The Things of the Kingdom of God: A Bible Study

God has one plan for those He has called: He "also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). The apostle Paul's exhortation must be read in the light of this plan: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1–2). The things above are where Christ is. They are, in fact, the features of His character. To seek them means to walk towards likeness with Him.

Summary

This study starts from the apostle Paul's exhortation: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Its thesis is that, in Scripture, "things on the earth" are not first of all material possessions but the inward attitudes of the earthly nature: bitter envying, a spirit of strife, judging and condemning one's neighbour, indifference towards the fallen. In the same way, "things above" are not only future realities but the fruits of the Kingdom of God lived out now: love for enemies, mercy, forgiveness, meekness and the wisdom "that is from above" (James 3:17).

The study distinguishes between a "natural spirituality" and a "Spirit-born spirituality". Both belong to a person's inner world, but one comes from below and the other from above. Drawing on Luke 6, James 3–4, Galatians 6, Luke 10 and Colossians 3, the study shows how the two kinds of wisdom can be recognised, why judging one's neighbour belongs to the things below, and how the one who is born again puts on the "clothing" of Christ: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering and forgiveness.

Keywords: things above, Kingdom of God, wisdom from above, meekness, mercy, forgiveness, judgement, parable of the Samaritan, the new man.

1. Introduction

1.1. The starting text

The apostle Paul writes to the believers in Colossae: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1–3).

The exhortation rests on something already accomplished: "ye … be risen with Christ". The believer does not seek the things above in order to reach heaven some day, but because his life is already hidden there, with Christ. Two verbs describe his response: "seek" (look for, pursue) and "set your affection on" (keep your mind turned towards). So this concerns both the

direction of the will and the direction of the mind.

1.2. A widespread misunderstanding

When we say of someone that he "seeks the things on the earth", most people think of business, houses, money, holidays, everything tangible and material. That is not wrong: these too can fill a person's heart and draw him away from God. Many Christians no longer keep time for the Word and for fellowship, because they "have other things to do".

Yet when we read the context of Colossians 3, we notice that Paul does not immediately list material possessions. He speaks of "fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness" (3:5), then of "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication" and lying (3:8–9). The things on the earth are, first of all, things of the heart. They are subtle, often hard to notice, and that is exactly why the religious person thinks them insignificant.

1.3. The structure of this study

We can therefore speak of two spiritual realities in a person. There is a natural spirituality, an inner world of thoughts, intentions and feelings that comes from below, from the earthly nature. And there is a Spirit-born spirituality, a new inner world that comes from above, from God. Both are invisible; yet both show themselves in deeds.

This study follows that distinction in seven steps. First it sets out the framework: the two kingdoms and the two origins, "from above" and "from below" (chapter 2). It then examines the two kinds of wisdom in James 3 (chapters 3 and 4), love for enemies and the Father's mercy in Luke 6 (chapter 5), the problem of judging in James 4 (chapter 6), restoring the fallen in Galatians 6 (chapter 7) and the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10 (chapter 8). The last chapter shows the "clothing" of the new man in Colossians 3 (chapter 9). The study closes with a comparative overview and practical conclusions.

2. Two kingdoms, two origins

2.1. The Kingdom of God lived out now

In Luke 6 the Lord Jesus describes how someone who belongs to the Kingdom of God lives. We do not enter this Kingdom only after death. The Lord says: "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), and Paul shows that the Father "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). The translation has already taken place.

That is why Paul can say: "our conversation is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20), that is, our citizenship is there. A person can live in a foreign country and still live by the laws, language and customs of his homeland. So it is with the believer: he lives on earth, but he is a citizen of heaven. And this Kingdom has a precise inner content: "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).

2.2. What "from above" and "from below" mean

Scripture uses the language of "above" and "below" not in a geographical sense but to show where something comes from. The Lord tells the Jews: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23). John the Baptist says of Him: "He that cometh from heaven is above all" (John 3:31). And James shows the source of all good things: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

A thing is "from above" when it springs from God and bears His character. A thing is "from below" when it springs from man, from the world or from the evil one. The same outward act can have two different origins. Two people may give the same sum of money to a poor man: one out of mercy, the other in order to be seen. Outwardly the deeds look alike; inwardly, one is from above and the other from below.

2.3. The works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit

Paul describes clearly what each of the two sources produces. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (Galatians 5:19–21).

