

**Eighth Annual
West Virginia Christian
Lectureship**

September 9-12, 2007

**Theme:
“The Wrath of God Against All
Unrighteousness of Men”**

**Pennsboro Church of Christ
205 East Penn Avenue
Pennsboro, WV 26415**

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Editor's Statement

As the editor of *West Virginia Christian*, I am honored that the eldership of the Pennsboro church of Christ is, once again, hosting and overseeing the annual WVC Lectures.

Since beginning our work with the paper in 1993, the Pennsboro congregation has been one of our strongest supporters.

- Their preacher, Terry Jones, has submitted well-written articles that help enable us to publish a useful monthly paper.
- The congregation receives a bundle of 75 copies of the paper each month.
- This is the third annual lectureship they have hosted.

The part we have in each lectureship is very small. The elders at Pennsboro and their preacher and lectureship director, Terry Jones, have selected the lectureship theme, topics, speakers, dates, and times. As I read over their schedule, I was, again, impressed by their wisdom and love for Christ, His church, and for lost souls.

May the Lord bless this good work. May every member of the Pennsboro congregation be richly blessed for all of their time, work, and prayers they have given to this project. May the efforts of every speaker be richly repaid by the close attention to and study of the messages they will present. May every person who attends the lectures be drawn closer to God and to one another through obedience to Jesus Christ our Lord. May the glorious church of Christ be taught, warned, strengthened, edified,

and encouraged throughout the beautiful hills of West Virginia and everywhere!

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BIOETHICS

Winford Claiborne

INTRODUCTION

Have you noticed how many new words have been added to our vocabulary in the past several years? Most of those new words are in the field of medicine, technology and genetics. For example, the term, deoxyribonucleic acid, came into existence in the 1930's. That expression is better known and more easily pronounced DNA. Ribonucleic acid (RNA) also entered our vocabulary in the 1930's. I have not been able to find the term, "in vitro fertilization," in any of my dictionaries, not even in my *Webster's Medical Desk Dictionary*. The table of contents of Scott Rae's book, *Brave New Families: Biblical Ethics and Reproductive Technologies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), lists the following reproductive technologies: gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), artificial insemination by husband (AIH), artificial insemination by donor (AID), egg donation, embryo transfer, zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT), surrogate motherhood, cloning and micromanipulation (pp. 13-16).

The word "bioethics" is so new it is not even included in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1976). The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) defines the word to mean: "the ethics of medical and biological research" (p. 135). The word is derived from two Greek words, **bios**, meaning life, and **ethikos** meaning character. In addition to the topics previously listed, bioethics relates to such matters as abortion, euthanasia, infanticide, physician-assisted suicide, cloning, human experimentation and similar topics.

ABORTION

Except for slavery, abortion has almost certainly been the most controversial topic in our nation's history. Almost every state in the union had laws restricting abortion until the United States Supreme Court ruled that woman has a right to kill her baby anytime during her pregnancy. Theoretically, a mother can have an abortion just days before time for the delivery of her baby. Recently the Supreme Court ruled against partial birth abortion. Apparently the majority of Americans support the right of a woman to have an abortion under some circumstances, such as rape and incest, but millions of Americans oppose abortion-on-demand.

My mother gave birth to twelve children. She believed her greatest contribution to the nation and to the church was having children and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. When my youngest brother went away to college, my mother insisted that my father go to the Potter Children's Home at Bowling Green, Kentucky, and get a child. She was lost without a child in the home. She grieved as long as she lived because all her children were gone. Contrast that attitude with the attitudes of many modern mothers. Since the Supreme Court legalized abortion-on-demand, mothers and their doctors have aborted more than 45,000,000 babies – 45,000,000! The most dangerous place on earth for a baby is in its mother's womb.

In my book, *Silence Can Be Sinful* (Fayetteville, TN: International Gospel Hour, 2002), there are four lessons on abortion. One of these lessons has the title, "The Babies' Pond" (pp. 94-103). In his excellent book, *Religious Apartheid: The Separation of Religion from American Life* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), John Whitehead, the attorney who defended Paula Jones in her

lawsuit against Bill Clinton, tells of a missionary who traveled through china in the 1800's. The missionary reported: "When I reached Amoy thirty-two years ago, there was a pond in the center of town known as the Babies' Pond. This was a place where unwanted little ones were thrown by their mothers. There were always several bodies of innocents floating on its green and slimy waters and passersby looked on without surprise" (p. 97).

In the United States of America, we have our own babies' ponds. They are not always located in the center of town. They are in respectable doctor's offices, in tax-supported hospitals and in Planned Parenthood's clinics. Those Planned Parenthood clinics specialize in killing unborn babies and are supported to a great extent by our tax dollars. The babies are brutally mutilated by professionals who are sworn to "do no harm." Americans are too compassionate and too civilized to throw unwanted babies in a pond or leave them beside the road where all can see the bloody business of abortion. But millions of Americans pass by the places where children are torn apart and burned to death with a saline solution and look on "without surprise."

Is it possible that abortion has led to the abuse of children? Between two and six thousand children are killed every year by their parents or guardians. But nobody knows how many children are abused each year. Abortion providers and supporters become very angry when abortion and other forms of child abuse are shown to belong in the same category. In fact, abortion is the ultimate form of child abuse. The nation's attention was riveted on Union, South Carolina, in the fall of 1994 when Susan Smith placed her two beautiful little boys in the back seat of her car and drove it into a lake. She made the lake where she murdered her little boys a "babies pond."

BREPHOS

The word *brephos* is one of the Greek words for “baby” or “child.” The Greek word means unborn child, baby, embryo or infant. Luke reports that Mary, the mother of our Lord, made a trip to the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. “And it came to pass, that, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe (*brephos*) leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” Elizabeth said to Mary, “For, lo, as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (Lk. 1:41, 44). Does this mean that John the Baptist was a person – a human being – a child – before he was born? The New Testament also uses the word *brephos* of newborn children and of older infants. Luke, the Greek physician, also wrote about Jesus after he was born. “For unto us is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe (*brephos*) wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:11-12). Later in the book of Luke we are told some people brought “unto him infants, that he could touch them: but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them” (Lk. 18:15). Paul used the word *brephos* when he wrote Timothy: “From a child you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:15).

ABORTION AND THE LAW

When I speak on some controversial issues, such as, abortion, gambling, beverage alcohol, illegal immigrants, the Equal rights Amendment, homosexuality and physician-assisted suicide, some of my listeners accuse me of being too political. I know that many topics I discuss

have political overtones, but my motivation is not political, certainly not partisan political. For example, I oppose illegal immigration because it is illegal. Illegal immigrants are criminals. Is that not what the word “illegal” means? Furthermore, those who encourage and support illegal immigration are criminals. When American businessmen hire illegal immigrants, they are engaging in criminal activities.

Abortion has probably existed almost since the beginning of time. But until relatively recently, it was illegal in most countries. In 1982 Michael Gorman published a book with the title, *Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press). Gorman examined documents in their Greco-Roman context and concluded that Christians held a consistent position throughout the church’s first four hundred years. Gorman concludes that the early church was unequivocally opposed to abortion, although in the pagan world, abortion was allowed, and in some cases, encouraged.

John Noonan, Jr. has served for many years as professor of law at the university of California, Berkeley. He is one of the foremost experts on abortion. He gave extensive testimony before the Subcommittee on The Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary during the 95th congress. Noonan’s book, *A Private Choice* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), affirms: “the makers of the Constitution, of the United States do not appear to have contemplated the subject of abortion” (p. 5). So I must ask you: Did the justices of Supreme Court find some overlooked principle in the Constitution that gave them the authority in 1973 to make their infamous decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Georgia*? The sad truth is: Many of the Supreme Court justices and other judges believe the Constitution and other legal documents are what the justices say they are. John Whitehead’s book, *The Second*

American Revolution (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1982), provides some examples of the attitudes of some judges. “In 1907 Supreme Court Justice Charles Evan Hughes remarked that ‘the Constitution is what judges say it is’” (p. 20). Justice Oliver Holmes, one of the best known and most respected men to sit on the highest court in the land, revealed his humanistic philosophy in this excerpt: “I see no reason for attributing to man a significance in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or to a grain of sand” (p. 52).

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

On the one hand, modern evolutionists cannot consistently condemn abortion, infanticide, euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide, except to say, “I do not like these practices.” Evolutionists have no basis on which to condemn any kind of behavior. On the other hand, Christians have been given a God’s-eye view of the worth of human beings – all human beings. The very first book of the Bible expresses God’s love for man. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:26-27). Does God’s care extend to the unborn? “For thou hast possessed my reins (or inward parts): thou has covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knows right well” (Ps. 139:13-14).

The word of God does not discuss the time when the new organism becomes human; it simply assumes that we are of special concern to God almighty from the moment life begins. Even many medical scientists concede that what is formed at conception is human, although some of them foolishly deny that it is a person. In their book, ***The Christian Confronts Culture*** (Chicago: Moody Press,

1983), Richard Fowler and Wayne House quote these words from Dr. Ronald Allen, a professor of Hebrew exegesis: “The Bible never speaks of fetal life as mere chemical activity, cellular growth or vague force, Rather, the fetus in the mother’s womb is described by the Psalmist in vivid pictorial language as being shaped, fashioned, molded and woven together by the personal activity of God. That is, as God formed Adam from the dust of the ground, so He is actively involved in the fashioning the fetus in the womb” (p. 87).

DOES ABORTION LEAD TO INFANTICIDE?

Infanticide means the killing of children after they are born. Is it possible anyone in the United States, especially medical specialists, would kill newborn or older infants? The answer is an unequivocal YES. It has been happening for years. A little boy was born to a schoolteacher and his wife at Bloomington, Indiana. The child was born with Down’s syndrome. In addition, the child was born with a condition known as esophageal atresia. The word “atresia” means the absence or closure of a natural passage of the body. A child with esophageal atresia would not be able to swallow. Without surgery, the child’s food would exit the child’s throat and go into its lungs. The child would die from pneumonia.

The schoolteacher had been reading about children with Down’s syndrome. He had read that such children were severely mentally retarded. When the doctor informed the parents that the child would have to have surgery to survive, the parents rejected surgery. They decided to allow the child to die. When the legal authorities heard of the parents’ decision, they held a hearing in the hospital regarding the parents’ rights. The judge’s decision was in harmony with the parents’ decision. The assistant attorney general made an effort to contact the

federal government, but the child died before the government could get involved.

When the decision was made to allow the child to die, the doctor asked a nurse to take care of the baby until it died. The first nurse the doctor contacted refused to become a part in the death of a child. She told the doctor: "I am not going to help you commit infanticide." The doctor asked another nurse to care for the baby. She agreed to do so, but was not allowed to give the baby water or food. It took two or three days for the baby to die. The day the baby died it would attempt to cry, but there was no moisture in its mouth and it could not cry. Blood oozed from the baby's mouth and it died a horrible death. Oh no, it was not in Nazi Germany or in Communist China, but in Bloomington, Indiana – the very heart of our great nation.

Jeff Hensley edited a book with the title, *The Zero People* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1983). The book contains essays by Dr. C. Everett Koop, John T. Noonan, Jr., Malcolm Muggeridge, George F. Will, Bill Stout, Dr. Richard John Neuhaus and other prominent Americans. One of the most intriguing and troubling articles in the book was written by Sondra Diamond. Sondra Diamond was born with cerebral palsy. The doctors told Sondra's parents that she would never walk or talk or do what other children can do. They encouraged Sondra's parents to put her in an institution and forget about her. The parents were unwilling to follow the doctors' advice. I am tempted to ask you what she has become, but you would never be able to guess. If she is still living, she is a clinical psychologist.

Sondra Diamond tells of an article that appeared in *Newsweek* magazine. The article, "Shall This Child Die?", was written by Dr. Raymond S. Duff and Dr. A.G.M. Campbell, both practicing physicians at Yale-New Haven Hospital of Yale University. The doctors who wrote the article reported on the children who died at the hospital in New Haven. Those doctors called people like Sondra

Diamond “vegetables.” The article angered Sondra Diamond. She wrote the following article for *Newsweek*. “I’ll wager my entire root system and as much fertilizer as it would take to fill Yale University that you have never received a letter from a vegetable before this one, but, much as I resent the term, I must confess that I fit the description of ‘vegetable’ as defined in the article “Shall This Child Die?”

“Due to severe brain damage incurred at birth, I am unable to dress myself, toilet myself, or write; my secretary is typing this letter. Many thousands of dollars had to be spent on my rehabilitation and education in order for me to reach my present status as a Counseling Psychologist. My parents were also told, 35 years ago, that there was ‘little or no hope of achieving meaningful ‘humanhood’ for their daughter. Have I reached ‘humanhood?’ Compared to Doctors Duff and Campbell I have surpassed it!

“Instead of changing the law to make it legal to weed out us ‘vegetables,’ let us change the laws so that we may receive quality medical care, education, and freedom to live as full and productive lives as our potentials allow” (pp. 225-226).

A veterinarian from Harvey, Illinois, was making calls when he received a message that his wife had given birth to a baby boy. The child was born with severe physical abnormalities. When the doctor arrived at the hospital, he went to the nursery to see his newborn son. When he saw the condition of the child, he picked him up from his crib and threw him against the floor. He killed the child. The hospital authorities call the police and had the doctor arrested. He was tried for manslaughter. Some of his neighbors were character witnesses in the trial. They said the doctor was a very compassionate man. He would stay up all night to take care of a neighbor’s dog or horse. But he killed his own child.

The judge in the case said there was no law in Illinois that forbade the doctor from killing the child. There is a law in Tennessee and in every other state in our nation that prohibits a parent from killing his or her child. Why do you think Susan Smith is still in prison in South Carolina? And as I write this manuscript, the nation is in shock over the brutality of a mother who killed her own children. Almost daily in the news media report parental abuse of children. If a mother can abort her child just days before delivery, what is wrong with killing the child days or even weeks after delivery? What is the standard that forbids the one and permits the other? Have we bought into the moral values that were prevalent during the days of the Judges in Israel? “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6).

DOES ABORTION LEAD TO EUTHANASIA?

Should not a society or a nation be known by the way it treats its children and old people? Since the law permits the killing of unborn babies because they are not wanted or because they would be expensive to rear or because they are physically or mentally handicapped, why would the law forbid the killing of old people when they become non-productive or expensive to maintain? Sometimes old people have to stay in hospitals or in nursing homes for extended periods. It costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to take care of those old people. Many of them will never improve physically or mentally. Why not follow the lead of Hitler and euthanize those people? Adolf executed 275,000 of German old people – not Jews or homosexuals or Gypsies – German old people. Hitler referred to such people as “useless eaters.” If we killed sick, physically handicapped and mentally troubled people,

it would save precious resources and relieve families of the necessity of spending their money on those old people.

For years, it was not legal for physicians in Holland to euthanize old people. The authorities turned a blind eye to the doctors who killed some of their patients. Now it is legal to put to death incurably ill old people. But before we accuse the Dutch people of pagan practices, we need to remember that the state of Oregon legalized physician-assisted suicide. Other states in our union are contemplating doing the same. I asked my urologist at Jackson, Tennessee, about his views of abortion and euthanasia. He told me he trained to be a physician to heal – not to kill – people.

WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO PLAY GOD?

The answer to my question is very simple. God alone has a right to play God. Geneticists who seek to alter the genetic makeup of human beings to make us handsomer or stronger or taller or smarter is trampling on God's territory. Physicians who decide when people shall die are usurping God's prerogative. How many doctors worldwide have the moral values of Jack Kevorkian?

CONCLUSION

How can Christians and other concerned citizens remain silent in view of the enormous evils that exist in our society? Do we now know that silence can be sinful?

REMOVING GOD FROM OUR MIND

Romans 1:28

Charles C. Pugh III

Introduction:

In her *New York Times* bestseller, *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*, conservative columnist, Ann Coulter begins by citing the apostle Paul who wrote, “They exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator. . .” (1). In a later chapter on the fruits of evolution Coulter again references the first chapter of Romans and then says:

Upon first reading *The Origin of Species*, Darwin’s mentor from Cambridge, Adam Sedgwick, wrote a letter warning Darwin that he was “deep in the mire of folly” if he was trying to remove the idea of morality from nature. If such a separation between the physical and the moral were ever to occur, Sedgwick said, it would “sink the human race into a lower grade of degradation than any into which it has fallen since its written records tell us of its history. (268)

As Ann Coulter has evidenced in her book, Romans 1:20-32 is the classic statement on the results of removing God from the mind. Paul wrote, “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” (Rom. 1:28). This verse particularly, and the context in which it appears generally, imply the results of removing God from the human mind. Old Testament parallels are Psalm 14:1-4 and 53:1-4. The former of these passages reads as follows:

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."
They are corrupt, They have done abominable
works, There is none who does good. The Lord
looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek
God. They have all turned aside, They have together
become corrupt; There is none who does good, No,
not one. Have all the workers of iniquity no
knowledge, Who eat up my people as they eat
bread, And do not call on the Lord? (Ps. 14:1-4)

Moral Loss

The loss of God in the mind results in the loss of moral objectivity in man. Without God there is no ultimate, objective reference for moral or ethical truth. In fact, when God is removed from the mind thought becomes nothing more than the accidental by-product of some unexplainable chemical or physical reaction of atoms in the skull and the credibility of thought vanishes. As C. S. Lewis stated:

A theory which explained everything else in the whole universe but which made it impossible to believe that our thinking was valid, would be utterly out of court. For that theory would itself have been reached by thinking, and if thinking is not valid that theory would, of course, be itself demolished. It would have destroyed its own credentials. It would be an argument which proved that no argument was sound—a proof that there are not such things as proofs—which is nonsense. (15)

French existentialist philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, explained the loss of moral objectivity that results when man refuses to acknowledge God:

The existentialist . . . finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values. . . . There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that “the good” exists, that one must be honest or not be, since we are now upon the plane where there are only men. Dostoevsky once wrote, “*If God did not exist, everything would be permitted;*” and that . . . is the starting point. *Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist*, and *man* is in consequence forlorn, for he *cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself*. . . . [I]f God does not exist . . . we [are not] provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior. (485, emp. added)

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British mathematician and philosopher, was an avowed atheist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize and authored more than 40 books on philosophy, education, morality, sex, etc. His Beacon Hill School, located sixty miles from London, was established in 1927 as a “free thought” school where children were to have “absolute freedom of inquiry” (Tait 73). Russell’s only daughter, Katharine, was educated at the school and wrote, “One of the most important aspects of the school, for my parents, was its sexual freedom. . . . [W]e were free to say anything we liked about sex, to ask any question and to compare ourselves with members of the opposite sex without concealment” (95). In his *Autobiography*, Russell suggests “the school gave nothing in return for the grief it caused” (98). His daughter calls it “an emotional disaster” (99). Because of his controversial views on free sex it was “decided he was not a fit person to instruct the young,” and

he was terminated from his professorship at the City College of New York in 1940. He authored a vicious attack on Christianity titled, "Why I Am Not a Christian." He taught his children and others that "mankind was no more than an accident of evolution" (178). In *My Father Bertrand Russell*, Katharine answered, "What was it like, having Bertrand Russell for a father?" (xi). She wrote:

My father was a notably irreverent and mischievous man, not above using his children to provoke people in ways that would not be quite acceptable from conventional adults. . . [W]hen we traveled more by car, he suggested that we might lean out of the windows when we passed other cars and shout out: "Your grandfather was a monkey!" This was to convince them of the correctness of Darwin's theory of evolution. . . . (4)

Russell believed, in spite of his atheism, that "parents must begin teaching the child with its very first breath that it has entered into *a moral world*" (59, emp. added). However, the moral failure of his (and all) unbelief is evidenced when Katharine wrote concerning moral responsibility that she might say as a child: "I don't want to! Why should I?" To which, she said, "a conventional parent would reply: 'Because I say so . . . your father says so . . . God says so. . . .'" However, Russell would answer, "Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don't." "So what? I don't care about other people," He would answer, "You should." She rejoined, "But why?" His answer: "Because more people will be happy if you do than if you don't." Tait then observed: "We felt the heavy pressure of his rectitude and obeyed, but *the reason was not convincing-neither to us nor to him*" (185, emp. added).

In an 1886 work, *The Influence of Scepticism on Character*, William Watkinson set forth the obvious failure of unbelief morally. He stated:

The testimony of history to the fatal effect of scepticism on character is very clear. . . . History shows in bold characters none may misread, that ***when a people does not like to retain God in their knowledge***, and construe the science of life into a science of indulgence, ***character rapidly declines***, and with [out] character all the glory of man descends into the dust. (19-20, emp. added)

The moral failure of unbelief does not provide a pretty picture (cf. Rom. 1:21-32) and, in the words of British atheist, Richard Dawkins: “My own feeling is that a human society based simply on the gene’s law of universal ruthless selfishness would be ***a very nasty society*** in which to live” (3, emp. added). This statement is from a militant unbeliever who misrepresents all religious faith as “a state of mind that leads people to believe something . . . in the total absence of supporting evidence” (330). And yet, what he offers in place of religious faith is ***“a very nasty society in which to live.”***

As I have written elsewhere:

Think about it! Dawkins is accurate in his conclusion. A society based simply on a philosophical viewpoint, which negates God, will be ***“a very nasty society,”*** because it has no objective reference point for ethics and morality. Any, and all, conduct, no matter how reprehensible, could be defended logically because, without God, it is impossible to argue for any objectivity with regard to “right” and “wrong.” “Right” and “wrong” conduct is meaningless terminology without God. . .

. As Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris roamed Columbine High School, they approached seventeen year old Cassie Bernall. She was asked by one of the gunmen if she believed in God. She said yes. She was then asked why and “. . .they just blew her away” (Bernall 13). Someone had convinced those two young men that God does not exist, and their actions are the horrifying, but logical, consequences of life without God. If evolution (atheism) is true, then there is no difference between killing a cockroach or a human being. (Pugh 93-95)

Could anything be clearer? Unbelief leaves man without a moral compass. Logically, he is doomed to failure without God, and any society that promotes unbelief is, logically, doomed to failure. This is not to say that all unbelievers see the logical moral implications of their unbelief and live accordingly. In one sense, we can be thankful they do not. You and I would not want to live in a society that consistently followed the moral implications of atheism and unbelief. Some unbelievers are good people, but such is in spite of their unbelief. They are better than their creed, just as some Christians are worse than their creed. But the point is—*unbelief is a menace to morality*. More than one hundred years ago (1905), Fitchett evaluated the moral failure of unbelief and his evaluation is still accurate today. He stated:

According to its teaching, all moral qualities—courage, goodness, pity, self-sacrifice—are nothing better than labels on the jars of a chemist’s shop. A mother is a mere combination of carbon, phosphorus, lime, and water, with a few salts thrown in. The whole interval betwixt greed and love, betwixt the lust that prompts to sin and the conscience that rebukes sin, can be measured in the

terms of chemistry. A few grains, more or less, say, of mercury, make the whole difference betwixt the saint and the harlot. Why, then, should we admire the saint or blame the harlot? (*Logic* 178)

Spiritual Loss

Removing God from the mind also results in spiritual loss. It leaves man guilty in sin, and hopeless in death. Smith wrote, “. . . [A]sk them if in their skepticism, their rejection of the Bible, and denial of God, they have found joy. . . . [T]hey will be unanimous in declaring this, that *unbelief leads straight to pessimism*” (*Stand* 188, emp. added). “. . . [U]nbelief, when it is thought through to its logical and inevitable conclusion, can find room only for deep, dark, pessimism” (Bales, *Faith* 57).

Numerous are the examples of unbelievers who, by their lives and words, show the pessimism of unbelief. Smith claims, “[T]he man who did more to destroy the faith of men in the Bible and in Christ, at the beginning of what we might call our modern age, than any one writer in Europe was Voltaire” (*Stand* 188). Voltaire’s pessimism is evidenced in the following words from his pen poisoned with unbelief: “Strike out a few sages, and the crowd of human beings is nothing but a horrible assemblage of unfortunate criminals, and the globe contains nothing but corpses . . . I wish I had never been born” (qtd. in Smith, *Stand* 188-89).

In 1946, in an obituary editorial, the *New York Times* called H. G. Wells “the greatest public teacher of his time” (qtd. in Smith, *Chats* 187). His *Outline of History* sold millions. His other writings were extremely popular and financially profitable (Smith, *Stand* 196). He called Jesus of Nazareth “the world’s greatest failure” (Wells, *Happy* 20). He viciously attacked Christianity. He suggested that men ought to get together and write a new Bible (Smith, *Chats* 188). However, “the greatest public teacher of his day”

could not teach himself the way of peace and happiness. Wilbur M. Smith calls Wells' final book, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, a work of less than forty pages, "the most despairing cry, the most agonizing scream of utter hopelessness that can be found coming from any intellectual leader of the 20th century" (191). Bales said in this book, "the dying wail of an atheist is recorded for posterity" (*Faith* 74). Wells wrote:

. . . [T]his world is at the end of its tether. . . .
[T]here is no way out or round or through. . . . It is the end. . . . "Life . . . a tale told by an idiot . . . signifying nothing. . . ." It passes, and presently it is vague, indistinct, distorted and at last forgotten for ever. . . . "Golden lads and lasses must, like chimney sweepers, come to dust." "No," says this ingrained streak of protest: "there is still something beyond the dust." But *is* there? There is no reason for saying there is. . . . There is no way out or round or through. . . . After all the present writer has no compelling argument to convince the reader that he should not be cruel or mean or cowardly. Man must go steeply up or down and the odds seem to be all in favour of his going down and out. . . . Ordinary man is at the end of his tether. (*Tether* 1, 4, 10, 14-15, 18, 30)

The philosophy of life that dismisses God, and a religious outlook, fails to provide one with purposeful fulfillment in life. The atheistic psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud branded faith in God as a form of mental disorder that he predicted humanity would outgrow (Glynn 57). However, Freud's disciple-turned-rival, Carl Jung, observed that every one of his patients in the second half of his life fell ill because of a loss of a religious outlook in life and none was healed who did not regain such (69). Just

here, I am reminded again of the noted atheistic philosopher Bertrand Russell and his daughter's observations about her father's life. She said:

I believe myself that his whole life was a search for God. . . . Somewhere at the back of my father's mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it. He wrote of it in his letters during the First World War, and once he said that human affection was to him "at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God". . . . I picked up the yearning from him, together with his ghostlike feeling of not belonging, of having no home in this world. (Tait 184-185)

Eternal Loss

The ultimate loss that occurs when man removes God from his mind is eternal in nature. Mitchell has summarized the worst thing that happens when man refuses to acknowledge God:

[I]t . . . freezes all the finer emotions and feelings of the human breast. It wraps up man in the mantle of exclusive and all engrossing selfishness. It causes him to regard himself as a piece of mere organized matter. It produces the utmost apathy towards the feelings and interests of others. It argues a cold heart, and a heart something worse than cold. . . never fails to rob his fellow being also of his confidence in God and of his prospects of immortality; the cruellest deed of which a human being can be capable. For, take from a man his gold, or his possessions, or his reputation, or his liberty, or his very temporal existence, great and

distressing as these evils appear, they are as a drop of the sea in comparison of taking from him *that*, the loss of which, the universe cannot make up. (408-09)

Paul described this eternal loss that comes to all who refuse to acknowledge God. Because they know not God the following will be experienced by them:

. . .[W]hen 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, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2 Thess. 1:7-10)

The *destruction (olethros)* in the preceding text (verse 9) is the ultimate result of removing God from the mind. It is “the loss of all that gives worth to existence” (Moulton and Milligan 445). Rogers says, “The word does not mean annihilation. . .” (483). The “unbelieving” will have “their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Rev. 21:8) where “they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). **THIS** is the ultimate failure of unbelief that Jesus Christ described as “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-48). Unbelief results in the eternal loss of the soul. Jesus said if we die in our sin “where I go you cannot come. . . [I]f you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:21, 24).

[NOTE: For a more in-depth study of the above see: Pugh, Charles C. III. *Life's Greatest Acclamation—God*. New Martinsville: Threefold, 2006.]

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Biographical Sketch

Charles C. Pugh III is in his 41st year of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He is one of the founders of West Virginia School of Preaching where he serves as an instructor. He has studied and taught for more than 30 years in the field of Christian Apologetics and teaches three apologetics courses at WVSOP. He is in his 21st year of working with the Bridge Street Church of Christ where he did the pulpit work for 15 years. Since 1999, due to a vocal fold disease, much of his work has been concentrated in the areas of writing and publishing. He is the author of several books and tracts and owner of Threefold Publications. He preaches several gospel meetings yearly and appears on various lectureships. He and his wife Sharon have two daughters, one son, a granddaughter and grandson.

THE SIN OF ADULTERY

Winford Claiborne

You cannot be unaware of the great number of divorces that occur in the United States every year. In 1890 the United States government first began to keep statistics on divorce. That year the total number of divorces in our nation was 5,000. Fewer than ninety years later, there were 1,000,000 divorces in America. There were 2,223,000 marriages in 1976 and one million divorces. In some cities, like Memphis, Tennessee, there were more divorces in that year than there were marriages. But even in some small cities, like Elijay, Georgia, for example, there were more divorces that year than there were marriages.

We see evidence in the lives of many of our young people that divorce is one of the greatest tragedies known to man. I am aware that divorce is sometimes unavoidable, but it is still devastating to millions of children and young people. But divorce not only affects the children of our country; it also adversely affects society. Dr. Judith Wallerstein's research shows conclusively that many children never get over their parents' divorce. Parents must do all within their power to prevent divorce. When men and women bring children into this world, they have the sacred obligation to stay together and to provide a stable home for those children. God will hold them accountable for failure to take care of their children.

I know you have wondered, as I have, why at this particular time in our history divorce has become such an enormous problem. There are probably many reasons – maybe even more than we know – but one of the major reasons pertains to the proliferation of adultery in American society. Television, the movies, popular books and magazines glorify adultery. I have read that adultery

occurs every thirty minutes on the soap operas. Tragically and inexplicably, some churches fail to condemn adultery. Adultery is almost a status symbol in communities.

Adultery means unfaithfulness to the marriage vows. Infidelity is a synonym of adultery. The scriptures discuss both physical adultery and spiritual adultery. Our Lord spoke specifically of physical adultery when he declared: “It has been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her who is divorced commits adultery” (Mt. 5:31-32). Christ also taught that lust – and not just the physical act – constitutes adultery. “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Mt. 5:27-28). According to Jesus Christ, it is not only wrong to commit adultery; it is wrong to think adultery. Besides, adulterers are not going to inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

The Old Testament speaks at length about spiritual adultery, that is, about a person’s turning from the true and living God to serve idols. Jeremiah says very bluntly to the Israelite people: “And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks” (Jer. 3:9). The key to understanding the beautiful book of Hosea is the word “whoredom” or “harlotry.” God commanded Hosea: “Take unto you a wife of whoredom: for the land has committed whoredom, departing from the Lord” (Hos. 1:2). The expression, “departing from the Lord,” tells us what the prophet had in mind when he used the word “whoredom” or “adultery.” God pled with the Jewish people to return to their husband – the living God – and cease to be unfaithful to him.

The apostle Paul teaches that when a Christian forsakes the gospel of Christ and embraces any other religious system – including the Mosaic covenant – he becomes unfaithful; his is guilty of spiritual adultery. Romans 7 makes that truth abundantly clear. “Do you not know, brethren, (for I speak to them who know the law), how that the law had dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law of her husband so long as he lives; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she is married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man” (Rom. 7:1-3).

Please listen to Paul’s application of these truths.

“Wherefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that you should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom. 7:4).

Anyone who leaves the church of the living God and returns to the world is guilty of spiritual adultery. By the same token, if we forsake Christ and embrace the New Age movement or Eastern religions or man-made religions, we are committing spiritual adultery or harlotry. Such language may seem harsh to some, but that is precisely what both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach. This shows just how serious it is to turn from the holy commandment that has been delivered to us (2 Pet. 2:21). Although Jeremiah does not use the word “adultery” in the following passage, there can be no doubt about his meaning. “My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed to themselves cistern, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13).

Modern attitudes toward physical adultery create an atmosphere where sexual immorality – and not just adultery

– proliferates. A few examples of modern beliefs about sex will provide some insight into the sexual immorality that pervades our culture. Lester Kirkendall, an American sociologist, wrote a little book he called *A New bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1976). Dr. Kirkendall is a secular humanist and a professor of marriage and family courses at Arizona State University. He argues: “Sexual values and sex acts, like other human values and acts, should be evaluated by whether or not they frustrate human fulfillment” (pp. 16-17). And who has the wisdom and the foresight to determine whether certain sex acts frustrate or enhance human fulfillment? If individuals are operating under the pressure of their hormones, how likely are they to use good judgment about their conduct?

