

What is Your Priority in Life?

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What is your priority in life? I Googled the term “priority” and found this from Oxford: the fact or condition of being regarded or treated as more important / a thing that is regarded as more important than another. A few months ago, I was talking to a York County Sheriff Deputy who was talking about an incident where they had to serve a warrant on a male subject at his house. When they got inside the house, the living conditions were very bad – unclean and nasty. The two children living there were in bad condition as well. The problem was the male subject was dressed in nice expensive clothes and he had a very expensive vehicle sitting in the driveway. The “priorities” of this male subject was on himself. The welfare for the children was lower down on his list. The sheriffs had to call another agency in to have the children taken care of. What is our “priorities” in life? People can know our priorities by just watching how we live. If we say we are a Christian, then our priorities should be pleasing God in every way. However, this may be harder than it sounds.

Apostle Paul makes an interesting statement in Galatians 5: 13 – 18, “For you have been called to live in freedom – not freedom to satisfy your sinful nature, but freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’. But if instead of showing love among yourselves you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just the opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict. But when you are directed by the Holy Spirit, you are no longer subject to the law. (NLT, 1866)” Paul is talking to the Church here through the Holy Spirit. There is a conflict that we have to deal with as a Christian from time to time. It is the conflict between our human nature and

the new life we have with Jesus where His Spirit should be leading the way in our life. Paul tells us that when we make choices, there can be conflict between these two forces and he also states that these two forces are constantly fighting each other and we are not free from this conflict. However, Paul points out by saying that we should be directed by the Holy Spirit in our lives, not by the leading of our human nature. We know that the Holy Spirit lives inside us if we have allowed Jesus into our hearts. He is there to guide and direct us if we choose Him to do so. This is where “priorities” comes in. If Jesus is not our number one priority in our daily life, then what is? If not Jesus, then Jesus is not our priority and how then can we call ourselves a Christian? If living for Jesus is our top priority in our life, then our actions will prove that. The conflict is when our human nature wants us to make something else to be top priority – like make ourselves our top priority. The male subject the Sheriffs had to deal with only thought about himself, not his own children. His human nature was guiding his choices in life, not God. He was his own top priority

James had to deal with the same issue with the Christian Jews of his day. James states this in James 4: 1 – 3, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (NIV)” What James states in verse 1 goes along the same line as Paul about the battle of our desires within us. The Church at this time was having a problem with this. Their actions demonstrated that they were allowing their desires from within to rule over them. They were fighting and quarrelling among themselves. A friend of mine works at the York Fair Grounds as a security guard. Last weekend they had a train show. He told me how some vendors got into a fist fight over a toy train. Someone couldn’t get what they wanted, so they fought over it. How many fights happen within a church because people want their own way, but can’t have it. Then James adds onto this in verse 3 by saying that even when they did ask God for something, they ask with wrong motives. The reason they ask with wrong motives is because they don’t ask to please God,

they ask to fulfill their own pleasures. This goes back to what our priorities are in life. As a follower of Jesus, our priority should be to please Him first, not ourselves. Look at what's going on within the church today. People want the church to accept certain practices and it's because they want to fulfill their own pleasures, not to please God. Their priority is to please themselves, not God. When God is not our top priority in life, not only does it show our own selfish desires, but it shows something else.

James adds onto this in James 4: 4 – 6 where he states this, “You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God. What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful? (James may be talking about New Testament Scripture here). He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, ‘God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble. (Proverbs 3:34) (NLT, 1990)” James now tells us that because of these selfish desires that causes us to make ourselves top priority, they also show that we have become friends of this world. James makes very plain here that if we become friends of this world, we have become an enemy to God. Remember, Jesus had told us we can't serve two master – money and God in Matthew 6. We also can't serve this world and God at the same time. We'll either love the one and hate the other. The Church has allowed itself in many areas to become friends to this world. Now, we have to be careful here. If we go back to Paul in Galatians, He did tell us we are to serve one another in love – Godly love. We can't be friends with this world, but we are commanded to show love even when it hurts. I talked to someone this week at another business where they told me how their spouse had beaten them. It got to the point they had to leave the spouse because it got so bad. However, the person stated how they had forgiven the spouse for what they had done to them. That doesn't mean they moved back with the person, but they had forgiven that person for the sin they had committed against them. The person stated how they didn't want to live in hate and bitterness and how they felt freedom when they forgave their ex-spouse in their heart. The world would say

to get even with that spouse and that would go against the law of God. This person wanted to please God first, not herself or this world. Paul and James are telling us Jesus should be our top priority in our life and then everything else will fall into place like a puzzle.

Then James let's us know that when we make ourselves / this world our top priority, it hurts the Holy Spirit that lives within us because He jealously longs for our spirit to commune with Him (my paraphrase). Paul tells us back in Galatians that when we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our lives, we are no longer subject to the law. God's Spirit wants the best for us. He jealously longs for our spirit to commune with Him because this is why we were created for – to have a relationship with God, not this evil world. The Lord knows what will happen when we make the choice to embrace this world and make pleasing this world and ourselves our top priority – it will lead to destruction. Just think what would happen if our own government decided to please God first instead of themselves. How things would be much different. How much different our own lives would be if we would totally embrace the Lord and make Him our top priority in our lives.

Some may say it is very difficult to live in this world and try to make God our top priority in our life because there are so many things pulling at us every day. This is true. It can be very hard to make the Lord our top priority in life when you are working a full-time job, raising a family, taking care of parents, taking care of a house and yard, and the list can go on and on. James does give us some hope on this in verse 6 where he tells us that "He" gives us more and more strength to stand against the evil desires that makes people become friends to this world. The Holy Spirit that jealously longs for us wants to help us from becoming friends to this world. I looked up the Greek term for "jealously". In the KJV, the term is "lusteth". The Greek term is "epipotheo" which means: to long for, to crave, earnestly desiring (Strong's Concordance). The Holy Spirit within you earnestly desires to have a relationship with you on a daily basis. Plus, He will give us grace / strength to make sure we serve Him and not ourselves or this world. Who wants to serve this world?

For us to receive this grace of strength we must humble ourselves before the Lord. James tells us in verse 6 to humble ourselves, but he continues, “So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites. Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor. (NLT, 1990)” So, James starts off by telling us to “humble” or other translations it is “submit” ourself before God. The Greek term used here means “to submit”. In other words, we must make the choice to give ourselves to God fully and to become aware that we don’t want to become friends with this world (we humble ourselves before God) – we have to make that choice. Then, we ask for the Lord’s help to do this. Then, we can come near to God and when that happens, we can resist the devil and he will flee from us. The closer you draw to the Lord, the harder it is for the devil to woo us because the power of the Lord will protect you spiritually. Satan still will shoot his arrows at us, but the Lord’s Spirit will help us to endure in every way. The devil won’t stay around as long if we’re close to God. If we’re not close to God, he’ll hang around us like a biting fly does. When we make the choice to make our priority to allow His Spirit to guide us to the Lord and make Him the Lord of our whole life, He will lift us up and give us honor. Then we’ll experience and fully understand why we were created – to have a close relationship with Him, not this world (which is dying because of sin). We have a choice to make. What is your priority in your daily life? To please the Lord or to please yourself and this world. I believe the only option for us is to make the choice to submit ourselves to Him fully. I believe this is why so many Christians feel empty today. It’s only a prayer away.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996.

The Strongest Strong’s Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001