It is striking how many of these "works" are attitudes of the heart and of relationships: hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings. There is nothing material about them, and yet they belong to "the flesh". By contrast, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance" (Galatians 5:22–23). Here, in brief, is the map of this whole study: the things below and the things above.

2.4. "Old things are passed away"

The foundation of the change is the new birth: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17–18).

Experience tells us, however, that old things do not pass away easily. How does the apostle's statement square with reality? Paul is speaking here of a law, of a reality established by God: the old things no longer have the right to rule. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him" (Romans 6:6), and the exhortation that follows is: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God" (Romans 6:11).

We can illustrate this with a man who has moved out of an old house into a new one. He has handed in the key to the old house, the lease has ended, his address has changed. It may happen that one evening, out of habit, he takes the road back to the old house. But he no longer lives there. In the same way, the believer can still fall back into the old things, because Satan is very cunning, but he no longer lives in them. John makes the same distinction: "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1); and "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin", that is, he does not

live in sin as his ordinary state (1 John 3:9).

2.5. The things which are not seen

The new things "are of God". Paul describes them with words from Isaiah: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." And he adds at once: "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9–10). So the things above are not merely a promise for the future; they are revealed and given to us now.

They are invisible, but not unreal: "we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Love, mercy, meekness and forgiveness cannot be put on a scale, but they will remain when everything material has passed away.

3. The wisdom that does not come from above (James 3:13–16)

3.1. To whom James is writing

James opens his chapter with the words "My brethren" (James 3:1). He is not speaking to people of the world but to those in the body of Christ. This detail matters for the whole passage: the earthly wisdom he describes is not only a danger outside the church but one that can dwell in the very hearts of those who pray, sing and serve.

The question with which he opens the passage is a challenge: "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13). Biblical wisdom is not proved by knowledge or by arguments won, but by conduct. And its distinguishing mark is meekness. The works of the wise are not merely correct; they are done in a particular spirit.

3.2. Bitter envying

Verse 14 describes the opposite: "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth."

In Romanian the word used in the Bible here carries the sense not only of envy but of spite and grudge, of resentment that reaches towards hatred and hostility; an everyday expression built on it even means "with the intention of upsetting someone". The word James uses in the original means zeal or ardour, and paired with the adjective "bitter" it describes a poisoned zeal that has turned against another person.

A simple observation helps us see where this envying works. You cannot upset someone who does not know you and whom you do not know. Envy needs a relationship. It is born between brothers and sisters, between colleagues, between husband and wife, between neighbours, wherever there is closeness. That is why it is so dangerous in the church: precisely where there should be the greatest closeness, the greatest bitterness can also grow.

Scripture warns that bitterness has a root that spreads: "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrews 12:15). A root cannot be seen above the ground, but it feeds everything that grows. In the same way, the intention to hurt hides beneath seemingly innocent words, calculated silences or "jokes" that wound.

3.3. The spirit of strife

The second thing James names is "strife": the desire to create conflict, to stir up a dispute, to be right at any cost. The original term describes a spirit of rivalry and faction, the ambition to impose oneself. Paul uses the same word when he says: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

The spirit of strife can wear very pious clothes. A person can "defend the truth" in a spirit that has nothing of the truth about it. He can quote correct verses with a clenched heart. That is why Paul writes to Timothy: "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

3.4. Earthly, sensual, devilish

James's diagnosis is unambiguous: "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15). The three adjectives describe three levels of the same origin:

Earthly: it takes its measure from this world, from its values, from the way ordinary people settle their conflicts.

Sensual: it springs from the soul of the unrenewed man, from his reactions, his wounds and his pride.

Devilish: it bears the imprint of the evil one, who from the beginning was "a murderer" and "a liar" (John 8:44) and who sows division among brethren.

The consequence is described in the next verse: "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Where this wisdom is at work there is no longer peace or rest. It is no longer the Kingdom of God but the kingdom from below.

The church in Corinth is a clear example. Paul writes to them: "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:3). The Corinthians had rich spiritual gifts, but they lived by a wisdom from below. Paul calls them "babes in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1): people born again, but stuck in the ways of the flesh.

The apostle's weeping in Philippians must be read in the same light: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame,

who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:18–19). To "mind earthly things" does not mean only thinking about money; it means living by a way of life that belongs to the past, not to the present of the new creation.

