



Front Cover

# **The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin**

By Guy V. Caskey

With a special chapter on

## **Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

By David Caskey

Cover by Jack Dow

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Guy Caskey, 82, has been preaching the gospel for the past sixty-six years. He began his ministry at age 16 and his work has consisted of local work, gospel meetings, and service as a missionary in Africa and Jamaica. He spent five years in South Africa, three years in East Africa, and five years in Jamaica. His experience in the mission field and his love for the lost made him aware of the need for printed gospel literature to aid in teaching the truth.

A few years after returning to the United States in 1974 to become the pulpit minister of the Randol Mill Road Church of Christ in Arlington, Texas, he was instrumental in establishing Mission Printing. Beginning in 1981, he served as director of Mission Printing or 17 years. His work consisted of preaching and teaching to congregations throughout the brotherhood, writing numerous gospel articles and books, and raising funds for Mission Printing. He is known for his scholarly and studious approach in his preaching and writing, and strives to always be in harmony with God's Word.

Although presently hindered by illness, Guy still feels the urgency to teach and save the lost through his writing and work at Mission Printing. Through his long years of uninterrupted service, many have been taught the truth and have obeyed the gospel.

## **MISSION PRINTING**

After serving as a missionary in Africa and Jamaica, Guy Caskey saw the need to provide written material that would bring the lost to Christ. The culmination of his dream was realized some twenty years ago when Mission Printing was established. Thus a dream became reality.

Mission Printing has its own facility which provides adequate space for its volunteers to work. Men and women print and assemble materials which are used to preach the gospel around the world. All of these materials are sent free of charge. Letters (about 250 a week from 150 countries) are received which tell of many conversions and baptisms, and requesting additional materials.

Some one hundred books are printed, consisting of from eight to four hundred pages on almost 100 Bible subjects. Millions have been printed and sent and some books have been translated into about forty languages. Sixteen different books have been translated into the Paite language of India and 80,000 copies were sent. Last year, Mission Printing sent about forty-five tons of books all over the world to help spread the pure gospel of Christ. The postage alone was over \$60,000 and these figures are growing every year.

Many are investing in the future of Mission Printing. Some have left this work in their wills, some have given paid-up life insurance policies, and others have given an Endowment Fund so that in the future the interest on that money will help pay for part of the paper postage, and other necessary costs. Mission Printing is a non-profit organization and is entirely dependent on contributions. If you can help in this way, or you know a friend or brother who is interested in spreading the Good News of Christ, we would be deeply grateful for that help. After all, the Lord left His church here in this world that we may see to it that it goes to "the uttermost part of the earth."

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# INTRODUCTION

## The Depravity of Man

"That man is a fallen creature, is evident. If we consider his misery as an inhabitant of the natural world: the disorders of the globe we inhabit, and the dreadful scourges with which it is visited; the deplorable and shocking circumstances of our birth; the painful and dangerous travail of women; our natural uncleanness, helplessness, ignorance, and nakedness; the gross darkness in which we naturally are, both with respect to God and a future state; the general rebellion of the brute creation against us; the various poisons that lurk in the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, ready to destroy us; the heavy curse of toil and sweat to which we are liable; the innumerable calamities of life, and the pangs of death.

"Again, it is evident, if we consider him as a citizen of the moral world: his commission sin; his omission of duty; the triumph of sensual appetites over his intellectual faculties: the corruption of the powers that constitute a good head, the understanding, the imagination, memory, and reason; the depravity of the powers which form a good heart, the will, conscience, and affections; his manifest alienation from God; his amazing disregard even of his nearest relatives; his unaccountable unconcern about himself; his detestable tempers; the general outbreaking of human corruption in all individuals; the universal overflowing of it in all nations.

"Some striking proofs of this depravity may be seen in the general propensity of mankind to vain, irrational, or cruel diversions; in the universality of the most ridiculous, impious, inhuman, and diabolical sins; in the aggravating circumstances attending the display of this corruption; in the many ineffectual endeavors to stem the torrent; in the obstinate resistance it makes to divine grace in the unconverted; the amazing struggles of good men with it; the testimony of the heathens concerning it; and the preposterous conceit which the unconverted have of their own goodness."

*(Theological Dictionary, Charles Buck, pp. 142–143)*

## **PREFACE**

Our generation might be remembered as, The Age of Denial. We are preoccupied with analyzing and labeling the ills of our society with terms that gloss over the cause of our predicament. Sin is seldom mentioned, lest we cast blame on the individual and make him responsible for his own behavior. The teachings of the New Testament are preoccupied with the message of transforming power of the gospel, and the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God, made effective in the sacrifice of Jesus.

This must seem sterile in the absence of being convicted of sin, and of finding an external scapegoat for every heinous deed. Mass media is clogged with stories of murder, violent robbery, rape, plunder, sexual abuse, and chemical addiction. Lives are destroyed, society is a jungle, and misery is the common form of existence.

Change must be motivated by awareness. We need again to hear the powerful preaching of the prophets in a world numbed into apathy. This book, *The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, is a scholarly and practical expose of all the Biblical words that give us understanding of sin and its consequences, as well as our deliverance from the grasp of the evil one.

Though designed to provide material for sermons and Bible class lessons when placed in the hands of national preachers and teachers in Third World countries, this book will serve well to encourage all who seek relief from the struggles and disappointments of life by knowing and adapting to the wisdom of him in whose image we are made.

David Caskey  
Missionary to the Bahamas  
1992

## FOREWORD

Over a period of many years the author has constructed the lessons found in this book. Originally, they were either lessons taught in a classroom or sermons delivered from the pulpit. From time to time, they have been modified, rearranged, and hopefully improved.

It is my sincere hope that the national preachers in other countries for whom this book is primarily published will find good use of these materials in their work among their fellow countrymen. If it will enable them to make a contact, prepare a lesson, or preach a sermon that will touch and turn the life of some interested individual, I would seek no higher motive in sending it forth.

And those young men in this country who are now preparing themselves in our Bible training schools to preach the gospel, and who expect to enter the difficult mission of this and foreign countries may find in this book useful materials that will enable them to construct their own lessons to be able to establish the Lord's church and help bring young congregations to greater spiritual maturity. No higher encomium could ever be paid me than for them to feel that these lessons are applicable and appropriate to their use.

Having lived and preached in a number of distant lands, and having associated closely with the people in those countries, I have some understanding of the great dearth of Bible writings accessible to them, particularly in their own languages. We in the church in this country have not been as concerned with this deficiency as we ought and the famine, through our neglect, has been perpetuated. Let us pray that it will not be extended further or prolonged into the future. We must know the importance of writing the gospel down on paper, else how could we cherish our Bibles as we do? And how could we expect to share the message of life and salvation within its sacred pages?

May God move our hearts to share the Good News in this way as well as other ways with people all over the world. Their hope for eternity is contingent upon our doing so.

—Guy V. Caskey



## PROLOGUE

Many times through the years I have said in Bible class lessons and sermons that the word forgiveness is the most meaningful, beautiful, and soul-stirring word to be found in the vocabulary of the language of any people. To me it is the most eloquent word in the Bible. What makes it eloquent is its value to every human being on earth—provided that person takes advantage of God's invitation and proposal to receive and enjoy the inestimable benefits of it.

How could two people, committed to one another in the relationship of marriage, make that alliance work if it were not for forgiveness? One of the first lessons young children are taught in the home is to forgive one another. It is eminently true in the church. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). There is no way for people to be friends over any extended period of time without this distinctive feature that is so Godlike—without this Christian attribute of wiping the slate clean, so to speak.

This book is primarily about sin. I counted more than fifty words in the English language that are synonyms of the term. The study of each corresponding word would be a great lesson within itself. They may not be the exact equivalent in each case, but they are at least counterparts and correspond in meaning. This gives us a larger view of the subject and helps us in a more comprehensive understanding of what God is telling us about the ugly, damaging, and destructive nature of sin. There are almost as many words in the Bible for sin as are found in the English vocabulary.

But while forgiveness is such a beautiful word, sin is everything but beautiful—particularly in the sight of God. Most men in our day are not disturbed by it; they sleep soundly without any compunctions of conscience over having committed it. In the sight of God, it is different. It is the most terrible, dreadful, deplorable word in the language of any people. Without question, it is the most abominable word in the Bible. It is discussed hundreds of times throughout man's history recorded in that sacred Book. Words which help define the term flood in upon my thoughts—flagrant, scandalous, shocking, abominable, dis-

gusting, despicable, reprehensible—are just a few that etch themselves in the minds of Christians we see sin in some measure as God sees it!

In the study of this book, *The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, an effort is made to aid you to see sin as God sees it—as wickedness, iniquity, immorality, depravity, corruption, profligacy, and a hundred other monstrous things sin is in the view God has of it and the pictures He draws of it so vividly for us in His word.

It will be shown that sin is *lawlessness (anomia)*—breaking God's laws (I John 3:4); it is *wrongdoing (adikia)*—falsehood, injustice, deceitfulness (I John 5:17); it is a *failure* to do what we know is right to do (James 4:17); it is a *falling short* of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Someone has said that sin is a lack of conformity to the moral law of God, either in act, disposition, or state. When one is at variance with the law of God, it becomes sin, however innocent or insignificant it may seem. For Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of a tree in the Garden of Eden must have seemed rather harmless and inoffensive, but inasmuch as God had forbidden them to do so, it was a sin—and a sin with far reaching consequences and grim penalties (Genesis 2:17).

When Saul, King of Israel, saved Agag, king of Amalek, alive and spared the best of the sheep and cattle for sacrifice, that must have seemed humane, affectionate, or at least the compassionate thing to do. But God had issued a command, a mandate, to destroy the Amalekites utterly, with all that they possessed. When we sit in judgment on God's actions and decide that our own judgment and decisions constitute a better ruling, we are treading on exceedingly dangerous grounds. That is nonconformity with the will of God and a departure from His rule. It initiates human arbitration and choice and embarks upon a clear course of disobedience.

David and his choice soldiers decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant back to the house of the Lord. They set it on a new cart and the two sons of Abinadeb drove it—Ahio led out, walking before the cart, and his brother, Uzzah, walked along by it. "... And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled." (II Samuel 6:3-6). To keep the Ark of the Cove-

nant from falling to the ground seemed to be the sensible thing to do. What impropriety could be found in such a practical and reasonable move? Listen to the consequences: "Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God" (II Samuel 6:7). This was a flagrant, arrogant, obvious atrocity.

The reason for it was that God had already set out certain simple rules for the *who* and the *how* of transporting this sacred box that contained the Ten Commandments. To ignore or transgress those rules given by the Lord was deadly disobedience. God forbids one to do evil that good may come! One of the ugliest and most discomfoting pictures of sin is found in the list Paul gave the Roman church (Romans 1:18—3:18).

It is really a discourse on the universality of sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

John discussed the subject in the same vein when he said, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (I John 5:19). Besides the universality of sin, he also discusses in these same verses the nature of the disease. He started out in a kind of interview communicating the broad categories of the sins of the Gentiles—heathens, pagans— under the headings of perversion, depravity, debauchery, and the most shameful and unnatural immorality—men having sexual relations with other men and women having unnatural sexual relations with others of their own sex.

These sins shock and horrify decent people. The Jews would be scandalized by them, even if they were guilty of some of the same sins! Generally speaking, however, the sins of the Jews were quite opposite. You see, the sins they committed were the offences of believers; of religious, nice people! The infractions were not as serious, and the law breaking was not in the same classification as misdeeds of the despised Gentiles.

May I make it plain that both species and genre were equally abhorrent to God and threatened the whole of society and brought down God's displeasure and retribution upon them.

In continuing to look at this list furnished by Paul, he itemizes some of the ugly pollution and wickedness in this catalog of offenses.

He points out some things that may be of interest and help to each of us if we will carefully observe them:

**1. Sin is the choice to do wrong.** This is strongly emphasized in this portion of his dissertation on the subject: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and God head, so that they are without excuse," (Romans 1:18-20).

You can see that these people chose the course in which they walked—and for several reasons: (1) they suppress the truth; (2) what may be known of God was manifested to them; (3) God has shown it to them; (4) it was clearly seen and understood; (5) they were without excuse. Men have exercised this ability to ignore, suppress, or postpone the will of God, however plain and explicable it is. God gave man, when He created him, the power of volition and He will not take that from him; but it places an awesome and fearful responsibility upon man to make the right choice.

In this connection we are averse and reluctant to brand *sin* as *sin*. We wish to call it something else like an *illness* or a *disease*. We are unwilling to face up to the fact that alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, overeating, spouse abuse, child abuse, homosexuality, adultery, and such like, belong in God's list of moral corruption, wickedness, and vicious wrong doing. The church is a purified people and that means chaste, virtuous, good, moral, honest, righteous, and uncorrupt, but, in our generation, most people treat sin so capriciously and unimportant that few are diverted from their course or feel any distress from involvement in it.

**2. Sin is the refusal to glorify and thank God.** "Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Romans 1:21). There is nothing more necessary for our happiness and well-being than to recognize that all we have comes from God. He is the great Source of our supply. One has to be miserable and wretched not

to know this; he has to be an ingrate, indeed, not to be thankful. What has been difficult for me to imagine is how ten lepers—men infected with the terrible contagion of an incurable disease—could all be cured of this dreadful, communicable, death dealing disease and only one out of the ten returned to give thanks to his benefactor. It was a transmittable disease; more than that, it was lethal. They escaped from that fatality and yet, in their thanklessness, they did not even take the time to return to Jesus to express their appreciation. Is there a sin more monstrous? Is there an outrage more outrageous? This was not just some impropriety or indecorum, this was the neglect and indifference of a bunch of thankless scoundrels!

What about us? Do we go our merry way each day with scarcely a thought of whence these countless blessings flow? Who pauses with any regularity to give thanks to Him who has provided everything necessary to life and godliness? There are two great wrongs in all this: (1) non-recognition of the origin of our blessings—life and every attendant blessing and (2) non-acknowledgement—no conceding, no attributing, no accrediting, and imputing to God the benedictions that attend every minute of our lives. What great fortune is ours. It may not always be a bed of roses, or the affluent life; we may not always live off the “fat of the land.” The very blessing of life itself, the air we breathe, the measure of health we enjoy, and the food He provides should be considered by us as the “smiles of fortune,” and for fortune’s favor we should be thankful.

It is not just a gift here and there and now and then from God. It is not just a donation or some subsidy He occasionally rations out to us. It is, instead, a constant care and provision for us each minute of each day, else we would perish in the blink of an eye!

**3. Sin is the exchange of immortal for mortal.** Listen to Paul’s rather extended and graphic description of this very sin in this same context: “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Romans 1:22-25).

With hearts darkened by self-centeredness and eyes blinded to the true values of life, man has placed himself at the center of his own world and lavished his affections upon those things he can see and touch and which gave him immediate gratification by assuaging his lusts and quenching his erotic appetite. One need but look casually around him in this old world to see how the majority have turned to worship of the worldly. Men are captivated by the materialistic, infatuated by the one-religious, and seduced by the unsacred. They treasure and idolize the fleshly and the profane; they are ensnared and seduced by the charm and charisma to the unspiritual and the ungodly.

This is what Paul meant by exchanging the immortal for the mortal. And you may also say that men changed the moral for the immoral—and times have changed little in these two thousand intervening years, except perhaps to grow worse!

**4. The sins of sexual immorality.** Paul's discussion of the libidinous is lengthy and varied. It is not the sexual urge or instinct which he faults and condemns, but the wanton driving force behind this human action. The sexual urge or instinct is not wrong in itself. God gave it to man to be used for his good and for the procreation of the race; but it is the voluptuous misuse of this God-given impulse that the apostle laments. When the sensory, the enthralling, the gratifying, and the physical pleasure giving takes precedence over everything else, it becomes the sin Paul graphically describes in the Roman chapter. Outside the relationship of marriage and the home, the sensual delights and pleasures arising from and producing sensuous gratification is a heinous deviation. It is a scandalous wickedness and it is reprehensible to God.

Here is what he has to say about some forms of it: "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness ... For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting" (Romans 1:24-28). Among those many

sins which he said were not fitting, he named "sexual immorality" (verse 29). He said they were filled with all unrighteousness. Not only were they habituated, they were depraved and degraded. And such action, driven by lower instincts, severs man's relationship with God. One becomes bestial in his behavior, perverts his own sexuality, fractures any friendship with his Creator, and completely dicotomizes the lineage with God and cuts off any association with Him. That's how serious the matter is.

**5. The conscience subordinated to and dominated by sin.** First, I want you to notice the list of sins Paul gives and then the ultimate deprivation of freedom of the conscience as a result of being held captive by those sins. One becomes enslaved to all these forms of wickedness. All of them are addictive. some are more habituating than others, and leave the sinner wholly dependent upon these evil habits. "Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful [without understanding]" (Romans 1:29-31).

Now notice what the practice of all this does to the conscience: "Who, knowing the righteous judgment of god, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). Consciences become seared, unfeeling—Paul says they are past feeling (Ephesians 4:19). It is like using a branding iron. One becomes indurated and impervious to feelings of right. When one is overwhelmed by the continued practice and power of sin in his life, the consequences of it recede into the background of his mind and he escapes any feelings of regret or fear. Sin is a terrible and ugly thing and make havoc of ones conscience.

**6. Sin blinds us to our own particular sins and imposes a judgmental view of the sins of others.** Paul strongly rebuked and reprimanded the Jews for sins of which they were guilty, but they were unable to see the same guilt and misconduct except in the lives of the detested Gentiles. The apostle's language, in the opening verses of Romans 2, was

what one would call chiding. He upbraided them, blamed them, and reproved them. I think we may go a step further and say that he blasted them, and there is no doubt they needed it.

Carefully listen to his words: "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God" (Romans 2:1-3)?

Do you see in this reprimand a reflection of our own character and doings? Have sin and depravity really changed very much in those two thousand intervening years? Are we still blind to our own mistakes and make every effort to excuse and extenuate ourselves when our evil doings are brought to our attention and exposed? I shout to the top of my voice the blatant deviations of others—particularly those for whom I have little respect—in the hope that in loudly proclaiming their blunders and misdemeanors my own will go unnoticed by the distraction!

Have you ever noticed what a formidable and massive blind spot with which iniquity so generously endows us? But Paul points out to the Jewish Christians in the church of Rome that by underlining the sins of others, they were highlighting and amplifying their own profligacy. It was, in fact, a feature of their vise they had not quite expected. They evidently thought that by tipping God off with a clue to the sins of the Gentiles, their own misconduct would go unpunished.

**7. Sin and God's justice.** This section of the Roman letter analyses the various facets of sin as thoroughly and completely as any inspired writings. Here is an extended composition of the subject of the justice of God and what we may expect in the premeditated infraction of His will. "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patience continuance



in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek” (Romans 2:4–9).

There is a time in the life of almost everyone of us when we decide that God will never actually execute justice. We may think that He has forgotten our blunders and offences because it has been so long ago. We may feel that the lapse of time has diminished the severity of the trespass, or God no longer considers the omission or the blunder reprehensible. Maybe He has granted, out of His goodness, a reprieve and has passed over what was, at one time, an outrage and He has wiped the slate clean. “Forgive and forget.” We doubt that God will ever get around to “balancing the scales.” So, we go on sinning blithely—in a kind of light-some way, because it is not nearly as serious a matter with us as it is with God.

**8. Sin makes the sinner arrogant.** Because we live so close to sin and are so enveloped by it, we consider it to be un hurtful and unobjectionable. Almost everything in the long list of wickedness most people consider innocuous and benign, if not altogether acceptable. So, in our moderate view and our tolerable acceptance of sin, we become arrogant and haughty and insolent; filled with pride and sureness of ourselves and our standing.

“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you ... For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart,

in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:17-29). Paul, here, toppled their ladder of arrogance. These same sins today are characterized by the aggression that marked these Jews and it is with the same belligerence and combativeness by which these people were so well known. Their pugnacity about their own righteousness moved them to invade and make conquest of the non-Jews around them and with a spirit of intrusion they felt they had gained a great victory over the pagan and enhanced their standing with God.

## **GRACE IS THE ANSWER**

The honor and justice of God require that He judge sin, condemn sinners to eternal banishment from His presence, or provide a way of escape. This is the hope He holds out to us, for He has made ample provision to save everyone who will come to Him through Jesus Christ. It was interesting to me that the word grace itself is found 156 times in the New Testament. Having seen such an ugly picture of sin drawn in the Bible, it lifts our hopes and expectations to the very highest points of expectation to read these beautiful passages about the love and mercy of God and the rich provisions He has made that men might be set free from sins iron chains of habit and destruction.

What could be more beautiful and inspiring than that through the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ there is the possibility and promise that we can be acquitted, absolved, exonerated, and discharged from the terrible consequences of sin? What peace and consolation are infused in the heart of one who thus gives himself wholeheartedly and unreservedly to the will of Christ? Take delight in these passages filled with expectation and happy anticipation. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ... God has passed over the sins that were previously committed" (Romans 3:24-25). "Through Him we have received grace ... for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name" (Romans 1:5). "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly ... But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been

reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:6–10). What could be more exhilarating to the heart of one who wants to be saved through eternity than this promise: "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Romans 5:20)?

This should not only gladden one's heart but stimulate him to a dedicated and committed life to Christ who made all this possible for him. "Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (Colossians 1:5). "In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Titus 1:2). The inspired writers speak often of grace. Out of the 156 times the word is found in the New Testament, it often appears as the "grace of God," and the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ." The inspired writers also speak of "grace," "thanks," and "favor" to God, which should be a constant practice in prayer to Him who provides us grace by which we are saved.

Paul told the Christians in Galatia that they had "called you in the grace of Christ" (Galatians 1:6). What an encouraging statement he made to the Ephesian church: "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7). And in Ephesians 4:7, we have this favorable word: "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." And, as you know, that was an unspeakable, immeasurable gift!

Despite the hideous eyesore sin is—the repulsiveness and unattractiveness of it—the future prospects and the cheerful expectations provided by the grace of God far outweigh the grim, bleak, and despairing rubbish engendered by sin—because all this has been blotted out. One has been released from the bondage of sin and the whole of it has been effaced from the memory of a loving and forgiving God. This, however, is not done without the consent of our will and without our heart felt response to the beautiful proffer of His grace to lost humanity. I pray that this book on the malignity of sin will cause us to resolve to stop the practice of it in our lives, motivate us to turn 180 degrees, facing toward God, and induce us to seek and receive His saving grace provided for all mankind.

**—Guy Caskey**

## WHAT SIN IS

- I Introduction:
  - A. Read Luke 15:11–24.
    - 1. Barclay calls this the greatest short story in the world.
    - 2. Lenski says this is the crown of all parables.
  - B. This colorful narrative is the story of sin:
    - 1. It tells of the havoc it has wrought in the lives of men.
    - 2. It is a picturesque view of what sin will do to an individual.
    - 3. It is the most destructive, ravaging and enslaving force.
      - a. It breaks up countless homes each year in this country.
      - b. It fills men's dreams with lust and hate and murder.
      - c. It plunges nations of the world into bloody conflict.
      - d. It blunts the will, hardens the conscience, masters the intellect, binds with the iron chains of habit, and leads one away as a slave to hard and cruel bondage.
- II Discussion:
  - A. Sin is separation: "He journeyed to a far country."
    - 1. It separated this young man from his father's household.
      - a. He was tired of the restraints of the parental household.
      - b. Self-willed, he wanted glamour and independence.
      - c. Rebellion was in his heart before he actually left home.
      - d. After inward separation, comes the outward.
    - 2. Sin has always separated from God.
      - a. It was the cause of separating our early parents from God (Genesis 3:22–23).
      - b. Through the ages it continues to be the cause (Isaiah 59:1).
      - c. Paul, knowing this, advised to come out and be separate (II Corinthians 6:17).
  - B. Sin is wasteful: "But when he had spent all."

1. All of his money was gone, pleasures gone, friends gone.
2. Sin was so enslaving, it controlled him and he spent all.
  - a. When sin thus gets control over one's heart, he will spend all—deprive loved ones of the necessities of life.
  - b. He will spend a good name, his influence, the qualities of his character—honest, truth, purity, and self-control.
  - c. Sin will cause him to lose respect for himself and then for others. It destroys man's moral fiber.
  - d. It makes the heart hard like the beaten path. It sears the conscience like a hot branding iron. It causes one to reach the point of being past feeling.
- C. Sin is inevitable misery: "And he would gladly have filled his stomach."
  1. There arose a mighty famine and he began to be in want.
  2. He got about as low as is possible for him to get.
    - a. Clothes were ragged and he had no shoes. Possessions all gone; spent.
    - b. In his extremity, he glued or attached himself to a citizen of that country.
    - c. Nothing more despicable than for a Jew to feed swine.
    - d. He would have eaten their food—the carob pod—but no man gave to him.
    - e. Instead of plenty in his father's house, he now had poverty. Instead of freedom, he had servitude. Instead of honor, he had degradation and shame.
  3. He had no intention of getting into this condition.
    - a. Had you asked him if he were going to eat and sleep with the hogs, he would have loathed the idea.
    - b. Ask a man who takes his first drink if he intends to be a drunkard, and he would be shocked and deny it.
    - c. Tell a young girl that the modern dance could lead to a degraded character, a destroyed

purity and a damned soul, and she would be insulted.

- d. Sin is progressive. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse: walk not, stand not, sit not (Psalm 1:1).
- D. Sin is insanity: "When he came to himself."
  - 1. In the whole course of sin, he was beside himself "not in his right mind" suffering from a species of insanity.
  - 2.
  - 3. Jesus believed and taught that a man away from God is not truly himself.
  - 4. This is spiritual insanity.
    - a. Whoever hears God's word but will not do it is insane (Matthew 7:26).
    - b. Paul reasoned with Felix "of righteousness." Righteousness is a reasonable thing. Unrighteousness is unreasonable. Therefore, it is insanity (Acts 24:25).

### III Conclusion:

- A. The son determined to go to his father.
  - 1. He arose and traveled the whole distance.
  - 2. He fully confessed his sin.
  - 3. He did not blame others.
- B. The father was happy to have him and happy to forgive him.
  - 1. He forgave him with no recriminations and no threats.
  - 2. He treated him as though he had never been away.

## WHAT SIN IS

"Then He said, 'A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

'But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.' "

'And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry.' " (Luke 15:11-24).

### THE STORY OF SIN

This has been called the greatest short story in the world. Lenski declares that this is "the crown of all parables." It is more than that. This graphic, colorful narrative is the story of sin. It tells the havoc it has wrought and yet works in the lives of those over whom it holds dominion.

It is a picturesque view of what sin is and what it will do to the individual and to the whole human race. In perfect panorama, Jesus shows the wreck and ruin left where sin has struck.

Sin is the most destructive, ravaging, and enslaving force known to the human race. It breaks countless homes (almost a half million a year in this country), leaves innocent children without the love and care and protection of both parents, subjects them to the terrors of hate and strife and to the fears of hunger and destitution. Sin fills men's hearts with lust and hate and murder. It plunges the nations and the world into deadly and bloody conflict. It is a hard, cruel, enslaving tyrant. It blunts the will, hardens the heart, sears the conscience, masters the intellect, fetters the faculties, binds with the iron chain of habit, and leads one away as a slave into painful bondage.

## **SIN IS SEPARATION**

"He took his journey into a far country." Sin separated this young man from his father's house. How unfortunate that it would, for there is every indication that he had a good home; a home filled with love and care and plenty. Why would he deliberately plan and leave a good home and turn his feet in the path of prodigality?

We may not know all the answers, but he was tired, no doubt, of the restrictions and restraints of the parental household. He was tired of the advice, the council, and the caution of a concerned father. He wanted to be free of his guidance and control. Self-willed, he was attracted by the glamour of independence and resolved to have his freedom. So, you see, he was a prodigal before he ever left his father's house. His whole deplorable career that followed indicates that his unlawful desire and rebellion were nurtured and cultivated in his heart before the actual separation came.

Let us pause for a moment in this line of thinking to mention that his father "divided unto them his living." In keeping with Jewish code and custom, he gave the elder son two-thirds and the younger son one third of the inheritance. The lesson that we may deduce from this is that God, our Father, gives to us, His children, freely and lovingly—life, health, earthly comforts, and a thousand advantages. We do not always appreciate them nor make proper disposition and use of them, but "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation, or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).



After the inward separation comes the outward. It began with the alienation of his heart. It continued by turning his back on his father. He went away. He went far away from his people to a world with its glamour and glitter, with its pleasure and promise. He was tired of goodness and righteousness; he was weary of purity and holiness. So, he traded his freedom that he did not know he had for abject and bitter slavery—for freedom in sin is slavery.

Sin has always separated man from God. It separated our early ancestors from the Garden of Eden wherein they had every need satisfied and where association and fellowship with their Maker was a constant and pleasant experience (Genesis 3:22–23). Long years later, Isaiah declared, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

Paul, knowing that God could not tolerate sin nor join himself in company with one whose life is marked by the practice of it, advised the Corinthian Christians to “come out from among them, and be separate ... Do not touch what is unclean ...” (II Corinthians 6:17). “... For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols” (II Corinthians 6:14–16)?

## **SIN IS WASTEFUL**

“And when he had spent all ...” All of what, had he spent? All of his money? No doubt, but this is not all. His money was gone, his pleasures were gone, his friends were gone. All was gone. Reference has already been made to sin as an enslaving power. It had a hold on him, control over him, and mastery of him. When sin gets control over a man's heart, he will spend all. He will spend a good name. His influence for good will be wasted and gone. If he continues in the practice of sin, continues to incline his life in that direction, he will spend the qualities of his character—honesty, truth, purity, and self-control sin causes man to lose respect for himself and then respect for others. It eventually destroys his moral fiber and the qualities that have gone into the construction of his character.

Sin makes the heart hard like the beaten path over which many feet have passed (Matthew 13:19). It sears the conscience like a hot branding iron (I Timothy 4:2). It causes one to reach that point of being past feeling (Ephesians 4:19). Truly, he had spent all. How careful and cautious we need to be lest sin and waste devastate our lives.

## **SIN IS INEVITABLE MISERY**

"There arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want ... And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate." Sin is both degenerative and deteriorative. It degrades and destroys. He got about as low as was possible for him—down in the pigsty. His clothes were ragged; his robe was gone, and he had no shoes. His possessions were all gone—spent. I know this is so, for he had spent all, and later his father said, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him ... and sandals on his feet."

In his poverty, he had joined himself to a citizen of that country. This expression, "joined himself" is in the middle voice, which suggests that the prodigal was responsible. There were external forces—the present emergency and the dire need of food, but there was also pride, for he could have turned back to his father's house. He willingly joined himself to a citizen of that land and that citizen sent him into his fields to feed the swine. No employment could have been more despicable for a descendant of Jacob. But even this ugly situation deteriorated. In the muck and mire of the hog pen, he desired to fill himself with the carob pod upon which the swine foddered and fattened and no man gave to him.

Instead of plenty in his father's house, he now has poverty instead of freedom. He has servitude instead of honor as an esteemed son. He now has degradation and shame. This is a vivid exemplification of the misery and damage that comes to one as a result of sin. It shows its unceasing progress and ultimate reward. The vanity and emptiness of such a life fall like a blight on the soul. This is real famine.

Had you, however, asked this young man if he were going to eat and sleep with the hogs, he would have been shocked and would have loathed the idea. He had no such intention. Sin makes a man a companion of swine in more ways than one.

Ask a man who takes his first drink if he intends to be a drunkard and he would, with intensity, deny it. He does not intend to do so, but he has taken his first step in that direction—a path that leads to misery. If you told a nice young girl that the modern dance in which she has begun to engage so that she might be popular and accepted could easily lead to a degraded character, a destroyed purity, and a damned soul, she would be insulted. She did not intend that it be so. Nor did the prodigal intend to get down in the hog pen, but he did; for sin is a progressive thing. "Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse."

## **SIN IS INSANITY**

"When he came to himself." In the whole course of sin in which he had chosen to walk, he was beside himself. He was not in his right mind. He was suffering from a kind of insanity. Jesus taught and believed that so long as a man was away from God, and against God, he was not truly himself. And it is true that neither sense nor reason exists in sin. It was a course of insanity for this son to leave home, plunge himself into riotous living, and go on and on until he ended amidst the swine and envied the food they ate.

I do not refer to literal insanity. It is not of some derangement of mind, such as manic depressive, dementia praecox, or paranoia, that I speak. God only knows how many broken bodies and distorted and deranged minds there are as a result of sin in one's life. Psychiatrists tell us that many of the mental disorders prevalent in our society are traceable to sin and its consequent problems which rise out of a sense of guilt.

I have reference to another kind of insanity. Although it is real, it is a figurative use of the term. Jesus once said, "Now everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand" (Matthew 7:26).

A man is a fool that would build his house on a foundation of sand. But the man is also a fool, insane, who hears and knows well what the will of God is, but will not bring his life into harmony with it. When Paul preached to Felix and other members of the royal court at Caesarea, "he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (Acts

24:25). Righteousness is a reasonable thing. Unrighteousness is unreasonable; therefore sin is insanity. To the Christians of Galatia, Paul wrote, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth ...?" (Galatians 3:1)? To one who knows the truth which is designed to save his soul, it is insanity not to obey it. One is insane who denies God: "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1).

## **THE SON DETERMINES TO GO HOME**

The son came to himself, pondered his plight, and resolved in his heart what course he would now follow. He arose and traveled the whole distance that lay between him and his father's house. This is what we must do today—arise and travel all the way from the far country of sin to the house of the Father where forgiveness and other bountiful blessings await. This young man did more than return to his father; he fully confessed. He did not blame his brother or his father; he did not excuse himself for his misbehavior by shifting the blame, and by pleading the circumstances, or inheritance, or determinism were responsible for his conduct. He said, "I have sinned. My transgression and my corrupt manner of life have been a sin against heaven and in your sight." He asked his father for the position of the lowest slave, a hired servant and a day laborer—one who was not counted among the servants that comprised the household.

## **THE FATHER'S RECEPTION**

The father was happy to have his lost son return home. His joy was unbounded. He forgave him with no recriminations. There were no threats hanging over him. He forgave, fully, freely, and lovingly.

Someone asked President Lincoln how he would treat some of the rebellious and recalcitrant Southerners after the war, hoping that he would make it rather difficult and unpleasant for them. He answered: "I will treat them as if had never been away." If you will come in the spirit of penitence and need which characterized this wayward son, God will have compassion upon you and forgive you and blot out the evil past and receive you as though you had never been away.

## THE DOMINION OF SIN

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read I John 5:17–19.
  - B. What sin is:
    - 1. Transgression (I John 3:4).
    - 2. A stepping aside (I Timothy 2:14).
    - 3. Separation (Isaiah 59:2).
    - 4. Neglect (James 4:17).
    - 5. Evil thinking—murder, adultery, idolatry.
    - 6. Inevitable misery and death (Romans 6:23).
  - C. Some of the things sin has done.
    - 1. Downfall of our first father. Introduced sin and death.
    - 2. Caused Cain to murder his own brother. Hate, jealousy, envy.
    - 3. Its magnitude is universal, its power is almost unlimited, and its appeal is constant and strong
- II. Discussion:
  - A. How sin gains power and control:
    - 1. Overtakes (Galatians 6:1). The element of surprise. Unexpectedly. To slip upon—to have one's guard down.
    - 2. Deceives (Hebrews 3:13; Ephesians 4:22; Romans 7:11).
      - a. Transform into apostles (II Corinthians 11:13). Angel of light and minister of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:13-15).
      - b. Good words and fair speeches (Romans 16:18).
      - c. By thinking we are better than we are (I John 1:8; Galatians 6:3).
      - d. By thinking we have no sin (I John 1:8).
      - e. Do evil that good may come (Romans 3:8, 6:1).
      - f. Need to be enlightened in truth to keep from being deceived.
    - 3. Overpowers.
      - a. Like a lion (I Peter 5:8).
      - b. Like a mighty tyrant (Ephesians 6:12). Conqueror (II Timothy 2:26).
      - c. We need implements with which to fight (Ephesians 6:11–20; II Corinthians 10:4).

- 4. Entices.
    - a. Pleasure (Hebrews 11:24–25; Matthew 4:3).
    - b. Allures (II Peter 2:18).
    - c. Draws.
    - d. Sin is magnetic and attractive.
    - e. Need to turn our faces away and set affections on higher things (Colossians 3:1).
  - 5. Ignorance (Ephesians 4:18).
    - a. Killed the Son of God (Acts 3:14–17).
    - b. People destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).
      - (a) Knowledge of truth to make men free (John 8:32).
      - (b) Involved in sin when ignorant (Isaiah 1:3–4).
    - c. Need instruction (John 6:45–46).
  - 6. Weakness (Matthew 26:41).
    - a. Not possessed of mastery of self; not the power of self-control. Cannot contain (I Corinthians 7:9). Flee.
    - b. Incontinence. Unruly appetite.
    - c. We need to seek His strength to lean upon.
  - B. Crown of life given to those who endure (James 1:12).
- III. Conclusion
- A. No truth for the Christian is given more emphasis than his faithfulness.
    - 1. "They continued steadfastly" (Acts 2:42).
    - 2. "Let us hold fast" (Hebrews 10:23).
    - 3. "If we continue in the faith, rooted, grounded" (Colossians 1:23).
    - 4. "Let us be diligent to enter into that rest" (Hebrews 4:11).
  - B. And no truth has greater impact on others than the faithfulness of the Christian.
    - 1. "Let your light so shine before men" (Matthew 5:16).
    - 2. "Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles ... they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God" (I Peter 2:12).
    - 3. "If some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives" (I Peter 3:1).

## **THE DOMINION OF SIN**

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves to sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:12-18).

## **WHAT SIN IS**

From the study of the subject of sin in the word of God and its action in the lives of men, we may deduce by reason these lessons: Sin is prevalent, powerful, progressive, and persistent. It is also devious, destructive, deceitful, and dishonoring. The apostle John, in his discussion of sin, apprises us that it is transgression (I John 3:4). He said that one who practices sin is lawless—that is, he lives without respect or regard for law and refuses to subject himself to it. No one can be a Christian, or in any way please God, who thus holds His law in contempt. Respect for authority is the primary principle in the gospel which he requires before we can obey God acceptably in any thing.

Paul, in his discussion of the subject with Timothy, declared that sin is "a stepping aside." He said that Eve was "in the transgression." When she introduced sin into the world, she did it by taking her eyes off the goal and stepping outside the path (I Timothy 2:14, KJV). Although she was beguiled and seduced into error, it was a violation of a prohibition clearly understood; and she stepped aside with God's command and threat on her lips. It denotes the fullest guilt. When one loses respect for God and His word, there is no one to guide him. He loses his sense of direction, and he steps outside of the path. (

Jesus tells us that sin is evil thinking (Matthew 9:4). The sins of murder, adultery, and idolatry had their beginning in the heart. One who hates his brother is a murderer (I John 3:15). Whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart (Matthew 5:28). The inordinate desire for that which belongs to another (covetousness) is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Christians need to be circumspect—give careful attention to their thinking and to the probable consequences of it. “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

## **HOW SIN GAINS CONTROL**

Our interest and concern at this time are how sin overcomes one and takes control and dominion over his life. The ways of Satan are devious. He is subtle, shifty, circuitous, and treacherous.

1. Sin overtakes. “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” (Galatians 6:1). Not every sin is premeditated. This means to be taken by surprise, or unexpectedly.

“It is not the detecting of a person in the act of sin, but his being caught by the trespass, through his being off guard” (W.e. Vine). Sin has slipped upon him through lack of circumspection. It is in contrast with the sins of the previous chapter, such as “envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like,” which were planned and intended. Here, the Christian is caught inadvertently. Through heedlessness, actually through carelessness, sin comes up from behind and unexpectedly overcomes him. He simply did not have his guard up. A Christian can never let his guard down. Jesus gave instruction for us to watch (Matthew 24:42, 44).

2. Sin deceives. “but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrew 3:13). Sin beguiles and misleads. It will not let you tell the truth. It never performs what it promises. Sin promises happiness but brings sadness and regret. Pleasures are assured, but never imparted. Life is offered, but misery and death are the fulfillment.



Paul said, "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me" (Romans 7:11). And to the Ephesian Christians, he said, "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22).

Satan's approach for the downfall of man is varied and variable. There are times when he assumes plausible appearances. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transformed himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

Sin often has the appearance of things that are decent and virtuous and respectable, but this is that it might delude and ensnare the hearts of unsuspecting people. "Such creatures are no servants of Christ our Lord; they are slaves of their own desires. With their plausible and pious talk they beguile [deceive] the hearts of unsuspecting people" (Romans 16:18; Moffatt).

Under the guise of a gospel preacher or the mask of a preacher of the word of God, Satan's representative obtains entrance into many hearts and homes. He puts on a show calculated to produce or strengthen the assumption that this man is a true, godly and dedicated servant of the Lord. Teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men, he is, in reality, an ambassador of the evil one.

Sin deceives us by inducing us to think we are better than we are. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3).

Sin is much harder to detect and acknowledge in our own lives than in the lives of others. "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness" (Isaiah 5:20). A thing that may seem to be foul and corrupt to another's life may appear innocent and pure and virtuous in our own. Sin blinds and deludes us.

The prince of the power of the air is effective in persuading people to think that they do not have to comply with the will of God to be saved. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). His influence and appeal with this lie is widespread in the church. Many have been led to believe that some of the things upon which God has spoken are not very important, and that they have the prerogative to decide what is and what is not important. Christians absent themselves from the house of God, neglect their public and private duty to Christ, and give priority to personal and secular matters because they have been moved to believe the lie that they are not obligated to do all of the time all that God has decreed.

It is not uncommon, therefore, to find a "faithful and stable" (?) child of God forsaking an assembly of the saints to devote time and talent to a civic enterprise, participate in a favorite sport, entertain a visiting relative, or indulge in an innocent pleasure. No wonder Satan's dominion is so vast! How we need to give priority to spiritual things. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

3. Sin overpowers. In the text of our study, Paul counsels: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Romans 6:12). He is saying that sin is like a mighty tyrant, who, with regal authority, will rule and govern your life and control the members of your body, unless you, by the power of Christ and His gospel, resist him. Otherwise, he will be king over you. He has mighty, almost illimitable, power; and we should never underestimate it. We should constantly pray, as did David, for God's help and strength: "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me ..." (Psalm 19:13).

Peter used another figure with which to picture the power of sin. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). He could have used another example of a lion with which to illustrate the deceitfulness of sin, for a lion is certainly deceitful. When the lioness goes out and selects from a herd a choice specimen of zebra or antelope, drives it by a

clump of brush where the male lion is lying in wait well concealed, and he leaps for the animal and throttles it almost without being detected, there is the element of deceit. But his is not the picture Peter is drawing for us. It is one of strength and courage and power. A full-grown male lion, weighing five or six hundred pounds, can leap over a kraal fence ten feet in height, and with sheer strength overpower and break the neck of an ox, flip it upon his back, and leap out again.

In Herman Eckstine Park in Johannesburg, South Africa, is a piece of art eloquently sculptured in bronze of an African lion upon the back of a Cape Buffalo in the process of breaking its neck. It tells the story of the brute and incredible strength of one animal pitted against another. Little doubt is left in the minds of those who stop to see and examine it as to which will come out the victor. So the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ warn us of the overpowering strength of sin in subduing the hearts of men. Paul speaks of those who "having been taken captive by him to do his will" (II Timothy 2:26). It is by downright and absolute strength that sin gains control and dominion over men's lives.

To avert this catastrophe, we need to implement with which to fight. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but might in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Corinthians 10:4-5). Instead of being overpowered by sin, our thought and all our being are to be taken as captive slaves into the obedience of Christ. "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit of holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

4. Sin entices. Here are some terms to describe sin: pleasure, allure, draw, lust, desire, entice. Moses chose "rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25).

There is no doubt that sin offers pleasure, and for a time, one may enjoy gratification of the senses, live in a state of excitement and of sensual relish and delight. The word itself suggests a high degree of enjoyment.

It cannot be denied that sin and self-indulgence are pleasant. It is in this way that Satan gains so many of his followers. But what multitudes fail to see, or refuse to see and believe is the fact that the pleasures and enjoyments of sin are short-lived. They are only temporary.

But often in the midst of this delusion of plenty and pleasure, one is overwhelmed by a poverty and emptiness that fall like a blight upon the soul. Especially is this true where the conscience has not been completely indurated and where the soul is still sensitive and impressionable.

But make no mistake about it, sin is attractive and magnetic. Peter says, "... thy allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness ..." (II Peter 2:18). Through the pull; the drawing and attractive influence of sin, God's people are allured into an intemperate and outrageous behavior of indulgence and licentiousness. They are entrapped and caught with a bait.

Again, in all this, there is the element of deceit. The pygmies of the Ituri Forest of the Belgian Congo are a small, less than five feet in stature, people. They are crude but subtle hunters. The protein in their diet is extremely limited. To provide food for themselves and their families, they dig deep pits and carefully conceal them with branches, tufts of grass, leaves, and soil. Then they induce the great African elephant to pass along the trail, across which the pit has been dug, that he might fall into their trap. Once they have trapped him, the food supply is assured for hundreds of people and for many weeks to come. Be not ignorant of Satan's devices, for he will draw you away and allure you into the pit by the inviting appearance of sin (James 1:14).

Christians need to turn their faces away from the world and its attractions and its proffered pleasures and set their affections on things above (Colossians 3:1-2). They need to renounce it and refuse it as Moses did.

5. Sin makes gains through ignorance. "Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18). The entire nation of Israel

was brought under the domain of sin through ignorance. "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know. My people do not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). He gives a great list of their transgressions: "They have rebelled against Me ... a people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward" (Isaiah 1:2-4). The inspired man of God who was challenging and chastising them knew that they would revolt more and more. Hosea said: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

It was ignorance that crucified the Son of God. "And killed the Prince of life ... Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers (Acts 3:14-17).

Ignorance is a mighty instrument and a deadly weapon by which sin brings into subjection an incalculable number all over the world. It is likely that Satan keeps in bondage and darkness more people through ignorance than any other implement he is able to employ. There are about one billion people who live in the countries of India. Almost all of them are without knowledge of Christ and His saving message.

There are more than a billion people in China, but their political and religious culture have kept them chained in the unfathomable depths of spiritual darkness. Africa, a great, formidable, sleeping giant with seven hundred million people rouses from a profound, if not impenetrable darkness. Muslimism, heathenism, and a perverted Christianity have stifled her life and blinded her eyes. Even in our own country, called a land of Bibles and enlightenment, ignorance of the truth designed to save men's souls reigns supreme.

The solution to this problem of ignorance is knowledge, and darkness can be dispelled by light. "And they shall all be taught by God ..." (John 6:45). "You are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

6. Sin overcomes through weakness of the flesh. Jesus once said, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Paul knew this and made allowance, not by

excusing it or treating it lightly, but by erecting the proper safeguards. "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (I Corinthians 9:27). He advised young Timothy to flee youthful lusts. There are times when one should stand courageously and unshakably, but there are other times when one should flee. Aware that the flesh is weak, we should not intentionally subject it to temptations which might effect our downfall. It is then the part of valor to flee.

To preserve the purity of Christian character, "let each have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:2). Even in those unusual circumstances where marriage is not advisable, "it is better to marry than to burn" (I Corinthians 7:9). Satan may tempt us through incontinence, or lack of self-control. Let us recognize the weakness of the flesh, and take the proper precautions—enlist the help of the Lord, and flee when we need to flee, lest Satan gain the advantage of us. Let us keep in our hearts the truth of the song we sing, "I need thy strength to lean myself upon."

## THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE SAVED

- I. Introduction:
  - A. The world assumes that the number will be large because:
    - 1. Man excuses himself and his friends. Eli. Saul.
    - 2. The world confuses morality with goodness.
    - 3. The world confuses honest with truth.
    - 4. The number of social criminals is relatively small.
  - B. The Bible teaches that the number will be small.
    - 1. The Lord said (Matthew 7:13–14; I Peter 4:18).
    - 2. Isaiah compares the number of the righteous to the grapes left in the vineyard after the vintage wine harvest; stalks of grain left after the reapers have passed; and the olives left on the outermost branches of the tree after they have been beaten (Isaiah 17:6; 24:13).
    - 3. Every Biblical type expresses the truth that the number accepted is small. Ex–Egyptian Israelites. Eight souls saved in Ark.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Why is the number small?
    - 1. Is it because the Lord has not made provision (I John 2:1–2; Titus 2:11)?
    - 2. It is not the Lord's fault. He wants men to be saved (II Peter 3:9; I Timothy 2:3–4; Matthew 11:28–30; 23:37).
  - B. Only a small number will be saved because:
    - 1. Friendship with the world (James 4:4).
      - a. “You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury, you have fattened your hearts as in the day of slaughter” (James 5:5).
        - (1) Amos 6:4–5
        - (2) Wanton = (*Espatalesate*): Voluptuously, delight or pleasure pertaining to sensual gratification. Lewd, lustful, undisciplined.
        - (3) Nourished = (*Ethrepsate*): Gorge, eat greedily, and to satiety. To fill, glut, fatten the heart.
      - b. Fear of social censure. Many do not obey the gospel because they are afraid they will be excluded from their circle of friends, ostracized from the affection of family—whose esteem

love and fellowship they respect and do not wish to lose. Others feel that to obey the gospel would be an indictment against parents and an admission that they are lost.

- c. Fear of the loss of economic security.
  - d. Indifference caused by an overemphasis of the secular.
  - 2. Men say that there is time enough yet:
    - a. All human experience denies this; yet, it is a universal fiction with which we delude and deceive ourselves.
    - b. We promise ourselves that we will obey the gospel or give more time to his service.
- III. Conclusion
- A. The rich fool (Luke 12:16–21).
  - B. Now is the accepted time (II Corinthians 6:2).
  - C. Sin will harden (Hebrews 3:13).



## **THE SMALL NUMBER OF THE SAVED**

"But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4:25-27).

The Bible teaches that relatively few people will be saved. Jesus once said, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Many are invited, but only a few choose to accept that invitation. "Then one said to Him, 'Lord, are there few who will be saved?' And He said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able'" (Luke 13:23-24).

In relation to the incalculable numbers who have lived and now live upon the earth, the number of the souls that will be saved will be alarmingly small.

## **THE WORLD ASSUMES THE NUMBER WILL BE LARGE**

There are many reasons why the world supposes that the number of the saved ultimately will be large:

Man is prone to excuse himself and his friends for any sin of which they may be guilty. In the first place, it is more difficult for him to see wrongdoing in his own life of the life of a loved one. Although Eli's sons were vile and wicked, "the sons of Belial," and he knew of their iniquity, yet he doubtless experienced a real struggle within himself to blame and charge them with the terrible sins in which they were involved. The judgment of God was against Eli "because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them" (I Samuel 3:13).

In the second place, man seeks to justify himself in the sins in which he is implicated and pleads extenuating circumstances. One's own sin are never as serious in one's judgment as the sins of a neighbor or an enemy. We are frequently blinded to our own shortcomings.

King Saul disobeyed the voice of the Lord, and his justification for doing so was twofold—the people took the animals, sheep, and oxen “to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal ... because I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (I Samuel 15:21–24).

This was also a shifting of the blame. When he found himself in a critical situation with the disapprobation of God and the stern denunciation of the prophet, rather than accept the remonstrance of Samuel, he endeavored to justify his actions and pass the blame to the people. At the first, he even claimed to have done the will of God: “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (I Samuel 15:13).

The world believes the number of the saved will be large because it confuses morality with goodness. A prevailing belief in Christendom is that a man who is morally good—that is, measures up to a certain established standard—will be saved, although he may have no religious convictions or hold no church affiliations.

If he is highly respected in the community as a good citizen, if he is a good husband and father and provides well for his family, if he is not guilty of infraction of the moral criterion recognized by the people among whom he moves, it is commonly believed that he will be among those redeemed in heaven. But this is not so. Jesus came into the world to provide salvation for all men. No man is, or ever has been, good enough to save himself. While morality and good character is not to be minimized in its importance, mere right conduct will not save one.

Cornelius, the Italian military officer whose history is recorded in the tenth and eleventh chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, is an example of this truth. He was “a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2).

The servants of Cornelius had this to say about him: “... a just man, one who fears God, and has a good reputation among all the nations of the Jews” (Acts 10:22). It is altogether

likely that one could not find anywhere a better man, morally, than Cornelius. He was devoted and dedicated to his convictions. He was unselfish with his possessions and interested in the welfare of his family and friends. And yet the Lord instructed him to send servants to Joppa to find Peter: "He will tell you what you must do" (Acts 10:6). One's spiritual relationship with God must be right as well as his character.

The world believes that the number of the saved, when we come to the judgment, will be large because it has confused sincerity with truth. It is also a widespread belief that if one is sincere and honest in all that he does and practices in the religious realm, this is sufficient to guarantee his entrance into the home of the soul. Jesus, however, taught that one must know and believe the truth to please God and to be saved when this life is over. "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). In this same conversation, He had said, "You will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

It is possible for one who is altogether honest to believe a lie and be damned (I Kings 13:1-34). Paul referred to those who received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, and to whom, therefore, God would send "... strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

The world believes that the number of the saved will be large because the number of social criminals is relatively small. Men rationalize after this fashion. There are relatively few people who commit crimes against society. The prisons and corrective institutions of this country are not large and heavily populated, when their number is considered in proportion to those outside. And besides this, a large percentage of those who have committed crimes are forgiven and released to go back to their normal way of life. So, the reasoning is, if man in his judgment is merciful and forgiving, surely the Great God whose creatures we are and whose chief attribute is love, will not condemn man to be punished. So, the number of the saved must eventually be very large.

## **THE BIBLE TEACHES THE NUMBER WILL BE SMALL**

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Peter inferred that the number would be small when he asked: "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will be the ungodly and the sinner appear" (I Peter 4:18)?

Isaiah compares the number of the righteous to the grapes left in the vineyard after the vintage, or the wine harvest; like the stalks of grain left after the reapers have passed; and like the olives left on the trees after they have been beaten for the harvest. " 'Like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives at the top of the uppermost bough, for or five in its most fruitful branches,' says the Lord God of Israel" (Isaiah 17:6; 24:13).

The truth expressed in these pictures is frightening. Almost every Biblical type that relates to this subject expresses the truth that the number finally accepted will be small. Of that almost innumerable host that left Egypt under Moses, only two who were above twenty years of age at the time finally reached the land of promise.

And everyone remembers that there were only eight souls saved from the flood. So, all of man's rationalization and plausible explanations that God is good and merciful and that man is not so bad after all does not change the fact that the Bible very clearly teaches that the number of the saved will be relatively small.

### **IS GOD RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SMALL NUMBER?**

Are men lost now, and will they be lost through eternity, because God has not made proper and full provision for their salvation?

Are the terms of His mercy and grace so circumscribed that only a few can enjoy the benefits of his blessings? Is the extent of his riches so restricted that a select and choice group alone can have their needs met? Surely this is not the case. The

apostle John apprises us of this fact to the contrary: "And if anyone sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (I John 2:1-2). And Paul declared, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11).

God has been charged with being austere, hard, and unfeeling toward man and indifferent toward his eternal destiny. Nothing could be further from the truth. Man's own sin is responsible for this kind of attitude toward His Maker and Redeemer. The truth is that He is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). It is His will to have "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4). For He came into this world for the very purpose of seeking and saving the lost.

It was while we were enemies of the Lord that God commended His love toward us in the gift of His Son (Romans 5:6-10). The invitation of Christ to men in His day was: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). His invitation to mankind is still extended. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who thirst come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17).

#### **WHY WILL THE NUMBER OF THE SAVED BE SMALL?**

In answer to this question, it can be said, in the broadest sense, that men will be lost because of sin. They transgress God's law. They contravene His sacred and divine will. They become lawless in their hearts and conduct and thus they are held to be guilty before Him and worthy of condemnation. A great catalogue of sins could be listed and I suppose it could be said that men will be lost on account of committing one or more of them.

#### **FRIENDSHIP TO THE WORLD**

Friendship to the world covers a great area in our activities. James asked, "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" (James 4:4).

The word friendship used in this verse means love for and devotion to the things of the world. It means to hold something dear and count it beloved. It is the word from which kiss translated many times in the New Testament. When Paul bade the Ephesian elders goodbye at the docks of Miletus, they wept and fell on his neck and kissed him ardently. This is our word for friendship. Having such affection for the world, the things which are evil in the world, will drastically reduce the number of the saved.

In discussing this matter further, James says, "You have lived in pleasure on the earth, and have been wanton; you have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter" (James 5:5, KJV). There are three things that may be considered sinful in this passage.

First, "you have lived in pleasure." This word pleasure means that you have lived in self-indulgence, delicately, luxuriously, softly, and effeminately. There may not be anything base and immoral about these things, but this sort of living is condemned because it is a desperate striving after things. It is status seeking. It is conformity to a standard of living that is soft and easy and luxurious. It is this standard in America, loved and sought after by so many, that has kept us from preaching the gospel in those faraway and difficult places where we might be deprived of these things we so much cherish. No people on earth live so comfortably as the American people, and these things in their rightful places and properly assessed are not wrong, but to make them the goal of life and "stretch ourselves out after" them for the pleasure and satisfaction they give is sinful.

The second sin mentioned in this verse is that of wantonness. This is an ugly word because it describes very ugly deportment. The manner of life of those who are wanton is delight in sensual gratification. Such people are lustful in their thinking and lewd and undisciplined in their behavior. It has to do with living voluptuously and probably includes this soft and luxurious kind of living at the same time. Some people in Israel in the days of the prophet Amos lived like that. "Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the middle of the stall; who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls,

and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Amos 6:4–6). They were not concerned with the vital and valuable issues of life.

The third sin mentioned in James 5:5 is that they nourished themselves as in a day of slaughter. They gorged themselves, filled and fattened the heart. Greedy and gluttonous they were. Some things are not wrong within themselves, but the degree and intensity with which we engage in them make them wrong. It was not wrong in the days of Noah to eat and drink, to marry and give in marriage, but there was something about these normal functions of life that caused the people in his day to be destroyed (Luke 17:26–27). I think there is no doubt but that it was the place they occupied in their thinking and lives.

The social aspects of life were of supreme importance to them. Eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage took precedence over everything else, and consequently they lost their lives in the flood. In the days of Lot, they bought and sold, planted and built, all of which may have been legitimate. When people become engrossed in the business side of life to the neglect and exclusion of things that are more important—to the permanent and spiritual values—it becomes sinful, and, like the people of Lot's day, they will be destroyed. So, this is one kind of friendship to the world that will diminish the number of the saved and make it small when God passes sentence in the final judgment.

### **FEAR OF SOCIAL CENSURE**

I have in mind today another kind of friendship to the world that affects many people whose principles are noble, whose reputations are unsullied, and whose characters, in fact, are above question. Gospel preachers and other teachers in the church have opportunities to preach to many people in many places as they go about the discharge of their Christian duty. I honestly believe that those who hear the gospel on several occasions, for the most part, understand the truth and their obligation to accept it, but many of them never come to Christ in obedience to the gospel. The reason: they are afraid they will be excluded from their circle of friends, lose the affection of their loved ones, be ostracized from their families, and socially be left abandoned. They fear hostile criticism. To avert this

unpleasantness in the form of censure and sometimes vitriolic disparagement, those who know their duty will continue in the course of disobedience. These same people often feel that to obey the gospel would be an indictment against parents and an admission that they are lost, having lived and died in some other religious body.

To find people in this situation, often in the midst of mental struggle and turmoil, is quite common. Several years ago, I taught the gospel of Christ to a young Greek Cypriot, who was visiting in my home in Tanganyika, East Africa. He admitted the truth of every Bible subject we discussed and he avowed belief of those fundamentals with which one must comply to become a Christian. He said to me, "I believe this is the truth; and this is what I want to do, but first I would like to return to my home on Cyprus and discuss these matters with my father and convince him of these things."

A gospel preacher sees it so often that it was not difficult to detect the fear he had of social ostracism, or perhaps even banishment from his family, for his people were strict members of the Greek Orthodox Church.

### **FEAR OF THE LOSS OF ECONOMIC SECURITY**

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; not about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing" (Matthew 6:25)? If we were able to accurately calculate, I am sure we would find the number large who are deterred from the course they know to be right because they fear the loss of economic security.

Once we taught a Cantonese friend New Testament Christianity. He was a small grocer in Johannesburg. The government of that country enforces a policy of social apartheid, segregation, and prejudice against Africans and Asians and it is very strong among certain Europeans. This made it difficult for him to provide the material things of life sufficient for the comfort of his little family. So, he was engaged on the side in a questionable practice associated with horse racing so that he might give to his wife and children the very day necessities plus some of the material things which give pleasure and enjoyment to life



here. He knew that he could not be a Christian and continue in his present course, for such practices are discreditable and shameful for a child of God. He never accepted Christ.

The superintendent of the public schools I attended as a boy, and from which I graduated, once said to me, after I had begun preaching: "I know you people have the truth. I further know that you have scripture for what you preach and practice." He liked to take me in his car to some memorial services in the country where I had invitations to speak. As far as I know, he never obeyed the gospel. I think he was discouraged from doing so through fear of the loss of economic security.

There is no doubt that many are prevented from right action on this account. This kind of friendship to the world will seriously curtail the accomplishment of our God-assigned purpose and diminish the number of the saved.

### **OVEREMPHASIS OF THE SECULAR**

Felix "sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.' Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him" (Acts 24:24-26).

Horace Gregory once wrote:

It is not money, but the power of money  
That heats the blood and turns the soul to ashes,  
Freezes the heart and changes the life to clay,  
Invisible spirit against human spirit.

Anytime there is an over-emphasis of things secular there is a proportionate indifference toward things which are spiritual. When men become absorbed with that which is carnal and earthly, they lose interest in that which is spiritual and heavenly. The man who cares most about the affairs of this life cares least about the affairs and life to come and the man who is worth most to the world in the promotion of its interests is worth least to the church. Immortality is not found in wealth, worldly possessions, positions, or fame.

## ILLUSTRATION OF THIS PRINCIPLE

To illustrate this much needed truth, Brother Eldred Echols tells in substance the following colorful story.

In the art gallery of the Campo Santo of Genoa, Italy, one is held spellbound by the marvels wrought in flawless Parma marble by the masters Orongo and Monteverdi—art that is so meticulously perfect one may see the sheen in the satin gown of a lovely lady and the delicate lace about her throat. She seems to be denied nothing but breath. This art is so sensitive it has captured the ethereal innocence of a baby's smile and the patient resignation in the countenance of an aged couple. One may see the sewing in a small boy's scuffed shoe.

But there is one piece of sculpture that stands out above all the rest. It is the figure of a little Italian woman. Her shoulders are stooped with toil and years, her face is lined with weather and care; and in her arms she carries loaves of bread and to her waist are tied strings of chestnuts—all of which proclaim her as a street vendor. On the pedestal upon which she stands is this inscription: "By the work of my hands I have been able to provide for my own, and also to pay for this statue."

The guide told this interesting story: The original of this marble replica was a familiar figure on the street corners of Genoa. In spring sunshine, in parching heat of summer, in autumn's frosts, and when winter's icy blasts roared down out of the Alps, this little peasant woman worked and toiled and saved and nursed in her heart a very strange hunger.

The seasons came and went for fifty years and finally it was enough. On the last day, this proud but weary little woman sought out the house of Monteverdi and laid at his feet the savings of a lifetime. She had a very unusual request. She asked to be carved in imperishable marble so that when her body lay down to its last rest, she may look out over the streets of the city she had loved so long. So, now the little stone figure looks out of eyes that cannot see the bright pageant of the bustling thoroughfares and listens with ears that cannot hear the tread of passing feet, and beneath it in eternal stillness lies the dust that was once a human being. Life and immortality are not found in stone. May God help us all to see and accept what is truly valuable both for here and thereafter.

## **TIME ENOUGH YET**

No one really wants to be lost. The way of the Christian is attractive and appealing. We have great admiration for one who is wholly dedicated to Christ. The true child of God is envied because of his happiness and assurance. There is no life like the Christian life, and many people promise themselves that one day they will be Christians. But they tell themselves in the same breath that "there is time enough yet."

All human experience denies this. It is a universal fiction with which we delude and deceive ourselves. The Rich Fool thought he had many years to enjoy in plenty and pleasure "but God said unto him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you ...'" (Luke 12:20). "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2). "But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). To defer becoming a Christian on the grounds that there is still time enough may diminish the number of the saved by one, and that one could be you.

I am indebted to Eldred Echols for the main points in this lesson.

## THE EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF SIN

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read I Corinthians 15:21; Romans 5:12
    - 1. Sin came about by man's choice.
    - 2. It is widespread and universal.
  - B. Sin is responsible for:
    - 1. All the sadness and heartache in the world.
    - 2. All the marital difficulties and broken homes.
    - 3. All the catastrophe, war, and death.
    - 4. All the drunkenness, murder, hunger, and fear.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. The various aspects of sin—what it really is:
    - 1. A missing of the mark (hamartia). A missing of our aim. Of spears thrown, but miss the foe (Liddell & Scott).
      - a. A missing of the true end and scope of our lives.
      - b. Every departure from the way of righteousness, both human and divine (Arndt & Gingrich (Greek Lexicon).
      - c. Read these passages: I John 5:17; Romans 3:23; I Corinthians 15:3; I John 3:4.
    - 2. The overpassing of a line (parabasis).
      - a. Adam's transgression (Romans 5:14).
      - b. Eve overpassed a line which God had drawn.
      - c. Harper identifies it: "to step by the side of, to deviate."
      - d. This is what so many have done (Romans 3:23; Hebrews 2:2, 9:15; James 2:9).
      - e. Trench, the New Testament language scholar, suggests that in Paul's language this is more severe than "missing the mark."
    - 3. Disobedience to a voice (parakoe).
      - a. A failing to hear, a hearing amiss. Disobedience which follows careless or inattentive hearing.
      - b. Failing to listen when God is speaking (Trench).
      - c. Hearing but not hearing. They heard and understood, but refused to heed (Jeremiah 11:10; Acts 7:57; Hebrews 2:2).

