." So if a person does something that is good, does it mean that he is a good tree, if he does something that is bad, that his being is a bad tree?

The Lord Jesus said, "Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." If we interpret it along the lines that we are either a good tree or a bad tree, then it must be if we are a good tree, we will always do the things that are good, if we are a bad tree, we will always do the things that are bad.

But we know that in reality, it is not so: People who are good often are good to varying degrees of goodness; people who are bad are often bad to varying degrees of evil.

God is absolutely good and we can say the evil one is basically absolutely bad – he has moved to that degree of evil that is extreme.

But then, what about people in general? Do we not see that sometimes, people can act in love and compassion genuinely, and yet the same person may at times be calculative, selfish and inconsiderate?

We can see this very clearly, for example, in the way that the apostle Paul addressed the Corinthians: "You are fleshly!" Yet he said, "I rejoice over you, that you have experienced God's love, you have responded to Him, you have been cleansed." So too the Lord Jesus spoke of His disciples, that they were obedient, they were following Him, and yet He rebuked them for their wrong attitudes.

So what I can see here basically is: The Lord Jesus is telling us where the fruit comes from.

The fruit comes from the tree and what is in the tree is a representation of our heart – that is to say, the fruit comes from our heart.

The meaning of our actions comes from our heart: If our heart is evil, then from that evil, the things that we do will be evil, even if they appear to be good. If the motive is bad, then the fruit is bad. If the motive is good, the fruit is good. So within our hearts, we can at times manifest the reality of the good tree, at other times the reality of the bad tree.

God wants us to be good. We should not be once in a while good; we should always be good. We should develop that kind of quality.

A vine cannot produce figs. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, and you cannot gather figs from thistles. The vine produces grapes, the fig tree produces figs. But the thorn bushes and the thistles do not produce this kind of fruits. So they are consistent in that way.

But human beings are moral beings. We are not consistent. It depends upon how we make our choice and what we have developed. We are dynamic. If 'a tree' will always produce the same thing, then there is no means for repentance: If we have sinned, we will continue to sin and sin and sin; we can never change. But we can: We can repent, we can change. The 'tree' can change. A leopard cannot change its spots but a sinner can change and become a saint.

So this is where we need to understand: If we do not do something about it, then the negativeness will grow and become more and more serious so that in the end we become 'a bad tree' that keeps on producing bad fruit. But if we respond well, even though initially we are not such 'a good tree', we will grow and develop more and more to become 'a good tree' that will produce more and more good fruit. And when we develop to a highest quality, we become like God who will always produce good fruit. God will always do what is right. We must move in that direction to become like Him, to be perfect like Him.

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits". You can tell the quality of the character by the fruits, but then we have seen that artificial fruit can look like the real thing.

Artificial fruits may look very much like the real fruit. A number of years ago, I was walking along the road and I was surprised to see oranges on a tree. They looked so fresh and so orange and they looked so real, but I knew that we cannot have that kind of oranges in Singapore. As I went nearer, then I saw that these 'oranges' were plastic oranges tied to the branches by wires. These were artificial oranges but they looked very much like the real ones.

And so too in many lives, we may mistake the artificial for the real. But those plastic oranges had no life: They were not properly attached to the tree; they did not belong to the tree. For us, we can pretend to be good and appear to be good, but it is not really good. The outward form is there, the actions appear to be so but the reality is not. So, we know them by their fruits: We must see the real tree – what is it – what is that real fruit.

A bad tree produces bad fruit. So therefore, we have to learn to distinguish between the true and the false fruit. If we ponder about what a tree is and what a fruit is, there are some aspects that we can consider. Basically, the fruit is part of the tree and it is also an expression of the health of the tree. A tree that is healthy will produce healthy fruit. If a tree is malnourished, then it may not produce fruit. The fruit also provides for the reproduction of the tree, so that more trees can come about and the fruit, if it is a good fruit, is also good for food for others.

Some of these aspects are actually true in the spiritual realm. Let us consider some other passages to see the meaning here. I will not spend much time here, but just to bring to your consciousness.