3.5. "Lie not against the truth"

James adds a warning: whoever has bitter envying and strife should "glory not, and lie not against the truth". The subtlest lie is not the one told to others but the one we tell ourselves: "I'm fine. Everything is all right between me and God." The prophet says: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). And John: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

The intention to hurt someone does not appear out of nowhere; it has a root. The first step towards healing is to acknowledge it, not to cover it with spiritual language. A doctor cannot treat a disease the patient denies.

4. The wisdom that comes from above (James 3:17–18)

4.1. A portrait of the wisdom from above

Having described the wisdom from below, James paints the other: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). Each feature deserves to be looked at in turn:

Pure. This comes first, because all the others depend on it. The wisdom from above has no hidden motives and does not mix truth with self-interest.

Peaceable. It seeks peace, not victory. The wise person does not ask "Who is right?" but "How do we come to peace?"

Gentle. It does not impose, force or wound; it can be firm, but it is not harsh.

Easy to be intreated. It can be persuaded and can give way. It is not stubbornness disguised as principle.

Full of mercy and good fruits. It bends down towards the one who suffers and proves itself in concrete deeds.

Without partiality. It does not have different measures for friends and for those it does not like.

Without hypocrisy. It is the same before people and before God, in public and at home.

In the light of the Lord's words in Luke 6, we may add that the wisdom from above is also forgiving. Forgiveness is not born of the flesh; it too comes from above: "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven" (Luke 6:36–37).

This portrait is not an abstract list of virtues. It is the face of the Lord Jesus. He is "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24), and in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

4.2. Meekness, the mark of the wisdom from above

James links wisdom with meekness from the very first verse of the passage: "his works with meekness of wisdom" (3:13). Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23) and one of the traits the Lord Jesus named about Himself: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

Biblical meekness is not weakness. The Greek word was used in ancient times for a tamed horse as well. A wild horse and a tamed horse have the same strength; the difference is that the second has put its strength under the bridle and uses it at its master's command. That is what meekness is: strength under control, placed at God's service. Of Moses, the leader of a whole nation, Scripture says: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). And the Lord Jesus, who had all power, entered Jerusalem "meek, and sitting upon an ass" (Matthew 21:5).

Meekness also carries a promise: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Those who do not fight for their rights on earth will receive everything from God.

4.3. The fruit of righteousness, sown in peace

James ends the passage with an image from farming: "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:18). A farmer does not sow on a battlefield. Seed needs quiet ground, worked patiently. In the same way, righteousness does not grow in an atmosphere of envy and strife, but where people seek peace.

That is why, in every relationship, our intention must be peace. "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). And the Lord says: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). The one who makes peace resembles his Father.

5. Love for enemies and the Father's mercy (Luke 6:27–38)

5.1. Hatred, neutrality, love

The Lord Jesus says: "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:35).

Towards someone who wrongs us, three attitudes are possible: hatred, neutrality and love. The distance between them is enormous. The natural person, even the religious one, would say:

"Let's at least be neutral. Let's not hate him, let's not do anything to him, but let's have nothing to do with him either." We think this way because our problem is hatred, and hatred belongs to the things on the earth. Neutrality already seems to us a great victory.

But the Lord does not ask us for neutrality; He asks for love. Imagine a man who has been wronged by his neighbour. The first response would be to pay him back in the same coin. The second, to turn his back on him and stop greeting him. The third, the response of the Kingdom, is to greet him first, to help his sick child, to pray for him. Only the third response comes from above.

5.2. The Father's example

The reason for this command is not a strategy for relationships but the character of God: "he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." In Matthew the Lord says the same: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44–45).

God does good even to His enemies. And we ourselves were among them: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"; "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:8, 10). Whoever has received such love can no longer demand more of others than he himself has received.

5.3. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful"

Mercy is the name God gave Himself before Moses: "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). The psalmist adds: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:13).

The command "Be ye therefore merciful" does not ask for a virtue foreign to us, then, but for likeness to the Father. Children are recognised by their parents' features. When a child of God is merciful, people see in him the face of his Father.

5.4. Judge not, condemn not, forgive

Immediately after the command to be merciful, the Lord adds: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you… For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:37–38).

The three verbs form a downward staircase of the flesh: judging leads to condemning, and condemning shuts the door on forgiveness. The Lord reverses them: no judging, no condemning, but forgiving. Forgiveness is spiritual; it comes from the Kingdom of God and cannot be produced by the strength of the flesh. And the principle of the measure warns us: the measure we use for others will be used for us.