4. Failing where one should have stood upright (paraptoma).
  - a. To fall by the side of, to fall off or away from (Hebrews 6:6).
  - b. He had reached a height in godliness and virtue and fell where he ought to have stood (Matthew 6:14–15; Mark 11:25).
  - c. A slip; a falling from the right way (Liddell & Scott).
5. Ignorance of what one ought to have known (Trench).
  - a. To be ignorant; not to understand; sin through ignorance (Harper).
  - b. So designated when it is desired to make excuses for one's sin. To regard it in the mildest possible light (Trench) (Acts 3:17; Psalm 23:7; Hebrews 5:2; I Timothy 1:13; Luke 23:34).
  - c. Forgiveness for the sin of ignorance is possible, but not necessarily forgiven simply because it was committed in ignorance.
6. Diminishing of that which should have been rendered in full measure (Trench).
  - a. Less: to be less. An inferiority to a particular standard; shortcoming (Harper).
  - b. Not the giving of the full measure which belonged to God (Romans 11:12; I Corinthians 6:7).
  - c. This thought is emphasized in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 15:21).
  - d. This is very likely the sin of Cain (Genesis 4:6–7).
  - e. This was the sin of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1–11); the one talent man (Matthew 25:14–28); the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16–22).
7. The nonobservance of law (Trench).
  - a. It means "without law, lawless, not subject to law" (Harper).
  - b. To hold the law in contempt, violation of law (Thayer).
  - c. Read these passages: Acts 2:23; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; I John 3:4; Mark 7:23.

- 8. A discord in the harmonics of God's universe (Trench).
- B. There are many other words which tell us what sin is.
  - 1. In this way a fuller and more comprehensive Bible view is afforded us.
  - 2. Nothing is more important in our daily walk of the Christian life than an awareness of sin and a resolute determination to steer clear.
- III. Conclusion
  - A. If our lives do not comport with the will of God, we need to make whatever corrections are necessary.
  - B. We need to share our knowledge of God's Word with others that they may escape sin's devises.

## **THE EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF SIN**

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (I John 5:19).

"Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" (Romans 7:13, RSV).

## **THE SCOPE AND DESTRUCTION OF SIN**

Sin is a universal product peculiar to no nation of people. "They have all gone out of the way; they together become unprofitable; there is not who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12). The damage that sin works upon the human race is readily discernible in the deep and ugly marks it has left—a hating, warring civilization, bitterness and dissension within nations evidenced by racial strife and hatred, by lawlessness, and men's disregard for the rights of others.

The foul workings of sin are seen in the boundless misery and the dreadful disorders which inhabit the globe—shocking, deplorable circumstances of hunger and deprivation, of darkness and ignorance, of bloodshed and devastation. Its fruits are abundant in the innumerable calamities of life.

In countless instances, the sensual appetites have triumphed, the moral and spiritual faculties have been corrupted, the heart, the will, and the affection have been alienated from God, and man has filled his life with the most impious, inhuman, and diabolical sins.

The obduracy of the human heart keeps him from responding to the tender pleadings of the Savior of the world to turn his face toward God and his feet into paths of righteousness.

Let us consider the various aspects of sin, as this subject is treated in the word of God. This must be our standard.

## **TO MISS THE MARK**

"All unrighteousness is sin" (I John 5:17). The word for sin, hamartia, which the apostle John used here, means, primarily, "to miss the mark, or aim." Liddell and Scott, in their lexicon, say it is used "especially of spears thrown." The warrior hurls his spear, but fails to strike his foe.

So, sin is the missing of the true end and scope of our lives; it is our failure to fulfill its designs and purposes. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). They missed the mark; they frustrated the very purpose for which God put man in the world. To sin is to defeat the object of life.

Departure from the way of righteousness, whether it is a human or divine standard, is sin. But that which I believe God wants us to consider is this: He has set a standard for us and He makes it possible for us to keep that standard. A failure to measure up, to bring our lives and service into correspondence with His will is a "missing of the mark," and constitutes sin. How often we fall short of God's norm. He has a standard of faithfulness and of loyalty in his service, but so many miss the mark. "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1).

There is the model and the pattern for a dedicated life of prayer and purity, of study and spirituality, and of service and selflessness. He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. In every facet in the entire fabric of the Christian life, there is a high and noble standard to which He invites and challenges us.

## **OVERPASSING OF A LINE**

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come" (Romans 5:14). This "transgression," parabasis, is the overpassing of a line, "the stepping by the side of."

It is the word Paul used when he said, "but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (I Timothy 2:14). She lost sight of her goal; something obstructed her view. She somehow got mixed on her values, and she stepped outside the path. It is



so easy to deviate from the course of righteousness when we remove our eyes from the divine Guidepost and remove our hand from the Guideline. The transgression of the law of God begins, as you see, in the heart. There is no question but that Eve understood that the step she was taking in crossing over this forbidden limit was wrong. In her heart, she wanted what was wrong to be right. She further wanted what was not truly hers. It was attractive, appealing, and offered promise of what Satan caused her to believe would make her truly wise and happy, and so she reached out to appropriate that which belonged to another. In doing so, she "overpassed the line."

The nature of sin, the tactics of Satan, and the desires of men have not changed through the centuries. Men would still like for wrong to be right and the search out ways to minimize the sinfulness of sin, to discredit the force of God's condemnation of it, and to give respectability to it and make pure what is, in fact, evil and corrupt. They imagine that happiness can be found in that which is forbidden and which belongs to someone else, and they thus break the law, dishonor God, and bring destruction upon themselves (Romans 2:23).

The writer of the Hebrew letter said that "if ... every transgression [the overpassing of a line, stepping by the side of] and disobedience received a just reward" (Hebrews 2:2). Trench suggests that in Paul's language this is more serious than 'missing the mark.'; This may be so because it is more deliberate and planned. Jesus, however, came to redeem us even from this sin (Hebrews 9:15).

### **DISOBEDIENCE TO A VOICE**

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners ..." (Romans 5:19). Adam's disobedience, *parakouē*, was a failing to hear, a hearing amiss, an erroneous, or imperfect hearing; disobedience. Paradoxically, it was hearing, but not hearing. He heard and understood, but refused to heed. He did not really listen when God was speaking; it was an inattentive and careless hearing.

Jeremiah described this consideration of sin when he said, "They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods"

to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers" (Jeremiah 11:10). "Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the doom that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them but they have not heard and I have called to them but they have not answered'" (Jeremiah 35:17)

Adam's action was a deliberate renunciation of the sovereignty of God, a repudiation of his supreme power. It was a self-determined rebellion against God. The issue was whether to hear the will of man or the will of God; and he did not have enough respect for the word of God nor enough concern for the consequence of his deliberate act to listen. Members of the Sanhedrin Court refused to hear the truth spoken by Stephen. I was condemnation of them and their fathers before them. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ear, and rat at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him ..." (Acts 7:57-58). They heard, but they did not hear. They failed to listen when God was speaking. Their sin was disobedience to a voice.

Jesus gave simple but full instruction upon the subject of discipline in the church. "More over if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your bother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17).

The man here described by the Lord who needed to make amends, or some reparation, heard and yet he did not hear. In a sense, he heard the brother against whom he had trespassed, he heard the witnesses who accompanied the injured party when this matter was discussed for the second time and he heard the church when it called to his mind the sin of which he was guilty and instructed him to make recompense. And yet, he was unwilling to hear. He was like the Pharisees and lawyers who rejected the counsel of God. They heard it, to be sure, but they set it aside and annulled it (Luke 7:30).

I conceive this disobedience to a voice to be among the most flagrant and heinous of sins. What could be more hateful and offensive to God than for one to know well his duty and refuse to comply? James says, "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). In the church, this lamentable condition exists. It is true that most of us have opportunity to teach men in classes and from the pulpit the fundamental facts and commands of the gospel. They hear these things times without number, but they continue in disobedience to the voice of God. But what of our brethren, who, through the years, have been fully instructed in Christian duty and service, but who give so little of their time, energies, talents, and money to the good of the Lord's cause, to the dissemination of the gospel, to the saving of the precious souls of men? Those who know the requirements of God, but do not listen to His voice, shall be beaten with many stripes.

### **FALLING WHERE ONE SHOULD HAVE STOOD UPRIGHT**

"Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25). This word which is here translated offenses, and which means "to fall by the side of, to fall off or away from, or a stumbling aside," paraptoma, according to such authorities as Harper, Thayer, Liddell and Scott, is used many times in the New Testament.

In Hebrews 6:4-6, the inspired writer declares some people who had reached a great height in godliness and virtue and fell where they ought to have stood. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and powers of the age to come, if they fall away, [or having fallen away], to renew them again to repentance. ..."

The background and training of these people in the religion of Christ was sufficient to make them strong and stalwart Christians, with the courage to meet the opposition and trials which doubtless confronted them in that day, and with the dedication and resolution to hold fast the confession of their faith (Hebrews 10:23). Of Christians who had developed such spiritual character, who had reached such a stage of maturity by growing up in

him in all things, one would conclude that they “are not of those who draw back to perdition, but those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:39).

But somewhere along the way; they made a false step. But they did more than that; they defected from the service of God. They became deserters where they ought to have been valiant soldiers. They quit their ranks. We are not told exactly why they did; there were likely many contributing factors. It was difficult to be a Christian in that day when Christianity was insignificant, unpopular, and dangerous.

The restrictions and prohibitions it imposes and the demands it makes upon our lives are often considered penalties which some are not willing to pay. but whatever the cause or causes, the statement is unequivocal that they fell away where they ought to have stood. Paul used the term in Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault. ...” Although the element of surprise is here involved—that is, he was taken unexpectedly in a trespass, the truth of the matter is he fell where he ought to have stood.

Many of you have been reared by Christian parents, lived, and served in God's church all your adult lives, tasted the full measure of the blessings of the abundant life and have been given a foretaste of the ineffable joy that awaits the faithful, but some you have fallen away. You have abandoned the position you once held; you are no longer standing upright. We hope this will be the time when you will arise and stand staunch and erect for that which is right.

#### **IGNORANCE OF WHAT ONE OUGHT TO HAVE KNOWN**

“Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:17). the word is agnoia, and it means “to sin through ignorance; not to understand; to be ignorant—that is, to be in error and sin because of ignorance.” Peter is here discussing the crucifixion of Christ. The Jews in ignorance had slain the Savior of the world.

This, however, was not a mitigating circumstance. It did not diminish the enormity of their crime. It is true that God has shown mercy and compassion where ignorance has reigned. In

relating some things in his former life, Paul said, "Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it in ignorantly in unbelief" (I Timothy 1:13). But his did not excuse Paul in his sin, for, in this same connection, he said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15). The Jews had every opportunity and every responsibility to know the will of God, for to them the oracles had been committed. They had a full and detailed description of the Messiah and His kingdom, and they were without excuse. To treat the sin of ignorance in the mildest possible light is but courting danger—the danger of eternal damnation. Men are ignorant now, as they were then, because they choose to be ignorant.

They have shut their eyes and stopped their ears and hardened their hearts. Like the blind man, they, "there is not sun" because they cannot see it. Truth in our time and in our land is available. To close our minds against it does not lessen its veracity, nor is our responsibility to know it taken away. "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware [ignorant] ..." (I Corinthians 10:1). Ignorance of truth does not determine whether a proposition is true or not. I did not see the red stop light and ran it inadvertently, but I violated the law nonetheless.

It is our business to "search the Scriptures" and diligently apply ourselves to the receiving of the word of God which we have heard (I Thessalonians 2:13). And be not ignorant either of it or of the devices of Satan.

#### **DIMINISHING OF THAT WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN RENDERED IN FULL MEASURE**

"Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you ..." (I Corinthians 6:7). The word in this instance is *hettema*, and is defined by the language authorities as, "to be less, inferior, default, failure, shortcoming." Their fault was their failure to give the full measure which belonged to God.

These Corinthian Christians had been very well taught. The right kind of example had been set before them. They had been fully instructed in their treatment of, and conduct towards, their fellow Christians. And they had sinned in that they had not measured up. They were acting more like the heathen from whose com-

pany they had come when they obeyed the gospel. They knew what was right. There was no doubt about the steps they should take in dealing with their brethren, and they knew quite well what God required and expected of them, but they did not render him the full measure.

This was the sin of Cain. God taught the sons of Adam about worship and sacrifice. He required of them an offering. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable; a more excellent sacrifice than Cain's because he offered it by faith. The divine record does not indicate that God was displeased with Cain's sacrifice because it was the wrong kind. God had taught them not only the kind of offerings to make but how much he required of them.

In reference to Cain's sacrifice the Septuagint reads, "Hast thou not sinned if thou has brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it" (Genesis 4:7)? This reading suggests that the kind of sacrifice he made was acceptable, but he had not apportioned God His part. His sin, therefore, was the "diminishing of that which should have been rendered in full measure." He withheld from God what belonged to Him—keeping for himself what belonged to another.

This was also the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–10). And it is the sin of men in the church today. Undelivered time and talent, unbestowed life, unrendered service, and ungiven goods involve us in the sin of robbery from God (Malachi 3:8). Our sacrifices are not sufficient, our giving is not in proportion to our ability. God has taught us to do much better. The potential power the church in this country possesses, developed and rendered in full measure in the discharge of Jehovah's assigned task to us, could well mean the spread of New Testament Christianity across the world in one generation. But, like the one talent man, too many of us never develop nor deliver our talents to God for use in His service and glory to His name.

### **NON-OBSERVANCE OF LAW**

"Him, being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (I John 3:4). The word wicked in the first verse and the word transgression

in the second derive from the same New Testament word, *anomia*, which means "lawlessness, without law, not subject to law; violation of law; iniquity." It applies to those who violate God's law and who hold it in contempt. Among these people there is no allegiance to government and no respect for law.

This spirit of lawlessness is exemplified in the story Jesus told in Luke 19:12–14: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man reign over us.'" Respect for God's law is essential to our acceptance of Him. The most fundamental principle of the religion of Christ is expressed by James in these words: "Therefore submit to God" (James 4:7). There must be a resignation of our own will and a complete transfer of allegiance from self to God. Arrangement of ourselves under the dominion and control of the Lord is the requisite to divine approbation. One cannot obey God acceptably in anything until respect for His law and authority permeates the heart.

Although "Saul attacked the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt" (I Samuel 15:7) and came very near to destroying the entire nation of these people who had been the implacable foe of Israel on their way out of bondage, "Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good" (I Samuel 15:9).

For his contempt of God's law, Samuel said, "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (I Samuel 15:23). You cannot trample under foot the word of God with impunity.

There are about one billion Moslems in the world. Their sacred city is Mecca in western Arabia. Each year hundreds of thousands of these Moslems from many parts of the globe make their pilgrimage to this spot, the birthplace of their prophet, where they believe the greatest blessings of Allah will be showered upon them.

Several years ago, when Aziz ibn-Saud was king of Saudi Arabia, a Muslim pilgrim who had landed at Jiddah was making

the forty-six mile journey from the coast to Mecca on foot. A brigand, seeing this well dressed businessman traveling alone, attacked him, robbed him, and left him injured by the way. King Saud, hearing of the despicable deed of this lawless plunderer ordered all the headmen in the villages about Jiddah imprisoned.

When this, after several weeks, failed to reveal the bandit, he ordered the headmen released and their sons imprisoned until the culprit should be found. It was not long until the criminal was brought before the court, tried, and the sentence passed. The King's soldier, authorized to discharge the punishment, took the guilty party to a large block of wood and, with a sharp ax, lopped off his right hand. Since that time, I am told, greater respect is had for the law of the land and the Hadji pilgrims are safe on their journeys.

Respect for the authority of God and observance of His law, are greatly needed. If our lives do not comport in any of these ways with the will of God, let us make them right now ere it is too late.



## WE ARE IDOLATERS

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read Romans 1:23–25; Exodus 20:3; Matthew 4:10; Acts 7:41–43.
  - B. Definition:
    - 1. It does not have to be a metal or stone image—mental image.
    - 2. May be an object of deep affection—misplaced loyalty.
  - C. Many of the world's peoples are idolaters:
    - 1. Hindu priest worshiped a golden Cobra.
    - 2. Buddhists worship before images.
    - 3. Petronius said that gods were more plentiful in Athens than men.
    - 4. Zoroastrians worship fire.
    - 5. Parsis refuse to kill an insect—may be an ancestor.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Idolatry practiced in modern denominationalism.
    - 1. Christening. Dedication of children.
    - 2. Extreme unction, celebration of the mass, transubstantiation, and people exclaim, "What a beautiful service." All without divine authority.
  - B. We are His creatures and daily enjoy His blessings; we have turned from Him to worship idols (Hosea 4:17).
    - 1. We worship at the shrine of life (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2).
      - (1) We venerate animal life itself.
      - (2) We fear and dread death because of the cessation of our existence in this world.
      - (3) There is something more dear than this animal life. The inward man (II Corinthians 4:16).
    - 2. We worship at the sacred and hallowed altar of marriage.
      - (1) God is the author of marriage; home is a haven, so do not misunderstand me.
      - (2) The purely social aspects and compensations we love and worship. The glamour, pomp, show, and finery often take precedence.
      - (3) Give more time and money and emphasis to the wedding itself than to the Lord.
    - 3. We worship the belly (Philippians 3:19; I Corinthians 6:12–13; Romans 16:18).

- (1) Time and considerations given to planning and preparation of food in this country.
  - (2) Eating and drinking (Luke 17:27). This was the thing important to them.
  - (3) Clothing, cosmetics, houses, cars, things. He forbids one thing to give emphasis to another (Matthew 6:31).
4. We worship in the temple of sex (James 5:5; Ephesians 2:3).
- (1) Attitude and behavior toward the purposes and functions of biological relationship.
  - (2) It is made the chief aim in life.
  - (3) Business, industry, commercial enterprise, misuse and capitalize upon it for financial gain and advantage.
  - (4) We lose sight of its purpose and of life itself.
5. We worship the idol death.
- (1) The Egyptians. It seemed to be their chief concern. The Pyramids.
  - (2) The Sumerians. Lived along the Euphrates.
  - (3) Taj Mahal. Built by Shah Jahan for favorite wife.
  - (4) More emphasis on death than preparation for it (Luke 9:60).
- III. Conclusion: Let us worship God in His temple (John 4:23–24).

## **WE ARE IDOLATERS**

"And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 1:23-25).

"You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

"Then said Jesus to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve"'" (Matthew 4:10).

"And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned and gave them up to worship the hosts of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: 'Did you offer me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship, and I will carry you away beyond Babylon' " (Acts 7:41-43).

### **Definition**

Idolatry is "the worship of a physical object, especially a made image, as a god," according to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. Webster further defines it as the worship of the true God with faulty ideas about Him. A third definition that applies particularly to us in America is: "Excessive attachment or veneration for anything. Respect or love which borders on adoration."

The uses of the term in the Bible closely parallels these definitions. In the New Testament, there is a compound word for idolatry: eidolon—form, shape, figure, statue (Acts 7:41; 15:20), and latreuo—to be a servant, to render religious service, homage, worship, servitude (Romans 9:4; 12:1, Hebrews 9:1-6, Harper). In his definition of the word, Mr. Thayer says, "The worship of false gods; of avarice, as a worship of mam-

mon (Colossians 3:5). The vices springing from it (I Peter 4:3).” So, an idol does not have to be a metal or stone image. It may be a mental image. It may be an object of deep affection; a misplaced loyalty. It can be covetousness, a speedy desire to have and hold earthly possessions for ourselves. This is idolatry.

From the study of great world religions, one would conclude that there are far more people who are idolaters than those who worship the true and living God. The majority of the inhabitants of this earth worship before some idol, or before some perverted and fallacious concept of God made in their own image and after their own likeness.

Joseph Gaer, in his book, *How The Great Religions Began*, gives these figures as estimates of the numerical strength of the leading world religions:

Buddhism—520,000,000; Confucianism—400,000,000;  
Christianity—800,000,000; Hinduism—310,000,000;  
Islamism—800,000,000.

I once watched a Hindu priest worship before the golden replica of a cobra in his prayer pit in Mombasa, Kenya. I watched Japanese worshipers making their vegetable sacrifices before their nature gods in a Shinto shrine in Hawaii; and in the heart of Central Africa, I watched pagans in their ritual dress dance through the night around a fire in tribute to a departed tribal chief.

The Parsis refuse to kill an insect or brush the flies from their faces lest they should injure or kill one and, perchance, it be the reincarnation of an ancestor. In India people count the white cow sacred and also the krait, a small snake allied to the cobra, which kills more people than any other snake in the world.

The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, “... cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lancets until the blood gushed out on them” (I Kings 18:28). Israel passed their children through the fires of Moloch (Leviticus 20:2-4). Petronius, the Roman satirist, once said: “It is easier to find a god in Athens than a man.”

## **America Is Not Exempt From Idolatry**

We look upon all these people as heathens and idolaters and their customs and practices as superstitions, and we are not wrong in our conclusions. They worship and venerate what is false. But should we not give some thought to the fact that idolatry is practiced among us, the highest order of civilization? Have we not turned from God to worship idols when we love the physical, material, tangible things of this world more than anything else?

### **WE WORSHIP AT THE SHRINE OF LIFE**

"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). An excessive attachment to life itself is idolatry. Satan once said, in conversation with the Lord about His servant Job, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life" (Job 2:4). This was not true of Job. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). And it is not true of genuine Christians. No true child of God would exchange the whole world, if it were possible for him to gain it, for his soul (Matthew 16:26).

Far too few have the proper concept of life. One who would save his animal life simply for the pleasures of living shall lose life everlasting. So many are interested in the rewards and gratifications of life here in this world. Paul said that Demas loved the "present age" or the "now world" (II Timothy 4:10). Emphasis is given just to living, not the aims and purposes of life, nor to the things we should strive to accomplish in service to God and fellow man.

Men fear and dread death, not so much for the consequences of sin, or the uncertainty of the beyond, but because it means a cessation of existence in this world. It is this kind of love of life that Jesus warned was wrong (John 12:25).

Jesus taught that our lives have a higher purpose, that there is something better and more valuable than the enjoyment of our existence here. "... But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). "So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not

receive a hundredfold now in this time ... and in the age to come, eternal life' " (Mark 10:29–30).

The renewing of the inward man is more important than the continuing of the outward man. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:16–18).

The intentions and declarations of the enemies of Christianity to inflict injury upon Paul did not, in any way, move him. "But none of these things move me; not do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). He later said: "... For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). Serving God was far more significant to him than just living. Life with its present rewards is empty and meaningless apart from the hopes and purposes of the Christian.

The god of this world has blinded the minds of people to the true design of life. The "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) induces them to walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the lust of the flesh. He tells them to take their ease, eat, drink, and be merry. He promises them many years to come. "This is the life," he says. Men believe it and worship at its shrine.

Paul said there is something far better—to depart and be with Christ. In this connection, he said: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). For the Christian, to die is profitable and an advantageous step.

It is good for us to live life and enjoy living in this world if we do not forget the purpose of it, but let us not be idolaters and worship in its sanctuary. The world has a tremendous pull upon our hearts. The magnetic attraction of materialism and the immediate satisfaction of our fleshly desires cause us to miss the true aim of life.

## **WE WORSHIP AT THE SACRED AND HALLOWED ALTAR OF MARRIAGE**

Do not misunderstand me: God is the author of marriage. It is both good and honorable. There is no earthly relationship so close and tender and vital, if it be fashioned after God's pattern for marriage and the home. Husband and wife, living together in deep love, mutual understanding, consideration for one another, sharing everything in life together, rearing children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, have a haven of rest and peace and a foretaste of the home of the soul.

But not many have this Christian view of marriage. The purely social aspects and compensations of it are loved and adored and worshiped. Emphasis is placed on the physical and sensory satisfactions derived, which are delusory and disappointing, apart from the spiritual connotation of this God-ordained, God-designed relationship. The glamour, pomp, show, and finery often takes precedence over everything else. More time and money, more thought and planning, and more consideration and effort are given to the wedding itself than will be spent over a period of years in making the home, after marriage, a family truly dedicated to the cause of Christ.

We should be more concerned about the meaning of marriage; about the kind of companion a son or a daughter is getting for a life partner, the common background of religion and education they mutually share, and the goals and aspirations they hold than the social and physical ends accomplished by bringing this young couple together.

In Noah's day, the people were primarily concerned with eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage. They worshiped the physical and social aspects of life and were, therefore, destroyed by the deluge. Jesus used this example to remind us that we must lift our vision and our hearts to the source of the true and permanent values for mankind.

The Lord was not minimizing the value of marriage and the home, nor was He diminishing the necessity of food and drink for the sustentation of the body, but he was giving us a very fundamental lesson in life's priorities.

## **We Worship the Belly**

“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 set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18–19).

“For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:18).

The average American lives in such comfort, even luxury, as King Solomon never knew. There is no place on earth, I am sure, where people give more time, thought, and money to the planning and preparation of food than in this country. It consumes a large section of our lives. There is nothing wrong with living in comfort, so long as these comforts do not impair our service to Christ. What is wrong is that so many of us think that we cannot do without them and that is why we are unwilling to preach the gospel in the needy areas of the world.

If the mission field which challenges us provides all the contentment and enjoyment in physical well-being in which we have been accustomed at home, we may give some consideration to spending two or three years of our lives there preaching and working for the Lord. But, if it means hardships, deprivations, loneliness, and primitive living conditions, we often choose to stay at home where we may “inspire others” to give brethren a vision of the fields that are white and the function of the church in sowing the seed to an ultimate bounteous harvest!

Jesus once said, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing” (Matthew 6:25)?

The Lord here uses that manner of speaking so common with Him and the apostles of forbidding one thing absolutely in order to give emphasis to something more important. Although it is not wrong to eat and drink, or to give some thought to those daily requirements, he prohibits them categorically so



that he may give priority to the spiritual values of life. He uses the examples of the people of Noah's and Lot's day. In the days of Noah, they ate and drank until the flood came and destroyed them all. I think it may be said of these people that they were giving preeminence to the things which satisfy the physical body, and that they were worshiping the belly. "For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" (Romans 16:18).

It is upon these things—food, clothing, houses, cosmetics, cars, and other such commodities— that many Christians put the accent. Success is often measured by the accumulation of material property. One has achieved the desired goal in life and has reached the full dimension of success, according to the estimate of many, if his worldly estate is sufficiently large to have made some mark of distinction in opulent society. Somehow we have come to equate affluence with both happiness and success. "Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them" (I Corinthians 6:13).

### **WE WORSHIP IN THE TEMPLE OF SEX**

"You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts ..." (James 5:5).

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites" (I Corinthians 6:9).

Describing one of the most wicked and crucial periods in the history of mankind, Paul said that men "burned in their lust for one another, men with men" and that "for this reason God gave them up to vile passions" and "uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves" (Romans 1:24–27).

When I say that we worship in the temple of sex, I have reference to the depraved attitude and the immoral conduct of countless thousands of people in this so-called Christian nation with reference to a function and a relationship that God intended to be sacred, pure, and beautiful. Sex in our country has been made the chief aim in life, synonymous with marriage.

In fact, apart from it, marriage is nothing and life is nothing. This is the height, the apex and the crown. Business, industry, and commercial enterprise misuses and capitalizes upon it for financial gain and advantage. Sex sells everything from matches to mansions and from cards to Cadillacs.

Sight is lost of the purpose of it. For a man and a woman pledged to each other in love through life, it preserves the purity of character. Paul said, "Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (I Corinthians 7:2). It gives honorable birth to children. A part of the design of marriage is the having of children, and then bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

This Christian companionship contributes to man's service to God, his accomplishments in the kingdom of Christ, and his ultimate salvation. God saw that it was not good that man should dwell alone. He needs a help suitable for him to share in all he encounters in this world.

The spiritual implications, as well as the social, of the marriage relationship overflow to the glory of God. When sex is made the end—the all in all, the totality of life—there will be problems insolvable, unhappiness, frustration, chaos, and despair.

The excessive stress placed upon sex in this country hardly distinguishes us from the heathen races which practice polygamy and those whose religions dictate that the conduct of their lives should be determined by what gives personal pleasure and promises material well-being. "But those who believe and do aright, we will make them enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, and they shall dwell therein forever and aye, for them therein and pure wives, and we will make them enter into a shady shade" (Koran, Sura 4:60; The Chapter of Women).

Soleman was a Baluch who worked on our farm in East Africa to help provide food for our African preacher students. He and his people were Muslims. His father had met and married his mother many years before and by her had seventeen children. When she had grown old, he put her away and married two young wives. The Koran permits and provides for such an

arrangement. Yosephmia was an Indian neighbor and a successful business man, and a Muslim of the Suni sect. He passed away while we were still living in Tanganyika. His hope was to dwell in the Moslem heaven of beautiful gardens, beneath which rivers of water flow, and have fourteen virgins for his wives through eternity.

"Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell" (I Corinthians 10:8). "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:11).

### **WE WORSHIP THE IDOL DEATH**

Many ancient people placed more stress upon death than any other event or experience associated with life on this earth. It was their chief concern and was of the highest importance. The early Egyptians learned and practiced embalming. By some lost marvel of science, the bodies of those whom they embalmed have escaped decay and have come down through the centuries and millenniums for human eyes to see.

In the British museum in London, one may see the mummified remains of people who lived and died before the days of Abraham. What relentless taskmasters drove these ancient wizards to miracles of chemistry never since equaled?

One of the Pyramids of Giza, Chelps, was built about 3800 B.C. in the IV Dynasty. It is constructed of 2,300,000 stones weighing from two and one-half to fifteen tons. The British House of Parliament and St. Paul's Cathedral could be put inside the area of the base and have room left over. Its base covers thirteen acres.

If cut into stone cubes of one foot each, it would reach two-thirds the way around the earth at the equator. It was 481 feet high; it is now 450 feet. It was covered with Tura limestone. There are subterranean chambers descending from the entrance 374 feet; and the king's chamber ascends 282 feet above the entrance. It is lined with granite blocks 34 feet long, 17 feet wide, and 29 feet high. There are nine slabs of granite in the ceiling weighing four hundred tons. One hundred thousand slaves were employed every three months over a period of

years (no one knows how long) to complete it. The burial chambers were filled with treasures of every sort. This is the emphasis the Egyptian kings and noblemen placed upon death.

In recent years it has been discovered by archaeologists that the ancient Sumerians along the Euphrates attached about as much importance to death as the Egyptians did. Those who were able were buried among their riches in very elaborate tombs.

For their use after death, they were buried with golden drinking cups and goblets, beautiful jugs and vases, bronze tableware, mother of pearl mosaics, harps and lyres, and silver and gold. They were even buried with entire teams of oxen with their wagons laden with household furnishings which they felt they would need once they had crossed over to the other side.

The Mogul Emperor, Shah-Jahan, built a marble mausoleum in 1631-1645 at Agra, India, in memory of his favorite wife, Taj Mahal. It is one of the most beautifully designed and richly decorated pieces of architecture in the Moslem world.

In America today, much more emphasis is placed upon death than preparation for it. More money is spent on funerals than preaching the gospel so that people might be able to meet this event. In many cases, vast expenditures of money are made, often when those who are left cannot afford it, that cannot benefit anyone or anything except people's vanity.

"Then he [Jesus] said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God'" (Luke 9:59-60).

The Lord was not hard and cold and unfeeling toward this man in his grief. He was not showing disrespect and irreverence for the dead, but He was teaching the lesson for all time that the preaching of the gospel to those who are dead in sin far transcends in importance taking care of matters associated with physical death.

We must make everything subordinate to the kingdom of God, for our following Christ and our service to Him is of prime importance.

## **LET US WORSHIP GOD IN HIS TEMPLE**

"But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

"Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

"Oh, come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Psalm 95:6).

"Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy" (Psalm 99:9).

"I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122:1).

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

## **DANGERS IN THE CHURCH**

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read John 2:14–16.
    - 1. Jesus found conditions in the house of God distasteful.
    - 2. He also found them displeasing and dangerous.
  - B. There has always been dangers.
    - 1. There were a number of crisis in the church of Jerusalem:
      - a. Crisis of rapid growth. Need for teaching and looking after new Christians.
      - b. Crisis of benevolence.
      - c. Crisis of discipline.
      - d. Crisis of persecution.
    - 2. Paul spoke of grave dangers confronting the church (Acts 20:28–30; I Timothy 4:1–3; II Timothy 4:1–4).
    - 3. At times through history, there has been the introduction and teaching of false doctrines which have divided and, at times, destroyed God's people.
  - C. There are dangers confronting us in the church today.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Disregard for the word of God:
    - 1. Israel (Jeremiah 36:20–24). Any nation or people who lose regard for the word of God are ultimately bound for destruction.
      - a. In this case, it was the king excising (cutting up) the word of God with a penknife. This is expressive of what many people think of the word of God today.
      - b. There are those who emphasize portions of it to the disregard of other parts. Some sections of God's word are important to them; other sections are not important at all
      - c. There are those who would compromise it. They concede principles for the sake of peace, or unity, or policy, or popularity. They love the praise of men more than the praise of God.
      - d. As in the case of Israel and Israel's king, they burned the scroll, the word of God, in the fire.
        - (1) They were not afraid.

- (2) They were indifferent to it. No one raised a finger in defense of it; voiced no objections to what was being done to the word of God.
  - (3) Men burn the word of God today in the fires of religious bigotry and prejudice.
2. Neglect:
    - a. Give attendance to reading (I Timothy 4:13).
    - b. Study to show yourself approved (II Timothy 2:15).
    - c. Search the Scriptures (John 5:39; Acts 17:11).
- B. Sensationalism:
1. Men seek the sensational to satisfy human appetites.
  2. Jesus performed miracles and drew a great deal of attention, but it was not sensationalism. It was to prove, establish, and confirm His identity and the authenticity of His word.
    - a. Herod Antipas wanted to see Him perform miracles.
    - b. Many followed Him out of curiosity to see Him do these wonderful works.
    - c. The Jews were often asking him to "Show us a sign."
    - d. The Devil said, "Throw Yourself down" (Matthew 4:6).
    - e. Even His disciples: "Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them" (Luke 9:54).
    - f. In the Corinthian church, some seemed more interested in the sensational, like speaking in tongues (I Corinthians chapters 12 and 14).
  3. It is difficult to get people of our day interested in the study and hearing of the plain gospel of Christ.
    - a. They are accustomed to professional entertainment and unusual happenings and events. They go from one high to another.
    - b. They are accustomed to news about the atomic and hydrogen bombs, speed several times faster than sound, and men being hurtled out into space.
    - c. It seems to take new, unusual, exciting, and dramatic events to attract attention. Even our children and grandchildren in this age are always look-

ing for the exciting and sensational, else they cannot be kept entertained.

- d. It is difficult to interest people in just a Bible class, a gospel meeting, or a teacher's training course. There must be an excited interest and a highly emotional response stirred and fired in our daily activities or else interest lags and fails.
  - e. To do a thing because it is good and right is not as common as it ought to be.
- C. Materialism:
- 1. Cares of this world (Matthew 13:22).
  - 2. The seeking of things (Luke 12:29–30).
  - 3. Life is not possessions (Luke 12:15).
  - 4. Treasures laid up on earth (Matthew 6:19–20).
  - 5. Trusting in riches:
    - a. Hope (I Timothy 6:16, 20).
    - b. Trust—to believe in and to be persuaded by these things. Place your confidence in them; make friends with them (Mark 10:24).
- D. Believing and practicing a purely social gospel.
- 1. In this particular period of the twentieth century, a social gospel is being preached and the practice is advocated.
  - 2. Even in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, preachers and elders are telling the people that it is not what Jesus preached, but what He did.
    - a. Leaders in the church are denying the necessity of preaching the doctrine of Christ—making this insignificant—and contending that it is life–style that counts.
    - b. It is true that Christians are to look to the interests and needs of others and give unselfishly to solve problems and meet the needs of other people, but the proper spiritual relationship must be secured and maintained between the individual and God.
- E. Lack of devotion (I Timothy 4:15).
- F. Shamelessness (Jeremiah 8:12; Philippians 1:20).
- 1. It is doubtful that there has been an age in which people so openly and flagrantly engage in sin and are not ashamed.
  - 2.
  - 3. They boast of misdeeds and feel a sense of accomplishment.



4. Brethren are often loose in their living and neglectful of their duty to God and are not ashamed.

III. Conclusion:

- A. May we highly regard His Word, be unattached by the sensational, lose our love for the material, establish and maintain the proper spiritual relationship with God, and be more devoted to Him and His cause.
- B. May we conduct our lives in such a manner that we will have nothing of which to be ashamed in the judgment.

## **DANGERS IN THE CHURCH**

"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves and the money changers doing business. When he had made a whip of chords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money, and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise' " (John 2:13-16).

The conditions Jesus discovered in the house of God were not only distasteful to Him but extremely dangerous. The temple had become a place of merchandise; a great commercial center used by leading Jews to prey upon their fellow men as they came from all parts of the world to observe their annual feasts in Jerusalem. It was inconvenient, if not impossible, for them to bring from such great distances, the sacrifices the law required them to make; so it was necessary for them to buy them after they arrived in the city. The traffic in this trade had evidently become so abominable to the Lord that it was intolerable. He reprimanded them for desecrating this sacred place and drove them from the temple porches.

### **Dangers in the Early Church**

There were a number of crises in the church at Jerusalem. One of the first problems confronting God's people in the infancy of the church was its very rapid growth. About three thousand people were added that first day. To guide and train and discipline such a multitude, with heterogeneous background in language and custom and learning, must have posed a challenge of Herculean proportions.

These early Christians in Jerusalem were faced with the crisis of persecution. They were threatened and harassed, pursued and oppressed until "they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). Although their lives were daily endangered, the apostles would not be intimidated. The Sanhedrin "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you

judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' " (Acts 4:18–20).

The persecution served to strengthen the faith and love of some, it "weeded out" those who were not worthy to be His disciples, and it helped in the promotion of the kingdom of Christ by the promulgation of His gospel in places beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem and Judea. These early Christians were faced with many other problems such as discipline of those who walked disorderly and the means of support for so many who were affected by drought and famine.

Paul spoke of grave dangers which would confront the churches down through the ages. "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29–30).

He later warned Timothy of some of these dangers in these words: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (I Timothy 4:1–3). And, again, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (II Timothy 4:3–4).

At times, almost innumerable, through history there has been the introduction of false doctrine which divided and, in many instances, destroyed the character and identity of God's people.

The church, I suppose, has never been free from the threat of dangers from without and within. We are warned "that there would be mockers in the last times who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts" (Jude 18; II Timothy 4:4). It behooves us, therefore, to be constantly on the alert and jealously guard the purity of the church of the Lord.

## **Dangers Confronting Us Today**

The dangers lurking on every hand to ambush and damage the Lord's cause are legion. The work of the church is often impeded and its influence in the community seriously impaired by divisive doctrines, jealous spirits, pet theories, and hobby addicts. These dangers, under the guise of causes designed to save the church from apostasy, are usually championed by a few dissident brethren unhappy with their role in the brotherhood, or by a handful of brethren who have been deluded by the specious arguments of a talented preacher with a strong personality and persuasive powers.

But, I have references in this lesson to some dangers which are more widespread, that directly touch more lives, and that are not as easily and readily recognized.

1. Disregard for the Word of God: Any nation or people who have lost regard for the word of God are bound for destruction. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 33:12). "Because you [Israel] disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof" (Proverbs 1:25). Malachi asked: "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears" (Malachi 3:2)?

No man who is heedless and inattentive to His voice and ignores His divine injunctions can abide the day of His coming or stand when He appears. "Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded ... I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes" (Proverbs 1:24-26)

The career of God's people in the Old Testament was a very checkered one, alternating between good and bad, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, and pledges to love and keep His word and the flagrant disregard and nonobservant of it. They were delinquent in duty far more than they were steadfast. They were a fluctuating, wavering, vacillating people through the entire course of their national history, and the reason for it is traceable directly to their attitude toward the word of God.

There was one period, it seems to me, when they were at their lowest ebb in want of respect and reverence toward the mandates of heaven.

Jeremiah was the prophet and Jehoiakim was the king of Judah. God gave instruction to His prophet to have Baruch, the scribe, to take a "scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations ... It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (Jeremiah 36:2-3).

"And they went to the king, into the court; but they stored the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the hearing of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to bring the scroll, and he took it from Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the hearing of the king and the hearing of all the princes who stood beside the king. Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning on the hearth before him. And it happened when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe's knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor did they tear their garments, the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words" (Jeremiah 36:20-24).

2. Excising the Word of God: King Jehoiakim hated the word of God because it pronounced evil against him and the entire nation of people over whom he ruled. So, he cut it into shreds with his penknife. This is what some people think of His word today. If it conflicts with their beliefs and practices, or if it condemns their obstinate, evil way of life, they simply cut it out and shred it into pieces, and accept the delusion that they have effectively disposed of that part of it which was out of harmony with their own settled religious concepts.

3. Human Standards: Disregard for God's word is shown by giving great emphasis to certain portions of it and treating as unimportant other areas to which he has given as much attention. Human standards have been set up by which to determine the importance of what God has spoken. The rules of judging what is important and what is not important are very flexible and vary with individuals and with religious bodies. Things in God's word men wish to reject, because they are in sharp conflict with their own long established tenets, are placed

in the category of the unimportant. If something in the word of the Lord runs counter to their traditional dogmas, it can be quickly settled by deciding that it is not important at all.

When such a criterion is established as an expression of man's esteem for the divine record, the Bible is left in a shamble and the world in utter and hopeless confusion. Every man becomes a law unto himself. He assumes the prerogative to sit in judgment on what shall be accepted and what shall be rejected. It is reduced to this simple formula: "What I like is important, and what I do not like is unimportant." Recently I was teaching a man in a Bible class on the subject of the manner and purpose of baptism. In the course of the discussion, he responded by saying, "Perhaps it does not make this much difference." And I answered him by asking, "Who are we to decide that some things on which God has spoken are important while others are completely immaterial? Are we left to our own judgment? What may seem a matter of small moment to us may be of great significance to God. I am persuaded that anything that God has taken time to say is important. Although I may not understand the import of it, because God has said it and because He has said it for my acceptance, it is of eternal consequence." He saw the truth of this and, at the close of the class that evening, I baptized him into Christ.

4. Indifference: When King Jehoiakim cut the roll of the Book into pieces with his penknife, the princes of his dominion and all the servants that stood by did not raise a finger in its defense. They saw it insulted, which was an insult to God, and they did nothing to save and preserve it. The astonishing thing is that they were not afraid. It seems to me that such treatment of the word of God would have terrified them and that it would have caused them such alarm and distress among them that they would have rent their clothes. Jeremiah suggests that this is what should have normally happened and what was expected of any of God's people who had respect and concern for what He had written.

Times have not radically changed since his day, nor have the people. The word of the Lord is still treated with the same coldness and carelessness. The word is preached from the housetops, and people are callous to its warnings and insensible to its pleas and promises. They hear it but they do not heed it

because they are indifferent to it. But God said He would punish those that stood by and said nothing in defense of it, as well as the king who destroyed it.

5. Burning the Word of God: Jehoiakim not only cut the word of God into pieces, but he threw each leaf, after shredding it with his penknife, into the fire burning in the brazier before him, until all of the roll was consumed. I doubt that there is a more reprehensible deed recorded in Bible history.

It makes us wonder how such a wicked creature could be king over God's people; how he and they could reach such depths of depravity. We lament his attitude toward the things God had said and we castigate him for his flagitious action in burning it in the presence of members of his cabinet. You cannot thus treat God's word with impunity. Although Jehoiakim hated it and committed it to the flames, he did not destroy God's inspired message to his people. "Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: 'They shall not lament for him' ... He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (Jeremiah 22:18-19).

It is altogether unlikely that any of us would be guilty of such an atrocious deed. No one in our acquaintance, I am sure, would literally burn in the fire God's sacred book. but there is no denying that all around us every day it is burned in the fires of religious bigotry and prejudice. It is burned by intolerant spirit and obstinate will, by the surrender of principle and by letting pass what is not true. We ourselves are guilty of burning God's word in the abatement of our convictions and the moderation of our stand for truth and right.

6. Neglect: I mention one other danger regarding our respect or lack of respect, for the word of God. For the most part, we come under a different classification from those who would tear the leaves from the Bible and burn them on the fire, or from those who would contend that some subjects upon which God has spoken are important and others are unimportant. The danger we pose to the very life and existence of the church is one of neglect to read and study God's word. "... give attendance to reading" (I Timothy 4:13). This is the answer to why we do not know more, do more, love more, and serve more.

The African preacher students in my classes in Tanganyika Bible School delighted to read the English translations of the Bible. They were even more delighted when they had learned enough English that they could deliver a lesson reasonably well in this greatest of European languages. They wanted the white man to know that they could speak his tongue and they worked assiduously at the job to be able to accomplish it.

One of my students requested that he be allowed to preach in English to the Sunday evening audience and he employed an interpreter to translate what he was saying in English into his own native language. In the course of his lesson, he wanted to admonish us to be steadfast. "Brethren," he said, "let us stand stagnant in the faith." I think his selection of words was far more an accurate description of what we do than either he or his hearers imagined!

Hollywood actors and television stars memorize entire scripts comparable in size to the New Testament, for a single production of a play or a motion picture. Many Christians spend a quarter of a century or more and never give serious study to the word of life. Neglect! Truly, they "stand stagnant in the faith!" These are dangers that really face the church and threaten to destroy the very fiber of her strength and character.

7. Sensationalism: In our country, sensationalism is the problem confronting the church. I do not mean that brethren are engaged in programs calculated to arouse great excited interest and emotional response, or even that they are employing incidents and materials of teaching which appeal primarily to the feelings as the criterion of achievement in the kingdom of God. Rather, I am saying that men today seek the sensational to satisfy their interests—that something new and unusual and exciting is sought. Dramatic events are wanted to attract attention.

There has been so much interests in many areas of the sensational until interest is almost nonexistent in anything that is not sensational. People have become so accustomed to professional entertainment and almost daily unusual happenings and events in life until that which was sensational yesterday is commonplace today. Atomic and hydrogen bombs, speed several



times greater than sound, men hurled into outer space, TV pictures bounced off a satellite, shooting for the moon, etc., must be replaced with other news and information of the melodramatic character to engage our attention and capture our interest. It is difficult to interest people in just a Bible class, a gospel meeting, or a teacher's training course.

They must be excited and stirred. If they are not fired to a high degree, we have failed. To do a thing because it is right and to continue to follow a course of right through life in conduct and service to God, are not as common as they ought to be. Peter and John said in their bold defense before the Sanhedrin: "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). And Paul wrote the Corinthians, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). To know what is right and to form strong convictions upon that knowledge of truth constitutes a commendable decision. But, then to pursue that course of right because it is right is even more commendable. In the midst of strong temptation, Joseph asked, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (Genesis 39:9)? One of the great dangers confronting the church today would be removed if people would do their whole duty to God because it is right.

8. Materialism: In our opulent age and affluent society no problem poses a greater threat to the true spirit of Christianity and the strength of the church than the prevalent attitude that many Christians and others have toward material possessions. We have developed a materialistic psychology. Undue importance is given to material interests and there is excessive devotion to the wants of man. When we give prior consideration to the material well-being of the individual and make this the rule in the determination of one's conduct, we have turned to idolatry to worship the god, Mammon.

Even as Christians, we are prone to measure success and happiness by the accumulation of physical substance. A church is great or strong based upon its budget. If it has a beautiful and commodious plant, an impressive income to provide lavishly and luxuriously for its membership, it is an important and front rank power in the community, commanding attention and respect. Unless we are careful, we will measure the success of

a gospel preacher by the size of his income, the automobile he drives, the house in which he lives, the number in the membership of the congregation for which he preaches, the circle in which he moves, the frequency with which his name is before the brotherhood, and the places to which he is invited to conduct meetings.

I fear our standard of measuring greatness may not be the same as the one God employs. A man in the sight of God may be a "big preacher" and truly great who lives in some remote corner of the earth, who has never been known for his eloquence or education, whose resources are limited to almost non-existent, and who works quietly and untiringly to promote the cause of Christ among people who have been without opportunity to know His blessings.

"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). This man's thoughts were occupied with the times; he had an anxious interest in the things of this life. The times worry him and wealth deceives him, and the word of God is thereby smothered in his life.

The size of the fortune or the value of the possession is not what is important. It is man's attitude toward these things.

It is not what you'd do with a million  
If riches should fall your lot,  
But what you're doing at present  
With the dollar and a quarter you've got!

"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after ..." (Luke 12:29-30). There seems to be no subsidence in man's passion and pursuit of that which gratifies the flesh.

This "seeking food and drink and raiment" becomes the paramount goal in life. He exerts his entire capacity of physical and intellectual strength for the attainment of his object. Food is necessary to life and a house is necessary to the comfort of life, and a Christian should provide for "his own," but these are not man's supreme achievements. Life is not abundant possessions

(Luke 12:15). Jesus warns us: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ..." (Matthew 6:19-20). It is not having treasures that is wrong, but the treasuring of them—the place they occupy in our hearts. We value things more than persons. The love of money, the desire for things, the cherishing of the material, the grasping for the seen, the enslavement to this world are characteristic of the carnal man and present a grave danger to the spirituality of the church.

Can we, with any confidence, claim that in "Christian America" are we less materialistic than people in communist countries when we identify material abundance with the abundant life? Yet, how little they have in common.

The life of the church in Laodicea was imperiled because its members equated material abundance with spiritual success and happiness. "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.'" The Lord hastened to tell them that this was not so, but that they were deceived about it. "And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17).

9. A Purely Social Gospel: In this period of the twentieth century, many of our leaders in the church are advocating the preaching and practice of a social gospel. I consider this to be one of the great dangers confronting our people today. My observation is that it has kept the church from growing as it did twenty or thirty years ago.

You will likely ask, "What do you mean by a social gospel?" First, I do not mean simply a social gathering, a get together, a reception, a party, or a dinner. It is not entertainment that I have in mind.

The camaraderie of fellowship on a camp-out, a ski trip, or a back-packing expedition is not the subject under consideration. Although, of course, if emphasis is placed upon these things making them significant and prominent things in our lives, to the neglect, or exclusion of the spiritual, we would, without hesitancy, find serious fault with any or all of these matters. But it is not living, or disposed to live in companionship with others in a community, rather than in isolation, which is a real problem for the church of our day.

What obstructs the progress of the gospel of Christ and hinders the growth of His church is our emphasis upon the physical and the material rather than upon the spiritual. There are those among us, preachers and elders—and others— who feel and proclaim that it is not the doctrine of Christ that is important, but how we live in relation to other people. “It is not doctrine but life–style that is important,” I heard one influential leader in the church assert. “Jesus could have preached fifty years and that would not have done the job. It was how He lived that made the difference,” I heard one preacher say to hundreds in his audience.

No Christian who knows anything about his Bible, would ever discredit Christian living. It was what “Jesus began both to do and to teach” that made the difference in the world of the first century—and, I would like to add, in all succeeding centuries! How we treat one another is so important it cannot be over stressed. Loving one another, bearing one another’s burdens, sharing with one another, helping the solution to the problems of our fellow Christians in the household of faith, and even the outsider, are principles that must characterize our daily lives in the horizontal relationship with others. We must be generous, unselfish, and untiring in giving our time and possessions to help those around us in need. But there is more to Christianity than this. “It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (I Corinthians 1:21)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). It is by the gospel that men are sanctified (John 17:17). We are cleansed, purified, and born again by that incorruptible seed, the word of God (James 1:21; I Peter 1:23; John 15:3). We are commanded to preach it to the ends of the earth (Mark 16:15). Not only must our relationship with fellow man be right, but prior to and above that, our relationship to God must be right!

The word translated doctrine is found 207 times in the New Testament. That speaks something of its importance. I reject the idea and discount the teaching that it is not proper to discuss doctrinal matters, such as premillennialism, instrumental music, or any other such teachings, until every hungry person

in the world has been fed, every naked person is clothed, every prisoner has been visited, every sick person has been attended to, and every person's problems have been solved.

It has been said that after all these social needs have been met and all these human exigencies have been compassed and man's social requirements have been dispatched—when we have achieved the demands and consummated the requisites of those in the world around us, when this attainment in the social realm has been realized—then, and only then, will it be time for us to sit down and get our doctrinal P's and Q's in order and discuss our disunity and our differences. I reject this as being totally and absolutely false.

There were good people in this world before Christ came upon the scene. What Abigail did for David and his soldiers was admirable and necessary and very commendable. The Good Samaritan was unselfish, generous, and sensitive toward one in the predicament of having been beaten, robbed, stripped, and left half dead in the gutter. But this did not make him a Christian. He was bearing the fruits of a Christian; and I believe Jesus was telling what a Christian would do under these circumstances in life.

Not a better man, morally, lives in this country today than was Cornelius. He had religious convictions and a spirituality which recommends him, also. He was honest, generous, cared about other people, and had a splendid reputation among those who were not of his race or background. But he wasn't a Christian. A social gospel would not save him or justify him before God. "... Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved" (Acts 11:13-14). We have lost the distinctive reason for our existence as the New Testament church when we take the position that a social gospel will meet our needs and aid us in achieving our goals.

A man of great wisdom who once served some years as an elder in the Lord's church, commented that we may as well go join the denominations and be with family or friends if a social message will attain for us the desired results of eternal salvation. He further commented that he believed that we have, in many places, gone overboard to entertain our children in the church. Give them a little Bible so as to justify a preponderance of recreational activities.

"When the play stops, they go," he said. "Teach them to be soldiers of the cross; commit them to Christ, and they stay," was his sound advise. And I wanted to say "Amen" out loud!

It is not only lamentable, but a travesty on God's church when a fellow worker with young Christian people feels compelled to designate a colleague and a brother-in-arms as a glorified tour guide! "Our work with young people should not be fun and frolic, but a constant effort to instill the true knowledge of God and the values of Christianity." I believe it is time for us to seek out the old paths and "walk therein."

10. Lack of Devotion: The distinctive need of the church today is the complete dedication of those who comprise it. Without constancy, fervor, and devotion, God's people can never accomplish what the Lord, in his eternal purpose, intended that they perform in this world.

Our own happiness as Christians is dependent upon a whole hearted service to God. "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek him with the whole heart" (Psalm 119:2). Paul counseled Timothy to be an example "in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" and to "give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Then he said, "... give yourself entirely to them" (I Timothy 4:12-15).

Half-hearted service is unacceptable service to God. "He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). This is a man with two souls, one for the Lord and one for Satan. He has one for the Church and one for the world.

Such a person does not want to sever ties with the Lord and His people, but neither does he wish to relinquish his hold upon the world. He, like Peter, follows from afar. He has tasted enough of Christianity's blessings and promises that he would be perfectly miserable to abandon God's house altogether.

But he is attracted to the world, and its pull upon him is so magnetic, he would be unhappy if he did not maintain his connections with it. There are times when he really wants to follow the Lord and be counted among His faithful disciples, but first he must go say good-bye to those at home, or he must first go bury his dead father (Matthew 8:21).

He has prior interests. His affection for other things is deeper than his love for Christ. He has put his hand to the plow and has looked back. The vision of his spiritual eye is double.

It is wholly following the Lord that counts (Number 21:11-12). What is needed for the renewed strength and increased power of the church in its march across the ages and realms is a band of men whose hearts God has touched.

11. Shamelessness in Sin: "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; in the time of their punishment they shall be cast down," says the Lord" (Jeremiah 8:12).

We ought to be ashamed of our sins. Ezra rent his garments, fell on his knees, and spread out his hands to the Lord and said: "O my God: I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). But, instead of being ashamed, "the wicked boasts of his heart's desire" (Psalm 10:3). This is an age when men boast of their mischief (Psalm 52:1). Hearts are filled with furious desires and earthly ambitions.

Lust and wickedness of every sort convulse this old world and for it all men are not ashamed. We should be ashamed of the ugly marks of our national character and our promiscuous conduct, dissipation of life, dissolute appetites, unrestrained lust, and our abandonment to every monstrous evil that wicked men have been able to conjure. That which makes it so lamentable is that there is no shame. It is rather a flaunting show of profligacy. It reminds us of the situation in Corinth where one had taken his father's wife, and they were "puffed up and had not rather mourned" (I Corinthians 5:2). They were inflated with pride over this odious deed. The word suggests that they were lofty and arrogant about it. It would seem that they had no consciousness of wrong, whereas they should have been abashed by their guilt and disgraced by this discreditable conduct.

In so many circles of our society, virtue seems to have fled and vice has occupied the throne as the supreme mistress. There is neither consciousness of wrongdoing, nor painful feelings of regret because of the infraction of God's law and violation of His

moral standards. Men lie, get drunk, commit murder and adultery, and are not thereby disgraced. Our crime bill is twenty billion dollars a year. For each one dollar that is spent in churches, synagogues, and temples, twelve thousand dollars is spent in crime. Taverns in this country far outnumber all churches. About five hundred thousand divorces are granted in America each year. The rate is one divorce in every three marriages. Illegitimacy has increased three hundred percent over the last ten years. In all of this, there seems to be no humiliation or dishonor.

With Ezra we should fall on our knees and say, "O my God, I am shamed and blush to lift up my face to You." Like the prodigal, we should say, "I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21).

But we should be ashamed, not only of these things I have mentioned, but of the neglect of our duty and the disuse of our talents for the good of His cause. God's people absent themselves from worship, intentionally and deliberately, to pursue personal interest and pleasure and feel no remorse of guilt. They neglect to study and pray and speak to others about their salvation and have no compunction. They make and spend the large part of their income on themselves and give a pittance to the Lord, and are not ashamed. Shamelessness for our misconduct is one of the great dangers confronting the church.

May we awaken to these dangers and to the true values of life ere it is too late and so bring our lives into correspondence with the will of God that in nothing we shall be ashamed here nor before Him in the coming of Christ (Philippians 1:20; I John 2:28).



## GOD GAVE THEM UP

- I. Introduction:
  - A. God gave Israel up for continued rebellion.
  - B. Passages that speak of hardness.
    - 1. Israel warned to turn from her evil ways (II Kings 17:13-14).
    - 2. She hardened her neck. Personal responsibility.
      - a. There were times of repentance, but then Israel would revert to former ways (Nehemiah 9:16-17).
      - b. Ezekiel accuses Israel of continued hardheartedness (Ezekiel 3:7-8).
      - c. It was this continual disobedience that spelled the doom of Israel as a nation (Jeremiah 19:1, 10-11).
      - d. Moses had predicted this calamity (Deuteronomy 28:15).
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Jesus speaks of hardness.
    - 1. The nature of sin is the same in all ages.
    - 2. He questioned His disciples about the character of their heart (Mark 8:14-21).
    - 3. What a hardened heart creates in the life of a person.
    - 4. The word for "hard" that Jesus used means stony, like concrete; harden the feelings so they are insensible.
      - a. Their minds are closed.
      - b. Questionings and doubts were in their minds.
      - c. Their eyes were blinded and their hearts were dead (John 12:40).
  - B. God gave them up.
    - 1. The part that God and man play in the hardness of the heart.
      - a. Pharaoh's heart was hardened.
      - b. Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15, 32).
      - c. God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12)
    - 2. The New Testament underscores this fact.
      - a. When one persists in sin, eventually God will harden him.
      - b. Examples of this truth: (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

- c. Paul gives attention to this truth (II Thessalonians 2:10–12).
  - d. In speaking of the continued disobedience of Israel, Micah said God would give them up (Micah 5:3).
  - e. Stephen, looking back over their history, makes mention of the fact that God gave them up (Acts 7:41–42).
- C. A lesson applicable to us.
- 1. Paul recalls that the Ephesian Christians had done like other Gentiles with darkened understanding and hard hearts (Ephesians 4:17–19).
  - 2. The hardness is produced, Paul says, by ignorance, by indulgence in impurity, and by lust for more.
  - 3. Jesus reasons for hardness and how we may prevent it.
    - a. The traffic of sin over the heart.
    - b. Proper cultivation of the heart's soil and the ready reception of the good seed (Matthew 13:18–19).
    - c. Besought them not to have a sinful, unbelieving heart that would cause them to depart from the living God (Hebrews 3:12–13).
- III. Conclusion:
- A. The greatest danger of all:
- 1. Possibility of becoming so hardened as not to be able to come back.
  - 2. He may reach such a point that he finds it impossible to repent again.
    - a. Those who have received the full understanding of Christianity and its blessings.
    - b. Those who desert it and turn back to the systems of the world have rejected the only source of help and salvation, and may have gone beyond the compass of turning back to God.
- B. God's grace is unlimited.
- 1. There is no sin which He will not forgive if His conditions are met. He is able to save to the uttermost.
  - 2. But obstinacy and hardness on the part of man may remove both the desire and the ability of man to genuinely repent and turn back to God and His way.

3. The New Testament warns against that direction which may land people in this hopeless plight.
  - a. They may be lead away by pleasure.
  - b. They may be lead away by false doctrine.
  - c. They may be lead away by greed.
4. Do not point your life in that direction. If you have, turn back before it is too late.

## **GOD GAVE THEM UP**

Taking a lesson from the Old Testament, the writer of the Hebrew letter both warned and besought those Christians he addressed not to harden their hearts. He told them that the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness ..." (Hebrews 3:7-9). Those originally referred to were their fathers whom Moses led out of Egypt (Hebrews 3:16).

He draws a lesson from that example to impress upon the Christians of that day and all succeeding generations the character of sin. In this case, it was the sin of rebellion.

The particularity of sin is its ability to harden the heart. No other aspect of sin is given more attention and emphasis in the Bible by the inspired writers than this feature; but not too many of us are disturbed by it. We may feel that we are immune to any hardness and that any time we decide to desist from evil, we will be able to turn back. I wish there was greater distress and anxiety in the heart of the Christian about this danger.

### **Passages That Speak of Hardness**

The writer of II Kings said, "Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all His prophets, namely every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded of your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants, the prophets.' Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the Lord their God" (II Kings 17:13-14).

This rebellion against the Lord and this transgression of His law grew out of unbelief. Unbelief produces not only rebellion, but every other sin that marks the evil course of man in this world.

There were times of repentance in the long and checkered career of Israel. These were the bright and hopeful spots in their history when they openly confessed their transgressions. Nehemiah records that the people, during one of these periods of

confessions of their sins, said: "But they and our fathers acted proudly, Hardened their necks, And did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey ..." (Nehemiah 9:16-17). It would seem from this passage that their hardness on this occasion grew out of pride. How common this is! It keeps people from looking at themselves as they truly are and prevents their acknowledging their mistakes to God and man. Pride and humility are poles apart. Israel continued to practice sin over the centuries, habituated to it, and God said of them: "But the house of Israel will not listen to you [Ezekiel], because they will not listen to Me[God]; for all the house of Israel are impudent [of a hard forehead] and hard-hearted" (Ezekiel 3:7).

Jeremiah, in that same vein, charged Israel: "O Lord, are not Your eyes on the truth? You have stricken them, But they have not grieved; You have consumed them, But they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; They have refused to return" (Jeremiah 5:3). This passage says that hardness of heart can reach that degree in the life of people where they are not grieved over their sins and where they refuse correction for their trespasses. Their hearts are represented as being harder than stone.

It was this continual hardness of heart that eventually spelled the destruction of Israel as a nation. This same prophet, Jeremiah, related how the Lord said to them: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask ... And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the Potsherd Gate; and proclaim there the words that I will tell you ... Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again" ' " (Jeremiah 19:1-11).

Moses had predicted this calamity in Israel, "... if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today ..." (Deuteronomy 28:15). Then, He listed the curses God would bring upon them and promised that ultimately they would be scattered and destroyed as a nation. Through fifteen hundred years of their national history they vacillated between good and evil. This is the result of the hardness of heart caused by sin.

## Jesus Speaks of Hardness

The nature of sin has not changed with the passing of time. Jesus brought the subject up with His disciples when they had "forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat ... But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, 'Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up? ... Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up? ... How is it you do not understand' " (Mark 8:14, 17-21)?

Sin will indurate the heart and obscure a clear vision of truth. A callous heart cannot see and hear what the Lord is trying to tell us. It creates doubt and uncertainty and blunts the memory, so this passage says. It desensitizes our feelings, weakens our resolve, blinds our eyes, moderates the seriousness of our transgressions, disinclines us from the course of right and dulls our conscience. And our lives can become a tragedy.

Jesus used a word for hardness, *poroo*, which means "a stony concretion, to petrify; to harden; to harden the feelings; to become callous, unimpressionable; hardness of heart, insensibility."

Describing the character of sin in these terms should fill our hearts with alarm and terror. Resolute in their pursuit of pleasure and fleshly satisfaction of the appetites, many who profess to be Christians are little perturbed about the jeopardy of their souls and seem to have no apprehensions of the frightful consequences of a hardened heart. Mark concludes, "For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened" (Mark 6:52).

There is no doubt about it. Sin will close up the heart! Jesus quoted a passage from Isaiah 6:10, and made application to those whom he addressed in that day: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them" (John 12:40). What a frightful condition. It should unnerve any Christian

who may be trifling and flirting with sin. Notice the danger and, eventually, the devastation of sin Jesus mentions in this verse: (1) It will blind the eyes. (2) It will deaden the heart. (3) It will prevent the understanding of the mind. (4) It will make it difficult, if not impossible, to turn around in life.

### **God Gave Them Up**

We may ask, "Does God play a part in this hardness of heart?" In a careful examination of the subject, we may certainly conclude that He does. At what point does He enter into the process? Let us make a close study of the subject, scrutinize some Bible examples, and examine thoroughly some passages which relate to it.

In the case of the Pharaoh of Egypt, during the bondage of the children of Israel in that country, it is said that when the request for their release from slavery was made by Moses to the monarch, he hardened his heart, "and he did not heed them" (Exodus 7:22). Some three expressions are used with reference to the hardness of his heart: (1) Pharaoh's heart was hardened, (2) Pharaoh hardened his heart, and (3) God hardened Pharaoh's heart. You may want to examine some of those passages in which it is stated that Pharaoh hardened his own heart: "... he hardened his heart and did not heed them" (Exodus 8:15). "But Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also; neither would he let the people go" (Exodus 8:32). "And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, the hail, and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet more; and he hardened his heart, he and his servants" (Exodus 9:34).

Later in history, the Lord asked His people, "Why then do you harden your hearts ..." (I Samuel 6:6)? In that same verse, the Lord said, "as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts."

In several different passages, it is said, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh" (Exodus 9:12; 10:20, 27; 14:8). A careful reading indicates that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, refusing to listen to, or grant the request, of the Lord made through Moses to let his people go free from the hard bondage in which they were being held for some 215 years. Persisting in this course, it is then said that God hardened his heart. Even after God hardened Pharaoh's heart, the evidence denotes that he was given the opportunity to

change his heart, as though God were giving him a second or third chance to do what was right, but the Scriptures again say, "Pharaoh hardened his heart." When one continues in the practice of sin, demonstrating his deliberate intention to pursue his own course and his willful, insensible disregard for what God says is right, you may be sure that God steps in and takes a part in the hardening of his heart.

### **THE NEW TESTAMENT UNDERSCORES THIS FACT**

This truth is borne out in many places in God's dealing with His people. When men persist in their resolution to walk a certain path in life, God permits them to do so, but not with impunity. He endeavors to turn them back from their evil track, stop the progression of their travel in the wrong direction, and pleads with them to repent, do an about face, and gain the forgiveness and acceptance of the God from whose pathway they have strayed. If they are impervious to His plea and oblivious to His warnings, continuing in the practice of sin, they may be sure that God will eventually "give them up."