Dr. Kirkendall believes every one “needs to have autonomy and control over his or her own sexual functioning.” He maintains: “Until now our bodies have been in bondage to church and state, which have dictated how we should express our sexuality” (p. 23). I certainly agree with Dr. Kirkendall that each person needs to exercise control over his or her sexual functioning, but how is a person going to do that unless he has a standard to know what is proper and what is not? But what if everyone in the universe actually had total autonomy? Can you not understand that sexual chaos would prevail, as it does in some segments of our society even now? Kirkendall and his fellow humanists are asking for total control over their sexual behavior when they have no norms to tell them how they should operate. They are asking for the impossible.

Robert Baker and Frederick Elliston edited a book with the title, *Philosophy and Sex* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1975). One chapter in the book, “Is Adultery Immoral?”, written by Richard Wasserman, affirms: “To begin with it I doubt that there are many, if any, *necessary* conditions for marriage; but even if there are, a

commitment to sexual exclusivity is not such a condition” (pp. 206-207). In the same book, Frederick Elliston wrote a chapter, “In Defense of Promiscuity.” Elliston maintains that when promiscuity hurts no one it “may be defensible simply on the grounds that it provides pleasure” (p. 225). Hitler’s murder of six million Jews almost certainly provided pleasure. Were his abominable acts justified because they provided pleasure? Is sexual abuse of children justified because it provides pleasure?

Carol Tavris and Susan Sadd wrote a book in 1977 with the title, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York: Delacorte Press). Included in that book is a poem by Peter Devries. The poem, “I Hear America Swinging,” is based on Walt Whitman’s poem, “I Hear America Singing.” The poem promotes the most immoral kind of sexual behavior. A few lines from the poem provide insight into the vulgar ideas Tavris and Sadd advocate. “Every man taking unto himself a wife, no matter whose, Every woman taking to herself a husband, no matter whose...None caring who does what to whom so long as it is done free and swinging” (pp. 107-108).

The conclusion to the book by Carol Tavris and Susan Sadd reads: “Sex outside marriage, once thought to doom the family unit, is now regarded as having positive as well as negative effects.” Some of those who engage in extramarital sex often list the benefits from such behavior. It lessens feelings of resentment that one is missing some blessing or pleasure that marriage does not provide. It makes a person feel alive and attractive. Those feelings are supposed to translate into a greater sexual relationship within marriage. “It makes an unpleasant marriage tolerable, if the spouses don’t agree to divorce because of religion, children, or finances” (p. 135). Such conduct should make a person know he is behaving like a barnyard animal – not like a decent, God-fearing human being.

No person in America has been more responsible for such attitudes than Joseph Fletcher, the infamous situation ethicist. In his most famous book, *Situation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), Fletcher insists there are no absolutes. Please listen to this former professor of Christian Ethics: “But if people do not believe it is wrong to have sex outside marriage, it isn’t, unless they hurt themselves, their partners, or others” (p. 140). And what human being is wise enough to know if a given act will hurt oneself, one’s partner or others? Only the God of heaven has such knowledge. He said a long time ago: “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14). Jesus Christ taught that it is even wrong to think adultery (Mt. 5:27-28).

I have a question for you to consider: What are the causes of adultery? I may not know all the cause of adultery, but I will examine some of them. It is my considered opinion that the basic cause of adultery is either ignorance of or disrespect for the law of almighty God. I have no doubt that other elements contribute to sexual infidelity, but this is unquestionably a major element. The statements I have read to you from Lester Kirkendall, Frederick Elliston and Joseph Fletcher reveal that these men have no knowledge of God’s word as it relates to adultery or they have no respect for the Bible. In the case of these particular writers, they do not care what God says about any topic. They are all humanists and deny explicitly that God exists. But think of the influence these men have on the lives of countless young people and on the homes of America. Is there a relationship between such teachers and the dissolution of American homes?

But the secular humanists are not the only ones who either do not know or simply choose to ignore what the scriptures teach about adultery. There are preachers in most denominational groups who think that God has no right to rule on these matters or what he has said was meant for another age and does not apply to modern men and

women. We are too educated and sophisticated people to need or to heed such outmoded advice. It may have been all right when birth control devices were not available or not reliable, but it makes no sense in modern times. We are beyond those antiquated ways and regulations.

To a great extent parents are responsible for widespread adultery in our culture. They have failed to teach their children. Parents have failed in too many cases to prepare their children for the responsibilities of adulthood. They have not taught their children about sexual values and standards and have not taken them to a church where these truths are taught and honored. When was the last time your preacher opened his Bible and taught what the Bible says about premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality and such like? Do you believe these matters are of vital importance to the welfare of your children? Does your preacher believe that?

Some people know what the scriptures teach about adultery, but they choose to disregard it. Many years ago I was teaching a teenage class during a Vacation Bible School. I mentioned the fact that Peter condemned a certain kind of behavior. One young man in the class responded: "I don't care what Peter said." I am delighted to report that this man has since learned better, but that is an attitude that is more common than most of us would like to believe. Even if one has not read the Bible, he ought to know that when one makes a commitment to his partner for life he ought to live by that commitment.

What does this mean for the church and for Christian homes? It means that preachers, elders and other church members must speak out on the teachings of the Bible – all the teachings of the Bible – even those that are unpopular and irritating. Silence on this or on any other vital topic is sinful. In addition, parents must teach their children and young people about their bodies and about human sexuality. They must model the kind of behavior

God demands of his children. If parents are guilty of sexual infidelity, what can they expect from their children?

Being too intimate with the opposite sex can lead to adultery. There are men and women who cannot keep their hands to themselves. They are too free in handling members of the opposite sex. Even preachers and priests get themselves in trouble by too much hugging and handling. Psychiatrists, psychologists, lawyers, medical doctors, social workers and other professionals often embarrass themselves and their professions by becoming involved with their patients or clients. The transgressions in the area of sexuality often begin innocently enough. The professional may simply reach out to a woman who is hurting a before he knows it, he is sexually involved with that woman. If you think I might be exaggerating, you need to do a little research to prove otherwise to yourself.

I am aware of the recommendations of Leo Bascaglia, the hugging psychologist, but I also know how too much handling of the opposite sex has gotten otherwise good people into serious trouble. We are not pieces of wood or stone that we do not respond to other human bodies. Millions of people are very vulnerable in this area of their lives. They must take extra precautions to prevent hurting themselves and others. This may sound old-fashioned to modern ears, but broken hearts and broken homes testify to the truthfulness of these observations.

A great number of modernistic churches by sponsoring dances have contributed to the downfall of their members and others. Let me ask you to examine yourself in this matter. How can one hold someone else's wife or husband in close embrace without having evil thoughts? Incidentally, most worldly people will admit that their motivation for attending dances is sexual stimulation. Christians will often defend dancing as being harmless entertainment, but most people of the world know better. I have heard such people talk and they make no bones about

their reasons for attending dances. When will those who call themselves Christians learn that we are not to be conformed to this world but are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2)?

Scanty and suggestive dress can also lead to sexual immorality – whether premarital or extramarital. Will you ask yourselves about your motivation for wearing suggestive clothing? How can people pretend to be totally innocent when they wear clothing that is designed to stimulate the sex desires of another person? Is it possible that young women do not know that guys are turned on by shapely bodies that are poorly concealed? If young ladies do not know – and it is possible even in modern America, I suppose – what about the responsibilities of their mothers and fathers? Is there any married woman who does not know? How can fathers be so naïve about their daughters' dress?

How many men and women frequent beaches and other places where others dress scantily strictly for the sun and exercise? You know and I know that some men go to beaches because many women at the beaches wear almost nothing. Can this lead to sexual immorality? Why do hundreds of thousands of America's college students descend on Florida during spring break? You cannot be unaware that Florida becomes one vast brothel when spring break comes each year.

The very first book of the Bible teaches us that we are our brother's keepers. Does that apply to helping him or her remain morally pure? We must as Christians refrain from causing a fellow Christian to stumble (1 Cor. 8:13).

Adultery, as every concerned person knows, adversely affects America's children, the communities where we live and our nation as a whole. It has always been the case and always will be. Should it not be the responsibility of every preacher, every parent and all others to do all within our power to learn the causes of adultery

and to work diligently to oppose adultery and all other forms of sexual immorality? Not only does adultery adversely affect our nation; it will keep the adulterer from inheriting the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Do movies, television programs, popular books and magazines have any bearing on adultery? The barnyard morals that are promoted on television, in the movies, on the internet, in books, in many magazines and throughout our culture contribute to the increase in sexual immorality – whether before marriage or during marriage. Can one view the kind of moral corruption our popular media advocate every day and not be influenced by such attitudes and activities? Our Lord Jesus Christ told his Jewish listeners: “But those things that proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things that defile the man: but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man” (Mt. 15:18-20). Can a person – any person – continually take filth into his heart and not be adversely affected?

Many of the movies made for television as well as for the theaters glorify incest, premarital sex, homosexuality and adultery. One of the great problems we face is this: If we continually watch the trash that television brings into our homes, we become hardened to the influence and to the consequences of such programs. We tend to think that television merely reflects the culture, but it does not reflect the culture of most Americans – maybe Hollywood or New York or New Orleans – but not most of America. But even if it did, should we not make some radical changes for the betterment of our world? Does not God expect Christians to let their lights shine to improve the moral status of our nation and of the world (Mt. 5:13-16)?

Beverage alcohol must be given credit for its share in adultery. I am not arguing that strong drink stimulates the sex drive and causes men and women to become immoral. Alcohol is not a stimulant; it is a narcotic. But it often takes away a person's normal defenses against such behavior. Under the influence of alcohol men and women will often behave in ways that would be foreign to their normal conduct. Could this be what Solomon had in mind when he wrote: "Your eyes will behold strange women and your heart will utter perverse things" (Pr. 23:33)? Alcohol allows a person to behave in very foolish ways, including becoming involved in adulterous relationships.

Beverage alcohol contributes to what one American judge calls "apparent infidelity." By the term, "apparent infidelity," Judge John A. Sbarbaro of the Cook County Family Court refers to those men who cannot keep their hands off other men's wives. When some men drink, they become "touchers." They want to hug and touch every woman who walks into the room. Such men may never be sexually immoral, but they might give their wives the impression they would if the opportunity ever arose. The husband's behavior may lead the wife to doubt his faithfulness to her. Such doubt can drive a wedge between a man and his wife. It could lead to separation and even divorce. Alcohol is a destroyer of marital happiness and of the tranquility that should prevail in all homes.

Adultery may occur when the persons in a marriage neglect their marital responsibilities. I am not arguing that such neglect justifies adultery, but it does explain what happens in some cases. A failure to be a loving, responsive and caring partner – and not just sexually – may lead to infidelity. Husbands and wives – according to the apostle Paul – have a sacred obligation to fulfill each other's sexual desires and appetites. He urged the Corinthians: "Let the husband render unto his wife due benevolence: and likewise the wife unto the husband. The wife does not have

power over her own body, but the husband does: and likewise the husband does not have power over his own body, but the wife does. Do not defraud one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency” (1 Cor. 7:3-5).

Several comments on this passage are in order. The term, “due benevolence,” no longer has meaning for modern readers. Some modern versions render the Greek “conjugal rights.” But the term does not mean “rights.” It means duty or obligation. The New American Standard Bible translates the Greek “duty.” Dr. Hugo McCord translates the term, “what is due her.” The King James Version uses the word “power” in verse 4: “The wife does not have power over her own body.” But the word in the Greek is “authority” (*exousias*). “The husband does not have authority over his own body.” A decision to interrupt intimate sexual relations for a time must be “with consent.” The Greek word translated “consent” is *sumphonou* from which we derive our word “symphony,” which literally means to sound together. The Greek word means mutual agreement or mutual consent. Paul commanded the married couple to continue their sexual intimacy “lest Satan tempt you for you incontinency.” The word “incontinency” means lack of self-control. Satan uses every means at his disposal to destroy lives. He knows the power of the sex drive. If a husband or wife denies the sexual privilege to one’s spouse, it might create a situation where the spouse would seek sexual satisfaction outside the marriage bond. Does that justify sexual infidelity? Absolutely not, but it explains the rationale of some unfaithful spouses.

There is a temptation for all of us to become complacent, indifferent and unconcerned about our marriages. We become so involved in our businesses or in our professions or in our recreational activities that we

neglect our married partners. We take our husbands or wives for granted and think that our marriages will continue to function and be fulfilling without any effort on our part to keep the romance alive in our relationships. It would be strange indeed if this were true. It is not true in any other phase of our lives. We must make an effort to keep love alive. How beautiful to see couples who have been married forty, fifty and even sixty years and still very much in love! I know God expects us to make our marriages exciting and fulfilling and permanent.

When marriages run into trouble, it is not unusual for the spouses to decide to have a baby to strengthen the relationship and to save the marriage. There are some very serious problems with that decision. It usually does not work. In addition, babies deserve to be born into a stable and loving family – not a family that is on the rocks. Tragically, having a baby or another baby may cause the wife to neglect her husband in favor of her baby. In 1952, Dr. Paul Popenoe, a pioneer in family life education, wrote a book with the title, *Marriage Is What You Make It* (New York: The Macmillan Company). Dr. Popenoe's book includes a chapter entitled, "Give Your First Child Second Place" (pp. 129-136). Dr. Popenoe was arguing that a wife must not neglect to keep her romantic interest in her husband alive or it could weaken the marriage.

About the time Dr. Popenoe's book was published, I took my only formal college course in marriage and the family. The teacher in the course told of his wife's first pregnancy. He said they had been very happy when they learned they were going to become parents. He was surprised when he came home from his office one day and found his wife sitting on the sofa crying. He asked her what the problem was. She explained: "I'm afraid that when the baby comes you will love it more than you love me." That may seem an unreasonable fear, but I assure you it is not. There are countless cases where the father and/or

mother lavished more attention on the baby than on his or her spouse. That attitude and behavior have caused some marriages to fall apart.

There are at least two good reasons why this must not be allowed to happen. As I said earlier, every child deserves to be born into a stable, loving and concerned family. It is good for the child – even when the child is very young – to know that his father and mother love each other more than they love anyone else. Besides, if we are not careful to cultivate our love for our mates and neglect the husband-wife relationship, we may wake up one morning and discover a dead marriage in our own home. Your children are going to grow up, leave your home and start families of their own. If you have not given attention to your primary relationship, you may discover that you have very little or nothing in common anymore. Could this be one of the reasons so many marriages are ending after twenty-five or thirty years?

Modern society's too indulgent attitude toward infidelity has led to an increase in adultery. How can we expect it to be otherwise? James Pike, John A.T. Robinson, Joseph Fletcher and John Shelby Spong have advocated a moral system that encourages men and women to be sexually immoral. I am not arguing that these men openly endorse adultery, but the moral values they support will surely lead to infidelity. You can know for sure that God will hold these theologians responsible for much of the evil that is tearing our nation apart. In addition, the enormous proliferation of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases must be laid to some extent at the doors of these liberal priests, preachers and bishops. Our whole society is saturated with a very loose view of various forms of sexual immorality.

Time does not allow for an in-depth examination of other factors that contribute to the incidence of adultery in our culture, but I must mention three others before I discuss

briefly some of the consequences of adultery. The downgrading of the importance of marriage and the family has had and continues to have devastating effects on every phase of married lives – including our sexual responses to our married partners. Women working outside the home can be and often is a contributing factor. According to *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977), the likelihood of a woman’s having an affair “jumps for women who have fulltime jobs outside the home. Among wives in their late thirties, fully 53 percent of the employed had had an affair, compared to 24 percent of the housewives” (p. 112).

Lack of religion in people’s lives plays an important role in sexual immorality. The *Redbook Report* says, “Only fifteen percent of the very religious women in this sample had done some serious coveting of their neighbor’s husband, compared to 36 percent of the nonreligious wives. Religious affiliation itself didn’t make the difference, but devoutness did” (p. 113). Does that surprise you? If people do not have strong religious convictions, what prevents them from coveting their neighbor’s wife or husband? Faith that God will judge us for our actions will surely put a damper on those who otherwise might be immoral and not just sexually immoral.

Why be concerned about the causes of adultery if it is not really all that serious anyway? Are you aware that some people in our country profess to see no difference between sexual immorality or the eating of food or performing any other bodily activity? There were people in Corinth who held the same unreasonable position. Paul quotes some of them as saying, “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats.” Paul responded: “God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13).

All thinking people know there are consequences of our behavior. What are some of the most serious

consequences of sexual infidelity? By far the most serious consequence is the loss of one's soul in eternal hell. Does the Bible really teach that? It would be difficult to teach any truth more forcefully. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Paul provides a long list of what he calls "the lusts of the flesh" – including adultery – and then says, "They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). The apostle John affirms that all sexually immoral people shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8). We know there are temporal consequences as well as eternal ones. Divorce with all its attendant evils often follows the act of adultery. Can you imagine what it must be like for one's home to be broken, one's children scattered and the church of our Lord maligned because a man or a woman committed adultery? As a college teacher of marriage and family courses, I often heard of the tragedies such stupid behavior brings into other people's lives. College kids are usually between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two and are deeply hurt when their parent's infidelity leads to divorce or a broken home. Obviously the partners in a marriage are hurt by divorce – whatever the reasons for it – but the children are the greatest sufferers. Couples do not have the right to bring that kind of suffering into the lives of the people who depend on them.

The book of Proverbs discusses at length some of the physical and earthly consequences of adultery. Solomon makes a number of observations and recommendations that modern men and women need to hear. "For the lips of a strange woman drip as a

honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold of hell” (Pr. 5:3-5). Those who would seduce you into sexual immorality – whether premarital sex or extramarital sex or any other kind – want you to believe that such conduct liberates you from unreasonable restrictions. They want you to believe you will be free. We would do well to remember the apostle Peter’s words: “While they promise you liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage” (2 Pet. 2:19). The apostle Peter affirms that those who promise sexual liberty are themselves slaves to evil. They may tell you that stolen waters are sweet, but their ultimate end entails bitterness and death.

Solomon warns those who would be sexually immoral: “Hear me now therefore, O you children, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her, and do not come near the door of her house: lest you give your honor to others, and your years to the cruel; lest strangers be filled with your wealth: and your labors be in the house of a stranger; and you mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed, and you say, How I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to them who instructed me” (Pr. 5:7-13)! Solomon has much more to say about sexual immorality. I recommend that you carefully read Proverbs 5, 6, and 7.

If adultery is such a serious breach of God’s law – and you know it is – and if it does such damage to so many lives – and it does – how can we cure it or better yet prevent it altogether? I shall make three biblical recommendations. Everyone – and I do mean everyone – must return to the morality of God’s inspired word. Nothing else will work; nothing else has ever worked. We can have doctors, prominent sports figures, Hollywood

actors and others talking about the dangers of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, but none of this works. We must convince all Americans to honor God's law by refraining from self-destructive actions.

Psalm 119 exalts the beauty and power of God's word. Please take note of the question the Psalmist asked: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" He gives God's answer. "By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:9-11). God's word must be taken into our hearts so that we may avoid any kind of behavior that will destroy our bodies and our souls. As old-fashioned as it may sound, there really is no other way to stop our slide into destruction.

Parents must provide a Christian home background. That means teaching our children right and wrong, taking them to all the services of the local congregation and exemplifying the principles they must follow. Finally, churches must have strong, sound and scriptural preaching on the beauty of marital sex and the evils of sexual infidelity. Too much modern preaching on most topics – and not just on human sexuality – is insipid, humanistic and powerless. So many people in our generation are like the people of Isaiah's day. They demanded: "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth (or pleasant) things, prophesy deceits: get out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us" (Is. 30:10-11).

The only solution to our moral and spiritual problems is to preach the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and then to obey it.

REPEATING ISRAEL'S SINS

Dan Kessinger

How valuable is the Old Testament? According to many of our church members, “not very.” Many otherwise good brethren see little value in the study of what Jesus called “Scripture.” (Jno. 7:38 et. al.) Denominations slander churches of Christ, saying “You don’t believe the Old Testament.” Though it is not true of all of us, it is unfortunately too true of some. Old Testament study is often a tough sell for us, since even some who fancy themselves serious students are inexplicably resistant to it. As one contemplates the various crises in churches of Christ today, the value of a whole knowledge of God throughout his word becomes quite apparent. There is probably more need of this foundational knowledge today than ever. Those swimming against a tide of liberalism sometimes are looking for a quick fix to hermeneutical problems. This kind of a search for the particular New Testament laws that condemn unauthorized practices can be successful, but one of the reasons that liberals have been so successful in having their way is that they prey on those ignorant of the Old Testament. This foundation teaches us **who God is**; it enlightens our understanding of the kind of character with which God was pleased; it also describes those whom God destroyed. But many of our members are shockingly disinterested in learning more about the character and nature of their own creator.

Real competence implies context. In our post-9/11 world, we shake our heads ruefully over a group of flight students who wanted lessons, but only on flying an airliner, not taking off or landing. One can safely say that they were not real pilots. Their actions are a little like those of many of our own students who have no interest in Bible

foundation and context. These say “all we need is to know what to do to be a Christian, and the rules of Christian behavior.” Can a law student skip the basic legal principles developed through centuries of jurisprudence? Should he learn only a technicality that scores big with one lawsuit? Given the sorry state of our legal system it seems that some have done just that. In some jurisdictions, basic justice principles are completely ignored. No doctor is trained to treat illness without first learning basic anatomy, nor would a pharmacist study specific drugs without first learning chemistry.

Why do so many Christians miss this simple lesson? Why do we assume that God is pleased with us when we approach his book with the attitude that we can use it to learn the least amount of truth possible to save us? Why is it that we seem surprised at the worldliness of Christians who have been trained that they needed nothing more than New Testament law?

Would this attitude be acceptable in another context? Those who love baseball are interested in its history and origin. The same is true of a love of music or art. To be more personal, no wife would be pleased with a husband who said, “I never want to see pictures or hear stories from your childhood, because these have nothing to do with our relationship.” She would correctly conclude that such a man was not really interested in her as a person, not to mention the fact that he would be both rude and odd. Who my wife is as a person derives from who she was as a child. Besides all that, since I love my wife, I love hearing about her childhood and seeing those precious pictures. It makes me wish I had known her longer, and I suspect most men feel the same way about their wives.

This admonition is not to say that we are living under any portion of the Old Testament. We do not follow the Decalogue, nor do we keep nine of the Ten Commandments (as most of us have heard claimed in at

least one Bible class). The Christian is to keep none of the Ten Commandments, for they belonged to another covenant entirely. We first need to examine the attitude that we bring to our study of the Bible. Do we really have a love and appreciation for it? While one may obey the gospel and live faithfully to God knowing nothing but New Testament law, such a disciple chooses a meager and a deprived existence. The Old Testament is a monumental and beautiful epic of God and his people. It is entertaining and fascinating reading, but every word is true (Ps. 119:160). There one meets his ancient and departed brothers, not mythical heroes, but ordinary folks who frequently erred. Those errors seem so familiar to us for a very good reason: you and I make the same mistakes. These served a God who blessed the weak who nonetheless believed. Abraham had his share of failings, but he nurtured his faith, and God's testimony was "For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Rom. 4:3).

We cite the preservation of scripture from the writings of Job and Moses onward as a Christian evidence. Do we understand the implications of that preservation? Why would God preserve something that is virtually useless except as a museum relic? The Old Testament provides a foundation for the ultimate revelation of the New Testament. Most students at least recognize the value of prophecies fulfilled in Christ and the church, but the Old Testament provides a more thorough foundation than even this. The character and nature of God, the authority of law, hermeneutics, and a host of other important themes are revealed in the Old Testament. The answer to "what must I do to be saved?" is not found in the Old Testament, but the greatness of the question is enriched there. Only a being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) asks such a question. Only "The God who sees" (Gen. 16:13) can answer it. Only the God who shares the depths of his

wisdom answers (Deut. 29:29). For those who choose to disregard God, the God of infinite mercy (Mic. 7:18) is a force for destruction (Deut. 4:24). Can one ignorant of such riches be spiritually mature? Can one be willfully ignorant of such information about his creator, and yet be pleasing to him?

One who refuses to learn everything he can about the God he serves can never reach spiritual maturity. God could have allowed the Old Testament to vanish into the mists of history after he sent his son and established his kingdom, but he preserved the thirty-nine books for a reason. God always has the very best of reasons for his decisions. The law given through Moses was a carefully crafted and preserved moral code, giving great specificity to a particular group of people for a particular time. The Jews were not like other people. God had overlooked various kinds of error in other people, such as idolatry (Acts 17:30), but of the Jews, he demanded more. Israel was a carefully preserved people for the advent of Jesus and his kingdom.

Our task is to discuss the sins that condemned ancient Israel in the context of Christianity today. Hopefully, we have already established the fact that the laws of ancient Israel are in no way applicable to those of us alive today. Hopefully, we have also established the fact that a mature understanding of God and his plan for mankind is incomplete without this knowledge. The only remaining factor is to emphasize the fact that while we are no longer living under that law, the principles of godliness transcend the covenants. God's character is constant. Man's most basic responsibilities, to believe God and act upon that belief, are also constant through the covenants. The combination of God's character and man's responsibility yields a third great Bible principle: God blesses those who obey in faith while he curses those who faithlessly disobey. Knowing these principles will

discourage our society's constant urge to de-value and disrespect our creator. Knowing God in the Old Testament is a sobering reminder of the consequences of rebellion. No wonder Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

They Created God In Their Own Image

Our study is based on 2 Kings 17, a chapter that includes what I refer to as a requiem for Israel. Eight hundred years of stubbornness is summed up in the description of the sins that lead up to the utter destruction of Israel and the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Creator is a patient God, as evidenced by the fact that Israel had survived for 250 years as a separate entity from Judah. During that time, Israel had not even one godly king. While Judah was little better, they at least had brief periods of semi-faithfulness under kings like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzzah and Jotham. Judah had also experienced glorious religious revivals under Hezekiah and Josiah (and temporarily under Joash). Even the greatest reformer of Israel, Jehu, while a destroyer of evil men, was wicked himself. The patience of God is not only expressed in the passage of time, but also in the sending of prophets.

Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." (2 Ki 17:13)

The first and most obvious sin among Israel is idolatry, mentioned several times in 2 Kings 17 as a root of their destruction. One such example is in 2 Kings 17:7. “For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods.” Though God overlooked it among the nations in the Old Testament, idolatry was always strictly off-limits to the chosen nation. Even before the giving of the law, God had begun to separate his people morally by separating them physically from the rampant idolatry of the ancient world. When we first read of Abraham, he is called to a life apart from his homeland and his entire family in Ur. Why did God call Abraham to such a move? We understand that God wanted him in the land that he should later receive for an inheritance, but was there something about Ur that prevented Abraham’s living there?

Ur (and Mesopotamia in general) was given to idolatry.¹ This probably explains the often misunderstood statement of Joshua in Joshua 24:15. “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” “The River” was a universally known pseudonym for the Euphrates.² Who were those fathers who served gods in Mesopotamia? Was it Abraham himself? Certainly it was at the least his father Terah and the rest of the family. Further evidence of the idolatry of Abraham’s family is seen in Rachel’s stealing of Laban’s gods (Gen. 31:19). Did Abraham himself partake of idolatry? It is impossible to know for sure, but, if he did, he was called to a different kind of life apart from the idolatry of Haran and Ur.

One would presume that with the great emphasis given to the sin of idolatry, the Israelites would not dabble in it. Even the first two commandments of the Decalogue dealt specifically with idolatry, but such a presumption would be a gross error. Only forty days after promising to heed the law given on Sinai, Aaron had already led the people into the sin of worshiping a golden calf. One cannot discount the seductive power of a desire to assimilate to culture, even if that culture had also been the source of cruel slavery. The Israelites were, in part, the product of two cultures (Egypt and Canaan).³ One also must not underestimate the wicked desire of men to make God smaller, lower, and less perfect. This is, in fact, the heart of idolatry; it is everything that faith is not.

To even the casual student of the Old Testament, the extent of Israel's idolatry is unmistakable. Israel served idols in the wilderness; they served them under the judges; they built the Mount of Corruption under Solomon; Jeroboam made Israel to sin with calves at Dan and Bethel. After this the history of the northern nation is nothing but continual idolatry, and that of Judah was little better. God's reaction to all of this idolatry was to send preachers to condemn it. This they did not only on the basis of its violation of God's law, not only because it was a betrayal of the Savior of Israel, but also because of its ultimate stupidity (Isaiah 44).

There is a tendency to think of idolatry as a relic of the past, or at least of cultures very different from our own. However, idolatry proved to be an insidious temptation even among the Jews, those who should have been closest to the real God and his true nature. It is unlikely that it will ever utterly cease to be. Religions that practice the most obvious forms of idolatry, the worship of images, are increasingly popular. Religions that call themselves Christian have practiced idolatry toward religious icons for

centuries. Even those who reject idolatry outright also partake of it.

In the application of the idolatry principle, we would do well to believe and echo the words of Paul who wrote in Col. 3:5 "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Certainly, covetousness is idolatry, but idolatry's curse is wider than just this particular application. One might also correctly conclude that anything that replaces or rivals God is idolatry. It has often been noted that we Americans mostly reject idolatry of the traditional kind, meanwhile, creating idols of our careers, pleasures, status, and even our children. To these idols we seem willing to sacrifice almost everything of real spiritual value.

To get to the heart of idolatry, one must contemplate its view of God. The idolater himself may be confused at the accusation that idolatry offends God. He intends that his physical expressions of a spiritual God honor that deity. Israel seemed convinced of this point of view when they proclaimed of the golden calf, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Gen. 32:4). Thus it was not a different god, not an empty idol, but just an expression of Jehovah, and 3,000 lost their lives because of it.

The sin of idolatry finds its center in an improper seeking of fellowship with God. Paul's sermon in Acts 17 reflected on the irreconcilable chasm between the nature of God and the idolaters attempts to normalize him.

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.
"Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives

to all life, breath, and all things.
(Acts 17:24-25)

"for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.
"Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.
(Acts 17:28-29)

Inevitably, the idolater expresses God in a way that is inferior to his true nature; frequently, the expression is even inferior to the worshiper himself. While God calls upon men to be in fellowship with him, that fellowship is based upon a covenant extended from an ultimate being to one vastly inferior to himself. While he calls upon men to be in fellowship with him, there can never be any doubt as to who God is in the relationship. The idolater seeks a God made in his own image, on his own terms, at his own convenience. In the name of idolatry, he thus dishonors God.

Perhaps the most common current proof of the spirit of idolatry is seen in views of God. The overwhelming majority of Americans believes in God ... or do they? Many of these theists, most members of "Christian" organizations, are no more believers in the God of the Bible than the philosophers of Athens who worshiped an unknown god. Their view of the Bible is that it is true, but only when it is palatable, rejecting huge portions of the Bible that seem to disagree with them. They paint a highly selective picture of Jesus in pastel shades of mediocrity. They even express confidence that distasteful scriptural injunctions must be mistaken since "God wouldn't say such

a thing.” Like Israel of old, they have created a God in their own image.

For proof, note the current religious battles over homosexuality. I select this topic because interpreting the verses condemning this abomination is some of the easiest work found in scripture. Yet, major religions are not sure that God is against it. Which god are we talking about? The God of the Bible surely is opposed to it and has always been against such perversion. The god of the modern idolater is made in his own image, and he would never oppose anyone for choices made among consenting adults.

In a host of other religious issues in America, one can trace the ultimate culprit to the spirit of idolatry; the idolater rejects the face of God revealed in Scripture, and insists that God be lowered to his own corrupt standards. It’s no new development either. The god of “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”⁴ was a caricature; the God of Catholicism is infinitely pleased with biblically condemned practices, etc. Until our generation, perhaps no Western era has known such an unabashed attack on the very nature of God himself.

Religious error thrives because of the spirit of idolatry. People may choose any religion they desire, and God is said to be equally pleased with all of them. How did denominations arrive at this conclusion? Did God express this of his own nature? No, but religious leaders like it, and the god made in their image agreed. One can be saved in any number of ways. Where did the God of the Bible say this? He didn’t, but men like it; and the god created in their own image is forced to follow their orders on the matter. What about worship? Does it matter of what worship consists? No, according to modern popular thought, sincerity is all that counts, and an imaginary idol named “God” agrees.