6. "Who art thou that judgest another?" (James 4:11–12)

6.1. Speaking evil as a form of judging

James comes back to this subject: "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" (James 4:11–12).

The link between speaking evil and judging is no accident. Speaking evil is judgement pronounced out loud. Whoever speaks evil of a brother has already judged him in his heart and is now passing the sentence on to others.

6.2. The courtroom in our mind

Judging is a work of the flesh, and the way it works is easy to recognise. We do not have the qualifications of a judge in a court of law. We cannot give anyone a year in prison, nor can we discipline him at work. But we have an invisible courtroom in our minds. There we open the file, hear only one side, pronounce the verdict, fix the punishment and then carry it out in the only way we can: we speak evil of the person. We tell others what this one or that one has done and how bad he is.

When we do this, says James, we speak evil of the law and judge the law. We sit in the seat that belongs to God alone. Paul asks the same: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth" (Romans 14:4). And: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

6.3. Judging is taken from us, and that is a release

In the Kingdom of God, judging is taken out of our hands. We have no right to judge, because we are not the Lawgiver. But this is for our good. The one who no longer carries the burden of judging everyone stays at rest. A judge in a courtroom takes the heavy files home with him; the disciple who has handed judgement over to God sleeps in peace. This is the rest promised to those who learn from the One who is "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

6.4. The Lord Jesus did not make Himself a judge

The Lord Himself refused to judge during the days of His earthly life: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).

In Luke 12 we find a telling scene: "And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (Luke 12:13–14). The situation could hardly be more up to date. Where there is an inheritance, there are rights, obligations and quarrels. Perhaps one of the brothers cared for the parents and reckons that everything is his due, while the other feels wronged. The Lord refuses the role of arbiter and takes the discussion down to the root: "Take

heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

In the same way, before the woman taken in adultery, the Lord did not deny the sin, but neither did He condemn her: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). In these two sentences lies the whole balance: no condemnation, but a call to new life.

6.5. To discern is not to condemn

It is true that we discern people's deeds. The Lord asks us to know people "by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16), and Scripture speaks of the mature, "who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). It is precisely because we discern that we know someone is our enemy: he has struck us, insulted us, speaks badly to us.

The difference between discerning and condemning is the difference between a doctor and a judge. A doctor makes an accurate diagnosis, sometimes a serious one, but he does so in order to heal. A judge pronounces a sentence in order to punish. Christ's disciple discerns like the doctor, not like the judge. He sees the evil, but his calling is not to condemn the person but to love him and, if possible, to lift him up. And before anything else he looks at himself: "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

7. Restoring the fallen (Galatians 6:1–2)

7.1. "Ye which are spiritual"

Paul writes: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1–2).

The measure of spirituality is not how quickly we notice someone else's fault, but what we do once we have noticed it. The spiritual person is a citizen of heaven; he can do nothing but good to his brother. He does not condemn him; he restores him.

7.2. What "restore" means

The verb Paul uses was used for mending fishing nets and, in medical language, for setting a dislocated bone. Both images speak volumes. The fisherman does not throw away a torn net; he mends it mesh by mesh, patiently. The doctor setting a bone does not strike the injured arm; he works with care, knowing that any sudden movement causes pain. That is how a fallen brother is restored: "in the spirit of meekness".

Scripture also shows us the worth of this work: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:19–20).

7.3. "Considering thyself"

The exhortation ends with a personal warning. The one who restores is not the judge but someone who could fall himself. He cannot say: "How fortunate that you fell in exactly this area! Here I can hit you, because here I'm as solid as concrete," when he himself is very weak in some other area. Whoever knows his own weaknesses can no longer look down on the fallen. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

7.4. Unlearning the instinct to judge

If we think about it, in God's eternal Kingdom judging one's neighbour has no place at all; it is entirely absent. That is why we must train ourselves, starting now, to remove the instinct to judge from our minds. It does not disappear all at once. It is an old reflex, formed over years, which must be unlearned through "the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The instinct to judge leads to condemnation; condemnation leads to slander, to speaking evil and to bitter envying. The Lord teaches us to put these away today, tomorrow and every day, so that we may come to the wisdom that is "peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated".

8. Your neighbour as yourself: the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)

8.1. A question asked to test

To learn how the Lord Jesus looks at the fallen and how we too should look at them, we turn to the parable of the good Samaritan. "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live" (Luke 10:25–28).