Listen to this language: "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:24-25). "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions" (Romans 1:26). "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful" (Romans 1:28-31). These people were persistent in continuing in an evil course in life, so indefatigable in their direction toward hell, they did not pause to look at themselves or up to God. And, thus, "God gave them up!"

The story does not end here. Paul, writing to the Thessalonian Christians, cautioned them of this very danger and endeavored to dissuade them from such drift or trend in their lives:



"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:9-12). Emphasis by Jesus and His apostles, in the writings left for us, is that men must hear the truth, believe the truth, love the truth, and obey the truth. To refuse to do so invites danger and destruction.

In speaking of the continued disobedience of Israel, the prophet said, "Therefore He shall give them up" (Micah 5:3). This is exactly what God did. As a nation, they have been broken and scattered as a "potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again." Of this same people, Stephen speaks of their idolatry: "... Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7:41-42).

### **A Lesson Applicable to Us**

Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that they should no longer walk, "as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness [hardening] of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19). Then, he says to them that "you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Indeed, such a person becomes a new creature. Hardness of heart comes about, Paul says, by ignorance, by sensuality, by indulgence in every kind of impurity. Jesus gave this instruction that we may understand the cause of hardness of heart and that we may prevent it from happening to us: "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This

is he who received seed by the wayside" (Matthew 13:18-19). There is more to the story. The path across a field has become hard by the traffic of many feet. Luke relates the parable in these words: "And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it" (Luke 8:5).

The traffic of sin upon the heart will harden it into insensibility. Paul, in his admonitions to the Hebrew Christians, pled with them, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13). To prevent this from happening, he further admonished them: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7).

### **The Greatest Danger of All**

That which should cause the Christian the greatest consternation and plant awe in his heart is the possibility, of which the Bible speaks, of his becoming so hardened by sin that he may have reached beyond the bounds of turning back. The New Testament indicates that one may penetrate so deeply into the abyss of wickedness that repentance is unachievable for him. We do not here speak so much of the compass of God's grace as we do of that periphery of sin that encircles one's life and destroys any motive to do good or free one's self from the entanglements of iniquity.

This thought is expressed by the inspired writer in these words: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

One of the problems Paul had with churches in which there were Jewish Christians was to prevent the Judaizing teachers from persuading the converts to revert to Judaism or parts of it, thus rejecting Christianity as capable or suited to fulfill every human need and accomplish what it was established to

do. Some evidently felt that they could take the good out of paganism from which they came, or Judaism, and mix it with what they considered to be good in Christianity, and thus achieve the highest standard of all. Paul was impressing upon them that those who had accepted Christianity and had been rooted and grounded in it were jeopardizing their eternal welfare by abandoning it and returning to the world, or to any other system. To do so, he reminded them later, was tantamount to a rejection of the sacrifice of Christ, "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26). Such hardness may make it impossible for us to turn around in our hearts. I would like to hasten to make this observation: the Bible teaches that as long as one desires and has the ability to repent, God is merciful and just and glad to grant forgiveness by His grace.

God's grace is unlimited. It is restricted only by our own volition, decision, and disposition of heart. The intention and will of man are the determining factors of the availability and extension of God's grace. The truth of this is seen by the experience Paul had in Ephesus: "And he [Paul] went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened [became obstinate] and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude" (Acts 9:8-9). The word Luke used for obstinate in this passage is one of the New Testament words for hardness. It is skleruno and it means "to harden morally, to make stubborn, obdurate." This is an act taken by the individual. More than that, it is a deliberate step which leads to hardness, and may eventually result in passing the point of no return.

The New Testament repeatedly cautions us against the kind of thinking and direction that may land us into this hopeless plight. He enjoins us to listen to what the Spirit has to say on the subject: "... having their own conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:2). This was an instrument for branding such as is used on cattle to assert ownership. He is conveying the truth that sin works such havoc upon the heart as to render it unperceptive, unfeeling, numb, and even dead. This is not a temporary anesthetic or sedative, but a condition where the heart is desensitized and impervious to any feelings of good

and right. Peter followed this line of reasoning when he taught the destructive effects that false teaching had upon the hearts of Christians.

He said that many would follow their shameful ways "and bring on themselves swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1). Their idea of pleasure is "as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (II Peter 2:13-15).

The exhortation is twofold: (1) Do not, in the first place, point your life in that direction and (2), if you have begun in this way where sin will ultimately harden your heart, turn back ere it is too late.

## THE REALITY OF SIN

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read I John 5:19.
  - B. Sin exists.
    - 1. It is a matter of fact; a sober reality.
    - 2. People do not give much thought to it; not disturbed or troubled by it.
      - a. Sin binds one to its nature.
      - b. People fail to recognize a standard.
      - c. A lack of respect for law and authority.
    - 3. The solution
- II. Discussion:
  - A. What sin is:
    - 1. A debt that must be paid.
      - a. Man's inability to pay.
      - b. Jesus paid it all.
    - 2. A degradation that needs to be removed.
      - a. The prodigal, as example.
      - b. A moral debasement.
      - c. Degeneracy, disgrace.
      - d. The happy ending: the son returned and he received him.
    - 3. A defilement that needs to be cleansed.
      - a. An uncleanness.
      - b. Impurity.
      - c. Excrement.
      - d. Baseness.
      - e. Soiling.
      - f. Dirt, filth.
      - g. Vomit, mire.
    - 4. A darkness that needs to be lighted.
      - a. Foolish hearts darkened.
      - b. Understanding darkened.
      - c. Former conditions reviewed.
      - d. Way of wicked is darkness.
      - e. One who leaves the path of righteousness.
      - f. Hates his brother.
      - g. God is light.
      - h. Jesus dispels darkness.
    - 5. A disease that needs to be healed.
      - a. Infirm, without strength.
      - b. The sins of Israel—head sick, heart faint.

- c. Vanity an evil disease.
    - d. Like leprosy.
    - e. The need of a physician.
    - f. Jesus can heal us.
  - 6. A death that needs to be abolished.
    - a. Punishment pronounced against our ancestors.
    - b. Sin entered the world and death by sin.
    - c. Men are dead in trespasses and sins.
  - B. Jesus came to destroy him who had the power of death.
- III. Conclusion:
  - A. Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
  - B. We have access to that immortality.
    - 1. The quality of that life.
    - 2. Our reception and response.
      - a. Baptized into his death, raised to walk in a new life.
      - b. We are a new creature in Christ.
      - c. Death without sting and grave without victory.

## THE REALITY OF SIN

"We know we are children of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one [lies in sin]" (I John 5:19).

Sin exists. It is a matter of fact; a sober reality. It has actual existence. It is not a dream, or a figment of the imagination, or a far-fetched idea or notion. It is not a shadowy, spectral, nebulous nothing. Sin is a positive, absolute, and prevalent reality. This passage says that it is present, extant, and a current certainty. As much as any other subject with which the Bible deals, sin is shown to have unquestionable, incontrovertible existence.

But many people today do not give much thought to it. An attorney in another country asked me, "What is sin?" Some do not recognize it, and outside of such sins as murder, robbery, and adultery, they have never seriously considered it. Little emphasis has been placed upon the danger of it, where it leads, and its fearful consequences. It is sad, but true, that our generation is not very disturbed or troubled about the matter of sin. Why is this so?

It is so prevalent and we live so close to it and are, at times, implicated in it ourselves, that we are blinded to its nature and we fail to understand its purpose and we disbelieve its consequences. More than that, we minimize its seriousness and underestimate its detrimental and destructive action in our lives. It is an abomination and the damage is damnable and irreparable, unless we turn away from it and seek the forgiveness which is found only in Christ through His gospel.

What makes sin so vicious is its ability to conceal its true intent and its shrewdness to manipulate man's thinking. By intrigue and deceit, sin cunningly leads us to believe that there is no standard by which to measure our conduct—that every man has the right to establish his own measure and model of deportment. Furthermore, sin victimizes us by contriving a scheme of moral relativity, that is, by inducting us to believe there is no absolute standard of right and wrong. He affirms that right and wrong are dependent upon times and circumstances. He makes us believe that we may do evil that good may come. Under such a system, each person is left to decide for himself what is

good and what is evil, paying no attention to what the law says. The most crucial period in the history of Israel was when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Things have not changed much. In our society, there are those who feel they should have the freedom to decide for themselves. When men become a law to themselves, this spells anarchy. They have no respect for law or the authority which enacted that law. God speaks plainly on this subject.

“To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

“That this is a rebellious people, lying children, Children who will not hear the law of the Lord” (Isaiah 30:9).

“They have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it” (Jeremiah 9:13).

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).

### **The Solution to this Problem**

The solution to this problem is both brief and easy—that is, it is easily understood!

“But happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18).

Of the godly man it is said: “But his delight is in the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1:2).

In the New Testament, this truth is given even greater emphasis: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Peter 4:11).

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ [which is from Christ] does not have God” (II John 9).

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you that what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).



## What Sin Is

There are about a dozen different words in the New Testament for sin, each carrying a little different meaning, or bearing a different connotation, so that we may get a full and comprehensive view of what sin is as it is described by inspired writers. Some of them picture it as:

1. A debt that must be paid. The common definition of debt is "something that is owed; something that one person is bound to pay or perform for another person; a liability or obligation to pay or render something. The condition of being under such an obligation."

Jesus spoke of sin as a debt in the prayer He taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12).

He further underscored this truth in a story He told in Matthew 18:23–27: "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt."

There are a number of lessons in this story for us, but there are three which I believe deserve our very serious attention. First, the size of the debt. The average laborer worked for a penny (denarius) a day. Through his lifetime, he would earn the equivalent of one talent. It may be said that a talent represents one lifetime.

You are able to deduce from this how great was the debt of ten thousand talents. It says that there is not the slightest possibility that the servant could ever repay the debt.

The second lesson is just that. We are indigent, bankrupt, and cannot pay the debt. Luke relates that Jesus told another story parallel with this one: "There was a certain creditor who had

two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. When they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both" (Luke 7:41-42).

The third lesson in this story is that Jesus paid the debt. He forgives fully, freely, lovingly, cancels the debt, and sets the servant free. Paul said we have nothing; we are penniless: "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (II Corinthians 6:10). The reason we have everything is because Christ has paid our debts. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (II Corinthians 8:9).

If we had to pay the debt of sin, the penalty would be death. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Paul said the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We should constantly thank God that Jesus paid it all, cancelled our debt, and offered us eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. A degradation that needs to be removed. Jesus accentuates the degrading nature of sin by highlighting this fact in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Here is how he did it: The younger son "gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But, when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want" (verses 13-14). When that need arose and he became desperate, "he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything" (verses 15-16). Later in the story, the inference is that his clothes were gone. He had no shoes and his garment was, doubtless, filthy rags, having been down in the muck and mire of the pigsty.

Sin had reduced his rank as a son, polluted his moral and spiritual condition, devastated his character, and left him a pauper. Morally, he was debased: he had "there wasted his possessions with prodigal living." Physically, he was hungry. He would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods the swine ate. Spiritually, he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country. Intellectually, his thoughts had turned from his home

to the far country. He wanted to be free from parental restraint, to "become a law unto himself." He wanted to do what he wished. There is a popular saying abroad today. "If it feels good, do it." Sin is a debasement. It degenerates further into disgrace, eventually bringing shame and humiliation. Can you imagine how humiliated he must have been as he returned totally indigent, impoverished, down-and-out, in rags and filth, when only a short time before he had left home confident, determined, and in possession of his inheritance and feeling that he was in command of his destiny.

The beauty of this story is that the son "came to himself," lifted himself from the hog pen and returned to the father's house, confessed his sins, and asked to be received as a hired servant. What makes it more beautiful is that the father received him gladly, removed the degradation, and restored him to full sonship.

3. A defilement that needs to be cleansed. There are a number of Bible terms used to describe this condition. One of them is filthiness. Sin is said to make one filthy. Ezekiel said that Israel had profaned the name of the Lord in the midst of the heathen. He must have had other sins in mind when he said, "... and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols" (Ezekiel 36:23-25). Earlier, Ezekiel spoke of their impurity. "In your filthiness is lewdness." Then, he further pronounced this curse upon them: "You will not be purged of your filthiness anymore, till I have caused my fury to rest upon you" (Ezekiel 24:13). And one said, "The land is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people."

An ugly term is used to describe them, the word excrement. "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness" (Proverbs 30:12). Gesenius, in his Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, defines filthiness "anything unclean [excrement], ignominy, dishonor." And Young defines it as filth, excrement. This tells us something of how repulsive sin in our lives is to the God of heaven.

When he wanted to show the baseness and obscenity of sin, he used a word which means indecent, *aiskros*. "Let it not even be named among you ... neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting" (Ephesians 5:4).

Another word is used by the apostle to speak of the defilement of sin. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1). The word here is *molusmos* and means "to stain, to defile, contaminate morally, to soil; pollution."

Then, there is the word for cleansing or purifying in the passage: *katharizo*. It means "to cleanse from filth, render pure, cleanse from sin; free from the influence of error and sin." The word is used frequently in the New Testament—some form of it sixty-six times. Our English word *cathartic* derives from this word and indicates a drastic action of thorough purging or cleansing the system. We are here admonished to submit to the will of God completely that the blood of Jesus will thoroughly and absolutely cleanse us from every defilement of the flesh and spirit. And this makes us like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Still another word is used to describe the filthiness of sin. That word is *dirt*. In the language of the New Testament, it is *rhuparia*, and it means, "dirty, to be filthy, moral filthiness." "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness" (James 1:21).

Peter used a term for sin that is disgusting to us, and he does it to show how reprehensible it is to God and how damaging it is to man. "But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'" (II Peter 2:22).

Look back at some of the words which are used to describe the character of sin as defilement: uncleanness, impurity, excrement, baseness, soil, dirt, filth, vomit, and mud. The purpose of this multiple use of terms is to solidly impress our hearts with how utterly, totally evil sin really is.

4. A darkness that needs to be lighted. If you have studied your Bible carefully on the subject of sin, you are aware that it is often portrayed by different word pictures. Sin is often represented as darkness. Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in

all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:8-10). If light, figuratively, is goodness, righteousness, and truth, then darkness is evil, unrighteousness, and falsehood. This picture of sin as darkness runs almost as a thread through the whole Bible. It begins in Genesis 3 and does not close until Revelation 22.

Solomon made two statements about darkness I would like to repeat here: "The way of the wicked is like darkness; They do not know what makes them stumble" (Proverbs 4:19). This passage signals their blindness in the dark. They are not able to see. They do not even know over what they stumble. That is often how sin operates.

Solomon further discloses the choice that many people make to walk in darkness because they wish to conceal their unrighteous deeds. "From those who leave the paths of uprightness To walk in the ways of darkness" (Proverbs 2:13).

Persistent practice of sin in which men find immediate pleasure will darken their foolish hearts (Romans 1:21). Paul addresses this problem and communicates this truth in his letter to the Ephesians. "Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18). He seems to know that it must be accented or we will miss the lesson entirely.

All manner of sin, at times, is categorized under the term darkness. One who hates his brother is in darkness. John stresses this in one of his letters: "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (I John 2:9-11).

We have learned several other things about darkness in the passages we have read: one is in darkness because he is ignorant, often willfully, of God's word. He is in darkness because He has hardened his heart with the practice of sin.

To escape the darkness, we must turn back to God, for He is light. "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at

all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is the light, we have fellowship with one another" (I John 1:5-6).

In his earlier writings in the record of the gospel, John declared: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:4-9).

Jesus is the only one who can dispel the darkness in which men walk and which has shrouded their hearts. Let us, therefore, walk in the Light as He is in the Light. Only in this way can we have forgiveness in the blood of Christ and true fellowship with one another. This is the reason for Jesus' coming into the world, and to accomplish this is the fulfillment of His purpose for us. Daily, therefore, we should pause to give the thanks of our hearts.

5. A disease that needs to be healed. I Corinthians 11:30 contains a sad utterance of the spiritual condition of many of the Christians there. It was a spiritual infirmity that robbed them of goals they should have achieved long before. "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." The word weak in this passage means "without strength (to the point of feebleness), without energy, inefficient." To add to their moral defectiveness and their spiritual imperfection, Paul further asserted that they were sick. This word carries the idea that they had so progressed in their faultiness and failures as to be invalids.

It sounded like a repeat performance of a time in Israel's history: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment" (Isaiah 1:5-6). Solomon talked about it in these terms: "This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction" (Ecclesiastes 6:2).

Not just the sins of adultery, lying, robbery, and murder are reported and depicted as a disease, but here is a man who has gained much of this world's goods so that he is in need of nothing and he comes to a position in life where the circumstances of health will not permit him the use and enjoyment of what he has accumulated. Solomon reminds him that all his striving and grasping for things have been vanity, and then he calls it an evil disease. The acquisition of material things without the disposition to give it where God says it should be used becomes a disease that will progress into further ungodliness. The accretion of wealth and storing it up for power, prestige, and personal security is a sickness that is virtually incurable.

Take a look at the rich young man with whom Jesus talked in Matthew 19:16–27. He told His disciples, when the young man had left, “I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Such becomes a serious disease, although many of us look upon such a person as a splendid success, or even a hero, confer on him our admiration and praise and secretly wish we might be like him. Sin is pictured as leprosy by drawing an analogy to this debilitating, damaging, destructive, and incurable disease.

Those who are sick need a physician, Jesus said (Matthew 9:12). That physician is Jesus and the Psalmist spoke of Him, prophetically, when he said: “Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:3). Malachi called Him the “Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2). And Peter said it is He “by whose stripes you are healed” (I Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5). There is no human cure for this disease, and this world will never be what it ought to be until men learn that fact and turn to the Great Physician.

6. A death that needs to be abolished. When God pronounced a curse upon our disobedient first parents, he said, “You shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

Recounting the history of this event, Paul said to the Roman church: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men ...” (Romans 5:12).

Later, he said that sin leads to death (Romans 6:16). To those who were dead in trespasses and sin, he offered life through Jesus Christ. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4–5).

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:22). Jesus came to destroy him who had the power of death: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14–15).

Speaking of the grace of God to us, Paul wrote to Timothy telling him that it "has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Timothy 1:10).

Jesus promised us: "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:50). In John 11:25–26, he further stated: "... He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Physically, men—all men—will die, except those who are alive at His coming, and they will be changed (I Corinthians 15:51). but, one who is baptized in Christ will rise from the watery grave to walk in a new life (Romans 6:4). In Christ he has been made a new creation, and he will live forever (II Corinthians 5:17). Death for him has been abolished, and in heaven he will live and reign with Christ throughout the eons of eternity.



## THE SIN OF DOING NOTHING

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read James 4:2, 17 and Matthew 7:21.
  - B. Christianity is a religion of doing:
    - 1. God has always expected and required His people to perform, to work, labor, and practice.
    - 2. Passages which impress this lesson (Ephesians 6:6; James 1:25; Acts 10:34).
    - 3. In relation to man (Galatians 6:10).
    - 4. In relation to civil government (Romans 13:3).
    - 5. Do the work of an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5).
  - C. What marked Jesus above others was His doing.
    - 1. He went about doing good.
    - 2. He came to do his Father's will (John 8:29).
    - 3. The things that Jesus began both to do and to teach (Acts 1:1).
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Different classifications of sin:
    - 1. Transgression, missing the mark, lawlessness, etc.
    - 2. Not doing, neglect (James 4:17; Hebrews 2:2-3; Matthew 22:1-4).
  - B. Bible examples that point up this truth:
    - 1. The good Samaritan (Luke 10:35-37).
    - 2. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).
    - 3. The ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13).
    - 4. The talents (Matthew 25:14-30).
- III. Conclusion:
  - A. The sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46)
  - B. No man should entertain the idea that the Lord will bless him merely because he does no evil.
    - 1. Positive goodness required (Psalm 1).
    - 2. "If you do these things ..." (II Peter 1:10).
    - 3. "But he who does the will of God ..." (I John 2:17).
    - 4. The great question is: "What must I do?"

## **THE SIN OF DOING NOTHING**

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The word that is translated do is poieo. In the New Testament it is found 576 times, which points up the fact that Christianity is a religion of doing. One acquainted with the word of God knows that He has always required His people to do. There are several other words which, in action, are related. The word energeo, from which we get our English words energy and energize, is used 30 times in the New Testament. The word ergon is used more than 200 times in the New Testament. These words primarily mean to work, labor, perform, practice, and do.

## **IN OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD**

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard" (Matthew 20:1). The purpose of hiring these men was that they might work. There was an agreement on the work to be done and the wages to be paid. When the offer was made and the stipulations were named and the laborers acquiesced, then it was their obligation to go into the vineyard to work. If they did not do what they were assigned and required to do, the land owner owed them nothing at the close of the day. This is not difficult to understand and no man has any quarrel with this arrangement. For the laborer to collect his pay at the end of the day when he had rendered no service would be dishonest. This is what James calls sin!

To drive this lesson home, so to speak, Jesus told them a parable: ".A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, 'The first' " (Matthew 21:28-31). There are two important lessons to be learned here: A change of mind and doing. Unless one changes his heart and does an about face, the doing of anything would be pretty

mechanical. But, on the other hand, to say you are going to do something and then neglect to do it implicates one in lying and disobedience.

### **DOING THE WILL OF GOD**

God never proposed that we do His will if our hearts were not in it. He wants your voluntary service; and He wants it to be a service rendered out of love. To do anything for Him machine-like is not acceptable obedience, but this does not say that the doing of God's will is not important.

"... Be obedient to those who are your masters ... not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (Ephesians 6:5-6). Doing the will of God is important, but it is empty and meaningless, and even hypocritical, if it is not performed and delivered from the heart.

One of the most powerful lessons to be found anywhere upon this subject of doing is found in the words and illustrations of James: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:23-25).

Great stress is laid on the business of doing God's will by the inspired writers of the New Testament. John relates what the (former) blind man said to the Jewish religious leaders who were hurling insults at him: "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (John 9:31). Peter said to those gathered at the house of Cornelius to hear what God had commanded him to say: "Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him'" (Acts 10:34-35).

Jesus said to those who followed Him: "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14). Christianity is in no way a legalistic system. There is not some formula

which, if one complies with it, he earns and therefore deserves the blessings of salvation. The commands of God to us and the service we render Him are not some conventionalized, superficial, and impersonal assemblage of procedures which will guarantee us forgiveness if we follow them to the letter. It is not counting beads and saying so many prayers with our faces turned in the right direction, or circumambulating the Kaaba of the Great Mosque at Mecca, that protects us from danger, indemnifies us against losses, and assures us life in another world.

At the same time, I am not trying to say that salvation here and hereafter is a matter of God's grace extended to us without reference to our response to it and our acceptance of it. God does not foist Himself upon us. He does not force unwanted and uninvited entrance into our lives. He does not intrude Himself into our hearts.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

It must be understood that God made us free moral agents with the power and right to decide to choose. Becoming and being a Christian is volitional. We do it freely, intentionally, and willingly. It is an elective with us. He makes the overture; He proffers the offer; He makes it beautifully attractive; and He stipulates the conditions. We accept or refuse according to our own disposition and will.

Nor do I wish to leave the impression that the individual does not need to comply with God's will. I have pointed out already that doing is found 256 times in the New Testament.

No thought is more often repeated and none is given greater emphasis than that we must obey God in everything He requires of us. While there are a number of words in the New Testament that are translated obey, there are two which are outstanding because of their repeated use and their particular meanings.

One of the words, *peitho*, means "to persuade, or be persuaded." "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The word used most frequently for obey is our word hear. When the New Testament talks about our hearing, generally it

is in the sense of obeying. The word is hupakouo. There are four thoughts connected with this word which we need to learn and keep in our hearts: (1) to hear audibly; (2) hear understandingly; (3) hear receptively; and (4) hear retentively. When one hears in these senses, he is an obedient child of God. "You obeyed for the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered" (Romans 6:17). this is the kind of doing that pleases God and results in salvation of the soul.

### **In Relation to Man**

A beautiful and solid principle that is practical in every age of man's existence is found in the words of Paul to the Galatians: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." This instruction us to do good to all men.

Instead of doing nothing or reciprocating evil for evil, the Christian is to do good. This is the spirit of Christ. This is being like God. Jesus put this in His divine constitution at the first of His ministry among men. It was repeated by His followers and those who wrote down these special orders He had given while He was yet with them. "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all" (I Thessalonians 5:15).

This kind of injunction is utterly incompatible with how people in the world treat each other, and it is inconceivable to the man of the world until he takes on the mind of Christ. Too many of us feel that as long as we are passive toward our fellow man—that is, we have the spirit of do nothing against them—we are inert and neutral. I do not steal from him. I would not do him bodily harm. Never would I be guilty of adultery with his wife. To bear false witness against him is furthest from my mind. There must be no further obligations I have to my neighbor!

But we have missed the truth Jesus and the apostles taught. In fact, Paul said in this charge to the Galatian Christians: "While you have opportunity. ..." Not if you have opportunity, but while. He is here telling us that in relation to our fellow man, our position cannot be one of non-commitment, abstention from evil toward him, and indifference to his needs, but we must be

actively seeking out and making opportunities to do him good. That is what Christianity is—that is, in our horizontal relationship to others. The religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a passive system of evasion, but a positive teaching, a doctrine, and an ethic of always doing good to others. Jesus spoke of doing good to the poor. We always have the poor around. The opportunity is ever present. In the judgment, doing good to others will be an important factor in determining where we will spend eternity. "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:35–36).

There are other needs our fellow man has than physical. Jesus never implied in this context of the judgment that all we have to do to be saved is to attend to the bodily requirements of those around us who are poor or have problems. Other passages compel us to look to his spiritual needs, teaching him the truth and leading him to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

To be concerned only with physical needs is to miss the point of His ministry among men; neither did he intend, however, for us to ignore them. These are musts and if we pass the physical needs by with indifference, in all likelihood we will not be very deeply concerned the spiritual needs.

Feed the body where need exists and where the recipient is worthy of such help, but then we are also to do the work of an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5). That means that we must share the good news of the gospel. This is not a duty imposed by divine mandate merely upon preachers, but upon each one who has named the name of Christ. I like what Jesus said about Mary who had poured an expensive container of perfume upon Him in anticipation of His burial: "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). It is an act of loving service, voluntarily and unselfishly rendered. This is the kind of doing that meets with God's approval and calls down His blessings upon us in return.

The principle that should run as a thread through the life of the Christian in all of his encounters with others is: "Do what is good and you will have praise from the same" (Romans 13:3).

### **Doing Marked the Life of Jesus**

If we were called upon to name what characterized Jesus above all else in His dealings with men, it would be His doing. He went about doing good. "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John 4:34). "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). "I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

Luke said he had written a former treatise "of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Not till He died on the cross was His work finished on earth. It was there in the shadow of death, only moments before he expired, that he uttered the words: "It is finished" (John 19:30). Early in His ministry He had said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). "It is finished," has reference to more than the fulfilling of the law and its abrogation. There is no doubt He had finished all that the Father had sent Him to do!

### **Different Classifications of Sin**

In another chapter in this study we have learned that there are different classifications of sin. There are sins of transgression which are overpassing a line and infracting the law of God (I Timothy 2:14). There are sins of lawlessness. Men endeavor to live without law, having no respect for the establishment (I John 3:4). We read of presumptuous sins and secret sins. But the sin with which we are concerned in this lesson is that of not doing.

"Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). Not many people feel that not doing something constitutes wrong, but this passage says it is. Not doing is tantamount to neglect. Some neglect is an oversight and other is intentional rebellion. Neglect may mean, "I do not care," or it may mean, "I am doing something else."

The writer of the Hebrew letter asked the question: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation ..." (Hebrews 2:3-4)? He was asking, "How shall we escape if we do not care?" Jesus said that certain invited guests to the wedding feast of the king's son "made light of it" (Matthew 22:1-5). They did not care and so neglected to go.

### **The Good Samaritan**

But what about those who do nothing? In the story that Jesus told of the good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37, the sin of the priest and the Levite was in doing nothing. They passed by on the other side. Here was a man who had fallen into the hands of robbers and murderers, who beat him, stripped him of his clothing, and cast him into the gutter, leaving him half dead. The priest and the Levite did not further his misery by kicking him more, or seeking from him other articles of worth they might steal, or even by ridiculing him. They did nothing. Perhaps there are several lessons Jesus taught in this brief narrative, but one is for sure: when people do nothing where something must be done, they will be damned, as though they committed the crime.

The Samaritan is commended to us because of his compassion and kindness and his love in action. He did something. He went where he was, he had compassion on him, he poured oil and wine into his wounds, bound up his wounds, and he put him on his own beast of burden while he, himself, walked instead of riding. He took him to an inn, cared for him, paid his keep, and promised to pay any additional expense incurred.

This is the kind of doing Christianity calls for. If we do not meet this challenge and do this required duty, we shall be caught up in the sin of neglect or of not doing! James makes it clear that this is sin. It is well known that neglect can be the most heinous of offenses.

### **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores ..." (Matthew 16:29-31)

The fault of the rich man consisted not in cruelty to this beggar at his gate, but in his neglect to minister to the needs of this unfortunate beggar. The text indicates that he petitioned this wealthy man as he went in and out of his home each day.



The word used for desiring in verse 21 is a very strong one. It may be a little surprising to you that it is the same word Jesus used in His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:28, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her [with a view to desire her] has already committed adultery with her in his heart." I mention this to show how strong was the desire and, I believe, the request for food. I do not doubt that as he was laid there by someone else that he reached forth his hands supplicating and beseeching the rich man to help him in his need.

Here was an opportunity for this man who had great plenty to show compassion and to reach out to someone less fortunate than himself and satisfy his want and deprivation. He did not even have to make the opportunity; it was there daily as he passed in and out that gate.

Let us look at another approach that could have been made. The rich man could have been mean and wicked in his treatment of this undesirable that cluttered the scene at the entrance of his home. He could have had him removed from the gate and thrown on the trash heap. He could have set the dogs on him and ended this nuisance, or instructed his servants to mistreat him. You can imagine, and I think, rightly so, that there was a disgusting annoyance to him, and he must have considered him a bothersome pest. But the story does not indicate that he took any kind of overt action against him or even any covert behavior or proceeding towards him.

The sin of the rich man was in not doing the good that was in his power to do. He could have satisfied his hunger and relieved his suffering. He did neither. He simply passed by, evidently heedlessly. the opportunity to feed, clothe, attend to his sickness, and care for him. As far as we are able to tell, Lazarus did not even get the crumbs he desired. And you know where the rich man ended up for his neglect.

How often we neglect to give someone whose moral and spiritual condition is as helpless and desperate as this poor beggar, the bread of life which is so readily and copiously available. This is not just a lesson in supplying the physical needs of the hungry and sick. The spiritual needs are greater than the physical needs and they are of even greater value because they pertain to the eternal welfare of men.

## **The Ten Virgins**

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out’ ...” (Matthew 25:1–13).

It is true that this is a lesson in preparation, but in making that preparation some doing was not only vital, but indispensable. The case in this story Jesus told was of not doing what was necessary and what was expected of them. Though listed as friends of the bridegroom, the five foolish virgins were barred from entering into the marriage because they had not prepared themselves for the occasion. One is hesitant to condemn these five virgins because it seems so innocent. The person who does not prepare his heart and life in harmony with God's will, and helps others to do so, will find himself confined in the darkness of despair and eternal perdition. This is a serious matter—this business of not doing.

## **The Talents**

Immediately following Jesus' story of the Ten Virgins, He spoke to them another parable. This time the subject was the talents. The central theme, however, is much the same—that of doing, serving, performing, achieving, accomplishing, and fulfilling.

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money ...” (Matthew 25:14–30).

Please observe several lessons in this story: a talent was the equivalent of a lifetime of work. Some people have such ability to exercise and multiply their talents that they accomplish ten times as much as the average person.

This man of considerable means who entrusted his goods to his servants went away on a journey. This suggests that he trusted them and left them with a personal responsibility. He didn't stay and stand over them and continually remind them that they should apply themselves to their task. He seemed to have also left them with the option of using their talents where they believed they would pay the greatest dividends. The servant with the five talents and the servant with the two talents went immediately and put their goods to work. They were, doubtless, proficient, energetic, ambitious, and determined. They worked at the job and they attained.

The third servant was not a criminal. He did not steal or cheat, except in the sense that he cheated his master. He had not even been wasteful. He buried his talent. He may have even thought he was preserving it by protecting it. But it had been entrusted to him for his care and use and development. The failure to put it into circulation so that he and others, including his master, could have benefited from it was his sin. It was the sin of doing nothing! And this is monstrous evil. It is not only deplorable, it is flagrant and foolish. Jesus said so. The master, in this story, said to the servant, "You wicked and lazy servant ... and cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Do you mean to say that a man is wicked and worthless who is lazy, and who does nothing? That is what Jesus said. In fact, He said a great deal more: He said he is worthy of severe punishment. In the eyes of the Lord, there are few things, if any, that are more reprehensible and, I suppose you would say, disgusting than a servant of His who does nothing.

We have a great many people in the church today who would never steal, lie, murder, or commit adultery, but they do nothing. They may warm a church pew on Sunday mornings and nights, but they do nothing! They have never taught a person about God or talked with him about Jesus and salvation, instructed him about the church for which Christ gave His life, or helped him solve moral, spiritual, physical, or earthly problems.

They have just done nothing. James and Jesus and others in the New Testament tell us that is sin.

### **The Sheep and the Goats**

Please read the rather long story in Matthew 25:31–46 that tells us about two classes of people in the judgment—those who have done and those who have done nothing. You will see as you read this narrative that the people on the right side of the judgment throne were blessed because of the deeds of love and the service they had rendered from their hearts. The people on the left were lost because they had not rendered service. “Inasmuch as you did not do it ...” No man should entertain the idea that the Lord will bless him ultimately and eternally merely because he does no evil. Positive goodness is required of him (Psalm 1).

Peter gave instruction to Christians to “supply” Christian virtues in their lives; and then he concluded, “If you do these things you will never stumble” (II Peter 1:10).

The apostle John, taking up this same subject, apprised the Christians he addressed in his letter: “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (I John 2:17).

Important questions we should ask every day are: “What must I do?” And “What must we do to work the works of Him?”

## SINS OF THE FLESH AND SINS OF THE ATTITUDE

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read Luke 15:11-32.
  - B. We are inclined to give weight to the former and play down the latter.
    - 1. The elder son Jesus was lecturing.
    - 2. The Jews felt they deserved salvation.
    - 3. Jesus spoke to this point a number of times (Luke 18:9-17; Matthew 23:2).
- II. Discussion:
  - A. These sins are seen in the lives of the first two kings of Israel
    - 1. Saul.
      - a. His attitude at first.
        - (1) He was handsome. None in Israel above him.
        - (2) Very humble (I Samuel 9:21).
        - (3) Did not seek notoriety (I Samuel 10:21-22).
        - (4) Heart had been touched by God (I Samuel 10:20).
      - b. His later attitude.
        - (1) Presumed to offer sacrifices.
        - (2) Samuel: "What have you done" (I Samuel 13:12-13)?
        - (3) Saul's disobedience (Samuel 15). Excused himself. Not read to admit his sin. Always justifies himself. He claimed the people forced him.
    - 2. David.
      - a. Brigand. Lawless fellow who lived by plunder.
      - b.
      - c. Adulterer.
      - d. Murderer.
      - e. Man after God's own heart.
      - f. Loved Saul greatly (I Samuel 16:21).
      - g. Regarded him as God's anointed (I Samuel 24:6, 10).
  - B. The sins are seen in the two sons (Luke 15:11-32).
    - 1. The prodigal was certainly guilty before the Lord.
      - a. His attitude: "I have sinned."
      - b. "I will arise and go to my father."

- c. He did not blame others.
  - 2. The elder brother could see nothing wrong in his own life.
    - a. He was self-righteous.
    - b. He was critical of his father.
    - c. He was unforgiving toward his brother.
    - d. He was selfish—unwilling to share.
    - e. He had an angry and ugly spirit.
- C. Woman in Simon;s house and Simon (Luke 7:36–50).
  - 1. She was a sinner; an immoral woman.
    - a. Stood at His feet behind him.
    - b. Wept over her condition, washed His feet with her tears, and dried them with the hair of her head.
    - c. Kissed His feet.
    - d. Anointed His feet with perfume.
  - 2. Simon and those he represented.
    - a. He owed five hundred denarii; she owed fifty.
    - b. He gave him no water for His feet.
    - c. He gave him no kiss.
    - d. He did not anoint His feet with oil.
  - 3. The woman loved much and much was forgiven. Simon loved little and little was forgiven.
- D. The Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9–14):
  - 1. Publican: “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”
    - a. Smote upon his breast.
    - b. Not so much as lifted his eyes toward heaven.
    - c. An attitude of humility, of acknowledged guilt.
  - 2. Pharisee:
    - a. Prayed with himself.
    - b. Thought he was better than other men.
    - c. Boasted of his own goodness.
    - d. Took great pride in his ceremonial keeping of the law—traditions.
- E. The woman taken in adultery and her accusers (John 8:3–11):
  - 1. The woman: She was guilty of sin—taken in the act of adultery, so they said.
  - 2. Scribes and Pharisees.
    - a. Their purpose was wrong. They came to tempt and entrap Him so they could accuse him.

- b. Had they possessed any honesty, they would have taken the man as well. Not concerned about sin.
  - c. The law required that the person who detected the sin be the first to cast a stone.
  - d. All must have been guilty of sin.
- III. Conclusion:
- A. Those who are interested in keeping the letter of the law but not the spirit:
    - 1. Concerned about the legalistic side.
    - 2. Intolerant toward the sins of others.
  - B. What is our attitude toward God and His word?

## **SINS OF THE FLESH AND SINS OF THE ATTITUDE**

Jesus said: "A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

"Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

"And they began to be merry. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.

"So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of



yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found' " (Luke 15:11-31).

### **How We Look at Things**

We are inclined to attach great importance to the conduct and waywardness of the son who left home. That is, this is a weighty and significant matter and should occupy priority in our thinking and concern. It is so noteworthy that we should immediately and urgently condemn it and publicly disavow any toleration of it, even momentarily. This has been our stance.

No doubt it is imperative that we speak out in clear tones against the deportment of the younger son. Our accent in this story has always been on the prodigal and we have either neglected to mention or played down the character and conduct of the older brother. By a careful examination of this narrative, it seems to me that the elder son was the one whom Jesus was lecturing. Or, maybe I should say that He was lecturing the Jews, who were unable to see their shortcomings reflected in the older brother. They believed they deserved salvation. God owed it to them. They were the children of Abraham. It was rather common for them to use the expression: "We have Abraham as our father" (Matthew 3:9). They got carried away with that idea and made some blatantly false statements: "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free' " (John 8:33)?

This was a glaring lie, and it is difficult to conceive how the Jews could have been that ignorant of their history. Their ancestors had been slaves in Egypt for 215 years and the whole world was acquainted with that fact. Their entire checkered career had been one of slavery and freedom, slavery and freedom, alternately for 1500 years. No wonder that the older brother, representative of the Pharisees of Jesus' day, could see nothing wrong in his own life. The prodigal was certainly guilty before the Lord. He had committed many sins through the weakness of the flesh, the magnetic attraction of worldly

pleasures, the incredible strength of temptation, the power of evil association, and the satisfaction of fulfilled lust for a season. But what exonerated him in the eyes of the father was his attitude. "I have sinned."

He did not try to excuse himself. He made no attempt to blame someone else. He did not accuse his father, his brother, his companions, or his environment. He did not say that it was inherited, acquired from evil associations, or that he was the product of determinism. He said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say [confess] to him, 'Father, I have sinned. ...'"

In vivid contrast with this, the older brother could see nothing wrong in his own life. He was self-righteous, egotistical, full of self-admiration, and self-love. He was critical of his father, unforgiving toward his brother, selfish in his demeanor, and possessed an angry, ugly spirit. Indeed, it is a matter of attitude. This determines the direction one will take and the forgiveness that is or is not granted.

### **The Pharisee and the Publican**

A briefer version of this story is found in Luke 18:9-14. "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed this with himself, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."

" 'And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.' "

One of these men, representing the Jewish religious leaders of the day was haughty, self-sufficient, demanding, and self-absorbed. The other, representing what one ought to be to enter the kingdom of God, was humble, unpretentious, unassuming, and self-effacing. One (1) prayed with himself, (2) thought he

was better than other men, (3) boasted of his moral goodness, and (4) took great pride in his ceremonial keeping of the law. The difference was attitude. Attitude, very largely, determines the formation of character, decides direction in one's course in life, induces the disposition of the heart, moves one toward his goal, and influences his destiny.

### **The Sin Exemplified in the Lives of the First Two Kings of Israel**

Saul: Saul's attitude at the first was remarkable, his outlook was commendable, his disposition was admirable, and his whole frame of mind seemed praiseworthy. He was a handsome young man and none in Israel were above him (I Samuel 9:2). In that early day, his attitude toward God's representative was laudable and his demeanor was unselfish (I Samuel 9:7). Look at his humility in what he said and how he acted: "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel" (I Samuel 9:21)? When the time came for Saul's selection and appointment before Israel, he had hid himself among the equipment (I Samuel 10:21-22).

One of the beautiful passages that tell the character of Saul at the beginning of his career is found in (I Samuel 10:26): "And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched." What a pity that he did not maintain that wonderful attitude throughout his life.

After Saul became king, with almost absolute power, his viewpoint was radically changed. His way of thinking did an about face, his personal temperament did a 180-degree alteration, and his spiritual posture took a nose dive. He presumed to offer sacrifices, which prerogative belonged to the priests only. The prophet Samuel asked him: "What have you done" (I Samuel 13:11)?

Saul began making excuses and extenuating himself: (1) I saw that the people were scattered from me. (2) You did not come within the days appointed. (3) The Philistines gathered themselves at Michmash. (4) I had not made supplication to the Lord. (5) I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. All of this must have sounded plausible to him, but Samuel replied: "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God" (I Samuel 13:11-13).

Because of his change of attitude which modified his course of action Samuel apprised Saul of the fact that the kingdom of Israel would be taken from him and given to a man after God's own heart (I Samuel 13:14). A little later in his career we note another act of disobedience produced by an attitude of determining to do what he wanted to do, of making his own decisions, of walking in his own way, of resolving to place his will above God's and of being his own judge of what was best, even in the face of the plain directives God had issued to him.

Through his prophet, Samuel, he was told that God remembered what Amalek had done to Israel as they came out of Egypt. He issued the command for Saul and his army to utterly destroy the Amalekites and leave nothing, but they spared Agag the King and the best of the sheep and oxen and all that was good. When Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, the king again was filled with excuses and lies: (1) "... I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (I Samuel 15:13). (2) "The people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen" (I Samuel 15:15), (3) "to sacrifice to the lord" (I Samuel 15:15), (4) "but I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission which the Lord sent me" (I Samuel 15:20). (5) "The people took of the plunder, sheep, and oxen, the best of the things" (I Samuel 15:21). Samuel then asked Saul: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (I Samuel 15:22-23).

Saul's response sounds good on the surface, but you must examine the answer and analyze it carefully: "Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words'" (I Samuel 15:24), but he did not stop there.

Listen closely: "... because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (I Samuel 15:24). When you reflect on Saul's attitude, you observe that he always excused himself, blamed other people for his sins and mistakes, was never ready to admit his own sin, claimed he was forced to take the action he did, and always tried to justify himself. It is this kind of sin of attitude that separates one from God, blunts the will, destroys character and ultimately damns the soul.

David: When one examines the life of David, he wonders why God held him in higher esteem than Saul and how he could have been designated "a man after His own heart." There was a period in his life when he was a brigand, an outlaw, and a lawless fellow who lived by plunder. In modern days, he would be branded as a bandit. Some of the blackest sins found in the catalog of crime marked his life.

He took a multiplicity of wives and concubines. Though permitted, it was never God's will. Jesus said it was not so from the beginning (Matthew 19:3-9). He reached out in his lust and took the wife, Bathsheba, of another man, Uriah, a faithful soldier in his army. He was guilty of lying, deceit, subterfuge, and hypocrisy. Sin will eat as a cancer and increase into more ungodliness. This is what happened in the case of David.

There was first lust, then adultery, and afterwards, lying and murder. Certainly, in all these sins, he was not a man after God's own heart. In his effort to lead Israel to do the will of God and get them to respect God's word, he was truly a man after God's own heart. He set some wonderful examples of attitude toward God's arrangement for His people. There were occasions when he could have killed Saul who constantly sought his life, but out of respect for God's anointed, he would not lay a hand upon him.

Also, his attitude of genuine repentance, of admitting his sins, of sorrow for all of his mistakes, and his resolution to turn his life around and face God and not repeat those heinous crimes ever again, pleased God. His attitude of humility instead of pride, repentance instead of stubbornness, and of prayer instead of arrogance are the things which eventually led him into the right path and into harmony with the will of God. There is nothing more important than the right attitude.

### **Simon and the Woman in His House**

"Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping: and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and

wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he said, 'Teacher, say it.' 'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him more.' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one who he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.'

"Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little' " (Luke 7:36-47).

For a moment, let us view this woman's thinking, her feelings, her impressions—the whole compass of her attitude. She was penitent, knowing her condition brought on by her former sinful life. Here weeping, washing the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing his feet was evidence of her self-reproach and change of heart. She was ashamed and conscience-stricken, and her regret over her past life is certainly shown in her reaction and conduct on this occasion. Further, she was generous in what she bestowed on Jesus and her love was deep and genuine.

In contrast to her attitude, give attention to the posture of this Pharisee. His was one of suspicion and doubt of Jesus. He felt that he had detected Jesus in a serious aberration and irregularity of conduct incompatible with his own traditional standard.

But the Pharisee had not shown Him the common courtesies that were due to a visitor in his home. It was tantamount to an insult, and he did it on purpose. He set himself up as a higher

authority in judgment of these matters than Jesus, and he thought of himself as incomparably higher, socially and morally, than this woman of the street. He was oblivious to any fault in his own deportment. He was critical and fault finding. He owed five hundred denarii and the woman owed fifty. He provided no water to wash his guest's feet. To kiss His feet was probably the furthest thing from his mind because it would have been repulsive to his dignity and offensive to his pride. It would have been an objectionable waste to anoint the head of Jesus with the expensive ointment or perfume. It would surely be abhorrent to pour it on His feet! Without doubt, it is all a matter of attitude!

### **Woman Taken in Adultery**

"Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say?' This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him.

"But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.'

"And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convinced by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

"When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has not one condemned you? She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more' " (John 8:3-11).

The story goes that this woman was taken in the very act of adultery. What has been perplexing and unaccountable to me in the reading of this account is the fact that those who brought the woman to Jesus did not bring the man who was equally guilty along with her! That creates an insolvable problem. But

what was more serious to Jesus and constituted the most effective cudgel to thrust against their defenses was to question their own morality. The woman was guilty of adultery, no doubt. But the purpose of the scribes and Pharisees was wrong. They came to tempt Him, to entrap Him, and to discover Him in some infraction of the law—or, at least, to make it appear so.

They searched for anything whereof they might accuse Him. Had they been honest they would have also taken the man. They were not really concerned about the sin, or the fact the Law had been transgressed.

Their whole attitude was wrong. Their bearing was in the opposite direction of right. The Law required that the person having detected the sin cast the first stone. One would conclude that all in that company, young and old, were guilty.

Like these separatists and sticklers who were so cautious and judicious about keeping the traditions of their fathers, we may be found to be interested in the keeping of the letter of the law, but not the spirit of it. These people were concerned about the legalistic side of the law, and intolerant toward those who may be guilty of overstepping their interpretation of it.

No more vital question confronts us than: "What is our attitude toward God and His word?"



## ONE BORN OF GOD CANNOT SIN

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read I John 3:9.
  - B. Definition of terms:
    1. Commit: "Of a continuous habit, practice. The committal of an act is not in view in that passage." (W.E. Vine).
      - a. "To keep, carry out, practice" (Arndt & Gingrich).
      - b. "Cannot keep on sinning" (Expositor's Greek New Testament).
      - c. Does not go on sinning. "He keeps purifying himself" (I John 3:3). "He is constantly busy sweeping out sin" (Lenski).
      - d. "An act is different from a state of sin" (Pulpit Commentary).
      - e. We partake of the characteristics of the parent.
    2. Begotten.
      - a. From father's consideration, beget.
      - b. From mother's consideration, bring forth, born.
      - c. We partake of the characteristics of the parent.
    3. Cannot:
      - a. To be able:
        - (1) Intrinsically and absolutely.
          - (i) Some things we do not have the power to do. It is a physical impossibility.
          - (ii) We cannot change things which have happened. It is not possible to turn back the clock.
        - (2) Circumstances do not favor it.
        - (3) Forbidden by law or custom. Example: Rob a bank; drive on the wrong side of the road.
        - (4) Restrained by moral obligation or standard.
        - (5) Cannot be done without forfeiting the promises, blessings, and fellowship of God.
      - b. Is the thought: It is a physical impossibility to sin? A Christian cannot do wrong? He possesses absolute perfection? He cannot fall from grace? He has eternal security and cannot lose it?

- II. Discussion:
- A. Common sense in the reading of the Bible helps one arrive at the truth:
1. Common sense tells us that one who is a child of God can lie, steal, and get drunk.
  2. Common sense tells us that he can do the same things after he becomes a Christian that he could do before he became a Christian.
  3. Common sense tells us that God saves only those, responsible before Him, who choose to be saved—that he does not force or coerce us to be Christians.
  4. Common sense teaches us not bring a passage of scripture into conflict with another passage.
    - a. I John 3:9 is not in conflict with: "If we say we have no sin ..." (I John 1:8-10).
    - b. I John 3:9 is not in conflict with: "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin, And if anyone sins ..." (I John 2:1-2).
    - c. I John 3:9 is not in conflict with: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (I John 3:4).
- B. Analysis of the Passage
1. John is not saying that it is a physical impossibility to commit an act of sin, or eve to turn back to sinning.
    - a. God does not tell us we cannot do things that we cannot do.
    - b. God forbids us and tells us that we cannot do certain things because he knows we cannot do them.
    - c. This prohibition (cannot) is in common use in our everyday lives. We forbid our children to do things we know they are can do.
  2. In God's word, the expression, cannot, does not always mean a physical restriction, or the lack of power or ability.
    - a. "the lad cannot leave his father" (Genesis 44:22).
    - b. "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:23).
    - c. "I could not go beyond the word of the Lord" (Numbers 22:18).
    - d. "For I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it" (Judges 11:35).

- e. "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (Luke 14:20).
- 3. Sometimes the expression, cannot, does mean physical limitation.
  - a. "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).
  - b. "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).
  - c. "Who can forgive sins but God" (Luke 5:21)?
  - d. "So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not" (Luke 9:40).
- 4. There are some things which God's people cannot do without violating His law, incurring His wrath, and suffering the consequences.

III. Conclusion:

A. The lesson for us:

- 1. It is not that we cannot commit sin or turn back into a world of sin (II Peter 2:20–22).
- 2. The child of God cannot afford to practice sin.
  - a. He is like His Father—has been begotten by Him.
  - b. He is a new creature and a new creation and sustains a new relationship (II Corinthians 5:17).
  - c. He has put off the old man put on the new (Ephesians 4:20-23).
    - (1) Put away.
    - (2) Be renewed.
    - (3) Put on.
  - d. You must adopt a new attitude of mine and heart. Mentally and spiritually you must be remade.
- 3. The practice of sin is inconsistent with the high standard of calling of the Christian life.

B. The seed remains in Him.

- 1. The seed is the word of God (I John 1:10; 2:5; 2:14).
- 2. It is the truth (I John 1:8; I Peter 1:23; James 1:18).
- 3. A seed has life in it (Hebrews 4:12).
- 4. The word is the means by which the Spirit makes alive, keeps alive, and by which He works (I Thessalonians 2:13).
- 5. Will you let the word of God change your life so that you will not continue to practice sin?

## **ONE BORN OF GOD CANNOT SIN**

"Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (I John 3:9). This is considered to be one of the difficult passages in the Bible, but it becomes understandable, and rather simple, if we approach it having given attention to these three principles: (1) the definition of terms, (2) the examination of it in the light of the context, and (3) the harmonizing of it with the plain passages of scripture in other places in the Bible on the same subject.

### **The Meaning of Commit**

Although there are some ten different words in the New Testament which are translated commit, this word is from *poieo* and is used 576 times in the New Testament. Its primary meaning is to do.

Here is how the scholars define it as it is used in I John 3:9:

"Of a continuous habit, practice. The committal of an act is not in view in that passage" (W.E. Vine).

"To keep, carry out, practice" (Arndt & Gingrich).

"Cannot keep sinning." (I John 3:9); (Expositor's Greek New Testament).

"Does not go on sinning." "He keeps purifying himself" (I John 3:3).  
"Is constantly busy sweeping out sin" (Lenski).

"An act is different for a state of sin" (Pulpit Commentary).

"Does not sin habitually and characteristically" (Barnes).

### **The Meaning of Beget**

The word for begotten or born, *gennoao*, is used 97 times in the New Testament and the word from which it comes, *ginnomai*, is used 677 times. It includes the begetting and the bringing forth. When used of men, it means "to beget or generate;" when used of women, it means "to bring forth, to bear, give birth to."

In this passage, I John 3:9, it is picture language, or figurative language, to tell of one who has been converted, or has become a Christian. The grammar of this expression in the verse is "having been begotten." As a child partakes of the characteristics of the parents, so the child of God, the Christian, partakes of the characteristics of the heavenly parent.

Jesus asserts that we are "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Peter, the apostle, writes: "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (I Peter 1:23).

### **The Meaning of Cannot**

The Analytical Greek Lexicon defines the term *dunamai* which is cannot in our passage as "to be able, either intrinsically or for specific reason." Bullinger says of the term: "capability or power, as inherent and moral."

Thayer defines it: "To be able, have power, whether by virtue of one's own ability and resources, or of a state of mind, or through favorite circumstances or by permission of law or custom."

There are some things that we cannot do intrinsically and absolutely. Physically, we cannot move the earth out of its orbit. Spiritually, we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). Those are absolute impossibilities!

It is not possible to change things that have happened. We cannot turn back the clock. Time moves inexorably on, regardless of the depth of our wish that things would remain much the same. There are some things we cannot do because circumstances do not favor it. I cannot go to London today because circumstances of time and other obligations prevent it.

Resources, or the lack of them, often cause me to say, "I cannot." "I cannot buy a new home." Why? My resources will not permit it! There are other meanings and applications of the word cannot. One cannot do certain things because he is forbidden by law or custom. "I cannot rob a bank." I may have the physical power to do so. I may have an arsenal of guns and

ammunition. There could be a number of accomplices who would be willing to help me. It is within the realm of corporal possibility. We may have the cleverness, the expertise, the courage, or foolhardiness, and the technical ability to walk into a bank with a gun and tools and rob it of a million dollars. But we cannot do it because we are forbidden by law.

I make the statement that in the United States I cannot drive on the left side of the street in my automobile. In actuality, I can. There is nothing to prevent me from physically doing it, provided that side of the street is clear of traffic, but I cannot do it because the law forbids it. There is a traffic rule that disallows it. It is taboo. With that proscription goes a penalty for violation of the law.

There are other reasons why I cannot do certain things. I am restrained by moral standards and obligations. I cannot get drunk on alcohol. In actuality, I can! I cannot lie. But, I can! I cannot steal. There is no doubt that I have the physical capacity of doing all these things, but from a moral standpoint all of these things are not permissible. Moral law outlaws them and, for a Christian particularly, such things are not only unlawful, but they are illicit, unauthorized, unlicensed, and a violation of God's law. God, a long time ago, vetoed this kind of behavior.

There is an extension of this sense of not being able to do certain things. I cannot do some things without forfeiting the promises of God to me, without losing His fellowship, and the fellowship of my Christian friends and without suffering the loss of God's blessings He pledges to His children. One who lies, steals, murders, and commits adultery will forfeit the inheritance and be divested of the promise of heaven that God has assured the faithful.

### **What is the Thought in This Passage**

What is the thought in this passage? Is John saying that it is a physical impossibility to sin? Is he affirming that the Christian, saved by the blood of Christ, cannot do any wrong? Is this an inspired assertion of absolute perfection of the Christian? Is he laying down a premise that the Christian cannot fall from grace? Is this an avowal or a declaration on the part of the apostle John

that the Christian has eternal security and that there is no way for that guarantee to be nullified? These are questions which arise out of a misunderstanding of the passage, and questions that must be answered by the proper handling of the Scriptures.

### **Common Sense**

Common sense in reading the word of God will help one arrive at a knowledge of the truth. I do not speak of logical arguments in and of itself. Mere dialectics is not the answer to the proper understanding of the word of God; but with the study and knowledge of God's word on a particular subject, rational deduction and reasonableness are necessary ingredients.

There is no doubt but that God intends that the Christian use sound reasoning and right thinking in his search for truth. When we read and carefully consider all that God has said upon a subject, we will find His interpretation to be forcible, clear, and incisive.

On subjects that have to do with salvation, life, and godliness, not only is it clear and unambiguous, but convincing and believable. For instance, common sense tells us that a child of God, who is a free moral agent, can lie and steal and get drunk—just like he may have done before he became a Christian. Common sense tells us that a man can do the same things after he is a Christian that he did before becoming one. Otherwise, he would be robbed of will power and would become a robot.

God accepts only a willing service rendered out of a heart of love. That which is performed mechanically never receives His approval or acceptance.

In reading the Bible, it, along with our common sense, tells us that God saves only those responsible before Him who choose to be saved. He does not force or coerce people to become His children. Common sense teaches us not to bring one passage, or passages, of scripture into conflict with another passage.

In I John the apostle repeatedly makes reference to both the possibility and actuality of sinning: "If we say that we have no sin ..." (I John 1:8-10). "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin ..." (I John 2:1-2).

"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness ..." (I John 3:4). And there are many others which declare substantially the same thing.

### **Analysis of the Passage**

John is not telling us that it is a physical, material, absolute, impossibility for a child of God to commit an act of sin. Nor is he saying the Christian cannot turn back to a life of sinning. You must know already that God does not tell us that we cannot do things which He knows we cannot do. God forbids us, or tells us we cannot do certain things because he knows it is possible for us do them.

This is the common, everyday use we make of the word. I never told my children, in their growing up, that they could not do certain things that I knew they could not do! I, rather, said to them: "You cannot" do certain things because I knew they could and, in all likelihood, would do them and, many times, they did!

On occasions, I said to them: "You cannot stay out on school nights until midnight." But they could and, unless we strictly kept our word, they were prone to try our restrictive rules!

"You cannot go to that kind of school party," I said. Sure enough, they could! It is true that they would suffer the consequences, but it was not impossible for them to plan, decide, and then carry out their intentions.

### **Physical Restriction Not Always Meant**

Lack of power or ability or physical restriction on the part of a Christian is not the thing under consideration in those passages wherein the term cannot be found. Sometimes, however, it does mean an utter responsibility. Let me give you some examples: "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

"And where I am you cannot come" (John 7:34). In this case there is no alternate choice. There is no option, no loophole, and no elective. There is not the slightest possibility of your going where Jesus is unless you believe that He is the Son of God, and all else that is implied in that statement.



"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Not only is Jesus saying that this is beyond the bounds of possibility, but he is also saying this is completely hopeless. There is no way for you to get into the kingdom of God unless you are born again of water and of the Spirit.

Physical restraint and limitations are under consideration most of the time, but not always. In so many of God's commands, moral and spiritual bounds are what He has in mind. His restraints and qualifications have to do with the sin of violating His law. Let me give you some simple examples: Moses said: "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:21-23). Well, of course, they could! But there were reasons why they could not: (1) Moses charged them not to come up and (2) "Lest they break through ... and many of them perish."

Balaam said to the servants of Balak: "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God ..." (Numbers 22:18). You know that he could and did go beyond the word of the Lord, but he knew he could not do it without breaking the law, without offending God, without open defiance of His instruction, without incurring His wrath and without forfeiting His blessings. He was not speaking of a physical impossibility, but of a moral violation that would incur God's wrath.

Jephtah said: "For I have given my word to the Lord and I cannot go back on it" (Judges 11:35). In the first place, he should have never made such a foolish, rash promise as to sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house upon his return from a successful journey. This shows how foolish, absurd, and empty one can be in his deportment. You might admire him for fulfilling his promise, but he was foolhardy to make any such promise in the first place. There are many promises you can make to God that are reasonable and that have real significance

The brothers of Joseph said to him concerning his request that Benjamin be brought down into Egypt on their next trip: "The lad cannot leave his father" (Genesis 44:22). Of course, he could leave his father, and he did leave his father. They were not

talking about an absolute impossibility. Their qualification was, "The lad cannot leave his father ... his father would die."

### **The Lesson for Us**

John is not in any way intimating that a child of God cannot sin, or even that he cannot turn back into the world from whence he came. He is telling Christians that they cannot keep on doing (practicing) sin without violating God's will, incurring His wrath, and giving up their hope of heaven. Such would not be compatible with the Christian life to which they had been called. This would be entirely out of harmony with the standard God has set for His people. It is not a single sin which might be committed inadvertently, or even purposely, that John is here discussing. It is the continuous or habitual sinning he has in mind.

One who has become a Christian does not continue to live as he lived when he was in the world. He is a new creature with his heart set on higher things than are found in this world.

This is the same truth Peter emphasizes in his writings: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire' " (II Peter 2:20-22).

John is telling us that we cannot do this and be consistent with God's revealed will; we would not thus reflect the goodness and purity of God and of His standard for us and we would lose our reward; and we would be divested of the glorious blessings the Lord has in store for those who live righteously, godly, and self-controlled lives in this world.

The child of God cannot afford to practice sin. He is like the Father, having been begotten of Him. He is a new creation, and he sustains a new relationship. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (II Corinthians 5:17). He has put off the

old man and has put on the new man. "... that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:21-23). Paul is here instructing and charging the Ephesian Christians to put off the old man once for all—a definite and decisive break with the former way of living. And John, in our context, is telling us there is a continuous renewal. This instruction is three-fold: (1) put away, (2) be renewed, and (3) put on. The putting on of the new man is in the middle voice, the grammarians of the New Testament language tell us. That simply means that this is something we do for ourselves. That is, we are able to do these things. They are not done for us by God, or by anyone else.

These are things which we have the ability and responsibility of doing. You must adopt a new attitude of mind. Mentally and spiritually, you must be remade and you have a part with God in that remodeling of yourself. It takes effort on your part.

The practice of sin is inconsistent with the high standard and calling of the Christian life. There is help, however, for the Christian to maintain this way of life. John said: "The seed remains in you." That is, the word of God is in our hearts and it works powerfully and effectually and energetically in the life of the Christian (II Thessalonians 2:13).

The seed, you must know, is the word of God. Read these verses from I John: 1:10; 2:5; and 2:14. The seed is the truth. Read also I Peter 1:23 where the apostle declares we are born of the incorruptible seed which is the word of God. And James 1:18 will help you in understanding the part the word of God has in the influence, direction, and shaping of our inner man.

A seed has life in it. Thus, the word of God is a living power. It is the means by which the Spirit quickens, makes us alive, and keeps us alive. The word of God is that tool or instrument by which the Spirit works in our lives.

Will you allow the word to change your life and live in you so that you may not continue to practice sin?

## NEITHER WAS GUILF FOUND IN HIS MOUTH

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read I Peter 2:21-25.
  - B. One of the most important subjects for the Christian:
    - 1. To be truthful with God, fellow man, and self.
    - 2. Necessary to peace, hope, happiness, and assurance; an absolute requisite.
  - C. Lying general and universal:
    - 1. Quotation from David (Psalm 116:11).
    - 2. Quotations from Paul (Romans 3:4; Titus 1:12).
    - 3. Quotations from Time magazine.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Truth is sacred:
    - 1. God is truth.
    - 2. Jesus compliments Nathanael (John 1:47).
    - 3. How do we consider truth and telling the truth?
    - 4. Of supreme importance (Proverbs 30:8; Malachi 2:5-6; Psalm 15:2-3; John 14:6; 16:7; 1:14).
  - B. Truth is priceless:
    - 1. "Buy the truth and do not sell it (Proverbs 23:23).
    - 2. The instruction of an apostle (Ephesians 4:24).
    - 3. Even the courts of our different countries.
    - 4. Deceit is dangerous.
  - C. The different kinds of lies:
    - 1. Deceit (I Timothy 2:11-14; II Samuel 11:8).
    - 2. Perfidy (I Kings 13; Genesis 37).
    - 3. Silent (Matthew 21:25-27).
    - 4. Inaccuracy (I Samuel 15; Matthew 19).
    - 5. Treachery (Judges 16).
    - 6. Dishonesty (Acts 5).
    - 7. Disguise (Matthew 26:47-50).
    - 8. Fragmentary, Abraham (Genesis 12; 20).
  - D. In our world, how can you be guiltless?
    - 1. Are you justified in telling lies?
    - 2. Is situation ethics permissible?
    - 3. How can I be tactful and truthful at the same time?
    - 4. How important are the other person's feelings?
  - E. How can a Christian handle these matters?
    - 1. "Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).
    - 2. Be frank and candid, but kind.

3. Do not withhold what needs to be said, if otherwise the person would be deceived.
  4. Decline to speak at all if truth is not advanced.
- III. Conclusion:
- A. To whom can we lie?
    1. To God.
    2. To our fellow men.
    3. To ourselves.
  - B. God requires Christians to be open and honest:
    1. Think, speak, act, live the truth always.
    2. God cannot be fooled. We cannot hide things from God.
    3. God will not forget, nor will He count lying an unimportant matter.
    4. He will bring liars into judgment (II Peter 2:4, 9; 3:7; Jude 6; Revelation 14:10).
  - C. What about believing a lie?
    1. The Bible is replete with information on what happens to the one who tells lies.
    2. What does it have to say about those who believe lies (II Thessalonians 2:10ff).
  - D. The answer:
    1. Repentance on the part of man.
    2. Forgiveness on the part of God.

## **NEITHER WAS GUILF FOUND IN HIS MOUTH**

"Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth" (I Peter 2:22). Any Bible subject that has to do with Christian living is important. Of course, any other topic upon which God has spoken is also important, whether spoken once or one hundred times. Generally, it seems to us, Bible subjects which have to do with practical everyday living are more important to us.

There is no subject that is of greater significance to the Christian or that is more major in the daily walk of the child of God than that of being truthful—with God, with his fellow man, and with himself. Jesus told His disciples that if they would hold to His teaching, they would know the truth and the truth would make them free. Later on, He prayed to the Father to set them apart from the world, using the truth as a means to do so. Then, He affirmed: "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). For the Christian to enjoy any measure of happiness, hope, peace, and assurance, this is an absolute requisite.