One cannot overestimate how idolatry depends on the spirit of self-will. The idolater makes a show of humility, but it is a misplaced and selfish sham of humility. He submits to his god, but it is the god he made. The modern idolater frequently uses words like “arrogance” to condemn those who insist that others follow Scripture, but, inexplicably, his creation of a god to endorse himself is characterized as humility. “Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,” (Col 2:18)

They Were Utterly Intolerant of Intolerance

As one contemplates the destruction of Israel in 2 Kings 17 and later of Judah described in 2 Chron. 36, he becomes aware of the devastation wrought by immorality. In fact, the two go hand in hand. After all, if we elevate ourselves to become inventors of gods, how can moral restrictions apply to such as us? The connection between a corrupt view of God and corrupt living is clearly stated in 2 Kings 17:9-12.

Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger, for they served idols, of which the

LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing."

The typical modern reader is comfortably insulated from the horrors of the Canaanite religions. They were not a decent and sincere people worshiping falsely out of ignorance. While they were certainly ignorant, they were anything but decent and innocent. Their religion was a service of horrific cruelty and immorality. Even in the text above there is a reference to the corruption of the land in the form of "high places" and "sacred pillars/wooden images (Asherah). These wooden images were most likely phallic symbols.⁵ Even worse, they were far more than just rather graphic artwork. Fornication was the *raison d'etat* for their religion. As bad as the Canaanite fertility cults were, they also included homosexual rites, and abuse of children as well. As unsuitable as such religion would be for God's people, it not only survived, it thrived. Repeatedly, the land had to be cleansed of those "perverted persons" and their booths of sodomy. (1 Ki. 15:12; 22:16; 2 Ki. 23:7). The "booths" seemed to indicate an all too common progression in such sin. When that which was hidden finds acceptance, it demands that the public embrace it. To the citizens walking the streets of Israel and Judah in such corrupt times, it was impossible to avoid the influence of the openly corrupt sodomites.

As further evidence of the corruption of sexual perversion, consider the case of Israel's war against Benjamin (Judges 19-21). Not only were sodomites openly roaming the streets, but also they demanded sexual access to a visitor to their town. Rather than turn these murdering rapists over to justice, the public felt honor bound to defend them. An entire tribe was virtually wiped out, and tens of thousands among the other tribes died, a ridiculously foolish sacrifice for a few corrupt sodomites.

It seems unthinkable that such religion should thrive among God's people, but it did. Through sophistry, some have attempted to place God's warnings against such perversion on par with his dietary and clothing restrictions for the Jews. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate the foolhardiness of such a comparison is to ask "How many societies did God exterminate because they ate shellfish or wore clothing without tassels?"

'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. 'For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you '(for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled), 'lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. (Lev. 18:24-28)

The Canaanite traditions included more than just sexual perversion. Naturally, they were also brutish in their behavior toward their fellow man. These traditions eventually found their way into the very palace in Jerusalem, as first Ahaz and then Manasseh caused their sons to "pass through the fire" (2 Ki. 16:3; 21:6). The meaning of this practice was quite literal: they burned their own toddlers to death in honor of a false god. How could they do such a thing? The answer, whether 21st Century America chooses to believe it or not, is that one who gives

up the standard of morality is capable of, quite literally, anything.

We are not just observing that we have regressed in the matter of morality. We are also noting that the nature of this immorality is to be most intolerant of intolerance. The problem is not just that open perversion is tolerated and celebrated. In our corrupt America (as in the corrupt eras of Israel) criticism of these activities is to be silenced. In some businesses, homosexual groups are encouraged to openly advertise while employees who formed a pro-family group are threatened with termination.⁶ In some school districts a typical family unit cannot be described as a mother and a father, lest this reflect negatively on “Heather” and her two mommies.⁷

The warning of Revelation against the church at Thyatira seems an appropriate reminder. It reads "Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:20). What exactly is the doctrine of Jezebel? Is it a pagan doctrine of fertility rituals? Some would affirm that this is the case, though I suspect it is not, and that this is more of a spiritual adultery. Scripture bears no record of the original Jezebel's committing fornication personally, though we would not be in the least surprised if it were so. I suggest to you that the doctrine of Jezebel, both the original one and the Jezebel of 1st Century Asia, was the Devil's brand of tolerance.

The original Jezebel was a native of Phoenicia. When she married the King of Israel, one might have expected her to retain her wicked religion. Given her position as queen and the acquiescence of her spineless husband Ahab, one might even have predicted that she would be successful in advancing the cause of Baal. She was in a position to see to it that this intolerable religion,

with all of its unthinkable wickedness, would be tolerated by a weak-willed public. Jezebel's brand of tolerance was to see to it that all of the preachers of righteousness were rounded up and executed. I suspect that the other Jezebel of Thyatira was also most intolerant of those who refused to tolerate her false doctrine.

In 21st Century America, we have moved worlds away from any real standard of decency. What once was "The love that dares not speak its name" has become "The love that just can't shut up." In so doing, we have condemned our nation to eventual failure, since tolerating such open perversion has condemned every great society that has thus far existed. America has forgotten the great proverb "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people" (Pr 14:34).

They were Stridently Screaming Moderates

As we again turn our attention to 2 Kings 17, we note another principle of Israel's destruction throughout the text.

and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. (2 Ki 17:8)

There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger, (2 Ki 17:11)

And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had

testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them. (2 Ki 17:15)

However every nation continued to make gods of its own, and put them in the shrines on the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities where they dwelt. (2 Ki 17:29)

They feared the LORD, yet served their own gods-according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away. To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel. (2 Ki 17:33-34)

As one contemplates the utter corruption of both Israel and Judah, he comes to the startling realization that with all of this rampant ungodliness, the people still considered themselves to be children of Jehovah. In almost all cases, they did not wish to utterly discard him, they just wanted to serve God and the gods. They would not have considered themselves religiously liberal, they were just stridently screaming, compromising moderates.

“Moderate” is not used here in the sense of one avoiding unjust extremes. To be a true moderate, one who avoids the dangers of the right and left hand errors, is a worthy and safe goal. This kind of moderation results in real devotion to the law of God. But the kind of

moderation practiced by ancient Israel turned out to be a sinful compromise between a thimble of truth and bushel of error. Their brand of compromise rejected any kind of real commitment to the law of God and distinction as his people.

Finding the center among all of the beliefs of religious people is no real test of truth. Jack Reese of Abilene Christian University expressed such a flawed premise when he wrote of the various extremes seen among worshipers at a particular congregation.

“Do I have to be upset every Sunday?” The question hung in the air, not spoken with anger but frustration. The woman had kept quiet for at least two years about the changes in the Sunday worship, but she would remain silent no longer. Why were things always being changed? Couldn’t the church just stop for a while and not keep upsetting so many of its members?

The young man sat on the edge of his chair, his arms gesturing emphatically. “Must I continue to sit through services that seem to have been planned in 1950? I dread coming to church and I’m embarrassed to invite my friends.” He had had about all he could take. The hymns seemed irrelevant, the services stale and stuffy. He was already looking for another place to attend.

Both of these complaints were voiced to the elders. The same elders. The two were members of the same congregation! This dilemma can be multiplied by hundreds. It’s a scene played out in church after church. How can we sort

all this out, do what's best for the whole church?⁸

Is Reese preaching real moderation when he presents these two “upset” folks? Isn't it likely that the two are upset for entirely different reasons, one because of God's standards, and the other for selfish reasons? Is the midpoint between two upset people a guarantee of being on the right path? Of course it isn't, and it is hard to imagine that Reese was ignorant of this fact. When Jehu trapped the worshipers of Baal, he did so by selling himself as a greater Baal worshiper than Ahab had been. He stated "Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu will serve him much." (2 Ki. 10:18) Would Reese tell us that the wise position would be to place one's self half way between the two extremes and serve Baal moderately? Finding the mean and median of beliefs is little if any guarantee against error, but modern moderates tell us there is value in all of the extremes.

Distinction was key for Israel, yet it was that very distinction they found so burdensome; it was as though they chafed under it. They longed to be like other nations, even those nations that had fallen before them. While God was calling them to be holy, a word that means different and distinct, they longed to assimilate. While God was calling them to fellowship with only him, they wondered why they could not embrace both the standards of God and of the nations. “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine” (Le 20:26)

Today, the church of Christ is losing its distinctiveness. This is due in part to weakness on the part of many, but others, stridently screaming moderates, have deliberately led us into syncretism with denominations. From within, our critics bemoan a lack of fellowship with other believers, though they must creatively define “believer” in order to make the criticism work.⁹ C.

Leonard Allen wrote that the distinctiveness of the church of Christ is an illusion.

This sense of historylessness works in powerful and subtle ways. In the process it creates exhilarating (and damaging) illusions. Among Churches (sic) of Christ it often has meant that we simply discounted eighteen centuries of Christianity as, at worst, a diseased tumor or at best, an instructive failure.¹⁰

More recently Buff Scott Jr. has also written with great personal conviction of his role as a reformer for all the Christians in all the churches.¹¹ It makes one wonder who the enemies of the church are, if Walling and Allen are its friends (Scott doesn't really consider himself a member any longer). It also begs the question: would Allen consider the Jews ignorant for their trust that they alone were the people of God? Would Walling joke about passing out gloves for Israel that they might hold hands (fellowship) with the sodomites of Canaan? What's wrong with being distinctive? Isn't that still God's directive for his people? "but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." (1 Pe 1:15)

When one begins to surrender his commitment and distinction in the spirit of compromise, there is no real ending point. Since there is no predicting the floating standards of the religious world, today's uncomfortable compromise becomes tomorrow's standard for the church. When compromising leaders say "Don't you worry; we would never go so far as to ...", time inevitably proves them liars. Tomorrow finds them moving again amidst more empty assurances for the day after tomorrow. It is

impossible to stay constant when one surrenders the only sure center in a shifting world.

So it was with Israel and Judah of old. When they began their compromising moderation, few if any would predict just how morally drab that one shining spot of distinction would become. They convinced themselves that they were still the people of Jehovah even after they gave up virtually everything that defined them as the unique people of God, and they suffered the consequences. How complete was their moderation? On at least one occasion a rather interesting small fertility god has been found in Palestine. The one in question is clearly a fertility god, as evidenced by its offensively exaggerated genitalia. The one in question was labeled ...Yahweh.¹² What are we willing to compromise, and where does that road lead?

Endnotes

¹ Charles F. Pfeiffer *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids; Baker Book House, 1973) pp 53-55.

² James Burton Coffman *Commentary on Joshua* (Abilene TX; ACU Press, 1988) p 266.

³ James Burton Coffman *Commentary on Exodus* (Abilene TX; ACU Press, 1985) p 442.

⁴ Jonathon Edwards *Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God* (Enfield, Connecticut, July 8, 1741).

⁵ Op. Cit. Coffman *Commentary on Exodus* p 338.

⁶ A quick “google” search of this incident revealed far more than I could document.

⁷ One such example may be found at the following location:
<http://americansfortruth.com/news/>

⁸ Jack Reese “Worship Wars” <http://cconline.faithsite.com>; originally printed in *Christian Chronicle*.

⁹ Jeff Walling, Taped lecture from *International Soul Winning Workshop*: (Tulsa Oklahoma, March 30, 1990).

¹⁰ C Leonard Allen *The Cruciform Church* (Abilene TX; ACU Press, 1990) p 5.

¹¹ *The Apostate Church/The Authentic Church* (debate) Buff Scott Jr. and Olen Hicks Published by Buff Scott Jr. 2007.

¹² Unfortunately I was unable to locate the documentation.

BIOGRAPHY

Dan is the son of Bob and Doris Kessinger and was reared in Roane County WV. He will recover soon, but he intends to sue the other driver for whiplash. He was semi-educated in Roane County schools, receiving higher education at Ohio Valley College. He knew it was higher because he carefully consulted a map and found that Parkersburg was located 60 miles north of his home. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West have two boys, D.J., and Thomas.

Dan has been trying to preach since 1982. Those at the Dewey Ave. congregation in St. Marys (where he is the minister) will attest that he is still trying ... very trying.

In addition to his local work (including a weekly radio program), Dan conducts gospel meetings and appears on lecture programs each year. He is a frequent contributor to religious journals, and is the author of "A Cloak of Malice." He has worked with WV Christian Youth Camp

since 1984 and West Virginia School of Preaching since 1995.

GOD WILL PROVIDE MY EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Kathy Pollard

The world is seeking fulfillment. Look at the list of topics for this lectureship. In addressing the subject of man's unrighteousness, such sins as adultery, alcoholism, pornography, homosexuality, materialism, and gambling will be discussed. All of these particular "vices" are a result of an emotional emptiness, a thirst for something more. The gambler seeks the thrill of risk. The adulterer is not satisfied with his/her own spouse. The alcoholic is looking for escape. The person seeking after material gain can never get enough. How sad that the world does not know how to find happiness! They will never find fulfillment in those sinful things.

These sinful outlets are not just problems in the world. They are problems in the Lord's church. Christians have emotional needs, too, and sometimes we neglect to seek fulfillment from the Word. We may let our relationship with our Father grow a little cold. Then, when that empty hole becomes noticeable and painful, we often turn to those same things that the lost world indulges in. Why is that? Maybe it is because those thrills are seen as a quick fix, an immediate source of emotional fulfillment. Perhaps it is simply that we are too weak to trust in our Creator. It is much easier to swallow Satan's promises of satisfaction.

We need to be reminded that God is the giver of all good things. One of His names, Jehovah-Jireh, even means, "God will provide." If we rely on Him to supply our emotional needs, we will be less likely to fall into an

addictive sin habit. Most emotional needs we have fall under one of four categories: Love/ Care, Peace/ Security, Comfort, and a feeling of being Needed/ Useful.

God Provides Love/Care

It is hard to imagine a love as great as God has for us. Paul even prayed that the saints would be able to comprehend it (Ephesians 3:18-20). We should strive to be daily mindful of the blessing of God's love.

God's love is wonderful because He loves us when we are unlovable. He loves us in spite of the fact that we do not always act as we should. God even loved us while we were still sinners (Romans 5:6-8). Jack Wilhelm said, "There's nothing appealing about us on our own, nothing appealing about sinful weaklings." In Mark 10, we read of a young man close to doing the will of God, but his possessions hindered him. In verse 21, Jesus was about to tell him what he lacked, and it reads, "Jesus, looking at him, loved him."

Man's love is sometimes fickle. It may last only for a season, or be lessened by a word or deed. God's love is eternal and everlasting. Look at Psalm 136. All twenty six verses read, "His mercy endures forever!" God is not compassionate and caring only when He feels like it. He cares about us always.

An unknown author wrote what God's love really means for you and me. It is a quite lengthy piece, so only portions of it will be shared here.

Because God loves me...

~He is slow to lose patience with me.

~He takes the circumstances of my life, good and bad, and uses them in a constructive way for my growth.

~He does not belittle me as His child in order to show me how important He is.

~He is for me. He wants to see me mature and develop in His love.

~He does not send down His wrath on every little mistake I make.

~He does not keep score of all my sins and then remind me and accuse me of them whenever He gets the chance.

~He keeps on working patiently with me even when I feel like giving up.

~He disciplines me in such a way that it is hard to understand the depth of His concern for me.

~He never forsakes or betrays me, even though many of my friends might.

~He stands with me when I have reached the rock-bottom of despair, when I see the real me and compare that with His righteousness, holiness, beauty and love.

Paul said it this way, “For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God” (Romans 8:38,39, NKJV).

God Provides Peace/Security

On any given evening, you might turn on the news and hear stories of terrorist attacks, credit card fraud, school shootings, or kidnappings. If you have a flight the next morning, you will need to go on-line to find out the

latest guidelines for packing in order to get through airport security. Then, you can finally head to bed, after you lock the doors and set the alarm on your home security system.

Sleep does not come, though, because your mind is full of questions. How are you going to get out of debt? Why is your marriage less than great? What if your children do not remain faithful when they leave home? What if your employer decides to downsize the year before you retire? Cares and worries cause you to have a restless night. If only you could relax and know that everything will be alright. If only you had some kind of guarantee, some kind of security. If only you had peace.

“The Lord will bless His people with peace” (Psalm 29:11). God understands our fears. He even tells us how we can truly be secure. “Whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil” (Proverbs 1:33). The “me” in this verse is “Wisdom” (see verse 20 of the same chapter). Notice what else happens when we listen to wisdom.

Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; For the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught. (Proverbs 3:23-26).

There is an “if ... then” passage in Proverbs 2:1-5. Concerning wisdom and understanding, we are given a promise. IF we receive it, treasure it, apply it, seek it, and search for it, THEN we will find the knowledge of God. What does that have to do with peace and security? The

next few verses (Proverbs 2:6-15) assure us that the Lord gives wisdom and He *shields, guards, and preserves* the way of His saints. His wisdom will *keep* us and *deliver* us from those who walk in darkness, whose ways are crooked. We can relax in the safety of God's care for our souls. "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:6). We do not have to fear because man cannot touch our souls (Matthew 10:28).

On your next sleepless night, remember "a prayer and a psalm." Prayer is better than warm milk. When we pray, the peace of God will guard our hearts (Philippians 4:6,7). And the psalms are filled with promises of God's protection. Try Psalm 121.

God Provides Comfort

Many turn to vices to escape pain and suffering. Alcohol helps one "forget," and cigarettes calm the nerves. Even Christians sometimes turn to these solutions when faced with an unfaithful spouse or the death of a loved one. We may assume that we will turn to God for help in times of sorrow, but then the overwhelming feelings of loss may cause us to falter. How can we be reminded to lean on our Heavenly Father?

We can look to those characters in the Bible who suffered so greatly. What did they do? How did they cope? Why did they not give up? There are many examples of righteous men suffering. David, Job, Paul, and even Christ experienced pain.

Listen to David, a man after God's own heart, cry out in his grief. "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, if only I had died in your place, O Absalom, my son, my son" (2 Samuel 18:33). "I am troubled, I am

bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long (v.6). I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart (v.8). For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me.”

Righteous Job lost his family, his wealth, and his health. “I have sewn sackcloth over my skin, and laid my head in the dust. My face is flushed from weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death” (Job 16:15,16).

Paul suffered much as a missionary. He was beaten numerous times, stoned, shipwrecked, weary, sleepless, hungry, thirsty, cold, and naked (2 Corinthians 11:24ff).

Even our sinless Savior suffered. “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?” (Psalm 22:1).

The Bible warns that “ALL who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). It might be a little depressing if we stopped right here, but God offers to comfort His people. We can look again at those same righteous men who cried out in their pain and this time notice their reliance upon their Father.

Remember David’s pain? He also wrote one of the most widely used psalms. “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4). “Blessed be the Lord because he has heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him and I am helped” (Psalm 28:6,7).

Job called his friends “miserable comforters” (16:2), and so he “poured out his tears to God” (16:20). What happened? According to Job 42:10-17, he received

twice as much as he had before. His brothers, sisters, and acquaintances fellowshipped with him. The Lord blessed the latter days of him more than the beginning. He had the most beautiful daughters in the land. He saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. He died, old and full of days.

In the same letter that Paul listed his persecutions, he also wrote of his hope. “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8,9).

When Christ prayed in the garden, an angel appeared to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). After He arose, He said, “I am ascending to My Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God” (John 20:17). He was also able to say to His disciples, “Peace be with you” (John 20:21,26).

All of these righteous men turned to God in their time of trouble. God comforted them and helped them through their trials. He also wants to comfort us when we go through pain and suffering. “The righteous cry out and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:17,18).

God Provides a Feeling of Being Needed/Useful

Have you ever felt useless? Lost? Without purpose? Or maybe you feel like you are just treading water. Maybe you are struggling with Empty Nest

Syndrome, and you are still trying to figure out what to do with your time. None of us should feel worthless! No matter our age or station in life, we are needed.

God has provided a purpose for each of us. It is up to us to recognize it and fulfill it. Each day needs to be filled with serving the Lord, laboring in His kingdom. When concentrating on that, we will not feel empty or as if our life is futile.

What does God want us to do? It is up to us to spread His Word (Mark 16:15). We are to encourage the saints (Hebrews 10:25). We are to worship God (John 4:24). We are to glorify God by our good works (Matthew 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31). We are to alleviate the burdens of others (Matthew 25:34-40). All of these things take determination, time, and effort. If we yield to God, He can use us to accomplish many mighty and wonderful things.

Not only does God understand our need to feel useful, but He also knows it is good for us. There was an aqueduct built by the Romans in 109 AD. For nearly 2000 years, it carried refreshing water to the hot and dusty. Around the turn of the 20th Century, some felt that the aqueduct should be preserved for posterity and relieved of its toils. They built a new pipe next to it and set up a memorial sign in honor of the aqueduct. Sadly, the hot sun and arid weather soon dried it up and it crumbled. The running water that served so many was what kept it from decaying. As long as we are busy serving others, we will continue to be useful. If we sit around complaining about not having anything to do, we will become rusty and worthless.

God knows that being useful helps us to grow. When we are visiting shut-ins, feeding the poor and

teaching God's Word, we will become too much like Christ to spend time twiddling our thumbs or feeling sorry for ourselves. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

A USEFUL VESSEL
(Author Unknown)

It's not what we keep but what we share,
Not what we have but what we spare,
Not what we clasp but what we loose,
Not what we hide but what we use.
A vessel He will make of you,
If small or great, 'twill surely do.
Great joy and peace will always fill
The one who's yielded to His will.

Our emotions come from the heart. Let us trust in God to take care of our needs, for He is greater than our hearts. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5,6).

RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTS A NATION

Steve Snider

I have to admit that I have struggled some in my efforts to decide what direction I wanted this lesson to take. I have heard many preachers and teachers take passages written to Israel in the Old Testament and apply them to America. I am not convinced this is always a legitimate way to approach such passages. Israel was the chosen people of God, and it seems to me the parallels for today would be to the church, God's chosen people today. However, the passage I have been assigned, Proverbs 14:34, does apply to America! In fact, it is a blanket statement to any nation! Proverbs 14:34 reads, ***“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”*** The truth contained in this verse holds true for any nation today. History is littered with nations that have failed because of their refusal to follow these principles. You can think of the Egyptian Dynasty, Babylon, Greece, the Roman Empire, the Soviet Union, etc. History confirms the principle that a nation's true greatness is not based on its numbers, its military, or political structure, or is it a nation's intellectualism, progress, or cultural greatness that determines its true greatness. What determines a nation's greatness is its private and public conduct. Whether a nation's conduct is in accordance with the standards of God and according to His moral guidelines will determine its greatness. It is righteousness that will elevate a nation to a place of prominence. Ps. 33:12 teaches, ***“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”*** The United States is certainly no exception to the principles of Prov.14:34. It will be our goal, then, to examine the simple truth of Prov. 14:34 and see how it applies to America today.

As we begin our study, we want to consider first what is meant by the word “righteousness.” The word “righteous” goes back to a root word meaning “to move in a straight line.” Thus, righteousness means the “straight (or right) way.” The Bible teaches us that God is righteous. Ps. 11:7 and Ps. 145:17 both state, **“the Lord is righteous.”** Ps. 97:2 states **“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.”** The Psalmist also proclaims that God’s word is righteous: **“the righteousness of your testimonies is everlasting”** and **“all your commandments are righteous.”** (Ps. 119:144, 172) It would seem from these verses that a nation is righteous when it seeks to honor the God of scripture by applying His righteous standard (His word) to every aspect of the nation’s interests. Righteousness is simply a right relationship with God that produces right behavior. Righteousness is not merely an idea that will make a nation great; it is a quality of life that will characterize the lives of those who make up the nation. In contrast, turning away from God’s law as the infallible standard of the nation constitutes the “sin which is a reproach to any people.” The wise man would say, **“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint, but happy is he who keeps the law.”** (Prov.29:18) John wrote, **“All unrighteousness is sin ...”** (I John 5:17)

Having looked briefly at the meaning of righteousness, we need next to ask what must a nation do in order to be righteous and thus exalted by God. Since our thought for this lesson comes from Prov. 14:34, I want to look primarily at the book of Proverbs for the answer to the question of how a nation can be exalted.

In order for a nation to be righteous and exalted by the Lord, its leaders must set an example of good living and

good leadership. Listen to these verses, ***“It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established by righteousness.”*** (Prov. 16:12) ***“Take away the dross from silver, and it will go to the silversmith for jewelry. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness.”*** (Prov. 25:4, 5) ***“Because of the transgressions of a land, many are its princes, but by a man of understanding and knowledge right will be prolonged.”*** (Prov. 28:2) In contrast to these verses listen to what the wise man says happens when leaders are not examples of good. ***“When the righteous rejoice, there is great glory; but when the wicked arise, men hide themselves ... When the wicked arise, men hide themselves; but when they perish, the righteous increase.”*** (Prov. 28:12, 28) ***“Like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over poor people.”*** (Prov. 28:15) ***“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when wicked man rules, the people groan.”*** (Prov. 29:2) Having noticed these passages stressing the need for righteous leaders, we now look to Proverbs to see what are the qualities of such a leader. The wise man shows us that a good leader is “truthful” (Prov. 17:7; 29:12, 14), “impartial” (Prov. 28:21; 14:35; 20:26; 31:8, 9), “just” (Prov. 16:10; 20:8; 25:2), “merciful” (Prov. 20:28), “possesses wisdom and understanding” (Prov. 8:12, 14-16; 28:16), and avoids the vices that often ruin leaders. (Prov. 31:3-5) If a country is blessed with leaders who demonstrate these qualities then that nation certainly has the potential to be exalted.

Not only must leaders be good, but righteousness also must be found in the people of the land as well. The book of Proverbs has a great deal to say to man and what his responsibilities are in this world. Time will not permit us to look at all of these in detail, but let me simply list some of the areas the book of Proverbs mentions. The wise

man deals with man's education, his domestic relationships, his social relationships, his economic relationships, his legal relationships, and his political relationships. It talks about man's duty to himself and to others. (It even mentions his treatment of his animals.) In order for a nation to be righteous, man must be living as God would have him live in all of these areas.

Let me give just a few examples:

- 1) Man must be receptive to learning and receiving instruction that will be helpful. (15:32)
- 2) Marriage is to be honored, and children are to be disciplined according to God's standard. (5:15-20; 19:18)
- 3) Man is encouraged to be a good neighbor and a good friend. (3:27-29). He is encouraged to be mindful of the less fortunate. (14:21)
- 4) Man is encouraged to learn a skill and to avoid laziness. He is encouraged to pursue honest labor and not worthless pursuits. (26:14,15; 28:19)
- 5) Man is encouraged to be careful in his judgments and not be guilty of perjury. (18:17; 24:23-25)
- 6) Man is encouraged to obey the government and again do nothing that would pervert justice.(20:2; 17:26)

The most important aspect of man's life, however,

is his relationship to God. In the book of Proverbs (as in the rest of the Bible), man is instructed to reverence God (1:7), keep God's commandments (2:1-6), trust God (3:5, 6), worship God (15:8, 29) and submit to God (3:11, 12). Can anyone deny that a nation whose citizens were living in this manner would truly be exalted by God?

Having looked at these two areas we must then ask, "Is America following a path that will cause it to be exalted?" You may have heard or read this prayer that was offered before the Kansas Senate, but I think it expresses clearly the condition of America today.

"Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek direction and guidance. We know Your word says, "Woe to those who call evil good," but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values. We confess that we have ridiculed the absolute truth of Your word and called it Pluralism. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery. We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare. We have killed the unborn and called it choice. We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable and we have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem. We have abused power and called it politics. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition. We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression and we have ridiculed time honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment ..."

I believe that is a pretty good summation of where our country finds itself today. Please understand that I still believe America is a great country in many ways. Having traveled to India several times, I am very thankful to live in

this great land. I appreciate our nation's concern for the less fortunate, its regard for life (in most cases), our opportunities to speak out about matters that trouble us, our opportunities to be involved in the process that selects our governing officials. However, we must not be deceived into thinking that this is a "Christian nation" that, on the whole, is following after the righteous will of God.

What can we do as God's people today, to try and improve this situation? You may disagree with me, and I admit that I am offering my suggestions here, but I do not believe the answer lies in boycotts, picket lines, marches, and other kinds of public protests. I do not believe the answer is to be found in politics! There may be some value in those, but I believe greater measures need to be taken. What are these greater measures? It all begins with Paul's statement in Rom. 1:16. ***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."*** What we need is a return to the word of God: that inspired, infallible word (II Tim. 3:16, 17) that will guide us in the way God would have us go. We need men who will stand up in their pulpits, who will speak on the radio and television, and will speak forth boldly the message of Jesus Christ. We need preaching and teaching in all these areas that is plain about sin and its consequences, to our individual lives, to our homes and to our nation. (Gal. 5:19-21) We need preaching that is relevant and is not afraid to confront the issues of the day, regardless of how controversial they may be. (II Tim. 4:1, 2) We need preaching and teaching that will encourage self-discipline in the lives of people today. Furthermore, as Christians we need to be setting the example of righteousness before all we come in contact with. (Matt. 5:13-16; Phil. 2:14-16; I Thess. 1:8, 9). We are not the first generation of God's people to live in a secular, godless world where we are in

the minority. Read the Old Testament and learn of Daniel and others who faced the same challenges. The church of the 1st century certainly faced these challenges. Finally, we need to pray! We need to pray for our country, pray for our leaders, pray for opportunities to teach the gospel to lost souls, pray for Christians to be strong in the face of adversity.

In closing let me make reference to a story that I have read many times over the years. In 1831 France sent 26-year-old Alexis de Tocqueville to the U.S. to study its prison system. He observed much more about America than just its jails, and he is said to have written these words:

I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her commodious harbors, and her ample rivers, and it was not there; in the fertile fields and boundless prairies, and it was not there; in her rich mines, and her vast world commerce, and it was not there. Not until I went into the churches of America, and heard her pulpits, aflame with righteousness, did I understand the secret of her genius and power. America is great because she is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.

May God help us as members of the body of Christ to do all we can to help America be good again.

Biography

Steve Snider preaches for the church at Barrackville, WV, and has been there for more than 27 years. He is also one of the instructors at the West Virginia School of Preaching and has been making annual mission

trips to India since 1991. He is married to Dianne, and they have two children, Stephanie and Aaron. Stephanie is a very active Bible class teacher at the congregation at Barrackville, and Aaron is a preacher of the gospel for the Daybrook church of Christ.

STEALING

Frank Higginbotham

When God gave provision for the moral conduct of His people under the Old Testament, he included this stern warning, "Thou shalt not steal." This Old Testament Law was given for the Jews and then later taken out of the way by the Lord. "Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:9-10). This event had been prophesied by the great prophet Jeremiah. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). The Old Law was replaced by the New Testament Law of Christ. This law is just as plain in regard to stealing as the Old Covenant. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). While there are still many thieves in our land today, it is not because they are unaware of God's prohibition in this matter. Stealing is universally recognized as being wrong and rejected by society as a violation of proper human conduct even when the person is not an adherent to Christianity. You may then wonder why we would take the time and put forth the effort to teach on this subject. If all recognize it as being wrong, why study the subject? There are many things about morality that are commonly accepted as being unacceptable behavior that are still being practiced quite openly by many people. We hope by teaching on these subjects we may be able to help hold the line against such practices. On one occasion a young man came to Jesus with some questions regarding his salvation. He

lived during the time that the Old Testament Law was still in force. Notice what the Master told him to do.

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? (Matt. 19:16-20).

The instructions that Jesus gave were a part of the 10 Commandment Law. Included in this instruction is the prohibition against stealing. Jesus pointed out that stealing is wrong conduct. The young man had known that this conduct was contrary to God's Will since he had been a youth. As Paul wrote the letter to the church at Rome, he made it clear that God was not happy with many of the Gentiles. Chapter one of this letter discusses the transgression of the Gentile world. The Jews must have felt rather content in their relationship with God, but they were soon to realize that there were some things that needed their attention. Note this reading.

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of

the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written" (Rom. 2:21-24).

The Jewish person was very well aware of the fact that stealing was wrong, yet they wanted to hold up this standard for the Gentile while forgetting that the law applied to them as well. In general, all men realize that it is wrong to steal, but punishment and control of this practice is still needed. Adam Clark made a very interesting statement in his comments on Ephesians four and verse twenty-eight.

Let him that stole steal no more. Stealing, overreaching, defrauding, purloining, etc., are consistent with no kind of religion that acknowledges the true God. If Christianity does not make men honest, it does nothing for them (p. 1181).

Being a Christian makes it perfectly clear that we must deal honestly and fairly with our fellowman. His possessions are completely safe in our presence.

