

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

# THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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## “The First and Great Commandment”

When Jesus was asked, “*Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*” (**Matthew 22:36**), He said “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*” He went on to add that the “**second**” is to love others as ourselves (**verses 37-39**).

The “*first and great commandment*” is probably among the best-known and least-practiced of our Lord’s commands. God did not leave it up to us to decide how to “love” Him. He defines for us what genuine love for Him is.

**1 John 5:3** says “*For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous.*” The verse before says “*by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments.*” In **John 14:15**, Jesus said “*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*”

In other words, the love God demands from us involves surrendering our will to His, so that His instruction becomes the guide of our lives.

It involves shaping our lives around what pleases Him (**2 Corinthians 5:9**). It demands change, sacrifice, and hard work.

The apostle Paul expressed true love for God in **Galatians 2:20**, when he said, “*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*”

This is much more demanding than the superficial view of loving God that is more about “serving” Him however we’d like.

Yet, it is the only appropriate way to respond to what He has done for us. When we consider the great “*mercies of God,*” how can we respond any other way but to present our “*bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God*” (**Romans 12:1**)?

Surrendering wholeheartedly to Him will never “earn” the salvation He offers by His grace. But such wholehearted surrender is the reasonable way to answer the Gospel message, which centers on the love God has shown us by sending His Son to die (**Romans 5:8**).

We must give our lives to the One who gave His life for us. **2 Corinthians 5:15** says that Jesus “*died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*”

This is what love for God is all about. Understanding this sheds much light on why our Lord said, “*This is the first and great commandment.*”

## “The Prosperity Gospel”

A characteristic of the sinner mentioned in **1 Timothy 6:3-5** is that he supposes “*that gain is godliness.*”

Some in the world of “Christendom” teach that living godly leads to earthly riches. This false teaching is not merely that God takes care of His children (cf. **Psalm 37:25**), that He helps the benevolent continue to give (cf. **2 Corinthians 9:6-15**), or that being a Christian discourages carelessness with money (cf. **Romans 13:8a**). Rather, the view is that Christianity is a blueprint for being wealthier than those around us. This is sometimes referred to as the “prosperity gospel.”

Such false teaching causes many to under-value the true riches available in Christ. Others are led to think that if they have more riches than someone else, it is a result of being more godly.

What is ironic about this misconception is that the One *Christianity* is founded upon was relatively poor at times as He walked on earth (cf. **Luke 9:58**). Many of His obedient followers were likewise poor (cf. **2 Corinthians 11:27**).

*Some* of Christ’s disciples are materially rich, but not nearly all are. Nor is the Bible a pattern for gaining earthly riches.

After stating the error of those who suppose “*that gain is godliness,*” the inspired apostle “turned the tables” to show how “godliness” and “gain” are connected. **1 Timothy 6:6**: *But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

Those who are godly and content with however much or however little they have (cf. **Philippians 4:11-12**) gain the true riches (spiritual riches) available through Christ. These riches far exceed any earthly prosperity.

This point is brought out to two churches Jesus addressed in Revelation. Speaking to the church at Smyrna, Jesus said He knew their “*poverty,*” yet He said they were “*rich*” (**Revelation 2:9**). By contrast, the church at Laodicea said they were “*rich, and increased with goods,*” yet Jesus said they were “*poor*” (**Revelation 3:17**).

While those in Smyrna had little materially, they were strong spiritually. The opposite could be said of the lukewarm Laodiceans.

If we live godly lives, we will receive blessings that cannot be measured with dollar signs...blessings that far outweigh anything the world can offer.

As Jesus said in **Matthew 13:44**, “*the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*” Being a part of the Lord’s kingdom is the greatest treasure one can gain. This is the “prosperity” the Gospel leads to...it is *spiritual* prosperity rather than *carnal* prosperity.

May we lay up “*treasures in heaven*” (**Matthew 6:20**), and not twist Christ’s message into one that elevates earthly wealth above spiritual blessings.

**-Michael Hickox (both articles)**