### **Lying is Commonplace**

It does not take one very long, in his associations with people, to discover that lying is both general and universal. David once said, "I said in my haste, all men are liars" (Psalm 116:11).

In his letter to the Roman church, Paul urged the Christians there: "Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). He quoted a Cretan poet when he wrote to Titus: "Cretans are always liars" (Titus 1:12).

Time magazine reported some time ago that the average American tells 200 lies a day! I wonder if the comment concerning people of other nations would parallel our practice in this country? If that is so, we may conclude that the world is filled with liars, and that David was not far wrong.

The Old Testament has a number of words for liars and lying. One of them primarily means failing. Another word means deceitful. Still another means to feign or make believe. In some passages vanity is the word.

In the New Testament, the word is *pseudos*, or a cognate, of the same family, of it. In English, this word, taken from the Greek, is *pseudo* and means "false, counterfeit, spurious, sham, pretended, unreal, denoting a deceptive resemblance." It means very much the same in the Greek New Testament: "falsehood, deceit, corruption of truth, perversion of religious truth, practice of false religion, delinquency."

### **Truth is Sacred**

Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). He not only spoke the truth and lived the truth, this passage says that He is the truth. For us to be most like God, we, too, must think the truth, tell the truth, and live the truth. One of the greatest compliments Jesus ever paid anyone was to Nathaniel when He said concerning him: "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). He used a rather uncommon word here, *dolos*, which means "a bait, a contrivance for entrapping: fraud, deceit, a decoy; an insidious artifice, guilt." Why would Jesus say that? Most people around Him in that day must have had guile. From the context, one would deduce that truth, and telling the truth, was an uncommon quality.

How do we consider truth? Do we think of it as sacred and desirable? Do we count it important? Necessary? In our world and in our time, do we believe that honesty is the best policy? I believe it is, but I also believe it is much more than policy. There is a much higher motive.

The truth is of supreme importance. I like the words of Agur in Proverbs 30:8: "Remove falsehood and lies far from me." Malachi had this to say about the man who had reverence for God and His name: "... The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity" (Malachi 2:6).

Who is able to abide in the tent of the Lord and dwell in His holy hill? The one who "speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue" (Psalm 15:2-3).

"For my mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips" (Proverbs 8:7). We need to go back and remember always that Jesus said, "I am the truth." He said, "I tell you the truth" (John 16:7). John records that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). But more than all of this, Jesus is the truth. This makes Him worthy of our emulation and also of our admiration and worship.

### **Truth is Priceless**

"Buy the truth and do not sell it" (Proverbs 23:23). I have often contemplated what this world would be if men everywhere and at all times would tell the truth. What discourages people in all countries today is to discover that those who lead them do not speak the truth. Men in high position in government, who legislate laws for us and then administrate them, cannot be trusted to communicate the truth. Those who stand out front in the religious world suppress the truth, distort it, diminish it, and substitute for it until the average person listening or reading or watching is so confused, he does not know what to believe and accept.

Some men in these places of leadership are so determined to advance their own interests, fill their own coffers, and embellish their own reputations, they obscure the truth, withhold it, add to it, subtract from it, corrupt it, debauch it, pollute it, and whatever else they can do to violate and pervert it for filthy lucre's, money's, sake. It is recorded in Titus 1:11 that there are those "teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest [filthy lucre's] gain." Read these passages also: I Peter 5:2; I Timothy 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; and you will discover the eminent, lofty position money holds in the ambitions of men—the avarice of power, the struggle with destiny, the frenzy of profit, the excessive greediness for position and the insatiable desire for comfort and independence.

Men will seek renown, power, security, popularity, pleasure, and prestige at the cost of truth. They will sell it for a few measly, contemptible dollars or whatever the exchange is. Solomon said, "Buy the truth and do not sell it." I am not sure that his statement was entirely correct. Most of the time you do not have to buy the truth. You can have it free of charge. God did not want men to make merchandise of His word. But on the



other hand, there is a price to pay for truth. It comes in terms of self-sacrifice and self-denial. You get it by paying a much larger price than silver and gold or stocks and bonds. It costs self-resignation—and the total, unreserved giving of one's self. Jesus said, "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43).

### **Different Species of Lies**

You likely know already the definitions of a lie. Our dictionaries define it as "a falsehood, an untruth, told or acted to deceive; a false statement made with the deliberate intent to deceive; something intended or serving to convey a false impression."

There are many different kinds of lies; hence Christians need to be careful lest they be guilty of lying one way or another inadvertently, because God hates a liar: "A worthless person, a wicked man, Walks with a perverse mouth; He winks with his eyes, He shuffles his feet, He points with his fingers; Perversity is in his heart, He devises evil continually, He sows discord. ... These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:12-19).

Observe, if you will, what this brief reading contains in the way of lying: (1) a lying tongue, (2) a false witness that speaks lies, (3) a heart that devises wicked imaginations. I have reason to believe that the last sin he mentions is fraught with lies. (4) He that sows discord among the brethren.

To help us in the understanding of this Bible subject and to prevent our being overtaken by this many-faceted sin, let us observe some of the common lies which were told and acted in those times and which are repeated in our day.

1. Deceit: This word, *exapatao*, is very strong, and means "to deceive thoroughly, to delude or beguile." "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (I Timothy 2:14). Perhaps a better translation would have been, "the woman was thoroughly deceived." It also carries the idea of "tricking, fooling, and cheating" someone.

All lies have this element of deceit, and usually the lie is told or acted to mislead. It is always premeditated and designed to do just that.

Rebekah, the wife of Isaac and the mother of Esau and Jacob, contrived a lie for Jacob to act and tell his father in order that he might receive the inheritance of the eldest son (Genesis 27:5–29). He seemed a little reluctant to be a party in this affair, but his mother urged him and he carried out the scheme successfully. His father asked him, “Are you really my son Esau? And he said, ‘I am’” (Genesis 27:24). They had been very subtle in disguising this fraud and the mother was willing to take the blame: “Let your curse be on me, my son, only obey my voice” (Genesis 27:13). I would not have you lose sight of the fact that this lie perpetrated to deceive the blind father was acted as well as told.

Once implicated in the sin of adultery with another man's wife, David began to scheme and chart out the course he would take to conceal his wickedness (II Samuel 11:1–12:24). The first arrangement he made in this stratagem was to call Uriah home from the front lines of battle and send him down to his house that he may know his wife. When this plot failed, he drafted another—to have Uriah dine with the king, get him drunk and call upon him again to be on his way to his house to sleep with his wife, leaving the impression that after days and weeks of battle and fatigue in the conflict with the Philistines, he deserved a few days respite and regeneration.

This scenario, likewise, was a failure which led him to the next step—murder! Have you observed how progressive sin is? This whole lie, sketched out and blueprinted, so to speak, did not stop just with lying. It increased to more ungodliness. From the beginning to the end it was deceit!

2. Perfidy: This word means “a deliberate breach of faith or trust, violating faith, false to trust, an act or instance of faithlessness or treachery.” In I Kings 13, the story is told of the prophet from Judah being deceived by the old prophet in Samaria. God had sent the younger prophet to Bethel to cry against the altar of idolatry and wickedness there. He told him not to return the way he came, and not to eat bread or drink water in that place. When the offer came from the king to “refresh yourself, and I will give you a reward” his response was very strong: “I you were to

give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place." The reason for his strong refusal "was commanded me by the word of the Lord" not to do so. He was a very admirable prophet with great respect for the word of God and for his commission to Him.

Later, the old prophet in Bethel heard about the prophet from Judah. He admired him greatly for his courage, even in the presence of the king. He thought how nice it would be to meet this young fellow. I presume that he was young in contrast with the other prophet because he is called old. He rode an ass to overtake him and to fetch him back to his home. He found him on the road and said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." The prophet from Judah at first refused because he said, as before, that God forbade him to do so. This was the old prophet's reply: "I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But the writer of I Kings immediately noted, "But he lied to him."

This is what is called a lie of perfidy—a perfidious lie. Think of the trust the prophet from Judah had in the prophet from Bethel. He thought, no doubt, that here is a man of God, as I am. He is older, wiser, and has been serving the Lord longer, and, no doubt, has received instruction more often than I have. He is engaged in the same work for God that I am doing. I have no reason to doubt or contradict him. But the old prophet violated the young man's trust, for he lied to him.

One of the sad stories to me in the Old Testament is the trust Jacob had in his sons being so wickedly violated by heartless, cruel boys whose jealousy and hatred led them to lie to the old man to get even with their younger brother. It was not only a lie of perfidy, but it also belongs in the category of silent lies.

3. Silent Lies: May I digress long enough here to tell you that to be a lie, it is not necessary for it to be spoken from the lips. You can act it out and not utter a word. This is what these sons did to their poor father. They sold Jacob into slavery, killed an animal, dipped his coat of many colors into its blood, and presented it to their father, Jacob. Their failure to speak when to do so would have revealed the truth, was a blatant lie and they were under condemnation.

The Pharisees lied about the baptism of John. Jesus had asked them. "The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men" (Matthew 21:25)? They could not answer without telling the truth. It was a dilemma. Either answer would be fatal to them. If they said John's baptism was from heaven, then Jesus would ask them why they had not accepted it. If, on the other hand, they said his baptism was of men, they feared the people because they counted John a prophet and would, in all likelihood, stone them. So they kept silent. They did not say anything, but they lied, as men so frequently do, by keeping silent.

In many discussions, someone fully familiar with the facts may keep silent, leave the wrong impression, and, thereby, be guilty of lying. One may take the silent route for several reasons: (1) he does not wish to be implicated in any unpleasantness; (2) he refuses to brand someone as being guilty; or (3) it is against his better judgment to divide a worthy cause. You ask, "How can he be true to God and himself under such circumstances?" It may be necessary for him to speak plainly in such terms: "This matter is not any of your business, and I am not at liberty to divulge the content of the story." This may not be the most pleasant avenue to take, but it is vital that the Christian tell the truth, whatever the circumstances.

4. Inaccuracy: This word, as applied to lying, simply means "incorrect, exaggeration, overemphasis, highly colored." Many are enmeshed in this label of lies; the most innocent class, they believe, of all. One becomes so absorbed in what he is telling and in his desire to favorably impress others, that he resorts to an exaggeration that completely distorts the facts and leads those listening to be deceived. Repeated practice of this course does not run the risk of his losing the confidence of his friends, he believes, and he feels that he does not incur the displeasure of God.

Saul, the first king of Israel, was guilty of this lie. God had commanded him, through Samuel, to utterly destroy the Amalekites—to leave nothing (I Samuel 15). He almost accomplished that, but he saved Agag the king alive, and the best of the cattle and the sheep. When Samuel approached him, Saul's first words were, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord" (I Samuel 15:13). He had not done so, of course. It was a lie. A lie of inaccuracy and of exaggeration.

One has the feeling that he knew he was lying when he said it. That approach is often a front to hide the true situation. God is able to see through such deceit. The rich, young ruler makes the same mistake. Jesus told him to keep the commandments under which they were living. They were still under the Ten Commandment law. The young man replied: "All these I have kept from my youth." He hadn't, of course. He had not even kept the first one in its true meaning: "You shall have no other gods before Me." His money and his possessions constituted a god and he placed it before following Jesus.

I have little doubt that he would have followed Jesus if he could have put Him second on his list, but God always said to put Him first! Neither had he kept the commandment to love his neighbor as he loved himself. Had that been true, he would have known what he could do and how he could use his possessions to a beautiful and successful advantage that would have received the approbation of the Lord. When he said, "All these things I have kept ...," he greatly exaggerated.

It is difficult to keep from giving too much emphasis and color to some things that we relate. We want to make a good impression: we want the story to be interesting, and we also wish people to think highly of us. So, it is tempting to add a few unnecessary adjectives to convey our message successfully and to overstate what really happened to intrigue our audience and thus be guilty of putting things in a false light. Maybe that is not strong enough language to describe our guilt.

In reality, we thus wrench the truth, twist the meaning, disguise what is actual, and slant things to our advantage, if such mishandling of the truth can be called an advantage. It becomes a caricature of the truth—an imitation of truth so inferior as to be ludicrous. A character on the American stage once said, "I never tell any white lies; all of mine are in Technicolor!" And so it is with many of us. A story, repeated several times, often does not resemble the original. How careful the Christian ought to be!

5. Treachery: This word indicates "an appearance that belies; treason; having in mind to do wrong while appearing to do right." This is certainly a common genus of lies which marks and permeates a very large section of society. In the lifetime of

those reading these words, there comes to mind innumerable instances where men and women have been untrue to the country in which they were born and reared.

Espionage and sabotage have been at the top of the list. One can scarcely read a newspaper today, listen to a radio news program, or watch a television summary of world news without coming across a happening in which some citizen of a country has been unfaithful to that place he has always called home. He poses as giving allegiance to the country of his birth, but for money, sex, position, or renown he betrays his country, violates his allegiance, and becomes guilty of treason. One poses to be loyal to his country, but endeavors to destroy and undermine it.

this can also be done in our relationships with one another. How many millions of homes have been destroyed throughout the world by this treacherous telling and living of a lie? Judges chapter 16 is a graphic description of this lesson I am endeavoring to convey to you. Samson, an Israelite, loved a beautiful woman of Sorek by the name of Delilah. The lords of the Philistines persuaded her to entice Samson, feigning a great love to him, and bring him into bondage that they may afflict him.

They promised to give her, everyone of them, eleven hundred pieces of silver. Such treachery was motivated by the attractiveness and magnetic pull of money, the patriotism she felt for her people and country, the affiliation with those of the same ethnic background, and, perhaps, an exclusiveness of racial superiority. Who know what all of her motives were.

She was both persistent and subtle in her approach to Samson and her effort to elicit from him the secret of his strength. She made him believe that she truly loved him, but that he must not love her, else he would divulge the means of his strength. But she had in mind to do him wrong with appearing to do right by him. She destroyed him. The Philistines captured him, put out his eyes, bound him with fetters of brass, and caused him to grind in the prison house. Lying caused misery of every conceivable kind!

6. Dishonesty: This kind of lying is characterized by fraud. One who is guilty of this class of lies is wanting in integrity. Such people are base and bad deep down. They are hateful and insidious.

I do not like dealing with people who are dishonest. It is far better for me to stand fearfully aloof from them. How disappointed I have been at various times in my life by people, sometimes brethren, who are not honest in their dealings with others. They promise, but they do not fulfill. They lead you to believe that all is well, when it isn't. They would have you think this is the best course, and you discover it to be an irreparable mistake.

Ananias and Sapphira, members of the early Jerusalem church, were present when an economic emergency arose among its members. Christians, not settled in homes and jobs, but having come from distant lands, needed to be fed and clothed. Their only hope for survival was the care of their brothers and sisters in Christ. The response, once the problem was proclaimed, was overwhelming. Christians came to their rescue. They gave generously that the needs of every person may be met.

Some were sincere in their motives for giving. This couple about whom we read in Acts 5, wanted the glory that crowned such generosity they had seen evidenced by others, so they promised to the church the full receipt from the sale of a piece of property they owned. But they were dishonest. They held back a part of that money they had been paid by the purchaser of their piece of land. Peter said they had lied to God and the Holy Spirit; but they had lied to others as well.

I truly wonder if we are not guilty of their sin of dishonesty when we shortchange God. We are able to give more; we promise Him our life and our best; but when it comes to a demonstration of that love and care for Him and for His needy saints, we dishonestly hold back what belongs to Him and selfishly keep it for our own use and pleasure.

7. Disguise: This word denoted hypocrisy. It is used of one who feigns and makes believe. This is stage acting. One is out of character. What you see is not what is really there. He is hiding behind another face. He poses as one thing when, in reality, he is something entirely different.

Do you remember the story of Ahab, the king of Israel? Refresh your memory by reading I Kings 22. Ahab wanted Ramoth Gilead, now held by the Syrians, to be returned to him and his people. He

requested the assistance of his fellow king in Judah, Jehoshaphat. They counseled with the prophets who told them to go up and take it. God would give it into their hand.

However, there was one prophet, Micaiah, who predicted catastrophe if they made the attempt to recapture it and take it back. Thinking that he, Ahab, could nullify the prediction of Micaiah, he proposed to disguise himself: "I will disguise myself and go into battle ... So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle" (I Kings 22:30).

Isn't it remarkable that while you may fool men and misguide them with reference to who you are and what you intend to do, that you cannot fool God? The captains of the chariots perceived that he was not the king of Israel and they turned back from pursuing him. "Now a certain man [just a common soldier, I am sure] drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor ... so the king died" (I Kings 22:34-37)

This and other stories like it tell us that we may fool, deceive, and hornswoggle, to use a strong expression, men all around us, and for an extended period of time; but there is no way we can lie and disguise ourselves so as to dupe and mislead God. We often make God in our image, as those people did to whom Paul spoke in Romans I, by thinking we can slip one over on Him, delude, and mock Him, but "God is not mocked" (Galatians 6:7).

Judas Iscariot posed as the Lord's friend. He even came and kissed Him in the garden, which was ordinarily a mark of friendship, but he was a hypocrite of the deepest dye (Matthew 26:47-50).

No people did Jesus condemn more often or more severely than the Pharisees whom He branded as hypocrites. They even told people to keep the Law of Moses and their traditions, but they would not so much as lay a finger on the practice of them personally. Jesus said for the people of His day to listen to them, the religious leaders, but do not do as they do (Matthew 23:2-3). He called them hypocrites so many times that it would seem to be redundant and unnecessary, but it was a great truth. He was driving it home for them and all succeeding generations. It is important that we be genuine. He was saying, "I want you to



be the real thing; authentic, legitimate, true, and consistent. Not infallible, but faithful. Not sinless, but sound in the faith. Not perfect, but doing your best to walk in the light in all sincerity.”

8. Fragmentary Truth: There is probably no lie that manipulates people with more shrewdness and craft than the partial lie. It may be observed that there is likely no lie that is more ravaging and destructive than a fragmentary truth. I like what a witness is required to affirm in the courts of this country: “Will you swear [affirm] to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

“Now Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She is my sister.’ And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah” (Genesis 20:2). Abraham endangered the purity of his wife and placed his people in jeopardy by telling a half-truth. I am not sure there is a bigger lie than a half-truth. This was not the first time Abraham had told the lie. When there was a famine in the land, Abraham, with his family and servants, went down into Egypt. He knew that his wife was a beautiful woman and how she would attract the men of Egypt. So, he entreated his wife to tell the people who admired her that she was Abraham’s sister. Her beauty was called to the attention of the Pharaoh and he took her. God plagued his house and evidently revealed to him through some avenue that Sarah was Abraham’s wife and not his sister, as Abraham had affirmed. He lied by telling a half-truth, to save his own neck! “... that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you” (Genesis 12:13).

He did not seem to be too disturbed that his wife may be violated and her purity destroyed as long as he was removed from danger. He caused a great deal of trouble by telling just a fragment of truth (Genesis 12:10–19).

Someone wants to know how you can be guileless (truthful) and, at that same time, courteous, gentle, and good mannered. “If I am entirely truthful, 100 percent, so to speak, will I not be rude and insulting to those whose friendship I seek or cherish? Do I have a right to withhold a part of the truth to save feelings? To protect myself from the danger of bodily harm? For profit? To prevent embarrassment? To keep from being disgraced?” These are questions frequently asked. I believe the answer is a plain and Biblical one: “No, if in so doing you deceive someone!”

Mark Twain, a great writer and novelist, once said: "Every man is like a moon; he has a side he shows to no one." That may be true, and there may be no need for a man to divulge everything about himself to others; but for him to withhold truth, or tell a half-truth to mislead or deceive others, is wrong without any question. I like another statement better than Mark Twain wrote: "If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

A Christian wants to know: "How can I be tactful or diplomatic? How can I employ tact and conciliation to keep from hurting one's feelings and making an enemy? Do I have to tell how I feel? Must I disclose to that person what I know his fault to be? Do I reveal to him how unpleasant he is, and how undesirable a personality trait I think he has? In my effort to tell the truth, should I be critical or should I be negative and silent?"

Before I go further, let me make this comment. I believe you can tell the truth with kindness, always considering the feelings of the other fellow and keeping in mind that your main purpose is to save his soul. That is the most important thing in the world. Even then, truth is not always pleasant or easily accepted. But you can be sure your spirit and intention are right. Jesus told the rich young ruler the truth, even though it meant that he went away sorrowful never to be his disciple. The Lord weighed the importance and value of his soul above his personal feelings and sensitivity to His hard, but kind, response. The ethical question is constantly raised: "Is a lie ever justified? Is the doctrine of situation ethics true?" Are lies permissible by God on the grounds of circumstances? Can a young woman with three children to support, live in sin and her conduct be sanctioned by the Lord?

What is lawfully and legitimately allowable for one to say and do under adverse conditions? A man holds a gun on me and demands: "Tell me where your brother is." Under that circumstance, does God permit me to lie? I have a friend in the islands whose home was broken into and demands were made. Was he entitled to lie about the \$9,000 in cash he had stashed away or the whereabouts of the key to his \$30,000 BMW automobile?

A doctor who knows a patient must die, either withholds that truth from him or tells him he will get well. Should he take such

a course? Does he circumvent the truth that might hasten his death? Am I licensed to lie if there is good enough reason to do so? But who judges as to the worthiness of the reason? May the lawyer lie, or withhold part of the truth, to save his client? On and on almost endlessly the questions go.

### **How Does a Christian Handle These Matters?**

"Speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). It is self-deception to think that we can lie in love. One may decline to speak at all (yes, you can lie by your silence), but you can, in love and warmth, allow one to know that you do not feel free to disclose to him the matter under discussion. You can do that without being rude or unkind by simply saying, "It is not your affair; I am not free to discuss this matter. No profit would come from it."

Any profession or business that cannot be practiced or carried on without lying or dishonesty is not for the Christian, no matter what the profit to him might be.

In answer to some of the above questions, I believe the Bible teaches that there are circumstances where you, as a Christian, have every right to defend your family—wife and children or other members—against an enemy that would rape, despoil, and kill; for you have a higher responsibility to these loved ones than you do toward an enemy. But this is really not the question. The real question is:

### **The Danger of Deceit**

We can lie to God, to our fellow man, and to ourselves, but it will destroy one's character—the fabric, the features, the qualities, the ethical traits, and moral excellence that make up the individual. Lying is damaging, destructive, and damning. It will impair our relationships with others, separate us from them by violating their trust, and leave them full of hurt and resentment.

Attorneys have a saying that is very applicable: "I cannot defend you unless you tell me the truth." We can deceive ourselves by thinking we are something when we are nothing (Galatians 6:3). A parallel passage is found in Romans 12:3: "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to

think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." He does not intend for us to think we are better than we are. This is self-deceit (I John 1:8). If we fail to bridle our tongues, thinking we are religious, we deceive our own selves and our religion is useless (James 1:26).

Obadiah said, "The pride [arrogance] of your heart has deceived you" (Obadiah 3). One who says that he knows God but does not keep His commandments is a liar (I John 2:4). There are other reasons why one is branded a liar. John asks, "Who is a liar?" Then he answers: "He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son" (I John 2:22). In 4:20 of that same book, John continues: "If someone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar." James says that a man who hears only and does not follow through by doing, deceives himself (James 1:22). That is, he lies to himself, and there is no more atrocious or extreme category of lying than this.

### **Men Treat Lying Lightly**

God requires his people to be open and honest—honest with him and ourselves. Somehow, since we can lie to and deceive one another, we feel that we may be able to dupe the Lord with a little underhanded dealing or with a scheme He does not see or takes no note. We fool ourselves into believing that God does not count it to be important, or that he has forgotten it with the passing of time. "He will not hold it against us. His grace will take care of that!" We hoodwink ourselves into believing that God will take little note of what I say or do. We thus limit God's ability and treat His justice inconsequentially. Like people of other times, we "make God in our own image."

When we say, "God does not see," we forget that God is not a man. We have failed to learn the lesson that "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). When we assume that God will forget in time, another hard fact needs to be impressed upon us: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promises ..." (II Peter 3:9).

And still another: "For if ... every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:2-3)? These things are not to be

taken lightly. Listen to this strong, inspired language: "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment ..." (II Peter 2:4). Read also these verses: II Peter 3:7; Jude 6; Romans 14:10; II Corinthians 5:10, and Revelation 21:8.

Not only does God take note of our lives, but so, also, do the people around us. "You are our epistles [letters] written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (II Corinthians 3:2). There is no escape from the close scrutiny of people with whom we are daily associated.

### **Believing a Lie vs Telling a Lie**

As we close this study, there is another question of great importance: "What about those who believe a lie?" We have pretty well settled, by the Bible, the question of those who tell lies, but what happens to those who believe them? There are many lies, I am sure, told every day that, if one should believe, would not result in serious consequences. For instance, if the evening newscaster should announce that the price of gold today has soared from \$454 an ounce to \$625 and people believed that lie, I am quite certain that it would not damn their souls. It may, eventually, adversely affect their bank account, but such a development need not be of any spiritual significance.

If someone should rush into my office and announce that my house was on fire, I might get into an automobile, or run on foot until I was out of breath, only to find out that the whole story was fabricated. Although I believed it, I am certain that it would not affect my eternal destiny with God. But there are lies that one can believe that will damn his soul. The story I related of the prophet from Bethel and Judah was told to impress that very lesson. We know what becomes of liars. The Bible is unambiguous on that subject. But what about those who believe lies?

There are some lies, without doubt, if believed and accepted, that will render one guilty and condemn his soul to everlasting perdition. In the story to which we have made reference, it is said that the old prophet "lied to him." Observe, if you will, that the censure in this narrative is not placed upon the one who told the lie, but he one who believed it.

Paul tells how God views this concern in his letter to the Thessalonians: "Those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion [an operation of error], that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Simply because one is honest or ignorant, he is not thereby excused and exempt from responsibility or from ultimate punishment. Paul was both honest and ignorant before he became a Christian, but he was also guilty!

The answer for each one of us is: (1) repentance on our part and (2) forgiveness on the part God.

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## HAVE A DRINK, BROTHER

Drinking and drunkenness were grievous, disastrous sins in the Old Testament.

“ ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones: so you shall put away the evil person from among you” (Deuteronomy 21:20–21).

There is no doubt that the mishandling and misuse of it are what produce the detrimental and destructive character of drink. The passage suggests a lack of self-control in eating and drinking, for the words are “glutton and drunkard.”

“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise” (Proverbs 20:1).

“Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper” (Proverbs 23:31).

Some of the effects of it are seen in such passages as these: “Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea ... They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink” (Proverbs 23:33–35)?

“They have cast lots for My people, have given a boy in exchange for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink” (Joel 3:3). Almost every sin in the catalogue of crime is perpetrated by the alcoholic out of consideration of drink. What a sad picture that a young man is given over to immoral purposes just to satisfy a drunkard's appetite for a drink. And a young girl is sold into prostitution, or maybe even slavery, to satiate for a moment that uncontrolled demand for alcohol.

“Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, pressing him to your bottle [adds your venom thereto], even to make him drunk” (Habakkuk 2:15). These are some of the detrimental and destructive results of strong drink.

## **The Word of God is Our Standard**

There is only one way to determine right and wrong—an appeal to the word of God as our standard. Some things are wrong, or evil, within themselves; inherently. By that I mean they are erroneous, false, and bad within the essential character of it. It is wrong to murder someone. Life is sacred. God is the Author and Giver of it. It is criminal to take away the life of another person; it is a violation of the law of man; and it is the transgression of the law of God. To do this puts one in defiance of the divine standard.

### **Things Inherently Wrong**

It is wrong to steal. God has always forbidden this because property rights are sacred. By sacred I do not mean something that has been dedicated to deity, or given for some religious purpose; but I do mean that it is a God-given right, bestowed upon the individual, and He intends that it be secured against violation or infringement. It is intrinsically wrong and sinful to take that which belongs to another person. That is, God has made resident the inalienable right to work for and own property, and He has forbidden anyone to infringe that right of another and thus contravene His will. There are those who live, however, to plunder.

I was told after someone broke into my house and robbed me of possessions accumulated over a period of forty years that 90 percent of those who “break through and steal” are never detected. Misgotten gain in this country amounts to billions of dollars each year. Locks and other security devices are small deterrents to the professional thief who lives by pillaging, looting, and plundering. What makes this case even sadder is that what they get from the sale of the stolen goods most likely goes for the purchase of drugs.

It is wrong to lie because truth is sacred and God forbade it. It damages the other person and destroys the moral fiber of one's own character. Read carefully the chapter on lying in this book.

Such sexual sins as homosexuality are condemned because they are wrong within themselves. God censures the sin of homosexuality and denounces the one who is guilty of practicing it. His disclaimer is considerably stronger than

that—God damns the one who continues in the practice of this sin! Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthian church: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, not idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites ... will inherit the kingdom of God” (I Corinthians 6:9–10).

In writing to the Roman Christians, he said, “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due ... God gave them over to a debased mind” (Romans 1:26–28).

### **Dignify Sin**

We have multitudes of people among us today who want to dignify these sins claiming this is the way God made us. “It is just a different life style,” they tell us. They have desecrated the beautiful word gay and prostituted other language in our mother tongue, as well as the Bible. They are blind to what God has said on the subject, or they are so hardened by sin to be indifferent and impervious to it. Paul, by inspiration, calls it: (1) sexual immorality, (2) shameful lusts, (3) unnatural relations, (4) indecent acts, (5) inflamed lust, (6) perversion, and (7) a depraved mind. How do you rationalize such behavior and vindicate people guilty of such scandalous and despicable wickedness? They call for legislation that will legitimize it and even raise it to be on par with the God-established standards of His holy word.

You might expect this of sinners out in the world who are ignorant of what the Bible teaches and who have low morals with which they begin their arguments, but what about priests and preachers who advocate and practice this kind of living? They build up congregations of such people, and justify or at least make an effort to extenuate themselves by claiming it is just another approach to living. “Our moral attitudes, preferred entertainment, and modern fashions are dissimilar to yours,” they assert, “but these points of difference do not make our way of life and our deportment among our fellow men either inferior to yours, morally wrong

or injurious to ourselves or others." How one reaches that degree of depravity in his reasoning, if it may be called reasoning, is not quite explicable in the light of either logic or Bible principle. Some things are wrong and God forbids them.

### **Wrong Because of Influence**

Your influence upon weak Christians or upon those who are not Christians may determine whether you should engage in certain activities. Inspired men in their writings speak often of our conducting ourselves so that the name of God will not be blasphemed. Speaking in this context, Paul remarked to the Romans: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Romans 2:24). When the apostle laid down qualifications for those who lead God's people in the local congregations, he stipulated, "Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside" (I Timothy 3:7). Jesus told us to so walk and conduct ourselves "... before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

### **Must Act in Love**

In making application of this principle, Paul instructed the Christians in the church at Rome, "Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore, do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak" (Romans 14:15-21).

Still discussing this posture of the Christian before others, Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians, "But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are

weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (I Corinthians 8:9-13).

May I depart for a little while from the points I am trying to make in this lesson to state my position which, I believe, is the Bible position about wine and Christians partaking of it. I would like to quote from a book in which I had a part in writing in South Africa: "The Greek word is *oinos* and it just means wine. It is the kind of wine that would make one drunk if he drank too much of it. Paul instructed Timothy to 'drink a little wine,' *oinos*, for his stomach's sake (I Timothy 5:23). Jesus never taught that wine was wrong within itself, but the misuse of it is sinful. The moderate use of wine by a Christian may be inexpedient, or even forbidden, if his influence is thereby harmful."

### **Jesus Made Wine**

Later on, in 1953, when someone who received our writings in India questioned me about Christ making wine (he called it inebriating wine), and stated that he was greatly shocked, I stated in part: "The moderate drinking of wine was condemned in neither the Old nor the New Testament times. Rather, it was practiced by good men, including the Lord Himself. Jesus said, 'For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" ' " (Luke 7:33-34). Jesus was not a gluttonous man nor a winebibber, but He plainly said He came eating and drinking—and the only drinking under consideration was the drinking of wine. His only denial of the statement of His accusers was the degree of eating and drinking. The reply to the gentleman from India continued: "At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:3). It was the kind of wine, *oinos*, on which Noah got drunk (Genesis 9:21)."

It was this same wine which Jesus said would burst the old wineskins (Matthew 9:17). What would cause new wine to burst old wineskins except fermentation? Paul forbade the Ephesian Christians to get drunk on this wine, *oinos*, (Ephesians 5:18).

He advised young Timothy to drink a little of it for his stomach's sake (I Timothy 5:23). Elders were not to be selected who were given to wine (I Timothy 3:3). The word given means *given over to, enslaved to, drunken*. Nor were deacons to be selected to serve if "given to much wine" (I Timothy 3:8).

"It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles," said Paul to the Roman Christians, in which case it was right to abstain from both (Romans 14:21). Over indulgence in wine is plainly and strongly condemned in both the old and the New Testaments. Drunkards will go to hell unless they repent and turn to the Lord.

In our society today, what is the attitude toward the drinking of wine and other intoxicants? What influence does a Christian have on a weak or new Christian? What about the men of the world? We are not of the world. I believe our influence would damage the new Christian and deter the man of the world in becoming a child of God; therefore, we should abstain altogether from drinking.

### **Wrong Because of Appearance**

Some things don't look right. They are border line events. Some of them are on the verge of being wrong. The counsel given by inspired men is to stay away from activities that may be construed as questionable.

The New International Version of the New Testament renders I Thessalonians 5:22 thus: "Avoid every kind of evil." That is not as accurate as it is found in the New Testament language. Paul uses the word *eidon*, and that means "form, external appearance, sight, perception, species." It is true that the Christian should abstain from every kind of evil, but this verse strongly indicates that he should avoid and stand aloof from

even the appearance of evil. There are things which a Christian may do that are not wrong within themselves, but they may have the outward semblance of indiscretion or even evil.

### **Not Directly Implicated**

Lot, Abraham's brother's son, was not directly implicated in wrong doing when he pitched his tent toward Sodom. "Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain" (Genesis 13:12). Peter looks back in history and remarks: "God ... delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) ..." (II Peter 2:6-8).

The lesson of influence and evil association also enter the picture. "Evil company corrupts good habits" (I Corinthians 15:33). While Lot himself was not evil, and even vexed his righteous soul at the wickedness of the Sodomites, he lost his wife and prospective sons-in-law, and his daughters were far from what they ought to have been.

It is not wrong for a Christian to drink a soft drink, a Coca Cola for instance, but to stand on a public street or in front of the church building where people meet to worship and drink Coca Cola out of a whiskey bottle would appear to be wrong. Christians must exercise the greatest care and caution. "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (II Corinthians 3:2).

### **Wrong Because of Danger**

There are activities and even relationships that may not be inherently wrong, but there are dangers lurking which may spell disaster unless we are exceedingly careful.

"A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (I Corinthians 7:39). Granted, the literal translation of the permission here is "only in the Lord." There is nothing morally wrong for such a widow to marry someone else than a Christian, provided the potential husband is eligible for marriage. But there are a great many dangers for

her to do so. In fact, there are so many that she is forbidden by the Lord to take such a step. She may be drawn away from the faith and enticed and tempted to take up a life of worldly pleasure. She may expose her children and herself to such conditions as to lose all respect for the church and jeopardize all their souls eternally. Being in love with a man, she may not intend to do that at all. It may have been the farthest thought from her mind.

The millions of drunkards and alcoholics we have in this land never intended to be drunkards. The young, pure, and beautiful woman never intended to become immoral—and certainly never had any intentions of becoming a prostitute, but she allowed boyfriends to engage her in fondling, caressing, and touching the intimate parts of the body, exciting the desires, and raising the passions to a frenzied heat; thereafter, she was well on the road to immoral living.

Some of the prominent people of our country whose names are almost household words never intended to become alcoholics, but they did. The reason why they degenerated into habitual users and addicts is that they failed to see and heed the dangers at the first. They became chronic, established, and fixed drunkards and once settled in this kind of problem, it is difficult to turn back.

There are more than eighteen million alcoholics in the United States in this year of 1988. More than twenty-five thousand people are killed each year on our streets and highways as a direct result of drinking intoxicants. In one year, there were eight hundred thousand crashes in automobiles traceable directly to drinking. These are the figures that were reported. No one knows how many were not reported. In addition to all of this, there are some thirty-five million problem drinkers in America. So, a Christian should think twice before engaging in the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

### **Wrong Because of Intensity**

Some things are wrong because of the intensity with which we treat them. There may be an overemphasis of things that are right within themselves and thus become wrong. There is nothing wrong in a clean, well-played sport, but when it is treated with such fervor and zeal that it becomes the all-



encompassing interest of our lives, it then and there crosses over the line from right to wrong.

There is certainly nothing wrong with close, warm, and sharing family relationships, but they may become so completely and totally absorbing of our time, energies, and money that other things with greater priority are neglected and swept away. "He who loves father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). This is a matter of relative preference. We are to have great family love, *storge*, but it must not supersede and take precedence over our love for, and our service to, Christ.

It is not wrong to make money, if it is made honorably. It is not wrong to keep and use money; but "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (I Timothy 6:10). An overemphasis is placed upon it and the things that it will purchase. It is wrong to treasure treasures (Matthew 6:19).

### **A Closer Look at Drinking**

One may say, "The Lord made and drank it; therefore, I am justified in drinking as I may wish." Someone else may say, "It was the abuse of this practice that made it wrong." Still another contends: "It was drunkenness that He condemned." There is truth in all these statements. It may be well for us to consider that the highly distilled alcohol in drinks in our day are very much unlike the natural fermentation of the juice of grapes in that day. The percentage of the content of alcohol is very much higher now than then.

But even then, in that day, inspiration always spoke of controlled, moderate partaking of wine. There were other circumstances of the exercise of divine principle. There was the influence hitherto spoke of on the new or weak Christian (Romans 14:21). The outside influence one has upon others who are not Christians is a principle always to be taken into consideration.

This governing principle is fraught with love, consideration, and care for the spiritual welfare of others. "But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience,

you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (I Corinthians 8:12-13).

The kind of alcoholic drinks which are produced in our country today—and other countries as well—are laden and fully charged with some dangers which should signal how carefully guarded the Christian should be in considering this question of drink.

Someone has said that alcohol "breaks more laws, corrupts more morals, divides and destroys more homes, incites more crime, jeopardizes more lives, kindles more strife, lacerates more feelings, pains more mothers, sells more virtue, undermines more youth, excites more passions, and yields more disgrace than any other enemy of man!"

Before you say, "Have a drink, brother," or accept one, remember that the danger is an increase of death on the streets and highways, a vote for broken homes, consent for hungry, ill-clad children, a contribution to juvenile delinquency, and a stamp of approval on the crime of immorality.

Remember, it buys less groceries, fewer shoes, limited clothes, smaller homes, and great insurance risks. It produces poverty, wretched lives, scared children, unloved spouses, neglected duty, and devastated souls

You have a Bible to guide you and, if you are determined to do His will, He will grant wisdom to properly evaluate and use the knowledge for good. God's counsel is simple and easily understood. Do Right!

## COVETOUSNESS IS IDOLATRY

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Much is said about this subject. It must be important.
    - 1. Covetousness strongly forbidden in the Law of Moses (Exodus 20:17).
    - 2. Great emphasis placed on it in the New Testament (Luke 12:15; Romans 1:29; I Corinthians 5:9-10, 6:9-10; Colossians 3:2-5).
  - B. Coupled with the sins of impurity:
    - 1. Not considered as evil out in the world.
    - 2. In the church, we withdraw fellowship from those who are guilty of moral sins of a sexual nature, but accord fellowship toward the covetous.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Sin is separation: "He journeyed to a far country."
    - 1. Old Testament:
      - a. To desire for yourself.
      - b. To cut off, or gain (unlawfully).
      - c. Dishonest gain.
    - 2. New Testament:
      - a. To fix the mind on.
      - b. To extend the arms for anything.
      - c. One who wishes more.
      - d. To reach after a thing: to give one's self up to.
      - e. A having more, a larger portion, advantage, superiority.
      - f. Greedy desire.
  - B. Covetousness a condition of the heart:
    - 1. Inner decay of the soul (Mark 7:21-22).
    - 2. May be unaware of the sin in our lives, and this is one of the great dangers of it.
  - C. What it does to one:
    - 1. Becomes a god. Occupies the heart, the center of affections, controls thought and actions (Colossians 3:5).
    - 2. It is idolatry. Define idolatry (Ephesians 5:5).
    - 3. Eve was more interested in what Satan promised than what God said.
    - 4. Achan looked with uncontrolled greed at the Babylonish garment and the silver and gold.
    - 5. Judas "bar the bag." A thief, set upon getting more and satisfying his own evil desires.

6. With Christians today, it can be jobs, homes, and other material things. The things of this world can become a god to us. We would never consider falling down before a graven image to worship such a thing, but we may fall down before things and make them an idol.
7. It leads to positive wrongdoing (I Timothy 6:10).
  - a. Many sins perpetrated out of consideration of money.
  - b. Achan coveted and was led to steal.
  - c. Eve coveted and was led to disobey God.
  - d. David coveted and was led to commit adultery and murder.
  - e. Ananias and Sapphira coveted and were led to lie to God.
  - f. Judas coveted and sold the Lord for thirty pieces of silver.
  - g. Israel profaned the Sabbath. Covetousness today leads some Christians to forsake the Lord's Day.

III. Conclusion:

- A. The destructive forces of it:
  1. Eats as a cancer in the soul of man. Does him the greatest damage.
  2. Hardens him to the needs of others. Loses sensitivity to the pain, problems, and position of others.
  3. Deafens him to the pleas and cries of those around him who are worth consideration.
  4. He can't hear the cry of those who are starving for the gospel.
  5. Blinds him to the opportunities every where at hand.
  6. They do not feel, see, or hear. They think only of themselves. Will a man rob God? A covetous man will!
- B. He becomes miserable, wretched, and discontented.
  1. Ahab and Naboth (I Kings 21).
  2. Haman and Mordecai (Esther 5).
  3. Tolstoy's story.
- C. The cure:
  1. The cause of it is selfishness, self-interest, preeminence, and self-satisfaction. What is there in it for me?
  2. The cure for it is self-denial (Matthew 16:24-25).

3. It is looking to the needs and well-being of those around us.
4. Happiness follows: "More blessed to give than to receive."
5. Contentment comes in the wake of such conduct (Philippians 4:11; Hebrews 13:5).

## COVETOUSNESS IS IDOLATRY

Covetousness is a sin about which we speak little. In all the years I have heard sermons, I cannot recall a complete lesson having been delivered about this topic. To explain why we hear so little on this question is rather difficult. Perhaps it is because the issue is subtle we fail to detect the evil with which it is fraught. Or it may be that it is a theme dear to our hearts and we are so involved in it and encapsulated by it, we are blinded to the dangers and destructiveness of it.

While I have never heard a complete sermon on this question, neither have I known a Christian guilty of covetousness to be disfellowshipped by a congregation. We withdraw fellowship from those who are impure, morally, and who persist in their sin, but we fail to mark those who are guilty of avarice. In fact, it has been noted that such people are often admired, praised, treated indulgently, and even coddled. It is not uncommon for some to court the friendship of those who are economically successful, even though they may be greedy and grasping in their demeanor.

The Old Testament forbade God's people to be covetous and strongly condemned the sin: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

Achan, when detected in his sin and confronted with it, said, "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with silver under it" (Joshua 7:21).

### How Classified in the New Testament

Considerable space is given in the New Testament to the discussion of the subject of *covetousness*. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness" (Romans 1:28-29).

The list goes on, but an important lesson we need to learn is that Paul couples *covetousness* with the sins of impurity, immorality, and even murder.

He drives this lesson home when he writes to the Corinthians, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people [to associate intimately with fornicators]. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the *covetous*, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of this world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or *covetous* [greedy], or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person" (I Corinthians 5:9–11).

### **Definition of Terms**

May I deviate for a moment here to say that this particular word for *covetousness*, (*pleonektes*), means "one who wishes for more." Notice the kind of company *covetousness* keeps! There is an old saying: "You can judge one by the company he keeps."

There is a strong indictment, therefore, against *covetousness* because it is always in evil company! There are several words in the Greek New Testament which are translated *covetousness*. Each word carries a little different connotation, thus giving us a larger view of what *covetousness* is.

There is the word *epithumeo* and it means "to fix the mind on; to set the heart upon; desire, long for; have earnest desire; to lust after (Matthew 5:28); to covet" (Romans 13:9). A further definition of a word that derives from the root word means "an impure desire, what enkindles desire." Paul said, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel" (Acts 20:33). He used this word.

Paul used another word for *covet* in his writings to the Corinthian church and this time it was *zeloo*. This word has the meaning of zeal—"to be zealous for; to boil, to be hot; to be fervent; ardent, zealous; to have a strong affection towards; to be ardently devoted to." In these passages, covet is used in a good sense: "But earnestly desire [covet] the best gifts" (I Corinthians 12:31; 14:39).

Another word that is used in the New Testament for covet is a term Paul used in his letter to Timothy warning him against the dangers of the love of money. He used *oregeomai*, and this denotes "an extending of the arms for anything; to stretch one's self out; to reach forward to; to earnestly desire; to indulge in, be devoted to." "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness [eager—there is the word], and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Timothy 6:10). These people "stretch themselves out" after money. How very common this is—and, I am afraid, even among those who profess to be Christians.

The writer of the Hebrew letter persuades us: "Let your conduct be without covetousness" (Hebrews 13:5). But this combination of words is *philarguros*. The two words are love plus silver. Anything that is made of silver and came, therefore, by metonymy to mean a "lover of money."

Luke relates: "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money [who were covetous], also heard all these things, and they derided Him" (Luke 16:14). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul asserted that terrible times would come in the last days when "men would be lovers of themselves, lovers of money [money-lovers]" (II Timothy 3:2). His term for "money-lovers" is one of the New Testament words for *covetousness*.

While *covetousness* is condemned throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments, the passage that is the most frightening is Colossians 3:5: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming."

Young says that this word means: "One who wishes more." *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* has several definitions: "An inordinate desire for riches; grasping, overreaching, extortion." Paul classifies this sin as *idolatry*. The word is *eidololatreia*, and the lexicons define it: *eidos*, "external appearance, image, form, shape, statue, an idol, image of a god." The second part of the word, *latreia*, "to render religious service and homage, worship, servitude." The apostle clearly states that one who is *covetous* is an *idolater*. That is strong language and should cause us to carefully examine our own spiritual posture.



The love of money threatens the very existence, spiritually, of many of God's children. Peter said: "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness [wickedness]" (II Peter 2:15). The word here for *wickedness* simply means "bad, vicious, false." But when we go back to the original story in Numbers chapters 22 and 23 we learn what that wickedness was. It was the grasping, covetous desire of this prophet.

The rich, young ruler of whom we read in Matthew 19:16–22 was *covetous*. He claimed to have kept all of the commandments of the law of Moses under which he lived. He had not even kept the first one: "You shall have no other gods before Me." He was an idolater. Jesus looked upon him and loved him. He must have been honest, but he had deluded himself. He loved his possessions more than following Jesus. Discipleship was not all that important to him. He was a "silver-lover." He had fixed his desire upon things. The affection of his mind was in the direction of wealth. He had a craving, longing, and a strong compelling desire to keep what he had—and, I think, to have more besides.

Paul said several things about this disposition of heart: (1) it is the root of every kind of evil; (2) eager for it, people wander from the faith; (3) they pierce themselves through with many griefs; (4) they fall into temptation and a trap; (5) they are accompanied by many foolish and hurtful desires; and by all of this (6) men are plunged into ruin and destruction. No wonder he calls this sin of covetousness *idolatry*! When these *things* in the world become a god to us, Paul said they lead to positive wrong (I Timothy 6:10). They will eat as a cancer; harden our hearts, deafen our hearing, and blind our eyes. This is what happened to Demas, the companion and fellow laborer of Paul. He loved the *now* age.

Review the brief narrative of Naboth in I Kings 21. We see the sin of *covetousness* in both Jezebel and Ahab: "Jezebel said to Ahab, 'Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.' So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab got up and went down to take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite" (I Kings 21:15–16).

The needs of others, misfortune, and death have little effect upon the hearts of those who are covetous. You can see why this sin is so damning: it is idolatry. It is the inner decay of the soul. What makes it among the most dangerous of sins is that those who are guilty of it and enveloped by it often do not recognize it. They are not aware that it has taken control of their lives. They may "go to church" regularly, appear to be, and think themselves to be, among the most pious, and live moral lives above question or reproach, yet God knows that they are idolaters.

Covetousness becomes man's god, occupies the chief place in his heart, becomes the center of his affections, and controls his thoughts and actions. He is endeavoring to worship both God and mammon. "For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5). Eve was more interested in the promises of Satan than in doing the will of God. She saw that the fruit offered her was (1) good to eat, (2) beautiful to look at, and (3) good to make one wise. She coveted what was not hers and reached out to take it.

Achan looked with unrestrained, willful, unchecked greed at the Babylonish garment and the gold and silver. He couldn't see anything else—not even that he might be detected and punished!

Judas Iscariot "bare the bag." Getting a few more *shillings* was all that occupied his heart. He cared nothing for the poor. He was, in fact, a thief. Covetousness filled his heart and he sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver which led to His crucifixion. So, covetousness leads to positive wrongdoing.

Achan coveted and it led him to steal. David coveted and it led him to adultery and murder. Ananias and Sapphira coveted and it led them to lie to God. This sin seriously impairs one's usefulness, impedes any spiritual progress, and, unless one turns back from it, will utterly destroy him.

Covetousness hardens people to the needs of others. They become impervious and can't hear the cry of those who are starving for the gospel. They pass by on the other side because they are blinded to the opportunities everywhere at hand. The successful (by this world's standards) farmer did not feel, see, or hear the needs of those around him. All he could think of was

make more, save more, and have more so that he could take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry. He thought only of himself. Will a man rob God? A covetous man will! The rich man at whose gate Lazarus lay in daily, desperate need cared nothing for this beggar. What an opportunity to show his love and care for his neighbor. He didn't even have to make the opportunity. There it was every day at his gate!

### **Covetous People are Wretched**

Spend a little time reflecting on Ahab and Naboth (I Kings 21) and on Haman and his relationship to Mordecai (Esther 5). Think about the covetous people you know. How many are truly happy? Someone has well said that covetous people spend half of their lifetime fretting and worrying about making their fortune and the other half in apprehension and uneasiness in saving and protecting what they have got.

Tolstoy, Russian novelist and social critic, who lived most of his life in the last century, said: "How much land does a man require? A greedy [covetous] man was offered all the land he could walk around in a day. He started very early, walked with diligence, came back late in the evening, and dropped dead where he had begun." "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

### **The Cause of It**

It is difficult to know all the contributing causes considering the complexity of the human frame, but we should not be far from the answer if we asserted that selfishness, self-interest, and self-satisfaction are the prime culprits. What is there in it for me? What can I get out of it? How will my cause be bettered? Will it enhance my standing? What about the increase in my personal coffers? Is it likely that my popularity will grow? Is there a chance that greater power may be wielded and my name more widely known?

### **The Cure For It**

The cure, without question, is self-denial. "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny

himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:24-26)?

Paul learned that lesson in becoming a Christian: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).

Following this commitment to the Lord will be happiness and a peace that surpasses understanding. Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," as quoted by Paul to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:35. And with all of that is contentment: "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11). And there is that great assurance from God, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 14:5). There are always additional things one wishes to say concerning a subject like this concerning which the Bible devotes so much teaching. I would not want to close this lesson without mentioning again those things that make *covetousness* so wrong.

Covetousness involves one in the wrong relationship to others. He is guilty of sensualism and coveting his neighbor's wife or property. This leads to taking advantage of others, and he will resort to almost any means to accomplish his goal. And a covetous man is so unlovable. We have such great admiration and respect for one who is unselfish, free-hearted, and generous towards others, and it is difficult to keep from despising a covetous man.

Covetousness involves him in the wrong relationship to God. Covetousness in the heart of a Christian puts God out of first place. It relegates Him to an inferior position in that person's life. So, he thus becomes an idolater. Covetousness puts him out of harmony with himself. He is never satisfied and always wants more—particularly more of what he doesn't have! His motto is : "To get, to have, to hold and to hoard." He becomes cruel and grasping. Hypocrisy is one of the chief characteristics of

him—make believe, feigned, stage acting, out of character and dishonest in it all. “So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their gain” (Ezekiel 33:31).

### **Here is the Answer for Each of Us**

“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetous, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:2–5).

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

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## THREE EVIL WAYS TO TRAVEL

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read Jude 11.
    - 1. The way of Cain, the error of Balaam, and the gainsaying of Core (Korah).
    - 2. The character and nature of sin described.
      - a. Persistent, progressive, prolific.
      - b. Deceptive, devious, and destructive.
      - c. Magnetic, malignant, and multifarious.
      - d. Inviting, enervating, and interminable
  - B. Sin is personified in the scriptures:
    - 1. It is dealt with as through it were a human being, having human characteristics.
      - a. "Do not let sin reign [be king] in your mortal bodies" (Romans 6:12).
      - b. An angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14).
      - c. Masquerading as apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 11:13).
      - d. As a roaring lion (I Peter 5:8).
    - 2. The deceptive nature of sin seen often (Job 1:6, Genesis 3:1).
- II. Discussion:
  - A. The way of Cain:
    - 1. Brief history of him from the scriptures.
    - 2. Disregarded misconduct. What he did and how he acted.
    - 3. Cain's character.
      - a. Was of the wicked one.
      - b. Murdered his brother.
      - c. Did all of this willingly. Planned it.
    - 4. God's judgment pronounced on all who go in his way.
    - 5. The sin of his sacrifice:
      - a. Not rejected because of kind.
      - b. Rejected because of quality and quantity. "Rightly brought it but not rightly divided it."
      - c. What was behind it all was unbelief.
      - d. He was disobedient.
      - e. He was guilty of theft.
    - 6. Other sins of Cain.
      - a. Slaughtered his brother.
      - b. Guilty of falsehood.

- c. He was angry.
  - d. Disowned responsibility to his brother.
  - e. It is in line of my Christian duty to bear the burdens of others.
- B. The way of Balaam:
  - 1. Knowledge of this prophet is limited.
  - 2. We know where he lived.
  - 3. Seemed to be under the Patriarchal Regime that had evidently continued. Although the Law of Moses had been added because of transgression of the Israelites.
  - 4. Moab was terrified and sent for some help
    - a. His offer was somewhat limited and was rejected.
    - b. The second offer was more attractive and more difficult to turn down.
    - c. There is no question that the prophet understood what the will of God was for him.
    - d. But the attraction of money and position is very strong and may succumb to its appeal.
  - 5. Balaam wanted to go back and see what the Lord had to say, more in the hope that he would find something to justify his decision to do what pleased himself.
  - 6. Times have not changed; men still go back to see what more the Lord has to say so they can feel an ease in their consciences and continue on their course of disobedience.
  - 7. Determined to go in their own way, men plunge ahead in spite of doubt or plain directives to the contrary.
- III. Conclusion:
  - A. The way of Korah:
    - 1. A subject of authority:
      - a. Absolute authority belongs to God alone.
      - b. Delegated authority—such as was given to the apostles.
      - c. Assumed authority—the kind of authority by men that does not belong to them.
    - 2. Korah's gainsaying:
      - a. He denied and contradicted God's constituted authority.

- b. He was jealous and attempted to set up his own arrangement.
- B. Moses takes the problem to God:
  - 1. Only God can settle these matters.
  - 2. The settlement is often severe and fearful when men have disregarded His plain directive.
  - 3. The most important question is, "What has God said?"



## THREE EVIL WAYS TO TRAVEL

“Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah” (Jude 11). In the story of these three Old Testament characters, God gives us a definition of sin and what it does. The lesson is actually God's definition of sin by telling us about some events in the lives of these three Old Testament characters: Cain, Balaam, and Korah (Core). The stories, as we go back and read them, should serve as a caution to us not to follow in the way these wicked men walked.

### God's Definition of Sin

Someone has said, “Wickedness has many faces, righteousness but one.” Thinking about this statement brought to mind several words that describe and define the character of sin. Sin is persistent, progressive, and prolific. It is also deceptive, devious, and destructive.

A further portrayal of its nature is that it is magnetic, malignant, and multifarious. While it changes its stance and does not always perform what it promises, it may be said that on occasions it is inviting, enervating, and interminable.

God, who is so concerned about us, tells us what sin is in all of its ramifications. He apprises us of its various guises, of its deception, its persistence, and of its devastation and ruin wrought upon the human race.

Sin is personified throughout the Scriptures—that is, there is attributed to it a personal nature, character, or quality as though it were a human being. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts” (Romans 6:12). For instance, here are some ways inspiration describes the character and works of sin:

1. **It is like a King.** Sin is a king that rules over people. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts” (Romans 6:12). The word for reign in this verse derives from a root word which means king or royal power. Paul is saying that sin, like a king, may control, dominate, lead your life, and rule in your heart if you allow it.

We know that it cannot do so, unless we permit it, for God instructs us: "Do not let [allow]. ..." We have that choice, that power. From the very beginning God gave to man the power of volition. He will not rob him of that inherent trait.

2. **It is like an Angel of Light.** Sin is pictured as "light" and as "righteousness." "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness" (II Corinthians 11:14-15).

He had just said, "For such [men] are false prophets, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ." (II Corinthians 11:13). Some men may look like apostles of truth—someone in whom you would place utmost confidence and trust—but they are deceitful workers and servants of sin. They may look like angels of light—have the appearance of truth, integrity, and purity—but they are representatives of Satan.

It is common for them to make a false or superficial appearance designed to give a favorable impression. "They are false prophets," Paul informs us.

3. **It is like a roaring lion.** Satan is pictured as walking about like a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). Hungry, sly, powerful, and persistent, he stays on the job night and day. His power must not be underestimated. The Christian must constantly be on watch with his guard up. It is essential that he walk circumspectly, conscious of the dangers that lurk everywhere he goes.

It was interesting to me and a little surprising to find the word *lion* one hundred and fifty times in the Bible. A great many lessons can be derived from the study. Certain features of the beast are depicted and certain characteristics emphasized so that we may be warned of the dangers confronting us. The Bible speaks of the roaring lion a number of times, as in our text, to indicate his boldness. "He will roar like a lion" (Hosea 11:10).

This teaching may be to underscore the trait of secrecy and deceit. "He has left His lair like the lion" (Jeremiah 25:38). But here Peter seems to punctuate his strength and his ability to destroy. Boldly he walks about seeking whom he may devour (I Peter 5:8).

May this illustration help alert us to the devious nature of sin. The deceptive nature of sin and Satan is seen in his appearing with the sons of God as they came to present themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6). In this way, he is neither as fearful nor as offensive as he would be if he showed his true ilk. However he is pictured in the word of God, you can be sure that he is a liar and a hypocrite.

We are told that he appeared to Eve as a serpent, "more cunning than any beast of the field" (Genesis 3:1). Whatever the facade, you can know that he is never genuine. He may have a thousand faces, but none truly represents his real character.

The context of Matthew 4:1–11 indicates that Satan appeared to Jesus in the form of a man. This is why I said that sin is multifarious. His appearance and approach are numerous and varied and, don't forget, deceptive! Whatever the appearance, approach, and presentation of sin, God informs us of him and warns us against him. This he has done in the brief verse of Jude 11.

### **The Way of Cain**

The inspired author of Jude does not specify the points in which the Christians addressed had imitated Cain and the others, so it is necessary for us to turn back and observe. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have gotten a man from the Lord.'

"Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?

"And if you do not do will, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.' Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, 'where is Abel your brother?' And he said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' And He said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.'

"And Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me.'

"And the Lord said to him, 'Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.' And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him" (Genesis 4:1-15).

### **Cain's Character**

The Book says that he "was of the wicked one." He was "out of Satan." The devil had taken control of his life. His works were evil. "Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (I John 3:12). You must know that Cain had chosen his way willingly and he was devoted to it (Jude 11). We are warned that the terrible judgment of God will be pronounced upon all who "*proceed, pursue after, become followers of or partisans*" of Cain.

### **The Sin of His Sacrifice**

In this account, there are two kinds of sacrifices offered to God—animal and vegetable. Both, as to kind, were, I believe without doubt, acceptable to God. Later, under the law, the first fruits of all their labors were to be offered to God. "... the first fruits of your labor which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering, which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field" (Exodus 23:16). There is no indication that Cain's offering was rejected because of kind.

## Why Rejected

Then why was Cain's sacrifice rejected? The answer to this question is rather simple, but a little involved. Cain was implicated in a number of sins in the offering of his sacrifice.

It was rejected by God first of all because of unbelief. The writer of Hebrews declares: "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Hebrews 11:4). The serious Bible student knows that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). These two young men had been taught about the proper and acceptable sacrifice that was to be made in worship to God. Abel believed what he had been taught and made his offering accordingly.

Cain disbelieved. God was displeased because Cain's sacrifice was not offered in faith—that is, according to the instruction God had given him. It needs to be repeated until people understand it. Faith is not something that God gives us, but what we do with the teaching and instruction He has provided.

We know, of course, that during the process of revealing His will in the first century that miraculous spiritual gifts were imparted to certain ones in the early church. The miraculous gift of faith was one of them. Through the centuries of God's dealings with man, He has expected us to listen to what He has to say and believe it—and then act upon it!

God rejected Cain's sacrifice because he was disobedient. You cannot really distinguish between the kind of faith God requires of us to be acceptable to Him and obedience. Obedience comes from the word *hear* and, in this instance as most others, it requires that we hear understandingly, receptively, and retentively. You must understand what you are being taught. You must receive it and you must continue to retain and practice it. That is a very good definition of Bible *faith*!

The LXX (Septuagint translation of the Old Testament which Jesus and the apostles frequently quoted from) renders this verse: "Hast thou not sinned if thou has brought it rightly, but not rightly dividing it" (Genesis 4:7)? He had brought it *straightly, rightly and correctly*, but he had not properly "divided it through."

## **It Was Theft**

So, while Cain was guilty of disobedience, he was also guilty of theft. He withheld from God what belonged to Him. He kept for himself what belonged to another. "You have not rightly divided it." The term, *diaireo*, is found about thirty-seven times in the Old Testament, and it means "to divide, divide out, distribute." What Cain had done was to short-change God—that is, he cheated Him and practiced fraud upon Him. He could not mislead or fool God, but he kept back some of the sacrifice that belonged to God.

The Hebrew writer says that Abel offered "a more excellent sacrifice." This word indicates better in quality and more in quantity. While Abel offered the "firstlings of the flock" and "the fat thereof," it was not so with Cain. Scholars in the Hebrew language say that Abel offered the "best." In fact, he took the *best* and, out of the *best*, he chose the *best* and gave that to the Lord.

Cain's sin is the sin of many in the church today. Undelivered time and talent, unbestowed life, inadequate service, and the love and attachment to material things (Malachi 3:8). The sin of Cain was also the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).

To neglect or refuse or hold back that which belongs to God; to fail to give as we have prospered is the sin of Cain in our lives today. Cain's sacrifice was not sufficient in quality or quantity. His was a failure to give as much as he was taught to give and as much as actually belonged to God. This spirit holds back the church of our generation from spreading the gospel to every nook and cranny of the earth.

It is either hypocrisy or self-delusion to speak of a faith that will *dare* anything for the Lord, even one's own life, and then give miserly and stingily of one's income for the gospel. There are those who live like a prince and give like a pauper.

## **Other Sins of Cain**

The more literal reading of this verse says that Cain "slaughtered" his brother Abel. He "butchered him" "Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother" (I John 3:12).

The spirit that led Cain to reject God's requirements in sacrifice also led him to cast aside moral restraint. Disregard for divine ordinance and taking the life of one's fellow being spring from the same evil spirit of rebellion.

To study the case a little more closely and answer the question "why did Cain slay his brother?" we need to see that Cain was envious. His works were wicked while Abel's works were righteous. Out of that envy grew anger and hate. Satan's children hate God's children because righteous works condemn their own works of wickedness. "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (I John 3:13).

He was discontent at the sight of another's excellence with a large degree of hatred and the desire to possess equal advantage. So, Cain was hostile and that hostility grew out of anger, fear, a sense of injury, miserable failure on his part, and a feeling of inferiority.

### **It's Called Lying**

But Cain was also guilty of falsehood. "I know not" he told God with reference to the whereabouts of his brother Abel. In all of this is seen the progress of sin. Sin begets sin. Sin detected in one's life prompts lying to justify or cover some other sin. His hands were reeking with the blood of his brother. The image of his mangled body must have been before his eyes. In his ears was the ringing of Abel's dying groans and unavailing plea that his life be spared. The whole horrid scene of fratricide must have been fresh in his memory. Yet, he said, "I know not."

We have mentioned his anger. "He was wroth." "Why are you angry?" Cain's anger was a keen, hot, smoldering, and retaliatory displeasure excited by a perception of injury to his pride. Men harbor feelings of resentment and antagonism when they themselves are in the wrong. Instead of changing and mending their lives and service when they are rejected because of sin, they give way to hostile feelings of jealousy and rage.

Another important aspect of Cain's misbehavior is that he disowned any responsibility toward his brother. "Am I my brother's keeper?" If we have listened to God as He has

spoken to us in His word, we know we have an obligation to one another. "For none of us lives to himself ..." (Romans 14:7). The Christian is required to be sympathetic. We "members should have care one for another. And, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (I Corinthians 12:25-26).

It is in line with my Christian duty to bear the burdens of others. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). God has given me the assigned task to restore a brother who is taken unexpectedly or by surprise in sin. "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1). The very character of Christianity makes it imperative that we seek the good and advantage of the other person (I Corinthians 10:24).

How common for us to seek our own welfare and pleasure and neglect the good of others. To minister to others was the Lord's life's work. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Without doubt, this should serve as an example for us. Our priority in life should be to serve others first.

"Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord," but he had long before gone out in his heart from the Lord's presence!

### **The Way of Balaam**

To have an adequate and satisfactory understanding of this lesson, you are advised to read the whole of Numbers 22, 23, and 31. Read also Deuteronomy 23; Joshua 13 and 24; Nehemiah 13; Micah 6; Jude 11; and Revelation 2.

We do not know very much about the prophet Balaam, but we are told from which part of the country he came. He lived in the city of Pethor, in Mesopotamia (meaning "between the rivers"), south of Carchemish, and on the banks of the Euphrates.

It would seem that the patriarchal regime had continued among these people, for he was not associated with the Mosaic Law which had been added because of transgressions (Galatians 3:19).



At least there is no indication in the Biblical record that Balaam was under the Mosaic Law or that he knew anything about it. The Mosaic dispensation had begun and Balaam seems to be a prophet of God under the patriarchal dispensation.