One of the great parables taught by Jesus has been termed the parable of the Good Samaritan. We are all very familiar with it. A man had been beaten and robbed and left half dead. The priest and the Levite, religious people, had seen and were fully aware of the plight of this man. They passed by on the other side of the road because they did not want to accept their responsibility. The Samaritan, however, had compassion on him and ministered to him. He was willing to give time and money for the care of this stranger. This account is recorded in Luke chapter ten in

verses thirty through thirty-seven. The parable sets forth three different philosophies of life.

The priest and the Levite practiced a rule of life that is very selfish. They had the ability to help but were totally concerned with their own interests and were not willing to share. The philosophy they followed was that “what I have is mine and I will not share it.” Our world seems full of people like this who are more interested in caring for themselves than they are in keeping God’s laws. They think about their needs first and then give consideration to the needs of others. Many times a deaf ear is turned to those who have genuine needs. We can be thankful that not everyone about us subscribes to this way of life.

The second philosophy that is seen in our study is that followed by the good Samaritan. His idea was that what he had belonged to him but he would be willing to share it with others who had needs. It cost him something to hire a room in the inn for this total stranger. He was even willing to give more, based on the needs of this man. There were perhaps many reasons that he could have offered to excuse himself from the responsibility, but he was genuinely concerned about the welfare of this man. It is wonderful to know that some people follow this way of life. We need each other. No one lives to himself or dies to himself.

The last way of life that is seen in this parable is the way of the robber and the thief. His idea was what another had was fair game for him. Even though he did not work for it or deserve it, he still insisted that he had a right to it. Much time is spent by our law enforcement officers in trying to control the person who thinks he has a right to the property and possessions of another. The thief seems to think that if you have what he wants, he has a perfect right

to take it from you. It may involve acts of violence and brutality, but he is willing to take advantage of anyone who gets in his way of having what he wants. The traveler had a rightful claim to the money or possessions he had, but this meant little to the thief. No one likes a thief. Stealing is never justified. The fact that someone has something even in abundance does not mean you have the right to take it. Some attempt to justify their actions by saying the other person has plenty and, therefore, there is nothing wrong in taking it from him. They justify stealing from their employers as they reason that the company has plenty of money and will not be hurt by the action of one employee. This way of life is both hard on the honest possessor of this world's goods and is also hard on the thief. "Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). The thief will pay for his actions. All will give an account for their behavior during this life. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Concealing a theft from an employer has not hidden this from God. God sees us at all times. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). It is much easier to live openly and with a clear conscience than it is to live with a past that will someday catch up with you. It is truly hard to deal with the consequence of a life of transgression. Thievery is not a happy way of life.

Have you ever wondered why people would steal from others? While we do not know all of the reasons, we wish to suggest a few in this study.

Some people become thieves because they have never really learned a healthy respect for other people. If we respect others, we would not take away that which

rightfully belongs to them. As we observe people working hard to provide for their families and to obtain what they need to comfortably live, we develop a respect for their ambition and diligence in meeting their responsibilities. True respect would prohibit us from taking away from others what they have provided. "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). Jesus taught this kind of respect as He spoke with the young lawyer who came asking about the great commandment of the Old Law.

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:35-40).

We would not rob and hurt ones that we love if we loved them as we do ourselves. Any definition of love would exclude us from taking advantage of another person. Love means that we actively do the right things to others. It is more than just a profession of our mouths but shows up in the things we do with regard to that person. How could we mistreat another and say that we are justified in taking from him what we want? This great passage describing our conduct toward others should help us. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). We have paraphrased this statement by saying, do unto others as you would have them do to you. When we steal what they have, how could we think that we are

treating them as we would want to be treated? A proper respect for others would constrain us from stealing from them.

The second reason we wish to suggest that some get into the practice of thievery, is a lack of self-respect. In discussing the proper treatment of others, Jesus uses our respect for self as an incentive for proper action. If we do not respect ourselves, how could we respect others? Proper thinking about ourselves would cause us to want others to look upon us favorably. We would seek the well wishes of our fellowmen. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17). Would you want men to think about you as a thief, or would you rather be respected as an honest, hard-working person? The answer should be obvious. Pick out a person in your community that you hold in high esteem, and then ask yourself if he or she is honest and upright. Would this person that you respect be a person who is a known thief? A thief is not held up in the minds of others and has no respect among his peers. It just makes good sense for us to show respect for ourselves. If we have no self-esteem, we might stoop to taking something that belongs to others. With the proper respect for self, any item of value would be safe in our presence.

The third reason we offer for becoming a thief is that the thief has a completely wrong attitude toward work and its rewards. In the beginning God gave to man the obligation of caring for the Garden. When man sinned in the Garden of Eden, God increased the difficulty of his work by adding thorns and thistles to the situation. This statement explains how man is to maintain himself in his lifetime. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen.

3:19). Through work, God provided what man needed to have satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in his life. It was never God's intention for man to become lazy and to refuse to work. In harmony with this plan, God gave, through Paul, the following instructions regarding work. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). This passage not only points out the importance of work to us, but it also teaches that proper work habits will profit our fellowmen. Notice the plain prohibition in regard to stealing. Even if this has been a part of our past life, the Lord now expects better things of us. Steal no longer but provide honest work as our means of livelihood. Because of our submission to the principles of Christianity, others will also profit from your hard work. This will bring the sense of satisfaction from being of service to others. When some of the brethren began to think of the return of the Lord as being very near, they thought it might be time for them to hang up their working clothes. Paul instructed them that they needed to continue to work for their living.

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (2 Thess. 3:10-12).

We must not provide for the lazy person who will not work. Of course, there are times when people are unable to work, and this is a different situation. Why should the unscrupulous thief be provided for by hard-working individuals about him?

A fourth reason we offer that contributes to a person's becoming a thief is the fact that men sometimes just do not care what God instructs in His Word. Man always gets into trouble when he decides that he does not care what God thinks about his life. Who would know what manner of life will give the most satisfaction for men? Since God made us, would He not know how life should be lived? In the instructions Paul gave to the church at Galatia he gave instruction concerning how we can experience the real joy of a good life. Some things were prohibited while other things were recommended.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

The life that Paul recommended is the life we enjoy in Christ. The thief does not live this way and does not have the joy associated with it. There are no little thieves and big thieves. All stealing is wrong. If you could not trust a man with little things, forget about trusting him with large things. God wants us to enjoy life. This does not include taking things unto ourselves that we have not earned or deserved. The good life is the life that respects ourselves, our friends and neighbors, and above all, God.

Biography

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV. He is the son of A.G. (Bus) and Garnet Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School and Florida Christian College. He is married to Rose Marie King Higginbotham. They were married on June 7, 1954. They had three children, Donna who passed away in 1965, Janie who is married to Brent Gallagher (preacher for the church on Oakwood Road in Fairmont, WV), and Steve who is preacher for the South Green Street church in Glasgow, KY. Frank is currently in his 42nd year of work with the Virginia Avenue Church of Christ in Chester, WV.

ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE

Dana Slingsluff

Since neither one of these terms is found in the scripture, I think it is important for us to define what we are talking about. We are not talking about or condemning all use of alcohol and other drugs. We need to take note - from the very beginning of this discussion – alcohol is a drug. It is amazing the double standard that exists in society! We outlaw and educate our children on the dangers of marijuana and other drugs, and advertise, glorify, tax and promote the use of alcohol. The only difference in the recreational use of alcohol and other drugs is that one is legal and the others are not.

The use of alcohol and other drugs have their place. We are thankful for the discoveries of medical research that has created substances to treat and cure disease and to help those who are so afflicted to manage the pain and suffering that accompanies them.

What we are talking about, by both terms, is the sin of drunkenness. One who becomes intoxicated is drunk whether his intoxication is the result of alcohol or any other drug.

God's judgment and punishment for drunkenness is clearly stated in scripture. In Galatians 5:19-21, drunkenness is numbered among the works of the flesh of which Paul writes, "I tell you before, as I have told you in times past, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

In I Corinthians 6:10, He writes, "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall 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** will inherit the kingdom of

God.” What is the bottom line? Alcoholism is drunkenness and those who stand before God in Judgment as drunkards will be lost.

Alcoholism

A discussion of this topic is complicated by the assertion that alcoholism is a disease. I willingly concede that there are some people who seem to have a greater tolerance for alcohol than others. Some families have much greater incidences of alcoholism than others. But, does this qualify alcoholism as a disease – or rather as the consequences of one’s behavior? Either way you look at it, no one has ever become an alcoholic who did not first make the choice to drink.

Are alcoholism and other addictions difficult to overcome? The answer, certainly, is yes! Alcoholism is an addiction both physically and psychologically. But more than that, it is a spiritual problem. The truth is that **sin** is addictive. Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” (John 8:34) There is no question about it, alcoholism is slavery! May one need rehabilitation or other special therapies to overcome this addiction? I believe we should take advantage of whatever help is available! But the good news of scripture is that God has made it possible for one not only to be forgiven of the sin of drunkenness, but to overcome it as well.

In I Corinthians 6:10, after pointing out that drunkard, along with the other unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul concludes, “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.” By the goodness and grace, and with the help of God, I truly believe that if one repents and gives his life over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, he will be able

to say “I **am** an alcoholic, but I have been washed, sanctified, and justified, I am a **drunkard no more!**”

The Christian and the use of alcohol

It is amazing to me that when you look at all the havoc wrought on our society by the social and recreational use of alcohol – a practice so obviously fleshly in its appeal – that there are Christians who wish to defend its use – in “moderation.” Their argument goes like this. “The Bible condemns drunkenness, but it nowhere states that it is a sin to drink in moderation.”

I don’t understand sin “in moderation!” I really think this is the same argument that the Jews tried to make about keeping the law. The law said, “do not commit adultery.” Jesus said “don’t even lust in your heart.” The law said, “do not commit murder.” Jesus said “don’t be angry with your brother.” Drunkenness is a sin. What do you think Jesus would say about the only practice that leads to drunkenness – the drinking of alcoholic beverages?

Wine in the Bible

Christians often defend drinking alcohol by sighting the use of wine in the Bible. Who hasn’t heard the argument “But Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.” (John 2:1-10) Or that Paul told Timothy “to use a little wine for his stomach’s sake.” (I Timothy 5:23) Of deacons (I Timothy 3:8) and even widows (Titus 2:3) it is said they should “not be given to much wine.” Doesn’t this imply that drinking in moderation is permissible? Does the Bible, not only defend but actually endorse the practice of drinking?

When you look at all the references to wine in the Bible, it is obvious that they do not all refer to that which has alcoholic content. Wine simply refers to the juice that

is derived from the grape. Like our word cider, it could be fermented, but the word does not imply or demand that it is. To know, one must look at the context. There certainly are warnings in scripture about wine – that leave no doubt!

“Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it, is not wise,” (Proverbs 20:1)

“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of the eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Those who go in search of mixed wine.

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. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lays down in the midst of the sea or one who lies at the top of the mast saying, ‘they have stuck 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 23:29-35)

The examples of those who became intoxicated through wine in the scripture tell of its power to cloud one’s conscience and promote conduct that is sinful. In Genesis 9:21-27, Noah grew a vineyard, became drunk and shamefully exposed himself to his sons. In Genesis 19:30-38, Lot’s daughters got him drunk so he would commit incest with them. No wonder the prophet Habakkuk warned “Woe unto him who gives drink to his neighbor – to make him drunk.” (Habakkuk 2:15)

But in other passages, the use of the word wine simply means the pure, sweet juice of the grape. Contrary to the claims of some, the ancients had several common methods of keeping wine from fermenting.

There is nothing in the word or context of John 2:1-10, that proves or even indicates that the wine Jesus

produced was intoxicating. There had already been six water pots of wine drunk at the wedding feast (130 – 180 gallons!). If Jesus had provided that much more intoxicating wine, He would have contributed to their drunkenness! That would have been a sin. (Habakkuk 2:15) The explanation of the master of the feast stated “Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, that which is inferior. But you have kept the good wine until now.” (John 2:10) In the classic sense the good wine was that which was sweet – that which had not begun to turn. The phrase “well-drunk” doesn’t mean intoxicated, it simply means satisfied.”

What about Paul’s advice to Timothy? “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities.” (I Timothy 5:23) The only thing we know for sure is that prior to Paul’s instruction Timothy was drinking only water. The key word here is “use.” We cannot know, from the word or the context, if the wine Paul advised Timothy to “use” was alcoholic or not. We do know that he was prescribing the use of wine for medicinal purposes.

Christians and the use of alcoholic beverages

You cannot equate what was or was not true about the use of wine in the New Testament, to the drinking of alcoholic beverages by Christians – in our time, in our society, in our culture – today! In ancient times wine was often mixed into water as a means of purification – today there is no such need. The natural fermentation of grape juice would reach a level of about 12-14% alcohol. Today’s distilling process produces alcoholic drinks with 40%, 60% or even 90% alcoholic content. These beverages are made for one purpose – because people wish to feel the effects of alcohol. They wish to become intoxicated!

Drinking and intoxication

Of paramount importance to our discussion of the use of alcoholic beverages by Christians is the assertion that one can drink, in moderation, and not be guilty of being drunk! The question is “when is one drunk?” (under the influence of alcohol or any other drug).

Even the world and the alcohol industry understand that this isn't true! A current campaign against drunk driving states “It's easy to tell when one has had way too much to drink, but how do you know when you've had a “little” too much?” Their conclusion, “Buzzed driving is drunk driving.” That is a very telling statement! Why do people drink alcohol? For the buzz! To feel the affects of alcohol! If you drink to unwind or because it “relaxes” you, you are feeling the effects of alcohol. After even one drink, you are one drink drunk! The position of the American Medical Association is “there is no minimum blood alcohol concentration at which it can be said there is no effect.”

But what does the Bible say? “Do not be drunk with wine, which is dissipation.” (Ephesians 5:18) The word drunk (methuo Gk.) means “to make or grow drunken – the process of becoming intoxicated.” Paul is not just condemning the end result of being “staggering around, falling down drunk,” he is condemning the process of “getting drunk.” He is condemning the use of alcoholic drink which leads to drunkenness. Is it O.K., is it even possible to be “just a little drunk?” I think such a statement is contradictory – in the same category as “being a little pregnant!”

Why Christians shouldn't drink – at all

Why would any Christian wish to participate in a practice that so obviously appeals to the flesh? Why would any Christian wish to participate in a practice that leads to drunkenness which is a sin and will keep people out of heaven? People often state, “But it won't do that to me. I can handle it! I can drink and never become drunk.” Can you – really?

Statistically, one of every thirteen people who begin to drink alcohol, will become alcoholics. The Biblical term for alcoholic is drunkard. That is approximately the same percentage of those who died when the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis collapsed this summer. Knowing those odds, would you have volunteered to drive over that bridge? Do you want to do something that gives you a one-in-thirteen chance of standing before God in Judgment as a drunkard and losing your soul?

As Christians we must avoid anything which compromises our ability to exercise self-control. Some defend drinking in moderation as a part of the freedom which we have in Christ. How could it possibly be? Paul stated, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the control of any.” (I Corinthians 6:12) Ask anyone who has a problem or has had a problem with drinking – “Do you control your drinking, or does your drinking control you?” If no other reason could be given to keep a Christian from drinking at all, the possibility of losing your soul should be sufficient.

Other reasons why Christians shouldn't drink – at all

Christians shouldn't drink because the use of alcohol is hazardous to your health. Alcohol is not natural

fuel for the body. The AMA classifies it as “an addictive drug.” As is the case of many drugs, alcohol is a toxin, poison! It has an impact on every cell of the body. Brain cells are destroyed by it. The liver, which filters such toxins from the blood, cannot keep up and healthy tissue begins to scar.

Yes, you hear claims that certain alcoholic drinks, such as red wine, are good for your circulatory and digestive systems. The truth is the same oxidants that are beneficial in fermented wine are found in the unspoiled juice of grapes. Drink Welch’s! All of the benefits - none of the risk.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, which is the tragic result of drinking alcohol by women who are pregnant, causes birth defects and mental retardation. An educational ad states “How much alcohol should a pregnant woman drink? Not one drop!” Why would anyone want to be exposed to the known or possible effects of alcohol? Would you take a little rat poison? In moderation?

“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, you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God’s.” (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

Another reason that Christians should not drink at all is because of the influence our actions have on others. Paul states that a man who is chosen to serve as an elder “must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” (I Timothy 3:7) As part of that testimony it is said that he is “not to be given to wine.” Is our example any less important? Does it serve the Lord or His church well for any of us to be seen in the world, by the world, as one who drinks?

Under the Law, those who were priests were forbidden to “drink wine or intoxicating drink.” Why? “So

they would be able to distinguish between what is holy and unholy.” (Leviticus 10:8-11) As Christians, we are all priests and should abstain for the same reasons.

And what of our influence on other Christians? Suppose you could drink alcohol occasionally without any adverse effects; you could take a drink, enjoy it, then not even consider drinking again for a month or two? But, there is one thing you cannot know – how is your example affecting others?

There was a young man I knew in college named Jack (not his real name). He was a dedicated and conscientious Christian. He was also an outstanding football player. He had grown up playing football in Texas. After practice, the players would go to a teammates’ basement or garage and drink a few beers. He said, “You have no idea of how good a cold beer seems after a day of playing football in 100 degree temperatures!” He had a friend who was also a member of the church and a teammate on the football team. He persuaded him that “there really was no harm in drinking just a beer or two.”

Jack grew up. He realized that the use of alcohol was not a good thing and certainly out of place in the life of a Christian. He never drank again. But for his friend, following Jack’s influence and example, proved to be the beginning of the end. He was an alcoholic by the time he graduated from high school. Whatever potential he had in school, in sports, in life, were destroyed by his addiction to alcohol (“just a few beers never hurt anyone!”) Most tragically – unless by God’s grace and with God’s help that young man was able to repent and overcome his drunkenness – He will be lost. “Woe unto him, who gives drink to his neighbor.”(Habakkuk 2:15)

Why should a Christian not drink at all? “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 14:21)

Conclusion

In a lesson on the subject of a Christian's use of alcohol, Brother Steve Higginbotham offered the following conclusions. "Having weighed the evidences, I am convinced that the Bible as well as medical science state that drunkenness is a process that begins with the first drink and continues to worsen with each subsequent drink. Alcohol, as a drug has its use; but as a beverage, is abused. Alcohol as a beverage deprives, destroys, deceives, and eventually will destroy those who flirt with it."

"Wine is a mocker...and whoever is led astray by it is not wise."

Biography

Dana P. Slingluff was born in Canton, Ohio, to Paul E. and Eleanor Slingluff, on June 1, 1951. He was raised in a Massillon and Mansfield, Ohio. Dana's father served as an elder in the church for nearly forty years. He graduated from Ontario High School in Mansfield, Ohio and Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas. He began preaching part-time while in college.

He began preaching full-time in 1975 and has worked with churches in Caldwell, Cambridge and Reynoldsburg, Ohio and in Knoxville, Tennessee. He has been working with the Camden Avenue Church of Christ in Parkersburg, WV since March 2004. In addition He worked as Development Director for Willowbrook Christian Communities in Columbus for three years.

He has been married to the former Cynthia Albright for 36 years. They have a son Nathan of Nashville, and a daughter Amy Carbaugh of Lancaster, Ohio. They have two granddaughters, ages 5 and 9.

Dana has been active in camp work, gospel meetings, and writing.

SINFUL WORSHIP

Will Montgomery

Introduction

One might ask, "What is sinful worship?"

In order to know what sinful worship is we must first find out what acceptable worship is.

The Bible Teaches That We Must Worship God in Spirit and in Truth

John 4:23-24

23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Would logic tell us that, if there are true worshippers, there are also false worshippers? The answer would have to be yes!

What Does It Mean to Be a True Worshipper?

The word TRUE has the following meaning in the Greek:

“That which has not only the name and resemblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name, in every respect corresponding to the idea signified by the

name, real, true genuine.” “Opposite to what is fictitious, counterfeit, imaginary, simulated or pretended; it contrasts realities with their semblances.” “Opposite to what is imperfect, defective, frail, uncertain; true, sincere.” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance)

The verse goes on to say “True worshippers” will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the father seeketh such to worship Him.”

It is God, through His word, that directs our worship. John 4:24 goes on to say that “God is a Spirit,” and I *must* worship him in spirit and in truth. In order for my worship to be pleasing in the sight of God, it must be according to what God has commanded. It would be helpful for us to define Worship.

The Meaning of Worship

The word *worship* as used in the Bible means to serve, praise, honour, glorify and reverence God or homage paid to God. We are not to worship to entertain ourselves or even to entertain God, but to worship God. In worship we are really not the audience, God is. We must learn that God must be the object of our worship. In Revelation 22:9, the Bible says, “Then saith he unto me, See *thou do it* not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.” The object of my worship must be God. Since creation, man has worshipped everything under the sun and even the sun itself. There are hundreds and even thousands of false gods and goddesses around the world created by man: angels, idols, animals, rivers, streams, planets, stars, and even man himself. Possibly the most offensive of all, is the worship of Satan himself.

Look at what Paul saw on Mars Hill in Athens:

(For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, *Ye men of Athens*, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.
Acts 17:21-29

Can one worship God ignorantly? Paul says “yes” in the verses above when referring to the fact that those on Mars Hill were worshipping ignorantly. Ignorance means void of knowledge.

What Is the Meaning of Sin or Sinful According to the Greek?

“To miss the mark.”

“To err, be mistaken.”

“To miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, to do or go wrong.”

“That which is done wrong, sin, an offence, a violation of the divine law in thought or in act.” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance)

This last definition seems to be the most appropriate to our lesson. We sin and our worship becomes sinful when we violate God’s law in THOUGHT or in ACTION. The Bible is very specific in telling us what acts constitute worship: namely, preaching or teaching, singing, praying, communing, and giving as we have been prospered. Any addition to or subtraction from these acts would constitute sinful worship.

In Romans 1:25, the Bible says, “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.” They changed the truth into a lie. They worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. In 2 Timothy 3:4 there were those who were lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Those today who want to engage in worship other than what is commanded by God are seeking for things that are pleasing to themselves. The Bible teaches us not to direct our steps when it comes to serving and worshipping God. Jeremiah explains that in Chapter 10:23 “O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself: *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Even though the Bible tells us this, it does not stop man from directing or trying to direct his steps. Proverbs 14:12 lets us know that when man thinks or feels something is right then that is what he is going to do. Just because something feels good or right does not make it so. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”

There are some things to consider when thinking about worshipping God. We must worship in Spirit and in Truth. In Spirit means the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, and decides; or the soul. In Truth means according to the Word of God. John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” We also need to consider I Cor. 14:33 as it tells us that God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. If we let man’s idea of what worship should be, be our standard, there would be utter confusion as each man would want to do things in different ways and according to what he thought was good or right or acceptable. Also, I Cor. 14:40 explains further that all things are to be done decently and in order. Can you imagine a school classroom where each student decided what subject he was going to study and how it was to be taught and who the teacher would be? It would be complete chaos, and little or no teaching or learning would occur. I learn from these passages that I must worship God, in the right attitude or frame of mind, from the truth, without confusion, doing things decently and in order, allowing God to direct me through His Word, and I need to love God more than the pleasure that worship as I want it to be might bring me. Further, I need to realize that I am not worshipping God to entertain myself, others, or God. We do not entertain God when we worship; we are paying homage to Him and His greatness.

I am sure that we all agree that Christians are to worship God; the big question, however, is *how* should we worship. To answer that question we obviously need to go to the New Testament. If you will study with me in this lesson today, we will be able to determine the kind of worship God requires. God has given us His Word and His Word reveals His will. This is true no matter what subject we are wanting to learn about, whether it be the Plan of

Salvation, the Church, Christian life, or Worship. We must always remember to turn to God's Word to find out what we must do.

When Nadab and Abihu offered fire to God, it was called "strange" fire. What made it strange fire? The Bible says; "they offered that which God commanded them not." In other words, it did not come from God's word or will. They were burned up for their disobedience. Lev.10:1-2 "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD." As we can see, disobedience or variation from God's word is a very, very serious offense. In this case, it was worthy of death. When one offers God that which He has not commanded, it is STRANGE to Him.

When Cain and Abel came to offer sacrifice to God, one was accepted and one was rejected. Why? Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than his brother, Cain, because he offered it of faith or according to what God had commanded. Hebrews 11:4 "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." Abel offered an animal sacrifice and Cain offered the fruit of the ground. Since Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's was rejected, it is evident that God had given instruction as to what was to be offered. Otherwise, God would have been unjust in punishing Cain for a wrong that he was unaware of, and we know that God is a God of justice.

The Bible speaks of different kinds of worship. In Acts 17:23-28 the Scriptures speak of ignorant worship; in

Matt 15:8-9 the Scriptures speak of vain worship; in Col. 2:20-23 they speak of will worship; and in John 4:23-25 they speak of worship in spirit and in truth. We must worship God in spirit and in truth.

The proper object – God

The proper standard – Truth

The proper attitude – Spirit

Too many today look at worship as entertainment; they have the idea that it has to be something they happen to like. The “I like it” argument is alive and well with many today. How many times have we heard from a visitor, “We love your services if you only had music.” Not understanding that we do have music but it is the type of music authorized in the Bible. Some in the Lord’s church have bought into this idea that we should have whatever “I like” and not what God has commanded. Some in the Lord’s church want to be like those round about them, as the Israelites of Samuel’s time: “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.” 1 Sam. 8:19-20.

The five items or acts of worship set forth in the New Testament are:

Singing Eph. 5:19

Prayer Acts 2:42

Communion Acts 20:7

Giving I Cor. 16:1-2

Preaching 2 Tim. 4:1-2

There are some who are not satisfied with what the Lord has commanded. They want to sing a solo at the Lord's table or practice two acts of worship at the same time by having the Lord's supper while we all sing. Hand clapping has become very popular in some places in the church of Christ. Dave Miller in his book *Piloting the Strait* talks about hand clapping as applause.

Handclapping has also been introduced into worship assemblies in the form of applause. The congregation is drawn into applause following baptisms, sermons, and other worship activities ... Those who are for applause say: "What is wrong with it? I like it! It is just an updated, modern way to say, 'Amen.'" Those who are against applause say: "We've never done it. I'm uncomfortable with it. It cheapens solemnity." ... What is the significance of handclapping in American culture? The primary function of applause is to indicate personal **approval**. (p. 234)

We applaud at sporting events; we applaud for performers, musicians at concerts, actors and actresses at theatrical performances, political rallies, and even for our children when they accomplish something. We clap our hands on such occasions because we like what we see and hear. In hand clapping we say you are good. Hand clapping is an expression of excitement. Applause can be to manifest courtesy.

We need to go to the Bible and ask and answer several questions. Who is the audience in worship? God is the audience in our worship. Does God need my approval? No, I need His approval. If I am applauding for myself, then I have made myself the audience. By keeping John 4:23-24 in mind, we can more clearly understand. Keep in mind that God seeks true worshippers to worship Him. We

must worship in spirit and in truth, and we must have the proper object, the proper standard, and the proper attitude.

We also need to remember Colossians 3:17 that tells us that “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him.”

Another question that comes to mind is, “Where or what do these things lead to?” When one “strange” act comes in, then more and more are brought in. Where does it stop? People want to make sounds with their mouths like instrumental music; when the Bible says to sing, they want to bring in instruments of music. Some want to make every Sunday a special Sunday with some gimmick to draw a crowd. Unfortunately, statistics have shown that when the gimmicks and gadgets are gone, so are the people because they only came for the gimmick and not for the gospel. Matt. 5:6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

A bad attitude might cause my worship to be sinful. There are some who are at every service of the church, but they will not participate. They just go through the motions. In 2 Sam. 24:24-25 the Bible says, “And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy *it* of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.” David said, “I will not offer God that which cost me nothing.” As he bought the threshingfloor and offered offerings unto God, we need to put forth a sincere, earnest effort to be totally involved in the worship service. Many say, “I didn’t

get anything out of worship today.” You must wonder, “What did they put into it?” The sad thing is that those who are there only for show are not fooling God. He knows their heart and their thoughts.

We must participate in worship: sing with the spirit, follow the prayer, listen to the sermon, and partake of the Lord’s supper examining ourselves and remembering His death till he comes. I Cor. 11:28-29 “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

Matt 5:24 “Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” This verse tells us that if we have ought against a brother our worship will be hindered. We need to reconcile whatever differences we have so that our worship will be acceptable.

Sinful worship may also be constituted by our lack of respect for God in the way we conduct ourselves at worship and by what we wear to worship. Sometimes we act like God is not in our midst on Sunday evening or Wednesday evening. Most of us dress as well as we can on Sunday morning but come back in the evening and on Wednesday like we are going to a picnic or sporting event. Sometimes our dress is not acceptable because it is not appropriate to worship the King of Kings. Sometimes our dress is inappropriate due to the fact that it is immodest. Some may disagree with me, but I feel that shorts have no place in the worship assembly. When I am at the worship service, could I go straight from there to the funeral home or to meet the President or for a job interview? It is a shame to dress down to serve a living God and dress up to

pay respects to a dead body. Don't get me wrong; our hearts must be right, but if they are right, then we will give God the very best of what we have. If you are wearing your best then that is the best you can do. We must be right on the inside, not just on the outside. Remember Jesus said in Matt. 23:27 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness."

Look at the church section of your Saturday evening paper to see what is going on in denominational churches, and beware because it creeps into the church of our Lord. I read these recently in our local newspaper: Traditional worship changed to contemporary, this usually means that the dress is casual and contemporary (instrumental, sometimes rock) music. Another one said "Dress - Casual to Grubby." Why would anyone want to dress in a grubby manner to worship their God?

We have many serious issues and problems facing the church in the realm of worship:

- Hand clapping
- Drama and dramatic reading
- Female leadership
- Dedicating babies
- The Lord's supper being changed
- Children's worship
- Instrumental worship
- Plan of Salvation not being offered or not according to the Bible
- Variety of Assembly Formats
- Sunday night cluster groups
- Contemporary Service
- Meeting Saturday evening

Embracing denominationalism

The saddest thing of all is that items in the above list are not just a description of what is going on in denominationalism, but these things are being practiced in some churches of Christ. Brethren we need to awake to these problems and ask, “What saith the Scriptures?” and “How readest thou the Scriptures?” Many do err not knowing the Scriptures.

May we study God’s Word and strive to do His will in all things including worshipping him in Spirit and in Truth.

Biography

Will Montgomery was born in East Liverpool, Ohio, January 11, 1947. He was baptized by Frank Higginbotham in Chester, WV in 1972. He began his preaching career while a deacon at the Chester congregation. He began located work with the East Liverpool, OH congregation in 1981 where he continues in his 26th year.

He has spoken on lectureships and holds 2-6 gospel meetings each year.

He is married to the former Anita Miller. They have one daughter, Tracy, who is married to John Knight, and they have two grandchildren.

GOD WILL PROVIDE MY SPIRITUAL NEEDS

Kathy Pollard

It is truly amazing to hear of all the different answers the world has come up with in its quest for religion. People claim to have found a spiritual element in things such as crystals, pendants, feathers, and stars. You can go on-line and find all kinds of strange things that people purport to believe all in the name of religion. It is frightening how quickly these new “spiritualists” are gaining popularity. Many websites even claim that Scientology is the fastest growing religion in the world (i.e., www.religioustolerance.org). How can so many get so lost in their search for the “meaning of life?”

God has provided all we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

God Provides Salvation

David, Jonah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, and Paul were all in situations where they should have lost their lives; but God, in His love and mercy, intervened and saved them. Imagine the gratitude they must have felt for the rest of their lives. Did they pause in their labors periodically and lift up a prayer of thanksgiving? We know David did. After God rescued him from Saul, David said, “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies” (Psalm 18:3). While still in the fish, Jonah prayed, “But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving...Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

We were all lost (Romans 3:23; 6:23); but God has provided salvation for us, too. First and foremost, He gave us His Son (Romans 8:32). Jesus' blood made it possible for us to be saved (Romans 5:9,10). The Scriptures teach that salvation is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8), because of His love (John 3:16), and according to His mercy (Titus 3:5). How often do we pause in our daily activities to offer thanks for this great gift?

We do not have to wonder about the meaning of life. God has explained it all in His Word. He has already answered all of man's questions:

Who are we? *Children of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17)*

What is our purpose? *Do good unto all men (Galatians 6:10)*

Where are we going? *We shall ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17)*

God Provides Blessings for Endurance

Satan is not worried when we are on fire after becoming Christians. He knows anyone can be excited about something for a little while. He will just wait for us to get discouraged. He will look for opportunities to fuel our desire to quit. He wants us to view Christianity as a sprint instead of a marathon.

