

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Matthew 6:33

I. INTRODUCTION: I

I. **2** Every endeavor of man requires knowledge; we must acquire and apply knowledge to be successful at anything we undertake.

A. ****** It is also important as we acquire knowledge of any endeavor we propose to engage in to first lay a foundation of the basic knowledge/skills required to achieve success.

(1) Sports analogy: basketball

- (a) A young man does not pick up a basketball for the first time and announce: "I'm ready for the NBA!"
- (b) To be a successful basketball player one must first learn and master the fundamentals: dribbling, shooting, defense, screening, working as a team member, etc.
- (c) If you watch any championship caliber team you will notice (if you know the game) that each player has mastered the fundamentals of the game and knows his/her role that best contributes to the team's success.

(2) Mathematics analogy: calculus

- (a) If a person proposes to master calculus, he/she must lay a strong foundation in other mathematical skills before tackling calculus.
- (b) If a person does not have strong skills in addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, algebra, geometry, etc. it is useless to try to teach them calculus.

(3) Building a house analogy:

- (a) When you build a house, you must first lay a strong, square, and level foundation.
- (b) The entire rest of the structure depends on the soundness of the foundation.
- (c) If the foundation is weak, out of square, not level; the entire house will be flawed, faulty, and doomed to failure!

B. ****** The same is true in the spiritual realm:

- (1) If we do not have a solid base of knowledge in what is involved in being a Christian; we will not be a spiritual success.
- (2) Furthermore, even if we've been a Christian for decades, we need to occasionally remind ourselves of the basics!

2 Pet. 1:12-15: "For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. ¹³ Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, ¹⁴ knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. ¹⁵ Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease."

Phil. 3:1: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe."

1 Jn. 2:21: "I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth."

2. Over the next few weeks we will be embarking on a series of lessons with the general theme of “growing in grace and the knowledge of the Lord.”
 - A. ****** This is a scriptural theme (2 Pet. 3:17-18).

2 Pet. 3:17-18: “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”
 - B. These lessons are intended to help Christians grow and be strong in the Lord; to shore up our foundation, if you will (Matt. 7:24-27).
 - (1) When one obeys the gospel, he/she is added to the Lord’s church (Acts 2:47; Gal. 3:27).
 - (2) But, regardless of chronological age, a new member of the Lord’s church is a “babe” in Christ and must learn what his/her responsibilities are to Christ and His word (**1 Pet. 2:2:** “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”).
 - (3) We cannot remain “babes” in Christ (**1 Cor. 14:20:** “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.”).
 - (4) Even those who have been a Christian for decades need to be reminded of first principles (1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Pet. 1:12; 2 Pet. 3:1).
 - (5) ****** It’s shameful for one who has been a Christian for several years to not be well-grounded in the “basics”!

Heb. 5:12-14: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”
3. **3** One very important thing is this: After a person has obeyed the gospel, he must learn to put “**First Things First**” (Matt. 6:25-34, esp. v. 33).
4. Let’s study and see if we can learn just what it means to put “**First Things First**” (8 points).

II. DISCUSSION:

The very “first thing” we **MUST** put first is...

I. **4** The Lord is #1:

- A. The very first thing one does as a Christian is to give himself to the Lord; totally, completely, absolutely! Matt. 12:30
 - (1) Some it seems either didn’t learn that or do so only sporadically when it suits them (i.e., bipolar Christians).
 - (2) They are forgetful and negligent!
 - (3) We cannot be lackadaisical in our commitment and service to Christ!
- B. When we obeyed the gospel we are no longer our own: **1 Cor. 6:19-20:** “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”; Rom. 12:1-2
- C. Nothing in our life should be more important than serving and pleasing the Lord! It should constantly occupy our mind!

2 Cor. 5:9-10: "...we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. *10* For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

- D. We need to always remember the tremendous price God paid for us! **Acts 20:28:** "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

1 Pet. 1:18-19: "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, *19* but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

- E. The saints in Corinth were told how the churches of Macedonia put first things first (**2 Cor. 8:5:** "And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.")).

- F. Other things will come much easier if we will first give ourselves to the Lord.

(1) We cannot serve two masters! **Matt. 6:24**

(2) We may successfully fool ourselves into believing we can serve two masters, but we won't fool God! **Jas. 4:4:** "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

(3) Too much is at stake not to totally, completely, and absolutely give ourselves to the Lord! **Matt. 16:26; 10:39:** "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

The next "first thing" we MUST put first is...