**Luke 13: 6-9**

- 6 And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any.
- 7 "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'
- 8 "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;
- 9 and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.'"

So we see here in this parable, the meaning is that the tree, the fig tree, should produce fruit; it is planted to produce fruit. If it were healthy, it should produce fruit, but it did not. And so, the man said to the vineyard keeper: "Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?" The implication is: a fig tree not producing fruit is of no use. Cut it down! But the vineyard keeper said, "Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down."

So this tells us that even though the tree may not produce good fruit, there is a possibility that it might. If you give it enough fertilizer, it might produce. So God gives us the opportunity to repent. We may not be bearing fruit, we may not be what we ought to be, but God is kind and compassionate, He wants to help us. He puts in fertilizer, He digs around it, He encourages us; He gives us opportunity to listen, to consider.

The question is: Will we respond? If we do not respond well, we will not bear fruit and we will be cut down. But if we respond well, we will bear fruit. That will be well. So it tells us fruit is something that is part of the tree that is intended for a good purpose, and it should be there.

John the Baptist, when he responded to the Pharisees and the Sadducees who came to be baptized by him, he said to them: "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance." That is in **Matthew 3**. John the Baptist rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees because many of them were bad trees bearing bad fruit generally. But they were coming for baptism. So he told them: "If you really want to be baptized, you must change. You must bear fruit in keeping with repentance." That means, not just say, "Yes, I repent" but "bear fruit"; and bearing fruit has to do with the life that you live. You live out that life, not just by words, by intention, by idea, by understanding, but by living. You live it out.

So he told them: "...do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." It is no use saying, "I believe this and that and the other; I have so and so as my example; I follow such and such." That is not good enough – 'We have Abraham for our father'. You must live the way that Abraham lived in terms of the positive aspects of his life: faith in God, trusting God, obeying God. These are the aspects. If you want to be a child of Abraham, then you follow that moral and spiritual direction that is good. So if you do not repent, judgment will follow.

And the Lord Jesus said, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven..." So the Scribes and Pharisees did not bear good fruit. What is the problem? They were not prepared to change their lives from the heart to live according to what ought to be.

The fruit of the Spirit is the expression of the health of our spirit in moral character and the fruit of our lives includes the quality of our influence on others.

These are two aspects that we need to constantly be conscious of if we want to bear good fruit. Both of these aspects need to be properly worked out and lived out in our lives.

**Galatians 5: 22-23**

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

The fruit of the Spirit basically is the result of our submission to God, our trusting Him, so that the Holy Spirit has the freedom to impart the life of God to us, so that it becomes part of our being. So the fruit of the Spirit is the character that is being formed in us – the character of the Lord Jesus Christ being formed in us as a result of our repentance and faith, our commitment to Him, our abiding in Him, our receiving life from Him.

So these aspects of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control are descriptions of the moral character of our hearts and expressed in the lives that we live: the love that we have in our hearts and shown towards God, towards others; the joy that we have with regard to what is good and meaningful in our hearts for ourselves and for others and what God is doing; the peace that we have as we walk with God and see Him at work; the patience, kindness goodness that manifest the way that we care for others, the values that we hold, how we work out our lives. These are aspects that show to us the kind of life that ought to be lived.

So the highest quality of being has to be lived out in the situations that we go through. The character has to be developed.

And then the fruit of our lives includes the quality of our influence on others: What is the effect of the way we live our lives on the lives of other people?

The apostle Paul says in **Romans 1: 13**:

**Romans 1: 13**

I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

He wanted to be able to obtain some fruit amongst the Gentiles – the fruit of his life seen in the lives of the people in Rome. He wanted to contribute to them, so that they could benefit from his life. He loved them, he cared for them; he wanted to exercise a positive influence on them.

As we go on to look at **Matthew 7** again, we can see the strong emphasis on the meaning of living by what we understand and believe to be good. **Verse 21**: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter.*"

Doing the will of God is different from saying, "The will of God is very good. I agree with it; I love it; I rejoice in it; I praise God for it." Doing the will of God goes beyond just appreciating how good it is. Yes, we must appreciate it; we must truly recognize it is good, but we must live by it.