Balak, king of Moab, was terrified at the crushing defeat of the Amorites and the triumphs of Israel. He sent for Balaam to curse the Israelites. He offered Balaam rewards of divination if he would come and burden these people with some kind of affliction. He believed the prophet had the power to pronounce oppression upon this invincible enemy and slow down or, perhaps, stop their conquest. The king said, "I know that he whom you bless is blessed" (Numbers 22:6).

Balaam's first response to the representatives of Balak seemed upright and honorable. "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the Lord speaks to me" (Numbers 22:7). You could hardly ask for a better reaction or reply than this which the prophet gave. On the surface, it indicated a deep respect for the word of God and told them that he would be guided by God's answer to him. The sad feature about it is that when put to the test, he did not keep his word.

### **God's Will Easily Understood**

God's answer to Balaam in reply was clear and unambiguous: "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed." Balaam acted in harmony with God's revelation to him. "Go back to your land, for the Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you."

God's instruction was plain, direct, and positive. There was no mistaking it. The answer does not altogether clearly indicate the prophet's feelings in the matter. It sounds a little like he is saying, "This is God's conclusion, not necessarily mine!" It may be that Balaam congratulated himself on his loyalty to the Lord.

We are not authorized to call it a great victory over evil for the rewards of divination were probably only moderate and provided no great inducement to undertake such a journey. We are apt to exaggerate the virtue of refusing a temptation that is really not very great in the first place.

## The Temptation Becomes Stronger

King Balak's next proposal was somewhat stronger and more attractive. He seemed to have understood this man. Balaam had not received a sufficiently loud call! He was a higher priced man than the Moabite had supposed him to be. "I will certainly honor you greatly," the king promises.

The story is told that George Bernard Shaw once propositioned a British lady to have an affair with him. He offered her at the first a million pounds of sterling. She accepted. Then, he began to reduce the amount of money he was willing to pay for such an encounter—finally offering her something like one hundred pounds sterling. Indignant, she asked: "What do you think I am, a harlot?" "We have established what you are, lady," Shaw replied. "We are now haggling over the price!"

So it is in the case before us and from which we may learn some very timely lessons. We dare not cry victory because, in the first skirmish, the enemy retired from the battlefield. There is hotter fighting ahead. "Then Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, please, you also stay here tonight, that I may know what *more* the Lord will say to me.'" You would have thought that Balaam's reply would have been markedly different—something like this: "Get out of my house, insulting, base-minded messengers of Balak." Instead, he told them to tarry through the night at his home "that I may know what *more* the Lord will say to me."

Why tarry the night? Had not the Lord already said to him in plain and understandable terms, "You shall not go with them!" What more was needed? Is not truth *truth*? Is not duty *duty*? Is not enough *enough*? How do you speak in more unequivocal terms than the lord had spoke to the prophet? Are there excuses which are acceptable to God for not doing what he commanded? Should we seek some extenuating circumstances that would permit us to do what we wish to do?

It is here that Balaam's motive reveals itself in dallying with the messengers instead of dismissing them. His motive is also seen in seeking God's response a second time, when the first answer left no room for doubt. Stubbornly bent upon getting Divine sanction for an unlawful course, men generally succeed. We hear the voice we want to hear.

### **What More Does God Say?**

Many of us go back to see what *more* the Lord has to say. The clink of Balak's gold and silver filled Balaam's ears, and he went back to see what more the Lord had to say. Many people of our day, in order to justify themselves on a course they are determined to take, will torture and pervert a passage into the very opposite of its obvious meaning. They make it say what they want it to say! The man who is set on the accumulation of material things above everything else in life goes to see what the Lord has to say, and he finds it. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ..." (Matthew 6:19). "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ..." (Matthew 6:33).

Like Balaam, this man is not satisfied with what the Lord has said, and so he goes back to see what *more* the Lord has to say. Sure enough, he finds it! "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Timothy 5:8). So, he now feels justified in withholding any help or contribution to the Lord's kingdom and makes the application of his financial assistance solely and exclusively to his immediate or even to his extended family. Furthermore, he justified the holding and hoarding of wealth without sharing it with the Lord at all.

### **Easy to Justify Self in the Practice of Sin**

The man who is a habitual drinker of alcoholic beverages "goes to see what the Lord has to say" on the subject. He has no problem in finding many passages that deal with his question. "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" (I Corinthians 6:19)? Your body belongs to God and you are forbidden to defile it. Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:10). But, walking in the same

path as Balaam and reasoning as he did centuries ago, men will endeavor to both rationalize their problem and justify their action, so they “go back to see what *more* the Lord has to say.” The drinker can find it—that is, find what vindicates him and defends his logic, although I do not believe it can be classified as logic at all! He points to Matthew 15:11 and the words of Jesus: “Not what going into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” He reasons, “If I can just drink it and keep it down, I will be all right!”

### **Exonerate False Teaching**

It is this kind of rationale that many use in their religious life—in deciding what to do and become as Christians. One asks, “What must I do to become a Christian?” The answer should be: “Go and see what the Lord has to say about it.” It is not difficult to discover this simple truth. It is repeated by principle and example many times in the New Testament. Jesus said, as he charged the apostles with His commission, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes [the gospel] and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned ” (Mark 16:15–16).

When people asked on Pentecost what to do to be saved, Peter replied: “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). It is not possible to speak more plainly upon a subject. There is no room for doubt or misunderstanding. No accountable person would have any difficulty with these plain answers as to what qualifies one to be a Christian.

But, displeased with the Lord's answer due to preconceived ideas, prejudice, doctrinal bias, or religious traditionalism, the person “goes back to see what *more* the Lord has to say” on the subject. Almost without any lapse of time, he surely finds what he is looking for: “I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). He shouts exuberantly, “See, I have found it. All one needs to do,” he says, “is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is then and there saved eternally. There is no need for him to be baptized because faith only will save him.”

This he affirms and to this he clings tenaciously for the rest of his life and shares it with those whom he meets along the way.

If he only knew what New Testament faith is, the difficulty would be removed. His sin that will damn his soul is in taking only one or two passages of Scripture, lifting them out of context, and refusing to consider or accept anything else the Lord has said about the subject of eternal salvation. This is a dangerous perversion of the word of God; but you may be sure that millions of people over the earth still practice the doctrine of Balaam. They are people who are very religious and have every appearance of being genuine. Endeavoring to make the Lord say more so that it will justify what I already believe is a very dangerous doctrine.

### **What Church Should I Join?**

The question has been asked countless times: What church should I join or be identified with? The only safe answer is to go see what the Lord has to say about it.

A hundred times or more in the New Testament one can read about the church. Many times more than that he can learn what God wants him to know about the church under the many word *pictures* or figures of speech that inspiration paints so beautifully and appropriately—His church as a family, a body, a vineyard, a temple, a kingdom, a school, a city, an army, and many others.

So the person making the inquiry goes to see what the Lord has to say. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). "The churches of Christ salute you" (Romans 16:16). "There is one body ..." (Ephesians 4:4-5).

But this individual seeking the truth (or is he?) and reading God's word on the subject feels, in consideration of the denominational teaching he has received and the background in which he grew up, that this is a very narrow view for anyone to take. "Surely," he thinks, "there must be room for each man's interpretation and, if he is honest," he further surmises, "it will not matter too much what he believes." Having a *broad mind*, he thinks men ought to thank God for so many churches (some 20,000 churches in Christendom), so he may join the one of his choice that is best suited to his personality and needs.

Anxious to defend and uphold a personal position and prove it to be blameless, he goes back to see what more the Lord has to say. Within minutes he has perfectly satisfied himself upon this question. He reads the words of Jesus from the New Testament, "For he who is not against us is on our side" (Mark 9:40). "Since no Christian denomination is against the Lord, and all worship the same God, this is reason enough for the existence of the many religious bodies in the world."

He even finds another passage which assuages his conscience if his conscience needs to be pacified: "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5). Gleeefully, he has found what he seeks. "You see, Christ is the vine, and all these churches are branches in that vine." It doesn't seem to matter to him that he has completely misapplied what Jesus said. It just sounds good to him and in keeping with what he wishes Jesus had said! Others ask, "Did not John the apostle write to the seven churches of Asia?"

These arguments are so unscriptural and far fetched, they do not really deserve the time and attention and space it takes to expose and refute them. Consider this one point with reference to the seven churches. They were represented, John says in Revelation, by seven golden candlesticks. Surely one is not so obtuse as to fail to see that they were all alike as to kind, for they were "golden candlesticks."

If these had been different denominations to which John referred, one candlestick would have been iron, another pewter, another silver, etc., but they were all golden! What settles this matter with one who is honest is the fact that Jesus and the apostles always deplored division and the New Testament knows only one way.

### **Determined to Go**

The Lord tried to deter Balaam from going with the representative of King Balak. He first told him, "You shall not go with them." Secondly, He sent an angel to stand in his way, but in his determination for earthly glitter and reward, the prophet was blind to it all. Rebellion, human obstinacy, and self-will are always blind. Jehovah said to him, "Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before me."

Balaam replied, "Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back" (Numbers 22:34). How could he say *if* when he knew full well that it displeased the Lord. Beware, my friend, of the subjunctive mode, *if!*

### **Plunge Ahead in Spite of Doubts**

If one is set in walking in his own way and is determined to gain this world's good "by hook or by crook" in his disloyalty, the word *if* can cast him into doubts and suppositions that will rob him of the power to see and hear the truth. As Balaam did not even see the angel of the Lord, the messenger He sent to turn him back, so we can become blind in our resolute insistence to travel in the way that seems right to us, even though the end thereof is death. Blind spots in our spiritual eyes are common if we rationalize in an effort to explain away a false position and endeavor to prove our own doctrinal stand.

### **Why All of This Foolhardiness?**

The answer to the question above is that Balaam did it for the sake of gain (Jude 11). He loved the wages of unrighteousness. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

I am more impressed every day that I live that the chief concern of the world is to pursue money and what money will buy. It is the root of many kinds of evil. What men fail to see is that those who pursue it will drown themselves in perdition.

The writer of Revelation states that Balaam taught Israel to practice idolatry and commit adultery (Revelation 2:14). This is a brief bit of history and we are not privy to the details of it. How he accomplished this among the Israelites we do not know and it would be speculation for us to assume. However, we may conclude that it is no surprise that he was guilty of such heinous sins, being as he was dead set on worldly gain irrespective of the consequences.

### **The Results of This Kind of Life**

After Balaam's rebellious conduct and a life of greed, when he came down near the end of his way, he pleaded, "Let me die the

death of the righteous, and let my end be like his" (Numbers 23:10). How typical! Men of the world and men in the church who are worldly wish to pursue the course of life they feel will give them present pleasure and satisfy the longings of the flesh, but when it is almost over, they want to be counted as the righteous and die in full hope of everlasting felicity.

I do not know how Balaam died, but unless there was a true turning back in his life, he probably died as the dog dies; food for the vultures and a feast for the jackals! Without the proper relationship with Jesus Christ, one may expect to die as the dog dies—without hope.

### **The Way of Korah**

Please read Numbers 16:1–35 and Jude 11. This is a lesson on the subject of authority. There are three kinds of authority about which we read in the Bible: (1) absolute, (2) delegated, and (3) assumed.

#### **Absolute Authority**

Absolute authority means that authority is inherent in the person and resides in him by nature. It is an inseparable part of him. God alone has that kind of authority. In a sense, it is totalitarian (we do not think of this as a very nice word)—that is, the power and authority are centralized. God has absolute control.

There is a sense in which Jesus has absolute authority. He made the worlds and everything in them (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). He was on equality with God (Philippians 2:6). He and the Father are one (John 17:21). He is of the same character as God (Hebrews 1:3). All of the power and deity reside in Jesus (Romans 1:20).

#### **Delegated Authority**

There is delegated authority. This means: "to commit to another. To depute, commission, assign, appoint." In his coming to this earth to show men how to live and then die to redeem them, His authority comes under the heading of delegated power. He Himself often said that He came not to do His own will, but the will of the One who sent Him.



This delegated authority is seen in one of the last statements He made on earth: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). All things have been put under His feet and He is the head over all things (Ephesians 1:22). The measure of His power, though delegated, was unlimited.

In reading the New Testament, one must come to the conclusion that Jesus had commanding, governing, controlling, and ruling power. He had mastership, headship, and lordship and was given the preeminence or the supremacy in everything.

This authority is established without question or doubt as far as Christians are concerned. "He taught them as one having authority" (Matthew 7:29). "I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things" (Matthew 21:24). "For with authority He commanded" (Mark 1:27). "Has given Him authority to execute judgment" (John 5:27). One day He will put down authority (I Corinthians 15:24). Jesus had authority to delegate authority as evidenced in His commission to the apostles.

### **Assumed Authority**

Then there is assumed authority. There never has been a time when some men did not take to themselves authority that did not belong to them. That was the case of Korah and 250 men who were with him. They had adversely influenced the entire congregation of Israel against Moses and Aaron, God's constituted representatives for His people.

They accused Moses of doing the very things of which they were guilty. Moses said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi" (Numbers 16:7). He told them that they were seeking to become priests and had gathered themselves against the Lord (Number 16:10-11).

When they were commanded to present themselves before the Lord at the door of the Tabernacle, they refused, saying: "We will not come up" (Numbers 16:12).

So it was a case of rebellion. They would not obey God. Jesus told a story in Luke 19:14, 27, in which He illustrated this lesson. The subjects of the ruler in a spirit of rebellion said, "We will not have this man rule over us."

## **Religious Leaders Assume Authority Today**

Religious leaders all over the world today assume authority that was not delegated to them by God. It is purely presumptuous. It may have been given to them by the people they represent, or by a group of earth's wise men, so called, who likewise assume authority which is not theirs and they elect or appoint whom they want to represent them.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram assumed that they had the congregation of Israel behind them and they felt this granted them the right to revolt against God's constituted authority. These men were malcontents, revolutionist, and insurgents if we classify them in today's language, but they were lawless, insubordinate traitors in language that people in that day understood. God handled the situation and brought the matter to an abrupt end when he caused the earth to swallow up the 250 men who appertained to Korah and shortly thereafter struck with plague, 14,700 Israelites which resulted in their demise.

### **Korah's Gainsaying**

The word gainsaying simply means "to say against, deny, contradict, oppose." Korah was opposed to constituted authority, but, as has been pointed out, it was rebellion against God (Numbers 16:11).

A rejection of God's word today, a refusal to accept the message of the apostles whom God delegated authority to proclaim, and the doing of what men have decided in religion comes in the same category of rebellion as these evil men in Moses' day. It is despising the Lord (Numbers 16:30).

Let us briefly analyze the sin of Korah. He was jealous. Although he was of the tribe of Levi, he was not of the priestly family. He was not made a prince among his family when the assignments were made to his house, the Kohathites. The chief of the family was Elizaphan (Numbers 3:30). His family had charge of looking after the holy things of the Tabernacle (Number 4:1-16). Not satisfied with this honorable place in the arrangement of God, Korah tried for the chief place in his own arrangement. Let us note also the tactics of Korah. He stirred up a number of men to go with him (Numbers 16:1).

They were famous men, princes, and there were 250 of them (Numbers 16:2). He played for major support of his cause against Moses: "You take too much upon yourself, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them" (Numbers 16:3).

He impugned the leadership of which God was the author and he assailed Moses and Aaron. At one time they had been glad to follow Moses (Exodus 14:22). They concurred in their desire to have Moses speak with God (Exodus 20:19). They assumed the people were righteous and God was in their midst. Korah made a great display of being interested in Israel's cause.

### **Moses Takes It To God**

Moses was concerned that God would destroy them all so he took the matter to God in prayer—as all problems should be taken there. A test was set up to show what the will of God was and, as you will remember the story, the rebellious were destroyed.

Jude warned that men may be guilty of the gainsaying of Korah today. In the religious world of our time, men are dissatisfied with God's arrangement. They seek to change it, pervert it, pollute it, and substitute for it, and all this action spells rebellion against God.

When men teach that salvation is by *faith only*, or by having a feeling that says: "I take Jesus as my personal savior," and that there is no further response on the part of the sinner, then they are guilty of Korah's sin, for it is a rejection of God and His word which clearly pronounces "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38).

When men substitute sprinkling for baptism, this is rebellion (Romans 6:4). It is rather common to hear someone say, "I believe in Christianity, but I do not believe in churchanity." He is saying, "I want Christ but I do not want the church." Such people have become disillusioned and disgusted with the modern day churches, and one can scarcely blame them, but this portrayal of Christianity by denominationalism does not negate the teaching of the New Testament upon the subject of Christ's church.

You cannot separate Christ and His church, for it is His body. By the teaching of the Holy Spirit we have all been baptized into the one body, the church (I Corinthians 12:13). That which puts one into Christ also puts him into the body of Christ.

The real question that should have a place constantly in our thinking is: "What has God said?" Another questions equally important is: "Am I willing to listen and do what He has taught me in His word?" No more important topic will ever engage your thinking.

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## SINS JESUS HATED MOST

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Christians classify and grade sin.
    - 1. Some sins are serious and damning.
    - 2. Other sins are counted respectable.
  - B. God hates sin (Proverbs 6:16–19).
    - 1. New Testament passages also point up this truth (Hebrews 1:9; Revelation 2:15).
    - 2. Paul's language against a sinner is strong (Acts 13:10).
  - C. Does God hate sin or the sinner?
    - 1. At times it is difficult to separate between the two.
    - 2. One becomes involved in sin and sold into bondage of it that it would appear that God hates the sinner (Psalm 5:5).
    - 3. We know that God loved the world (John 3:16) and that He loved the sinner while he was an enemy to God (Romans 5:8–9).
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Jesus treatment of the subject.
    - 1. It was not necessary for Jesus to accuse a person of some very obvious sin of the flesh. Everyone knew that already.
    - 2. He dealt more severely with the sins of the heart.
    - 3. These sins seemed to be more prevalent among the religious leaders of His day.
  - B. Is there an application of this lesson today?
    - 1. Sins of the attitude are more cunning and deceptive than the obvious lusts of the flesh.
    - 2. People who have rid themselves of the outward sins of the flesh often feel a self-righteousness which is more insidious and devastating.
  - C. What are some of these sins?
    - 1. Self-righteousness.
      - a. Men often speak of their own goodness and morality.
      - b. Men boast of their humility and their generosity.
      - c. But truly good men do not know they are good or boast about it.
      - d. Men who are humble in the sight of God do not go around telling people of their humility.

- e. While adultery and murder are sinful and will damn the soul, there are other sins lurking out there which are less perceivable, but just as damning.
  - f. Self-righteousness and self-esteem are frequently discussed throughout the pages of inspiration. A vivid and powerful story is told by Jesus in Luke 7:36-48.
  - g. Another story that emphasizes Jesus' distaste for self-righteousness is found in Luke 18:9-14.
  - 2. The Jews felt they were a notch above others.
    - a. Some, in Paul's day, boasted of this (Romans 2:23; 3:17-22).
    - b. The Gentiles enjoyed the rebuke Paul gave them (Romans 11:20-21).
    - c. Jesus hated religious piousness and egotism (Matthew 23).
    - d. John makes reference to this spirit and attitude and condemns it severely (Revelation 3:17).
  - 3. Symptomatic religion:
    - a. Religious leaders of his day had many of the symptoms of genuine religion, but it was empty and meaningless (Matthew 23:13).
    - b. Jesus condemned them in strong and vitriolic language (Matthew 23:8-11).
    - c. It is doubtful that Jesus hated any sin more than hypocrisy. He called them hypocrites many times in the same context.
    - d. "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark 7:6-9).
- III. Conclusion:
- A. Their religion was external.
    - 1. They sat in Moses' seat and commanded people to act, but they themselves did not bring their lives into correspondence with their preaching.
    - 2. They pretended to be interested in the poor, but it was all external show.
    - 3. They pretended to fast and even slashed and disfigured themselves to appear unto men to fast, but it was not genuine (Matthew 6:16-18).
  - B. The danger still exists.
    - 1. We identify certain acts of worship or works of service with righteousness.

2. It may be empty and meaningless.
  - a. If baptism, which is commanded and necessary, is not done for the right purpose and with the right attitude, it is empty mockery.
  - b. The Lord's Supper is meaningless if our hearts are not in the right place.
3. We may form grandiose pictures of ourselves, exaggerate our importance, and become eloquent about our greatness.
4. The fruits of righteousness must be produced from hearts that are genuine.

## **SINS JESUS HATED MOST**

There is a strong inclination on the part of Christians in our time to classify and grade sin. It is sorted out, separated and even collated, and then screened as to the seriousness and danger of it. Some sins are ranked as vicious, reprehensible, and damning. Others are tidied up and rearranged by people into a category that has been groomed into respectability.

For one reason or another, we have a tendency to sort sin as to type or species and then tabulate it as terrible, shocking, and scandalous on the one hand and upgrade some so as to make them unobjectionable on the other hand.

### **God Hates Sin**

As you read the Bible on this subject, you are impressed with the number of times it is said that God hates sin.

“These six things the Lord hates,  
Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:  
A proud look, a lying tongue,  
Hands that shed innocent blood,  
A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that are swift in running to evil,  
A false witness who speaks lies,  
And one who sows discord among brethren”  
(Proverbs 6:9–19).

What seems to be stressed most in this passage is lying. “I hate and abhor lying” (Psalm 119:163).

### **NEW TESTAMENT Passages**

The writer of Hebrews said: “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness” (Hebrews 1:9). He quoted this passage from Psalms 45:7. In Psalm 119:104, David echoed the sentiment of the Lord, “Therefore I hate every false way.”

The apostle John in the Revelation said: “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:15). Reading through the New Testament both Jesus and the apostles and other inspired



writers show strong disagreement, even repugnance, to false teaching of religious leaders. There is a note of verbal hostility in the language of Paul when he denounces Elymas: "But Elymas the sorcerer ... 'O full of all subtlety and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord' " (Acts 13:8-10)?

### **Hates the Sinner?**

It has been said, "God hates sin, but loves the sinner." This, and other parallel passages, show this to be true. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). But there are times when man so inclines himself toward sin and persistently involves himself in it that it is difficult to separate the sin from the sinner.

In some passages it would appear on this account that God hates the sinner. "You hate all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). David seems to be speaking from God's point of view and on His behalf when he said, "I have hated those who regard useless idols" (Psalm 31:6).

### **Jesus' Treatment of the Subject**

Any infraction of God's law is wrong and will condemn man unless it is forgiven. All sin is bad. Paul talks about sin, that it "might become exceedingly sinful" (Romans 7:13). But sins which are not readily detectable by man or which are quickly and quietly excused because they do not seem to be threatening or injurious, Jesus discussed at length and pointed out how insidious and destructive they are.

Jesus never told an adulterer, "You are an adulterer." He never said to a drunkard, "You are a drunkard." These sins of the flesh were obvious; clearly visible to both the sinner and those around who were listening to His teachings. But He discussed at considerable length and with great emphasis sins that were subtle and deceitful, sins of which people are not generally aware. One will rid himself of the sins of the flesh only to develop sins of the heart. And, strange as it may seem, these lessons were spoken to religious people, even to those who were leaders in the movements of that day.

## **Is There an Application Today?**

People in the church develop blind spots. Their spiritual vision is often blurred, not because the sins are imperceptible or unseeable, but because Satan, calculating and designing as he is, uses every scheme to deceive and mislead men. But some of it is self-imposed. Sins that do not involve the lusts of the flesh are not as apparent to us as lying, stealing, murder, adultery, and dishonesty. Sins of the attitude are often more cunning and devious in their nature than those mentioned above. More than that, we are inclined to justify the actions or inactions that result from these attitudes. The man who has rid his life of these outward sins feels a self-righteousness that may be more insidious and devastating. To relinquish our hold on one should not blind us to the possibility of a shrewd undermining of our character by the other.

This is not to say that we should not discard, once for all, these sins of the flesh; but it does say in clarion tones that there are other sins lurking out there less perceivable, but just as scheming, which will twist and damn the souls of God's people.

### **Self-righteousness is One of These Sins**

We have already made reference to one of these sins: *self-righteousness*.

There are a number of important truths in this vein that I have learned from reading the Bible and observing the lives of people around me. A man who thinks he is good and talks about it is usually a hypocrite. One who feels compelled to tell you how smart he is may generally be branded as a fool. When someone boasts of his bravery, you may rather accurately conclude that he is a coward. If he advertises and praises his blue blood and aristocracy, you may safely conclude that his is a knave. If he speaks of his humility and modesty, you may be sure that he is proud and arrogant.

The man who is truly good does not talk about his goodness. He doesn't seem to know that he is good. One who is really humble never speaks of his humility. And the person who is certainly wise never mentions his wisdom. The wise man said, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 12:15). The man who speaks of his goodness says, "I am pure, without

transgression; I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me" (Job 33:9). "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness" (Proverbs 20:6).

Self-righteousness and self-esteem are discussed frequently throughout the pages of inspiration. One would think we would learn! But, if a man is a good husband and father, a good citizen and neighbor, and add to that, that he does not carouse (participate in hilarious drinking parties), steal, lie, cheat, and commit adultery, it is hard not to think that he is a pretty good person. This may be the "way that seems right to a man" (Proverbs 14:12). Solomon said, "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness" (Proverbs 30:12). We may say to such a man as described above, "What a fine person you are." Whereas the truth could easily be that he is but a *shell of righteousness*.

This was the case of Simon the Pharisee in whose house Jesus ate. "Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

"Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself saying, 'This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.' And Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.' 'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have rightly judged.'

"Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this

woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.' Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven' " (Luke 7:36-48).

This is a clear cut case of self-righteousness built on externalism. Externally, Simon was so good, but he was just a shell of righteousness.

We identify certain acts with righteousness and the examples we offer are often elders, deacons, and preachers. They are there when the doors of the church building are open; they pay their bills; they admonish the sinner; and they have never committed adultery. These actions are important, yes, even imperative, but outward actions without the heart are empty. Baptism, prayer, Bible study, and even personal work can become empty if we do not love the souls of men. A man may *go to church* regularly and meet his bills on time, but he works little on covetousness, malice, pride, and envy. His self-righteousness keeps him from meeting these imperatives.

### **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

A classic example which illustrates how Jesus felt about self-righteousness in his followers is found in a story he told about a Pharisee and a tax collector. Listen to it carefully: "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus to himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' " (Luke 18:9-14).

We often free ourselves from sins of the flesh and turn and sadly encumber ourselves with sins of the heart. Jesus hated the sin of self-righteousness. He could lead a man who knew and acknowledged that he was a sinner to righteousness. The man

who knew that he was righteous began to think that he was better than he was. The man who knew he was bad was better than you think, but the man who knew he was good was worse than you think. Indeed, we must look childish to God in trying to reconstruct a shell, when we are empty on the inside.

Not much change has taken place in the heart and deportment of some men since that distant day. They still think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. John called this to our attention when he said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8).

James made this critical observation of a threatening, dangerous course a Christian may pursue: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26).

### **The Jews were a Notch Above**

Some of the Jewish Christians of Paul's day boasted as if they were deserving recipients of the law (Romans 2:23). "You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?" They possessed such self-righteousness they felt they were exempt from the demands of it. You see, they were the children of Abraham and that put them a *notch* above the Gentiles! They were the spiritual aristocracy and had privileges not granted to others of God's children. In fact, Paul indicated that they felt they had a license to infract God's law.

Hear how he warns and rebukes them: "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, and instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples" (Romans 2:17-22)? You can tell they though they were a *notch* above the Gentiles.

## **A Satisfaction in the Rebuke of Others**

In his rebuke of the Jews, the Gentile Christians seemed to take some delight, but Paul corrected them in saying, " Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either" (Romans 11:21-21). He told them, "do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in' " (Romans 11:18-19).

Jesus hated religious piousness and egotism. There was nothing genuine about it. Some had deceived themselves into believing that because of their spiritual heritage, they stood innocent, virtuous, and immaculate before God and their fellow men. They never seemed to question that they were generous, chaste, and upright, even magnanimous in all of their doings. How despicable this spirit of self-righteousness was to Jesus! Ignorant of God's righteousness, they had gone about to establish their own righteousness (Romans 10:3). They were like the man Paul discussed in Galatians 6:3: "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." Such a haughty spirit, high and proud, must be contemptuous in the sight of the Lord. It is present at times in churches and elders as well as individual Christians.

Listen to John quoting Jesus as given to us by the Holy Spirit: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed and the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with salve, that you may see. " (Revelation 3:17-18). How strange that we cannot see our own faults and discern our own abomination!

## **Symptomatic Religion**

Jesus examined and carefully inspected the religions of His day, particularly the religion of the Pharisees. On different occasions He interrogated them about what they believed and practiced in an effort to ascertain the genuineness of their theology. As He measured their traditions and questioned their religious beliefs,

He came to the conclusion that the leaders among them were hypocrites. "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites" (Matthew 23:13)! He repeated that charge against them six or seven times in the same confrontation with them. There were several other epithets He applied to them that expressed qualities he considered to be characteristic of them—such as, *generation of vipers, blind guides, fools, whitewashed sepulchers, and serpents.*

I doubt that there was any sin that Jesus hated more than hypocrisy. You can detect that by the critical and judgmental language He used to describe those who were guilty of it. The word in English means, "one who pretends to be what he is not; or one who pretends to be better than he really is." In the language of the New Testament, *hypocrites* is defined as, "one who acts a part upon the stage; a stage-player; actor; a moral or religious counterfeit" (*Analytical Greek Lexicon*).

### **Our Traditions are Important**

The Pharisees as a group came together to see Jesus and discuss infraction of their traditions by some of His disciples. They said they saw His disciples "eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands" (Mark 7:2). Mark said that they washed their hands often, else they would not eat. He further informed us that when they came from the market place that they would go through the routine of ceremonial washing (sprinkling themselves), or they would not eat. They had a ceremony of washing (baptizing) cups and pots to keep the worshippers from becoming contaminated.

Here is what Jesus had to say about them: " 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do'. And he said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition' " (Mark 7:6-9).

Even today there are people who have the symptoms of true religion, but it is not real. It looks like it is, but it is what doctors, in medical terms, call *psychosis*. Such a person goes to

a doctor with all the symptoms of some disease and says, for example, "I can't walk; my back and legs ache and are weak. I haven't walked for years." He may even have other symptoms, but the doctor, upon thorough examination, finds a lack of any organic cause. Actually, it means that the disease is not real. The point I am trying to make is that too often some of the spiritual qualities we should possess are imagined—they are not real and are not acceptable to God.

### **Externals**

So it was with the religious leaders and many of their followers of Jesus day. They had the symptoms, but they were all externals. They sat in Moses' seat and told people what to do, but they did not practice what they preached. They pretended to be interested in the poor. "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men" (Matthew 6:2). They were not all concerned about the poor. Jesus said they have their reward here; the plaudits of men. When they prayed, they stood on the street corners or in other public places and uttered loud and colorful prayers to be heard and seen of men.

Public prayers are not a sin, but if they are uttered for show to impress those around us, they are empty and futile. These people wanted others to believe they were very religious. Their aim was to flaunt their religion. The Pharisees made a gaudy, ostentatious, conspicuous display before others.

In fasting, they would disfigure themselves that they may appear to men to fast. They wanted people to notice. It was purely external. If externals were taken away, nothing would remain except an empty shell.

### **Danger Now**

The danger still exists; this danger of externalism in religion. We are inclined to identify certain acts in our work and worship with righteousness. Make no mistake about it, actions are important, but outward actions without the heart are empty. Baptism, the observance of the Lord's Supper, prayer, Bible reading, and even personal work can become empty and meaningless if they are



not done for the right purpose, with the right attitude, and with hearts filled with love for God and the lost. One may *be at church* every time the door is opened and sing as beautifully as the best, listen to the sermons, and give of his money and, in the end, it may add up to hollow mockery because he gives no attention to his egotism and self-importance and does not work on his envy, hatred, covetousness, and malice. Truly, we must look like the mock-playing of a child to God; trying to construct a shell while empty on the inside. I don't think that God ever used the term *humbug*, but he has used terms like *misleading, dishonest, trickery, deception, and hypocrisy*.

### **How We Look at Ourselves**

Like many of the Jews of that day, we can form some grandiose images of ourselves. We exaggerate our importance and become eloquent in speaking of our own greatness. With some pride we boast of our accomplishments and with a courtly dignity we tell how far we have come. Lofty we are. You have but to look at the record! Finally, we can congratulate ourselves for our noble stance and our royal achievement! We are big; we are distinctive and we have arrived. More than that we have authority. We are the bosses! Jesus hated affectation because it is hypocrisy.

*Hypocrisy* has so many brothers and sisters. It is, in fact, an *extended family*. Members of this family are *pretence, putting on airs, false show, mere facade, feigned righteousness, artificial graces, and insincerity*. It is a big family. Jesus denunciation of it was in the strongest terms He ever used.

One would expect a whoremonger or an adulteress to go to hell if they continue in the pursuit of that course in life, but hardly anyone thinks that the keepers of orthodoxy, the guardians of the sheep, the approved leaders of the people, and the ones who sit in Moses' seat with the right beliefs would share the same fate. Some sins are worse than others, we think.

We believe that adultery is more grievous than addiction to drugs. We brand extramarital activities among Christians as shocking and scandalous, and indeed they are; but we would never consider a short temper, a spirit of authoritarianism, and rude and discourteous demeanor toward other Christians to be reprehensible or even particularly objectionable. God considers these things lamentable and worthy of punishment.

Attitude toward God and his word, and toward ourselves, is enormously important in determining where we will all spend eternity. The belief of the truth is of significant consequence. You can never be free without believing and embracing it (John 8:32). But self-righteousness, false piety, and affected humility are as dangerous to one's soul and eternal destiny as taking another man's wife or sniffing cocaine! The subtle sins, the deceitful deeds, the crafty contrivances, and the manipulative maneuvers are as deadly and damning as the obvious sins of the flesh. This wickedness has grown out of an attitude of the heart and the Lord calls upon us to constantly reexamine ourselves that we may daily produce the fruits of righteousness in our lives.

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## THE REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read John 4:3–42.
  - B. Setting:
    - 1. Sychar, or ancient Shechem, stood at the foot of Mt. Gerizim, about forty miles from Jerusalem.
      - a. Some scholars think it meant drunkenness.
      - b.
      - c. Joseph was buried near by.
    - 2. Jesus was travel weary and fatigued.
      - a. It was about twelve o'clock noon by Jewish time.
      - b. The disciples had gone into the village to buy food and Jesus was resting.
    - 3. Some problems encountered in this narrative that separate people from Christ and prevent them from being Christians.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. A racial barrier:
    - 1. "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans."
    - 2. Who the Samaritans were. A brief history.
    - 3. "No dealings" meant that they would not use anything together. Would not drink out of the same cup or well, nor would they sit down to meals together and eat out of the same vessels.
    - 4. It is a great problem facing people all over the world today.
      - a. Jesus faced the problem with His disciples during His personal ministry.
      - b. The disciples were surprised that Jesus talked with the woman.
      - c. Some of the apostles continued to have the problem long after He had gone back to heaven.
      - d. It exists to a regrettable degree among some Christians.
  - B. A religious barrier:
    - 1. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain. Are you greater than our father Jacob?"
    - 2. Religious traditionalism is one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome.
    - 3. Jesus told them they transgressed the law of God by their traditions and that they taught for their doctrines the commandments of men.

4. Paul was a murderer of Christians and made havoc of the church prior to his becoming a Christian.
  5. Not many of us are as open and honest as the Ethiopian nobleman: "How can I, unless someone guides me?"
  6. Many today have inherited their religion and their ties to family and friends keep them from making a change and become true children of God.
- C. A moral barrier:
1. "He whom you now have is not your husband."
  2. She had had five husbands in times past and the man she was now living with was not her husband.
  3. Jesus laid bare her entire life in just a few sentences.
    - a. He did it to show her how wrong such a life is.
    - b. And to point out to her that He could help her correct it.
  4. One of the greatest barriers that keeps people from becoming Christians and living as a Christian should is the moral evil in their lives that needs to be cleaned up!
    - a. The whole tenor of Christianity is for us to purify ourselves even as he is pure..
    - b. The high standard is set and the principles are clearly enunciated, "Let us cleanse ourselves ..."
- D. An ignorance barrier:
1. "You do not know what you worship."
  2. This caused the apostasy of Israel from God.
    - a. Even the donkey knew his master's crib, and ox knew his owner, but Israel did not know God.
    - b. God's people were destroyed for lack of knowledge.
  3. Today, ignorance keeps people from serving God and turns their faces toward the world.
- E. A material barrier:
1. "The woman then left her water pot."
  2. Why did she do it?
    - a. Did she forget because of the great impression Jesus had left on her?
    - b. Did she do it because she had found something incalculably more important?
  3. Does the press of duty today and the attraction of material things blind us to the true values in life?

4. People want things and that is paramount in their lives. Other things are neglected or laid aside for worldly goods.
- III. Conclusion:
- A. A barrier of procrastination:
    1. "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest' " (John 4:35)?
    2. Jesus and the apostles taught that it is now (Hebrews 3:7, 13, 15; 4:7).
    3. Do not delay; do not defer it; souls are at stake. And now is the time.
  - B. It is a matter of priorities:
    1. The word *proton* is used sixty times in the New Testament. "But they first gave themselves to the Lord" (II Corinthians 8:5).
    2. The word *protos* is used one hundred times in the New Testament. "He would be the first to rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23).
    3. When we get first things first in our lives, the barriers will fall and pure Christianity will be practiced and people will be moved by it.
    4. It is difficult not to treasure treasures. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."
      - a. People simply want things; and they want things above the spiritual and the lasting.
      - b. Life to them is possessions. Animal enjoyment is the superlative achievement.
      - c. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ..."

## THE REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

To understand the setting of our lesson, please read John 4:3-30. The encounter with the woman at the well, whose name is not given, with Jesus the Messiah took place in a small village in central Palestine. Sychar was located at the foot of Mt. Gerizim about forty miles north of Jerusalem. Some scholars think the word meant *drunkenness* or town of drunkards because of the character and conduct of the people (*Pulpit Commentary*, Isaiah 28:1). There are others who think it means *town of liars* (Habakkuk 2:18). Joseph was buried near this village and Jacob's well was there.

Jesus and His disciples had walked this long distance and He was travel weary and fatigued. "Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey ..." (John 4:6). John used one of the many words found in the New Testament for work. This word is *kopiaō* and the definition is "to be worried or spent with labor, faint from weariness; to labor hard, to toil" (*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*).

There is a common expression with many people today when they are tired; "I am beat," or "I am worn out." It might interest you to know that this is the measure and degree of effort in which the Lord wishes us to be engaged in His service as Christians. It is not half-hearted, but complete dedication fully giving one's self to the tasks to which he has assigned us.

According to Jewish count of time it was about twelve o'clock noon. Jesus was tired, dusty, thirsty, and hungry. He had traveled a long distance, as indicated in the number of miles from Jerusalem to Sychar. The sun had waxed hot, the disciples had gone into town to buy food, and He was spending this period of time resting. This is one of the classic examples of the humanity of Jesus.

### Roadblocks that Bar the Way to Heaven

By now you have read the story and have observed some of the things discussed which separate people from Christ and true discipleship—and some things which separate people from one another and prevent them from being true Christians. But let me

hasten to say that all of these roadblocks that bar our way to Christ and the practice of Christianity as He taught and lived it can be removed once we decide to relinquish our hold on the world and give ourselves without reservation to Him and His purpose for us.

1. **A Racial Barrier.** The woman said to Jesus in reply to His request for a drink of water, "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (verse 9). She was saying that "there is a fence between the Jews and my people, a boundary that I am surprised, even astonished, You have crossed." Perhaps we can understand more about this wall of enmity that existed between these neighbors in Palestine if we learn who the Samaritans were.

When Israel's last king, Hosea, transferred allegiance from Assyria to Egypt, Samaria was surrounded by the armies of Shalmaneser and, after a long siege, was taken by Sargon II in 722 B.C.

Many of the Israelites were driven from the country and carried away into Assyria. Sargon's annals say that he deported 27,290 people. But some were left behind and colonists were brought in from Cuthah, Babylon; Hamath, Syria, a city of old Hittite origin, and other foreign parts after he had conquered Samaria. The Jews counted these people as only one-degree nearer to them than the Gentiles. It is thought that the descendants of these mixed people, in the devastated land of Samaria, produced through intermarriage, this mongrel, bastard race called Samaritans.

The Samaritans had asked long years before to have a part in the rebuilding of the temple, but they were refused. "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, 'Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do...'" (Ezra 4:1-2). They hated the Jews and the Jews, in turn, hated them!

Subsequently, the Samaritans built their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. It was totally destroyed by John Hyrcanus about 128 B.C., but they still worshipped where the sacred edifice had stood.

### **No Dealings With the Samaritans**

This word *dealings* is a compound word which means “they will not use together.” The Jews would not drink out of the same cup or well with the Samaritans. They would not sit down to meals with them nor eat out of the same vessels. They would have no religious or social connections with them. Some of the Jews, history indicates, did have some commercial dealings with the Samaritans, but they would go no further than that!

The deadly hatred that existed between these two peoples was well known. The Jews cursed them and believed that they were accursed. Their most merciful wish for the Samaritans was that they would have no part in the resurrection. They hoped that they would be annihilated!

The Jews from Judea would cross over the Jordan into Perea and go up the east side of the river and then cross into Galilee. They did this to keep from passing through the land of the Samaritans.

### **The Barrier of Racism in Our Day**

There are few problems facing the world today more serious than the barrier of racism. It is likely that there is no interference that so locks out world peace or that so impedes the spread and progress of true Christianity than racial hatred. I truly believe that this is one of the greatest barriers to preaching and reception of the gospel around the world in the twentieth century. For a time it seemed that this ethnic condition would improve, but one who watches the daily news and reads the papers finds this to be a false hope. There is only one solution—embracing the principles of Christ which have to do with our attitude toward, and our treatment of, other people.

### **Some of the Apostles Affected**

It is not a new problem by any means. The apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ wrestled with this problem in their own thinking and conduct over a long period of time. At a time when one would think that the apostles of Jesus had learned well and for all time this needed lesson, it would erupt and evidences of the prejudice would break forth like a floodgate.



To the household of Cornelius, Peter made this strong and incisive statement: "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean." (Acts 10:28). After penetrating directly to the heart of this matter in such clear and unambiguous language, he made a trenchant and classic statement that has become somewhat of a motto or an axiom for Christians of all ages and colors: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34).

After this persuasive language and this obvious truth, this same Peter found himself in a situation which, for a short while, turned him around one hundred and eighty degrees to the former prejudices and narrow-mindedness of his Jewish way of life. Paul related to the Galatian brethren what happened: "Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, 'If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?' " (Galatians 2:11-14)? Old prejudices do not die easily!

### **Worldwide Problem**

This problem or barrier is not peculiar to any one country or race of people. It does not apply to just Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and Mississippi in the United States. It is a fierce predicament in the Middle East where Jew and Arab have gone berserk and are engaged constantly in violent skirmishes sometimes flaring into full scale war. It has been a troublesome bother for centuries in India with its 17,000 castes in the hereditary Hindu social distinctions based on birth, wealth, and occupational class. It is a "sea of troubles" in Africa between blacks and whites, blacks and colored, whites and Asiatics, and blacks and Arabs. Among a thousand Bantu tribes, it is an insoluble prob-

lem that stymies national progress. It is a besetment that keeps communities and countries in a constant state of ferment. There is hardly a brief period in their affairs that is free from excitement, agitation, commotion, and unrest. Their societies seethe with bitterness and hatred.

Some years ago while living in Africa, I recall that in Uganda the Bantu killed 100,000 Watts, the tall, royal inhabitants of that part of the world. Not long after these tragic events, the newspapers reported fifty thousand others had been killed. Pregnant women were slashed open and small children were run through and held aloft on the points of bayonets. On much of that continent it was a story of indescribable, heartless cruelty.

This state of affairs has not erupted in violence everywhere, but it exists as a formidable barrier in distressful proportions in many parts of the world. We lived for five years in the Caribbean and have visited there on many occasions throughout the past twenty years. It poses a dangerous and awkward situation, but, more than that, bitterness and animosity subsists among people who aver that they have any form of discrimination.

### **Skillful Discrimination**

What distresses me is the more subtle and abstruse approach which characterize so many Christians faced with this problem. We would never think of doing bodily harm to one of another color or race and we would be repulsed by any rude remarks or sharp invective spoken against these people, but how much do we care about their having the gospel preached to them?

We can relate to people who live down the street from us, particularly if they have the same color skin as ours, or we may feel greater sympathy for a family of a different culture and linguistic background who have lived in the neighborhood some years. But how much money would we give, and what kind of sacrifices would we make, to see that the people in Southeast Asia or the Caribbean Islands have the gospel fully preached to them?

Are we ready to generously and unselfishly share the gospel with all races and are we willing to accept them as one with us in the family of God? Is there a secret annoyance that

that they should presume to be on the same plane with us? Our prejudices take on a good many different faces and forms and each Christian needs to examine deeply his own heart.

The problem may seem insoluble, but Christianity can remove the barriers, heal the wounds, alleviate the hurts, tranquilize the ruffled feelings, and bring men and women together in peace, love, harmony, and good will in one great family, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But you have to be willing!

2. **A Religious Barrier.** "Are You greater than our father Jacob" (John 4:12), the woman at the well asked? "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain" (John 4:20), she said.

One of the most difficult obstacles to overcome and one of the most stubborn barriers to remove is that of religious traditionalism. It is as unyielding, intolerant, radical, extreme, and unreasoning as racism. Religious traditions not only blind one to the truth, but it gets a firm hold on one in a death-like grip.

Jesus dealt with people throughout His ministry who placed tradition above the doing of God's will. On every turn he met it. It kept the leading Jews of His day from accepting Him as the Messiah. "Why do you also transgress [step by the side of; become a violator] the commandment of God because of your tradition" (Matthew 15:3)? Jesus told them: "And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Mark 7:7).

### **Tradition Once Everything to Paul**

Paul himself, at one time, was mad and murderous against Christians because, through the blindness caused by religious traditionalism, he tenaciously held to the doctrines of the Pharisees.

Listen to this apostle as he reflects upon this period in his life before he was converted to Christ: "According to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (Acts 26:5). "And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:11).

"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). "And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Galatians 1:14).

### **What About People in Our Time?**

Today there are not as many people as there ought to be who are really open to the truth. Far too many people have inherited their religion and feel strongly averse to any change. They hesitate to even discuss the matter. In the remote areas of Africa where I once lived, I encountered this spirit, "Let me first talk with the elders in my village." I found it among other races of people as well. A young Greek lad whose beginning had been in the Greek Islands remarked, "I believe what we are now studying from the Bible is true, but let me first go back to Cyprus and tell my father about it." In America I hear, "My people have been this, religiously, for generations; and what would my mother and grandmother say if I should make a change? The current of religious thought has been in the family from times almost immemorial, and to break with that tradition would be sacrilegious. None in my family runneth to the contrary."

Connected with the breaking of tradition is the fear of social and economic ostracism. They feel that such a change as becoming simply a Christian would be an admission that their parents and other members of their family had died and were forever lost. It would be an admission that they could not go to heaven. Furthermore, they are not willing to lose the love, friendship, and support of those whom they cherish. Nor are they willing to make the sacrifice of a family inheritance that, in many cases, results when the decision is made to make such a change.

### **It Takes Genuine Honesty**

There are not many people with the honesty of the Ethiopian nobleman, about whom we read in Acts chapter 8. "And he [the Ethiopian nobleman] said 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him" (Acts 8:31).

There are not many people like Paul who broke with his people and religious culture to become a Christian—especially in the face of the storm of rebuke and rejection by family and friends which such change produced. This barrier of preconception, prejudice, and bias needs to be removed if God's will is to be effectively carried out and if He is to be glorified, for there is no warp or twist of man's thinking which is more detrimental to the prospect of unity and peace among God's people than this cancer of the soul.

**3. A Moral Barrier.** “And the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” (John 4:18). The woman had said to Jesus, “I have no husband.” She had been doing considerable talking, using forty-one words in two sentences and fifteen words in another, but when the conversation moved into a critical, crucial stage, there was a turning point in her approach and her response. The next sentence she used contained just three words! There is no question but that she was throwing up a barrier. She refused to be exposed and unmasked. At least that was the nature of her defense.

But the Lord did not leave her alone. In His reply, He literally said to her “A husband you do not have.” He emphasized the fact that she was without a husband by using the word first in the sentence. What He said to her was, “For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” (John 4:18). In one sentence, He laid bare her entire past and present immoral life. He penetrated the innermost recesses of her heart. Why did He do it? He revealed it to impress on her two significant truths: (1) the sinfulness of her life and (2) His ability to correct it and change her.

### **Let's Change the Subject!**

This woman of Samaria changed the subject to avoid the embarrassment and the painful reminders of her sinful conduct. She needed to make correction of her own life before she could be a disciple of Jesus.

Two thousand years have gone by, but people have not changed very much. The story has been retold countless times through these two millennia. It parallels what happened yesterday and the day before. The great hindrance that an incalculable number of

people have to becoming Christians is the character and conduct of their own lives. They need to clean up their manner of living. There is no place on earth where this need does not exist. There is certainly no place where the truth is more pertinent and relevant than in our own country, the United States of America.

### **Widespread Social Relationship**

I also saw this moral barrier in distressing proportions during the years I lived in and visited the Caribbean Island nations. Marriage is treated so lightly there. The practice of concubinage is more common than marriage. Millions of people cohabit without legal ties or moral promises. Concubinage is, in fact, a socially recognized and accepted state of affairs in these societies. I recall picking up my daily newspaper and seeing an editorial on the subject. I was taken aback by its report that ninety children out of one hundred were born of these concubined connections.

In a sense, the situation in America is more wretched and miserable than in the Caribbean because the economic standards are higher in America and the opportunities for intellectual achievement are much greater, so that we are without excuse.

Give serious attention to the high and royal standard set by Christianity. No system of ethics in the world favorably compares with that of Christianity. A true disciple of Jesus who has brought his life into correspondence with God's will, stands in every moral principle, head and shoulders above the converts of any world religion in existence.

### **What Must be Done as a Remedy**

"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1). "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (I John 3:3). Paul continued to give this advice to young Timothy: "Keep yourself pure" (I Timothy 5:22). "Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4:12). "Flee youthful lusts" (II Timothy 2:22). "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness" (James 1:21). James further said, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is ... to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:27).

The line of demarcation in conduct and deportment is not drawn clearly enough between the man of the world and the Christian. The Bible makes a clear distinction; it depicts who is a true disciple. A man's life does not always delineate that difference. The outline sketched in the New Testament is full and complete. It is beautiful and practical and we know and understand it perfectly well in theory, but making it a part of our daily living is where we fall short. The barriers will not be removed and God will not be glorified because of us until the day arrives when we, like many of the Christians of the first century, unreservedly commit ourselves to live like Jesus.

**4. An Ignorance Barrier.** "You worship what you do not know" (John 4:22). A barricade that must come down is that of ignorance. No wall that prevents men from becoming Christians and worshiping God in spirit and in truth is longer or higher than this one. The peoples from other nations that were brought into Samaria and left there after the Assyrian captivity intermarried with the Israelites and produced a mongrel race called the *Samaritans*. It was of these people that the writer of the book of Kings said: "They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods—according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away" (II Kings 17:33).

The prophet Hosea said concerning this condition among his people: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you ... Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (Hosea 4:6).

The prophet Isaiah, pursuing this subject of ignorance and what resulted from it among God's people, said: "The ox knows its owner And the donkey its master's crib; But Israel does not know, My people do not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). Then follows a long list of sins of which they were guilty growing out of that ignorance. Let me write some of that list down and draw your attention to the danger and devastation of the sin of ignorance:

1. "Ah, sinful nation."
2. "A people laden with iniquity"
3. "Offspring of evil doers."
4. "Sons who deal corruptly."
5. "They have forsaken the Lord."

6. "They have despised the Holy One of Israel."
7. "They are utterly estranged."
8. "The whole head is sick."
9. "And the whole heart faint."
10. "From the sole of the foot even to the head."
11. "There is no soundness in it."
12. "But bruises and sores and bleeding wounds."
13. "Your country lies desolate."
14. "Your cities are burned with fire."
15. "Aliens devour your land."
16. "Like a besieged city."
17. "Unless the Lord of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9).

Can you imagine that many evil things growing out of ignorance? Peter preached to the Jews in the city of Jerusalem and said to them: "Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17).

### **Ignorance and Alienation Defined and Understood**

Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus on this subject: "Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18). Paul asserts here what is difficult for us to accept, viz., that ignorance will alienate one from God. Ignorance produces spiritual blindness and one cannot see. What is hard for us to believe and accept is that one who is ignorant of God and His will should be held responsible for his actions. The term *alienate* is a strong and descriptive one. It means to separate, disunite, sever. Ignorance produces blindness, Paul said, and that in turn results in a cleavage, a rupture, and a detachment from God.

### **Three Classes of the Ignorant**

Today, there are three general classes of people in ignorance: (1) those who have not had the opportunity to know God because we have not taken the gospel to them, (2) those who have the opportunity to know Him who refuse to surrender themselves to Him—a dangerous, willful ignorance, and (3) those who



are blinded by false teaching.

Many people in the world are illiterate and need more than ordinary help to come to *know* God. Some years ago there were places on the African continent where the rate of literacy was not more than one percent. Hopefully, that figure is higher today. There are other places in the world with large populations where the literacy rate is very low. I picked up a newspaper in the airport in Port au Prince, Haiti several years ago and noticed that 90 percent of the people of that island nation could neither read nor write. It was a big problem in Jamaica where we lived for a number of years.

Along with this ignorance go fears of the unknown, the beliefs and practices of superstition, trust in magic, an irrational attitude of mind towards the supernatural, voodooism, ancestor worship, witchcraft, and communication by trance with animistic deities. All the pagan rites and ceremonies which accompany this ignorance are rife and endless.

People who have embraced this way of life are hard to reach with the gospel. The complexity and complication of heathenism are deeply entrenched in their minds. They, more often than not, have a suspicion and mistrust of the man who brings them the gospel.

The ramifications of these systems comprise a labyrinth of confusion to the mind of the Christian who is accustomed to simplicity of truth, the purity of thought, and the logic of the teachings of Christ. Disentanglement from it is a Herculean task. I know! Students in our schools of preaching and Biblical studies in these countries have serious difficulties uncluttering their minds and stripping themselves of long accustomed habits.

I recall a graduate student of the Tanganyika Bible School whom we had sent to preach and establish a church in Dar-es-Salaam returning for a visit at the school. He had developed a distressingly painful condition of his feet. Ultimately, he went back to the witch doctor and when he removed his shoes to show me the treatment he had been given, I was amazed to see a hundred scars on top of his feet. These slashes from a knife or some sharp object were slits, supposedly, through which the evil spirits responsible for the pain had escaped.

I hoped that the Christian student did not believe that but was simply seeking some relief from the distress he had experienced.

A second class of these people in the category of the ignorant are those who have had every opportunity educationally, economically, and culturally to learn and know the truth, but who have filled their hearts with earthly ambitions and furious desires and simply have not chosen to know God. Their god is their belly and they mind earthly things.

And there is still a third class. They, too, have had every educational advantage, but have been blinded to the truth by false teaching. There was this class of people in Jesus' day. Paul contended with them almost everywhere he went. He said, "I marvel that you are tuning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6-9).

Today there are so many people with preconceived ideas, prejudices, and set opinions and their faces thereby have been turned away from the truth of the gospel. People die of ignorance in a land of learning and Bibles.

5. **A Material Barrier.** "The woman then left her waterpot" (John 4:28). Jesus could have left this job for Philip. Many years later Philip came to Samaria and preached Christ to them, but Jesus had already laid the groundwork. The Lord could have said, "I am tired, thirsty, and hungry and these matters can wait. This woman is not Jewish, but eventually she will be included." The woman, on the other hand, could have said: "I must carry water; this is my job. Religious matters can wait." But she didn't. The wonderful news the woman had just received impelled her to tell it to others. That is one of the highlights of this lesson—her undaunted desire to share what she had heard with her neighbors and friends in the village. The fact that Jesus had opened an ugly chapter in her life did not deter her from telling the story.

It seems that it would have been unnerving, and even disheartening, to be confronted by "a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (John 4:29). She was constrained to tell others.

Often I have asked, "Why did she leave her water pot?" I like to think that in her excitement she forgot it because she was so absorbed in what she had heard. As we say in our language today, "She was so *caught up and enmeshed* in Jesus' teaching and who He was" that she was overwhelmed by it all. She could have easily forgotten her water pot. I also like to think she left it purposely, deliberately, and intentionally because now she has found something far better and more important.

One of the most formidable, insuperable barriers which confronts us in modern times is the barrier of *materialism*. It is difficult not to treasure treasures. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (I Timothy 6:10). Every sort of crime has been perpetrated out of consideration of money.

People want things, and they want things above everything else. Life, to them, is possessions. The accretion of wealth, and what it will purchase for animal enjoyment and compensation are the superlative achievements. This is so true in affluent America; but it is also true in what we call the disadvantaged societies of the Third World countries. A Haitian preacher said to me some years ago: "Anything can be bought in Haiti with money." But could not this be said in New York and Dallas? The tragedy of it all is that Christians have been terribly influenced by materialism.

Jesus once said, "the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). He used two words worthy of our careful inspection. One of them is deceit, *apate*, and it means, "the lusts excited by deceit; by deceitful influences, seducing to sin;" the verb means: "to cheat, deceive, beguile" (Thayer). Two of the passages he uses are Matthew 13:22 and Mark 4:19. In being deceived by lusts of the flesh, he enumerates and specifies what these particular lusts are. Jesus called them riches, but that word, *plousios*, means "wealthy, abounding in material resources; to be rich, to have an abundance of outward possessions" (Thayer). One standard translation renders this part of the verse, "the delight in riches." It is true that men delight in them because of all the promises money makes, all the security it offers, and the wonderful status

symbol it represents. It promises power, pleasure, and popularity. Nothing is so prestigious as money. It is a delusion, but men believe a lie, and this translation says they *delight* in it. The pleasure, however, is short-lived.

The love of money, of things, of creature comforts is still a barrier which deters us from preaching the gospel around the world in this generation. The answer to this question, the solution to this problem, and the surmounting of this obstacle is that we "first give our selves to the Lord, ... seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

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## PRIDE OR SELF-ESTEEM. WHICH?

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## PRIDE OR SELF-ESTEEM. WHICH?

"So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: 'When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, "Give place to this man," and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, "Friend, go up higher." Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.' " (Luke 14:7-11).

"Beware ... lest—when you have eaten and are full and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God ..." (Deuteronomy 8:11-14)

### The Sin of Pride

Jack London, as the most highly paid writer in the world, never outgrew his ego. He liked to be called *Mr. God* by his Korean valet.

Our age is saturated by philosophies which encourage and stimulate vanity. Humanism cherishes and worships man. Shakespeare, in his play, *Hamlet*, ironically pointed out how man adores and idolizes himself. He placed the words of this humanistic philosophy upon the lips of a character, "What a piece of work is man ... how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!"

Liberalism, in many denominations in Christendom today preaches, and I may say *transmits*, a philosophy which influences and induces pride in its converts. They neither view man as a rebellious creature nor admit that he is alienated from God. They do not understand nor appreciate the gospel as a remedial

system of man's woes, and they would never concede that the message of Jesus is one of salvation, for, in their judgment, man does not need to be saved. Their meetings are more like a civic club, or a community center, where they congregate to praise humanity and not God. Pride forbids that they kneel before God or acknowledge that they are sinners.

The Dutch poet, Koos Schur, describes the conceit that characterizes our time, and contemporary liberal religion, or theology: "... this world, this universe and me—and me, me, me, and me, me, me. ..." It is all *me*, not God!

### **Where the Danger Lies**

Many passages, including the ones at the beginning of the lesson, tell us what the danger is and where it lies. It is not so much in the abundance of possessions, but man's attitude toward, and treatment of, those possessions. Jesus once told some people, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). Believing that *things* will supply our total needs and provide us independence is pride. The proud man is the self-sufficient man who feels no need of help, or counsel, or guidance. The rich fool "thought *within himself*" (Luke 12:17, emphasis mine). "Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they *loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*" (John 12:42-43, emphasis mine).

It was the rich farmer who said to himself, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). This pride consisted in a false view of himself—that the obtaining of these things was his own doing. He considered that he was smart enough, knowledgeable enough, and able of himself to secure these material possessions. Like the person described by the prophet, some say, "Of course I knew them" (Isaiah 48:7), and trust in their own works and treasures. Such people forget God, the Source of all that we have or accumulated. "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). "... He gives to all life, breath, and all things" (verse 25). "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness" (Proverbs 20:6).



## **Obvious Lessons**

From the Bible I have learned that the man who boasts of his goodness is a hypocrite, who must tell of his achievements is a failure, who advertises his bravery is coward, and he who exults in his humility and who gloats over his greatness is diminutive, indeed! "There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes" (Proverbs 30:12).

Men who truly possess these qualities we have mentioned never speak vauntingly of any of them. Harry Truman, former president of the United States, made a statement in this vein worth repeating. "Never forget who you are or where you came from." And a greater than Harry Truman said long ago, "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth" (Proverbs 27:2).

The wise man in Proverbs stated another great truth: "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18). This is the case many times among God's children. They fall into sin and never repent because of pride. It is a sad commentary on the judgment of a child of God when, in order to save face, he is willing to lose his soul!

## **Passages That Define Pride**

There are those who feel they are better than others. Why do they develop such feelings? The answer is manifold, and it is not always clear and simple. A place of honor and power occupied by one in a community, or a nation, may elevate these feelings in his breast. Economic influence often exalts a man in his own eyes above his fellows.

I have known secular education to escalate a man's estimate of his worth to the world, and worldly accomplishments often heighten one's calculation of his own measurement. He belongs in the roll of the noble and magnanimous!

"A messenger has been sent among the nations, saying, ... 'The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you ascend as high as the eagle, And though you set your nest

among the stars, From there I will bring you down,' says the Lord" (Obadiah 1-4). Men feel safe, secure, and untouchable. "I will bring you down says the Lord."

### **He Thinks He is Better Than He is**

It is not only possible, but it is common for some to think they are better than they actually are. John dealt with that problem in his day. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (I John 1:8, 10). This spirit is the very essence of pride.

This was a prevalent problem in Jesus' time. He told the story of the Pharisee going into the temple and he "stood and prayed thus with himself [the Greek text says "to himself"], 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess' " (Luke 18:11-12). This Pharisee not only thought that he was better than he actually was, but he thought he was much better than the man standing in the temple with him. He felt exalted; but the Lord put him at the bottom of the list!

Paul issued this warning to the Galatian Christians: "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Galatians 6:3). Have you observed that when one has grandiose delusions about himself, that's exactly what it is! He is the only one who is deluded and misled. He deceives himself! He has elaborate and impressive thoughts about his own goodness. He has a great many beautiful words in his vocabulary which exalt him about the common herd. He is splendid, magnificent, and noble. He has lied to himself and believes it! Others know that he is a phony and counterfeit.

The Pharisees were *humbugs*. Their religion was a sham. Listen to what Jesus had to say about them: "Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.'" (Matthew 23:1-3). Yet they had a *corner* on piety, they thought. They sounded a trumpet before them to call attention to their benevolence. On the

street corners and in the market places, they prayed long and loud that they might be heard of men. Some of them disfigured themselves so they might appear to others to be dedicated and committed children of God. Such pride will damn the soul and rob it of the crown of heaven.

### **Some Think They Know More Than They Do**

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, ..." (I Timothy 6:3-4). Paul further says, in strong language, that they are "men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain" (I Timothy 6:5). One is filled with devilish pride who does not teach and stand for the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem exists today as it did two thousand years ago. You meet men in the leadership of the church who think they know more than they do. Their advice on how to conduct your affairs approaches the standard of inspiration! Their recommendations and instructions are unquestionable. The warnings they issue are divine! Truly, they are puffed up with deceit.

And the most tragic and astonishing feature about it is that they, like the Pharisee in the temple, never call into question their own ability or goodness. Such men are convinced that their conduct is impeccable, their counsel flawless, and their integrity immaculate. They are classic, irreproachable examples to the flock—so they have caused themselves to believe this myth about themselves.

Paul had some comment about this situation in the first century church: "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30). This sin of pride is exhibited in examining one's self or in believing that he is better than he is and that he knows more than he does. Paul spoke of the dangers of elders "being puffed up with pride" (I Timothy 3:6) and Peter gave this mandate to elders: "nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock" (I Peter 5:3).

### **Please Consider This**

Many times I have thought: "How can these men be sincere in such perversion? How can they believe they are right in upholding and supporting false doctrine?" Paul alerted Timothy to false teaching and cautioned him to watch for it so that it may not enter the ranks of Christians. Listen to his message. Some people will teach things that are false. These people will not agree with the true teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. And they will not accept the teaching that agrees with the true way to serve God. That person who teach falsely is full of pride and understands nothing (I Timothy 6:3-4).

Why would such preachers and leaders have these magnificent concepts of their station in life? Is it possible for them to be honest, possessing as they do, a spirit of lordship and bossism? That led me to think of the prominent religious leaders of our day whose false teachings fill the airways via television and radio. Religious groups from various denominations stuff my mailbox with their literature. And I ask, "How can these preachers be honest?" Multiplied millions of dollars are spent to propagate these teachings and advance the causes they represent. Millions of honest people over the world contribute to these efforts to support and promote furtherance of them.

Then I must conclude what I have always believed the Bible teaches—that honesty and sincerity are no guarantees that one is right. Paul thought he was right in his beliefs, teachings, and practices while he was a Pharisee. He lived in all good conscience before God and man while, at the same time, doing his best to expunge God's people from the earth. He spoke of those who believe a lie and are damned (II Thessalonians 2:12). The young prophet from Judah believed the lie the old prophet in Samaria told him, and he lost his life. Isaac believed he was blessing Esau when in fact he was blessing Jacob.

So, what one honestly believes or feels about himself neither affirms the authenticity of it nor secures him in the sight of God. False doctrine is being promulgated and upheld today, in some places, in the church of the Lord and you may be sure that it is just as false as if it issued from the lips of a Buddhist priest. Sincerity of conviction and genuineness of belief have little to do with whether it is accurate or spurious.

It is the diabolical sin of pride that prevents a preacher or an elder or any other Christian from resigning his own will and resolving to be guided alone by the will of God.