The lawyer knew the right answer. The problem was not knowledge but obedience. So, having come to test Him, he was "willing to justify himself" and asked: "And who is my neighbour?" (10:29). Loving the invisible God seems easy to talk about. But John tells us plainly: "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20). There is no love for God without love for one's neighbour.

8.2. The measure "as thyself"

The second part of the commandment has a precise measure: "as thyself". Each of us can see in ourselves that when we do wrong and judge ourselves, we quickly find mitigating circumstances. We judge ourselves gently, we excuse ourselves: "It's not really that bad. I was tired. They provoked me." But for others we have a different measure.

It is as if we had two sets of scales: a light one on which we weigh our own faults and a heavy one on which we weigh the faults of others. Scripture calls this by its name: "Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the LORD" (Proverbs 20:10). The

commandment asks us to use for our neighbour the same scales we use for ourselves: the same understanding, the same patience, the same desire for his good. In another form, it is the golden rule: "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12).

8.3. The road that goes down

The Lord answers with a parable: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30).

The words "went down" first describe a geographical reality. Jerusalem lies about 750 metres (some 2,500 feet) above sea level, and Jericho, near the Dead Sea, almost 250 metres (over 800 feet) below it. Over a distance of about 27 kilometres (17 miles), the road drops nearly a thousand metres through a rocky desert where robbers could easily hide.

Seen spiritually, this road can be a picture of a person going down through sin: from Jerusalem, the holy city, towards Jericho, the city on which a curse was pronounced (Joshua 6:26). This is an application, not the main theme of the parable, but it helps us understand what is asked of us: when someone is going down, when someone falls, the Lord calls us to lift him up, not to pass him by.

8.4. The priest and the Levite: religion without mercy

"And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31–32).

The priest and the Levite were the men closest to the Temple, appointed to teach the people God's Law. Some commentators think they feared ritual uncleanness, since touching a dead body made a person unclean (Numbers 19:11); others, that they feared the robbers. Whatever the reason, the result was the same: they saw, and they passed by on the other side.

This is so subtle that it involves no unkind word and no evil deed. You simply walk past the person and take no further notice of him. But indifference is also a form of condemnation. When we pass by on the other side, we are not loving him; we are judging him: we see his state, reckon in our hearts that he deserves his fate and walk on. This is the kingdom on the earth, even when it wears priestly robes. Religion without mercy can know the whole Law and keep none of it.

8.5. The Samaritan: "he had compassion on him"

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him" (Luke 10:33). The choice of this character was shocking to Jesus' listeners. "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). The despised man becomes the example.

The Samaritan saw exactly what the other two had seen: a man beaten, stripped, half dead. He discerned his state clearly. But what he saw did not turn into condemnation within him; it turned into mercy. The verb used here describes a deep movement of the heart, a compassion that shakes you inside. It is the same word used of the Lord Jesus when "he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad" (Matthew 9:36), and of the prodigal son's father, who saw him "when he was yet a great way off" and "had compassion" (Luke 15:20). The Samaritan has the Father's heart.

His mercy does not remain a feeling. He goes to him, binds up his wounds, pours in oil and wine, sets him on his own animal, brings him to an inn and takes care of him. The next day he pays the innkeeper and promises to cover any further cost (Luke 10:34–35). Mercy from above costs time, money, effort and risk.

At the end the Lord turns the question round. The lawyer had asked, "Who is my neighbour?" The Lord asks: "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" The answer comes: "He that shewed mercy on him." And the command is short: "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:36–37). The question is no longer whom I must love, but whose neighbour I choose to become.

8.6. "Stripped" and "half dead"

The Lord does not choose His words at random. He could have said that the robbers hit him a little; instead He said that they stripped him, robbed him of everything and left him half dead. The man was in a state in which, by human judgement, he was no longer worth approaching.

The word "stripped" reminds us that Scripture calls us to put off the old man and put on the new (Colossians 3:9–10; Ephesians 4:22–24). The man in the parable was left with nothing, and the Samaritan clothed him with his care. That is what Christ did for us. Of Him it is written: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench" (Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20). And He sends us to a lesson we must learn: "go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6).

The parable speaks of mercy. We, however, often carry bitter envying and a spirit of strife in our hearts. The difference between them is enormous: envy seeks to hurt the other person, mercy seeks to heal him; the spirit of strife wants to win, mercy wants to lift up.