We *will* get tired. We will face challenges, and we will want to give up. There are so many things this side of Heaven that can discourage us. It could be ongoing health issues, a loved one who falls away, a marriage full of friction, or a son or daughter who has yet to put on the

name of Christ in baptism. God is aware of this and has provided ways to help us endure. “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

The first blessing God provides for endurance is a *goal*. He has given us something to keep our eyes on so that we can aim for it. He has promised us a reward! “I press toward the goal for the prize...” (Philippians 3:14). “Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord...will give to me on that day” (2 Timothy 4:7). “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 10:22). God has given us a goal. He has promised a reward for all those who are faithful.

The second blessing God provides for endurance is *strength*. God is a power source that can never be tapped out. “He gives power to the weak, and, to those who have no might, He increases strength” (Isaiah 40:29). When we feel spiritually weary, we can lean on the Lord. We can call on His promise to help us be strong. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Another blessing God provides for endurance is a *living example*. His Son certainly endured and conquered. If anyone ever had an excuse to quit, it was Jesus. He was accused and ridiculed, mocked and beaten. He knew He was going to the cross for people who would not even appreciate His sacrifice, but He did it anyway. “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). God has blessed us with a Guide. If we try to do it on our own, we will only end up with failure and discouragement. Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Following the example of Christ will help us endure to the end.

God Provides the Ability to Overcome

In addition to trials, we also face temptations. God does not tempt us; Satan does. We are drawn away by our own desires (James 1:13-15). The Bible warns us of the danger of temptation and tells us how to protect ourselves.

1 John 2:16 teaches that there are three types of temptations—lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Christ was tempted in all three areas (Matthew 4:1-11). Each time, He used Scripture as a shield. We must spend time in the Word each day so that we can overcome temptations. We can trust in God’s assurance that when temptation comes, there will be a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). We also have a spiritual armor we can put on to protect us against Satan’s attacks (Ephesians 6:10-17).

In Jude 20,21, God has given us a prescription for living. We are to build up our faith, pray, keep ourselves in the love of God, and look unto eternal life. This is the perfect, inspired formula for spiritual success. If we do our part, then God will do His. Jude 24 encourages us with the reminder that He can keep us from stumbling.

God provides for our spiritual needs. He has given us salvation, blessings for endurance, and the ability to overcome. There are many other things we can be thankful for, such as, forgiveness and our Christian family. The psalmist who wrote Psalm 119 devoted all 176 verses to the priceless word of God. He said he stands in awe of it and rejoices at it. He wrote that God’s law is a great treasure and he loves it. In a burst of gratitude he said, “Seven

times a day I praise you because of your righteous judgments” (v. 164). Just think how it would boost our spiritual lives if we followed the psalmist’s example and praised God that often for his providence.

The things at which we have looked, God has already provided for us. There are things He is still providing on a daily basis. What a thrill to know that God is also providing for our future eternity (John 14:1-4)! In Revelation, our final message from God, we are left with a glimpse of that heavenly home that He will provide for His faithful children.

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

Roger A. Rush

I appreciate the invitation to be a part of this year's lectureship. My thanks to Terry and the good elders of this church for the invitation to speak. Also, my thanks to Albert for his foresight in starting the *West Virginia Christian* and for his labors (and that of so many others) in keeping this good work going.

I am happy to deal with the topic at hand. I believe it is a relevant one, not only for the world, but, sadly, also for the church.

The Psalmist wrote: *Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.*

At this hour we are dealing with the sanctity of human life. In spite of the many scientific and technological advances of the last century, in some ways, society has made little if any progress in the areas of ethics and morality. My personal judgment is that we have actually regressed in these areas.

In a letter dated 1 B. C. from a man called Hilarion to his wife Alis, we encounter the following quote: "Hilarion

to Alis his wife heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonarion. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all others return I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and, as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. If...good luck to you...you have a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out. You told Aphrodisias to tell me: 'Do not forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry." It is a touching letter from a soldier far from home conveying his love for family and friends, but at the same time reflecting a cold and heartless attitude toward the unborn and new born. It is the same attitude reflected by those in the pro-abortion movement in this nation.

In a similar vein, Seneca wrote: "We slaughter a fierce ox; we strangle a mad dog; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown." The mantra of the women's lib movement was "we've come a long way, baby." I would agree, but in the wrong direction.

Before we proceed, I think it is important to emphasize that forgiveness is available for those who are guilty of these kinds of sins. The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: *Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.* To anyone who may have had an abortion, or to one who is providing counsel, it is important to emphasize that there is forgiveness.

For those who are willing to obey Jesus Christ in baptism, there is cleansing in His blood. The list of sins Paul referenced in the preceding text was not exhaustive, but representative. One who has had an abortion, or one who has performed an abortion, can repent, obey Christ in baptism, and be washed, sanctified, and justified. A Christian who is guilty of this kind of sin can also, in genuine repentance, turn to God and find forgiveness. We never want to minimize the love, mercy, and grace of God through Christ; but, we are quick to point out that though forgiven, the consequences of our actions may haunt us for a lifetime. There are no hopeless situations, but it would be far better to avoid the sin than to be guilty and have to live with the consequences.

When we talk about the sanctity of life, we are broaching a broad subject. We will begin with abortion. On January 22, 1973, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that: “A state is forbidden to ‘proscribe’ abortion anytime prior to birth if in the opinion of ‘one licensed physician’ an abortion is necessary to preserve ‘the life or health’ of the mother.” A problem quickly arose over the expression “health of the mother.” The definition of “the health of the mother” was clarified by the Court by an additional ruling in which “health” was further defined. The Court ruled, “The medical judgment may be exercised in the light of all factors – physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman’s age – relevant to the well-being of the patient. All these factors may relate to health.”

As a result of the Court’s ruling, a pregnancy may be terminated when it would 1) force upon a woman a distressful life and future; 2) produce psychological harm; 3) tax the mental and physical health by child care, 4)

bring distress associated with the unwanted child; 5) bring a child into a family already unable to psychologically or otherwise care for it; 6) bring the continuing difficulties and stigma of unwed mother-hood.

Abortions are now legal at anytime prior to birth. In this nation alone, approximately 3,500 abortions are performed daily. It should be noted that no more than one and a half percent of the abortions performed each year are “therapeutic” in nature, which would mean they were because of rape, incest, fetal deformity, or threat to the life of the mother, and even these are objectionable.

The reality is that almost all abortions are for social or economic reasons. In a 2004 study, researchers interviewed more than 1,000 women about their reasons for having an abortion. The women gave more than one explanation for their decision. The breakdown was as follows: 74% said having a baby would dramatically change my life; 73% said they couldn't afford a baby; 48% said they didn't want to be a single mother/relationship problems; 38% said they had completed their childbearing; 25% didn't want people to know they had sex or got pregnant; 22% didn't feel mature enough to raise a child; 13% identified problems with the health of the fetus; 12% identified personal health problems; and less than 1.5 % said they were victims of rape or incest.

Although abortion is portrayed as a matter of choice and an issue of “women's rights and reproductive freedom,” it is actually females who are most frequently aborted in the two largest nations in the world. In India roughly 6.7 million abortions occur yearly, and girls outnumber boys by 500,000 – or 10 million over the past two decades.

Early in 2007 the British medical journal Lancet

estimated the male-female gap at 43 million. Worldwide, Lancet said, there are 100 million “missing girls” who should have been born but were not, of which 50 million would have been Chinese and 43 million would have been Indian. These statistics make it clear that worldwide it is females who are the victims of the majority of abortions.

We are not going to bother with a barbaric explanation of how abortions are performed. There are many sources which provide detailed explanations of the various procedures including Caesarean Section Abortions (Hysterectomy); Salt Poisoning Abortions; D & C Abortions; Suction Abortions; Partial Birth Abortions. All are barbaric, but the most barbaric is the “partial birth” abortion. In one striking bit of good news on this subject, the United States Supreme court ruled earlier this year that “partial birth abortions” were not protected by the Constitution. To be blunt, abortion at any stage is MURDER.

Euthanasia (mercy killing) is defined as: the act or practice of killing or permitting the death of hopelessly sick or injured individuals (as persons or domestic animals) in a relatively painless way for reasons of mercy. The term comes from “eu-thana-tos” which is defined as “good” or “happy death.”

Charles F. Potter founded the Euthanasia Society of America in 1938. Today this organization is known as the “Society for the Right to Die.” Dr. Glanville Williams advocated legalization of both “humanitarian infanticide” and “euthanasia for handicapped children.”

Dr. Robert Williams of Washington State Medical School has written: “There are various levels at which one can consider the indication for euthanasia” a) a group of

individuals who will soon be encountering death; b) a group with such severe mental damage as to be unable to express proper judgment with respect to termination of life; and c) a group with varying degrees of cognizance, but with disabilities so incapacitating and so common as to produce great hardship on society.” It is a small step for a society which can rationalize the killing of the unborn to move to a rationalization for doing the same for the elderly and infirmed. Parents who see no moral dilemma in seeking the death of their own offspring in the womb will also have no moral misgivings in doing the same for parents or others for whom continued care is deemed to be no longer cost effective.

Of course, the same moral principles which cause Christians to condemn abortion as a murderous act, also come in to play in relationship to euthanasia. God’s book still says, “Thou shalt not murder.” Christians have a responsibility toward those less fortunate. Respect for the aged is still demanded as a testament to one’s respect for the Almighty. We are compelled as people of God to bear the burden of those who are struggling; and the “Golden Rule” must surely be considered.

These same arguments can be used with force in dealing with suicide, stem cell research where viable human embryos are being destroyed, and even when it comes to the matter of compassion for the helpless in any situation. It is the acceptance of the sanctity of every human life which motivates true people of God to action. Our Lord died at Calvary for everyone. Each life is precious – the unborn, the aged, the infirmed and the deformed. Every life should be treated with dignity, respect, and genuine compassion. Anything less is abhorrent to God and to God’s people.

Two stories crossed my desk which were tragic beyond

belief. Both involved military personnel. These were bright, successful, highly respected family men. They seemed to have it all.

On January 10, 1995 Captain Ernie Blanchard, the U. S. Coast Guard's top spokesman, stood to address the 118 cadets of Bravo Company and their guests. Wishing to start his speech on the lighter side, he told several risqué jokes. Three days later, following complaints from some of those who had been present, Patrick Stillman, commandant of the cadets, called Blanchard to formally express the academy's displeasure. Blanchard almost immediately faxed a letter of apology to the academy. This, however, was not enough for the politically correct crowd. A criminal probe into the incident was launched. Fearing the loss of his pension, and concerned about embarrassment to the Coast Guard and his family, he offered to resign if the probe was dropped. The Coast Guard refused. A few days later he took his own life.

The story of Admiral Jeremy Boorda was more publicized than that of Captain Blanchard. Admiral Boorda, the Navy's top officer, was accused of wearing two medals which some said he was not entitled to wear (an issue that is still being debated). When the charge was first leveled more than a year earlier, he immediately stopped wearing them, but the problem wouldn't go away. Rather than subject himself, his family, and the Navy to further embarrassment, Admiral Boorda took his own life.

These stories are filled with tragedy. Neither solved his problem by suicide. Neither spared his family additional grief and embarrassment. Neither spared his particular branch of the armed forces additional embarrassment. Their actions did the exact opposite of what they intended. They thought they were taking the honorable way out, but,

in fact, they were not!

Suicide solves nothing. It helps no one! We can't run from our mistakes. We must admit them and learn to live with them, even if others cannot. Jesus was betrayed by two disciples. Judas sold Him. Peter denied Him. Judas took his own life. Peter repented and wept bitterly! Which one demonstrated the greater courage? Which one is still admired today? Which one went on to accomplish great things for his Lord? You know the answers.

No matter how bad it seems, suicide will not make it better. Whatever problems you are facing, there is help. Life is too brief and precious to tragically end it. Look to God, forgive yourself, and resolve to do better!

As Christians we cannot be silent regarding these issues. The importance of taking a stand is illustrated in the statement of Martin Niemoller, a Protestant preacher imprisoned and martyred by the Nazi government. He wrote: "In Germany they came first for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionists. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."

America still claims to be a deeply religious nation. Roughly, 9 in 10 of us believe in God or a Supreme Being; but, when it comes to the Bible we are a nation of religious illiterates. According to Stephen Prothero, head of the department of religion at Boston University, and author of a new book, *Religious Literacy*, the problem began in the mid-19th century, not because of the influence of secularists

or by Supreme Court rulings that outlawed Bible reading and prayers in public schools, but from a debate over which Bible to read, a debate instigated by religious people, not secularists. With this debate also came a change in emphasis, putting the focus on **loving** Jesus rather than **listening** to him.

Biblical ignorance has disastrous consequences. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn made an astute observation when he wrote: "I heard a number of older people offer this explanation for the great disasters that have befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.'" He went on to say, "If I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: 'Men have forgotten God.'"

Whenever men forget God, disaster is inevitable. The apostle Paul wrote of this ruinous sin in his letter to the church at Rome. He attributed the Roman decline to the fact that men "did not like to retain God in their knowledge." Men had forgotten God.

What happens when men forget God? They become wicked, greedy, evil, envious, murderous, malicious, gossipers, slanderers, insolent, arrogant, boastful, disobedient to parents, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful. It's not a pleasant picture to contemplate, but it is clearly where atheism leads, and we are rapidly going in that direction.

George Gallup, Jr., readily recognized as one of America's leading pollsters, has observed that "We want the fruits of religion, but not the obligations ... That we revere the Bible, but don't read it ... We believe the Ten

Commandments to be valid rules for living, although we can't name them." We may claim to believe in God and revere the Bible, but most of those who profess to be Christians don't know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount, can't name one Old Testament Prophet, and almost never read the Scriptures. We, too, are in danger of forgetting God. The warning of the prophet Hosea bears repeating. He wrote, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Specifically, they had forgotten God!

Almost a century and a half ago Abraham Lincoln wrote: "We have been recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have grown in number, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown; but we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand that preserves us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior virtue and wisdom of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us...it behooves us, then, to humble ourselves before the offended power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

There are two kinds of atheists in our world. The first make no pretense of believing. They foolishly say, "There is no God!" The second profess to believe, but live as though He did not exist. This seems to be an accurate assessment of many in our nation, and, sadly, some in the church, who profess faith but make moral and ethical decisions without regard to what the Scriptures say regarding the sanctity of life.

There has been an ongoing effort for some time now to

undermine the credibility of faith. Copernicus, the father of modern astronomy, demonstrated that our universe was heliocentric (sun centered). Earth (and man) was not the center of the universe. Five hundred years ago such a suggestion was blasphemous. People interpreted Copernicus's theory to mean that humankind had no "privileged central" place in the universe. Galileo, with his invention of the telescope, confirmed the Copernican theory. For his work, Galileo was convicted as a heretic and sentenced to a life of imprisonment, but the sentence was commuted to house arrest, and his books were officially banned.

Then, along came Charles Darwin and his theory of "natural selection." Evolution removed God from the equation. Our universe, and life itself, could be explained by a single, simple "blind" mechanism which, given sufficient time, could explain the emergence of both matter and life.

With the birth of evolution, science had a mechanistic explanation for everything. This led the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche to declare in 1885 that "God is dead." This philosophy was embraced by Bertrand Russell and Sigmund Freud. These men, and others, were convinced that science and philosophy could essentially be defined as the **triumph of mechanism over teleology** (design). They never dreamed that their mechanistic model would some day be overthrown, but it has been. The modern secular view has been shattered, ironically, by science itself!

In what Brandon Carter called "the anthropic principle," he argued that life had to be "pre-planned" from the very origin of the cosmos. The philosophical notion of a "random universe" was not borne

out by the evidence. Patrick Glynn observes: “Modern thinkers assumed that science would reveal the universe to be ever more random and mechanical; instead it has discovered unexpected new layers of intricate order that bespeak an almost unimaginably vast master design”

As science progresses, it is becoming more and more certain that time and chance cannot account for our universe or the existence of life. There are too many signs of design to attribute our origin to an accident. Like the Psalmist, we should all exclaim, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” Every life is precious! We are made in the image of our Creator, and the evidence supports the assertion!

God has been removed from the picture. Humanism, materialism, and selfishness have displaced HIM. God, the Creator, has been dethroned, and man the creature has become his own maker. Dethroning God devalues man! It makes us nothing more than animals. Human life, then, is no longer precious.

The church of Jesus Christ cannot be silent in the face of this assault. We must forcefully reaffirm the sanctity of life. May God help us to rise up with a unified voice and call our nation and our world back to Him and His WORD.

Resume

PERSONAL: Married Diane Bond of Senecaville, OH
January 8, 1972. Parents of two children, Angela Willman

(30) CPA in Columbus, Ohio (married Mike Willman - July 2000), and Adam (27) an MD at Riverside Hospital in Columbus, OH. Two grandchildren, Abby and Andy Willman, born November 17, 2005.

EDUCATION

- 1992- Harding Graduate School - satellite courses
- 1986-1990 Marietta College - Masters of Arts
- 1976 West Virginia University - graduate courses in Communications
- 1971-1972 Lubbock Christian University - Bachelor of Arts in Bible
- 1970-1971 Ohio Valley University - Certificate of Achievement
- 1969-1970 Fairmont State University - Pre-engineering major
- 1965-1969 East Fairmont High School - Graduated with Honor

EMPLOYMENT

- 1985- Preacher - 6th & Washington Sts. church of Christ, Marietta, OH 45750
- 1982-1985 Preacher - Lower Paw Paw church of Christ, Lower Salem, OH 45745
- 1978-1985 Preacher - Little Hocking church of Christ, Little Hocking, OH 45742
- 1972-1978 Preacher - Hundred church of Christ, Hundred, WV 26575
- 1971-1972 Worked with Vandalia church of Christ, Lubbock, TX 79412

ADDITIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Served as part-time faculty member in the Bible Department of Ohio Valley College (1984-1990)

Directed Junior Week at Ohio Valley Christian Youth Camp for several years

Extensive radio and TV experience

Written a weekly newspaper article for the *Marietta Times* since August 1985

Preach in four to six gospel meetings a year as well as two or three lectureships

Articles published in the *Gospel Advocate*, *Power For Today*, *Bible Herald*, *20th Century Christian*, *West Virginia Christian*, *Upon the Rock*, and articles translated into German and Spanish publications

Has preached in India and Germany

Also serves as one of the elders at 6th & Washington Streets

LIES

Frank Higginbotham

How many times have you begun to tell someone something and prefaced the statement by saying, "I am telling you the truth"? One might conclude that on other occasions the truth is not always spoken. We have the right to expect the truth every time someone speaks to us. In our present society we have come to accept the words of some people as not being truthful. We joke about the dishonest politicians, lawyers, and auto salesmen. Is the standard requiring truth the same for everyone? Should we insist that all people be truthful and honest with us? Let us take a look at some passages that give us a clear view of the way God pictures the liar and the falsehood he tells. God has always placed a high value on the truth. "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding" (Prov. 23:23). It is only by the truth that we are made free. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren (Prov. 6:16-19).

If something is an abomination to God, we can quickly come to the conclusion that it cannot be a part of our lives. If it displeases God, lying must not become a casual friend or a very present help in the time of need. Speaking of the new man that is created when a person becomes a

Christian, Paul gives this admonition. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9). A very similar statement is made by Paul to the church at Ephesus. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25). God has never placed His approval on one who is dishonest and lies to others.

It would be helpful now for us to seek a definition for the word. It is not enough to say that a lie is to speak a falsehood. Certainly, this would be lying, but there is more involved than that. Anything which we tell with the intent to deceive is a lie. Even when the thing which we speak has a grain of truth in it, we might be saying it in a way that we are intending to mislead others. This is a lie. We even become guilty when we find pleasure in the lie. "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 22:15). Note carefully the list of sinners that is given in this passage. Why would the liar be mentioned in the same list as murderers, whoremongers, and idolaters? Perhaps we are given a glimpse into the way God feels about the lie. While the sins mentioned are bad, so is the sin of lying. This helps us to understand how God feels about the lie. It is not a little matter, and we must regard it as very distasteful to God.

Because it is so distasteful, men have tried to minimize the significance of the lie. We have invented terms that say to others that it is not quite so bad. It is not uncommon to hear someone speaking of black lies and white lies. How would a person define a white lie? We suggest that we might tolerate the white lie but are upset when people tell the black ones. The Bible makes no such distinction. Is the white lie the one you tell on others and

the black lie one that is told on you? Next we try to reduce the effect of the lie by speaking of the size. There are big lies, and there are little lies. Again, there is no way that distinction can be made by comparing the size of lies. We sometimes call lies by other names to lessen the severity of the sound of the term "lies." We speak of prevarications and talk of stretching the truth and say that some are a little careless in handling the truth. All lies stand condemned by God in His Book. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8).

Abraham was guilty of lying when he told that Sarah was his sister instead of his wife. Yes, Sarah and Abraham had a common father but a different mother. "And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife" (Gen. 20:11-12). When Abraham told this to Pharaoh and his men (Gen.12:11-16) and to Abimelech (Gen. 20:2-7), he intended to deceive them. While there was a measure of truth in what he was saying, the purpose of Abraham was to mislead. It is a common practice among us to tell some of the truth but not the whole story and thereby to attempt to deceive. Later, the influence of this mistake by his father showed up in the life of Isaac when he tried using the same story in an attempt to deceive. (Gen.26:7).

Doesn't everyone recognize that lies are wrong? It would seem so, but some seem to be unaware of the fact that lies are an abomination to God. Joseph Fletcher, in his book on situation ethics, suggests that we have gone too far

if we condemn a sin in every situation. Circumstances, according to him, change from time to time depending on just what the situation is at the time.

Is adultery wrong? ... One can only respond, 'I don't know. Maybe. Give me a case. Describe a real situation.' Or perhaps somebody will ask if a man should ever lie to his wife, or desert his family, or spy on a business rival's design or market plans, or fail to report some income item in his tax return. Again, the answer cannot be an answer, it can only be another question. 'Have you a real question, that is to say a concrete situation?' If it has to do with premarital sex or libel or breach of contract or anything else (you name it), the reply is always the same: You are using words, abstractions. What you are asking is without substance; it has no living reality. There is no way to answer such questions. (*Situation Ethics, The New Morality*)

For a person who rejects the idea of an absolute standard of right and wrong, this answer is typical. This approach puts a person on his own. He must make up his own standard of right or wrong. When he has thus decided his own situation, this would not apply in any other situation. The correct answer might be entirely different for another person at another time. This situation is best described in the Bible by a time when Israel had no king. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Imagine the confusion if each man became a standard of right and wrong. All would be justified in their own eyes. No one would ever be guilty of doing the wrong thing. This is the dilemma every infidel faces when he tries to remove God from the picture. This theory makes lying a matter of

personal choice that could change with each different situation.

One lady, in trying to explain the use of lies, did so in this manner.

Lying is universal – we all do it; we all must do it. Therefore, the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously; to live with good objective, and not an evil one; to lie healingly, charitably, humanly, not cruelly, hurtfully, or maliciously. (“Truth Worth Living For Is Truth Worth Lying For,” Julia Wharton, *The Reformer*, Sept/Oct, 1986)

While most all people will readily admit that it is wrong to tell a lie, there are still some who try to justify their conduct in a variety of ways. When you reject God as the final standard of right and wrong, it is not surprising to hear people going in every direction in an attempt to justify lying.

Where did the lie come from? The Bible gives us some insight into how lying came into the world. Jesus had a discussion with some of the Jews of His day who tried to come up with a connection with Abraham and the Jewish family in their attempt to justify their conduct. They thought that through Abraham and being descendants of this great man they had the right to act as they did in their disobedience. They claimed to be children of God. Jesus, however, related them to someone else.

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he

speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? (John 8:44-46)

Notice that Jesus said the Devil is the father of the lie. This should speak volumes to us. When God gave instructions to Adam and Eve, they were told that they must not eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. A penalty was connected to this instruction. They were told that if they disobeyed this commandment, they would surely die. When the Devil conversed with them about this he added one word to the instruction of God. He said that they would not surely die. (Gen. 3:4). This was a lie, and they listened to Satan. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The terrible consequences of sin came when man listened to the father of lies.

Have you ever asked yourself why people lie? If the lie is of the Devil, it is clear that all men should be avoiding it. What are some of the motives that drive men to fall prey to this terrible sin? Some tell lies in order to spare the feelings of other people. They consider it an act of kindness when they lie to another about some health situation that they feel would make that person feel bad. They then reason that they are justified in telling the lie because the truth would do hurt to the person. To tell a friend that she is wearing a terribly ugly dress would surely hurt her feelings so they tell her how beautiful that dress is. To let a proud parent know how ugly you think his or her baby is would be unkind, so the reasoning is that in this case you are justified in lying about the beauty of the baby.

Others lie to make themselves look better to other people. They speak of accomplishments they have never gained. In their imagination they lift themselves to heights they have never reached. Most of the time their lies catch up with them, making the situation even worse.

Some lie to protect themselves. When they find themselves in a situation that is condemning, they tell a lie to escape the disapproval of others. They will deny any guilt, fearing the consequence of the others knowing the truth. When people lie like this, they need to have a very good memory because they may change their story when they tell it the second time.

Some lie for material gain. They might be able to sell an automobile if they do not tell the full story of the past history of the car. We often joke about the dishonest salesman who places a higher value on the money he is able to get from you than he does in having a clear conscience and a good reputation.

We all know of someone who lies out of habit. He is so used to telling a lie that he seems to be uncomfortable in just speaking the truth. We speak of this person as we joke about knowing that he is lying because he has his mouth open.

There are three areas of lies that we want to note and that need to be avoided. First, we need to speak the truth to our fellowman. Everyone appreciates having a friend that he or she can trust. We all need someone who is honest enough to deal fairly with us and to tell us the truth. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17). Our yeas are to be yeas and our nays to be nays. "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is

more than these cometh of evil" (Matt. 5:37). When we give our word to our fellowman, he should be able to trust it. We would not speak a lie. We do our very best to be honest with all men.

A second area of truthfulness has to do with our handling the truth of God's Word. It is terribly dangerous to be careless in handling the truth when helping others in the way of salvation. Only the truth will make us free from our sins. We must not be blind leaders. "But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 15:13-14). The person who will enter Heaven is the one who does the will of God.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

If we mislead people in the way of salvation we have taken their souls into our hands and have turned them in the wrong direction. False teachers are still present in our world. Jesus warned, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15). It would be terrible for us to be the instrument of turning a person away from the truth. We cannot afford to mislead anyone. A careful study of the Word of God will prevent us from straying

from God's will and teaching error that will condemn others. Paul encouraged Timothy to preach only the Word.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

If Timothy was not careful in handling the truth, he would be responsible for the souls he misled. Each person needs to be sure about the person who teaches him or her. We must be honest and truthful in handling the Word of life.

The third area that we would like to note has to do with honesty and truth in dealing with ourselves. As amazing as it seems, it is possible for us to lie to ourselves. We are given warnings concerning deceiving ourselves. We must not lie to ourselves in hearing but not obeying the truth.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:22-25).

We must not lie to ourselves. We also lie to ourselves if we do not bridle our tongue. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain" (James 1:26). Many warnings are given in the Bible about the use of our tongues. We must not lie to ourselves. We also would be guilty of lying to ourselves if we were to claim that we have no sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). It is bad to lie to others but equally bad to lie to ourselves.

The consequence of a lie is too great for us to ignore. Paul stated the result of a person's believing and obeying a lie. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:11-12). The lie is a deadly sin against man and God. It must not be treated lightly. We must speak the truth.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF IMMORALITY

Eddie Cooper

I wish to thank the eldership and brother Terry Jones for the invitation to be a part of this great lectureship.

Thanks to brother Albert Farley for his foresight in beginning *West Virginia Christian*, and the good this paper is doing.

Let's begin this session with a quiz:

1] In 2002, what television reality program portrayed its contestants walking totally naked down a fashion show runway before a live audience?

2] During the 1952-53 television season, what word could not be used on the show *I Love Lucy*?

3] How many scenes of suggested sexual intercourse or sexually suggestive comments does the average television viewer see in a year's time?

The subject we are to discuss this hour is one of major importance and greatly needed in the church today, even though many do not want to hear it preached. In our time, it is imperative that we continue to declare the principles of Christian ethics to all men in emphatic language and to demonstrate them in our daily lives.

Although I will not list the consequences of sin during this lesson, we will make application as to what happens when God's law is not put into practice.

Definition of Terms

Let's begin by defining the terms we will be using in the title of this lesson—***THE CONSEQUENCES OF IMMORALITY***.

Perhaps the first word we need to define is *moral*. This word is defined: “*of or concerned with the discernment or instruction of what is good and evil; being or acting in accordance with established standards of good behavior.*” Along with that, the word *morality* is defined: “*the character of being in accord with the principles of right conduct.*” (Jackson 2)

“Morality/ethics, then, asserts that there is a differentiation between right and wrong, and between good and evil.” (Jackson 2)

What would life be like if there were no standard? Chaos and confusion would be the results. Paul in Romans 10:3 discusses that very principle, when he wrote: “*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*”

Consequences is defined: “An effect, result, significance, importance; an issue of consequence.” Often, young and old alike, do not think about the consequences of their evil deeds. Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you are willing to pay.

Immorality is defined: “the quality or state of being immoral; behavior or an act that is immoral. Behavior must be that which pleases our Father in Heaven, otherwise we will pay the penalty.

When we speak of *morality*, what are we talking about? This word comes into our language from the Latin, *moralis*, and it means manner, custom, or habit. Morality then is a code of conduct, a standard of behavior, between and among people. Broadly speaking it is what the sociologist speaks of when he speaks of the “*mores*” of the people. It is one’s thoughts and actions about how to live with and how to conduct one’s self in relation to other people. It has to do with our regard for humanity and how we treat other people. (I Corinthians 15:33)

There is no adequate motivation for living the high level of Christian ethics, unless one believes in the personal existence of a Heavenly Father and has a close relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord. Human moral responsibility is based upon the fact that God is our CREATOR, as Psalm 100:3 declares: “**Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; WE are His people and the sheep of His pasture.**” Since morality is grounded in the unchanging nature of God, it is **absolute**—not cultural, not relative, not situational.

Examples of an Awareness of Immorality

Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, mankind has been struggling to define the good and do the right. The quest for standards of right conduct is distinctly a human endeavor. Man often thinks in terms of “ought’s” and “why’s.” He often asks himself whether or not there are universal standards of right conduct that apply to all men everywhere. Most folk have a sense that some things are right and others are wrong, even though they may disagree about which are which.

This sense of “oughtness,” or what might be called a sense of duty, cause us to formulate, develop, and implement codes of ethics, and rightly so. There are some examples of those who may have been considered “heathen,” who had this inherent sense of duty. For example, the Pharaoh about whom we read in Genesis 12:18, had learned and lived by an ethic that it was wrong for him to have another man’s wife. In that respect, he was much more ethical than some people living today who claim that they are Christians. Another powerful example of this same point is that of the Philistine king by the name of Abimelech. After Abraham lied about his full relationship with Sarah and after Abimelech had taken her into the company of concubines and wives, he learned that Sarah was more than a half-sister to Abraham, that she was indeed his wife. This prompted him to chastise Abraham in these words, “***You have done deeds to me which ought not to be done.***” (Genesis 20:9) Why would Abimelech make such a statement? Obviously, because he had a moral code, an ethic - a morality, if you please - regarding marriage to the wives of other men.

Things That Contribute to Immorality

We live in the midst of what has been called three world-wide explosions: 1] Population, 2] knowledge, and 3] immorality. The world population is now over 6.5 billion and growing at a fast pace. It is hard for us to imagine the concerns God has for each and every one of these individuals. The knowledge explosion involves all types of communication devices. Information is at our disposal at any time of the day or night in just a matter of seconds. Every day we are dealing with immorality of one form or another.

We live in an age of permissiveness. Constraints have fallen, and moral consensus has vanished. Man asserts that he has “come of age” and has outgrown the morality of the Bible. In light of that, not long ago, I received a lengthy discourse that stated that those outside of Christ are not amenable to the law of Christ. If that be the case, why worry about their soul? No need to try to reach the lost because they are not amenable to Christ’s law anyway. No need to allow the gospel of Christ to change people, because they are not amenable. Such absurdity.

As we study our Bibles, we are aware too, that human behavior is not a matter of *subjective* speculation, but rather God tells us what to do. (Hebrews 1:1)

One of the greatest questions of ethics and morality is, “Who will be king?” God? Self? Society? Physical nature? No one at all?