### **Lovers of Self**

Paul cautioned Christians in the early church about the selection and appointment of men to be elders. It was a kind of forewarning to them because he saw the danger of these men being "puffed up with pride" (I Timothy 3:6). He knew that men who are overbearing, rude, domineering, and superior in their attitudes could wreak havoc on the Lord's church and do irreparable harm to its mission in the world. Pride inflicts untold damage to God's church in any age. It makes a man presumptuous, self-appointed and insolent. He is superior to others, lordly, and imperious. He exaggerates every event because his self-importance and self-admiration dictate this course to elevate him to the rank of the high and mighty! He belongs to a different class, and his station is far above the rabble.

John tells us that one of the things that comprises the love of the world is the pride of life (I John 2:16). Pride is not far removed from arrogance nor self-esteem from vanity.

### **Pride and Self-Respect**

We must be careful to distinguish between pride and self-respect. There is a difference between arrogance and assurance, and there is a vast distance which separates self-interest and self-regard and even self-value. One is permissible and desirable; the other is devilish and destructive. Every Christian should have a very good image of himself. Coping with life's day-to-day problems would be impossible if one did not have a good feeling about himself.

What we call the Golden Rule would be meaningless if we did not first make some estimate of our own personal worth and needs. That principle which Jesus enunciated in His Sermon on the Mount ("Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12)), emphasizes a careful look at one's self. How can a child succeed in school and later in life if you do not help him feel good about himself? Paul encouraged and advised young Timothy: "Let no one despise your youth"

(I Timothy 4:12). He wanted him to have a healthy self-respect and personal dignity. To adore, idolize, and deify one's self is strongly condemned. Hero-worship and homage are traits a thousand miles from Christian attitude and deportment. There is a self-approval which is good and right provided it is kept in harmony with the standard of God's measurement of the Christian character.

It was self-respect that kept Joseph from committing adultery with Potiphar's wife. Daniel valued his personal character of integrity and devotion to God so highly he resolved that he would not defile himself with the King's dainties. Self-respect propels us to seek satisfaction in work that is well done. It keeps the dishes washed, the floors swept, the beds made, and something to eat for supper besides a can and a can-opener. But there is a word of caution. Let us be careful lest we label our behavior as self-respect, when in actuality it is self-importance, self-admiration, and snobbery.

Paul was modest and meek, but he showed a high self-esteem on many occasions. Go through his writings in the New Testament and observe how many times he said: "I." "I know whom I have believed." "I can do all things through Christ." He said, "I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin" (Romans 11:1). "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I ..." (II Corinthians 11:22-23).

It is good and right for us to love life, but not more than God. We should love self, and one of the reasons for this is that we are to love our neighbors as we do ourselves. A husband is to love his wife as he loves himself (Ephesians 5:33). Jesus instructed us to "lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven" (Matthew 6:20). The danger is that we can love ourselves so much we lose sight of God and others. Christianity primarily concerns itself with the other person. Our love for God should transcend love for all other things.

### **Of What Are We Proud?**

Some are proud of their social standing. This is often characterized by a vainglorious attitude, a tilted chin, and a turned up nose. This self-importance and self-admiration may cause one to look

down on others and consider them inferior on account of education, worldly possessions, or social standing. The caste system is extant in the Western world as well as in the Eastern and is practiced by Americans and Englishmen as well as Indians.

Social pride embraces racial relations. Racism and caste arrogance are fruits of social conceit. We speak pretty loud about white supremacy. When a Christian, or anyone else as to that matter, treats with contempt and scorn one of another color, that is fiendish pride. In Jesus's instructions to the people of His day, He taught against it. "Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'" (Luke 3:8). There is not a human on earth who is not inherently as valuable as I am. One is neither superior nor inferior because of an accident of genetics.

A legend grew up in Germany during Hitler's purge of the Jews. It is said that Jesus was told to leave and go to His own church. A groaning was heard as Jesus came down from the crucifix and walked out! To feel superior is a mark of ignorance and crudeness. Until the most unpopular race and the most despised minority are treated with dignity, our own rights are undeserved and insecure.

There is no discrimination among true Christians. With us "there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free" (Galatians 3:28). Here, "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:11). The most rude and uncultured are extended the Lord's invitation. "Come to me all you who ..." (Matthew 11:28). "And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Someone has well said: "In the great hours of the church, she did not seek the tag of respectability, but consorted with sinners and extended the helpful, brotherly hand to the rejected."

### **Proud of Worldly Wisdom**

Some are proud of their intellectual attainments. They have reached the heights of knowledge and wisdom! It results in pretentiousness and ostentatiousness. Paul said, "Knowledge

puffs up" (I Corinthians 8:1). It is easy to discern these marks of pride. They are unmistakable. The intellectual snob is easily detectable.

I have never known just why, but the worldly wise think it is not intellectual to live your life by faith. As in Paul's time, the word of the cross is foolishness. Paul was truly an intellectual and a scholar. He must have known well the languages of Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and Aramaic. He had sat at the feet of the best doctors of the law. His education had been intense, but when he visited Corinth, he laid aside lofty words (I Corinthians 2:1-2).

There is another side to this coin. There are those who take great pride in their lack of education, and are proud of their poverty of intellectual achievement. They are often as pretentious and boastful as the worldly wise. It has been my observation that often the least informed is an intolerant and conceited fool.

### **Proud of Wealth**

Wealth, worldly possessions, is the dispenser of pride. Nothing in this world seems to produce more egotism and immodesty than the accretion of wealth, the having of things. I recall what a preacher friend from Haiti said to me some years ago: "There is not anything in this country that you cannot buy with money."

Moses gave the warning long ago, "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; ... then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this



wealth.' And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:11-18).

About as much is said in the New Testament on this subject as any other. Warnings are issued and exhortations are made because vanity follows in the wake of possessions. Pity and pray for the one who is intoxicated by money. It is the root of every kind of evil. More literally, it reads, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (I Timothy 6:10).

Reading further from *The-Easy-To-Read New Testament*, Paul further discusses this subject: "It is true that serving God makes a person very rich, if that person is satisfied with what he has. When we came into the world, we brought nothing. And when we die, we can take nothing out. So, if we have food and clothes, we will be satisfied with that.

"People who want to become rich bring temptations to themselves. They are caught in a trap. They begin to want many foolish things that will hurt them. Those things ruin and destroy people ... Give this command to people who are rich with things this world has. Tell them not to be proud. Tell those rich people to hope in God, not their money. Money cannot be trusted. But God takes care of us richly. He gives us everything to enjoy.

"Tell the rich people to do good. Tell them to be rich in doing good things. And tell them to be happy to give and ready to share. by doing this they will be saving a treasure for themselves in heaven" (I Timothy 6:6-19). During our prosperity, let us remember that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father" (James 1:17).

### **Proud of Poverty**

One may be proud of a closet full of the latest fashions in clothing, but he may also be equally proud of his rags. He or she may cherish the gold bangles worn on the arm, or the gold chain about the neck; but, on the other hand, one may conspicuously boast of the straits of his poverty. Diogenes, who lived in 412 B.C., was a Greek philosopher who believed in a severely impoverished way of life. He was the spokesman for the Ascetics and the leader of the Cynics. His cloak was but a rag

and filled with holes. Socrates reportedly said to him, "Diogenes, I see your vanity through the holes in your cloak." "How apt," it was said, "the poor are to be proud."

The poor are often more intolerant toward the rich than the rich are toward the poor. Someone has said: "Pride has no special abode; it homes in rags as well as silk, among the social outcast as well as the social register."

### **Pride and Spirituality**

Spiritual pride is the most offensive and objectionable of all pride. It has been said that there is a sense in which it is a greater sin than murder, adultery, and thievery. It is Satan's sin. We have discussed in other lessons as well as this one, the theatrical pomp of the proud Pharisee and how his ostentatious display of his religion aroused resentment in the Lord and called forth a caustic denunciation of them (Luke 18:9-14).

A failure or a refusal to recognize our own spiritual arrogance and grandeur must be disgustingly abhorrent to the Lord.

The apostle John points out the fact that Diotrephes loved the limelight (III John 9). One translation renders it, "He always wants to be their leader." He is not the last man in the church who likes the spotlight and public advertisement. Some like publicity stories and "write-ups" so much, it makes little difference that the reports they produce are unfavorable toward them. "Just herald my name abroad and bring me some attention!"

Preeminence is the name of the game. It was this spirit that led to the apostasy of the church in the first centuries of the Christian era.

It is lamentable that in some places today this same story is being retold and those original scenes are being reenacted.

Spiritual pride may have the earmarks of egotism, but disguise itself in abasing, syrupy humiliation. Pride is gaudy and garish, but often masquerades in the attire of lowliness. Feigning meekness, such a person in fact is saying, "I am better at everything else than I am at bragging." His stateliness is camouflage. His garb of humility is just that—a mask and a false front.

### **Proud of Their Sins**

There are those who boast of their seductions and debauchery. The homosexuals and lesbians who appear on our public communications mediums dignify their conduct as simply a different life style. God calls it sin. Many never go to the trouble to even try to justify or extenuate their dastardly deeds. They boast about them and they flaunt them. They are proud of their sins and in delight call attention to their weaknesses.

The public ought not to be exposed to some of the cancers in our society. Why open up to public view, particularly to our children, the festering sores of wicked people? We cover our garbage. Why parade our sins? Jeremiah emphasized this theme several times in his condemnation of the sins of Israel, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, or did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; In the time of their punishment They shall be cast down" (Jeremiah 8:12) We still have in our midst people who are not remorseful.

### **Self-Esteem a Necessity**

The problem is with over self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and self-love. One of life's greatest challenges to the Christian is learning to walk this line of self-esteem with proper humility. One misses the mark when he says, "I am not qualified to teach a class, talk with a friend about his soul, or perform some task the Lord wants done." Is this a lack of self-esteem, or even qualification, or is it an evasion of duty? Let us make sure!

The kind of self-esteem that Paul discussed, and encouraged every Christian to have was comprised of three important facts in our faith:

1. **Each Christian is significant.** "We should be called the children of God! ... Beloved, now we are children of God" (I John 3:1-2). "But you have come to Mount Zion ... to the general assembly and church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:22-23). The first son born in a Jewish family was given the most important place in the family. All of God's children are like that. A more literal translation of this phrase is, "the church of the

high-born ones." God's children are high born; they are sons and daughters of the King and that makes them princes and princesses. They live high above the world, and yet they are deeply concerned about the affairs of this world and the people who are involved in those affairs. Their purpose is to serve these people to the betterment of society and the hope of heaven. Yet we must be careful not to confuse this with pride.

2. **Each Christian has** (or ought to have)**security**. "I know whom [the One, Jesus] I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (II Timothy 1:12). "... there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (II Timothy 4:6-8).

3. **Each Christian is competent**. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). "Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:6-7).

### **Some Results of Pride**

The final result of this sin is failure. "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

Herod Agrippa made "an oration" before an audience made up of the people of Tyre and Sidon, in Caesarea, "and the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:22-23).

Look at Nebuchadnezzar and his sin of pride: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty ..." (Daniel 4:30)? I do not have to tell you what happened to him.

Haman's pride was deflated when a peasant refused to bow down when he passed by. The only medication which would give him relief was Mordecai's neck. Haman's lofty conceit and immeasurable arrogance received confirmation when he looked

up and saw a gallows seventy-five feet high waiting for him. "They hanged Haman on the gallows" (Esther 7:10). His pride was his undoing.

There are many dangerous and evil consequences of this sin of pride we have discussed. It brings misery inexpressible; it prevents gratitude and contentment; it dissolves friendships, hates superiors, scorns inferiors, and allows no equals. It breeds strife. "Evil men do not understand justice" (Proverbs 28:5).

### **Cannot Succeed Alone**

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). In speaking of the One upon whom we should rely completely, Paul said to the Ephesian Christians, "In whom you also trusted" (Ephesians 1:13). It is faith in the Lord we need to maintain the proper balance. This is what Peter lacked as he endeavored to walk on the water (Matthew 4:29-31).

Add to this our own experience of years as Christians and our reliance on fellow Christians and this can be of incalculable assistance in maintaining the proper balance between pride and self-esteem. There is certainly a vast difference between the two. God wants us to have self-esteem in such virtues as purity, truth, integrity of character, and commitment to the greatest cause this earth has ever known. This is far removed from pride—the pride that devastates the soul and holds the promise of eternal condemnation.

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## THE SIN OF GAMBLING

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Self-evident truths:
    - 1. Gambling is gain at someone else's loss.
    - 2. The loser is an unwilling giver.
    - 3. It involves an unnecessary risk.
    - 4. Nothing is given for value received.
  - B. Unchristian spirit permeates each of these principles:
    - 1. It involves selfishness on the part of the one who wins and takes what is not rightfully his.
    - 2. My contribution to his loss may involve hardships for innocent people.
    - 3. A Christian cannot manipulate others in games of chance and subsidize that manner of living.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. The purpose is to propel the other person into loss:
    - 1. It is taking what does not rightfully belong to one.
    - 2. It may be legal; it is not mostly right.
    - 3. The New Testament principle is that the Christian must look to the good and advantage of the other person. "Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (I Corinthians 10:33).
    - 4. To deliberately cause innocent people to suffer by depriving them of their necessary income and squeezing them into financial straits is to sin against those people as well as God.
  - B. The unwilling giver:
    - 1. The loser is an unwilling giver.
      - a. Even if the amount is small.
      - b. Particularly if he continues to lose.
    - 2. Few, if any, are inclined to hand over hard-earned money, especially if it entails hardships and spells unpaid debts.
    - 3. Losses lead to pressure and stresses which trap one in sin and often lead to serious crime.
  - C. The unnecessary risk:
    - 1. Welfare of family, endangered marriage, shadow upon reputation, imperiled future by engaging in games of chance.
    - 2. Deceived by the magical promise of quick riches. The hope is to become rich and independent now.

3. The thrills and excitement of uncertainty—the daring involved in taking chances, and the challenge of testing one's skill or luck.
- D. Nothing given for value received.
1. What is the relation between the contribution made and the money received?
  2. How do you justify spending two or ten dollars and receiving fifty million in return? For this to be done many people lose.
  3. When the outcome is settled the winner collects the loser's stakes.
  4. What makes gambling wrong from the beginning is greed. Selfishly wanting things for one's self, with the best effort. And it is with total disregard for the other person or his welfare.
- E. Why people gamble:
1. They believe it is an easy way to make money without the exertion and trouble in working.
  2. Most work requires struggle, toil, industry, consistency, and constancy. This day after day strain makes gambling more attractive.
  3. One has a goal in life and often does not wish to pay the price of waiting and years of toil which are required to bring it to fruition.
  4. One magical moment of good luck, he believes, can bring him prosperity and comfort which he could never have otherwise. Sudden good fortune is better than years of struggle which may end in disappointment and despair.
- F. Gambling—legal and illegal:
1. One of the oldest sins in history.
  2. By law, gambling is sanctioned in some states and societies.
  3. Much of the gambling in the world is overseen and supervised by organized crime.
  4. Associated with gambling are all the sins of murder, prostitution, drunkenness, drugs, etc.
  5. Some gambling governments seek to make respectable and dignify with legitimate business and cultured society.
  6. Billions of dollars are spent in illegal gambling under the guise of acceptable and justifiable organized business.

- G. Gambling may become an addiction:
  1. Many things in life to which people become addicted—alcohol, drugs, tobacco, sex.
  2. Gambling is no exception—time, money, effort, study, trouble, and energy are all given in pursuit of the habit.
- III. Conclusion:
  - A. What about little sins
    1. If the risks are not great and the losses pose little or no inconvenience, would gambling be permissible?
    2. The practice of evil, however slight it may appear to be, is wrong. The principle is the same as if the risk were significant—the winning or losses considerable.
    3. Lying if lying and adultery is adultery, even though the circumstances or consequences may seem trivial and immaterial.
  - B. Prototypes for the young:
    1. We cannot be too careful about examples we set.
    2. To deprive a fellow man of his possessions and expose him to complete disaster and financial ruin is the wrong kind of example to set before others whose lives we influence.
    3. To determine right and wrong, the question should be asked: "Is this an investment for productive purposes and is it above question or reproach?"
  - C. What about prizes for unusual accomplishment?
    1. If reward is given for achievements, would this constitute gambling?
    2. If prizes of considerable value were given for advertising, would this be counted in the category of gambling?
    3. What of such games as Bingo being played by religious people and promoted by churches?
  - D. What is our purpose in the Christian life?
    1. Upon what does our focus center as Christians.
    2. Jesus taught that our "eye should be single." Can it be if we are engaged in what is evil on the one hand and something that is good on the other?
    3. "He is a double-minded man [a man with two souls] unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).
    4. Gambling is a dissipation rather than an expedient.



- a. Where is the work ethic we should be teaching our children?
- b. Do the material goals take precedence over the spiritual and moral?
- c. If Christ is to dwell in us, we should keep His habitation clean and attractive.
- d. You do not see this kind of conduct in the lives of the apostles who left examples for us to imitate. Look to men like Paul for the daily conduct of your life.

## **THE SIN OF GAMBLING**

There are four axioms relative to gambling that need to be mentioned at the outset of this lesson. They are statements that I believe are universally accepted as true. They are principles that need no proof and to which all of us acquiesce because the truths that they assert are obvious. They are self-evident propositions.

1. Gambling is gain at someone else's loss.
2. The loser is an unwilling giver.
3. It is an unnecessary risk.
4. Nothing is given for value received.

### **Gambling—Gain at Someone's Loss**

It is not difficult to detect the unchristian spirit that permeates each of these principles. Take the first one, for example. In this act I am responsible for someone's loss and, selfishly, I take what is not rightfully mine, for which I have not worked, and use it for my own purposes. This, in no way, comports with the Christian standard. His loss, to which I have contributed, may provide the occasion of his children going hungry or without clothing. It may mean they are deprived of a place to live or the opportunity to go to school. A Christian simply, cannot subsidize that manner of living!

### **The Unwilling Giver**

The loser is an unwilling giver. This is almost always true, even if the amount he loses is small. And particularly if he continues to lose over and over. He is disinclined to hand over his hard earned money when it spells hardships and deprivations for the family and the inability to meet his obligations or pay his debts. While he may release it voluntarily, it is with reluctance you can be sure, for what man does not loath to relinquish his income to another when absolutely nothing of value has been received in return and when the welfare of his family has been jeopardized.

There are so many principles and passages of scripture that are violated by gambling. In writing to the Philippian Christians, Paul warned them, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:4).

A similar statement he made to the Corinthian church: "Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (I Corinthians 10:33). He was saying, "Don't seek your own advantage, but the advantage of others that they may be saved." The underlying spirit of gambling is doing what is best for me and not what is best for the other person.

### **The Unnecessary Risk**

There, there is that unnecessary risk. Why should I imperil the welfare of my family, gamble with my marriage, put in jeopardy my reputation, and incur the danger of destroying any future possibility of sound success by engaging in a game of chance? Is it because I believe it is a quick way to make lots of money without the effort and discipline required in working?

You can be sure that in most gambling games the chances of winning are small and most gamblers lose money. How can a father take bread out of the mouth of his children, expose his wife to the pressures of debt wherein his life is threatened, and force his family into a bread line, all to satisfy his attraction to gambling in the hope that he will *make a killing* and become rich overnight? Indeed, it is an unnecessary risk!

### **Nothing Given for Value Received**

What contribution has one made in money, in talent, or in service for the money he wins—in case he does win? Passing through one of our western states where gambling is legal, I stopped on the street at the curb and watched people gambling as I sat in my car. Suddenly, my view became focused on a chore woman, so she appeared to be. She was past middle age and poorly clad. She was playing the slot machines, called one-armed bandits. Into one machine after another, she was feeding silver dollars. I sat and watched her for a considerable time, but never saw her win any money.

Several thoughts flashed through my mind. I wondered with what toil, backache, and sweat she had earned those dollars. Later, I asked the question, "What if she had won ten thousand dollars? How would the fifteen or twenty dollars she dropped into the slot relate in value to that large amount?" How can

you justify giving a dollar and receiving a thousand in exchange? Someone has got to lose and it has to be a severe, drastic, exorbitant loss! And only selfishness and greed could leave a conscience indifferent in that predicament!

### **A Closer Look at the Sin**

Gambling is betting on the outcome of a future event. One who gambles usually bets money or something else of value as a *stake* on the outcome he predicts. When the outcome is settled, the *winner* collects the *loser's* stakes. Most often people gamble on games of chance; those games played with cards or dice. However, gambling is very widespread on games of skill—as horse racing and almost every professional sport. Along the streets of cities and towns in a poor country like Jamaica, one could buy tickets or chances on horse racing or national lotteries. Even political elections, or any event with an unpredictable outcome furnish opportunities for betting.

### **Why People Gamble**

Many people believe that gambling is a swift and easy way to make money without the exertion and the trouble involved in working. To work regularly on a job involves discipline and constant endeavor. Most employment requires industry, even struggle and toil, to be successful. Characteristics of it are determination, resolution, and constancy. Even if it is not manual labor, it is often arduous with strain and stress—truly a *long pull!* And so, with impulsiveness, one wants to hasten this business of success and race to the point of financial security and plenty.

It is a mad scramble to accomplish the goal one has set for himself in life. Hurried in his intentions to accomplish his objective and reach his destination, he plunges in, believing this is his lucky or magical moment which will spell prosperity and comfort for him for his entire future. He conjures up a life of wealth and affluence on "Easy Street" where, thriving in his good fortune, he will not have to work again as he has in the past to keep body and soul together. Yet, down deep, he knows his chances of winning are small. The picture of prosperity in his mind largely obliterates this unpleasant thought. Psychologists who have studied people who gamble are

convinced that the real attraction of gambling lies in the thrills and tensions of uncertainty, the daring involved in taking chances, the challenge of testing one's skill or luck, the satisfaction of beating an opponent, and the dreams of sudden good fortune. The latter is certainly true in poor countries where I have lived and where people put the last penny they possess into these games of chance.

### **Gambling—Legal and Illegal**

Gambling has been prominent and fashionable from ancient times despite the fact that most societies disapproved of it and have made laws to forbid or restrict it. It is my understanding that in the United States, it is more circumscribed than in most other countries.

However, in recent years, it is less confined than previously. At the present time there are twenty-nine states which collect taxes on parimutuel betting—a system of betting on horse races in which those backing the winners divide, in proportion to their wagers, the total amount bet after a percentage has been taken by the agency conducting the betting.

There are presently twenty-one states which conduct lotteries. Likely you know that a *lottery* is a game of chance, sponsored in these instances by the state for the purpose of raising funds. Subscribers buy numbered chances, tickets, on the prizes offered. The winning numbers are chosen by lot. Nevada is the only state in the United States that permits all forms of gambling. Race track betting, as the above figures indicate, is legal in a little over half of the states.

### **Shall We Do Evil That Good May Come?**

There are some states that allow bingo for charitable purposes and their are churches that are involved in this kind of gambling—the Roman Catholic Church leading this group, no doubt.

One may ask, "If a person should gamble for benevolent purposes and were generous with his winnings by contributing half to humanitarian institutions—children's hospitals, homes for the aged, feeding the hungry—would he not thereby be justified in

what he was doing? Would it not be a magnanimous spirit to give half of one's earnings to such philanthropic causes? Such noble and lofty resolution for worthy and needy uses surely could not be condemned as evil. Would one not be vindicated and released from any wrongdoing for such unselfish consideration?" Paul answers these questions with one brief statement: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound" (Romans 6:1)?

Some in that day had slanderously reported that Paul had said, "Let us do evil that good may come" (Romans 3:8). Such reasoning would throw open the flood gate of corruption. One could justify drunkenness, adultery, or even murder if the proceeds from trafficking in these sins were spent for benevolence and welfare projects! God has never permitted men to do evil that good may be derived.

There are several states that operate state lotteries for cash prizes. The take has been very considerable in the last few years, reaching thirty or forty million dollars at a time. Some states operate these lotteries to raise money for education.

From the resources which are available to me and which I have examined, most Americans gamble occasionally, even though they have been unwilling to legalize more extensive gambling in their state or community.

When legal facilities are not available, I am told, many people gamble illegally. One of the commonest ways in which they do this is by placing bets on various sporting events through bookmakers who are reputed to work for organized crime. They may gamble in other ways with friends or neighbors that are not controlled by organized crime.

Those avenues of betting which create the most cash are certainly planned, overseen, and completely controlled by the crime machines in this country. You do not have to be told that murder and every other kind of immorality in the catalogue of crime is perpetrated out of consideration of this lucrative profession.

There is no way that a Christian can be involved in such a despicable and damnable business. Reliable sources assert that Americans spend billions of dollars each year on illegal bets of all kinds. You may ask why laws against gambling are not more scrupulously and exactly enforced—why are not our law enforcement bodies more meticulous in carrying out the vote and wishes of the people.

One hesitates to charge our officials with ill-repute and illicit dealings, but (1) much illegal gambling is a well organized business and gambling organizations have large sums of money available to bribe police and public officials. (2) Many Americans do not really want laws against gambling strictly enforced, even though they are unwilling to legalize gambling. They may like to gamble occasionally themselves. Or, they may believe that all gambling should be legal.

Some people who favor legalized gambling argue that people will always gamble because gambling laws are not fully enforced and probably cannot be. They claim that legalization would end organized crime's control of gambling. Also, they tell us that legal gambling could be taxed and the profits would help pay for useful public projects.

Those who promote legalized gambling fail to tell you in what desperate straits it leaves so many families whose heads are tempted to become enveloped in it. They also forget to tell you about the cost of crime associated with gambling in those states and communities where it is permitted by law. The moral aspects of gambling mean nothing to them. They disregard that consideration without the slightest twinge of conscience.

The vilest crimes committed as a result of its legalization are passed over without notice if it enhances the interest and fills the coffers of big business. Financial ruin to gamblers and their families is not a consideration. The fact that gamblers win primarily by chance makes absolutely no difference to them.

Our society's belief that money should come as result of honest, hard work and from reason and thrift doesn't make an *iota* of difference to those who have their hearts set on making money. They are not one *whit* concerned about the subject of morality! Their's is an old philosophy: "Get money if thou canst by fair means; but if thou canst not, get it by hook and by crook." How can we permit distribution of rewards by chance without regard for individual worth?

### **What About Small Sins?**

What about games for insignificant amounts of money, or games which do not create hazardous risks? Can Christians engage in such

games as matching money, pitching money to a crack or line to see who can come closest, or matching for soft drinks, a meal, or for some other reason?

These are identical in character with those gambling actions which do create hazardous risks and where significant amounts of money are involved. Christians should carefully avoid gambling in small things because:

1. The practice of evil, however slight, is still evil. There is no such thing in Bible language as dwarfed *lying*. You would never say, "The lie he told was scant." Or, "He slightly lied." When Abraham said, concerning Sarah, "She is my sister," he told a half truth, but it was a whole lie! The wooden dummy or puppet, Charlie McCarthy, of ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, said, "I never tell any white lies; all of mine are in Technicolor!"

Big or little, white or colored, lying is not insignificant or inconsequential. There is no such thing as a meager lie. One does not commit just a little adultery or fornication. Sin is sin; evil is evil. Gambling is gambling and a Christian should have no part of it.

2. Such represents a dangerous example for the young and have been the pitfalls for the old. Repeatedly we are instructed to "be an example." One translation has it: "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" (I Timothy 4:16). "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Galatians 6:10).

A Christian is not setting an example of this principle when he, in a game of chance, deprives his fellow man of his money and causes what may be complete disaster and financial ruin for him. The world may not look upon such action the same as it looks on murder or adultery, but it is, nevertheless, wickedness that will rob one of a crown of life. Paul gave this instruction to the Christians in Thessalonica: "Abstain from every form [appearance] of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:22).

The acid test in determining the right or wrong of this issue is: "Is this an investment for productive purposes, or an unnecessary risk for either frivolous or outright vicious purposes?" Small gambling grows into large and reckless gambling. Always a good question for a Christian to ask about his activities, especially those that are questionable, is: "What will this lead to?"



### **What About Prizes for Unusual Accomplishment?**

If prizes were given for accomplishment or purely as a means of advertising, would this constitute gambling?

If reward is given for achievement, no risk is created and no risk is taken. It would not be gambling. A firm or company that gives away goods for advertising receives a just return in advertising value. In such cases, this does not constitute gambling.

This differs from a bingo game where one pays so much to play in the hope of winning a great deal more. Further than that, a bingo game produces nothing in goods or service and a risk that did not exist has been created. It should not be difficult for a Christian who exercises his knowledge of the word of God and who uses the wisdom God has given him to distinguish between the right and the wrong in these areas of conduct.

### **Gambling May Become an Addiction**

An addiction is "giving oneself up habitually to something." It is a devotion to a practice or habit, especially a bad habit. It is the condition of being addicted to a habit; habitual inclination.

One of the most common addictions of people all over the world is that of alcohol. Men have learned to produce alcohol out of agricultural products and plants by nature. Almost every kind of fruit is a source of strong drink. Almost all the grains that are used for food are also used to make intoxicating liquor.

In East Africa in every village, one of the small feed grains is boiled in large pots with sugar to produce *pombe*. *Pombe* is called a native beer, but it is an ardent spirit that sends one into a drunken binge in a very brief period of time! In that area, they tap a certain species of bamboo and the fluid they drain from it begins to ferment almost immediately. The English call it *Bamboo Wine*.

In the sugar cane producing islands of the Caribbean, the chief product is rum, and those who drink it straight or mixed are soon inebriated. In the United States there are 18,000,000 alcoholics. In addition to these, there are millions of Americans who

are *problem drinkers, social drinkers, cocktail party drinkers, serious drinkers, swill pots, gin hounds, bottle suckers, booze hounds, winos*, and a dozen other captions. Alcohol consumption is one of our major health problems in this country and the cause of much of our crime. Something like 150,000 people will die this year in the United States as a direct result of drinking intoxicants. Other countries around the world are similarly affected.

The addiction to drugs is as great or greater than that of alcohol. Eighty billion dollars (\$80,000,000,000) worth of drugs come into this country each year from South American countries through the Bahamas Islands. It is more than a hundred billion dollars per year business in this country, and for that reason it is almost impossible to counteract or control. Sixty percent of those who occupy our prisons are there on drug related charges. It is the major cause of crime of every sort. A drug addict's desire; his want and need is so great that it is next to impossible to deter him from satisfying his addiction. This kind of drug abuse produces every conceivable evil. There is no way to excuse it or justify it.

People become habituated to tobacco. They are nicotine addicts. Three hundred and sixty thousand people will die this year, according to the report of the Surgeon General of the United States, from the various damaging effects of cigarettes. This injurious, harmful drug has caused the loss of health and life and you cannot compensate for it.

All of these things I have said to point up the fact that many Americans have become addicted to gambling. Just as one becomes an alcoholic with an abnormal and insatiable craving for alcoholic drink, so one becomes accustomed and habituated to the practice of gambling. It may not be compelling from the physical standpoint—that is, not as physiologically addictive; but it nevertheless becomes as fixed and as deep rooted and ingrained because it is psychologically addictive.

To put it in everyday parlance, "One becomes hooked on gambling." One of the definitions of the New Testament word for *addiction* is, "habitual inclination, to devote to a pursuit." Christians are to be "addicts", but that addiction should be only to the service of *fellow Christians*, the saints (I Corinthians 16:15). Instead of being habitual addicts to drugs, alcohol, and

tobacco, we should be chronic and established addicts of good works in the interest of others. If one is *hooked* on gambling, there is no adequate way to handle the stewardship entrusted to him by the Lord.

Everything we have belongs to God and should be used at His direction. There is no way a Christian can gamble and, at the same time, be a true custodian of the possessions with which the Lord has entrusted him. Paul laid down some disciplined instructions: "Owe no one anything except to love one another" (Romans 13:8). This sounds harsh and inflexible, but we need to ask, "What is our purpose in the Christian life? Upon what is our Christian focus centering? Does it converge on a single goal?" If so, then gambling is a dissipation rather than an expedient. What are we accomplishing by participating in this questionable activity? How will we be able to justify it in the judgment? They gambled for Jesus' clothing in the shadow of the cross. Was the victor really victorious? Where is the work ethic we should be teaching our children? Do we tell them that it is lucrative and that they should become adept in all phases of it to enjoy the bounty?

If we allow Christ to dwell in us, because of His presence we should keep His habitation and abode cleanly swept. "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (II Corinthians 7:1). "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:1-2).

It is a total impossibility for a Christian to gamble and "seek those things which are above". We cannot play games for money or some other stake which requires taking a risk in order to gain an advantage. A Christian positively cannot involve himself in the risks of loss that always accompanies gambling. Look to Paul as your example and follow those principles clearly enunciated by him for the daily conduct of your life.

## **AND NOW THEY SIN MORE AND MORE**

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read Hosea 12:2; Luke 18:10-14.
  - B. Present generation seems undisturbed by sin.
    - 1. Not discomforted, bothered, shocked, upset, or distressed by it.
    - 2. Little, if any, feeling of anxiety or concern or heaviness of heart. No anguish or torture or terror. People engaged in sin suffer no affliction, grief, or regret.
      - a. Some do not recognize it or will not submit to its reality.
      - b. Others deny it and say it is not true, or they call it a life style.
      - c. There are those who do not want to face up to the consequences of sin and, thus, they minimize it. They claim sin is not as bad as it is made out to be.
      - d. There are those who live so close to sin and are not mixed up in it. They are not aware of it.
      - e. There are still others who are indifferent to sin. They do not care. They are, in no way, saddened, disturbed, or distressed by it.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Some of the elements of sin:
    - 1. Its prevalence (I John 5:10; Romans 3:10, 12, 23).
      - a. Someone has said, "Sin is the most common commodity amongst us."
      - b. It is everywhere. Where can you go and not find it? It is among the elite and the outcast, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and the learned and the unlearned.
      - c. In the darkest areas of the world where people do not know—it still exists.
      - d. Lying, stealing, adultery, intrigue, rape, murder, materialism—all exists among all classes and grades of people, whether civilized or uncivilized.
    - 2. Its power (Romans 6:12-14).
      - a. It caused Adam and Eve to forfeit paradise, Cain to slaughter his brother, David to lie and commit

adultery, and Judas to sell his Lord for thirty measly, contemptible pieces of silver.

- b. Do not underestimate its power in one's life. Example of lion and Cape Buffalo (I Peter 5:8).
- 3. Its progression (II Timothy 3:13).
  - a. Give attention to the progression in Psalm I:
    - (1) Walks not.
    - (2) Stands not.
    - (3) Sits not.
  - b. Spreads like a gangrene (II Timothy 2:16–17). Increases, advances.
  - c. Note also its growth expressed by James (James 1:14–15):
    - (1) Drawn of his own lust.
    - (2) Enticed.
    - (3) Lust conceives and brings forth sin.
    - (4) Sin, when finished, brings forth death.
- 4. Its pleasures (Hebrews 11:25).
  - a. Sin is pleasant, magnetic, and attractive. It is pleasurable, causes pleasure, and it is pleasure giving.
  - b. To those who engage in it, it is welcomed. It is delightful, cordial, and stimulating.
  - c. Sin is very charming, captivating, winsome, an sweet—for a time.
  - d. Old Satan does not come in dark array with a forked tail, horns, pitchfork, and a terrifying countenance. He would never win anyone with that approach.
  - e. Sin sends out affections and lusts (Galatians 5:24).
  - f. The pleasures are only temporary, that it, it continues for a limited time. It is not permanent. It is transient (II Corinthians 4:18).
- 5. It's persistence (Matthew 4:1–11).
  - a. The lust of the flesh: "turn these stones into bread."
  - b. The lust of the eye: "cast yourself down."
  - c. The pride of life: "fall down and worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world."
  - d. Satan continued to tempt Jesus through His life on earth, even up to and upon the cross. Does he persist in trying to bring about our downfall?

6. Its punishment (Hebrews 2:1–3).
  - a. He is coming in flaming fire to punish those who do not know God and who have not obeyed the gospel.
  - b. Further discussion of the punishment of sin (Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20; Galatians 1:6–9).
- B. What sin will do:
  1. It will make a slave out of you (Romans 6:16; Titus 3:3; Romans 16:18).
    - a. Men become addicted to narcotics, alcohol, gambling, nicotine, immorality, curing, hate, and retribution
    - b. Lost will and will power and strength of mind is gone; as also are resolve and control.
    - c. One loses self-command and self-mastery. He no longer has possession of his faculties. Government of his direction is left behind—gone and forgotten. There is no restraint and he becomes oblivious to responsibility.
    - d. Self-control is the mainstay of the Christian's day-to-day progress and success. Control of his thoughts, speech, tongue, desires, food, time, and temper.
  2. Sin will make you dirty.
    - a. The prodigal evidently got down to the muck and mire of the pig sty.
    - b. Like a dog returning to his vomit again and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (II Peter 2:20–22).
    - c. One of the words used means utterly decayed; another means depraved, spoiled, ruined, still another means moral filthiness and pollution. Read I Timothy 6:5; II Timothy 3:8; James 1:21; Jude 10.
    - d. Evil association ruins good character (I Corinthians 15:33).
    - e. Cleanse ourselves from all filthiness (II Corinthians 7:1–2; Romans 1:26–32).
  3. Sin will separate you from God.
    - a. Separated Adam and Eve from the garden and God.
    - b. The prodigal son (Luke 15:11–14).

- c. Cannot live in sin and have fellowship with God (Isaiah 50:1-2).
    - d. The one who is born of God does not keep on practicing sin (I John 3:9).
  - 4. Sin will make you destitute.
    - a. The prodigal son spent all and wanted to eat the pods on which the pigs foddered and fattened (Luke 15:16).
    - b. Have observed what sin will do to men of promise—destitute, stripped, impoverished, indigent, and penniless. Reduced to want.
    - c. Sin will make a pauper of you—morally, spiritually, intellectually, and even economically.
  - 5. Sin will make you miserable. What greater misery than when the prodigal thought of what he once had in his father's house, and now complete destitute—no shoes, robe, or ring and starving to death. Now a beggar and a tramp. Even the day-laborers in his father's house had more.
- III. Conclusion:
  - A. The world is filled with people with problems and complexes.
    - 1. You cannot think yourself out of these situations.
    - 2. It will take the forgiveness of God. One has to be willing to comply with His will so as to receive that forgiveness.
  - B. The appeal is to obey the gospel now and become a Christian.

## AND NOW THEY SIN MORE AND MORE

Read Hosea 13:2: "Now they sin more and more." Sin is one of the most common words in the Bible. Someone has said, "Sin is the most common commodity we possess." There are many Hebrew and Greek expressions that are translated by that single term. Each of them has a different connotation. For instance, the Greek utterance, *hamartia*, which means "to miss the mark," is found with its cognates 272 times in the New Testament. But there are many other words—such as the term that means lawlessness, *avomia*, and the word which means "to fall or fall away," *paraptoma*. There are Hebrew sayings—such as *asham*, which means "guilt" and *chet*, which means "error or failure." And the Hebrew word, *chattath*, is found 163 times in the Old Testament.

Although *sin* is often discussed and defined and the dangers of engaging in it are clearly pointed out, God's people, in any age, have not been very disturbed by it. Only a few days after Israel left Egypt accompanied by almost countless miracles performed in their presence by God, they murmured against Him and sought ways they might return to their former state of sin and bondage.

Some of the most egregious and atrocious sins that have stained the garments of God's people were committed by Israel not far removed from divine evidences of His care and deliverance. Twenty-three thousand fell in one day by committing fornication (I Corinthians 10:8). Because of their lusts they were overthrown in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:4–5). Enormous as this was they did not seem shocked or distressed.

Fifty days away from Egypt and perhaps no more than a week from the most convincing miracle, they worshipped in idolatry before a golden calf they had fashioned with their own hands.

They murmured and complained and criticized and found fault and there never seemed to be any heaviness of heart or wretchedness of spirit for their misdeeds. Only occasionally, when they saw the relation between their affliction and their sin, did they show any signs of grief or regret. In our day, sin, however monstrous, does not seem to upset the guilty or bring anguish to the observer or their misconduct. We are barely discomfited by



murder, rape, torture of one another, or any other grievous, inhumane and brutal act. We are not shocked or distressed by sin.

### **Does Not Recognize It**

In so many instances, people do not recognize sin. They have lived in it and around it all their lives and it has become so common and accepted that they pass it by without noticing it.

An attorney in Johannesburg, South Africa, visiting in my home, asked me the question: "Mr. Caskey, what is sin?" I was taken aback, for I had not idea there was any accountable, responsible adult in the world who did not know what sin is! I have learned that one can tolerate it in his environment, approve it in his life, experience it in his own person, condone it in his conscience, endorse it to his fellows, and even countenance it in his own family, and, as a result, such delinquency blinds one to the reality of infraction of God's law.

### **Denies It**

There are those who minimize it and consider it insignificant. Some deny it—say it is not true. Or, one may give it another name—like, *life-stye*. Talk to homosexuals in our day and they declare it to be a legitimate life-style and a viable alternative. One notion is that it is constitutionally inherited. Someone else contends that it is a hormonal imbalance. And still others claim to believe it is a genetic or chromosomal problem. They deny, categorically, that it is sin.

A man and a woman live together before marriage—or without ever being married. Any conflict that may arise about the relationship is never a dispute about the nature of it. There is not a single discord about the inherent rightness or wrongness of it. No dissension arises about the question of sin. "What Legitimacy does a piece of paper, speaking of a marriage license, give to the relationship," they ask?

There is no dissidence about the origin of marriage and the home for they attribute none of it to God. It is totally a human institution, thought up and brought to fruition by man alone. There is, therefore, no shame in its perversion

## Consequences Are Unpleasant

Because the consequences of sin are harsh and forbidding, men tend to minimize the seriousness. They turn their faces away from it because of the fearfulness of it. They do not want to live under the exposure of a threat. It would be a liability to their happiness. They refuse to be intimidated by the warnings of punishment, so, with a hardened conscience, they go on about their merry way, completely indifferent to it. In no way are they saddened or disquieted by it. Sin, to them, is just not sinful!

## Some Features of Sin

In our effort to learn more about the subject as it is discussed in the word of God, the Bible, let us examine some of the elements of it:

1. **Its prevalence.** Someone has said, "Sin is the commonest commodity among us." Where can you go and not find it? It prevails in every society, among the elite, the outcast, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and the learned and the unlearned. In darkest areas of the world it is sovereign. Where men boast of highest civilization, it is both typical and popular. Lying is lying, whether committed in the modern offices of big and sophisticated businesses of New York City or in the jungles Borneo in the East Indies. If a student of mine in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania had decided to take another wife in addition to the one he already had, you can be sure that would have constituted polygamy as much as if the act had taken place in Salt Lake City, Utah.

"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19). The apostle is emphasizing the preponderance of wickedness among all men. And Paul concurs with John in these statements: "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). "They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:12). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

It needs to be stated at this point that there are some members of the human race who are not sinners. They are not in any way capable of sinning because they are not responsible. The largest

group in this category are small children and infants. Jesus talked about these in Matthew 18:2-5. Matthew, in recording the incident, and Jesus, in speaking, called the child *little, paidion*.

He further said to His disciples and, consequently, to us, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). There is no such thing as an infant inheriting the sin of Adam. If men are sinners from birth, having inherited Adamic sin, then we must all become sinners, said Jesus, to enter the kingdom of heaven and that is nonsense! More than that, sin is transgression of God's law, and there is not the slightest possibility of a child who is immature morally, spiritually, and intellectually being answerable before God (I John 3:4). John here speaks of one who is *doing lawlessness*.

There has to be some understanding, purpose, or design in *walking across* the law of God. Only responsible, rational, blamable people are liable before the judgment, whether it is man's judgment or God's judgment.

2. **Its power.** I have grave doubts that any of us can really comprehend the capacity of Satan in influence or strength exercised upon his victims. Peter speaks of him in terms of his strength—his might and muscle, so to speak. "Your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). His drive is intense and his force almost immeasurable. I remember some years ago when my son, David, who lived and preached in East Africa, had occasion to lead a group of American doctors on a photographic safari. In the course of their trip, they encountered a Cape Buffalo and a large, black maned lion in deadly combat. The large tract of land they covered in their conflict resembled a freshly plowed field. There was some question for a while which one would come out victor. As they drove through the scene, the lion dragged himself into the tall grass, but the buffalo lay dead near the edge of the clearing. The lion weight about 500 pounds; the buffalo weighed nearly 2000 pounds. Don't ever underestimate the incredible strength of sin, the tremendous punch it possesses, the vigor with which it attacks, and the persistence with which it endures.

Look at some of the havoc sin has wrought in history in the lives of our ancestors. It caused Adam and Eve to forfeit paradise,

Cain to slaughter his brother, David to lie and commit adultery, Israel to abandon God, Judas to sell his Lord for thirty measly pieces of silver, and the Jews to crucify the Messiah. Today, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (I Corinthians 10:12).

3. **Its progression.** The Bible has much to say about the advance of sin in the lives of those who permit its entry into their hearts. Its forward movement and rapid locomotion is found in the life and doings of David as he began with a strong and unlawful desire for a beautiful woman who belonged to another man and ended in the cold blooded murder of the woman's husband. Paul knew the nature and potential of sin when he wrote to Timothy in these words, "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (II Timothy 3:13). How it flourishes when given the slightest headway: "But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer" (II Timothy 2:26-17)

David must have had the development and maturity of sin in mind when he wrote the first Psalm: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly [wicked], nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." Its advance is seen in the expressions, "walking, standing," and "sitting.". That is how sin takes control of one's life. James was discussing this very subject when he wrote, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

Here is the order of the progression: (1) man is drawn of his own lusts, (2) he is enticed, (3) lust conceives and brings forth sin, and (4) sin, when finished, brings forth death. Sin has not altered its course; it still uses the same tactics. It was this strategy sin used on our earliest forbears; and the design of its plotting changed little, if any at all, when it approached Jesus. Satan's maneuvers and directions are much the same in practically all cases. "And Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And

there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.' " In his plotting to bring about the downfall of Achan and reproach into the camp of Israel, Satan's intrigue was well ordered: (1) I saw, (2) I coveted, (3) I took, and (4) I hid.

The word Paul used in his letter to Timothy in II Timothy 2:16 was *prokopto* and it is a strong word meaning, "to cut a passage forward, to advance, make progress, to grow worse and worse."

If Satan is unsuccessful in one plan of attack against man, he will proceed to another. He avails himself of every possible scheme to bring about man's downfall. The Christian should constantly be on his guard, walk circumspectly, looking in every direction, and call in help from the Lord and his fellow Christians to secure the relief and support needed against Satan's attacks and prevent his taking control of his life.

It is also interesting to note that sin "will eat [feed] as a *gangrene*." The word is *gaggraina* and means "to eat, gnaw; mortification." It is localized for awhile, then it spreads and keeps extending and expanding itself until its outstretch has given it control of the life, and results in spiritual mortification.

4. **Its pleasure.** "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25). One of the old translations renders it, "the pleasures of sin for a season."

Make no mistake about it, sin is pleasant. It is pleasure-causing and pleasure-giving. So often it is welcomed because it is delightful, cordial, and stimulating. Peter talks about it being "alluring," that is, seductive, exciting, and appealing. Listen carefully to what inspired writers said on the subject: "Though evil is sweet in his mouth, and he hides it under his tongue, though he spares it and does not forsake it, but still keeps it in his mouth, yet his food in his stomach turns sour; it becomes cobra venom with him. He swallows down riches and vomits them up again. God casts them out of his belly. He will suck the poison of cobras; the viper's tongue will slay him" (Job 20:12-16). "Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (Proverbs 9:17). "Folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment, But a man of understanding walks uprightly" (Proverbs 15:21).

"I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure'" (Ecclesiastes 2:1). "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13).

"Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14). "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives" (I Timothy 5:6). "... serving various lusts and pleasures" (Titus 3:5). "... as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime" (II Peter 2:13). These passages speak of the immediacy of pleasure. It is instantaneous, and this is where sin gets much of its appeal. The word of God also warns that its pleasures are brief and fleeting. They are like a migrant worker—here today, gone tomorrow. Like a wandering nomad in the desert, you see him one moment, and the next, he has disappeared.

If Christians could understand how impermanent are the pleasures of sin and how soon they vanish, in all likelihood, they would give more forethought to the matter of wrongdoing before they implicated themselves in it.

Sin makes an attractive appearance. Old Satan does not come in dark array with a forked tail, sharp horns, and a terrifying countenance. He would never win anyone this way. But, rather, he makes his product charming, captivating, and even tantalizing, and certainly sweet—all for a brief time. Note that the inspired writer emphasized that it is *fleeting, for a season*. Its affections and lusts are for the present. It appeals to the *now*.

It is only temporary and continues for a limited time. "For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:18). Things which once were desirable and possessed a great appeal have lost it all!

**5. Its persistence.** Study the history of sin in the lives of people recorded in the Bible. Satan's approach to Job was one of determination and tenacity. He tempted our early ancestors through the lust of the flesh, i.e., *so when the woman saw that the tree was good for food*; the lust of the eye, i.e., *and it was a delight to the eyes*; and the pride, or vainglory, of life, i.e., *and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise*. It is not said how long it took him to bring about their acceptance of his

proposal, but you can be sure he used whatever patience and stamina were required. There are not many good lessons one can learn from Satan, but will power and endurance he has in great abundance; and perseverance is not always the Christian's greatest resource. It is a valuable treasure and the Christian should acquire it, cultivate it, and even cherish it.

Look at the endurance and resolution Satan exercised in his temptation of Jesus in His early ministry. In Matthew 4, he confronted Jesus in a very subtle and challenging way. He said, "If You are the Son of God." He, in substance, said: "I question that You are, but if You are, command these stones to become bread."

Satan disputed Jesus' deity, objected to His claim of Sonship, and opposed His assertion to such power that would transform a rock into a loaf of bread. When he failed to accomplish his purpose through the strong and natural desire for food, he turned immediately to another avenue, which, evidently, he considered a weaker strand in the character of Jesus, and, with this same questioning technique, he posed another attack on Him. "If You are the Son of God, throw yourself down" from an exceedingly high wing of the temple extending out over the wall of Jerusalem.

To make his proposal more effective and vigorous, he quoted a passage of scripture. This, he thought, would make it more credible and certain. It gave it a spirit of authenticity to support his proposal with the word of God, but it was not very convincing and Jesus again rebuffed him by his refusal to comply. But Satan never gave up.

Some Christians, headed in a certain direction, are easily discouraged and deterred in their purpose, and feel powerless to continue. The tempter of man never, in all of history, seemed feeble or inept in this quality of persistence.

The story continues. Satan took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him the kingdoms of the world. We are not told if this was actual, of which the devil was likely capable, or if it was a dramatic view which he vividly portrayed. No doubt, he had the power to illustrate with clarity the kingdoms and thrones of men.

When his scheme collapsed Satan never gave up. He only left him for a brief while; and then he returned time and again throughout Jesus' personal ministry until the very day He expired on the cross. This was fortitude; and I have opened up this point on the persistence of sin that Christians may be made aware and cautious.

**6. Its punishment.** This is what we call, in the present generation, *the bottom line*. It should serve as a warning and a deterrent. "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:1-3).

"... the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). The nature of the punishment, the apostle tells us in these three verses, is (1) flaming fire and (2) exclusion from the presence of God. That punishment will be inflicted on those (1) who do not know God and (2) those who do not obey the gospel of Christ.

Those who do not *know* God are the ones who are not acquainted with Him. This places a tremendous responsibility upon those of us who do *know* Him and who know about Him.

For only those of us who *know* Him have the ability to tell others and convey His message to them. But, it may also be that they do not know Him because they choose not to know Him. The passage says that people can be lost for not knowing God, and for not obeying the gospel of Christ.

Paul told the Christians in the church at Rome that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The apostle is not here talking of physical death, for it is a certainty that each one of us is going to die. This is spiritual death. For one to live in sin and to never be forgiven in the blood of Christ, spells separation from God, and the glory of His power.



This is called *death* in the word of God. It is a very old principle that each one of us is responsible for his own doings. In fact, it was established by the God of heaven in the beginning of man's existence upon the earth. "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezekiel 18:20).

This principle is considerably amplified and defined in such verses as Galatians 6:7-8: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."

These passages and promises are to the effect that sin will be punished—that means, of course, unless it is forgiven. This is what gives beauty and meaning to Christianity for there is no truth so magnanimous as that of God wiping the slate clean with reference to our character.

### **Some Things Sin Will Do**

1. **It will make a slave out of you.** "Do you not know that to who you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Romans 6:16)? There are two words in this passage to which we should give special attention. One of them is *obedience* and it derives from a term which means *to hear*. The compound word is *upo*, which means *under, subjection, by the agency of*.

Another word is *akouo* which means *to hear, to hearken, listen to; to heed, obey, understand, to take in, acceptance*. So, the significance as well as the intent of Paul's language is that one who "hears, listens to, gives heed to, accepts, obeys" lust and sin, and, therefore, brings it into his life, has become the servant of sin. The other word is *servant*, but there are many words for servant in the New Testament, each carrying a little different notation or implication. This particular word is *doulos*, and means "a male slave, enslaved, subservient, involved in moral or spiritual thralldom." It can also apply, of course, to a female slave, or a handmaiden.

In the simplest terms, the apostle is saying, "Sin will make a slave out of you." "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

This same apostle, writing to Titus, used the same word, *doulos*, translated as slave in Romans 6:16, as *serving*—"serving various lusts and pleasures" in Titus 3:3 above. But, for *disobedient* he used another word, *peitho*, from which we get *faith*, *belief*. Paul put a negative (not) on it and said, therefore, to these people, "You will not be persuaded; you are noncompliant, obstinate, and disobedient. Your unbelief has caused you to become slaves to your lusts and pleasures." That's plain language, isn't it?

We return to the Roman letter where Paul said, "For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" (Romans 16:18). His expression for *serve* in this passage is the same as the others we have observed. It is the word which means a slave, but, in this instance he charges that people are slaves to their own bellies. While this word, *koilia*, literally means "a cavity; the belly; the stomach," its spiritual meaning is "the inner self."

So, men become slaves to sin by serving their own inner self, fulfilling what pleases them, satisfying their own human longings and inclinations. One of the great principles of Christianity is self-control. The sin is not just in the thing which is evil, but lost will, and left behind will-power. Unremembered commitment, forgotten resolve, and preoccupied hearts with the delicacies the world has to offer will reduce one's strength, forfeit self-mastery, and cast restraint to the winds.

The government of one's life is not to the exclusion of God's help. There is nothing we can do alone; no Christian has consummate leverage over himself. God expects us to have some possession and command of our deportment. He does not step in and take over utterly and absolutely. I am involved in control of my thoughts, my temper, and my speech. I can resolve to limit the intake of my food and drink. There can be an exercise of influence upon myself in the direction I take, how my time is spent, and where I go.

Men become addicted to narcotics, alcohol, gambling, nicotine, foul speech, and immorality. These sins can bind you with the iron chains of habit and lead you away as captive slaves into total bondage.

2. **Sin makes you dirty.** The prodigal son got down into the muck and mire and into the filth and manure of the hog pen (Luke 15:15–16). Engaging in sin—that is, to keep on doing sin—is like a dog returning to his vomit again and like a sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (II Peter 2:20–22). We live so close to sin. It is such a common occurrence and we are so familiar with its every aspect that we fail to grasp its immense dimensions and its enormous depth, and particularly its ravaging and devastating nature. Not many of us believe that sin makes you filthy.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote much in this mood: “Useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds” (I Timothy 6:5). He used a word which means “depraved, spoiled, ruined.” You can understand that, because he went on to tell Timothy that these people were “destitute of the truth.” It literally means in this passage, “utterly perverted.”

In II Timothy 3:8, he used a little different form of the word that means “spoiled, debased, rotten.” there is no doubt that sin makes people dirty! “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness” (James 1:21). This pictures sin as moral filthiness and pollution. And Jude spoke of people who “in these things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 10). And that term means “stain, sully, pollute.” Thus, Paul besought us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (II Corinthians 7:1–2).

3. **Sin will sever your relationship to God.** It detached Adam and Eve from God and made them as aliens. It was such a rupture that it was never refocused and consolidated until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to reconcile man to God.

There were some temporary merges, such as the offering of animal sacrifices, but the break up had occurred because of sin and there was an isolation and a remoteness that nothing could fix except the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. “But your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God” (Isaiah 59:1–2).

We must know that sin is repugnant to God. He cannot associate with it; He will not condone it. "And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them, because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. And He said: 'I will hide My face from them' " (Deuteronomy 32:19-20).

One translation says that God *abhorred* them. I think we may say that God not only rebuffed them, but when they persisted in sin, He abandoned them. He separated Himself from them. "For all who do such things, and all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 25:16).

Their conduct was blasphemy to God. Their lives were obscene and vulgar in His sight. The lamentable component of such sin is that there is little or no shame in the heart of the sinner. He rather takes pride in what he has done.

David spoke of how God detaches Himself from sin and dissociates Himself from the sinner: "For you are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight: You hate all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:4-5).

Moses quoted God as saying: "Then my anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and will hide My face from them" (Deuteronomy 31:17). Consider and heed what Joshua says on the subject: "Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you" (Joshua 7:12). Hosea said, "Woe to them when I depart from them" (Hosea 9:12).

Review and ponder deeply what Amos says: "Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, unless they are agreed" (Amos 3:2). The essence of His statement is that God will not tolerate sin and will not walk with the sinner.

Consider the words of Micah: "Then shall they cry to the Lord, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds" (Micah 3:4). While God is a merciful and forgiving God, He will not endure the continuing practice of evil and He will not abide the man or woman whose heart is set on doing evil. There is another lesson

in the story of the prodigal son that should solicit our solemn attention. It was terribly lonely in that distant land, and, according to the story, it must have been severe in that solitary situation—all alone with the hogs and in the most despicable circumstances! That's what sin will do!

4. **Sin will impoverish you.** In another lesson we learned that the prodigal son “spent all” he had. This was not just his money. And, more than that, “he began to be in want.” This word means that he was deprived of basic needs. We have some expressions for that circumstance in life in this country, and I think they are rather common in most other countries. He was “down and out,” “dirt poor,” “broke,” and “penniless,” and all because he had wasted his substance with riotous living. When he left his father's house and was away from parental guidance and discipline, he went on a kind of rampage and indulged himself in what gave him pleasure and satisfaction. Under those conditions money doesn't last very long.

I knew a talented sculptor in Kingston, Jamaica, and bought some of his wood carvings. They are outstanding. He was a young man with great promise, but somewhere along the way he began the use of *ganga* or marijuana as it is called in this country. This drug almost destroyed his brain and left him a tramp and a vagabond. Sin will reduce one to want, leaving him indigent and penniless.

The Lord commissioned His men to write much on this subject. “Even as I have seen, Those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same” (Job 4:8). “He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow” (Proverbs 22:8). “Like a bird that wanders from its nest is a man who wanders from his place” (Proverbs 27:8). “By transgression an evil man is snared” (Proverbs 29:6). “He who loves pleasure will be a poor man” (Proverbs 21:17).

Solomon is not here discussing the possession, or the loss of material wealth. He himself had engaged in every pleasure his flesh lusted after and he was immensely wealthy. There is another kind of poverty. There is the loss of character and reputation and there is the deprivation of purity and truth. One can be bereft of conscience and wanting in integrity. Sin will rob him of an honorable name. Such a person is “dead broke,” you can be sure! “You shall lie down in torment” (Isaiah 50:11).

"Whose waters cast up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace,' says my god, 'for the wicked' " (Isaiah 57:20-21). The tender and impressionable heart of the child of God knows this truth well—there is no peace.

5. **Sin will make one wretched.** The apostle John told the church in Laodicea "that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). When one is blind, he is not always aware of the state of his health, but sooner or later it will burst upon him and shatter his vision of his own spiritual fitness.

It may be that someone points out to him his deplorable and woeful state and like a flood it breaks over him and leaves him with a pathetic awareness of his flawed character and what a sorry, shoddy mess he has made of his life.

This is when real misery sets in. His condition is more than unfortunate; it is calamitous. What is more woeful than feeding upon the pods on which hogs fodder and fatten? A dreadful part of it is remembering that in his father's house there was bread enough and to spare and he was perishing with hunger. Grievous also was the fact that he had no shoes and his ring was gone and his robe was filthy and tattered. Even the day laborers in his father's house had plenty and he had nothing.

It is not the impoverishment that makes his condition so lamentable. Most of the world is indigent. Families who survive are often strapped with debt and obligation. It is the nostalgia of what once was and the recollection of how he fared before this poverty set in. It is the recall of what life could have been with its fullness. The true pleasures could have made him incalculably rich. There would have been hope and promise and bright expectancy. Sin strips us of happy anticipation. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). "Whatever a man sows that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door" (Genesis 4:7). "But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). Such prospect will make one miserable.

"How often is the flame of the wicked put out? How often does their destruction come upon them" (Job 21:17)? Wretchedness

is the bonus the sinner receives in due time. His commission is not cut short! Sin's compensation has been justly earned. The fruit of his product may be bounteous. The outlook is disheartening.

### **People's Guilt Complexes**

The world is full of people with problems and guilt complexes. I have seen figures that tell us that 60 percent of the hospital beds in our land are filled with people who have nothing organically wrong with them, but psychologically that are in serious trouble. Morally they are ashamed and filled with remorse. They carry a burden too heavy to bear. Through the years, they have implicated themselves in sin and know they are condemned—have no desire to doubt or deny it. It is a stigma the removal of which promises no prospect or possibility. Nor for a moment do they disallow their guilt. Deep remorse accompanies every waking moment, but they do not know where or how to seek relief.

There is a solution, but they do not know where to seek it and have no idea of the nature of it. For a moment's respite they would be grateful. The abatement of the pain is the most ardent wish they entertain. Like Job, many of them feel: "Even today my complaint is bitter; my hand is listless because of my groaning" (Job 23:2).

Again, "Though I speak, my grief is not relieved; And if I remain silent, how am I eased." (Job 16:6)? These people do not know the cure or the correction, where help can be found, or where the remedy can be discovered. The solution is at hand, but there is no release! Doctors and human advisors miserably fail to alleviate the hurt and diminish the anguish.

There are those who would tell these sick people that they can *think* themselves above the distresses of the human frame and above this suffering of the flesh. Some would have the patient appeal to an approach to hypnotism or mesmerism. In some countries, it may be voodooism or the witch doctor. In more advanced societies, it is fortune telling, or it may be called visionary, but no human appeal or fascination will accomplish the task.

No emotional experience will remove the blame or the guilt. To wipe the slate clean and remove the shame and condemnation, it will take forgiveness. "Who can forgive sins but God alone" (Mark 2:7)?

It is the blood of Christ that can cleanse the sinner from his guilty stains. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us" (Ephesians 1:7). This alone will lift us from the pit of despair. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8-9).

The appeal I now make to you is for you to obey the gospel. "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18).

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## FLEE FORNICATION

- I. Introduction:
  - A. The term is used many times in the Old and New Testament:
    - 1. Paul discussed the subject thoroughly with a number of the churches to whom he wrote (I Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 5:19; Romans 1:29–31).
    - 2. Jesus frequently discussed the subject (Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21; Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9).
  - B. Definition of the term:
    - 1. Thayer defines it in the light of many New Testament as well as Old Testament passages (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; I Corinthians 6:12; Hosea 2:4; Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Matthew 21:31; I Corinthians 6:15; Luke 15:30; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).
    - 2. Arndt & Gingrich defined the term as used primarily in such passages as Matthew 5:32; 19:9.
    - 3. Kittel defines and discusses it at length, using the same New Testament passages, and adding Hosea 1:2 and Ezekiel 16:23 from the Old Testament.
  - C. Why fornication is wrong:
    - 1. It violates Christ's right to the Christian's body (I Corinthians 6:18-20; I John 3:9).
    - 2. The fornicator sins against his own body (ibid.; II Corinthians 7:1).
    - 3. Fornication is a sin against others (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). Joseph well understood this (Genesis 39:8–9).
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      - a. What makes it so strong is that it is an infringement upon the residence of the Holy Spirit.
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  2. God's grace is expansive enough to save unto the uttermost.
  3. There must be the understanding (I Corinthians 6:9-11). We know that licentiousness is prevalent, but Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; Mark 2:16).
  4. Great hope is instilled and a spirit of urgency when we read Hebrews 7:25.
  5. It is a turning away from what we once were (Ephesians 5:1-10).
- B. It is a putting to death the man of the flesh (Colossians 3:5-10) as well as receiving His grace and forgiveness.

## FLEE FORNICATION

The word *fornication*, with its cognates (same family of words), is used fifty times in the New Testament, and in the Septuagint it is used more than one hundred times. We will be considering some of these passages in this study.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians and charged them to “Flee sexual immorality [fornication]” (I Corinthians 6:18). In his letter to the Galatian Christians, he listed *fornication* along with *idolatry*. “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness” (Galatians 5:19). To the Roman Christians, he spoke about the malignant spiritual condition of some people in former days: “Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality [fornication], wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful” (Romans 1:29–31).

I have never read a more mournful, hopeless, desperate list in my life. I have never heard a more bleak and forlorn condition and fornication is high on that list!

Jesus placed *fornication* in a similar register: “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). On more than one occasion, Jesus said: “But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery” (Matthew 5:32). When the Jews later asked Him about the grounds for divorce, He said to them: “Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality [fornication], and marries another, commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9).

### Definition of the Term

It is not my desire or intention to *over-define* the term *fornication*. One does not learn much about a subject if it becomes monotonous; but I would like for you to have a sampling from different New Testament language scholars so that it may be understood how the term was used in that day. While the scholars

define the terms in the Old and New Testaments accurately, the Jews were not as generous in the application of these definitions to the male as they were to the female; but God always considered the rights of the woman for her protection.

Joseph Henry Thayer, in his *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines *porneia* thus: "Of illicit sexual intercourse in general" (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). Then, he makes the comment: "that this meaning must be adopted in these passages will surprise no one who has learned from I Corinthians 6:12 how leniently converts from among the heathen regarded this vice and how lightly they indulged in it."

Later, Thayer says that it is "used of adultery" (Hosea 2:4; Matthew 5:32; 19:9). Then he defines the verb form of the word: "To prostitute one's body to the lust of another. To give one's self to unlawful sexual intercourse; to commit fornication." Then he defines the word *porne*: A woman who sells her body for sexual uses; in the New Testament, any woman indulging in unlawful sexual intercourse, whether for gain or for lust (Matthew 21:31; Luke 15:30; I Corinthians 6:15; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, in their *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, gives us this definition of the term: "Prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse. Of the sexual unfaithfulness of a married woman (Matthew 5:32; 19:9)." The verb form of the word he defines thus: "To prostitute, practice prostitution or sexual immorality, generally. Fornicator, one who practices sexual immorality."

In Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, we have these definitions: "In Non-Jewish World, *porne* 'to sell,' especially of slaves, 'harlot for hire,' 'prostitute.' Greek harlots were usually bought slaves; whoremonger who has intercourse with prostitutes; one who lets himself be abused for money, 'male prostitute.' 'Fornicator,' 'licentiousness,' of homosexuality."