The Lord Jesus tells us, and He quotes from the Old Testament: "Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God". In that context, He is saying we depend on physical bread for our physical life, but man is not just physical. Man is primarily moral and spiritual. So, we must live on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

This is the spiritual bread that comes down from heaven. We must partake of the life of the Lord Jesus.



So that is one major aspect. We partake of physical bread for physical life; we partake of spiritual bread for spiritual life, and that spiritual bread is every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

But if we ponder further, we will realize that partaking of the spiritual bread is not just "I come to God, I take of His life and therefore, I become strong."

In order to partake of the life of God, we must first give ourselves to God; we must base our lives on the will of God. That is the context of partaking of the word of God.

We cannot partake of the word of God just by saying, "It is very good; I like it." We have to live on that basis. In that spirit, we can then receive the life from God and it will become part of us, we become partakers of *the* divine nature, and so the character of God can then be formed in us.

So we have to learn to do the will of God by living our lives based on the character of God, based on the instructions of God, based on what He has said.

And so the Lord Jesus goes on to say, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'"

These people were doing many things. It was not action that was lacking. They were doing many things. They were prophesying in the name of the Lord; they were casting out demons; they were performing many miracles.

They were very active in doing what may be regarded as spiritual things, but these were false prophets; these were statues of wax; there was no life in them.

The Lord Jesus said, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" LAWLESSNESS was their way of life. In reality, their heart was not right but they were doing these things that appeared good.

So what is the fruit? The fruit comes from the tree, it comes from the heart. When the heart is not good, these outward things become not good. So they were actually practising LAWLESSNESS.

Even though they were casting out demons, they were performing miracles, they were actually practising LAWLESSNESS - because their motive was bad.

We are not told specifically what they were, but it can be in the area of wanting glory for themselves, taking advantage of other people, deceiving people. There are many, many reasons where it can be so.

So then, if we want to exercise good influence, if we want to develop quality in our being, we must take care to concentrate on the right things.

And the apostle Paul is a good example of a man who understood this and who lived it out in his life, so that he could help other people to live that way.

The way we should live and bear fruit in our character and in our service and contribution in the kingdom of God and in the lives of others can be seen in this passage:

**1 Thessalonians 2: 4-12**

- 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.
- 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed--God is witness--
- 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.
- 7 But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.
- 8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.
- 9 For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
- 10 You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;
- 11 just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children,
- 12 so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

In this passage, we see how the apostle Paul more than once calls God to witness. He refers to God, that God has approved him, God witnesses it, God sees how he has lived his life.

And he tells us first in terms of his character, how he lived his life, and secondly, the influence on them was based on this.

The apostle Paul was not primarily concentrating on telling the Thessalonians: "You are a sinner, you need to be forgiven. You are under the wrath of God. The Lord Jesus Christ died for you on the cross. Be saved." He was not concentrating on that.

He was transmitting a message from God by his life and when he said those things from God, it came forth from a heart of true love for them. He was concerned for their well-being. He exhorted them, he warned them, he pleaded with them because he wanted them to benefit from the gospel of God.

That was what motivated him and it was this life that came from him that was received and the Thessalonians benefited and they learnt to follow his example.

He said, “...just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.” He knew that God was watching. He ministered in a way that he could be confident that God would be pleased.

“...we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed...” There was no ulterior motive; there was no impure motive. His motive was pure. He sought their well-being.

“...nor did we seek glory from men...” – not from anyone. He did not exert his authority, even though he was an apostle, for his own ends.

“But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing *mother* tenderly cares for her own children.” He loved them, he cared for them; he wanted them to grow well. That was what motivated him.

“Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.” So he gave of his life in order to help them benefit, to receive what was good. That was his love for them, his concern for them.

And so, he was prepared to labour in hardship, worked night and day, so that he could contribute to them, lessen their burden, and proclaim the gospel to them.

And he said, “You are witnesses, and *so is* God... You can see for yourself. You can see the fruit, in our lives”; “...and *so is* God...” – God is also witness. God can see all this.