9. The clothing of the heavenly citizen (Colossians 3:1–15)

9.1. Putting off and putting on

We began with Colossians 3:1–2, "Set your affection on things above", and now we return to the same chapter. Paul first shows what must be put off: "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Colossians 3:8–10).

Then he shows what must be put on: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body" (Colossians 3:12–15).

These are the things above: mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, love and peace. They are not material things, as many believe. They are Christ's garment, which we are to wear.

9.2. Identity before command

Paul does not begin with the command but with identity: "as the elect of God, holy and beloved". "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). To those who have put off the old man, the apostle says: now put on. The garment matches the identity. A prince does not avoid rags because he has been ordered not to wear them, but because they do not suit him. In the same way, the one who is loved by God can no longer wear the garment of anger and envy.

9.3. "Even as Christ forgave you"

Verse 13 touches a point where our problem often lies: forgiveness. Its measure is not how much we think the other person deserves, but how much we ourselves have received: "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

The Lord illustrated this with the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21–35). A servant owed the king ten thousand talents, a sum impossible to pay, and the whole debt was forgiven him. Going out, he met a fellow servant who owed him a hundred pence; he took him by the throat and had him thrown into prison. When the king found out, he said to him: "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" (Matthew 18:33). Whoever remembers how much he has been forgiven can no longer refuse forgiveness to someone who owes him little. And Peter's question, "how oft shall … I forgive?", receives an answer that does away with all counting: "Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22).

10. Faith that we can be like Him

All this might seem a beautiful but unattainable ideal. This is where faith comes in. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The things above are among the things not seen. That is why we need an unshakeable confidence that we can come to be like the Lord Jesus.

The command is not given to discourage us, but because it can be fulfilled. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). God does not leave us alone with the command: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain

unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). What God asks, He Himself gives.

11. Comparative overview

The two spiritual realities can be set side by side. They differ not in anything material but in their origin: one comes from below, the other from above.

Aspect	The things below	The things above
Origin	the earthly nature, the world, the evil one	God, "the Father of lights"
Wisdom	bitter envying, a spirit of strife (James 3:14–16)	pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated (James 3:17)
Towards the enemy	hatred or, at best, neutrality	love and doing good (Luke 6:35)
Towards the fallen	condemnation or indifference, "passed by on the other side"	mercy and restoring "in the spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1)
Speaking about others	speaking evil, judging (James 4:11)	blessing, praying for them
The measure	light scales for oneself, heavy scales for others	"thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27)
State of the heart		

confusion and every evil work (James 3:16)

peace and rest (Matthew 11:29)

The fruit

the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19–21)

the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)

The garment

the old man (Colossians 3:8–9)

mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness (Colossians 3:12–13)

12. Conclusions

The things on the earth are, first of all, things of the heart. They cannot be reduced to material possessions. Bitter envying, the spirit of strife, judging and indifference are "earthly, sensual, devilish", even when they wear religious clothes.

The things above are the fruits of the Kingdom lived out now. Love for enemies, mercy, forgiveness, meekness and peace are not reserved for the life to come. They are the marks of heavenly citizenship in everyday life.

Wisdom is proved by conduct. James does not measure wisdom by knowledge but by "works with meekness of wisdom".

Judging our neighbour is taken from us. There is only one Judge. Discerning deeds is necessary; condemning the person is not ours to do. Giving up judging is also a release, because it brings us rest.

The spiritual person restores; he does not condemn. The measure of spirituality is what we do with the fallen: we restore him "in the spirit of meekness", considering ourselves.

Mercy is the Father's heart. The Samaritan saw the same state that the priest and the Levite saw, but in him what he saw became mercy, not condemnation.

The new man puts on Christ's garment. Mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering and forgiveness are the clothing of the chosen, and over them all is love.

Applications for the believer's life

Examining the roots. Let us ask ourselves honestly whether there is in our hearts an intention to hurt someone or a desire to be right at any cost, and let us not lie against the truth.

Closing the courtroom. When we notice that we are beginning to judge someone and speak evil of them, let us remember the question: "Who art thou that judgest another?"

The same scales. Let us judge others with the same understanding with which we judge ourselves.

Stopping on the road. Let us not pass by the fallen on the other side, but go to them, help them and lift them up.

Forgiving by Christ's measure. Let us forgive as He has forgiven us, without keeping count.

May the Lord help us all to set our affection on the things above and to seek them.

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