In the Old Testament: "To have intercourse with another, to be unfaithful; to play the harlot; used of the married woman who is unfaithful to her husband" (Hosea 1:2; Ezekiel 16:22-26).

In the New Testament: "An unconditional repudiation of an extra-marital and unnatural intercourse. In both verses (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) *porneia* refers to extra-marital intercourse on the part of the wife."

### **Why Fornication is Wrong**

"Flee sexual immorality [fornication]. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality [fornication] sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit that is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:18-20).

There is a sizable roster of people against whom one sins when he or she commits fornication. And there is a rather lengthy column of other things involved in this wrongdoing of the offender. Such misdeeds seriously touch the lives of others, related and unrelated to the guilty party.

1. It violates Christ's rights to the Christian's body and severs the one who committed the sin from Him. The Lord Jesus Christ will not continue to live in the life of a person who continues to practice sin (I John 3:9). This passage says that Christians have been bought with a price, and that price was the very life of Christ. So, they belong to another by virtue of the price that was paid for them. They do not belong to themselves. The fornicator takes his body which belongs to Christ and unites it with a harlot and thus breaks the bond between his body and Christ. What a deadly sin; an act of high treason for the Christian.

2. The fornicator sins against his own body. It is true that the sin appropriates the person of another, but it is a self-violation. It engages and debauches the person, for such sin enters into the heart, and also proceeds out of the heart, touching the springs of his very being. The point is that these bodily sins "defile the flesh."

Fornication makes the body the instrument of the sin and becomes the subject of the damage effected. And Paul here indicates that it ruins the body itself. It is a sin against the body.

"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).

3. Fornication is a sin against others. It is a violation of the marriage bond because each partner, husband and wife, belongs *exclusively* to the other. In the Old Testament, fornication was a sin against a future companion and was considered with all the seriousness and solemnity that the marriage relationship implied. A man would take a woman for his wife, believing her to be a virgin, "But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house; so you shall put away the evil person from among you" (Deuteronomy 22:20-21).

Joseph understood this well for he knew that his master's wife belonged exclusively to his lord and that the sin of fornication would have defiled her and would have infringed his owner's private and intimate right to her body.

You may call it a monopoly. It was a God-delineated restraint. "But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you' " (Genesis 39:8-9).

This would have been a sin of sexual immorality; but, more than that, it would have been the sin of perfidy against his earthly sovereign—a deliberate breaking of faith, a betrayal of trust, and a violation of confidence, and, therefore, treachery in its most heinous form.

4. Fornication is a sin against God. Though Joseph realized and, I think, thoroughly comprehended that such a sin would be a violation of his own body, a sin against the woman with whom the act would have been committed, a crime against his master, a shadow upon his father's family, and a transgression against his future wife, he recognized and was able to distinguish it above everything else as an offense against God. "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (Genesis 39:9). What makes it such an infringement of justice is

that the Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is God's dwelling place and for it to be cluttered with the deadly sin of fornication is not just an impropriety or an indiscretion, but a grave crime against God and His habitation. It is trespassing God's property, for Paul goes on to say, "... and you are not your own; for you were bought at a price" (I Corinthians 6:19-20). With our bodies as well as our spirits we are to glorify God.

The moral and physical rottenness produced by immorality renders one's body an unfit residence for occupancy by God. He simply will not lodge or stay over in a place peopled by those who have their hearts set upon sin. First, it needs to be realized that the domicile does not belong to the man who is committing the sin of fornication. It has been bought and paid for by the purchase price of the blood of Christ. It is an infringement of God's rights to one's body; it is an intrusion into His residence; and it is an overstepping of property lines. In the secular world such an incursion would be designated as thievery and a plundering of what does not belong to one. Thus, the sin is even more grievous.

In Corinth, there was the temple of Aphrodite and fornication committed within its sacred precincts was a consecration instead of desecration. History records that prostitutes were there as priestesses of Aphrodite to help men worship the goddesses by fornication. Jesus and the apostles uses these powerful arguments to which we have referred against all sexual uncleanness. It was a complete transformation of one's thinking and an unabridged changeover of the use of the body. In the New Testament, it is called *regeneration*.

Paul knew that sexual sins bear a vicious character all their own. He showed how unsavory they are and how they entail shame and disgrace. Fornication, he pointed out, has a deadly eminence. It desecrates the very sanctuary of God. Paul tells us it must be completely reversed. One truth he strongly impressed—the Christian's body is God's temple.

### **How to Avoid Fornication**

There is an old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

1. We need to realize who we are and how we are supposed to conduct ourselves as Christians. "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things [exercises self-control]. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (I Corinthians 9:25-27)..

We must be concerned about our own lives. Our department must be such as not to disqualify us in the end. We want to be saved and by keeping this uppermost in our mind the danger of falling into sin is lessened. Fornication loses some of its strong appeal. Setting our affections on things above is essential to keeping our feet in the path of purity and uprightness. We must make it our aim to be well-pleasing to God always in all things. One reason for this is that one day we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of what we have done in this body (II Corinthians 5:9-10).

The love of Christ should constrain us to live free of such sins (II Corinthians 5-14). The love He has for us should be so powerful in our awareness, in the consciousness of our hearts, and in our appreciation so as to dominate us in the path we walk and in the direction we take. He must overwhelm us, govern us, possess us, and prevail over us in the fleshly appetites which are common to this body. This is who we are and let us not be remiss for a moment!

There are many today who contend that it is just as natural to commit fornication as it is to eat and sleep. The sexual function, they tell us, God created for us to enjoy, and the perimeter of this action is measured by respect for one another and compatibility in the sexual act. Thus, in this Christian nation (?) even the sexual act takes precedence over marriage itself.

Recently, I watched a national television program where those engaged in the discussion maintained that it would be unwise to marry a companion until their sexual compatibility had been thoroughly tested over a period of time. It sounded like shopping for a garment of clothing, an automobile tire, or a household appliance, and securing a guarantee that assured satisfaction or



your money would be refunded! How blasphemous and impious can human beings become? How disrespectful of God's standard! What is their standard?

2. We must never forget to whom we belong. Paul told the Galatian Christians that the Son of God loved him and gave himself for him (Galatians 2:20). There is no truth to which he gave greater emphasis in all of his writings to Christians than this. "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly ... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:6-10). "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God" (I John 3:1)!

One thing our parents impressed upon us children when we left our house for some school function or other activity was who we were and to whom we belonged. We were careful, therefore, not to bring reproach upon our family name by shameful or questionable conduct. There was pride in wearing our name. There should be great self-respect and dignity in wearing the name of Christ. Fornication in the life of the Christian mars that "noble name by which you are called" (James 2:7). Weak ones fall away and the world laughs and blasphemes.

In that day it was the church against the world and God and His teaching on the subject was ambiguous in defining illicit sex as completely unacceptable for His children. Sexuality, divinely established and approved, was to be expressed only within the boundaries of marriage and the home.

The Lord intended that sexual intercourse be the conjugal relationship between husband and wife that would amalgamate two personalities, blend into one identity two lives, surrender the private identity of each for the purpose of creating a confederated oneness. It was intended by God to be a melding of two beings in all the qualities under consideration. The affiliation is exclusive. It is limiting. It is prohibitive. It is special. It is a gift from God to be expressed with one person within the marriage relationship.

When I say the Bible teaches that the sexual act is *exclusive*, I mean that it is not only selective, but also segregative. When one chooses a companion it is for life, and that companion has exclusive rights to the other. This asserts that there is a shutting out of all other considerations. That companion is not to be shared or divided with someone else.

This is God's arrangement from the beginning; from the very creation of the marriage relationship. In expressing one consideration or facet of that right of the married party, Paul states: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (I Corinthians 7:4).

So Paul, in his letters to the churches, mandates the proper channeling of the sexual relationship, ordering Christians into the course of ethical and, therefore, suitable behavior, and then warns them of the dangers of any deviation from that direction.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:3-5).

The same instructions and warnings were given to the Christians in Colosse and Thessalonica: "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience" (Colossians 3:5-6). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit" I Thessalonians 4:3-8).

Damage in committing this sin is done not only to one's self, but to others who may not be directly implicated in the transgression. Beyond that, the will and goodness of God have been violated.

He says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)."

### **A Re-emphasis of its Sinfulness**

It is an invasion of God's sovereign will; it is a human conquest of the Almighty's territory; it is an intrusion into God's plan for the family; and it defeats God's purpose of sexuality. That specific purpose was to know intimate love in marriage and to give honorable birth to children.

There is no greater need facing us today than that children have fathers and mothers loving each other and working together to rear their offspring in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If both father and mother do not work in uniformity of purpose and resolution, the goal to shape and fashion the child into a useful, productive, and happy citizen will never be reached. The far-reaching effects of the sin of fornication are crime, disfigurement of lives, deformity of character, and wretchedness of existence. Such distortion breaks the home, corrupts children, defaces society, and mutilates the future. No wonder the inspired writers placed such stringent punishment upon the commission of it. It is hoped that these strict and severe warnings will be both convincing and compelling.

### **Forgiveness of the Sin Possible**

To those who have transgressed God's law and violated His design for sexual behavior, there is good news. Forgiveness is available if you desire it. God's grace is broad and He is able to save unto the uttermost all of them that respond to His invitation and proposal: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.

Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (I Corinthians 6:9–11).

McClintock and Strong, in their *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, tell us: "Among the Greeks and Romans of the apostles' day licentiousness was fearfully prevalent." In the face of this we must remember and believe that Jesus came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). He once told those who were listening to Him, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

Great hope is instilled in us when we read from His inspired word this wonderful assurance: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25). The term *uttermost*, in this context, indicates that He is able to save the largest number, *all*, and those who are remotest, *the farthest away*, and for the greatest length of time, *forever*. There are several translations of this passage that quite adequately convey the intended thought.

One says, "He is fully able." Another renders it, "He is able to save completely and all." "He is also able to save absolutely," another translation depicts it. Still another version submits this rendering; "He is forever able to save all."

In writing to the Ephesian Christians, Paul issued a combined warning and a pledge filled with happy anticipation: "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the

wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:1-10).

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all those: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:5-10).

What a beautiful reward to one who has been a vile sinner—to be renewed in the image of His creator! One who has been guilty of that great list of sins enumerated in these two passages can be fully forgiven and made into a new person which is a product of regeneration. What an incentive!

To briefly sum up our lesson, I think it may be said that God's word makes it crystal clear that although sexuality is good and a gift from God, it is to be expressed with one person within the relationship of marriage!

## AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Definition of the term:
    1. Some form of the word adultery is found sixty-three times in the Bible with four cognates.
    2. The English definition: "Voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with someone other than his or her lawful spouse."
    3. Gesenius' *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*: "To commit adultery, used both of male and female" (Exodus 20:14).
      - a. His definition is quite simple and he gives other Old Testament references (Proverbs 6:32-33; Leviticus 20:10; Jeremiah 29:23).
      - b. Gesenius makes other applications of adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22-24; Hosea 2:2-3). Kittel: Genesis 39:10.
  - B. A spiritual or metaphorical connotation:
    1. When God's people had made other alliances with other people, it was called adultery (Jeremiah 3:8-9).
    2. Other passages (Ezekiel 23:36-39).
    3. This picture is clearly drawn in that analogy of physical and literal adultery and Israel's adultery with other nations by adopting their religions and worshiping their gods (Jeremiah 19:1-11).
  - C. The New Testament use of the word:
    1. *Analytical Greek Lexicon*: "Adulterer; an adulteress, an adulterous man, faithless, ungodly, lustful significance; to defile a married woman; debauch, to commit spiritual adultery, be guilty of idolatry."
    2. Kittel: "The right of the man to sexual freedom is denied. Like the wife, the husband is under obligation to fidelity. The wife is exalted to the same dignity as the husband. Marriage is a life-long fellowship of the partners."
    3. Thayer gives definitions of this word and its cognates: "To have unlawful intercourse with another's wife; to commit adultery with." Then Thayer uses it figuratively, as do other scholars.
    4. Moulton and Milligan: They give an added definition and say it "is apparently used of sodomy."

5. Jesus gives an additional meaning, or application of the definition: "... whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."
- II. Discussion:
- A. Note how the term adultery is applied:
    1. Willful violation of the marriage contract by either partner through sexual intercourse with a third party.
    2. Abandoning the God of heaven and turning to the worship of idols.
    3. Faithlessness—treachery, deceit, dishonesty, manipulation, perfidy or spiritual adultery.
    4. Sodomy.
    5. Lust.
    6. Divorcing one's wife and marrying another woman for some other reason than unchastity.
    7. To marry a divorced woman whose former companion was not guilty of fornication.
  - B. The objective of this lesson:
    1. Marriage is an exclusive sexual relationship between husband and wife.
    2. The condition of the Roman world in the days of Christ and the apostles.
    3. The cause of the rapid growth of Christianity in the first century.
  - C. Attitude toward marriage in Jesus' day:
    1. Historical sources—very low, base picture.
    2. Quotations from historians.
    3. Temple prostitution among the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Canaan, even among the Jews.
    4. The schools of the Jews and what they taught about marriage and divorce.
  - D. Why is adultery so wrong?
    1. Wrong in the sight of God—basically and inherently wrong.
    2. God meant man's sexuality to be a natural impulse toward a deep and personal relationship with a woman he loves.
    3. Because God intended it to be an act that would amalgamate two persons into one.
    4. Because it is a betrayal of an oath and a person.

5. The innocent party feels rejected, inadequate, a loss of self-esteem and competency.
  6. Because marriage is the only relationship that can give honorable birth to children.
  7. Adultery is a rejection of God's objective for man's use of his sexuality.
- III. Conclusion: God's plan for marriage and the home is:
- A. Monogamic in form.
  - B. United in construction.
  - C. Procreative in design.
  - D. Indissoluble in nature.



## AN EVIL AND ADULTEROUS GENERATION

Some form of the word *adultery* is found sixty-three times in the Bible. The root word in the Old Testament is *naaph*, while the word in the New Testament, used thirty-five times, is *moicheia* with some four cognates, i.e., words in the same family or derived from the same root.

### Definition of the Term

The English dictionary defines *adultery* as: "Voluntary sexual intercourse of a married person with someone other than his or her lawful spouse."

The Old Testament Hebrew uses the word primarily as a sexual relationship. Gesenius' *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* simply renders it: "To commit adultery, used both of male and female." Then he gives the reference as Exodus 20:14 which says, "You shall not commit adultery."

The Hebrew lexicon thereafter makes the application: "To commit adultery with a woman," and gives the following passages: "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, and his reproach will not be wiped away (Proverbs 6:32-33)." Another reference is given: "he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus 20:10). Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon and he said to them: "because they have done disgraceful things in Israel, they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and have spoken lying words in My name, which I have not command them" (Jeremiah 29:23).

Gesenius makes other applications of *adultery* than illicit intercourse. Generally, *adultery* in the Old Testament under Judaism was "possible only if there is carnal intercourse between a married man and a married or betrothed Israelite woman" (Deuteronomy 22:22-24). "Adultery is the violation of the marriage of another" (Genesis 39:10-18, Kittel).

Gesenius then refers to Hosea 2:2-3: "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, And her adulteries from

between her breasts; Lest I strip her naked And expose her as in the day she was born" This is his comment in defining the term, " 'Let her take her adulteries from between her breasts.' Here the sacred writer speaks of immodestly uncovered breasts as the seat of lust, immodesty, and meretricious solicitation."

### **A Spiritual or Metaphorical Connotation**

The Hebrew lexicon, under the word *naaph* (adultery) makes this comment and gives these references: "In the same manner as fornication, it is applied to the turning aside of Israel from the true God to worship idols, (Jeremiah 3:8-9). She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce; yet her false sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the harlot. Because harlotry was so light to her, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree."

It was rather common to use the term *adultery* to apply to God's people when they had made alliances with other nations and formed coalitions with them that would involve the worship of their gods. Ezekiel speaks of such a confederation when he said: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. They have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me" (Ezekiel 23:36-37).

In verse 39 the prophet continues: "For after they had slain their children for their idols, on the same day they came into My sanctuary to profane it." It is difficult to conceive of God's people sacrificing their own children to an idol god!

The intimate affiliation of God with His people Israel was often likened to a marriage; and when Israel formed a coalition with other nations and merged with them in the worship of their idols, they were said to commit adultery or to play the harlot. It was like a man having unlawful intercourse with another man's wife. They had broken their promises to God, betrayed their vows, violated the covenant they had made with Him, and disregarded their obligations, and this was like defiling a married woman—to commit or be guilty of adultery. These references in Ezekiel 23 are allegorical names given to Samaria and Judah.

The two kingdoms are pictured as sisters, both married to Yahweh. They are both charged and condemned with adultery against Yahweh, their husband, by their voluntary political entanglements and alliances with other nations.

In the concept of the time, such alliances implicated them in an association between their gods. All of this was called *adultery*. It is likely that the literal and figurative are thus used because, in the mind of God, they bore a similar degree of heinousness.

This issue of Israel's *adultery* was of such grave concern to the God of heaven, He charged Jeremiah: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the Potsherd Gate; and proclaim these words that I will tell you ... Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again[so that it can never be mended]" ' " (Jeremiah 19:1-11).

The purpose of this approach is not only to define the term and show how it is applied, but to point up and emphasize how forbidding and severe is the sin of adultery in the sight of God.

### **The New Testament Use of the Term**

*The Analytical Greek Lexicon* defines *moichos* and its cognates: "adulterer; an adulteress, and adulterous mein, lustful significance, faithless, ungodly, to defile a married woman, debauch, to commit spiritual adultery, be guilty of idolatry."

Kittel has these comments: "The right of the man to sexual freedom is denied. Like the wife, the husband is under obligation of fidelity. The wife is exalted to the same dignity as the husband. Marriage is a life-long fellowship of the partners. Only thus does it actualize the ideal intended in creation ... the full marital fidelity of both spouses is an unconditional divine command." Kittel's point is that if a man is unfaithful to his wife by having sexual intercourse with another woman, he is an adulterer. And if a wife is unfaithful to her husband by having sexual intercourse with another man, she is an adulteress.

Thayer gives definition to this word and its cognates: "To have unlawful intercourse with another's wife, to commit adultery with." Then, Thayer uses it, like many other scholars, figuratively: "Hebraistically and figuratively, faithless toward God, ungodly."

Moulton and Milligan, in *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, define the terms for *adultery* very much as do the other scholars whose works I have quoted, but they add this thought under *moikos*: "Ordinary, 'adulterer' is apparently used of sodomy." They give the reference as the Oxyrhynchus Papyri.

Jesus gave us an additional definition of *adultery* in His sermon on the mount: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27–28).

He also said, "But I say to you whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and who marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32).

In Matthew 19:9 is this statement by Jesus: "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

You are able to see from the passages quoted when the term *adultery* is applied to different situations:

1. Willful violation of the marriage contract by either of the partners through sexual intercourse with a third party.
2. Abandoning the God of heaven and turning to the worship and service of idols.
3. Faithlessness that may take a number of different forms, such as treachery, deceit, dishonesty, manipulation, perfidy—false to trust—disloyal. In such a relationship to God, this would be *spiritual adultery*.
4. Sodomy. Some lexicographers believe that sodomy, in some instances, was branded as *adultery*.
5. Lust. Jesus used the phrase, *pros to epithumesai aute*. It indicates the purpose of looking, and a very strong word

for *lust*. It means "to set the heart upon, long for, have an earnest desire; one who has an ardent desire." Jesus was saying that one who looks upon a woman with intense emotion and fervent, burning heat in his heart has already committed *adultery* with her. So *adultery* does not necessarily involve the physical sexual commerce with another woman other than his wife.

6. Divorcing one's wife and marrying another woman for some other reason than sexual immorality on the part of his companion is called *adultery*.
7. To marry a divorced woman whose former companion was not guilty of fornication is to commit *adultery*.

### **The Objective of this Lesson**

In the lesson before us, we are considering the definition under number one. This has to do with marriage as an exclusive sexual relationship between husband and wife. This is not all marriage is, of course, but it is to point out and emphasize that marriage is the only association in which the physical sexual act between a man and a woman has God's approval. Jesus introduced Christianity into a world of very low moral ethics. The code of conduct was riddled with sexual immorality. Sexual pleasure was taken where one could find it. Demosthenes, the great Athenian statesman and orator who lived about three hundred and fifty years before Christ, said: "We have courtesans for the sake of pleasure, we have concubines for the sake of daily cohabitation; we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately, and of having a faithful guardian for all our household affairs".

History tells us that in this time, the Romans' caliber of virtue was despicable and disgusting. They neither admired nor valued virginity or monogamy. The elevated heterosexual love above homosexuality and lesbianism, but it was not because they lauded or honored purity. The dominant mood of the world was easy sex wherever one could find it, whether it was within the confines of marriage or outside it. It really made little difference.

Cicero once said, "If there is anyone who thinks that young men should be absolutely forbidden the love of courtesans, he is

indeed extremely severe. I am not able to deny the principle he states. But he is at variance, not only with the license of his own age, but also from the customs and concessions of our ancestors. When indeed was this not done? When did anyone ever find fault with it? When was permission denied? When was it that that which is now lawful was not lawful?"

What a shock the Christian standard must have been to them when those Gentiles who later embraced it, first heard of its stringent and restrictive measures of conduct! Such discipline must have seemed harsh and inflexible. No such rigid or severe rule had ever been administered to them. Many of them readily embraced the high and noble model which Jesus and the apostles set before them. It was this pattern they emulated and this archetype that became the criterion to which they pointed and asked the world to imitate.

The historian, Edward Gibbon, says this was one of the prime causes of the rapid spread of Christianity across the world in the first century. He called it the *pure and austere morals of the early Christians*. "The primitive Christian demonstrated his faith by his virtues; and it was very justly supposed that the divine persuasion which enlightened or subdued the understanding must at the same time purify the heart and direct the actions of the believer ... The desire for perfection became the ruling passion of the soul. It was the first, but arduous, duty of the Christian to present himself undefiled." It was the highest standard of which the world had ever heard. And for thousands across the empire it held an attraction they had never felt before.

Adultery has always been wrong. God's design for man's sexuality was that it be used in an alliance of one man and one woman, married to each other, and committed to each other for a lifetime. The sacredness of marriage and the private, intimate exclusiveness of the marital relationship have always been given special emphasis by God in His word. Marriage was a kind of monopoly, surrounded by some restraints, of those who entered into it.

Listen to some early instructions concerning it: "The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10). That willful

violation of the marriage contract by either of the parties through sexual intercourse with a third party was punishable by death under the law. It was a serious matter! The inviolability of marriage was clearly verbalized in the law God gave to His people.

### **Attitude Toward Marriage in Jesus' Day**

One may read in a number of historical sources that the institution of marriage was at an all-time low about the time Jesus came upon the scene. Due to the Jewish school of thought at that time, divorce was so common at that time that it appeared that almost everybody had been divorced and remarried many times. Some historians believe that divorce and remarriage were far more common in that day than in the time in which we live.

Chandler, in his *Trial of Jesus*, describes the moral conditions of that day. He told of a woman who married a man and, by him, had several children. She put him away and married another and, by him, bore children. She continued this procedure until she had five husbands.

Juvenal tells of one woman who had eight husbands in five years. Seneca said, "People are getting married to get divorced, and they are getting divorced to get married again." Does this not sound like a replication from the news columns of the twentieth century? It would be difficult to convince some of us that moral conditions were worse then than now!

Listen to what the Lord said to Moses: "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am the Lord your God. According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do' " (Leviticus 18:2-3).

The beliefs of the Egyptians gave rise to temple prostitution, as did some of the other fertility religions. The practice of incest was common. The Pharaoh married his own sister, as did others who belonged to nobility.

The religion of Babylon had little linkage with morality. There seemed to be no affiliation between the two! *Ishta*, the goddess of fertility, was often pictured as a nude female with inviting breasts offered for suck to those who were her devotees. Her love affairs were countless, lively, and stimulating.

History states that Babylon was replete with immorality and the very equivalent of unbridled lust and license. *Herodotus*, in his history, relates a common custom: "Every native woman is required, once in her life, to sit in the temple of Venus, and have intercourse with some stranger."

Both male and female concubines were commonplace. Trial marriages were permissible. Eerdman's *Handbook of the Bible* relates: "In Canaan prostitution and fertility rites were all mixed up in worship." Whatever form taken by immorality, adultery was the willful violation of the marriage contract by either of the partners through sexual intercourse with a third party. It was not only current and surviving in the first century, it was extensive, even rampant, when Christianity made its debut in the world. In many cultures, it was more than all of that; it was fashionable!

Eleanor Daniel said in her book, *What the Bible Says About Sexual Identity*, "By the time the New Testament era had been ushered in, the institution of marriage was at an all-time low, even among the Jews. Divorce was common. Seemingly nearly everybody had been divorced and remarried many times. Divorce and remarriage were far more common than in our day."

One reason that marriage was "at an all-time low" among the Jews was the tremendous influence the school of Hillel had on the nation for forty years. His views prevailed in Jewish theology and dominated religious thought in the time of Jesus. He taught that a man may divorce his wife for any cause.

It is true that there were Jews in that day who held to the teachings of the school of Shammai that one may divorce his wife only on the grounds of sexual infidelity. So, adultery in that day was commonplace and widespread. That did not make it less atrocious and grievous, however, in the sight of God. It was so typical, so ordinary, and so prevalent that the average person certainly did not consider it to be a monstrous sin.

### **Why is Adultery so Wrong?**

There are some things in life that we should do because they are right and there are other things one should abstain from doing



because they are wrong. That is not a very complex or involved philosophy and it is quite understandable.

We taught our children in their growing up that we had a very simple standard—that standard was that there are certain things we do about our home because they are right, and there are certain things we refrain from doing because they are wrong. All of that was based, we believe, upon God's standard of right and wrong. A Christian should not commit adultery because it is wrong! He should be faithful and true to his wife because it is right!

Adultery is wrong because God created man whose sexuality He meant to be a natural impulse toward a deep and personal relationship with another person. While this desire and stimulus is strong, it was never designed to be used promiscuously and indiscriminately. The function of it was to lead to a heterosexual union of a contracted and assured love for that person of the opposite sex. To contravene that standard which God originally set up is an infraction of God's will. It is a violation of His design.

Adultery is wrong because God intended that in the sexual act the two persons become one flesh. Marriage must be a kind of capitulation of one's private identity for the sake of creating an affiliated, corporate makeup. Paul calls this individuality a mystery. "This is a great mystery ..." (Ephesians 5:32).

In this relationship, one relinquishes his personal identity to become coupled in a partnership team with the one whom he promised to love and cherish. If he does not thus forfeit himself to this oneness and God-ordained confederation between two people, the unification of two is not genuine. Their marriage is a farce.

Without this total yielding of self into a synonymousness with the exact counterpart (the wife to whom God has bound him), marriage would be little more than legalized adultery. If that commitment were one that tolerates indiscriminate sexual relations with whoever happens to be available, two people becoming one flesh would be meaningless. A man cannot become one with more than one woman at the same time. All that I have said here is applicable to the woman as to the man.

Adultery is wrong because it is the betrayal both of an oath and of a person. One's promised word obligates him. It becomes a sacred commitment; and that responsibility cannot be bypassed. It is also the betrayal of a person—what we call in everyday dealings a *double cross*. This guarantee is made to a partner for life and there are no detours. The terms of the pact made cannot be circumvented. The contract was certified before God and the assurance pledged cannot be evaded or avoided. An Adulterous relationship devastates the wronged partner.

He/she feels plundered because what was thought to exclusively belong to one has now been shared by another and desecrated by the act. A marauder has slipped in and stolen what belonged to the rightful owner. One's rights have been violated; one's territory has been invaded; and one's property has been pillaged. What one once cherished and esteemed has been spoiled and the home has been demolished. Adultery can be branded as stealing—taking unlawfully that which belongs to someone else.

More than all of this, the companion against whom this sin has been committed feels rejected, inadequate, and the loss of self-esteem. The lying and cheating which accompany adultery create a distrust which is difficult, if not impossible, to fully rebuild. To become open and honest with a person again is both challenging and painful.

Adultery is wrong because marriage is the only relationship that can give honorable birth to children. All children need a father and a mother to lead and love them, to shape their plastic and impressionable hearts into what God wants them to be. Mothers are commanded to love their husbands and to love their children. "...speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: ... that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children" (Titus 2:1, 4). These are the kinds of mothers that children need.

Problems that arise could then be solved. In fact, most of them would never occur! The word for love in this passage is a kind, warm, affectionate, understanding, sharing, and sympathetic love. What children are the recipients of this love, and when they see their mother show and shower this love upon their father, the home becomes a haven of peace and bliss and safety and refuge for them.

Paul wrote to Timothy upon this topic: "Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage [rule] the house" (I Timothy 5:14). This word *rule* comes from a word that means, "to manage the household." This is what children need. Children born of adultery do not have these blessings and will never know these advantages. Homes broken by adultery twist and warp the minds of children and deprive them of the rewards God intended they enjoy in the home.

These natural endowments God placed in the realm of marriage and the home are exchanged for loneliness, lack of direction, and the temptations of a world without a parent. No wonder God erected such safeguards and issued such warnings. Adultery is the rejection of God's objective for man's use of his sexuality. By engaging in this sin, God's design for marriage and the home is frustrated. His goal for man's happiness is thwarted. Adultery is sin! God's plan for marriage is that it be:

1. **Monogamic in form.** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined [joined, cemented, welded] to his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus quoted this passage in Matthew 19:5 and translated a part of the verse in this way: "and the two shall become one flesh." When the scriptures discuss this subject, it is always in a one man and one woman relationship.

"In the day that God created man, He made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind [Adam] in the day they were created." Genesis 5:1-2). The admonition was issued by the Hebrew writer: "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Hebrews 13:4).

2. **United in construction.** Their lives are blended into a unique combination of oneness. It is much more than a physical conjunction of bodies. It is a fusion of lives, an amalgamation of personalities, a merging of identities, and a melding of their very spirits. To infract that relationship by the introduction of adultery is to trespass God's design for the home and to defy His inspired arrangements for the perpetuation of the race. It also infringes His right to the glory which springs from this God-arranged alliance.

3. **Procreative in design.** A part of the design of marriage is to have and rear children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It has already been noted in this study that marriage is the only affiliation which affords noble, reputable, and honorable birth to children. That's not just ethical; it's precious.

4. **Indissoluble in nature.** We must recognize that God is the Author of marriage. It is He who made it a part of the creative act. It is He who brought and bound them together, and He said, "What God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband for as long as he lives" (Romans 7:2). It is perpetually binding and obligatory. Man is forbidden to undo it. Adultery works evil against that partnership.

To say that it hurts, harms, and injures it is not quite enough. It wreaks havoc upon that union which God arranged. It is His pattern that man thus damages and destroys. There is prescribed a severe penalty for it in the word of God. May this act as a deterrent to many; but what would be better, far better, would be for Christians to love God and each other immeasurably so that the danger of a broken home through the sin of adultery would be very remote.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

## LICENTIOUSNESS—A VARIETY OF SINS

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Definition of terms:
    1. Liddell & Scott: "wanton violence, insolence, brutality, lewd, outrageous."
    2. Wilbur Gingrich: "licentiousness, debauchery, sensuality, insolence."
    3. Gerhard Kittel: "In the new testament sense of voluptuousness or debauchery is relevant."
    4. Robertson's Word Pictures: "Unrestrained sex instinct."
    5. Wuest and Vincent: "Lawless insolence and wanton caprice—wantonness adequately renders it here."
    6. Bullinger: "Excess immoderation in everything."
    7. Abbott-Smith: "wantonness, excess, licentiousness."
    8. Arndt & Gingrich: "debauchery, sensuality, give one's self over to debauchery; live licentiously; follow the inclination to sensuality; especially sexual excesses; indecent conduct."
    9. There are many others like Thayer and Barkley.
  - B. The sin in conjunction with other sins:
    1. Three times the word is found in association with covetousness (Mark 7:22; Ephesians 4:19; II Peter 2:3).
    2. In four cases, it is connected with adultery (Mark 7:22; II Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; II Peter 2:18).
    3. In three cases, it is near drunkenness (Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; I Peter 4:3).
    4. Some have deceived themselves into believing that such a life will always be sunshine and happiness.
- II. Discussion:
  - A. Passages in which the term is used:
    1. Read carefully: Mark 7:21-23.
    2. Romans 13:13.
    3. II Corinthians 12:20-21.
    4. Galatians 5:19-21.
    5. Ephesians 4:17-24.
    6. I Peter 4:3-5.
    7. II Peter 2:4-10; II Peter 2:18-19.
    8. Jude 4:8.

- B. Homosexuality
    - 1. Closely associated with Sodom and Gomorrah.
    - 2. A cognation (related word in the same family) means a male + bed. Would be sodomy—two males cohabiting.
    - 3. Arndt & Gingrich: "A male homosexual, pederast, sodomite."
    - 4. Paul uses a term that means: "Illicit sexual activity between two males, and another word that is disgraceful, prohibited, intimate, carnal, and erotic relationship between a man and a boy."
    - 5. It is claimed by those who would justify the sin that it is a natural and inherited trait.
    - 6. Scientific and medical evidence point to the fact that it is a learned behavior.
    - 7. Lot and Sodom serve as an example of the fact that such men are responsible (Leviticus 20:19; Judges 19. Read Romans 1:26–27; I Corinthians 6:9–10).
  - C. Note carefully in this lesson the list of sixteen things that are pointed out in association with this sin.
- III. Conclusion
- A. There is hope for the homosexual.
  - B. Other forms of licentiousness:
    - 1. Immodesty (Genesis 38:14–15).
    - 2. Noah's indecency (Genesis 9:20–29).
    - 3. Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:1–5).
    - 4. Paul and Peter address the subject (I Timothy 2:9–10; I Peter 3:3–4).
    - 5. Rape:
      - a. Genesis 34:1–31.
      - b. II Samuel 13.
      - c. Deuteronomy 22:25–29.
      - d. I Corinthians 7:2–5.
      - e. I Timothy 5:14–15.
      - f. I Peter 3:7.
    - 6. Incest:
      - a. Leviticus 18:6.
      - b. Deuteronomy 27:20–23.
      - c. Genesis 19:30–38.
      - d. Genesis 39:3–4.
      - e. I Corinthians 5.
    - 7. The Christian is exhorted to keep himself pure.

## LICENTIOUSNESS—A VARIETY OF SINS

The term *licentiousness* is used both generally and specifically. That is, there are times when it covers a multitude of sins and there are other times when it applies to some specific sin. So, it would be accurate to say this sin includes a vast list in the New Testament and one would have to read carefully the context in order to be able to identify it.

### The Definition of the Term

As the term is defined in the outset of this lesson, the applications of it will become clear. The *Random House College Dictionary* defines it in the secular rather than in the Biblical sense: "sexually unrestrained; lewd. Unrestrained by law or morality: lawless; immoral. Going beyond customary or proper bounds or limits. Abandoned, profligate." The word on which we will focus more frequently in this study is *aselgia* and we hope to consolidate those definitions and apply them to the sins that are highlighted under the understanding of the subject.

Liddell & Scott, in their classical lexicon, list the following words in their clarification of the word: "wanton, violence, insolence, brutality, lewd, outrageous." You are able to see from these that it may be employed in different situations and have quite a number of applications.

Wilbur Gingrich, in his *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* defines it: "licentiousness, debauchery, sensuality, insolence," and then refers to Jude 4: "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

Kittel says: "In the New Testament the older and sensual sense of voluptuousness or debauchery is relevant," and then he quotes from Jesus in Mark 7:21-23: "... thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." Kittel continues by saying, "It characterized Sodom and Gomorrah" (II Peter 2:7). which reads, "... and

delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked.' And it characterizes the pagan world generally, (Ephesians 4:19), which tells us 'who being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.' "

Then he adds that it characterizes "heresy and apostasy" (Jude 4). Kittel continues: "The special sense of sexual excess is probably in Galatians 5:19: 'Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness ...' and the special sense of sexual excess is certain in Romans 13:13 and II Corinthians 12:21."

It will help us in our comprehension of the subject under consideration to read these: "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy" (Romans 13:13).

"Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced" (II Corinthians 12:21)

Robertson's *Word Pictures of the New Testament* gives this very cogent, but ugly definition: "unrestrained sex instinct." Wuest and Vincent provide this definition: "lawless insolence and wanton caprice—wantonness adequately renders it here." Bullinger: "Excess immoderation in anything." Abbott-Smith: "Licentiousness, wantonness, excess." Arndt & Gingrich: "Debauchery, sensuality, give one's self over to debauchery: live licentiously; follow the inclination to sensuality; especially sexual excesses; indecent conduct."

*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*: "Outrageous intemperance; voluptuously, wantonly." The references that are given to make application of this meaning are I Timothy 5:6: "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives," and James 5:5: "You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter."

Thayer, in his *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* has a rather extensive definition of the term. "The conduct and character of one who is *aselgia* a word which some suppose



to be compounded with 'a' which is a negative, and *Seige*—the name of a city in Pisidia whose citizens excelled in strictness of morals)." The negative would indicate that they excelled in immorality, making it an abhorrent, repulsive word. Indeed, it is despicable when one considers the nature of the sins it describes and the attitude the people who engage in them have toward their revolting conduct.

Then, Thayer gives the definitions of the expression: "Unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageous, shamelessness, insolence (Mark 7:22); of gluttony and venery (Jude 4), of carnality, lasciviousness (II Corinthians 12:21); manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females (Romans 13:13); of the wantonness of women."

William Barclay in *New Testament Words*, remarks: "In many ways *aselgeia* is the ugliest word in the list of New Testament sins." He gives some of the classical definitions, as well as New Testament meanings.

Plato used it in the sense of *impudence*. A later writer gave it this connotation: "Preparedness for every pleasure." It is described as "the spirit that knows no restraints and which dares whatever caprice and wanton insolence suggest." the man who is *aselges* shocks public decency. He is the man who is lost to shame. It reminds one of the words of Jeremiah: "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed, nor did they know how to blush" (Jeremiah 8:12; 6:15).

There is enough decency and respectability to most men to seek to hide their sin, but one who commits *aselgeia*, licentiousness, is long past that point. Many young people in this country endeavor to hide from their family the fact that they are addicted to drugs and, yet, in the end, they are so habituated to narcotics they will stoop and cower, whine and grovel openly to satisfy their body's demand for this devastating dope which that hope will tranquilize them for a few more moments.

Eventually they do so without restraint and in the complete absence of shame because the drug has so thoroughly and utterly mastered them.

## The Sin in Conjunction with Other Sins

Sin scarcely ever works singly or operates alone. There are always a host of willing companions! In reading your Bible, you have noticed the long columns and how they are connected. The roster, with a discussion of each sin, would make a book of considerable size.

1. Three times this sin, *aselgeia* is found in proximity to *pleonexia*, which is most commonly translated covetousness (Mark 7:22; Ephesians 4:19; II Peter 2:3). This is an unbridled passion to get more and to have more. It is an insatiable appetite for things which are forbidden and an unquenchable thirst for what one should not desire in the first place. In its association with *licentiousness* it becomes a voracious greed.

2. In four cases the sin, *aselgeia*, is connected in the same vicinity with adultery, *moikia*. It is also in the same vicinity with lust and sexual sin. In this association, there is the idea of sheer animal lust. I hesitate to use the term animal lust because animals copulate naturally and of the God-given urge to reproduce. *Aselgeia* is immorality and wickedness of which the animal is not guilty.

It is a dereliction because of misuse and exploitation that God never intended in his design for man's sexuality. In this word is found a shameless abomination which infracts the will of God for marriage and the home.

The mere gratification of physical desire, apart from a meaningful relationship and a noble purpose, is ungodliness. New Testament writers give particular emphasis to this topic (Mark 7:22; II Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; II Peter 2:18).

3. In three cases, the word, *aselgeia*, is near drunkenness.

So, you see that *licentiousness* has a broad scope of applications. We will consider these more in depth as we proceed. Do not lose sight of the concept of self-indulgence inherent in this word. It amounts to self-gratification for hearty enjoyment of physical pleasure. Let it be remembered that the Bible teaches, and experience imparts, that the sensuous pleasure is short lived. It is but for a season. Fleshly and carnal delight have a short life span!

Some believe that a life of lasciviousness will always be sunshine and happiness. They are so enchanted and bewitched by this bodily, erotic rapture that it is forgotten that the death of such ecstasy is rapidly approaching. Their bliss will not long be blissful. Their paradise is transformed into an abyss of regret and profound confusion.

Although we have read most of the passages in which the word *lasciviousness/licentiousness* is found, I would like to list them in their order and quote them in the context of each passage. This should help us in our understanding and utilization of each.

### **Passages in Which the Term is Used**

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within and defile a man" (Mark 7:21-23).

"Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:13-14)."

"For I fear lest, when I come I shall not find you such as I wish and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; and lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication; and licentiousness which they have practiced" (II Corinthians 12:20-21).

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

"I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of

their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:17-24).

"For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (I Peter 4:3-5).

"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing the flood on the world of the ungodly; and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries" (II Peter 2:4-10).

"For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of

corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" (II Peter 2:18–19).

"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. but I want to remind you, thought you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries" (Jude 3–8).

Note carefully the *company* in which this sin, *lasciviousness/licentiousness*, is always found. There is a very close connection and a linkage between this sin and the others named in that roster—murder, idolatry, greed, and all sorts of sexual immorality.

The word always has the signification of promiscuity. By that I do not mean just loose and lax in one's morals; but I mean licentious, unchaste, wanton, whorish, and viciousness in all of this. There is the underlying meaning, inherent in the word, of sexual misconduct. In the Scriptures there is an allusion to the sin of homosexuality.

### **Homosexuality**

Did you notice how many times in the list *licentiousness* is used where Sodom and Gomorrah are also found? No one has to question the implication of the names. Homosexuality and sodomy are used interchangeably. The hidden character of the sin lies veiled in this city of the plain. Immediately, however, and without question, one knows the name Sodom

is tantamount to homosexuality. One who has read the Old Testament Scriptures is informed as to what took place in Sodom.

Two messengers from the Lord visited Lot in Sodom. "Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally'" (Genesis 19:4–5). *The New International Version* renders this: "Bring them out to us that we can have sex with them." *The Living Bible* translates it: "Bring out those men to us so we can rape them."

The word used in the New Testament for *homosexuality* is *arsenokoites*. It is a compound word, *arsen* = male + *koite* = a bed. Thayer defines it: "One who lies with a male as with a female, a sodomite." Here are the passages in which the term is used: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 6:9–10).

It would appear that there are two words in this passage for the same sexual activity—homosexuals and sodomites. One of the words is a general term for *homosexual*, *arsenokoites*. Arndt & Gingrich define this word as: "A male homosexual, pederast, sodomite."

The other is *malakos*. This word is defined by Thayer as "Effeminate, of a catamite, a male who submits his body to unnatural lewdness." These definitions do not help us very much unless we know the meanings of the words which are used to define the terms. A catamite is a boy who is kept for pederastic purposes. What does that mean?

A *pederast* is a lover of boys and pederasty is sexual relations between two males, especially when one is a minor. So Paul used two words here, one to explain that homosexuality is an illicit sexual activity between two males, and the other word says that it is a disgraceful, prohibited, intimate, carnal, and erotic relationship between a man and a boy.

There are several words for this last practice:

(1) *Paiderastes*. This is the word that would be translated into English by the term *pederasty*. It means "lover of boys." This has an interesting history. The word *pais* means boy or small child. The other part of the word is *erastus*. This means *beloved*. A man by the name of *Erastus* was converted by Paul and was the treasurer of the city of Corinth (Romans 16:23; II Timothy 4:20); and Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). He was responsible for the Treasury Building in Corinth and perhaps other buildings. His name is on a large stone slab that was once on the side of that building and still is to be seen in the ruins of that ancient city.

(2) Another word is *paidophthoros* and it means "corrupter of boys." "To corrupt, morally deprave; moral corruption."

(3) A third word is *arrenomanes*. The definition of this expression is "mad after males." To be disordered in mind, mad, madness, insanity (Acts 26:24).

All of it is homosexuality and its baseness is seen in its league with a host of other offenses equally infamous! "knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing contrary to sound doctrine." (I Timothy 1:9-10).

How ironic and contemptuous can a person be in our day who elevates homosexuality to a respectable lifestyle? In the Bible it is an unspeakable abomination; in our society in the twentieth century, men and women want to make it legitimate and legal. They contemptuously assert that it is simply a matter of choice and they excuse it or endeavor to prove its validity by alleging that it is "constitutionally inherited." Some claim that it is a hormonal imbalance, or a genetic or chromosomal problem and that, therefore, the homosexual or the lesbian is not accountable or liable for his or her conduct.

Most modern geneticists do not teach that the basis of character traits or behavior patterns are found in the genes. According to Dr. Charles Wahl, the vast preponderance of evidence clearly indicates that homosexuality is a learned disorder and is not genetically inherited (Wahl, p. 194).

There is no proof that homosexuality is caused by a hormonal imbalance. Dr. Evelyn Hooker, who is famous for her research on homosexuality, states: "there is no evidence that homosexuals have faulty hormone levels, or that their sexual orientation can be changed with hormonal injections" (Chance and Hooker, p. 55). While many years of research have contributed to our understanding of homosexuality, its cause or causes remain controversial. However, it can be maintained that there is no justification for a homosexual to claim that he was born a homosexual or that he cannot change his attitude and behavior.

If one can remove personal responsibility, then blame can be shifted to someone else. Attorneys in our courts today in building a defense for a client who is accused of a criminal act, repair to an age-old argument that the man accused of the offense could not be responsible because it was congenital, hereditary, and therefore an inborn characteristic disposition. If that doesn't work to his advantage, he may choose to blame his environment or his background which had such an impact on his life that he was not left with the power of choice.

May I say to you that scientific and medical evidence point to the fact that homosexuality is a learned behavior. There may be some contributing factors, but they do not rob a person of self-control. He is still a creature of volition and of will power. He becomes a homosexual by choice. It is not genetic, anatomic, or physiologic make-up. It is by his own initiative that he decides to walk in this path! Otherwise there would not be such strong censure in the word of God against this sin, and God, in His justice, would not denounce it as damnable to the person's soul.

Lot pleaded with his fellow townsmen in Sodom to refrain from "this wicked thing." Peter branded it as "lawless deeds" and called it "filthy conduct." Jude called it "sexual immorality and perversion." The law strictly forbade such deportment. "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them." (Leviticus 20:13).

There is a Sodom-Gomorra rerun recorded in Judges 19. A Levite from the hill country of Ephriam had gone after his runaway concubine. On his return journey, he and his company decided to spend the night in Gibeah among fellow countrymen



rather than among aliens. It must have been an inhospitable people for no one invited them into their home until an old gentleman came in from his day's work. He took the party into his home.

Here is what happened: "While they were enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, they shouted to the old man who owned the house, 'Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him' " (Judges 19:22, NIV).

The old gentleman understood well what they had in mind and he, like Lot years before, offered his daughter and the visitor's concubine for them to abuse and defile. The tradition of hospitality must have been very strong for one to take such an undesirable course. "The owner of the house went outside and said to them, 'No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man, don't do such a disgraceful thing' " (Judges 19:23-24, NIV).

The men of Gibeah did take the concubine and raped her; an abhorrent, despicable sin to be sure. The sin of homosexuality is here described as a vile, disgraceful thing. Nothing could be more revolting or repugnant to one who has respect for God's arrangement. It is inconceivable that people of our day who clamor for acceptance by society could approve of such conduct.

Paul discusses this subject a number of times in his writings: "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen" (Romans 1:24-25).

The radical and blatant extreme of sexual impurity is seen in the passage which discusses homosexuality. The people who engaged in it were unabashed and shameless. "For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also

the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due" (Romans 1:26-27). It is incomprehensible that men of any sense or logic would argue that homosexuality is "constitutionally inherited" and that it is a different, but as good a life-style as God's plan and pattern for marriage and the home comprised of husband and wife and children.

I Corinthians 6:9-10 is translated by some scholars as "male prostitutes and homosexuals," and I Timothy 1:9-11 as "perverts [homosexuals]." In some countries this sinful action is elevated to a position of respectability and has been made legal. This same concession is sought by homosexuals in this country. Recently, I noticed in the newspaper an article which involved two women lesbians who undertook to procure a marriage license and made strong efforts to have such a relationship given judicial approval. You wonder by what standard such people seek to live and conduct their lives. Whose standard is it? Who legislated its rules? By what authority is their standard established? Are the principles inculcated divine or human? Does each group have the freedom to establish its own guidelines? Whose is the correct model?

Let us take note of some things God has to say about this sin of homosexuality and the characteristics of it. From the verses we have already read, you may note something of the moral tone of the practice:

1. It is called licentiousness.
2. Such people are said to deny the Lord.
3. They have no shame.
4. They are guilty of sexual immorality.
5. They have gone after strange flesh.
6. It is called a perversion.
7. Those who practice it are said to be slaves of corruption.
8. Inherent in the word is the spirit of insolence.
9. It is called the lust of uncleanness.
10. Peter brands it as lawless deeds and filthy conduct.
11. Those who are guilty have their understanding darkened.
12. They are alienated from God's way.
13. They are classified as ignorant.
14. They possess hardened hearts.

15. They reach a point of being past feeling and morality.
16. They think it strange you do not live in the same degree of dissipation.
17. They are called perverted men.
18. God's divine word calls it an abomination.
19. Those who are guilty of the sin were to be banished and put to death.
20. Such sinners among God's children were to be cut off from their people.

These disgraceful passions and desires were common and accepted in the heathen world, Paul shows. So shameful were they that the apostles seem hesitant in discussing them. Perhaps there is no sin in the whole catalogue of crime that so deeply shows the depravity of man as that of sodomy or homosexuality—men with men and women with women. The choice of men in those days, and maybe today, was younger boys. The prevalence of it is seen in the words of Seneca who said that in his time, "it was practiced openly and without shame." It was an age of unparalleled immorality—like that of the antediluvians (Genesis 6:5). Juvenal says that Agrippina, the empress herself, would leave the royal palace and serve in a brothel for sheer unsated lust. Society from top to bottom was riddled with crude and unnatural vice. Fourteen out of the first fifteen emperors were homosexuals.

Aristotle says that it was a reaching out after pleasure. The stoics said it was a reaching out after pleasure which defies reason. Clement of Alexander said, "It is aiming at and reaching for what will gratify self—passionate desires for forbidden pleasure which make men do nameless and shameless things. It is a kind of insanity which he would not practice had he not robbed himself of a sense of honor, prudence and decency."

It is the way of one who has become completely immersed in the world and ceased to be aware of God at all. This sin reaches far back into history, as is shown in this lesson. The houses of the male prostitutes (Sodomites) were destroyed by Kings Josiah and Asa (I Kings 14:24–26; 15:11–12; 22:44–46; II Kings 23:7).

It was common among the Greeks and the Romans and the heathen of that day. Is it better now? We live in a society where these sins are sanctioned, approved and even acclaimed. They

find both religious and civil consent. The gratification of the flesh is described as a lifestyle. One is exonerated because he is said to be born with these tendencies. It is commended, esteemed, and embraced for there are priests, pastors, and preachers who commend it, embrace it, and esteem it.

There is social acquiescence and acceptance. The sin is wrong for many reasons and should be universally condemned!

1. It is wrong because it is unnatural. This is not how God made man and woman and not what He intended, therefore.
2. It is unseemly. The Lord Himself marks it as indecent, naked shame, infamous, lewd, debauchery, dissolute, profligacy. It is wrong because God said so, regardless of how many feel about it.
3. It is wrong because woman was created to be the helper suitable to man.
4. It is wrong because it destroys the laws of procreation. In this relationship they are to be fruitful and multiply, else the human race would become extinct.
5. It is wrong because it destroys the family unit. For the proper rearing, development, and happiness of the child, there must be a father and a mother. It is in this relationship where love, warmth, unselfishness, sharing, tolerance, and generosity are teamed and imparted.
6. It is wrong because there is no self-restraint and no self-control. This is the very heart of Christianity and it may be said that it is the very heart of intelligent and successful society.

Why did this evil, morally debased, repulsive, disgusting, and contemptible condition exist in history? Why does it still exist? Whose standard is it that permits, encourages, and accepts such a status? Here are the reasons:

1. People become a law unto themselves (Romans 2:14).
2. "Every man did [does] that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).
3. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 12:15).
4. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).
5. "Every way of man is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 21:2).

6. They change the truth of God into a lie (Romans 1:25).
7. "They have despised the law of the Lord" (Amos 2:4).
8. With the flesh they serve the law of sin (Romans 7:25).
9. They commit abominations and are not ashamed (Jeremiah 8:12).
10. They have their own human standard and no regard for God's standard. When men become a law unto themselves, decide their own values, walk in their own paths, set their own goals, make their own judgments as to what is right and wrong, the country and the world end up in anarchy—that means "without rule" or law!

### **There is Hope for the Homosexual**

This is to say that the sin of homosexuality can be forgiven. There are some Bible requisites to that, however.

1. One must recognize that he is a sinner. He must be aware of his situation.
2. He must be willing to accept personal responsibility for his sinful condition. He cannot continue to blame God for making him as he is; nor can he blame his environment, or his heredity. To extenuate one's self, blame is almost always placed upon the shoulders of another person.
3. He must have a genuine desire to change.
4. He can be helped in this new course of determination to do what is right by engaging the help of others. Such a person must have a very strong resolve, but he may need therapy.
5. He needs to become involved in helping others who have experienced his problem.
6. If he is an erring Christian, he needs to turn to God in prayer for forgiveness and he needs the spiritual strength and support of fellow Christians.

### **Other Forms of Licentiousness**

You have observed that the terms *licentiousness* and *lasciviousness* are closely related. Both words are used to translate the Greek New Testament word *aselgeia*. The English word *licentiousness* derives from the word *license* which originally means, "formal permission from a constituted authority to do a specific thing, as to carry on some business, drive a car, etc." It also means, "intentional deviation from rule,

convention, or fact; excessive or undue freedom, or liberty, especially licentiousness.”

One often assumes the prerogative to decide his own path in which he will walk and gives himself the license to say and do what pleases him or what satisfies his human desires and inclinations. Paul spoke of those who had “given themselves over to lewdness (*aselgia*) [lasciviousness], to work all uncleanness” (Ephesians 4:19). Peter spoke of those who “walked in lewdness [lasciviousness], lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries” (1 Peter 4:3).

This English word *lasciviousness* means “inclined to lustfulness; wanton, lewd, arousing or inciting sexual desire. Expressing lust or lewdness.” This term covers, as we have already seen, a multitude of sins— including lying, cheating, subterfuge, the searing of the conscience, and living a life of hypocrisy, which has to be a miserable kind of existence in the midst of this family of sins.

### **Immodesty**

The Bible clearly imparts to us and installs within us that sexuality is good and beneficial in many ways and the expression of that sexuality is right and proper and ethical within the appropriate context. While it is honorable and pure under the right circumstances, it is also very private and is to be discreetly disclosed in any relationship (as in business or as friends) outside of marriage and the home.

It is not something to be exhibited and put on display in order to attract or tempt someone else. What one sees so often on TV and in real life on the beaches of our oceans and lakes and streets of our cities is a parade of the human body. This is a flaunting of one’s physical attraction for the purpose of manipulating and enticing others to lust and even to make deviant sexual overtures and proposals. For these and other reasons, immodesty is strongly denounced in the word of God. It is vigorously censured in both the Old and New Testaments and those who were guilty have been convicted for their misdeeds.

One of the most dramatic and pictorial instances of immodesty in the Scriptures is found in Genesis 38:14–15: Tamar “took off her

widow's garments, covered herself with a veil and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place ... When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot." It is not always the length of a woman's dress that marks her as indelicate and improper. It may be how she wraps herself that signifies obscenity and vulgarity. It is as common as the food we eat that one sees a person whose body is completely enveloped with clothing and whose flesh is screened from view, but who has so wrapped herself/himself that every feature of the body is distinctly in focus and accentuated to the point of being flagrantly indecorous.

What deepens the coarseness of the scene is the total absence of shame and the unabashed, unblushing, and brazen promenade as if it were a first class stage show for children. The trouble with slacks which many women in our day wear in public is that they are not slack and this seems exceedingly difficult for one to learn.

Western women's fashion a few years ago clad them in disgracefully short attire. It seems to be returning to the arena. There is no way to characterize it as modest. It is shocking and embarrassing. Women who wear swimsuits today that little larger, if any, than a handkerchief, are not just inappropriate or indiscreet, but are bawdy and lewd. Many of the costumes for dancing and ice-skating are little better. Grossly indecent, they fill in the category of salacious and wanton substance which indicates the direction of one's life.

### **Noah's Indecency**

Genesis 9:20-27 tells the shocking, scandalous story of Noah's immodesty. Drunk with wine, his sense of propriety was left behind and his pride in his personal sexuality was totally unremembered and had escaped the province of his will. He lay naked in his tent. I do not know what Ham did to him. It just says, "So Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him" (Genesis 9:24). One translation says, "when he found out what his youngest son had done to him." The grammar suggests that Noah was passive and his son did something to him. It may be that he did not more than look upon his father's nakedness. Earlier in the story, the write said, "He drank of the wine and was drunk, and became

uncovered in his tent" (Genesis 9:21). The King James version renders it, "and he was uncovered within his tent." The crime was serious enough in the sight of God that a curse was placed upon Ham's posterity.

### **Bathsheba Bathes in Plain Sight of David's Palace**

This story is related in II Samuel 11:1-5: "It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the King's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite?' Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, 'I am with child.'"

The sin of adultery and the many sins that followed that are inseparably connected with it is traceable directly to immodesty. This is not to place the blame solely on Bathsheba, but that is where it started. She may not have intended to tempt David, but the fact is that she did and the result was adultery, lying, drunkenness, deceit, and an illegitimate pregnancy. I may add to that that David murdered the woman's husband to carry out his unholy scheme. It is certainly likely that none of these heinous crimes would have occurred if Bathsheba had been modest enough to bathe in private. A woman is not to exhibit and display her sexuality indiscriminately. God made her that way and it is beautiful, but it is to be safeguarded and maintained exclusively for her lifetime partner. Her sexuality and, I may say, his, is not for public inspection. It is private, infinite, and exclusive.

### **Paul and Peter Address the Subject**

Paul tells Timothy that women should dress modestly. Paul stressed that instead of placing the emphasis on the outward person, it must be placed on the



inward person. "... the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." (I Timothy 2:9-10).

"Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (I Peter 3:3-4). Even in today's world, this teaching becomes very evident. God wants His men and women to be modest in their dress and deportment. It may be that carelessness on the part of some women and their desire to appear attractive and desirable to the opposite sex induces them to go to these questionable, if not vulgar, lengths to explore the advances that such men are willing to make.

### **Rape: "And Being Stronger Than She, He Forced Her" (II Samuel 13:14)**

There is not enough ugly words in the dictionary to adequately describe the sin of rape. It is the vicious and depraved action of a degenerate deviant and an immoral villain. More than that, it is an unnatural, impersonal, detached, and cruel portrayal of one's sexuality. It has to be unnatural, for how could a man find the capability of penetrating a woman who is frightened, has absolutely no desire for such a relationship, and protests the intrusion with every objection she can utter. It is an ungodly and selfish invasion of the privacy of another person.

A great many words come to mind which help describe such a person: savage, barbarian, brute, monster, fiend, demon, and hoodlum. I thought of including the word animal in the list, but that would be inappropriate because an animal breeds only when it is time to do so and for the purpose of fulfilling God's natural law of reproduction. It is a horrible and unlawful conquest of one's private domain and an encroachment into a territory to which he has absolutely no right to enter. The Bible condemns the sin in no uncertain terms.

"Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. ..." You will likely remember what followed.

The sons of Jacob were so enraged it ultimately resulted in their plundering the city and killing every male in it. Their justification was, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot" (Genesis 34:1-31)? While these sons of Jacob were not justified in reciprocating as they did, a scheme filled with deceit, it shows what a vicious and monstrous crime rape is considered to be.

A tragic story of rape is related in II Samuel 13, where one of David's sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar. It is a lurid, frightful, and disgusting story, repulsive in every way. One reason the tale is so hideous is because of the deception and plotting that led to the invasion and transgression of the private sexual territory of this beautiful and pure young woman.-

"After this Absalom the son of David had a lovely sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. Amnon was so distressed over his sister Tamar that he became sick; for she was a virgin. And it was improper for Amnon to do anything to her.

"But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother. Now Jonadab was a very crafty man. And he said to him, 'Why are you, the king's son, becoming thinner day after day? Will you not tell me?' Amnon said to him, 'I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.' So Jonadab said to him, 'Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill. And when your father comes to see you, say to him, "Please let my sister Tamar come and give me food, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand."' "

"Then Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, 'Please let Tamar my sister come and make a couple of cakes for me in my sight, that I may eat from her hand.' And David sent home to Tamar, saying, 'Now go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him.'

"So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was lying down. Then she took flour and kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. And she took the pan and placed them out before him, but he refused to eat. Then Amnon said, 'Have everyone go out from me.' And they all went out from him.

"Then Amnon said to Tamar, 'Bring the food into the bedroom, that I may eat from your hand.' And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought them to Amnon her brother in the bedroom. Now when she had brought them to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.' But she answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing! And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be like one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.'

"However, he would not heed her voice; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, 'Arise, be gone!' So she said to him, 'No, indeed! This evil of sending me away is worse than the other that you did to me.' But he would not listen to her. Then he called his servant who attended him, and said, 'Here! Put this woman out, away from me, and bolt the door behind her.' So she had on a robe of many colors, for the king's virgin daughters wore such apparel. And his servant put her out and bolted the door behind her. Then Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore her robe of many colors that was on her, and laid her hand on her head and went away crying bitterly. And Absalom her brother said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this thing to heart.' So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house" (II Samuel 13:1-20).

You will recall that this affair caused dissension in the king's household—bitterness, separation, and murder ensued. The ultimate outcome was the murder of Amnon, the attempted murder of David by Absalom, and the eventual violent, fierce death of Absalom.

The language of the Old Testament on the subject of *rape* was very clear and not only was it objectionable to God, but completely inadmissible for any of His children. He laid down laws that were readily understood regarding the crime and showed how severely it was to be punished. "But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die" (Deuteronomy 22:25).

The Lord continued His discussion by saying this is like: "when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter" (Deuteronomy 22:26).

It is lamentable that in our day a man may be guilty of multiple rapes and other crimes besides and, after a hearing and a trial which is a farce, he is set scot free, able to roam the streets again. Swift and consistent punishment is what is needed in today's world if justice is to be served and our streets and homes made safe from such things. Such savage delinquents are worth nothing to society. They are a detriment and a drag, a scab on the body politic. Most of them have forfeited their right to rehabilitation.

I am in favor of educational programs designed to prevent and correct this disease of our society. Moral and spiritual therapy are vital in this treatment. The Bible supports every effort to improve and reform these people, provided they are willing to correct, not just modify, their own behavior. I also believe the Bible teaches that a man who has attacked, raped, and murdered a woman to satisfy his ungodly lust, whether sexual in nature, hatred of women, or male dominance, gives up his legal rights.

In the Old Testament, the divine writer, speaking for the Lord, said: "If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days." (Deuteronomy 22:28-29).

To turn such a criminal loose today to repeat his crime is a travesty on society. It is not only inadvisable, but extremely dangerous for a woman to walk on the sidewalks of her neighborhood for exercise or pleasure, day or night, in any of our urban areas. The incidence of rape is rising at a phenomenal rate throughout our country and is frequently linked with other violent physical crimes.

If we used education and discipline as God directs, this problem would be solved almost overnight! The New Testament handles this sin by emphasizing that sexuality is private, exclusive,

restricted, and a personal, intimate act of love, which is expressed voluntarily with a life time partner to whom one is totally committed.

Listen to this charge given by an apostle: "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (I Corinthians 7:2-5). Observe, as you read your New Testament, how God always speaks of the relationship of a man and a woman in the context of marriage and the home.

"Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan" (I Timothy 5:14-15).

"That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:4-5).

"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (I Peter 3:7). The word translated *understanding* here comes from the word *gnosis* meaning "knowledge of a special kind and relatively high character." There is another Greek word Peter used here, *time*, in the husband's attitude toward, and treatment of, his wife. The word is translated as *honor*. It means that he should cherish her as a precious possession.

You can see that a woman's sexuality, and a man's also as to that matter, is not something public, but is to be used for a specific and definite relationship. It is narrow and it is fixed. It is so precise that you may be sure that it is to be used exclusively in the area of love in the home. You may say that the husband has a

monopoly on the sexuality of his wife, and the wife has a monopoly on the sexuality of her husband. And you may call this restraint. That is exactly what it is!

### **Incest — “No One Is To Approach Any Close Relative”**

The definition today of *incest* is “sexual intercourse, cohabitation, or marriage between persons so closely related that marriage is legally forbidden.” The word itself means impure.

After the human race was well established on the earth, God laid down very strict laws regulating the periphery of marriage and the home. There were certain clear, distinct regulations which set boundaries. In Leviticus 18:6 (NIV), the Lord said: “No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord.” Then, He proceeded to inform them what those limitations were and what the restrictions He stipulated encompassed.

The Israelites were prohibited to have sexual relations with a parent, child, step-parent, sibling, stepsister or stepbrother, grandchild, half-sister or half-brother, aunt or uncle, daughter-in-law or son-in-law, and mother-in-law or father-in-law. The punishment, in many cases of incest, was death. In other cases one was cut off from his people. Curses were pronounced upon Israel for such behavior (Deuteronomy 27:20-23).

Let me give you an example or two so that you not misunderstand. “Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person. And all the people say, ‘Amen’ ” (Deuteronomy 27:25)! Then, he continues in this manner. He meant that they must learn and respect the fact that God had certain confines; and those who did not respect them were either slain or cut off from their people.

In this same list, Moses, quoting God, said, “Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal” (Deuteronomy 23:21). This is more fully treated and developed in the Old Testament, but this should be sufficient to show God's intolerance of such coarse, vulgar, obscene, erotic sin. He was unforbearing and unindulgent in these sinister and filthy deeds. We need to pause occasionally to be reminded that *licentiousness* covers all these sins, although they may not be treated with the same detail as they are in the Old Testament.

Back to the topic of *incest*. One of the most graphic instances of this sin is found in Genesis 19:30–38. It is descriptive, even in detail. Lot's daughters duped their father into having intercourse with each of them. I don't know whether he could be characterized as a victim. It seems to be that he was a chump and a sucker to permit himself to drink their wine until he was inebriated. How culpable was he under these circumstances? After they left Zoar, they settled in the mountains and lived in a cave. The daughters were concerned about having children and so they arranged a schedule to get their father drunk and each of them lie with him. Both became pregnant by him and bore sons. One of the sons became the father of the Moabites and the other the father of the Ammonites.