C.S. Lewis wrote, as appears in *Mere Christianity*:

Morality, then, seems to be concerned with three things. Firstly, with fair play and harmony between individuals. Secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonizing the things inside each individual. Thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole: what man was made for: what course the whole fleet ought to be on: what tune the conductor of the band wants it to play. (Lewis)

Here is another quote worth consideration:

The essence of Biblical morality is not a legal system, a written code, an abstract moral philosophy, but a spirit and a loyalty, a vision and

faith, incarnate in the inexhaustible, rich and varied personality of Jesus. It is this fact which has lent astonishing flexibility to Christian ethics, while ensuring that each new extension and application is kept true by being referred, at all points, to the mind and example of the Master.
(White 11)

There are really only two standards of determining morality. They are false standards and a right or true standard. The former is based on Satan and sin; the latter one is based on God and truth. The former will destroy; the latter will build and save.

Satan has many standards, and they always vary. God has one standard of morality, and it does not change with succeeding generations, and does not change in various parts of the world to meet the standards of men.

God's laws are usually general in nature, and require honest and sincere application to the particular situations of our lives...This is part of the very genius of the Bible. Here in one small volume, carried in one hand or pocket, are all the laws needed to govern the conduct of all peoples of all times! How is this possible? It is possible because the laws are mostly so general that they transcend cultural differences, and can be given relevant applications from culture to culture, from age to age. (Cottrell 9)

There are some challenges to our faith and as a result consequences that come from following these. They are 1] Compromise, 2] Materialism, 3] Tolerance of false religions, and 4] The wickedness that surrounds us. Compromise is a sign of an impure heart, a heart that is not

totally submissive to God and His will. The message of God's Word is something that we NEVER compromise. I'm fearful that many have compromised with the world and disregarded God's Word when it comes to morality. Righteous living is in danger of becoming an oddity rather than the norm for Christians. Preachers are sometimes accused of "raising the bar too high." Why is it that Christians don't want to be different from the world? Why do we just want the "norm"? Christians, of all people, should determine to live "better" than most. The standard of God's demands are high. We must never compromise principles for the pleasures of the moment. (Hebrews 11:24,25) A single decision made under compromise can lay the foundation for a very difficult life. We must teach our children there are consequences with each decision they make and teach them to make decisions based on righteousness with foresight.

Titus 2:11-14 reads:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

From this we learn that undeniable fact that there is a certain "right" way to live if we expect to go to heaven when we die. It seems apparent, too, that there is a certain lifestyle for us if we are to follow the Savior. (Cf. Romans 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1)

Materialism is rooted in selfishness. There is nothing wrong with having the necessities or even the comforts of

life; but, the demand is high again when we find our Lord making this demand: Matthew 16:24-26—“***Then said Jesus 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, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?***” Materialism is nothing more than putting the wants and desires of self first. (Cf. Luke 12)

Every freedom carries with it responsibilities. When one plays a game, he is required to play by the rules. Paul discusses this concept in I Corinthians 9:24-26, when he writes:

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. 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 unto subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

When God created man, he made him a spiritual being, and, that being true, he has the responsibility to be spiritually responsive to the directions of the Heavenly Father.

There is also the tolerance of evil. It is easy to find many examples of those who failed to obey God because of their acceptance of their heathen neighbors. (Judges 2:1-5) Our

Lord knows, and we know that we are in the world but must not be like the world.

Those in Corinth demonstrate for us that sinners have no excuse—they **can change**. Because of the tolerance of evil, there are those who say that homosexuals, and others with that deviant lifestyle, are “born that way” and cannot change. Who are we going to believe? Those involved in these sinful practices and others like it will suffer the consequences of their immorality. Here is what Paul said about the possibility of change:

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)

It is amazing how so many “toy” with immorality as if it is innocent or harmless. Romans 1:32 reads: “***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.***” Does that sound like anything going on today? It is certain that those who play with sin have not considered the damage it does. It affects one’s ability to keep the family strong. Immorality also damages one’s ability to influence others for good. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Jehovah’s law of morality is not only absolute but it is also universal. Heaven determines what it

is—not a situation in a parked car some night or in a motel room where a man and woman or a boy and girl not married to each other are voluntarily together for a night of fleshly indulgence. His law is universal.

Jehovah's system is absolute. Situations are relative and ever changeable. Situations, regardless of what they may be, do not change vice into virtue, revelry into righteousness, and promiscuousness into purity. Those who live by the devil's standard will be with him in eternity; those who live by Jehovah's standard will be with Him in eternity. (Joshua 24:15) (Taylor, Robert, Jr.)

John Gipson has written this about our society:

In our superior wisdom we question the laws of God, and even dismiss the Bible as a standard of faith and conduct. We don't sin today; we have alternate lifestyles. Forget the ten commandments; we live in an enlightened age. Why teach morality when condoms are available? The answer to murder is gun control rather than "thou shalt not kill. And drugs? Make them legal and pass out free needles. This will cut down both crime and disease according to contemporary wisdom. Don't teach anything in our schools about God, profanity, honoring parents, murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, coveting, etc., that's promoting religion, and we might be infringing on somebody's rights. We ought to take the words "under God" out of our pledge of allegiance to the United States for the same

reason. Just look at the wonderful society we are creating without the help of God.

Maybe the reason we see the departure of so many toward denominationalism is due to the lack of teaching by the generation that went before. (Acts 20:27) We have allowed the denominational world to convince us that our religion is no better than theirs—or anyone else’s. (Romans 8:31; Matthew 28:20)

Practical Applications

Things we need to be aware of:

- 1] Say “no” and really mean it.
- 2] Immorality betrays the confidence others have in us.
- 3] Morality teaches us that some things don’t belong to us.
- 4] Even though we may sin against others, all sin is against God.
- 5] Remember that immorality is sin.
- 6] Do not flirt with evil.
- 7] Be aware of the seductive measures the devil uses.
- 8] Never forget that God is with us wherever, and with whomever, we find ourselves.

The Bible’s detailed description of immorality will help us stay away from evil. The damage immorality is known to cause should keep us far from it. The destruction to which immorality leads should lead all mankind to flee from the wrath to come.

Let me close with the following quotation: ***“God does not require a perfect, sinless life to have fellowship with Him, but He does require that we be serious about holiness,***

that we grieve over sin in our lives instead of justifying it, and that we earnestly pursue holiness.” (Bridges 40, 41)

ENDNOTES

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Biography

Eddie was born April 23, 1946, to Denver and Florence Cooper. He married Barbara Buckley of Parkersburg, WV, on September 2, 1966. They have two sons: Jason of Sumpter, SC. He is a Captain in the Air Force and has a PH.D in Psychology. His wife, Martha, is from Nashville, TN, and they met at Lipscomb University. She completed her Master's Degree in June 2007. Scott lives in Portland, TN, and is Chief Financial Officer and Manager for Tennessee Farmers Co-Op in Nashville, TN. His wife, Leah, is from Leoma, TN. They met while attending Freed-Hardeman University. They have one son, Austin.

Eddie is a graduate of St. Marys High School, St. Marys, WV, in 1964, a graduate of Ohio Valley College with an Associate of Science Degree in Bible in 1966, and a

graduate of Abilene Christian University with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Bible in 1969.

He has worked for congregations in Ohio: Veto, Pennsville, Hanoverton, Sardis, and Chillicothe. In West Virginia: Oakwood Rd. in Fairmont, the North End congregation in Parkersburg, WV, and is currently with the Washington Street Church of Christ in St. Albans, WV. He also preached in Lawn, Texas, while a student at Abilene Christian.

He has served as counselor, teacher, director, and board member of Northwestern Ohio Christian Youth Camp; teacher and board member of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp, in Pennsboro, WV. He has directed and taught in Training For Christian Service in Fairmont, WV, and has conducted Singing Schools in West Virginia and Ohio.

He has done Radio and TV work and written articles for *Teenage Christian*, *Bible Herald*, *Gospel Truths*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Therefore Stand*, *Christian Bible Teacher*, *West Virginia Christian*, and *Upon The Rock*.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Winford Claiborne

Most journalists claim they examine every side of an issue and then without fear or favor report their findings. Anyone who believes that propaganda needs his head examined. If you have been misled by the ratings and ravings of the media elite, you should read Bernard Goldberg's very revealing books, **Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News** (Washington, D. C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2002) and **Arrogance: Rescuing America From the Media Elite** (New York: Warner Books, 2003). Leonard Bownie, Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser's book, **the News about the News: American Journalism in Peril** (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2002), reveals: "Bad journalism – failing to report important news, or reporting new shallowly, inaccurately or unfairly – can leave people dangerously uninformed...Bad journalism can misinform...Much bad journalism is just lazy and superficial...Bad news judgment is commonplace" (pp. 6-7).

I have mentioned these excellent books dealing with the bias and arrogance in the news media – radio, television, newspapers and magazines – because I plan to discuss with you today an article by a columnist for **The Dallas Morning News**. The article has the title, "Weighing homosexuality by the Bible," and appeared in **The Tennessean** (Sunday, February 8, 2004). The author of the article is Jeffrey Weiss who fits into the category of being a bad journalist – an inexcusably bad journalist – not because he writes poorly but because he has no idea about the nature of scripture. When one attempts to discuss a biblical topic, should be diligent enough and honest enough

to consider all the scriptural material and not just what he imagines fits his theory.

Weiss begins his article by asking, “What is the difference between homosexuality and a ham sandwich?” He says his question is not intended to be a joke. He says the question is important “for many Christians who consider the Bible in its entirety to be God’s authoritative word” (p. 19-A). I have no doubt Weiss thinks he really nailed conservative Christians’ hides to the wall. But all he did was to demonstrate that he knows practically nothing about the Bible and what he does know is wrong. If he had studied the Bible more carefully, he would not have raised the question about homosexuality and a ham sandwich.

Weiss discussed what the book of Leviticus says about eating pork and engaging in homosexual practices. Weiss correctly writes: “Leviticus not only condemns a man ‘who lies with a male as with a woman’ and the eating of pork. It also prohibits seafood without fins. And tattoos” (p. 19-A). There is absolutely no question that Leviticus opposes both homosexuality and the eating of pork. But does that mean those regulations are still in force? We know absolutely that the New Testament does not condemn the eating of pork or of any other kind of meat. In fact, Paul teaches that those who try to deny Christians the right to eat any kind of meat are promoting the doctrines of demons. “Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons: speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meat, which God created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:1-3). I am aware that the word “meat” (**broma** in the Greek) means any kind of food – not specifically flesh.

But there can be no question the term includes “meat” or “flesh”.

Do you suppose Jeffrey Weiss has ever read the New Testament’s teaching about the eating of meat? If he has, he apparently has no idea what it says or he would not make so many inexcusable blunders. Weiss does not know or does not care to know that Christians do not live under the Mosaic covenant that forbade the eating of pork, catfish and some other kinds of meat. If we still lived under the old covenant, we would be required to keep the Sabbath, burn incense, offer animal sacrifices, observe the various Jewish festival, refuse to wear clothing made with mixed kinds of cloth and engage in other activities that were meaningful under the Jewish covenant but have only historical significance for Christians. Keeping the Sabbath holy was God’s requirement for the Israelites, but the law has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14-17).

The book of Hebrews – a book Weiss has probably never read – shows conclusively that we do not live under the Mosaic Covenant – any of it. I do not have enough time to examine a large number of passages from Hebrews, but I do want to read a few verses from Hebrews 10. “For the law (that is, the Mosaic law) having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of those things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect....For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins....Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He takes away the first that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Heb. 10:1, 4, 9-10). When the author of Hebrews affirmed that “he takes away the first that he may establish the second,” what did he have in mind by “first” and “second” – “first” and “second”

what? Only those who do not want to know can miss the meaning of this passage. The first covenant or will required the Jews of offer animal sacrifices, to keep the Sabbath holy and such like, but the second covenant has abolished those requirements. We do not live under the covenant that forbade the eating of a ham sandwich. No serious Bible student should have any difficulty understanding that truth.

Some of the Christians in the province of Galatia had serious misunderstandings about the relationship of the two covenants. They apparently believed they could take some of the best of elements of both covenants and formulate a covenant that was superior to either one by itself. In trying to wed the two covenants, they were guilty of perverting the gospel of Christ. Paul then warned the Galatians: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:7-9). Mixing and mingling may be permissible when we are speaking of clothing or even of furniture, but it is spiritually deadly when we speak of mixing the gospel of Christ with error. If you have any doubt about that truth, please listen to Paul. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bandage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, you are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:1-4).

God gave his people the Jewish covenant. It just as surely came from the mind of God as did the gospel of

Christ. The commandments, statutes and judgments God gave the Jews applied to them during the existence of the Mosaic covenant. God forbade the eating of pork, rabbit and catfish. He also opposed having tattoos on the bodies of his people. Did God enforce those regulations because he did not want his people to adopt the customs and practices of their pagan neighbors? I have no doubt that was true in some cases, but was it true in all cases? I do not know and do not care to speculate about the matter. But I know this: the Jews were in deep trouble with God when they violated the restrictions he had placed on them. They could even die physically if they ignored God's law. You do remember the man who was executed because he picked up sticks on the Sabbath, do you not?

Not one of the regulations I have mentioned was included in the new covenant. There are no restrictions on eating meat, mixing various kinds of cloth, such as wool and linen, sowing different kinds of seed in one's vineyard or plowing an ox and a donkey together (Dt. 22:9-10). All of those restrictions were removed when Jesus gave the new covenant. I do not question God's wisdom in binding those regulations on his people. But whatever his reasons were, they no longer apply in the Christian era.

But does homosexuality belong in the same category as eating a ham sandwich or wearing a garment made of wool and linen? I am not planning to discuss with you the Sodom story, the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:23 and 20:13 or the tragic story in Judges 19, although I have no doubt these passages have a bearing on the current debate over homosexuality. Since we live under the new covenant, our concern today is to examine the new covenant's teachings on homosexuality.

I begin with a passage so plain and comprehensive that no true Bible believer could ever have any doubts about the sinfulness of homosexuality. Please listen carefully to Paul's Holy Spirit inspired words. Paul mentioned people in his day who "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. For this reason God gave them up to vile affections: for even their women exchanged the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet" (Rom. 1:25-27).

I am going to use an approach to this topic that I normally do not use. I have in my study about forty commentaries on the book of Romans. Obviously, I cannot read from all of these commentaries, but I shall read from several of these scholarly books. Charles Hodge taught for many years at Princeton Theological Seminary and was a highly respected conservative scholar. His **Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans** (Philadelphia: H. B. Garner, 1883) for years has been considered a very valuable commentary on that great book. Please listen carefully to Dr. Hodge's comments on Romans 1:26-27. "Paul first refers to the degradation of females among the heathen, because they are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals, and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is lost" (p. 63).

Dr. John MacArthur is one of Evangelical's most prolific authors. I must have at least twenty of Dr. MacArthur's books and, generally speaking, have profited greatly from reading his literary works. **The MacArthur Commentary on Romans** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991)

say concerning homosexuality; “There is a burning level of lust among homosexuals that beggars description and is rarely known among heterosexuals. The homosexuals of Sodom were so passionately consumed with their lust that they ignored the fact that they had been made blind and ‘wearing themselves trying to find the doorway’ into Lot’s house in order to pursue their vile passion (Gen. 19:11)...In the United States and many other western countries it is not uncommon for homosexual males to have 300 partners a year. Even when relationships are on a friendly basis, the most bizarre acts imaginable are committed, and mutilation is common....A San Francisco coroner estimated that ten percent of his city’s homicides were probably related to sado-masochistic sex (that is violent and brutal sex) among homosexuals.” Dr. MacArthur expresses amazement that “many church denominations in the United States and elsewhere have ordained homosexuals to the ministry and even established special congregations for homosexuals” (volume 1, pp. 105-106).

Dr. Everett Harrison was one of the founding professors of Fuller Theological Seminary in California. His commentary on **Romans** (Grad Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976) provides the following thought-provoking information on the passage I am examining with you. “The first exchange, that of the truth for a lie, is followed by another – the upsetting of the normal course of nature in sexual relations, Instead of using the ordinary terms for men and women, Paul substitutes ‘males’ and ‘females.’ The irony is that this sort of bestiality finds no counterpart in the animal kingdom. Perversion is the unique contrivance of the human species” (p. 25).

Long before the so-called “Gay Liberation Front” was organized, R. L. Whiteside wrote **A New**

Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome

(Denton, TX: Miss Inys Whiteside, 1945). Brother Whiteside's comments are right on the mark. "Paul is not indulging in a lot of fanciful speculations or presenting baseless theories. He is showing how the heathen nations had reached the lowest degree of moral degradation. When people cease to respect God, they will not long respect their own bodies. They give themselves up to passions of dishonor. Their women become abusers of their own bodies. The men indulged in the debasing practice of sodomy. We are told that this was a common practice among the prominent men of Greece and also the Romans. When the greatest men of a nation descend to the lowest conceivable form of immorality, it shows how powerless education and philosophy are to save men from the deepest depths of moral pollution: (p. 36).

There are many other scholars from whose commentaries on Romans I would like to read to you, but I want to return to the article by Jeffrey Weiss. He asks, "So what makes on law still in force another seemingly obsolete? Particularly when Jesus himself said, 'Not one jot or tittle' of the law would change" (p. 19-A). So what does make one law still in force and another seemingly obsolete? If Jeffrey Weiss had bothered to dig a little deeper, he would have had no difficulty answering his own question. The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah predicted that God would give a new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). The author of Hebrews affirmed that the gospel is that new covenant. What else could the author of Hebrews have in mind when he wrote: "In that he says, A new covenant, he has made the first old. Now that which decays and waxes old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13).

When a writer – whether a journalist or any other – wants to maintain a particular point of view, he may be

tempted to modify what Jesus actually said. Did Jesus teach that “not one jot or one tittle” of the law would change? If he did, we have some really serious problems with the teachings of the Bible. The New Testament books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews condemn trying to enforce the Mosaic covenant. Please listen to a brief excerpt from each of these epistles. “Now we know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19-20). “For I testify again to every man who is circumcised, that he is debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; you are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:3-4). “Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He takes away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:9-10). If Jesus said, “not one jot or one tittle” would change, these and dozens of other biblical passages are simply wrong. They make absolutely no sense.

So what did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount? Did he teach that “not one jot or one tittle” would change? If Jeffrey Weiss had been honest with the text, he would not have made such an inexcusable blunder. Please listen to the very words of Jesus Christ. “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away, till all be fulfilled” (Mt. 5:7-18). If only Jeffrey Weiss had bothered to examine two very important words in our Lord’s saying. Those words are “fulfilled” and “until.” He wrote as if these two words were not in the text. His ignorance of these words cannot be excused. Dr.

Jack Lewis has an earned doctorate in Greek from Harvard University and an earned doctorate in Hebrew from Hebrew Union. Dr. Lewis wrote a commentary on **The Gospel According to Matthew** (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Company, 1976) in which he says concerning Christ's fulfilling the law and the prophets: "**The law and the prophets** make up two main divisions of the Hebrew canon of Scripture. Jesus, born under the law (Gal. 4:4), was no antinomian. He came not **to abolish the law but to fulfill it**. Back of 'fulfill' is the Hebrew word to uphold. 'He kept its precepts, fulfilled its prophecies, and accomplished its purposes (Gal. 3:19; 5:14). As marriage does not nullify courtship but accomplishes its purposes, so the new system while modifying, fulfills the law and the prophets'" (part 1, p. 86).

Now let us take a look at the little word "till" or "until." Jesus explicitly taught that not one jot or one tittle of the law and the prophets would pass away until all was fulfilled or accomplished. Does the word "until" have any meaning in this passage? Jeffrey Weiss either did not know the word was in the passage or did not consider it worth noticing. If Jesus fulfilled – literally filled full – the law and the prophets, they have passed away. They were to be in force until he fulfilled them. Since he did fulfill them, they are no longer in force. Not one jot or one tittle of the law and the prophets applies, to us, unless we can find that teaching in the gospel of Christ. Other wise, we would be living under two covenants.

I have already emphasized that we are not bound by the restrictions and prohibitions of the Mosaic covenant, unless we can find the restrictions and prohibitions in the gospel. I had a professor at Andrew University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, to ask on a final examination: "If the Mosaic covenant has been removed, why would it be

wrong for us to commit adultery or to murder? Christians do not engage in these sinful activities – not because they are forbidden in the law of Moses – but because the New Testament forbids them. The principles I the Ten Commandments are also found in the New Testament, with the exception of the Sabbath command. So we do not commit adultery because Jesus condemned it. In fact, he went a step further. He taught that it not only is wrong to commit adultery; it is wrong to think adultery (Mt. 5:27-28). God told the Jews: “You shall not steal” (Ex. 20:15). Paul adds: “Let him who stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him who needs” (Eph. 4:28). All the moral principles found in the Old Testament are also found in the New – moral principles not ceremonial laws, such as, burning incense and offering animal sacrifices.

Jeffrey Weiss summarizes a poll conducted by Pew Research Center for People and the Press and the Public Forum on Religion and Public Life. The poll found that two-thirds of people who attend evangelical Protestant churches at least once a month say their preachers speak out against homosexuality. About half of Catholic priest and mainline Protestant preachers also condemn homosexuality. Weiss comments: “Many of those ministers, presumably, cite Scripture in support of their view that homosexuality is sinful” (p. 19-A). And why do many of the preachers and priest cite scripture in their opposition to homosexual conduct? Could it be because the Bible specifically and unequivocally condemns homosexuality? That has always been the almost universal view of those who call themselves Christians. Only those preachers and theologians who are way out in left field have questioned the teaching of scripture on homosexuality.

Jeffrey Weiss quotes John Shelby Spong as saying, “one wonders why several other Torah rules have been generally ignored while this one is elevated to the status of the word of God” (p. 19-A). Does Jeffrey Weiss know anything about John Shelby Spong, except that he is a retired Episcopal bishop? Does he know, for example, that the former bishop rejects virtually every fundamental of New Testament Christianity? Spong rejects the virgin birth of Christ, the inspiration of the Bible, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and most, if not all, the miracles of the Bible. He does not believe God is a personal being. And besides, he is absolutely certain that we cannot be certain about anything, except that we can be certain that we cannot be certain.

If you think I might be misjudging Spong’s views, please listen to a few brief excerpts from his book, **Into the Whirlwind: The Future of the Church** (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1983). “We are thus entering a brand new world where certainty more and more will be seen as a vice rising out of an emotional need, and uncertainty will be seen as a virtue possessing integrity and a willingness to risk security in the quest of truth” (p. 26). I wonder if Spong is certain about that observation. If he is certain, his whole argument falls flat on its face. If he is not certain, we can simply ignore what he writes. Spong asserts: “If the frontier voice cannot be heard and affirmed in the church, if theological and biblical relativity cannot be embraced, if the rigid control systems of the past cannot be opened, then I see little future for the church” (p. 19). What this excerpt amounts to is very simple: There is no such concept as absolute truth and John Shelby Spong is absolutely certain of that. Spong further argues: “Truth is never found in words, but always beyond words. Truth is not found in doctrine or dogma, but always in the experience to which

the doctrine or dogma points and which it seeks to interpret” (p. 200). Did you take note of how absolutely irrational Spong’s statement is? If “truth is never found in words,” why does he use words to establish his position that “truth is never found in words?” And yet John Shelby Spong considers himself a deep thinker – a scholar on the cutting edge of modern thought.

Why would Jeffrey Weiss quote from the views of John Shelby Spong? Spong “wonders why several other Torah rules have been generally ignored while this one (that is, opposition to homosexual behavior) has been elevated to the status of “the word of God.” The word “Torah” refers to the first five books of the Bible. The word means law. I have already shown that the Mosaic covenant does not apply to Christians. But condemnation of homosexuality under the Mosaic covenant was the word of God. In the Christian era, we abide by the New Testament that also explicitly condemns homosexual conduct. It even affirms that those who engage in homosexual activities will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The English Standard Versions translates 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 as follows: “Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality....will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Personally I prefer the inspired apostle Paul to the uninspired former bishop.

Homosexuality – A Death Style

Is there any doubt in your mind that homosexuality is one of the most serious moral, medical, social and spiritual problems this nation and many other modern

nations face? The topic is being vigorously debated in most denominations in the United States, in state and national legislatures, in some colleges and universities and in society in general. The reason it is not being debated in all colleges and universities is because most institutions of higher learning could care less about the moral and spiritual implications of almost any kind of behavior. The administrations and faculties of many schools have bought into Satan's lie that we cannot know right and wrong. They argue that right and wrong depend on the situation. There are no absolutes and they are absolutely sure of it.

From a scriptural viewpoint, there really can be no doubt about the sinfulness of homosexuality. Paul's letter to the Romans makes that truth too plain for anyone to deny. Please listen to Paul's description of moral conditions among the Gentiles at Rome. "Wherefore God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. For this cause God gave them up to vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into what which is against nature: and likewise the men, leaving the natural use of the woman burned in their lusts one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was appropriate" (Rom. 1:24-27).

I often preach and lecture on the sinfulness and destructiveness of homosexuality. But my major emphasis today is not on the sinfulness of homosexuality, but on the physical dangers of sexual perversion. We must teach our children to realize that our bodies are sacred and must be kept pure and strong for the Lord. Paul asked the Corinthians: "What? Do you not know that your body is

the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20). I am calling our lesson today; "Homosexuality – A Death Style."

Homosexual activists in our nation often refer to their sexual behavior as "an alternated lifestyle." They want us to believe that homosexuality is just as legitimate as heterosexuality. In fact, many homosexuals believe and do not hesitate to say that homosexuality is puperior in some ways to heterosexuality. At least, homosexual conduct does not add to the population explosion throughout the world. But the sad truth is: If the nation endorses homosexuality as an alternate way for men and women to express their sexual desires, we would become unpopulated. Incidentally, there is a dangerous decrease in the population of Germany, of Italy and of other European countries. Their population is actually below replacement levels. That fact may have little or nothing to do with homosexuality, but widespread homosexual behavior will be detrimental to those countries.

I am not by myself in describing homosexuality as a "death style." Dr. Charles Socarides is a medical doctor who has worked with both men and women who are confused over their sexual identity. During our discussion today, I shall be referring to his book, **Homosexuality: A Freedom Too Far** (Phoenix: Adam Margrave Books, 1995). The subtitle of the book is: **A Psychoanalyst Answers 1000 Questions About Causes and Cure and the Impact of the Gay Rights Movement on American Society**. Dr. Socarides calls "the gay lifestyle...a death style" (p. 269). He mentions an observation John J. McNeill, a former Roman Catholic priest, made about a French homosexual by the name of Jean Genet: "Today,

with the onset of the AIDS epidemic, we who are gay...are now linked to a frightening, usually fatal disease. By our very existence...we are a constant reminder to everyone of the inevitability of death. Gay people are now called upon to give a special witness to the meaning of death” (p. 270).

Surely everyone in the United States know about the association between homosexual sex and AIDS. The only problem is that sexually transmitted diseases were rampant in the homosexual community long before AIDS was discovered in the early 1980's. Every health care professional in America has known for years that homosexuals – especially male homosexuals – were dangerously infected by many sexually transmitted diseases. Dr. Socarides affirms: “Some pretty good studies have already proven that male homosexuals have a very high infection rate for STDs.” Dr. Socarides provides the following information on sexually transmitted diseases among homosexuals. “In New York City, at one point in the early 1980s, 52 percent of the gay male population had come down with these diseases. In Dallas (the number) was 60 percent. In Newark NJ (the number) was 64 percent. And then there's the STD to beat all STDs: AIDS: (p. 190).

Louis Shelton, founder of an organization called Traditional Values Coalition, has recently written a book, **The Agenda: The Homosexual Plan to Change America** (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2005), which provides some up-to-date information about sexually transmitted diseases within the homosexual community. Please listen to what Shelton writes about diseases among male homosexual. “Human papillomavirus (HPV), which has been causally linked to cervical cancer in women, was found in 57 percent of the homosexuals who participated in the study.” It was also linked to cancer in men. The HPV rates are

extremely high in some cities. In San Francisco, 61 percent of the men are infected, 57 percent in Boston, 60 percent in New York City and 49 percent in Denver (pp. 64-65).

There is much more information about sexually transmitted diseases other than AIDS. But for just a minute, let us talk about people with AIDS. Larry Kramer, Randy Shilts and thousands of other have died of AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses. And those men who have died were someone's sons. I have two sons. I would hurt to the very depth of my being if I lost one of my sons. The mothers and fathers of those young men who died with AIDS hurt just like the rest of us when we lose our children to death.

In this country, AIDS is passed primarily through homosexual contacts and through drug-contaminated needles. Both Louis Shelton and Dr. Socarides discuss the tragic case of Larry Kramer. Shelton records a portion of a speech Kramer made in New York City to his fellow homosexuals. Kramer told them: "You are still murdering each other....Please stop with all the generalizations and avoidance excuses gays have used since the beginning to ditch this responsibility for this fact" (p. 160). When only forty-one homosexual men had died of AIDS, Larry Kramer began to write essays and letters to the editors of papers warning of the tragedy that was looming on the horizon. Dr. Socarides says Kramer chided the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta for failure to gather data on the AIDS problem. Kramer published a book with the title, **Report from the Holocaust-** but he was not speaking of the German holocaust. He had in mind the holocaust associated with the AIDS tragedy (p. 226).

The late Randy Shilts was regarded as the nation's most expert journalist on the AIDS epidemic. Shilts

worked as a reporter for the **San Francisco Journal**. He broke a number of key AIDS news stories. His book, **And the Band Played on: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic** (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), provides an enormous amount of information about the homosexual lifestyle and the many tragedies that occur in cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Atlanta. Randy Shilts was a very capable journalist who died of AIDS. Shilts mentions the fact that Rock Hudson died of AIDS. He says: "People died while public health authorities and political leaders who guided them refused to take the tough measures necessary to curb the epidemic's spread, opting for politics with the disease, putting political dogma ahead of the preservation of human life" (p. xxii of the Prologue). Incidentally, Shilts also discusses the many other sexually transmitted diseases that wracked the homosexual community, such as, amebiasis, giardiasis, gastrointestinal parasites, shigellosis, hepatitis B, genital herpes, gonorrhea and syphilis.

Our nation has been cursed with a great amount of family violence. It is estimated that between two and three million husbands abuse their wives every year in the United States, although nobody knows the actual number. Many wives are embarrassed or afraid to report the abuse. Tragically, some of those wives are abused to death. In addition, thousands of children are beaten, burned, pushed down stairs, run over with automobiles, drowned in bathtubs and abused in other ways. Spouse and child abuse are absolutely inexcusable. Abusers must be punished to the full extent of the law.

Did you know there is also violence between homosexual partners? Dr. Socarides does not mention abuse among homosexuals, but Louis Shelton does. Two brief excerpts from Shelton's book should open our eyes to

the problem. “In addition, surveys have confirmed the extremely high mortality rate among homosexuals due not only to AIDS, STDs, cancer, bacterial infections, but also to violence, substance abuse, accidents, murder and an inordinately high rate of suicide” (p. 6). Shelton also writes: “Physical abuse is at least twice as high among gays as it is among heterosexual couples” (p. 57).

The rate of suicide among homosexuals is much higher than in the population in general. Louis Shelton reports that males are four times more likely to take their own lives than females, although females are more likely to attempt suicide than males. “The rate of suicide among homosexuals is highest of all” (p. 66). We may not know all the reasons homosexuals commit suicide at a higher rate than heterosexuals, but we know that many homosexuals are ashamed of their lifestyle, depressed a great amount of the time and angry with God for their condition, although God has nothing to do with their choices.

If you had any doubt why I called our lesson today “Homosexuality – a Death Style,” let me give you one more piece of disturbing information. Do you know the average lifespan of a male homosexual? The average man in the United States will live to about seventy-five years of age. The average woman will live to almost seventy-nine. According to Louis Shelton, “Dr. Paul Cameron conducted an important study of the mortality rates of homosexuals. He recorded the age of death of homosexuals as reported in the death notices of eighteen homosexual journals over an eleven-year period, and what he found was the median age death was the late thirties for those with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). For those who had not developed AIDS, the median age of death was only slightly longer, in the early forties. Statistics for lesbians indicated an average lifespan of less than fifty years” (p.

56). In very simple language, the lifespan of a male homosexual is cut almost in half by his sexual activities. How could we not call homosexuality a “death style?”

For the remainder of our time today, let us stress some of what the Bible teaches about life. As you know, if you are a diligent student of the word, the Bible has much to say about life. For example, the book of John alone uses the Greek **zoe** thirty-five times. 1 John uses the word fourteen times and the book of Revelation uses the word fifteen times. That means that the apostle John alone use the word “life” sixty-four times in just three of his literary productions. Obviously, I cannot read all the passages – not even in John’s writings – that mention life, but I must examine some of them.