2. ** Willing mind:

- A. A willing mind is an absolute must for spiritual success! **2 Cor. 8:12:** "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have."

- B. God has always required that His people have a willing mind:

(1) Building of the tabernacle (**Ex. 35:5:** "Whoever is of a willing heart").

(2) David to Solomon (**1 Chr. 28:9:** "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.")).

- C. Only the "willing" will be saved!

Rev. 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let him that heareth say, 'Come.' And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (KJV)

Jn. 7:17: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."

"You have to be tough and stick it out, or you wind up being nothing."

—Joe Louis

"Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die."

—Joe Louis

- D. Whatever we do in serving God, He wants us to do it w/a willing mind! **Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 6:17**

- E. No pun intended but to make it to heaven you and I will have to want it more than anything in the world! **Lk. 22:42:** “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.”

The next “first thing” we **MUST** put first is...

3. ** First cleanse the inside:

- A. In obeying the gospel, one purifies his soul (**1 Pet. 1:1, 22:** “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.”).
- B. We must constantly focus on keeping the “inside” clean.
- (1) Recall Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees (**Matt. 23:25-26:** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”).
 - (2) When we profess one thing but do another, we are hypocrites! (Hypocrite: an actor, a stage player, a pretender (Thayer)).
 - (3) One can do no greater harm to the cause of Christ than to be hypocritical (Many use “hypocrites in the church” as an excuse not to obey the gospel!).
- C. We must exert all effort to remain pure on the inside; we must strive to be the “real deal” (**1 Thess. 5:22:** “Abstain from all appearance of evil.”; **Matt. 5:14-16**).
- (1) Paul’s exhortations to Timothy (**1 Tim. 4:12:** “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”; **1 Tim. 5:22:** “...keep yourself pure”; **2 Cor. 7:1:** “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”).
 - (2) We are what we think! (**Prov. 23:7;** **Matt. 15:19-20:** “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”; **Phil. 4:8:** “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things.”).

Another “first thing” we **MUST** put first is...

4. ** Consider your own faults:

- A. It is easier to see other’s faults than our own: **Matt. 7:3-5:** “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”
- B. So, we must be very cognizant of our own faults, failings, and weaknesses: First cast out the beam in thine own eye! (Parents: this is especially important in raising godly children!)
- (1) It is not wrong to point out other’s faults to them (**Jas. 5:20**).
 - (2) We just need to do it in the right spirit (**Gal. 6:1:** “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”).

C. This doesn't mean that we are not to make "judgments" :

Matt. 7:1-2: "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Matt. 7:6: "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."

Matt. 7:15-16: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"; 1 Jn. 4:1.

D. Point: we are not to make hypocritical or hypercritical judgments!

Jn. 7:24: "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Prov. 18:17: "The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him." (i.e., don't "jump" to conclusions!)

1 Cor. 13:5b-7: "...thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (i.e., graciously extend the "benefit of the doubt" to others!)

Another "first thing" we **MUST** put first is to be...

5. **Easily entreated:**

A. Problems among brethren (family, friends, co-workers, etc.) are bound to happen.

B. The key is how we handle problems when they occur!

(1) Some folks are temperamental, high strung, volatile, touchy, defensive, easily offended; some people "get their dander up" easily and can be "difficult"!

(2) On the contrary, we must try always to be "peaceable" (**Rom. 12:18:** "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.").

(3) Pursuing peace must be our constant "top priority" (**Rom. 14:19:** "Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.").

(4) When strife comes seek to defuse the situation rather than escalate it.

(5) Requires a great deal of humility on our part! Because, we must put the interests of others above our own (**Phil. 2:2-4:** "fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.").

C. Read Matt. 5:21-24—Note that God will not accept our worship when we are at odds with our brother.

D. Jesus also prescribes proper conduct when a brother sins against us (Matt. 18:15-17; 2 Thess. 3:15; **Eph. 4:31-32:** "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.").

E. Never let your anger get the best of you!

Jas. 1:19-20: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."; Eph. 4:26

Eccl. 7:9: “Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.”

Another “first thing” we **MUST** put first is to...

6. ** Continue earnestly in prayer:

A. We have a very important obligation to remember a lot of folks in our prayers!

1 Tim. 2:1-4: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. 3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

(1) “kings,”

(2) “all that are in authority,”

(3) “all men.”