The writer does not discuss, in this place, the moral and ethical aspects of this experience, but subsequent history points out the insoluble, tangled relationships between Moab, Ammon, and Israel through the events of much of their national career.

Before Jacob died, he gave some advise to his sons and charged them in the region of the development of their character. To Reuben, his firstborn, he said: "Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it" (Genesis 49:3–4).

We see a clear-cut case of *incest* in the New Testament—even in the church (I Corinthians 5). A man in the church at Corinth was guilty of immorality by taking his father's wife. They seemed to be proud of their conduct. Paul was rather surprised that they were not filled with grief. Maybe their pagan background kept them from viewing this incestuous sin as being filthy and odious in the sight of God.

But to show how heinous it really was, here are some steps they were to take to keep from permeating and destroying the whole congregation: (1) Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (2) I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done this thing. (3) You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his soul may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (4) Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be fresh dough.

(5) But I wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother if he is guilty of immorality. (6) Drive the wicked person from among you.

While living in another country, we had association with a young Christian girl who had been sexually abused by her father. Eventually she became pregnant by him. Sometime thereafter she left the church and I did not know of her whereabouts. I often wondered about two things: (1) Did we show her enough love and concern? Did we try to help her and encourage her during this most difficult period of her life? (2) What effect did this grievous sin committed against her by her father have on her unfaithfulness to the Lord and His church?

Some years ago, after returning from the mission field to the United States, a civil servant who was a Christian related to me the most unusual and, I hope, uncommon and weird case of which I had ever heard. There was a young Christian woman with three children who approached this Christian brother who was working for the State in the Welfare Department for some economic help. She was having a difficult time providing for her children. He knew her mother and her grandfather whom he had come to respect out of his belief that her grandfather was a Christian. Little helpful information could be drawn from the young woman concerning her circumstances and needs.

After the death of the grandfather, the civil servant derived the morbid details of the story that unfolded gradually before him. Her grandfather had begotten her mother and, by her mother, his daughter, had sired the young woman of our story. Then, by his granddaughter, who was also his daughter, he had fathered her three children! He had quietly threatened all of them with death if they divulged this uncivilized and unconscionable secret disgrace during his lifetime.

*Incest* is the degradation of the tenderness that is natural between those of consanguinity (relationship by blood or family ties) into a shocking, egregious and flagrant moral character. It is the crime of sexual relations of persons within the degree of kinship forbidden by God (Leviticus 18:17; 20:14; II Samuel 13; Genesis 19:33; Genesis 35:22; II Samuel 16:22; I Corinthians 5:1; Genesis 38:15–26; Ezekiel 22:11; Matthew 14:3, Leviticus



20:21). *Incest* is far too common in our society today and is not held in extreme disdain by our justice system and not held in contempt and derision by the citizens of our country as it ought to be.

Marriage, in the Old Testament, was forbidden between any person and a direct ancestor or a direct descendant. It carried not only a connotation of immorality, but there was confusion and befuddlement of the race resulting often in mental deficiency and physical damage. This calamitous impairment still exists in tightly knit communities which have existed over a long period of time without the introduction of new and different blood lines. You may be sure that God still frowns upon this offense and abhorrent evil. In the New Testament it is classed under the head of *aselgeia—lasciviousness/licentiousness*. It is in the same category with murder, robbery, and rape.

May we so teach and live the line of demarcation between the church and the world and between the children of God and the children of Satan, that it will be clearly seen as a boundary across which the Christian refuses to walk.

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## ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

- I. Introduction:
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    - 1. Twenty-five thousand people killed each year by drunken drivers on our streets and highways.
    - 2. Crime, robbery, rape, broken homes, juvenile delinquency all traceable to this sin.
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- II. Discussion:
  - A. The Bible speaks plainly:
    - 1. Both alcohol and drugs are dealt with.
    - 2. Society has ignored the warnings and dangers. The disasters have not seemed to change the direction of their course.
    - 3. The spiritual message is often watered down because they do not wish to face the eternal consequences.
  - B. Relevant Bible passages:
    - 1. The drinking of alcohol is mentioned forty-five times in the Scriptures.
    - 2. One passage in the New Testament particularly addresses drug abuse, and many passages prohibit strong drink,
    - 3. Read these passages: Leviticus 10:8-11; Proverbs 31:4-5; Ecclesiastes 10:17; Isaiah 28:7; I Timothy 3:3-8; Numbers 6:3; Luke 1:15; Genesis 9:22-25; 10:30-38; Esther 1:5-22; Proverbs 23:29-35; Isaiah 22:13; Hosea 4:10-11. Could be many more.
    - 4. Paul mentions drunkenness and witchcraft in the same list (Galatians 5:19-21).
    - 5. Drunkenness is always strongly condemned (Luke 21:34; I Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18; I Corinthians 5:11).
  - C. Chemical dependence:
    - 1. There are different kinds of addictions.
    - 2. Nicotine has been called the "gate-way drug."
    - 3. The drinking of alcohol in our country begins at a very early age—even with small children.
    - 4. In high school, one-quarter of American students are users of illegal drugs, two-thirds are frequent users of alcohol, one in five uses tobacco daily.

5. More than fifty percent have used marijuana; ten percent hallucinogens, and over ninety percent alcoholic beverages.
- D. The slide into abuse:
1. Drug abuse and alcoholism are very closely related and seldom separated.
  2. When urged or driven by a drink, pill, or a smoke, addiction has already set in.
  3. Eighteen million known alcoholics in the United States and only a fraction on skid row. Most of them maintain homes, families, and jobs, and are masters at facades.
- E. Disease of denial:
1. Perhaps the most serious thing about addiction is denial.
  2. We know that many drink too much or use drugs excessively, but the fear and shame which accompany the acknowledgement of it causes us to shrink from facing the truth and admitting it so we may help those addicted to seek medical help.
  3. Why addiction?
    - a. As a means of solving social and emotional problems.
    - b. Supposedly enables one to forget a thousand troubles.
    - c. Places him with associates and in an environment where his friends do not find fault and condemn him.
    - d. There are millions of children born with this strike of addiction already against them, because of the addiction of the mother during the period of pregnancy.
- F. Home dysfunction
1. There is the pattern of alibis, social pressures, grandiose behavior, aggression, guilt, remorse, periods of cessation, changes in drinking habits, the decay of home and other social relationships, problems on the job, increase in the importance of the substance.
  2. Most die without getting the spiritual help that will enable them to recover and put the problem behind them.
  3. Not only is the addict sick, but the misery is passed on to co dependents. There is much this person must

learn and do in order to help solve the problem—if there is any hope at all for a remedy.

4. Hiding one's head in the sand and denying that his/her spouse is an addict will never get the job done.
5. Children of addicts do not properly understand what normal behavior is and have serious difficulties adjusting.

G. There is hope and a way up:

1. Radical change is necessary.
2. Only through the revealed path of God can we find the ability to self-control and hope, happiness, and purpose.
3. To overcome anger, hate, and resentment, we must respond to God's will and spend time in meditation, study, and prayer—if we expect to be led away from drugs and alcohol with all of its attendant hurts.

III. Conclusion

A. Seven tips for parents:

1. Set limits on your children—knowing where and with whom they are associating.
2. Talk about alcohol and drugs from authentic information.
3. Get involved with others in your fight against these evils.
4. Don't deny. If it is true, face up to it.
5. Look for behavior changes—friends, language, attitude, physical appearance, weight loss, grades, interests.
6. Gate-way drugs. The wrong example of the use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol can lead children into abuse and addiction.
7. Get help. When you discover the problem, get help immediately.

B. The most successful help is free.

1. There are recovery support groups everywhere.
2. Read and study carefully the twelve steps with the Scriptures to help you help yourself as well as those who are in desperate need around you.
3. You must keep in mind that the transgression of God's law is sin, and carries consequences very far reaching.

## **ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE**

During the close of the nineteenth century a new social philosophy, along with a new code of morality, emerged all over the world. This was not a rebellion against God and the Bible, but a sustained effort to destroy the idea of *sin*. Those acts and thoughts which gave sensitive minds feelings of guilt were no longer to be seen as sinful, immoral, or wrong. Any action not carnal or caused by disease might be inelegant, in bad taste, or unpleasant, but not categorized as *sin*.

The expansion of these ideas was originally taken from the fields of hypnosis, psychoanalysis, conditioned reflex phenomena, the discovery of drugs which alter mood and behavior, and changes in the scientific methodology of research. They have given rise, in our day, to the idea that no man is responsible for his own actions. Thus, when 25,000 people are killed on our highways each year by drunk drivers, or a drug addict causes a train wreck, or a drunken mob rapes and terrorizes, or a condemned mass murderer confesses that all the gruesome acts were committed under the influence, the defense often argues that the perpetrators are chemical dependents. Supposedly, this nullifies and excuses the deeds.

God, in His wisdom, designed a pattern for living so that we might have purpose, direction, hope, and happiness. The man who, out of love and gratitude, seeks to know and do the will of God is rewarded in both this life and the next.

### **The Bible Speaks Plainly**

The word of God speaks plainly about the abuse of both drugs and alcohol. Our society has ignored the warning and now faces the most far-reaching social disaster of all time. Ninety-seven percent of our homes and families are, to some extent, dysfunctional. Lives are out of control, unhappiness and bewilderment prevail, suicide statistics are escalating, and crime is at an all time high.

In an atmosphere of panic, support groups who offer hope and direction to individuals and families affected by drugs and alcohol are increasing at unprecedented rates. The airways are clogged with talk shows and documentaries which discuss every

aspect of the aftermath of our national tolerance of the very thing condemned by the inspired word. We have sown to the wind and now reap the whirlwind. Churches across our land are dying, not because the message of the Bible is weak, ineffective, or irrelevant, but because we have not opened our eyes and hearts to the pain and desperation of a baffled society.

Secular support groups borrow, disguise, and water down the spiritual message of hope rendered in Christ and give serenity of mind, but not salvation to a grasping society. They meet several times a day in many borrowed and rented rooms in every town and village and still the numbers grow. We must awaken to the challenge created by the sins of alcohol and drug abuse. We must learn to recognize the resulting personality disorders, understand the damage done to affected spouses and children, know how they respond and cope, and, with compassion, lead them to the solution of all of life's woes through both the knowledge and the understanding of how to apply the message of Jesus to their own life and soul.

### **Relevant Bible Passages**

The drinking of alcohol is mentioned in fifty-five verses of scripture. One passage in the New Testament especially addresses drug abuse. Many of the passages prohibit those in positions of secular or spiritual leadership from the use of strong drink. Aaron and his sons were not to drink while rendering service to God (Leviticus 10:8-11). Officials with responsibility for human life should not imbibe (Proverbs 31:4-5). The nation is blessed with leaders who refrain from drunkenness (Ecclesiastes 10:17). Spiritual leaders became incapable because of their drinking (Isaiah 28:7).

Church leaders in the New Testament must not be given to wine (I Timothy 3:3, 8). The Nazarite vow excluded strong drink (Numbers 6:3; Luke 1:15). Various forms of immoral sexual behavior are associated with drunkenness. Noah, in a drunken and naked state, was accosted by his youngest son, Ham (Genesis 9:22-25). Lot's incestuous relationship with his own daughters was a result of drinking (Genesis 19:30-38). King Ahasuerus tried to subject his queen, Vashti, to the immoral gaze of drunken princes (Esther 1:5, 22). Drinking fills minds with impure and perverse thoughts (Proverbs 23:31-33).

Carnal living and immorality go hand in hand with drinking (Isaiah 22:13; Hosea 4:10–11). Young women were sold for the price of a drink (Joel 3:3). Drinking is an attitude of rebellious disobedient sons (Deuteronomy 21:20). David's drinking led him to murder. Others died at the hands of those who were drunk (II Samuel 11:13; I Samuel 25:36–38; II Samuel 13:28–29; I Kings 16:8–10; I Kings 20:13–21; Isaiah 24:20).

Drinking alters personality and deceives a man (Proverbs 20:1). It produces sorrow, woe, contentions, babbling, and wounds without cause (Proverbs 23:29–30). Drinking gives a man a false sense of invincibility (Isaiah 56:12). Drinking leads to the profaning of sacred things (Daniel 5:3). Drinking makes one scornful and selfish (Hosea 7:5; Amos 6:3–6). Arrogance is inflamed by drink (Habakkuk 2:5). Those who drink are not alert (Matthew 24:18–51). Rioting and drunkenness are shown opposite of honesty (Romans 13:13).

The addictive nature of drinking and its progressive destructiveness are discussed (Proverbs 23:35; 23:32; 23:20; Habakkuk 2:16; Proverbs 21:17; 23:21). God's people are forbidden from setting the wrong example for others (Habakkuk 2:15; Romans 14:21). The seriousness of the sin of drunkenness is shown in these passages that teach that drunkards are not prepared for the Judgment Day and shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Luke 21:34; I Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21). Christians are commanded not to be drunk (Ephesians 5:18) or to keep company with drunkards (I Corinthians 5:11).

Paul gives a list of the sins of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21. He lists both *drunkenness* and *witchcraft*. The New Testament word translated as witchcraft is *pharmakia*. This is the same word from which we derive our English word *pharmacy*. The word deals specifically with the abuse of drugs. The use of hallucinogenic drugs in practicing witchcraft in its various forms is and was so common that the words were synonymous. We should not be amazed that God delivered warnings thousands of years ago that in recent times are being *discovered* for their timely applications to people. The modern psychological profile of the chemically dependent personality does not differ from the passages in the preceding paragraphs. These people have low self-esteem, tell the truth or keep promises with great difficulty, think irrationally, estrange themselves from all but drinking or using partners, deny that

they have a problem, are forgetful, disorganized, late, addictive, and compulsive. Sexual abuse and looseness are common. Intolerant is the trait that does not allow for the delay of the gratification of personal desires. This, in turn, leads to progressive involvement and often crime to support the habit. The thought and behavioral traits of the dependent personality adversely affect family members, and are uniformly passed on to the next generation. In this way almost every family has been touched and we have lost sight of personal interaction that is *normal*, and the *ideal* of the family as God intended it to function.

God, in His love, set a standard and blazed a trail with His own Son that would provide purpose, service, happiness, hope, and peace. He intended that children be brought up in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4) with both a father and a mother to guide them. Forty-five percent of our children are raised in a single family home, and one in four children has at least one alcoholic parent and is thus between four and ten times as likely to become addicted as other children.

### **Chemical Dependence**

The dependent personality exists even among those who have never had a drink or a smoke or a sniff. Those traits, which are character flaws, may express themselves in other fields. Groups are now formed to deal with work-aholics, food-aholics, sex-aholics, and even neg-aholics—people addicted to negative thinking.

These recognized addictions are treated in much the same way as alcohol and drug dependency. Treatment is also needed for *families* of all these addictions, because they, too, have been caught up in a senseless *merry-go-round* proceeding nowhere.

The road to addiction unusually begins with nicotine. I Heard a young addict on a television program involving hundreds of people say that this was true always without exception. He called it the gate-way drug. The addiction then advances to beer, hard liquor, marijuana and/or various pills or hallucinogenics, then to cocaine and/or the form called crack. There are exceptions to this procedure, but this is the norm. The frightening news is that young people are being *hooked* as increasingly earlier ages.



*Drugs* are illegal for everyone. Although alcohol and tobacco are legal for adults, they are almost always illegal for school age children. Every state has raised its drinking age to twenty-one. In forty-four states the sale of tobacco to minors is forbidden. The scope of drug use is not confined to particular population groups or economic levels. Thirty-nine percent of urban youth have used drugs by graduation day, as compared to thirty-two percent in rural areas. Female students use drugs at only a slightly lower rate than males —thirty-four percent verses thirty-eight percent.

By age thirteen, thirty percent of boys and twenty-two percent of girls have begun to drink alcohol. Two percent of sixth graders have experimented with marijuana and five percent of junior high students are daily tobacco users

By high school graduation, one-quarter of American students are frequent users of illegal drugs, two-thirds are frequently users of alcohol, one in five uses tobacco daily. More than fifty percent have used marijuana, ten percent hallucinogens, and over ninety percent alcoholic beverages.

Seventy percent of child and adolescent suicides can be directly related to depression aggravated by drug and alcohol abuse. The United States suffers the highest rate of teenage substance abuse in the industrialized world. No family can bury its head and pretend not to be concerned. Statistics show that kids usually get their drugs from a close friend or a relative and are most influenced by peer pressure. Truly, "evil companionship corrupts good morals" (I Corinthians 15:33, ASV). One-fourth of fourth graders are pressured to try drugs and the median age for drug and alcohol use is eleven and one-half years.

### **The Slide Into Abuse**

Chemical abuses are closely related since drug addiction is seldom, if ever, isolated from alcoholism. This information was shared by Barbara starr, First Vice-Chairperson of the National Council on Alcoholism. We note many similar characteristics in all forms of abuse. The slide into abuse can be gradual and subtle. While kids are pressured by peers, many adults use substances to cope with daily problems, frustrations, and feelings of inferiority.

Alcohol or drugs or both become a pattern because of unrelieved stress. Over a period of time, a person can become psychologically addicted to chemicals as a method of coping with personal problems.

Abuse has already occurred when one automatically reaches for a drink, smoke, or a pill when difficulties or emotional stress are present. By persistently keeping chemicals in the bloodstream, one may alter metabolism and become physically addicted as well. Alcohol or drugs should never be used to escape problems or to cure loneliness, boredom, or depression.

The Bible teaches us to resolve our problems through knowledge, prayer, seeking forgiveness, setting our minds on values above, correcting interpersonal wrongs, and understanding our worth as those made in the image of the Maker.

Of the eighteen million known alcoholics in the United States, only three to five percent exist on Skid Row. Most maintain homes and families, and are masters of facades. Thus, the greatest roadblock to early and successful treatment has always been its prime symptom—denial.

Addicted people use hundreds of forms of attempted control to maintain denial. These include drinking only beer, never drinking alone, never drinking before noon, never drinking during business hours, seeing a counselor, going on the *wagon* for periods of time, and on and on.

### **Disease of Denial**

*Denial* is the biggest thing about addiction. Most families make an effort to hide the problem. It is ignored and denied. We know that someone drinks too much, or someone uses drugs, but we are baffled, ashamed, or hurt and in such pain that the truth is almost never faced. It is a secret that everyone shares. Our attitude and fears make it worse and we pass the effects of this destructive *monster* from generation to generation. The debate rages about calling alcoholism and drug abuse a *disease*. Usage of the term is usually acceptable if properly defined. Over a period of time, abusers alter brain-cell function, induce nerve damage, shrink the cerebral cortex, imbalance the hormonal system, and damage vital organs.

Life expectancy drops from twenty to forty years below national averages depending on complications. Children of abusers can inherit things that make them more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol. We are influenced by our genes which affect psychological and metabolic functioning and social environment. One does not inherit *alcoholism*, but a *genetic predisposition* which renders a person more *metabolically vulnerable* if drinking is chosen. Addiction is still created by our world which fosters careless, socially encouraged, abusive practices as a means of solving emotional problems.

Regardless of background, no one can assume that he or she has an immunity. Great concern is being given , and criminal charges are being filed, over the birth of children who are already addicted. *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and drug abuse* is one of the three leading causes of mental retardation and the only preventable one. The safe alcohol consumption level for a pregnant woman is none.

### **Home Dysfunction**

Chemical dependency follows a familiar pattern. Sometimes the order changes or the behavior is temporarily suspended, then resumes. The pattern is one of loss of control, alibis, social pressures, grandiose behavior, aggression, guilt, remorse, periods of cessation, changes in drinking or using patterns, the decay of social relationships, problems on the job, increase in the importance of the substance (I heard abusers say on the television program Crack Down that they were married to it and loved it above anyone or anything else—Editor), seeking counseling, family problems, unreasonable resentments, escape, chain drinking or using, ethical breakdown, loss of logical thought processes, jealousy, decreased tolerance, fears, tremors and shakes, bankruptcy of alibis, admission of defeat, and seeking a helping hand.

Most die without getting the spiritual help that will put them in recovery. It is horrible living with an active dependent personality. The addict is not the only one who is sick and in need of help. The spouses and associates of alcoholics and drug users are labeled as *codependents*. They also become very unattractive people and contribute to the dysfunction of the home. *Codependents*, without a spiritual program of recovery, are barely

surviving while they cope with outrageous circumstances. Most do not realize the mistakes they are making. For years they have been doing all the wrong things even for the right reasons.

Before circumstances can change, they too must be aware and accept their part in aggravating the sad scenario. Most codependents who see support groups are looking for help in getting the addict to stop. At that point there is a delusion that if the addict would stop, things would return to normal. However, years of playing games, building defenses, and trying to control another's drinking or using have put the codependent in a position to need active and vital spiritual programs of recovery.

Codependents are rescuers, caretakers, and enablers. They do things for others that keep them from meeting responsibilities and that allow them to continue the abuse without suffering consequences for their actions.

Codependents help increase family anger, anxiety, and denial. The codependent rescues and then gets resentful and begins to persecute the addict. They nag, lecture, scream, cry, beg, coerce, hover over, protect, accuse, chase after, try to talk out of, attempt to induce guilt, entrap, check up on, scold, lock in, lock out, and snarl out demeaning names. The methods are endless and the goal is always the same—make someone else do what you want them to do. In time, we must learn that neither the drinking nor the controlling behavior is normal.

The most detrimental effect is on the children caught in the middle. The bad, sad news is that the effect of the dysfunctional home on the children is much worse than previously suspected.

Twenty-three million children of alcoholics, of which seven million are under the age of eighteen, have been identified. Common traits of children, many of them now adults, have been identified—not all of which have each trait.

Those who are children of alcoholics guess what normal behavior is, follow projects from beginning to end with great difficulty, and lie when it is just as easy to tell the truth. They judge themselves without mercy, struggle to have fun, take themselves very seriously, and shy away from intimate relationships.

They overreact to changes concerning which they have no control, constantly seek approval and affirmation, and feel differently from other people. They are either super responsible or super irresponsible, they are loyal even when it is undeserved, and frequently lock themselves into a course of action without giving consideration to the consequences. They become isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.

As approval seekers, they lose their identity. Children of alcoholics are frightened by angry people and react to criticism in the extreme. Most become alcoholics, marry alcoholics, or both. Some will find another compulsive personality to fulfill the abandonment needs. They are addicted to excitement. These people are terrified of abandonment.

### **There is Hope and a Way Up**

When we get so far away from what God in His wisdom has revealed as His path through life for us that offers hope, happiness, purpose, and eternal communion with Him, we must seek radical change. Recovery begins with an awareness of why our lives are chaotic. We must accept blame for our own wrongs.

We must detach from those things over which we have no control and be willing to grow with humility and repentance toward the image of God's will. Through study, prayer, and meditation, we can move past anger, hate, and resentment. We must not only accept responsibility for our life and soul, but must guide our children and others to the path that will lead them up and away from alcohol and drugs with all of its attendant hurt and destruction.

### **Seven Tips for Parents**

Raising drug and alcohol free children in our society does not just happen. These tips are helpful guidelines to reducing a scourge on our society.

1. **Set limits.** Know your children's friends. Know where they are and what they are doing. Expect them home on time.
2. **Talk about alcohol and drugs.** Seek information and talk about it together. Discuss peer pressure. Listen to what your child is facing. Be there for them.

3. **Get involved.** Join with other parents to fight drugs. Encourage meetings with Christian parents and teens. Learn to recognize drugs and paraphernalia.
4. **Don't Deny.** "Not my kid," has become the norm when discoveries are made. By denying the truth when it is presented, parents encourage self-destruction. Catch it early.
5. **Look for behavior changes.** These changes may be in friends, language, attitudes, physical appearance, weight loss, grades, interests, etc. One or two changes may be normal; several are a danger sign.
6. **Gateway drugs.** The wrong example with use of prescriptions or tobacco or alcohol can lead children to abuse. We give out mixed messages when we forbid one thing while using another. Children are not deceived by the behavior of their parents.
7. **Get help.** If you discover the problem, do not delay. Addiction is progressive. It does not get better; only worse. Destruction strikes rapidly. A friend had a delightful 15-year old son who tried crack over the Christmas holidays. A year later, after ten months of treatment and the exhausting of medical insurance, he was informed that the next step was three to five years of rigid treatments at \$365 a day.

### **The Most Successful Help is Free**

There are recovery support groups all over the world to help all forms of addicts and their families. All are based on Alcoholics Anonymous for the alcoholic and Al-Anon, Ala-Teen, and Young Ala-Teen for families of alcoholics. There is adult Children of Alcoholics, Cocaine Anonymous, and many others.

All of these use the Twelve step approach to recovery along with meetings to teach and encourage putting the program to work in daily living. Each offers a telephone list of people to call if you have a tough time between meetings and an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging.

Help is non-judgmental, but relentless as it points to the steps of the program. Twenty-four hour telephone answering services are maintained by volunteers. These are not counseling services; they will only give you the time and location of the next meeting nearest you and encourage you to attend.

The Twelve Steps are nothing more than a restatement of passages from the inspired book, the Bible.

### **Twelve Steps with Scriptures**

1. We admit that we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable (Proverbs 23:19–35; Romans 6:16; II Peter 2:19; John 8:34; Galatians 5:16–21; Proverbs 20:1).
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity (Philippians 2:13; Psalm 107:27–30; Proverbs 3:5–6; Psalm 111:10; Galatians 2:20).
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him (Hebrews 11:6; John 7:16–17; John 1:10–13; Joshua 24:15; Isaiah 55:6–7).
4. Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves (Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 32:5; I Corinthians 11:31; Romans 12:3; Galatians 6:3).
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs (James 5:16; John 1:8–10; Ephesians 5:15–18; Psalm 32:3–5).
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character (Psalm 32:5–6; Isaiah 5:6–7; James 4:6–10; Psalm 139:23–24; Ephesians 2:8–18).
7. Humbly ask Him to remove our shortcomings (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14; II Corinthians 10:4–6; II Chronicles 7:14; I John 1:7; Psalm 51:1–3).
8. Make a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all (Proverbs 16:17; Ephesians 4:25–27; 4:30–31; Exodus 20:16–17; Colossians 3:13; Matthew 5:21–24).
9. Make direct amends to such people whenever possible except when to do so would injure them or others (Luke 19:8–9; Romans 12:14–18; Romans 13:6–9; Philippians 2:14–15; Romans 12:21).
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when wrong, promptly admitted it. (I Corinthians 10:13; I John 3:1–3; Proverbs 21:2; Psalm 139:23–24; Luke 6:41).
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out (Romans 12:1; II Peter 1:2–10; Psalm 1:1–3; Ephesians 1:17–19; I Timothy 4:14–16).

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs (II Corinthians 1:3-4; Romans 15:1-2; Matthew 28:18-20; 25:40; II Corinthians 5:17-20; Mark 5:19).

### **Summary**

We must have no doubt that the transgression of God's word is sin and will separate us from Him. We need also to know that God loves us and lays down certain commands to protect us from self-destructive ways.

Choosing to disobey carries consequences that reach beyond us to touch the lives of those yet unborn. We can and must repent and turn from our present ways or the forces of destruction will continue to mount their attack on both young and old. We in the church cannot continue to ignore the devastation of sin upon our land and allow someone else to satisfy the longing of the sin sick soul with only a part of the message of hope. We must arise to the undeniable and clarion call of the Captain of our salvation and march against the enemy.

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## YOUR BODY IS GOD'S TEMPLE

- I. Introduction:
  - A. Read I Corinthians 6:19–20.
  - B. What the passage entails:
    - 1. It contains very strong, drastic directives—both positive and negative.
    - 2. In I Corinthians 3:17, the apostle addresses the entire church as God's temple and prohibits the Christian from defiling it.
    - 3. Here is how the word defile is defined. "To spoil, ruin, morally deprave, spiritual ruin; cause to decay."
- II. Discussion:
  - A. The two passages referred to above discuss:
    - 1. The church as the temple of God.
      - a. The prohibition is against morally defiling the church—fornication, adultery, and any other moral aberration—a departure from what is right, pure, and true.
      - b. This happened in the church in Corinth when a man took his father's wife (I Corinthians 5).
      - c. The church may also be defiled by teaching and espousing false doctrine (I Timothy 1:10; 4:3; Titus 2:1, 7; II John 9).
    - 2. The Christians body is God's temple. The Holy Spirit dwells in the Christian (Romans 8:9).
  - B. How we consider the matter of the physical body as the temple of the Holy Spirit:
    - 1. There are many ways in which a Christian mistreats his body—alcohol, drugs, tobacco, overeating, etc.
    - 2. A way in which we are concerned in this lesson is the use of tobacco.
      - a. The Surgeon General of the United States revealed that in 1989, 400,000 people died from smoking cigarettes.
      - b. Advertising, which makes the product appealing to so many, is done in the most attractive manner.
      - c. The world is not told of the dangers and of the damage that is done in so many ways.
      - d. What else, short of war, has ever caused so much human pain, misery, and destruction?

- e. The evidence is clear from doctors and scientists, so that there is no question of its devastation.
- C. The increased risk of cancer among smokers.
  1. Coronary heart disease increased 80 times over nonsmokers.
  2. Pancreatic cancer is increased 100 times.
  3. Kidney cancer is increased 180 times.
  4. Bladder cancer is increased 383 times.
  5. Peptic ulcers are increased 390 times.
  6. Esophageal cancer is increased almost 800 times.
  7. Lung cancer is increased 1500 times.
  8. Laryngeal cancer is increased 2000 times.
  9. This is only some of the havoc wrought by smoking cigarettes.
- D. It is a fruitless waste.
  1. Is there a habit one has that is more nonproductive?
  2. Think of the fortunes it would save families where such cancers and illnesses take over on account of the habitual use of tobacco!
  3. Think also of the millions of earth's poor and hungry the expenditure would feed and house—of the medical care and the education it would provide.
  4. The cost of this misuse would pay to send the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- E. It is offensive:
  1. To those associated or near the habitual smoker. The clothing he wears and even the pores of his skin exude the foul odor. The odor is exceedingly unpleasant.
  2. Babies and small children reared in homes where the parents smoke are far more susceptible to cancer than children reared in nonsmoking homes.
  3. What greater abuse could there be than killing a child by causing it to inhale your tobacco smoke during all the years of growing up?
- III. Conclusion
  - A. Laws passed prohibiting it:
    1. There are many public establishments where smoking is banned.
    2. It is prohibited on most airlines.
    3. In other places, it is confined to specified areas.

- B. What a blessing when laws are enjoined which will outlaw it all together.
1. It would prevent innumerable diseases. It would stop the rapid climb in the death rate. It would stop millions from having to struggle with nicotine addiction.
  2. When smoking is outlawed the misery caused by it which is now prevalent will disappear and make existence in our society more tolerable.

## **YOUR BODY IS GOD'S TEMPLE**

“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? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” (II Corinthians 6:19–20).

### **What the Passage Entails**

This is a very strong and drastic passage of Scriptures. It is both positive and negative. It restricts and debars the Christian from anything that might defile and destroy his body, for it is God's temple. On the other hand, it enjoins certain duties and obligations upon him—any and all that have to do with glorifying God in His body. It also brings to the Christian's attention the fact that he does not belong to himself. He is owned by another, the Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of purchase. He is the Lord's property and is, therefore, answerable to Him for the use of his body and the service he renders.

In I Corinthians 3:17, the apostle prohibits the Christian from “defiling the temple of God” which is the church. Most likely he had reference to moral and spiritual corruption. This is how the word *defile* is defined by lexicographers: “to spoil, ruin, corrupt, morally deprave, spiritual ruin; cause to decay.”

While, in this verse, he speaks explicitly of the church, he also distinctly expresses in I Corinthians 6:19, that the Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is definite, then, that where the Holy Spirit has residence, it must not be defiled or corrupted by man.

The injunction is clearly issued against moral and spiritual pollution in the passage regarding the *body* as the church (I Corinthians 3:17). If fornication were allowed or condoned in the body of Christ, it would corrupt and destroy the whole body (I Corinthians 5). If false doctrine were proclaimed and practiced among God's people, then God promises to take retribution against His people (Acts 20:29–32; Romans 16:17–20; II Corinthians 4:2–4; II Peter 2).

The physical body of the Christian is the “temple of the Holy Spirit” and must not be abused, mishandled, and maltreated.

There are many ways in which people buffet and batter and savage their bodies—alcohol, drugs, tobacco, etc. Many Christians persecute their bodies, torment them, and defile them by the use of tobacco. The Surgeon General of the United States revealed on national television that in 1989, 400,000 people died from smoking cigarettes! Our country is not beset by a greater health problem.

### **How We Consider the Matter**

The tobacco companies portray their products in the most glamorous and alluring manner the human mind can conjure. What could be more beguiling and captivating than to picture a young handsome man in the vigor of health riding a beautiful horse or engaged in activities with a sports car, diving gear, mountain climbing, or some other popular sports project? What attracts more immediate attention than a beautiful, shapely young woman scantily clad, sensationally poised aboard a sail boat or provocatively smiling while reclining by a swimming pool?

They do not tell you that in the *real* world, it is a daily struggle as they are plagued by hacking coughs and shortness of breath. They do not portray the stained teeth and hands, the burned spots on clothing, furniture, beds, and floors. They fail to tell you of the irritability it creates in the individual who habitually uses their product; and they neglect to mention the difficulty in concentrating, the anxiety restlessness through the nights and the headaches of the days unless a steady fix of nicotine is regularly introduced into the blood stream.

These large tobacco companies do not divulge, they don't even whisper, that their product causes cancer of the lips, mouth, throat, and lungs as well as heart attacks. They would never breathe in their advertising that the last years and months of the smoker's life ebb away slowly with the strangulating disease of emphysema. This totally unnecessary and preventable cause of death is little, if any, short of a massacre. What else in this world besides a major war has slaughtered 400,000 people in a year's time? A bloodbath of that magnitude would cause a general uprising of the people to protest to the point of revolt and insurrection. It would be put in the same class of the genocide of the Jews—that systematic effort on the part of Nazi Germany to exterminate a whole people.

I have often wondered if our atomic energy program in America were responsible for the deaths of nearly a half million people a year, how far it would advance in its purpose. Yet it is *lawful* to produce, sell, and consume a product that causes incalculable suffering and death far greater than this country has endured in any kind of war in which it was engaged! By what kind of logic and reason, judgment, or common sense is our nation characterized?

I have watched films taken by doctors of patients whose mouths and throats were eaten away by cancer, whose lungs are blackened and degenerated, and whose breathing was seriously impaired. I am told by those who know that cigarette smoking aggravates heart and circulatory problems by increasing fatty deposits on the inner walls of the arteries and produces blood clots.

You would think that those smokers who puff away happily on their cigarettes would not be oblivious to what is happening right now to patients in hospitals who are having their cancerous mouths, jaws, lips, tongue, and esophagus cut away by surgery because of smoking.

There are so many devastating effects from the habitual use of this product that the list becomes almost interminable. I am looking at a chart, a kind of outline of the multiplicity of afflictions and physical disorders which bring the human body to irreparable infirmity—and ultimate death. I will not go into detail of what doctors have said and written, but look at this list of the effects of smoking tobacco on the brain, heart, muscles, stomach, pregnant women, breast feeding mothers, blood vessels, face, mouth and throat, bronchial tubes, lungs, and the blood.

Read what informed and experienced doctors have to say about the consequences and the aftermath on all of the organs of the body and what will eventually occur if the person persists in his habit. It will ravage him, consume him, and destroy him. The temple that God gave him for the purpose of dwelling in him will be utterly and thoroughly consumed—and I may add, painfully.

## **The Increased Risk of Cancer Among Smokers**

I have before me a chart from the U.S. Surgeon General's Office which gives the significant figures of the damage done to the human body by smoking—figures that should frighten and ought to be impressed immensely on the mind of every man and woman who smokes tobacco. In persons who smoke as many as two packs of cigarettes a day, coronary heart disease is increased 80 times; the risk of pancreatic cancer is increased 100 times, kidney cancer 390 times, esophageal cancer 430 times, oral cancer 493 times, emphysema almost 800 times, lung cancer 1500 times, and laryngeal cancer 2000 times.

What I have discussed in the foregoing paragraphs about the deleterious effects of smoking tobacco to one's health and well being constitutes one of the vital and foremost reasons for representing it as a sin against God and against one's own body. It has not been exhaustively discussed, but enough has been said to depict the defiling practice as a desecration of God's property. To misuse and despoil what belongs to Him is an offense that dishonors Him. The Christian must cease such infraction if he desires forgiveness.

### **It is a Fruitless Waste**

Is there a habit one takes up that is more nonproductive and, therefore, more unavailing than the frequent and regular use of tobacco? Add to this the vast expenditure which goes each year into this worthless usage and established way that has become an addiction to millions.

Literally hundreds of millions of dollars are spent by men, women, and children in America each year that could be profitably used to feed the hungry, house the homeless, and provide medical attention for the sick and the diseased.

Psychologically and physically one becomes dependent upon the chemical found in tobacco and his craving is so strong it turns out to be virtually uncontrollable. He will then spend the last dollar he has to satisfy his appetite. In this capitulation of his will, his habit has mastered him. Tobacco holds priority over everything else and his subordination is tantamount to slavery.

Paul spoke of this forfeiting of moral fiber and self-possession when he said, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Romans 6:16)?

Earlier, Paul had urged them not to relinquish that strength of mind and purpose: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:12-13).

The smoking of cigarettes is not only a misuse and corruption of one's body—that has been abundantly proved—but it is a misapplication, a mishandling of the goods which God has entrusted to the Christian's stewardship. Billions are spent in an effort to satiate his appetite and the world is lost. Put at the disposal of Christians the money that is spent on tobacco and the gospel could be preached to the ends of the earth in this generation. We are custodians of what we possess; it is not ours. God gave it to us. As agents of His, we must make proper disposition of His goods. That entails our learning what must be first in our lives. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ..." (Matthew 6:33). "... they first gave themselves to the Lord ..." (II Corinthians 8:5).

Jesus told a story in Matthew 25:14-30 which illustrates how God expects us to make proper use of our possessions. That with which He has entrusted us is to be used, exercised, and multiplied to His glory and honor. He tells another story in Luke 15:11-32, in which he pictures a young man who, "wasted his possessions with prodigal living." He misspent his inheritance. When one walks to the cash register with two cartons of cigarettes and pays \$40.00 for them and then drops a five dollar bill into the collection basket on Sunday morning, he has certainly perverted the use of his inheritance and possess a twisted and distorted view of the values God intends His children to have.

For many years, this country has produced almost two billion pounds of tobacco every year and the largest percent of this goes



for cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, snuff, and chewing tobacco. Imagine what these two billion pounds of tobacco costs the American public. But this is just the tip of the iceberg.

The health costs to this country are staggering. The Office of Technology Assessment, a scientific advisory group for the United States Congress, states that the health cost of smoking in the United States amounts annually to \$65 billion and could conceivably approach \$100 billion each year.

You can understand, therefore, why I said that with what the tobacco costs are to the American public the gospel of Christ could be preached to the whole world in this generation. Likely, there would be enough money left over to feed the hungry!

The United States are not the only people who are spending these vast sums and reaping the dreadful results in lost health and lost production. The little country of Sweden, going back to 1980 with their statistics, published findings that indicate smoking related illnesses cost that country \$500,000,000 a year. Increase that by many millions by adding unseen costs of smoking in the form of medical bills, health care insurance premiums, lost worker productivity, and premature deaths.

The former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. C. Everett Koop, said: "A smoking employee is a more expensive employee than a nonsmoking employee." If there could be erased from our budget these preventable costs, America's productivity would be greatly expanded, the needs of pitifully poor people could be more nearly met, and living standards of legions could be substantially raised.

A recent newspaper article on the front page caught my attention. It pointed out that this disastrous habit has flooded the Soviet Union and virtually overwhelmed that nation. In that nation of 280 million people, 70 million, one of every four, smoke. There is presently a shortage of cigarettes in that country and it has led to strikes and demonstrations—to say nothing of long lines. They stand in those interminable lines for hours and are limited to five packs—the inferior, nonfilter brands sell for \$4.80 a pack. One Russian said: "Three times I have tried to quit, but I almost went mad."

The tobacco situation in some cities was so acute that packets of tobacco dust, normally used to control pests, showed up in the marketplace. A government official said, "We have to admit that the situation has gotten out of control. But who could think that such things could happen just because of cigarettes?" "No cigarettes—no work," the strikers were saying. So, in central Russia, an airplane was on standby to fly anywhere that cigarettes are available! What a picture of human foible—only the frailty is not very slight. It is, in fact, mighty!

### **It Is Offensive**

Many nonsmokers in this country are deeply concerned about the dangers in being exposed to secondary or side-stream smoke. The British Medical Journal reported in 1986, "About a third of lung cancer in nonsmokers who live with smokers, and about a quarter of the cases in nonsmokers in general, may be attributed to such exposure [side-stream smoke]." Similar studies have been made in the United States, Asia, and Europe that have added evidence of the risks to the health of the nonsmoker from the "second hand smoke."

Nonsmokers have suffered burning eyes and nasal passages and headaches and nausea from secondary smoke. Someone only a few days ago spoke of how allergic he was to the smoke from tobacco—almost a complete blockage of the air passages in his nose and a restriction of the path of air to his lungs. Even this sad affair does not move the average smoker to curb his insatiable appetite for nicotine even for a few minutes.

I recall on some long distance airplane flights before there were restricted areas for smoking, how dreadfully uncomfortable and unpleasant was that cigarette smoke from the passenger in front of me as it would curl against the sloping side of the plane above my head and enter freely into my eyes, nose, and throat. Six and a half hours of that experience across the ocean leaves an indelible impression on one's mind—and not a very gratifying one!

Many times I have sat on the front seat of the church auditorium on Sunday morning and night by a brother who had been asked to lead the prayer. He had smoked cigarettes so voluminously that even his Sunday morning bath had not washed away the

offensive odor. It seemed to exude from the very pores of his skin! The cars that are driven by habitual cigarette smokers and the houses that are lived in by these people are literally permeated by the scent—it is more of a stench. They literally reek with the foul odor. Contrary to the advertisers of the product, I refuse to call it an aroma—that signifies something pleasant.

The word that best describes it is *malodorous*, and the definition of that word is *stinking*. It is as penetrating and nose-piercing as a lovely perfume, but contrariwise, it is repugnant and suffocating. It has been difficult for me to understand why otherwise nice and considerate people do not know how disagreeable and objectionable their cigarette smoke is to other people. This is sharp language, but it is true; and more than that, it helps constitute the smoking of tobacco as sin.

To Christians I say with a strong note of urgency and concern, “Stop this sinful habit. If you cannot do it alone, get medical or other help, that your health may be improved, the years of your life extended, your money better spent, and your influence more valuable.”

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## THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN

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      - c. Cancel completely. Sin is here consider a debt (Matthew 6:12). To wipe off or away; obliterate, erase (Revelation 3:5).

- (1) Blotted out as a thick cloud (Isaiah 44:22).
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  - (1) The picture is one of bondage.
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- e. To be gracious (Luke 7:42; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13).
- 2. Covered: To cover over or veil by pardon—so as not to come to view.
  - a. Love shall cover a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8).
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    - (1) By conversion (James 5:20).
    - (2) By forgiveness (Psalm 78:38).
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  - a. Paul prayed that the abandonment of brethren may not be reckoned against them (II Timothy 4:16).
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- III. Conclusion
  - A. “Blessed” = happy, fortunate. This is the joy of those blessings of forgiveness.
  - B. “He went on his way rejoicing.”
  - C. “And he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”
  - D. “And there was great joy in that city.”

## **THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN**

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1-2). "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Romans 4:7).

There is no mystery attached to this passage. It does not refer to some special dispensation conferred upon one to whom God is partial. In it some special or favor is not granted. There is no permission to sin with impunity. Rather, some facts are stated and some blessings are offered under certain stipulated conditions with which men must comply.

### **Three Terms for Sin**

The first term to which we give our attention is "iniquity." It means lawlessness. In the Old Testament, the verb form of the word meant to rebel or revolt; to make war; to renounce and resist the authority of the ruler or government to which one owed allegiance; to be insubordinate; to oppose. In the New Testament, it means very much the same thing. It describes man's attitude toward God and His authority.

"Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion [gainsaying] of Korah" (Jude 11). The word here that describes the attitude of rebellion toward God is "gainsaying." This spirit is seen and defined by Jesus in a narrative He told. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. So he called ten of his servants and delivered to them ten minas and said unto them, 'Do business till I come.' But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us'" (Luke 19:12-14). Those who, in any age, will not subordinate themselves to the authority of God and humbly arrange themselves under His will are rebels and are guilty of iniquity.

The second term in our study of this passage is "sin." It means, primarily, to miss the mark. The teaching here is a refusal or a failure to come up to the divinely set mark, to measure up to the standard of the law of God, to bring our hearts and lives into conformity with the rule of His inspired will.

The third term is "transgression" which means to turn or step aside. Eve was deceived and led astray. She stepped across the line, beside the path of right, having taken her eye and heart off the goal. Israel said: "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way ..." (Isaiah 53:6). And James said: "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth ..." (James 5:19). Paul called to mind that "we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived ..." (Titus 3:3).

In this transgression, there is the element of deceit. One is led astray by sin and its bold and attractive promise. This does not make it excusable at all. It is still violation. It is self-will against God's will. Each would be his own god and make his own law and choose the way in which he would walk.

### **Three Things Sin Will Do**

1. It will sear the conscience (I Timothy 4:2). This "searing" derives from an instrument for branding and the lesson is drawn that sin will cauterize and sear into insensibility the hearts of those who are indulgent and yielding toward it. By habit, by repeated practice of evil, they become the children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Accustomed to sin, they become indurate.

2. Jesus taught that sin will harden the heart. Of the good seed that was sown, he said that some "fell by the wayside" (Parable of the Sower, Mark 4:4-20). The hard, beaten path was not suitable soil for the reception of the seed. So many feet had passed over the path, it had become impervious. In like manner, the traffic of sin across the hearts of man leaves them hard and impenetrable. They are untouched by the appeals of the gospel. Their hearts are gross, their ears are deaf, and their eyes are closed.

3. Paul affirms that sin will darken the understanding, blind the heart, alienate from God, and bring one to the point of being "past feeling" (Ephesians 4:18-19). He ceases to feel pain or grief over his condition and has no twinges of conscience, having given himself over to lasciviousness. It is possible for a man to abandon himself to uncleanness and become so callous in this degraded moral condition that he is completely inured to any plea for rectification of his life. He has become so compliant and has so habituated himself to sin, he has lost all desire to adjust his habits, correct his conduct, and remedy his lost condition by

turning to the Lord for help and forgiveness. Unless we are sober and watchful, we may place ourselves outside the compass of God's provisions and beyond the possibility of recovery.

### **Terms Used for the Removal of Sin**

There is nothing more important to our happiness and usefulness in this world than forgiveness. It is necessary to the proper function and maintenance of the home. Its defenses would be destroyed without it. In our relationship with friends and associates, and in just about every other area of life, forgiveness is tremendously important. It is most important to us, personally, in our relationship to God.

What comfort and consolation in the assurance that God will forgive us upon the condition that we yield to His will. What alleviation of misery and distress by His guarantee that He will forgive us and thereafter support, sustain, and encourage us if we will walk in His paths. There are a number of words in the Bible which are used to express the great extent and almost limitless scope of God's forgiveness.

### **To Send Away**

One of the most strikingly beautiful words used for forgiveness means "to send away." I do not know the origin of this thought. It likely came from the practice, under the law, of sending the scapegoat away into the wilderness during the yearly feast of expiations.

This is the provision that was made: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land: and he shall release the goat in the wilderness." (Leviticus 16:21-22).

There is not only the sending away of the sins as indicated here, but the very desirable element of their being forgotten forever. This is what the prophet promised Christ would grant to us and accomplish for us.



"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:34). This has been fulfilled (Hebrews 8:12).

God promises to send our sins away upon the conditions of repentance and baptism. To those who, on Pentecost, asked what to do, Peter replied: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Great satisfaction is derived from knowing that all of the sins of our past life are sent far away. "As far as the east is from the west, So far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

We are further promised and assured that if we, as Christians, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). Here again is the word "forgive," which means, "to send away." In Christ, we have the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). If we have some knowledge of how God views sin, feel some weight of its guilt, and realize that the consequences of it are terrible, we will deeply appreciate this provision of God's love to send our sins far away and cast our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).

### **To Lift Up or Away**

Sin is pictured as an oppressive and grievous load. "For my iniquities have gone over my head: Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me" (Psalm 38:4). The brothers of Joseph carried the load of their monstrous crime for a quarter of a century and more. They had not only sold their brother into slavery, but they had lied to their father about his beloved son. It must have weighed heavily on them.

When Jacob died, "they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, 'Before your father died he commanded, saying, "Thus you shall say to Joseph: 'I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you. Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.'" And Joseph wept when they spoke to him" (Genesis 50:16-17). This kind of forgiveness is the lifting up and the removing of the guilt and punishment which justice would require that it receive.

John said to his disciples concerning Christ: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world" (John 1:29)! Jesus is the one who lifts up the burden of sin from our hearts and who bears it away. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. ... And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:5, 12).

In lifting them up, He grants us pardon from our offences, and permits us to enter into fellowship with Him. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

In the Middle East and the Orient and some other parts of the world, women carry considerable loads. For years, I watched African women leave their villages, go to the distant hills, gather long, heavy loads of wood, bind them together with bark string, balance them perfectly on their heads, and jog for many miles across rough terrain to their homes to provide fuel for cooking their food and warmth for their mud and thatch houses. These bundles of long African hardwood poles often weighed between two and three hundred pounds. It seems impossible that they spend their lives with such daily tasks.

I suspect there is no greater joy you could bring to the life of an African woman than to relieve her of this lifelong, burdensome assignment imposed on her because she was born a female and which she has born constantly since she was a little girl.

In some such way, we should feel the burden of sin on us and gratefully receive the assurances that our Lord will lift it off if we will accept the forgiveness provided by the Lamb of God. "Look on my affliction and my pain, And forgive [lift up] all my sins" (Psalm 25:18).

### **To Cancel Completely**

The figure suggested by the use of this term is that sin is a debt. "I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. ..." (Isaiah 44:22). Jeremiah was speaking of forgiveness when he prayed: "Yet, Lord, You know all

their counsel Which is against me, to slay me. Provide no atonement for their iniquity, Nor blot out their sin from Your sight; But let them be overthrown before You. ..." (Jeremiah 18:23).

Among the things Jesus taught His disciples to pray was "... forgive us our debts ..." (Matthew 6:12). Although the word translated *forgive* here is not commonly used for *cancel*, Young, in his concordance, says it means: "what is owing, indebtedness." This story is graphically told and the lesson effectively presented by Jesus in these words: "Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt" (Matthew 18:23-27). He marked out and canceled what was owed.

The Lord told another story which illustrates this lesson of forgiveness of sin as a debt. "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both" (Luke 7:41-42). Although one owed ten times more than the other, they were equally forgiven. He abolished the debt freeing them of their obligation. Peter preached to a great multitude gathered in Solomon's porch of the temple. His instruction to them was "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out ..." (Acts 3:19).

Wax was one of the common but impermanent types of writing materials used by the ancients. A contract was made on it by the use of a stylus and it was signed by the debtor's hand. When the debt was paid, the blunt or flat end of the stylus was drawn over the writing smearing it out, expunging it, and so canceling it.

Perhaps the most common type of material they used for writing was papyrus. It was a reed that grew along the banks of rivers and streams. Its fibers were sliced thin and pressed together. On it was recorded an account of a debt and a bond was signed by the debtor. When the debt was discharged, it was canceled and the document was then nailed up by way of publication.

When Jesus died on the cross, He “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us ... having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14). The forgiveness Jesus offers us today through the gospel provides a complete cancellation of our sins and a publication for all to see that they have been nailed to the cross.

### **To Be Gracious**

I feel a need today for the forgiveness of God in its every aspect. Truly, it is comprehensive and I am glad. It should stir our souls with the spirit of gratitude and humility and submission to contemplate the limitless scope of His forgiveness. In His forgiveness, He sends our sins far away. He lifts them off as a burden. He cancels them as a debt and He looses us and sets us free. But the consideration of this great divine gift that stirs and lifts my heart most, and which is of greatest significance to me, is the fact that , in it all, God is gracious.

Without His grace and mercy we could never arrive at home. It is only by His graciousness and condescension toward us that we entertain any hope at all of eternal happiness. I know that none would “make it” without His mercy. Our God is merciful in forgiveness. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32).

This forgiveness means “to be gracious.” Paul describes the condition of the Colossians prior to their becoming Christians: “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13). How fortunate we are and how happy we ought to be that God is gracious—that He has covered our sins by forgiveness and, on the grounds of our conversion to Him, “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).

Will you then turn to the Lord in belief of, and obedience to, His will, having abandoned sin and self, and thus receive the full, free, and loving forgiveness He offers now?

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**APOSTASY** – A child of God can “die” – Romans 8:12–13, Revelation 3:1–5, Also can be “disinherited” Numbers 14:11–12. See also James 5:19–20, I Timothy 4:1–3, Galatians 5:4, I Corinthians 10:12 & 9:27, II Timothy 2:17–18, Hebrews 3:12, I John 1:7–10, II Peter 3:17, Revelation 2:4–5, II Peter 2:20–21, Hebrews 10:26–30, Matthew 13:40–42, Galatians 6:7–8, Ezekiel 18:24. Eternal life already given like, Joshua 6:1–3.

**ATTENDANCE** – Hebrews 10:25–26 (and Isaiah 54:7), Matthew 6:33, Titus 3:1, Psalms 122:1.

**AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE** – II Timothy 3:16, Deuteronomy 18:20, Revelation 22:18–19, Deuteronomy 4:2, Numbers 24:12–13, Luke 16:15; Proverbs 14:12. The final revelation – Galatians 1:8–9, John 16:13, II Peter 1:3.

### BAPTISM

**Purpose:** Acts 2:38, Mark 16:15–16, Acts 22:16, I Peter 3:20–21, Acts 10:48; John 3:5, Luke 7:30, Read II Corinthians 5:17 with Galatians 3:27.

**Candidates.** Those taught – Matthew 28:19 (See also Isaiah 28:9), Believers – Mark 16:15–16, Acts 8: 36–37, Must repent – Acts 2:38, Must confess faith – Acts 8:36–38, Matthew 10:32–33.

**Infants not need:** Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:13–15, Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 14:12.

**Holy Spirit baptism:** See “Holy Spirit” (Separate listing).

### BEING SAVED

**Hear:** Romans 10:17, Matthew 7:24–27.

**Believe:** Hebrews 11:6, Mark 10:13–15 (Not faith only – James 2:24, John 12:42).

**Repent:** Acts 2:38, 17:30, Luke 13:3.

**Confess:** Matthew 10:32–33, Acts 8:36–37.

**Be baptized:** See “Baptism.”

**Remain faithful:** Revelation 2:10 (See also “Obedience” and “Conversion”).

**CHURCH** – Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 5:23–27, Acts 27:28. The church is the “Body of Christ,” Ephesians 1:22–23, Colossians 1:18 & 1:24, There is one body – Ephesians 4:4–6, I Corinthians 12:12–13, Colossians 3.15, “Churches of Christ” – Romans 16:16, Saved “Added by the Lord” – not “Voted in,” Acts 2:47, II John 1:9–10. Religious division is sinful – see “Division,” Name – see “Name.”

### CONVERSION, EXAMPLES OF

**1. Pentecost** – Acts 2:22 & 2:36–47, **2. Samaria** – Acts 8:4–13, **3. Ethiopian eunuch** – Acts 8:26–39, **4. Paul (Saul)** – Acts 9:1–20 & 22:6–16, **5. Cornelius** – Acts 10:1–48 & 11:1–18, **6. Lydia** – Acts 16:13–15, **7. Phillipian jailer** – Acts 16:23–34, **8. Corinthians** – Acts 18:8.

**Division** – sinful – I Corinthians 1:10–13, John 17:20–21. Only one body – Ephesians 4:4 & 1:22–23, I Corinthians 12:13. See “Church.” To support false teacher is sinful – II John 1:10–11, Isaiah 5:20, Proverbs 17:15.

**Divorce** – Matthew 19:8–9 & 5:31–32, 1 Corinthians 7:10–11, Luke 16:18, Romans 7:1–3, Mark 6:16–18, Ezra 10:1–3.

**ELDERS & DEACONS** – Titus 1:5–9, I Timothy 3:1–13 & 5:17, Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17.

**ETERNAL PUNISHMENT** – Matthew 25:41–46, Mark 9:43–48, Matthew 10:28, Luke 16:19–31, Matthew 13:40–42, Revelation 14:9–11 & 21:8, Punishment worse than death: Matthew 18:6 & 26:24, Hebrews 10:28–29. Wicked raised for this – John 5:28–29, Acts 24:14–15, Daniel 12:2. Wicked at future judgment: Matthew 10:15, Luke 11:31–32.

**FAITH ONLY** – James 2:24 & 2:26, John 12:42. See “Works” and “Obedience.”

**FALSE TEACHERS** – II Corinthians 11:13–15, II Timothy 4:2–4, I Timothy 4:1–3, Matthew 24:24, Acts 20:28–30, Galatians 1:7–9, Deuteronomy 28:21–22. To support is sinful – II John 1:10–11.

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## BIBLE REFERENCES

**GRACE** — Justified by grace — Romans 3:23–24, but not by grace only — Titus 2:11 and Matthew 7:13–14. See "Obedience."

**HOLY SPIRIT** — Member of Godhead — Matthew 28:19, I John 5:7–8, "He" — John 16:13 & 14:16–17, Acts 8:29, Gave us God's word — II Peter 1:21, "Sword of Spirit" is "word" — Ephesians 6:17.

**HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM** — Occurred twice

1. On Pentecost— To give power to the apostles—Acts 1:8 & 2:1–4

2. At Cornelius' house— To show that Gentiles accepted — Acts 11:15–18 & 15:7–8

Paul later wrote that there is now only "One Baptism" — Ephesians 4:4

Baptism in the name of Christ is **water baptism** — Acts 10:47–48 and Acts 2:38. It is commanded of everyone — Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16.

**INSPIRATION** — II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21, I Corinthians 14:37, I

Thessalonians 2:13, Galatians 1:11–12, Matthew 10:19–20, Luke 1: 68–70, Galatians 1:8–9.

**JUDGMENT** — Hebrews 9:27, Acts 17:30–31, Matthew 25:31–46, Luke 11:31–32, II Peter 2:9, II Corinthians 5:10–11. See "Eternal Punishment."

**KINGDOM** — "At hand!" — Matthew 3:2. To come in first century with "Power" —

Mark 9:1, but "Power" to come with Holy Spirit — Acts 1:8. This happened on the

day of Pentecost — Acts 2:1–4. The kingdom was in existence in Paul's day —

Colossians 1:13. It is the Church — Matthew 16:18–19.

**LORD'S SUPPER** — Matthew 26:26–28, I Corinthians 11:23–29, "Upon first day of

the week" — Acts 20:7. Note: This is the same wording used for the weekly

contribution — I Corinthians 16:1– 2 and for the Sabbath — Exodus 20:8.

**MUSIC** — New Testament church used only vocal music — Ephesians 5:19,

Colossians 3:16, Matthew 26:30. It is sinful to add to or take from God's word —

Revelation 22:18–19, Deuteronomy 4:2. See "Authority." Vain worship — Matthew 15:9.

**NAME** — Romans 16:16, Acts 4:12, Matthew 16:18, Philippians 2:9–10, Isaiah 62:2, Colossians 3:17.

**OBEDIENCE** — Matthew 7:21, Acts 10:34–35, II Thessalonians 1:7–9, John 14:15 &

14:23, I Peter 1:22–23, Hebrews 5:8–9, I John 2:4 & 5:3, Romans 6:16, James

2:24. See "Works."

**OLD TESTAMENT (LAW)** — For our learning — Romans 15:4. Changed — Hebrews

7:12 & 8:7 & 8:8 & 8:13 & 10:9, Ephesians 2:13–15, Colossians 2:14. Ended at

death of Christ — Hebrews 9:15–17, Galatians 3:19 & 3:16 & 3:24–25, Galatians 5:4

& 5:18. Sabbath to Jews — Deuteronomy 5:2–3 & 5:15. Made known at Sinai —

Nehemiah 9:13–14.

**ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED** — See "Apostasy" and "Obedience."

**SIN** — What is sin? — I John 3:4, James 4:17. "All have sinned" — Romans 3:23.

Sin is not inherited — Ezekiel 18:20, Matthew 18:3, Mark 10:13–15, Romans 14:13.

**SINCERITY NOT ENOUGH** — Paul was — Acts 23:1 & 26:9–11, I Timothy 1:12–16,

Acts 7:58–60 & 8:1. Cornelius was — Acts 10:1–2 & 11:13–14. See also Proverbs

14:12, Luke 16:15, Isaiah 55: 8–9.

**WORKS** — James 2:14–17, 2:19, 2:24, 2:26, John 12:42, Galatians 5:6, Acts

10:34–35, Matthew 7:21, Hebrews 5:9.

### **KINDS OF WORKS**

1. Works of the **flesh** — Galatians 5:19– 21

2. **Our own** works — Acts 7:41, II Timothy 1:9

3. Works of the **law of Moses** — Galatians 2:16

4. Works of **obedience** — Acts 10:34–35, Luke 6:46, John 6:29. See "Obedience."

## WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

**BELIEVE** — “Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16; 20:30–31). When the Bible speaks of believers being saved, it means obedient believers and not disobedient ones (Acts 16:34; 2:44; Galatians 5:6). Faith alone will not save (James 2:24).

**REPENT** — “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 24–46, 47; Acts 17:30–31). To repent means to change one's mind and conduct (Matthew 21:28–29).

**CONFESS** — “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father who is in heaven, but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32–33; Romans 10:9–10; Acts 8:37). One is not to confess that he is taking Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, or that God for Christ's sake has pardoned his sins, but that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 8:37).

**BE BAPTIZED** — “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38, 22:16; Mark 16:15–16; I Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27).

**BAPTISM IS A BURIAL IN WATER** — “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4, 6:17; Colossians 2:12; Acts 8:17–39).

## WHAT MUST I DO TO STAY SAVED?

**FOLLOW AFTER THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT** — “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1, 8:13; Galatians 5:19, 23; I Corinthians 9:27).

**LIVE A GODLY LIFE** — “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11–12; Colossians 3:5, 12; Revelations 21:8, 21:27).

**FAITHFULLY FOLLOW THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST TO THE END OF LIFE** — “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22; Revelation 2:10; I Corinthians 10:1, 12). When one departs from the commands of Christ, it is worse that if he had never known them (II Peter 2:20, 22; Hebrews 6:4, 6; 10:26, 29).

**ADD THE CHRISTIAN GRACES AND BEAR SPIRITUAL FRUIT** — “And besides this giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, understanding, and to temperance, patience; and patience, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity...for if ye do these things ye shall never fall” (II Peter 1:5, 10; John 15:1–6).

**REPENT, CONFESS, AND PRAY** — When we sin we must repent of it, confess it, and pray that we may be forgiven. “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22; I John 1:8, 10; James 5:16, 19).

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## WHAT CHURCH MUST I JOIN?

**NONE** — Nowhere in the New Testament can you read of men joining a church. The New Testament church is the spiritual family of God, and men are born into it (I Timothy 3:15; John 3:5).

**THE LORD ADDS THE SAVED TO HIS CHURCH** — “Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47; I Corinthians 12:18). Thus, it is impossible to become a Christian or be saved and stay out of the Lord's Church.

**THE LORD HAS BUT ONE CHURCH** — “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Nowhere in the New Testament can we read of any church except the Lord's (Ephesians 5:23, 27).

**THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST** — “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18).

**THERE IS BUT ONE BODY** — “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4; I Corinthians 12:12, 12:20). This one body is the Lord's one Church which is the one spiritual family of God into which all men are born when they become Christians. No one should ever have any desire to be a member of any other church. Division is condemned in the Bible (I Corinthians 1:10, 13; John 17:20-21).

## HOW MUST I WORSHIP SO AS TO PLEASE GOD?

**REGULARLY** — “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” (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42). God is not pleased when we let weeks go by without worshipping him.

**GIVING GLORY TO GOD IN THE CHURCH THROUGH CHRIST** - “Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end” (Ephesians 3:21). All worship must be directed to God through Christ and in His name [by his authority](Ephesians 2:18; Colossians 3:17).

**IN SPIRIT** — “God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). To worship in spirit means to worship sincerely and earnestly. Our worship must be free from all hypocrisy and pretention (Matthew 6:1-15:8).

**IN TRUTH** — To worship in truth means to worship according to the teaching of God's word (John 17:17; John 4:24; Matthew 15:9).

### **GOD'S WORD COMMANDS**

1. **Prayer:** I Timothy 2:8; Romans 12:12.
  2. **Lord's Supper:** Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23, 27.
  3. **Bible Study:** II Timothy 2:15; Acts 2:42.
  4. **Contribution:** I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:7)
  5. **Singing:** Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.
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**WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS  
ABOUT GOD'S FORGIVENESS**

**Every person is separated from God because of sin.**

Romans 3:9-21  
Romans 5:12-21  
Romans 7:13-25

**God has always sought to form a close relationship with people.**

Ephesians 1:3-14  
I Peter 1:1-11  
I John 3:1-10

**God has reached out to people in a personal way by sending Jesus Christ.**

Colossians 1:15-23  
Romans 5:1-11  
I Peter 2:10-25  
John 3:1-21  
II Timothy 1:3-11  
Ephesians 2:1-10

**God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ is available to every person.**

I John 1:5-10  
Romans 10:5-13  
Romans 8:31-39  
Romans 3:21-26

**New life in Christ calls a person to live in a Christ-like way.**

Romans 6:1-14  
Matthew 20:20-29  
Ephesians 4:17-32  
Galatians 5:16-26  
I John 4:7-21  
Romans 12:1-21

**What must I do to obtain forgiveness of my sins?**

Hear the word of God (Matthew 7:24).  
Believe in Christ as God's Son (John 8:24).  
Confess Christ as the Son of God (Romans 10:10).  
Repent of your sins (Luke 13: 3-5).  
Be buried with Him in baptism (Romans 6:3-6).

**As a Christian, God commands us:**

To pray (I Timothy 3:8).  
To eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7).  
Study the Bible (II Timothy 2:15).  
Give our money (I Corinthians 16:1-2).  
Sing praises to God (Ephesians 5:19)  
Share the gospel with all men (Mark 16:15-16).

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