“...how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers, just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children...” So there was a love of the mother, there was a love of the father in him and in those who were working together with him – devoutly, uprightly, blamelessly.

So what was the direction? “...so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory...”: to be worthy of God, to live in a way that would be truly pleasing to God.

So if we want to develop quality in our being, we need to concentrate on living out the moral meaning that we see in God, the moral values and the motives within God. We must follow His example, we must live like that, and this must be lived out in every situation that we go through. Our doing is lesser than our being but true quality of being will be expressed in doing.

On the other hand, doing what seems to be good without the quality of being has no moral value. It is in reality the doing of what is not good. So, if our hearts are not right, we may do the things that seem to be good, but it is still a practice of LAWLESSNESS. We need to make sure first that the heart is good, the tree is good; from there, produce good fruit.

The Lord Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...” If we truly love Him in our hearts, if that meaning is real, if this is the motive within us in the things that we do, we will keep His commandments, we will follow Him, we will do the things that are pleasing to Him. That will be real.

However, we all know that to live like that is very difficult. Negative habits are very difficult to give up. Good habits are very difficult to develop and nurture. So how can we develop?

There is no other way except to pay great heed to this issue, keep on working at it, seeking God to help us understand, seeking His enabling to work it out, trusting Him... but we have to exercise ourselves always to move in this direction.

The commitment has to be there. If it is not deep enough, then negative habits can be given up for a short while – there are many people who have given up bad habits for a while – but in time to come, they go back to that; good habits can be nurtured for a short while, but soon given up.

If we want to develop true quality, we must give up the bad habits permanently and keep on being alert not to allow them to come back.

If we want to develop good habits arising from good meaning, then we have to be determined to keep looking to God, to walk by the Spirit, to be vigilant, to be prayerful; trust Him that He will continue to help us to develop, then we can grow.

And this will take time, effort, constant looking to God. But if we do that, we keep on building in the positive direction, we will increasingly become a good tree that produces good fruit.

So if our heart completely belongs to the Lord, we will live our lives that are truly pleasing to Him. The things that we do will be good and meaningful in His sight and He will take delight in us.

What is important is for us to ensure that the meaning is real and genuine and that we are prepared to live it out. That does not mean that when we develop that quality in us, people will always appreciate us. People can still misinterpret, they may think otherwise. Men may look at our outward appearance, but God sees our heart.

What is important is to ensure that our hearts are right and that there is genuine commitment, preparedness to live that way and that we work out each day in that direction.

Finally, let us look at the last portion of this passage in **Matthew 7**. The Lord Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."

He says, "...everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them..." "...acts on them..." is the critical thing. Many people heard the words of the Lord Jesus and many people could easily have said, "Very good! It is very meaningful, it is so refreshing, it is so enlightening." But can we hear and appreciate without acting on that? Certainly, and many do. Or we may act on them partially, to some degree, but not all the way.

The Lord Jesus says, "...everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them fully, totally, completely, wholeheartedly, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock." If you build your life like that, you live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, you base your life on what the Lord Jesus has said, you live it out each day in that way then you will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. This house will stand. The man who does that can be compared to the wise man; he can also be compared to the house built by the wise man - the house that will stand in the midst of storm, in the midst of flood, in the midst of rain, in the midst of wind. It will stand.

And that is a picture of a life of quality. You will not easily shift your position because of convenience, because of problems and difficulties, because of fear and anxiety and stress. You maintain your course, your direction of life, your commitment to God.

What you believe in and you are committed to, you remain steadfast, you will not crumble and waver.

That does not mean that we will not learn from our failures. We will: We are open to be corrected, to be taught, but in terms of our commitment to what is good and right, you will be steadfast. In the midst of pressures, difficulties, pain, problems, we continue to be faithful to God, we continue to hold on to what we believe and recognize; we will remain true to the Lord. It will not fall. So Satan may attack us, the world may seek to draw us, but we remain true to God.