B. There is nothing more important we can do for someone than to pray for them.

C. When is the last time you prayed for:

(1) The brethren here? **Eph. 6:18-19:** “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints — 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,”

(2) The Lord’s work here?

(3) Your enemies! **Matt. 5:43-45:** “‘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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,”

(4) The lost? 1 Tim. 2:4

D. We need to remember the power of prayer! Jas. 5:16; Lk. 18:1-8

Col. 4:2: “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;”

Another “first thing” we **MUST** put first is to...

7. ** Share the gospel:

A. After learning the truth of the gospel, we need to find others and share the truth with them. We are saved to save! 1 Tim. 2:4

(1) Someone taught you the gospel; so, go share it with someone else! **2 Tim. 2:2:** “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

(2) Your influence in this regard is much more powerful than you might think: **1 Tim. 4:16:** “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”

B. Each of us needs to be an Andrew (**Jn. 1:40-42a:** “One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. 41 He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus.”).

C. We sing a song, “You Never Mentioned Him to Me”; what a sad refrain!

- D. No matter how much we may dislike someone; when we consider the stark reality of an eternal hell, surely, we can overcome that dislike and have true concern for their eternal welfare (**Ezek. 33:8-9**: “When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die!’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.”).

Another “first thing” we MUST put first is to...

8. 6 Seek Him first:

A. Read Matt. 6:25-34

(1) What is the “kingdom”?

“‘Kingdom of God’ points to God’s rule (v 13, 3.2). To seek first the kingdom means we have an undivided loyalty for and obedience to the things of God. The most important thing in life that we constantly seek (present indicative) to do God’s will on earth, as it is done in heaven (v 10).” (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 131)

(2) What is God’s “righteousness”?

“‘Righteousness’ likely refers to the forgiveness God (v 12) gives and the right conduct that befits a son of God (5.6).” (K. L. Chumbley, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 131)

(3) Synonymous with justified (in God’s sight), approved (in God’s sight), not guilty (acquitted) of sin.

Rom. 10:1-4: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Rom. 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”

B. What are somethings involved in seeking first the kingdom?

(1) ** Attending regularly:

- (a)** The Lord expects His people to attend the services of the church faithfully! (Heb. 10:25; for our own good! For the good of others!)

Heb. 10:23-25: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (KJV)

- (b)** How could one legitimately claim to be “seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”; “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering” when they only attend when you don’t have anything better to do?

(2) ** Giving purposefully and liberally:

- (a) God requires His people to give with purpose and as one is prospered (2 Cor. 8 & 9: 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:35; Lk. 6:38).
- (b) What would happen to the work here if everyone had your attitude toward giving?
- (c) Remember the widow? Mk. 12:41-44 No shame in only giving a very small amount!
- (3) **** Study regularly:**
 - (a) God expects us to know His will (Eph. 5:17; 3:3-4).
 - (b) “Knowing” requires study (2 Pet. 1:5; 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11; Rev. 1:3).
 - (c) Why wouldn’t you want to study? **Acts 20:32:** *“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”*
- (4) **** Being zealous in church work:**
 - (a) Note **Titus 2:14:** *“who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”*
 - (b) First century Christians were zealous and steadfast (Acts 2:42; 8:4; 1 Thess. 1:8; 2 Cor. 9:2).
 - (c) Need to always remember 1 Corinthians 15:58! (cf. Matt. 6:19-21)
- (5) **** Take time for God:**
 - (a) It takes time to be holy! (recall song, “Take Time to Be Holy”)
 - (b) Time goes by so swiftly! If we are not extremely careful, we can let the everyday things of life steal all of our time! **Psa. 90:12:** *“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”*; Eph. 5:16
 - (c) “Life is what happens to you when you’re making other plans.” (John Witt)

III. CONCLUSION: 7

1. Whether we obeyed the gospel this morning or 60 years ago, we need to put first things first!
2. By putting first things first, one will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord: **2 Pet. 3:17-18:** *“You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*
3. Have you been putting first things first?
 - A. If yes, great! Continue to do so! 1 Cor. 15:58
 - B. If not, why not change your priorities now!
4. Invitation

Adapted from: *Growing in Grace and Knowledge of the Lord*, by Johnie Edwards, Titus Edwards, Johnie P. Edwards, Edwards Publishing, pp. 1-3)