The apostle John introduces his gospel with these inspiring words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4). According to these words, Jesus Christ is the source of life. Do you believe he is pleased with his children who fail to take care of the life he has so graciously given them? Should we cut short our life of service to him and to our fellowmen by engaging in activities that hasten our death? We must not engage in a death style. And that includes much more than refraining from homosexual behavior.

Most Americans are familiar with the Golden Text of the Bible, although most of them probably have no idea where to locate it in the Bible. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believes in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:14-17). I am aware that Christ came to give us a good life here, but his ultimate reason for coming to this earth was to provide eternal life to all who believe in him and obey the gospel.

The word “life” appears more often in John six than in any other chapter in the New Testament. I do not have time to read all eleven verses in John six that use the word “life,” but I do want to read some of them. Please listen to these stirring words. “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes on me shall never thirst....And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son, and believes in him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day....It is the Spirit who quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (John 6:35, 40, 63). Both physical life and eternal life are very important to our God.

In his Parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus contrasted himself – the Good Shepherd – with the thief, that, with false teachers. Our Lord affirmed: “The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and destroy: I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). In his excellent commentary on **The Gospel According to John** (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), Dr. D. A. Carson makes the following appropriate comments on John 10:10: “This is a proverbial way of insisting that there is only one means of receiving eternal life....only one source of knowledge of God, only one fount of spiritual nourishment, only one basis for spiritual security – Jesus alone” (p. 385).

Walking according to the will of God gives us the good life here and guarantees eternal life hereafter.

I shall take time to read just two verses from John's first epistle. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who loves not his brother abides in death. Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14-15). Christ is not teaching that the ones who have committed murder cannot be forgiven. Peter accused the Jews on Pentecost of having crucified and slain the Son of God (Acts 2:23). But those who repented and were baptized were forgiven and added to the Lord's church. They were on their way to eternal life.

The book of Revelation uses the word "life" fifteen times. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Jesus promised the faithful member of the body of Christ: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit say to the churches; to him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7). When Adam and Eve sinned against God, he forbade them to eat of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). The life, death and resurrection of our Lord have overcome the effects of sin and permits us to eat of the tree of life and live forever. The Lord assured the faithful Christians at Smyrna: "Fear none of those things that you shall suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you in prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days: be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (that is, a crown consisting of life") (Rev. 2:10).

I have one other brief reading from Revelation. "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the

Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations....And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him who hears say, Come. And let him who is thirsty come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:1-2, 17). According to these words from Revelation, eternal life is available to all who come in faith and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. What an absolutely remarkable promise!

We know that life is in the Son. That is precisely what the apostle John tells us in his first epistle. “And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in the Son” (1 John 5:11). But how do we experience the life that is in the Son? We know we are not in the Son just because we have been born physically into this world. There must be something else we must do to inherit eternal life. Do you remember what Jesus told some Jews? “You will not come to me that you might have life” (John 5:40).

On one occasion, “a certain ruler asked him (Jesus Christ), Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life” (Lk. 18:18)? Do your take notice of that little word “do?” If men have nothing to do in order to inherit eternal life, as some Calvinists teach, why did not our Lord correct the ruler’s question? Instead, Christ proceeded to explain what the man had to do to be saved and have the promise of eternal life. What did Jesus tell him to do? Did he not tell him to keep the commandments (Lk. 18:20)?

Obviously, the commandments the ruler had to keep were different from the ones we have to keep. The reason for making that statement is very simple: Jesus lived and taught under the Mosaic covenant. Why did Jesus not tell

the ruler, “You must believe that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God?” That great truth was not a part of the covenant God had made with the Jewish people. We must believe in Christ because we live under the new covenant.

So what must we do to inherit eternal life? That is not exactly the question the Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul, but the import is the same. For the remainder of our time today, let us examine the conversion of that prison keeper at Philippi. Acts 16 records some events that transpired in Philippi, including the conversion of Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira (Acts 16:14-15). While Paul, Silas and Luke were in Philippi, a young woman who was possessed with a spirit of divination kept following them and crying out, “These men are servants of the most high god, who show unto us the way of salvation.” That is precisely who Paul, Silas and Luke were – servants of the most high God – and that is exactly what they were doing – showing the way of salvation. But Paul was not happy to have demon-possessed person telling who they were and what they were doing. So Paul commanded the demon to come out of the young woman and it came out the same hour (Acts 18:16-18).

There were some Philippian men who were using the demon-possessed woman for telling fortunes or for predicting the future or for other pagan practices. When those men saw that Paul had cast the spirit of divination from the young woman, they were very angry. They accused Paul and Silas of troubling the city by teaching customs that were unlawful for Roman citizens to observe. The magistrates of the city tore their clothes, beat Paul and Silas and put them in jail. The magistrates commanded the jailer at Philippi to put the feet of Paul and Silas in stocks.

At midnight as Paul and Silas were singing praises to God almighty, God sent an earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison. The bands that held the prisoners were loosed. The jailer knew his life was in danger if any of the prisoners escaped. He drew his sword to kill himself, but Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do yourself no harm; for we are all here." Then the jailer called for a light, came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas. He knew something spectacular was occurring. He asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved" (Acts 16:19-31)? The Greek of that question literally reads: "Sirs, what is necessary for me to do that I may be saved?" I hope you took notice of the words "Necessary" and "do." Was there really something necessary he had to do to be saved? If there were not, why did not Paul tell him otherwise?

Paul and Silas urged the Philippian jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house" (Acts 16:31). I have some questions I must ask you to consider. Did the command to believe involve believing only? Was that all that was necessary for the jailer to do to be saved? Do some Calvinists actually teach that faith alone saves? If you ever had any doubt, let me remove that doubt. Dr. Ron Rhodes is an expert in cults and in the New Age movement. In his book, **The Challenge of the Cults and New Religions** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), Dr. Rhodes affirms: "Salvation is said to be by faith alone close to 200 times in the New Testament" (p. 275). He cites Acts 16:31 as an example of salvation by faith alone (p. 273).

Let me say as plainly and as kindly as I know how: Dr Rhodes would have done all of us a great favor if he had given just one verse that teaches salvation by faith alone. I know the New Testament mentions faith many times in connection with salvation. I have read to you already one of the best-known verses on that topic. "For God so loved

the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). There is not the slightest doubt we are saved by faith, but can we add the word “alone” – as Martin Luther and some of the ancient theologians did – without perverting scripture?

The Philippian jailer was a pagan. He knew nothing or almost nothing about Christ or about the plan of salvation. He did not know what to believe about Christ and what to do to be saved. So what did Paul and Silas do to remove his ignorance of the truth? “They spoke unto him the word of the Lord, and to all who were in his house” (Acts 16:32). When the jailer learned the plan of salvation, he obeyed the gospel by being baptized into Christ. Is that actually what the text teaches? The jailer showed his penitent attitude by taking Paul and Silas and washing their stripes. Then he and all his household were baptized, immediately” (Acts 16:33).

Is that not exactly what occurred in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost? “And they who gladly received the word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). That is also what took place in Samaria. “And when they (the Samaritans) believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

Hollywood's Influence on Morality

Allen Webster

“Hollywood”¹ is a district in Los Angeles, California, situated west-northwest of downtown. Due to its history of movie studios and stars, the word “Hollywood” is often used as a synonym for American film and television. It is the undisputed movie capital of the world, although much of the movie industry has moved to Burbank and the Westside. Although Paramount Studios is the only major studio still physically located within Hollywood, in American culture, “Hollywood” still stands for the entertainment industry in general.²

The influence of Hollywood on American culture is phenomenal. Although less than 200,000 live in the Hollywood district (167,664, 2000 census), it exerts more influence than—arguably—any other single city in America. The income per capita in Hollywood is only \$26,119, but it generates about 9 billion dollars each year in movies alone (\$23 billion if worldwide sales are counted).³

In early 1910, director D.W. Griffith was sent to the west coast to film in Los Angeles. His Company visited the little village Hollywood, and found that it enjoyed having the movie company filming there. Upon returning to New York, Griffith spread the reputation of this “wonderful place” called Hollywood. This caused other movie-makers to head west. The first feature film made in Hollywood, in

¹ The name Hollywood traces is said to come from the native *Toyon*, or “California Holly,” that cover the hillsides with clusters of bright red berries each winter. The name *Hollywood* was coined by H.J. Whitley, the Father of Hollywood, who came up with the name his wife Gigi while on their honeymoon.

² The background history and information is adapted from Wikipedia.

³ <http://news.ecoustics.com/bbs/messages/10381/207211.html>

1914, was called "The Squaw Man", directed by Cecil B. DeMille.

Television entered the Hollywood scene in 1947 when KTLA, the first commercial television station west of the Mississippi River, began operating in Hollywood. And in the 1950s, music recording studios and offices began moving into Hollywood. The famous Capitol Records building, with its unique circular design that looks like a stack of 7-inch vinyl records, was built in 1956.

Hollywood Morals

The Bible says, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8). A quarter century ago, Professors S. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman interviewed 240 broadcasters and journalists from national media outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* magazine, *Newsweek*, CBS, NBC, ABC, and PBS. They reported:

- Few are churchgoers. Only 8% go to church or synagogue weekly, and 85% seldom or ever attend.
- 90% agree that a woman has the right to decide whether to have an abortion; 79% agree strongly.
- Although most Americans believe homosexuality is wrong, Lichter and Rothman found that 75% of the media elite believe it is okay. A mere 9% felt strongly that homosexuality is wrong.
- The majority—54%—do not regard adultery as wrong, with only 15% strongly agreeing that extramarital affairs are immoral.

Their conclusion? “Members of the media elite emerge as strong supporters of sexual freedom or permissiveness.” If

this true then, no one would argue that it has improved since. Should it surprise us, then, that the plot of many prime-time shows promotes offensive behaviors?

A Look at Television

A human being is a virtual learning machine. Our senses constantly soak up information, sending our brain a flood of over 100,000,000 bits of data every second. To some extent we can influence that content by deciding what we feed our senses. We must take heed to what we see and hear (Matthew 6:29; Mark 4:24), because the primary accesses to our hearts are our eyes and ears. “The issues of life” come from the heart (Proverbs 4:23; 13:20). Our souls may be polluted as easily by what we see and hear as our bodies are by what we eat or drink.

One of the greatest enemies to our minds is found in 98% of American homes. Harvard University reported that it has more influence over our culture than school, homes, and churches *combined*. According to *Time Magazine*, the average American watches **television** three hours and 46 minutes a day! By high school graduation, a student has been in school for about 10,800 hours but will have watched TV more than 20,000 hours. Between two and sixty a person views TV for 3,000 days (nine full years).

How could such massive doses *fail* to affect us? If a thirty-second spot can convince us to make a purchase, what will 1,850 hours a year convince us of? We sift out many harmful concepts, but are probably more influenced than we realize. Sinful concepts are so invisibly woven into plots that they are hard to recognize (2 Corinthians 2:14). The morals we absorbed yesterday appear on the printout of their lives today. Ask yourself: “Am I careful enough about what I watch?”

TV is powerful—either for good or evil. From a Christian perspective, we need a “TV Guide.” Keep it handy. It might save more than time.

A Christian watches TV realizing that God is watching him (1 Peter 1:17-19; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Proverbs 4:34, 26). We ought to be afraid to watch R-rated movies and bad TV because Jesus might return in the middle and leave without us! There *is* an all-seeing eye watching you (Hebrews 4:13).

A Christian watches TV remembering that what is in his hand—the remote control—is one of the most dangerous things in his house (Ephesians 6:10-13). Guns, knives, and poison can kill the body, but sin ruins one’s eternal soul (Matthew 10:28)! More is involved here than innocent entertainment or killing a couple of hours.

A battle rages daily for our hearts, minds, and souls (1 Peter 5:8). The musician Frank Zappa argued before a Maryland State senate subcommittee (when asked about lyrics), “These are only words—words can’t hurt anyone.” Yeah, right! Television can foster violence in teenagers. Such reputable organizations as the *American Academy of Pediatrics*, the *National Institute of Mental Health*, and the *American Medical Association* all agree that TV violence causes aggressive and anti-social behavior.

One social scientist estimates that by age 14, the averaged child witnesses 11,000 “murders” on TV—not including thousands of fights, robberies, muggings, rapes, and kidnappings. The more children and adolescents are exposed to violence, the more likely they are to engage in violence. A study by Wake Forest University was published in the journal *Pediatrics*.

They found that boys who watched wrestling were more likely to start fights with their dates, be a date-fight victim, or carry a gun or other weapon. They also said they drank alcohol or used drugs during their last fight, the researchers found. For girls, watching wrestling led to higher rates of starting a fight with a date, being a victim of a date fight, carrying a gun at school, fighting, fighting at school, or being injured in a fight. And like the boys, these girls said they drank or used drugs during a fight, the study found.

TV sends the message that violence is the normal way of taking care of disagreements. When TV was first shown in a remote village in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa, a bewildered old man asked: "Why are whites always stabbing, shooting and punching one another?"

Don Johnson, president of J. Walter Thompson Company (once the nation's largest advertising agency), said an analysis of existing scientific and social research on TV violence reveals the following areas where he believes "damage is caused:"

(1). If children are constantly given models of violent behavior, their behavior will probably turn violent.

(2). Incidents have been reported in which unstable adults have modeled crimes on television dramas.

(3). Excessive doses of violence tend to desensitize even stable adults. They become indifferent to the suffering of others.

(4). Heavy watching of TV violence contributes to the tide of paranoia that afflicts a major part of the population. Caution is a useful emotion. Terror is not.

Violence is not compatible with Christianity (Romans 12:18). Christians do not need to be desensitized or indifferent to the needs of God’s creatures (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:32; 2 Timothy 3:3).

A Christian watches TV with his mind set in concrete. He has already made up his mind—sin is sin and wrong is wrong (Psalm 119:97-105). We ought to read the Bible before we watch TV, so our minds will be “fixed” (Psalm 57:7) about moral issues. The TV is not a reliable teacher when it comes to what is right and what is wrong. (This is why children’s TV should be severely limited.)

Enemies that come out in broad daylight banishing a sword are easier to conquer than ones that sneak in under cover of darkness. Physical persecution would be hard to bear, but at least we would know we were under attack. Satan attacks through television by eroding our character, spoiling innocent pleasures, and cheapening our view of life. He does it so subtly that most are unaware of what is happening (2 Corinthians 11:3).

A Christian watches TV remembering that the devil usually writes the script (Galatians 5:16, 19-21). Is it any wonder that the perspective of news reporters tends to favor homosexual radicals and abortionists? When Hollywood was incorporated in 1903, interestingly, among the town ordinances was one prohibiting the sale of liquor except by pharmacists and another outlawing the driving of cattle through the streets in herds of more than two hundred. Now, liquor is woven into the common fabric of movies, television, and music. When you turn on to the TV lane, proceed with caution (Proverbs 2:11; Psalm 32:8).

Parents would never put a pistol with one chamber loaded into a child’s hand and say, “Here, play with this.” Yet, they will put a remote control into the same hand and invite them to kill their soul. The average American teen—

and, yes, Christian teens—are given access to enough sexual imagery to push them strongly in the direction of sexual experimentation. Sexual content went from R-movies to cable to ABC. TV contributes to teen immorality and pregnancy.

- There are 10.94 instances of sexual behavior per hour in prime time (Matthew 5:28).
- *The National Federation of Decency* reports that 88% of all sexual affairs depicted on TV were outside of marriage.
- By a two-to-one margin, teens in a Gallup Youth Survey view premarital sex as “not wrong.” Specifically, 59 percent say sex outside of marriage is all right while half as many, 30 percent, take the opposite view. About one in nine, 11 percent, are undecided.
- One million young women become pregnant each year—two-thirds of the pregnancies unwanted. The two-thirds are broken down as follows: 370,000 end in abortion; 235,000 end in illegitimate births; 100,000 are hastily legitimized by marriage.

Television and movies generally portray uncommitted, unmarried sex as enjoyable and rarely shows the “dark side” consequences. Marriage is honorable (Hebrews 13:4) and a permanent contract (Matthew 19:6; Romans 7:1-4; 1 Corinthians 7:39). Sex outside of marriage is sin (1 Corinthians 6:18; 7:1-2).

The Entertainment Industry says that Christians often express concern over the content of today’s entertainment, but continue to be entertained by it. Maybe it’s time we stopped cheering for the enemy (Psalm 101:3). Paul wrote, “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them” (Romans 1:32; cf. Colossians 3:1-6). Sin is sin and wrong is wrong (Psalm 119:97-105). One righteous man prayed, “Let the

words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).

People have gradually gotten more lax on what they watch. Things we would have been red-in-the-face to have seen with our wives (husbands) ten years ago, we now watch (and laugh at) with pre-school children in the room. Paul spoke of those “who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but *have pleasure in them that do them*” (Romans 1:32). It is a sin to enjoy watching others sin! We must not forget we are in a battle for the *mind*.

A Christian watches TV with his heart on his sleeve. He doesn’t laugh at or enjoy it when his values are attacked, mocked, or undermined by the comedian. One youth speaker said, “I never cease to be amazed at the number of students who come from ‘good homes’ and even attend Christian schools who have watched one or more episodes of a teen soft-porn movie—typically, 60% of those whom I’ve surveyed.” It is inconsistent to enjoy things that prompt God’s anger (cf. Colossians 3:1-6).

A Christian watches TV realizing that it has an “off” button which needs to be used. He would rather miss the end of an interesting program than have to watch something dirty (Psalm 101:2-4; 19:14). Television can be destructive to the family. Parents have the right—responsibility—to tell children (including teens) what they can and can’t watch. One parent complained, “My kid’s all messed up from heavy metal music and exposure to sexual videos on MTV at an early age. You can’t blame *me* for his problems. I’m never home!” That’s most of the problem (cf. Titus 2:4-5).

A Christian watches TV with one eye on his watch (Ephesians 5:15-16). TV is the biggest waste of time in

America. We could save so many more souls, learn so much more about the Bible, bring so much more glory to God, if only we didn't have to watch TV.

As her mother was scraping vegetables for a salad, a daughter came to ask permission to see an "adult movie." "All my friends are going," she argued, "their folks think it's okay." As they talked, her mother threw scraps into the salad. Startled, she shouted, "Mother, you're putting garbage in the salad!"

"I know," she replied, "but I thought if you didn't mind putting garbage in your heart that you wouldn't mind garbage in your stomach." Thoughtfully, the girl picked the peelings from her salad and then smiled. "I guess I'll just tell them I'm staying at home tonight."

Jesus told us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation" (Matthew 6:13). Paul wrote, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things*" (Philippians 4:8). Only those with pure hearts will see God (Matthew 5:8).

A Darker Side of Hollywood

Every year, hundreds of runaway adolescents leave their homes across America hoping to become movie stars. They soon discover that they have extremely slim chances of competing against professionally trained actors. Some return home, while others become prostitutes, panhandlers, or end up in the large pornography industry in the San Fernando Valley.

Most of the pornography made in the entire world is made in the small geographic area in and around Hollywood. Rapper turned porn director DJ Yella (formerly of N.W.A.), who has directed more than 100 porn flicks [*Vibe*, 7/02] “Three years ago, you'd have a lot of resistance from people if you said you made porn. Now it's the thing to do.”

“The thing to do.” The devil’s words if they were ever spoken. Consider the great damage done in the world by the influence of the porn industry.

An anonymous reader wrote:

Shouldn’t a person have the right to watch or read whatever he pleases? As long as he watches or reads in the privacy of his own home, and nobody gets hurt, what difference does it make?”

This expresses a view commonly held among American males—and many females. Let’s consider who is hurt by pornography use.

Pornography hurts the user. The individual who reads and watches pornography does not come away unscathed. Paul wrote, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7-8). God promises one will reap “corruption;”¹ who would dare disagree with Him?

What a person “sows” in his mind determines how he acts. Solomon wrote, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...” (Proverbs 23:7), and, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs

4:23). Someone observed, “Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.”

Just as with alcohol and drugs, pornography is both addictive and progressive. It is undeniably addictive. The percentage of people addicted to pornography is reaching epidemic numbers.² According to an MSNBC.COM survey, 10% of respondents indicated they are addicted to sex or Internet pornography.³ Other estimates range from 3-8%, which would indicate that at least 8.7 million Americans are addicted to pornography (and the number may be as high as 29 million).⁴ Sex addiction is not gender specific, as one might imagine. Half of cybersex addicts are men, and half are women, with men preferring pornography pictures and women preferring sexually explicit chat rooms (however 23% of women preferred pictures).⁵

Why is pornography addictive? Beyond the obvious—that it partially satisfies the human sex drive—Dr. Alvin Cooper, clinical director of the San Jose Marital Services and Sexuality Center in San Jose, California, found that people engage in online sexual activities to break away from their daily routines, explore fantasies, relieve stress, and spice up their sex lives.

Pornography use is progressive in that one needs more and more to satisfy cravings. It starts small, innocently enough. It grows to what one has aptly described as “athlete’s foot of the mind.” It never goes away. It always asks to be scratched, promising relief. To scratch, however, is to cause pain and to intensify the itch. It progresses to greater amounts of time devoted to it, and it progresses to greater perversions—more extreme types of pornography. The user needs rougher and more sexually shocking material to achieve the same level of arousal each

time. For example, simple “swimsuit porn” turns to more daring pictures, then to pictures of younger and younger girls. Eventually, this can turn to interest of sex with children, sex with animals, and even to “snuff movies” where the sex act ends in murder.

Pornography hurts women. The Bible’s command for men to honor women (1 Peter 3:7) is sadly lost in a modern world. The National Victim Center now estimates that at least one woman is raped in the U.S. every 46 seconds.⁶ Why so many rapes? Many experts point to the increase in the use of pornography.

- Exposure to pornography increases the inclination to believe that women like to be hurt, to be humiliated, to be forced to do things that they do not want to do, or to pretend to be forced to do things that they really do want to do. Researchers reported that in the field of violent/pornographic movies, prolonged exposure to X-rated as well as R-rated films caused male college students to be “desensitized” to rape and violence and more accepting to the rape-myth that women say “no” when they really mean “yes.”⁷
- Dr. Sal Pellicano, veteran prison chaplain for prison systems in Florida, North Carolina, and New Jersey reports that during his 15-year career, 100% of the inmates he has known who have been incarcerated for a sex crime were pornography users.⁸
- A study released by the University of New Hampshire revealed that states with the highest readership of porn magazines such as *Playboy* and *Hustler* also had the highest rape rates. Researchers Murray Straus and Larry Baron also found “an unusually high correlation” between sex magazine readership and the rape rate in all states. They stated, “The fact that sex magazine readership is strongly and consistently correlated with rape supports the theory that porn endorses attitudes that

increase the likelihood of rape.”⁹

Pornography hurts children.

- Human Development Specialist Dr. Shirley O’Brien of the University of Arizona found that child pornography victimizes as many as 600,000 children in the United States each year. Victims often include children as young as three and as old as eighteen.¹⁰
- 77% of those who molested boys said they were regular users of hard-core pornography; 87% of those who molested girls said they were regular users of hard-core pornography.¹¹
- The typical serial child molester will abuse more than 360 victims over the course of his lifetime. He is usually able to abuse 30-60 children before he is even caught for the first time.¹²
- 74% of female adolescents who had sex before age 14 reported that it was involuntary.¹³
- It is estimated that one in three girls and one in seven boys are sexually molested by age eighteen.¹⁴
- 20% of children using Internet chat rooms have been approached by pedophiles.¹⁵
- 30% of teenage girls said they had been sexually harassed in a chat room, and only 7% told a parent about the harassment, as they were worried that their parents would take away their Internet use.¹⁶
- 89% of sexual solicitations are made in either Online Chat Rooms or Instant Messages. By the way, 13 million teens use Instant Messenger¹⁷ and 25% of teens participate in Real Time Chat.¹⁸
- 95% of 15 to 17-year-old-teens go on line; 83% have Internet access from home; and 29% have Internet access in their bedroom.¹⁹ Only 33% of teens have a filtering service on Internet at home and 43% of teens do not have rules at home about Internet use.²⁰

- 53% of teens have been exposed to pornographic materials on the Internet;²¹ 31% of kids age 10-17 from households with computers (and 24% of all kids 10-17) say they have seen a pornographic website.²²
- 91% of the first exposure by a teen to pornography was during benign activities, such as research for school projects or surfing the Web for other information. Pornographic Websites often disguise themselves by using common search terms used by children, such as names of popular teen games, TV shows, action figures, and even the White House, to lure teens in hopes that they become future paying users. Once exposed to pornography, teens often seek it out again, and many eventually become addicted.
- Some counselors estimate that the average age for a boy to be exposed to hard-core porno-graphy is now eight and a half years old, and for a girl it is eleven years old.²³ Focus on the Family reports that the average age of first contact with pornography for males has dropped from 11 years old to five years old.²⁴
- Children spent 64.9% more time on pornography sites than they did on game sites in September 2000. In addition, 27% of children age 17 and under visited an adult website, of which 21% were 14 or younger and 40% were female.²⁵
- Adolescents ages 12-17 are among the age groups most frequently exposed to pornography.²⁶
- UNICEF reports that one million children each year are forced into prostitution and used to make pornography.²⁷ Children are reported missing at the rate of 750,000 per year, 62,500 per month, 14,423, per week, 2,054 per day, and 85 per hour or 3 children every 2 minutes.²⁸

Pornography hurts society. An estimated 3,500-5,000 people in the U.S. are murdered each year by “recreational

killers.”²⁹ Most of them feed on pornography. Serial killer Ted Bundy, in an interview just before his execution, said, Listen, I’m no social scientist, and I haven’t done a survey. I don’t pretend that I know what John Q. Citizen thinks about this. But I’ve lived in prison for a long time now. And I’ve met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence **JUST LIKE ME**. And without exception, without question, **EVERY ONE** of them was deeply involved in pornography. There’s no question about it. The FBI’s own study on serial homicide shows that the most common interest among serial killers is pornography. Well-meaning, decent people will condemn the behavior of a Ted Bundy, while they’re walking past a magazine rack full of the very kinds of things that send young kids down the road to be Ted Bundys. But I’ll tell you, there are lots of other kids playing in streets around this country today who are going to be dead tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day and month, because other young people are reading the kinds of things and seeing the kinds of things that are available in the media today.³⁰

Is it any wonder that the Bible instructs Christians to think on that which is PURE? Paul wrote, “Finally brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8; see also 2 Corinthians 10:5). Wayne Jackson notes, “Pornography, sexually explicit movies, etc., have paved the way for many an act of rape, adultery, incest, homosexuality, and other equally vile sins. . . . One simply cannot feed upon the impure and be pure!” (Matthew 5:28; 2 Peter 2:14).³¹

Conclusion: Hollywood is one of the great enemies of God's Cause in our generation. That is not to say that everything produced in Hollywood is unfit for Christian consumption, but so much of it is unfit that we must be careful that we do not gradually allow the line to be moved to the point that there is no difference in the entertainment choices of Christians and those of the world.

Endnotes:

¹ *phthora*, "decay, i.e. ruin (spontaneous or inflicted)."

² Much of this research is found at the website for Proven Men Ministries, Ltd., 16011 Chieftain Ave., Rockville, MD 20855 (<http://www.1wayout.org/pages/need.aspx>). No endorsement of all content is implied, but one may find much additional useful information at this site.

³ According to the U.S. Census Population clock, which takes birth/death rates and census figures and updates into account, at: 11:19 EST March 23, 2004 there were 292,859,499 Americans.

⁴ Results of MSNBC.com, the number one Internet news site, 2000 Online Cybersex Survey, printed by Business Wire, July 19, 2001. The MSNBC online poll is believed to be the largest Internet study of online sexuality to date. The survey received responses from over 38,000 users. MSNBC website surveys are self-selected and unscientific, not the random samples utilized by polling organizations. In 1999, the National Council on Sexual Addiction Compulsivity estimated that 6-8% of Americans are sex addicts. (Cooper, Alvin, Dana E. Putnam, Lynn A. Planchon, and Sylvain C. Boies "Online Sexual Compulsivity: Getting Tangled in the Net" *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, 6:79-104. Taken from Amparano, J. "Sex addicts get help." *The Arizona Republic*, p. A1, 1999). Even with a much more narrowly defined definition, the range of those sexually addicted remains between 3 to 6%. Jennifer P. Schneider, M.D.,

PhD; National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity Website, October 2000.

⁵Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity: The Journal of Treatment and Prevention, Spring, 2000. Based on 1998 survey of 9,265 adults by Dr. Alvin Cooper and others.

⁶ The Parsonage®, Battle Plan Against Pornography, Sermon Outline, printed at Family.org.

⁷ Linz, D., Donnerstein, E., & Adams, S. M. (1989). 509-522.

⁸ “Vile Passions,” an article on the effect of pornography reprinted in the AFA Journal, August 2002, by Rusty Benson.

⁹ “Legitimate Violence, Violent Attitudes, and Rape: A State-Level Analysis” (with Larry Baron and Murray A. Straus). Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 528, 1988.

¹⁰ O’Brien, Shirley. 1992. Child Pornography (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company).

¹¹⁻¹² The Parsonage®, citing Dr. Gene Abel, Emory University.

¹³ “Sexuality, Contraception, and the Media” American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education, Pediatrics, Vol. 107 No. 1, Policy Statement (January 2001, pp. 191-194) (January 2001).

¹⁴ The Parsonage®.

¹⁵ Detective Chief Superintendent Keith Akerman, Telegraph.co.uk (December 3, 2000).

¹⁶ Report, Girl Scout Research Institute, The Net Effect: Girls and New Media (survey of 1,246 teenage girls ages 13-18 between May and July, 2001).

¹⁷ Pew Study reported in JAMA, 2001.

¹⁸ Online Victimization, NCMEC (June 2000).

¹⁹ The Kaiser Family Foundation (2001), reprinted at <http://www.kff.org/content/2001/20011211a/GenerationRx.pdf>.

²⁰ Time/CNN Poll (2000).

²¹ Study by Yankelovich Partners Inc. (1999).

²² Published by “Survey Shows Widespread Enthusiasm for High Technology” NPR Online, www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/technology.

²³ “Seminar addressing dangers of Internet” Campus Life (February 25, 2002), citing George Kuykendall, Director of Citizens for Community Values.

²⁴ The Pastor’s Weekly Briefing, with H.B. London, Jr., Focus on the Family, May 5, 2000.

²⁵ The study was conducted by NetValue, Internet activity measurement service (December 19,2000) and published by “The NetValue Report on Minors Online...” Business Wire.

²⁶ The Attorney General’s National Study Commission on Pornography, 1970 and 1986.

²⁷ The Parsonage®.

²⁸ NCMEC Online Victimization: A report on the nation’s youth (April 3, 2000).

²⁹ Holmes and De Burger (1988).

³⁰ For the text of the interview with Dr. James Dobson, see <http://www.pureintimacy.org/online1/bundy.html>.

³¹ Thanks to Luke Griffin and Mike Benson for research assistance.

IDOLATRY / MATERIALISM

Albert E. Farley

Our lecture theme, “The Wrath of God Against All Unrighteousness of Men,” is very sobering, indeed. It is not common to devote an entire lectureship to an examination of the severe nature of Almighty God.

Our lectureship is based, primarily upon the words of the apostle Paul, recorded in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. My assignment, specifically, is to examine the sins of materialism and of idolatry. I will seek to define these sins, to identify them in the lives of some examples, and to exhort and warn us all to flee from them.

Materialism is defined as “**1 a** : a theory that physical matter is the only or fundamental reality and that all being and processes and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter **b** a doctrine that the only or the highest values or objectives lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress ... **2 : a** preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things” (“Materialism” 717)

Idolatry is defined as the worship of images or idols. In the Bible, an idol is “primarily ‘a phantom or likeness’ (from *eidos*, ‘an appearance,’ lit., ‘that which is seen’, or ‘an idea, fancy,; denotes in the NT (a) ‘an idol,’ an image to represent a false god, Acts 7:41; 1 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 9:20; (b) ‘the false god’ worshipped in an image, Acts 15:20; Rom. 2:22; 1 Cor. 8:4, 7; 10:19; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 John 5:21.” (“Idolatry” 317)

In order for us to, hopefully, more fully understand why materialism and idolatry are sin and why they will bring the wrath of God upon us, let us, first, notice the true nature of God.

The Nature of God

All things begin with God. Genesis 1:1. The Lord our God is One, yet, when He made man, he said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness: Genesis 1:26; 3:22. As we study the scriptures, we learn that God is described in three persons. Jesus spoke of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:1-5. He is referred to as the *godhead* (“godlike; divinity”) three times in the scriptures: Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20, and Colossians 2:9.