Then, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall." "...great was its fall" tells us: most likely the whole house collapsed. There was no longer a house, it just collapsed totally. It would not stand because it was built on sand. It is just like a wax figure. There is no life in it; there is no strength in it.

So, when we pretend, when we seek to be like God but without the cost and the preparedness to follow Him, then when difficulties come, we will dry up, we will move away, we will not be prepared to stand together with the Lord. The fall will be great.

So the important aspect that we need to be very conscious of is that ultimately, true quality of being is manifested by living – living it out each day, each moment.

"Walk by the Spirit" is a description of every step that you take, you walk by the Spirit. That is to say, you live your life on the basis of the guidance of the Holy Spirit; you live your life on the basis of the power of the Holy Spirit; you live your life in accordance with what the Holy Spirit teaches us: the way of God, what life ought to be.



Every step that we take, we are to live by that. By the Spirit, we are to put to death the practices of the body; we are to put to death the self-centred desires of our hearts. And this has to be done all the time. We are to live in that way then it will be possible for us to work out the purposes of God.

I just want to conclude by distinguishing two kinds of situations where we are not what we ought to be. These are two broad categories, to help us recognize, so that we can help ourselves more correctly. There are two major kinds of not being what we ought to be.

The first is hypocrisy, that is, pretending to be what we are not in order to impress others, gain recognition, without sincere commitment to live by what we say, that is, we are not true to what we say we are or we project ourselves to be.

So the Lord Jesus specifically warned in **Luke 12: 1**, He said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy..."

So this is one kind: We pretend. We want to impress, but we have no intention of truly living that way. We say, "This is good, I live by it" but in reality, we do not and we do not intend to do so. There is not that commitment.

So the Pharisees had their own desires, motives that were not honouring to God, but they honoured God with their lips, while their heart was far away from Him.

So this is the first kind and this is very serious. So we cannot allow this in our lives, but it can happen to varying, varying degrees of it. We need to be alert to this.

The second category of not being what we ought to be is failure: failure to be what we want to be; striving to be what we ought to be, but failing to attain to that level of quality; what we sincerely want to be is not yet real in us, in our being.

So this category refers to those who genuinely want to be good, who want to follow God, who are willing to work at it, to strive in that direction, but they fail. They have not yet attained to that quality, but they sincerely want to develop.

An example of this is the apostle Peter. He wanted to follow the Lord Jesus; he was sincere. He thought he would die for Him, but he failed and he was very sorry. But he was humble, he was willing to learn, he could be corrected.

And so, the Lord Jesus said to Peter a second time: "Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." (**John 21: 16**)

The apostle Peter failed. He did not keep to his word because of fear, but the Lord Jesus forgave him.

The Lord Jesus was kind, compassionate. He understood it was difficult. And so He asked him, "...do you love Me?" He asked him three times to help him remember his failure, to help him understand why he must not be self-confident, and Peter was prepared to respond positively to the Lord.

The Lord Jesus said to him: "Shepherd My sheep." That is to tell us the Lord Jesus continued to give to Peter the opportunity to grow, to develop well, and to contribute his part in the kingdom of God – that is on condition that he was prepared to work at it, to live well, and to develop.

So if we want to live our lives well and fulfil God's call in our lives, we must work hard to develop the highest quality in our being, as we seek God to enable us and we entrust ourselves fully to Him because we love Him and are truly committed to Him and His perfect will.

So, if we want to develop in that direction, we must concentrate on who God is, who the Lord Jesus is, ponder over what is in the heart of God, in the heart of the Lord Jesus, how they expressed that meaning in the actions that they took, in the way they lived it out for us to see.

We must follow that example: first, to ensure that your heart is like that, that we are fully given to Him and then live it out each moment, in accordance with that meaning.

As we do that, there will be a transformation that will take place in us and depending on how deeply we respond and how hard we work, it will affect how quickly we develop.

Let us then come before the Lord and ask Him to help us to understand the issues more clearly and to know how we can do something for ourselves, so that we can become what we ought to be and He may be pleased with us and we can contribute positively to the lives of others.

Let us ponder over what He has done for us, and express our gratitude to Him and ask Him to help us to develop well.