We often use the words “omnipotent” (almighty; all powerful), “omnipresent” (present in all places at all times), and omniscient” (all knowing; having universal, complete knowledge) to describe the almighty nature of God. One of God’s greatest and most important characteristics is His holiness. That is, He is completely and wholly clean and morally undefiled. “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy.” Leviticus 19:2. “... holy and reverend is his name.” Psalm 111:9. “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

God is perfect in all of His ways. “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.” Deuteronomy 32:4; Matthew 5:48. He, alone, is righteous. “Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments.” “Thy righteousness is an everlasting

righteousness, and thy law is the truth.” Psalm 119:137, 142.

Because God is God, He, alone, deserves and demands all of our love, worship, and adoration. “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his foot stool; for he is holy.” Psalm 99:5. When Satan tempted Jesus to worship him, as recorded in Luke 4:8, Jesus instantly and strongly declared, “Get behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve,” evidently quoting from Deuteronomy 10:20. Today, in Jesus Christ and in His church, this worship must be by and through the name of Christ and must be offered in spirit and in truth. That is, it must be from the heart and in accordance with God’s holy word. John 4:24; 14:6.

God hates sin. The Bible defines sin. (1) “All unrighteousness is sin:” 1 John 5:17. (2) “... sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4. (3) “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” James 4:17. (4) “... for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Romans 14:23. When God saw the sins of His people, the Bible says, “He abhorred (spurned) them.” Deuteronomy 32:19. “... they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed,” 1 Kings 14:22. “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: ...” Proverbs 6:16-19. “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination (“something disgusting, morally”) to the Lord: ...” Proverbs 15:26.

God is love. His great love for man has been demonstrated from the day He created Adam in His own image! His salvation of Noah, His calling of Abram, His covenants that promised the coming of the Messiah – all these are manifestations of God’s great love. The coming of Jesus into the world was the gift of God’s great love.

John 3:16. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” 1 John 4:7, 8.

God is also severe (decisive; rigorous) in his condemnation and punishment for sin. He loves the world, but He hates sin. The Bible says, clearly, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” Romans 11:22. No, God is not mocked. We will reap exactly what we sow. Galatians 6:7. “For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 10:30, 31; 12:28, 29.

The Nature of Man

Before the Lord made man, He designed and created “the heavens and the earth.” The twenty-four elders of Revelation chapter 4 fell before the throne of God in worship and said, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” 4:11.

After the Lord had created the heavens and the earth and filled the earth with all good things, He created man in his own image and said, “... let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the

cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” Genesis 1:26, 27. When the Lord made man, there was, of course, no sin in the world. None of the sins of Romans, chapter one, had been committed. It was not long, however, until man committed the first sin. It is significant for us to notice that sin on earth began through the misuse and abuse of the material creations of God.

The Lord placed Adam in the beautiful paradise of Eden. There He provided for everything beautiful and good but, also, placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden - giving man an ability to make his own choice as to whether or not he would serve Him. God commanded Adam not to eat of this tree: “... for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” It was following this that the Lord made Eve from Adam’s side.

Sometime following Eve’s creation, Satan came to her, tempting her through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. 1 John 2:15-17. She knew what God had said, but her physical desires began to overpower her desire to obey God. She began to “see” that the tree was good for food (lust of the flesh); she “saw” that it was pleasant to the eyes (lust of the eyes); and she “saw” that it was a tree to be desired to make one wise (pride of life). The Bible says she ate of the forbidden fruit, gave to her husband, and he also ate. Genesis 3:1-6.

Adam and Eve thus committed the first sin in the world. The apostle Paul wrote, in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:” James reveals the progressive steps in the development and commission of sin. (1) We are drawn away of our own

lust; (2) we are enticed; (3) lust conceives and brings forth sin; (4) sin brings forth death. 1:13-16.

God was severe. He cast the serpent upon his belly; he put enmity between the serpent and the woman. He greatly multiplied woman's sorrow in her conception and placed her under the rule of her husband. He cursed the ground for man's sake, and he brought sorrow, thorns, thistles, and hard, burdensome toil upon man. He brought physical death upon Adam and Eve and upon all of their descendants. He said, "...for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:14-19.

Truly, all of the history of man is a history of "Paradise Lost!" All of the pain, suffering, sorrow, tears, and death of this life have resulted from the sins of man. Yet, man continues to persist in sin.

The Revelation of God to Man

God has always been faithful to man. He has always revealed to man exactly how He wants man to live. Eve knew what God's will was concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Genesis 3:2,3.

Paul wrote, in our text, "For the wrath of god is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being

understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Romans 1:18-21

Can it not be said that, in committing the first sin, Adam and Eve failed to glorify God as God, were unthankful for their lives and the blessings of the garden, and that their foolish hearts were darkened?

How had God revealed himself to mankind? In the first place, Paul said that God revealed his invisible things through the things he made – his creation. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” Psalm 19:1-4. In the second place, God spoke directly to the heads of the families during the age before Moses. In the third place, God spoke to the people through his prophets. Noah was such a prophet.

The Development and Spread of the Sin of Materialism

The rate of increase of sin escalated from Adam to the days of Noah when, the Bible says, “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” Genesis 6:5, 6. The earth was corrupt and filled with violence. 6:11-13. Later, Solomon wrote, “Lo, this only have I

found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” Ecclesiastes 7:29.

The wickedness of man in the days of Noah was the result of hearts and minds that had become materialistic. This can be seen, I believe, in the Bible references to them. In Genesis 6:2 the Bible says, “The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” The men (evidently from the godly lineage of Seth) began to select their wives primarily on the basis of their physical beauty – and not on their godly character. Jesus said that the wicked people of Noah’s day spent their time in “eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.” Mt 24:36-39; Lk 17:26, 27. This emphasis upon the material, the physical, was to the neglect of the spiritual.

In contrast with the general condition of the world, Noah was a man of faith. Hebrews 11:7. When God spoke, Noah believed Him and moved with fear in preparing the ark to the saving of his house. While the ark was being built, Noah was a preacher of righteousness. 2 Peter 2:5. Truly, the spirit of Christ was in Noah, and, while the ark was being prepared, he preached to the spirits that were “in prison.” 1 Peter 3:18.

God was severe. How many people were alive on earth in the days of Noah? Hundreds of thousands? Millions? The flood came and took them all away. “And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;” 2 Peter 2:5. “And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of

all that was in the dry land, died.” Genesis 7:21, 22. Only eight souls were saved. 1 Peter 3:20.

Materialism enslaves or imprisons man. The great conflict of the ages of the earth is the war between the flesh and the spirit. Paul addressed this great warfare in Romans 8. “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” 5, 6. Peter spoke of those who walked after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness (passions). 2 Peter 2:10. He warned of false teachers of this sort and said, “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.” 19.

The Sin of Idolatry

Idolatry is a natural development of a materialistic mind. Those who practice idolatry seek *an image* to worship – a likeness. They want that which can be seen. Therefore, they “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.” Romans 1:23.

When man rejected the incorruptible God and changed Him into physical images, it opened the door to all of the unbridled lusts, desires, and pleasures of the flesh – all to be encompassed and included - not only in the “gods” of their imaginations but also in their corrupted lives of worship and of service to these creature-gods.

We can see this even in the example of God’s own people, the children of Israel. When Israel convinced

Aaron to make them gods to go before them, and after Aaron fashioned a molten calf from their golden earrings, the Bible says they proclaimed a feast, rose up early in the morning, offered burnt offerings and peace offering, sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play! Exodus 32:1-7. Clyde M. Woods writes, “This expression doubtless refers to such revels and orgies as those practiced by the idolatrous Canaanites.” (211)

God was severe in his punishment of His people on that occasion. He told Moses to “Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them:” Exodus 32:7, 8. God further told Moses, “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them ...” God would have destroyed all of them and made a new nation from Moses, but Moses intervened and besought the Lord. The Lord was touched by Moses’ plea; the punishment, nevertheless, was severe. When Moses came near the camp, his anger, too, waxed hot. He cast down the tables of stone and broke them, burnt the golden calf, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made Israel to drink it. He then stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come unto me.” All of the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him, and the Lord commanded Moses to tell them to put on their swords and to go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp and to slay every man his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor! They did so, and three thousand men were killed before the day was done. “The Lord plagued the people because they made the calf, which Aaron made.” Exodus 32:35.

The Relationship Between Materialism, Idolatry, and Covetousness

As materialism lies at the heart of idolatry, so dwells idolatry in the heart of covetousness. Paul said, to the church at Ephesus, “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” 5:5.

To “covet” is to engage in several materialistic activities. In Exodus 20:17, when God commanded Israel, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s,” He used a word that means “to delight in.” When the Law was repeated in Deuteronomy 5:21, God used the word which means “to wish for; to greatly desire.” Later, in Romans 8, Paul referred to God’s commandment against coveting when he wrote, “Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.” To covet, then, is to lust and to commit all manner of concupiscence, that is, “a longing (espec. for what is forbidden).” (Strong)

Jesus connected covetousness with idolatry in Luke 16:13, 14. “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.”

Warnings to the Church

Today, we, as individual Christians and as congregations of the Lord's church, need very much to examine ourselves regarding materialism and idolatry. The kingdom of Christ is in the world, but it is not of this world. John 18:36.

When a man came to Jesus, asking Him to speak with his brother about dividing the inheritance with him, Jesus said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Luke 12:13-15.

The apostles of Christ acted quickly and severely when the first hint of materialism showed itself in the early church. The great body of the members was following in the example of Christ and His apostles. All that believed were together and had all things common. The Bible says they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need. Acts 2:44, 45. None lacked. Those who possessed homes and lands sold them and laid the prices down at the apostles' feet. One of those who did so was Joses, surnamed Barnabas by the apostles. 4:32-37.

However, two members, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, brought the wrath of God upon themselves when their love of money caused them to greatly err. They had land, sold it, kept back part of the price, and then, clearly, brought part of the price to the apostles and told them they were giving all! This hypocrisy brought the wrath of God upon them. God struck both Ananias and his wife Sapphira dead in the space of three hours. Acts 5.

Some teachers in the early church evidently taught that gain was godliness. Paul wrote, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Having

food and raiment, let us be, therewith, content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” 1 Timothy 6:3-10.

As members of the body of Christ, we have been called out of the world – with all of its lusts and physical pleasures. Paul spoke of these very things when he wrote to the church at Colosse.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deed; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (3:1-10)

Our Lord teaches and admonishes us to put our treasures in heaven and not upon the earth.

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Luke 12:29-34.

Where is your heart? The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. The sunshine and the rain are His. He has given us the world to sustain our physical needs and to equip us to better serve Him and one another. We are to use it but not to abuse it; "... for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Corinthians 7:31.

Let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof. Romans 13:14.

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Biography

Albert Farley was born at Crum, West Virginia, April 26, 1942, the son of William H. and Clista Spaulding Farley. He attended Ohio Valley College (1964-66), where he met and married Nancy Ann Brewer. They have four children: Scott, Clista Heintzman, Rebecca Ragle, and Elisabeth Taylor; and four grandchildren: Bethany and Darren Heintzman and Aaron and Andrew Ragle. He began full-time preaching in 1966 at Belington, WV. He has also worked with WV congregations at Chesapeake, Weston, Crum, Webster Springs, and Salem, where he has lived since 1982. He is a graduate of Glenville State College (BA in Elementary Education). He has done graduate work with the Alabama School of Religion. He has done some radio and television work and is the editor of *West Virginia Christian*.

A WOMAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO HER HUSBAND

Kathy Pollard

Satan has a mission. It is to make us turn away from God. He will attack the church. He wants to destroy families. Revelation 12:9 says that he deceives the whole world. Concerning the role of women, the Bible has things to say that the world rejects. For this study, we will look at three specific things that women are to be: chaste, good, and obedient to their own husbands (Titus 2:5). To the world, these words are synonymous with dull, boring, and weak. Satan has the world deceived. We are going to look at each of these characteristics and see how God pictures the Christian woman.

Even Though the World Embraces Sexuality, Be Chaste.

When Titus received Paul's letter, he was working with the churches on Crete in the Mediterranean Sea (Titus 1:5), and Titus had his hands full. Satan had already been very busy on this small island. The 1st century inhabitants had a reputation for being untruthful and immoral. There was even an expression, "To play the Cretan," which meant "to play the liar" (Titus 1:10-16). It is no wonder, then, that Paul encouraged Titus to remind the young women to be chaste. Since they were Christians, they must live differently from their Cretan neighbors.

What about American women? Is it fair to say that we are gaining a reputation for being immoral? What would Paul write if he could send a letter to your hometown? There are some scary things going on.

Schools in Smalltown, USA, are allowing their gay/ lesbian teachers to bring their lovers to school-sponsored events. Most daytime and primetime TV shows promote sexual immorality, filthy language, greed, and immodesty. Blockbuster movies entertain by blaspheming the pure nature of Jesus Christ. Consider these statistics shared at a recent lectureship. (Speaker, Randall Caselman, Fort Worth Lectureship, 2005)

--There are 4.2 million pornographic websites.

--There are 372 million pornographic pages.

--There are 68 million search engine requests for porn DAILY.

--47% of Christians admit that pornography is a major problem in their life.

--30% of preachers admitted to having visited a porn site in the past 30 days.

--1 in 6 *women* struggle with some form of porn addiction.

--9 out of 10 kids ages 8-16 have visited porn sites, intentionally or unintentionally.

Paul could have been writing to modern day Americans. As Christian women, we must live differently from our worldly neighbors.

What does it mean to be chaste? Webster defines it as 1) not indulging in unlawful sexual intercourse; virtuous; 2) free from obscenity, pure in thought and act, innocent, modest; 3) indicative of simplicity, restraint, free from vulgarity, affectations, or extravagancies. Let us look at these three areas that Webster mentioned.

First, a chaste wife does not indulge in unlawful sexual intercourse. We are not interested in what the world considers unlawful. What does God say about it?

According to Genesis 2:24, Proverbs 5:15-20, and 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, a woman can have sex with her husband only. It is really that simple. Because Satan tries to confuse us on the issue, God also specifically condemns fornication (1 Corinthians 6:9), adultery (Deuteronomy 22:22-29), prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17), incest (Leviticus 18:6-18), homosexuality (Romans 1:26,27), and bestiality (Deuteronomy 27:21). These are all sexual perversions.

Second, a chaste wife is free from obscenity, pure in thought and act, innocent, and modest. This covers what we say, think, and do. Nothing is more unattractive in a woman than a filthy mouth. If you say something shocking or crass and people laugh, it is usually because they are uncomfortable or embarrassed and do not know how to react. Our speech reveals our heart. Engaging in an unwholesome conversation quickly diminishes a Christ-like image. Being pure in thought takes even more discipline than controlling our tongue, but we can make it easier by controlling what goes into our minds. We can be more select with what we watch, listen to, and read. Would Jesus be pleased with each of the DVD's and books on your shelves?

Third, a chaste wife lives simply, shows restraint, and is not extravagant. Chaste conduct is something that is observed (1 Peter 3:2). Our motives determine our lifestyle. Think about your own personal style of dress. Why do you dress the way you do? Christian wives do not dress to attract attention, show off their bodies, or impress men. Being chaste also means not being in competition with other women. Rather, we are to be dressed in fine linen, which is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:8).

This definition of being chaste also sounds like it involves our material lifestyle. A chaste wife will not be extravagant when making purchases, but will efficiently take care with her budget. If the conditions of our hearts are trained to seek what is best for others, then our motives will be pure, and our lives will be chaste.

In a Society that Rejects the Golden Rule, Be Good.

When we tell our children to “be good,” we are really asking them to stay out of trouble. Then what do we really want to know when we ask them, “Were you good?” We want to hear that they did not fight with their siblings or make a mess. We often think of “good” in terms of being opposite of “bad.” *I’m a good person. I don’t drink. I don’t smoke. I don’t steal, cheat or lie.* Certainly, Christian wives need to rid their lives of as much sin as possible (Isaiah 1:16), but being good is more than just having an absence of evil. Being good is something we must learn (Isaiah 1:17).

Jesus told a parable about a Samaritan who found a man who had been robbed and beaten. We refer to him as the Good Samaritan. Why? It was not because he did not do anything wrong that day. It was because of all that he did do. In Luke 10:33ff, we can read about all that he did to take care of the poor victim. Then, in verse 37, Jesus said, “Go and do likewise.” Being good involves DOING. Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

How can we learn to do good? “The Lord is good” is found multiple times in the psalms. If we want to learn to do good, we must learn of God’s goodness. We will look at three examples.

1. Psalm 25:8- “Good and upright is the Lord; Therefore, He teaches sinners in the way.” A *good* wife looks for opportunities to teach. We cannot ignore opportunities, hoping that someone else will take care of it.

2. Nahum 1:7- “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.” Are you a stronghold in the day of trouble? Can others trust you to remain faithful, calm, and loving? Are you reliable?

3. Psalm 145:9- “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.” Do you reserve goodness only for those who are good to you? Sometimes we let the pride of life get in the way of being good to all mankind. Also from this verse, we see that God’s tender mercies are over all His works. Christian women are involved in many works. We must strive to do them ALL tenderly and graciously, whether we are surrounded by others or in the privacy of our home.

There are dozens of passages about the goodness of God. We can study them to help us grow in this area. Just beginning with these (teaching sinners, being a stronghold in the day of trouble, and doing good to all) will help define us as true, good women. We are the daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:18), the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-9), and heirs of the throne (Romans 8:17). Practicing goodness will help us represent God’s family in a way that will draw others to Him. John Wesley summed it up this way, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

In a World that Promotes Rebellion, Be Obedient To Your Own Husband.

We live in a society that rejects rules, rebels against authority, and all in the name of having rights. Children are not made to obey their parents. Our nation is doing everything it can to be no longer under God. No wonder that wives are fighting the notion of being submissive to their husbands! That idea is so out-dated and un-American, but when has God's Word ever been bound by culture or time? "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8). This same Word is our standard of conduct, according to our text, Titus 2:5. We are to be "obedient to our own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

This all comes down to a matter of attitude. Most men are not going to make you obey them. It is not worth the effort, and they are not going to try and force submission. Therefore, it must be a gift we give to them. Why? It will show our love and trust. Sometimes it is hard, and we want to resist. We may not even like the very idea! We can be like strong-willed children, resisting being told what to do. Children do not understand that testing authority makes life harsh and unpleasant. Willing obedience, on the other hand, brings peace and harmony.

Some women feel that submission lessens their importance. That is simply another of Satan's lies. God places great importance on a woman who gives her best to her role as wife. Any undertaking that we try to accomplish with the least amount of work and effort will result in failure. Again, it is our pride that keeps us from submitting. We want to be on top. We do not want to "miss out." In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so

hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.”

1 Peter 3:5 says that holy women who trust in God are submissive to their own husbands. What does being submissive have to do with trust? It is trusting that God knows best! He knows what it takes for us to have peace and harmony in our homes. Make a conscious effort today. You will see a difference. It has nothing to do with whether or not your husband is worthy or capable. It has everything to do with yielding to God’s will and trusting Him to work through us. It will not only affect our families, but it will also affect our nation.

Remember, Satan is the father of lies. He does not want us to do things God’s way. He will try to deceive us into thinking we know a better way, but only God knows what is best for us and for His kingdom. According to Titus 1:2, God cannot lie.

Paul reminds women to be chaste, good, and obedient to their husbands (Titus 2:5). Titus 1:16 reads, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” Abominable is the opposite of chaste. Disobedient is the opposite of obedient. Disqualified for every good work is the opposite of good. Therefore, any woman who is lacking in one of these qualities may profess to know God, but in her works she denies Him.

We can pray about this. First thing each morning, we can pray that God will give us wisdom to so that we will know how to be chaste, good, and obedient. That will

help us be more aware of it and remind us to practice it daily.

WOE TO THOSE WHO CALL EVIL GOOD

Terry G. Jones

During the 1950's and 60's, Television watchers regularly tuned in to hear the eerie voice of Rod Serling as he said, "You're traveling through another dimension -- a dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind. A journey into a wondrous land whose boundaries are that of imagination. That's a signpost up ahead: your next stop: the Twilight Zone!" Each episode of this popular science-fiction series would usually reveal some unexpected twist, undoubtedly the exact opposite of the norm. For example, that which would be considered beautiful would find itself in a scenario where it would be deemed hideous and grotesque.

Unfortunately, far too often we find real circumstances in this world that much more resemble "The Twilight Zone" than reality. More and more do we find time-tested traditional values and morals that are being uprooted and reversed. That which once was obscene, immoral and criminal is now legal and lauded, approved and applauded.

From the very beginning God has provided man, not only a sense of right and wrong, but also, a moral standard by which man is obligated to live. In the garden of Eden, "the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam and Eve had no problem with God's requirements for them. That is, until Satan entered the

picture and distorted the view. “And he said to the woman, ‘has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Gen. 3:1). Eve clarified that they could freely eat of all the trees, “but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die’” (Gen. 3:3). In reply, “the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’” (Gen. 3:4). That which the serpent declared was the exact opposite of what God had spoken. After being tempted by the serpent, the first couple violated God’s command and was held accountable for their transgression. God has not changed. What was true in the Garden of Eden is still true today.

Thousands of years have since passed, but Satan is still using the same tactics to lure souls down the paths of wickedness. Everything that is of God is good, but Satan is effectively influencing the world to turn against it with disdain. Simultaneously, he packages that which is vile, lewd and sinful and convinces men that they have a right to practice it openly without shame.

A PASSAGE

Seven centuries prior to the earthly life of our Lord, God delivered this warning through the prophet Isaiah. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Is. 5:20)! The late Johnny Ramsey, a beloved gospel preacher, described this as “upside down thinking!” It seems unimaginable that the most depraved, defiled and damnable things of this world could be looked upon in a favorable light. And yet, that very thing has permeated the history of this world.

In the time of Isaiah, apostasy was the order of the day. Israel had lost their spiritual equilibrium and was seeking peace, prosperity and refuge everywhere but in the God of heaven. Their sinful condition is very clearly seen in Isaiah chapter 5 where God pronounces six “woes” upon this rebellious people. These “woes” provide a vivid picture of the kind of people they really were.

A Covetous People (8-10). A woe is here placed upon those who greedily buy up, or otherwise acquire, the land and houses of the less fortunate and the poor are crowded out. They were obsessed with greed. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, gives an even more vivid description of Israel’s condition. “They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance” (Mic. 2:2). God hates greed and declared that their houses would be uninhabited and their fields unproductive.

A Carousing People (11-17). Isaiah had to deal with a bunch of folks who were continually intoxicated. They began drinking early in the morning and continued until late at night. Two great tragedies are revealed about this carousing people. First, their carousing caused them to be *unconcerned* about God’s work (12). At this very critical time in Israel’s history, all they could think about was their banqueting and sinful indulgences. Secondly, their carousing caused them to be *unaware* of God’s judgment (13-17). Because of their lack of understanding and uncaring attitude God promised that they would be carried into captivity.

A Captive People (18-19). They are so entangled in sin they are slaves to it. Those who are entrenched in sin do not even realize their predicament until it is too late.

Here the prophet depicts men as though they were hitched to a wagon and pulling their sins behind them with cords of falsehoods. Sins are always committed because of lies. Sin always pawns itself off as something that it is not, and promises that which it cannot deliver. He who succumbs to temptation usually finds out the hard way that sin takes a person farther than he ever wanted to go, keep him longer than he ever wanted to stay, and cost him more than he ever wanted to pay.

A Contempt People (20). Israel was in gross contempt of God and His holy standards of morality. They had rejected God and had arrogantly replaced His system of values and decency with dishonesty and debauchery. They had deliberately confused the moral distinctions God had made between good and evil, right and wrong. Daily we see instances of those who stand up for what is right and end up being accused of being intolerant, bigoted and prejudiced. God placed a “woe” upon “those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!”

A Conceited People (21). “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” Having turned from God and rejected His word, they were left to depend upon their own wisdom and trust in their own judgments. The prophet Jeremiah clearly understood the folly of such an idea which lead him to pray, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23).

A Corrupt People (22-23). They were justifying the wicked and destroying the righteous. Judges were involving themselves in drunkenness and taking bribes to sway their judgments. Those who were righteous before

God were not being treated accordingly in the courts of men.

A Condemned People (24-30). Rather than pronouncing a seventh woe, the prophet announces their condemnation. Because they had despised and rejected the law of God, they would be consumed by His fiery judgment. Their wickedness had brought them squarely into the focus of God's anger.

A PRINCIPLE

When God placed a woe upon those who call evil good and good evil, it brings to the surface a vital principle. The apostle Paul said, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Gal. 6:7-8). We must never forget the continuous and consistent principle of sowing and reaping. We will reap what we sow!

There is an unchangeable law in both the natural, as well as, the spiritual realm that says that everything produces after its kind. A farmer who plants corn can expect to harvest the same. It is impossible for cattle to produce koala bears. This principle holds just as true in the spiritual realm. Paul applied this principle to Christian giving. "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

Jesus applied this principle to false teachers. "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's

clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Mt. 7:15-20). Jesus indicated that false teachers can be identified by examining the fruits of their life. It goes to reason that if a man is not faithful in his preaching the gospel of Christ, then he is not going to be faithful in living according to the gospel. He will be identified by the fruit of his lips and of his life.

In Isaiah’s day, those who blurred the distinction between good and evil were subject to the judgment of God. With the passing of time there is the temptation to think that, perhaps, that is no longer the case. However, we must not allow ourselves to fall victim of such foolish thinking. God has not changed, neither has He relaxed His standards of morality.

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

It is not difficult to take the Biblical teaching and principles under our consideration and make the application to our current day. We live in a time when our moral compass has been turned upside down. This lectureship provides a study of many things that God has very clearly identified as evil, and yet are openly practiced and promoted. Immodesty, dishonesty, gambling, adultery, homosexuality, lying, pornography, abortion, stealing, drinking and a host of other issues are all sins that will damn a persons soul to hell for all of eternity (Gal. 5:19-21). However, our society has chosen to justify all of these evil vices. Isn’t it interesting that folks in our day say that

there is no right or wrong? Then when you point out something that is evil, you are called evil. God will only allow this sort of thing to continue for so long before He puts an end to it.

This problem of calling evil good and good evil is directly connected to the deliberate suppression of the Bible from society. The writer of Hebrews chastised those who had been delinquent in their study of the scriptures which was evidenced by their spiritual immaturity. “For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:13-14). Only those who feed regularly upon the Word of God and put it into practice in their daily lives will develop the skill to “discern both good and evil.” Rejecting God and His Word will result in moral corruption and eternal destruction.

Biography

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He serves as secretary on the board of directors of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is on the faculty of West Virginia School of Preaching. In addition, he is a writer for West Virginia Christian and has served as its lectureship director on three occasions. He has preached in gospel meetings and lectureships in West Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, Indiana, and Virginia. He also has made missionary trips to the countries of Moldova and Ukraine.

GAMBLING

Frank Higginbotham

The growing involvement of gambling in our every day activities has presented a challenge to Christians. Is it acceptable for Christians to engage in this activity, or is it unacceptable conduct? God has provided in the Bible the standard that must be applied in order for us to decide on this conduct. While the world about us may scoff at our questioning the rightness of this practice, Christians realize that we are governed by a different standard. The world does not decide for Christians what is acceptable conduct, but God gives us our standard in His Word. "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). With the Bible in our hands, we approach the study of this popular practice.

It would be helpful for us to get a good, workable definition of gambling. We are not talking of such things as the possibility of dying each day. Often we hear people in an attempt to justify gambling saying that life is a gamble. "To play games of chance for advantage, to bet, to wager; an act or undertaking involving risk of loss." (*Webster's New World Dictionary*) The attempt to get something for nothing is the driving force behind the rush to be a part of this industry. The fact that the word "gambling" is not in the Bible is frequently used as justification for its practice. However, this argument does not follow. If the fact that the word is not in the Bible means it is alright to do it, take the time to consider the fact that the Bible teaches many things by principles contained in the Word of God. Where in the Bible do you read of the

word we use to describe a person who has an overestimate of the value of a particular person who is a preacher? We commonly refer to this practice as “preacheritis.” Where in the Bible do we read this word? It is not in the Bible, but the principles governing this practice are found throughout the Bible. Paul wrote about this practice in 1 Corinthians the third chapter. Does the fact that the word is not recorded mean that we have a right to practice it? Are the words “child abuse” used in the Bible? Are we at liberty to practice it because we cannot find the word? Does the Bible use the term “internet pornography”? Is it therefore approved? When people reason that because the word “gambling” is not a Bible word that it is therefore an acceptable practice, they have not thought through this reasoning. Many principles are announced in the Bible that govern a variety of practices that do not have the approval of God.

Next we want to take a look at the motive that drives people to gamble. The desire to be rich, along with the dream of overnight success, causes people to take chances they would not take otherwise. Money is thrown away thinking that you will be the lucky one who will have no needs for the rest of your life. Honestly, are your chances good for beating the house in a gambling establishment? Who are we fooling except ourselves? We still picture ourselves as the one who will beat the odds. Our visions of grandeur make us take risks we would not take in any other way. The excitement of winning five dollars after losing one hundred dollars seems to be worth it all to the compulsive gambler. Some try to justify this thinking by saying that they will remember the Lord when they are deciding how to use their winnings which will amount to many thousands of dollars. I wonder if the Lord is thrilled at the prospect of gaining this extra money that is provided by this sinful practice. Excitement is also used as

a motive for gambling. Some can only think of how great they would feel when they realize that they are winners. Remember that there are many different ways to have excitement by legitimate means. Some speak of the challenge that they meet as they put their efforts against the efforts of others. To be more successful than others may be a driving force, but does this justify an ungodly practice?

One of the strongest arguments used by those who attempt to justify gambling joints on every corner in every small town is that table gambling will bring jobs to our area. Gambling is presented as a 'cure all' for the ills of society. For years we have been told that gambling profits will solve our need for money in the field of education. Yet, our school boards continue to present levies to fund their needs. Our senior citizens have been promised that their needs will be met by the gambling industry. We are told that the lottery profits senior citizens. What percentages of profits go to the gambling industry? In high unemployment areas we are told that the addition of further gambling opportunities is the answer to a rise in employment. Having people get credible work is certainly the desire of all, but is giving them questionable employment the answer? How many of the jobs which are created are involved in the control and policing of problems that are created by gambling? Certainly we will need more policemen to enforce the law and to protect the innocent from the violations that are directly or indirectly tied to gambling. It is also true that we will need to employ more counselors to deal with the problems faced by the gamblers we are producing. If we spend more in controlling the effects of an industry than we are taking in, does this sound like a windfall for our citizens? The gambling industry is claiming far more than they provide for us. Does the creation of jobs mean that we are right in turning our neighborhoods into areas that are run and controlled by the

gambling interests? If extra jobs are used as an argument to justify more gambling, does that argument also hold true of the groups who practice prostitution? If we are to create more jobs in our area, should we argue that the legalizing of prostitution would create more jobs? What about the nude bars that accompany the racetracks? If it brings more jobs to our area, should we take up the cause of the nude bars owners? It is not a legitimate argument to state that gambling will add jobs to our area. Prostitution and nude dancing employ some who need jobs, but does this make these practices legitimate?

It is time now for us to examine some Bible principles that are violated by the practice of gambling. It is without question that God intended for mankind to work in legitimate ways to provide for their families. While man was in the Garden of Eden, we find this statement. "And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Because of his sin God placed added burdens on man in the work he was to perform.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17-19).

It is a clear violation of God's plan for a person to refuse to work when he is able to do so. "For even when we were

with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Paul exhorted that each of us should work with our own hands. "And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you" (1 Thess. 4:11). Through legitimate work we perhaps could be of help to others. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). God's plan is very clear. He wants us to do our own work and to provide for our own. However, to take money that we have earned in a proper way and then to lose that money in a scheme to become rich quick was never in God's plans.

Another aspect of gambling that needs to be considered is that in gambling we desire to have for ourselves that which properly belongs to others. In the Ten Commandment Law God forbade that we covet. To covet means that we desire to have for ourselves the possessions or things that really belong to another person. Covetousness is listed in the midst of some very bad things that people do. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). When a person works hard to provide for what he and his family need, it would be wrong for others to covet and seek for themselves these good things. Gambling is based on this very principle. This warning on covetousness needs to be heeded. "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). Jesus reminded men that life is more than just material things. "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a

man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). The "desire to be rich" attitude is based on the idea that things bring happiness. Solomon came to realize that life is more than just having material things. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13-14). What is really important is to have eternal life. What can these material things do for us beyond the grave? "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matt. 16:26). The wealth of the world all together is not worthy to compare to the value of the never dying soul. Is it possible to buy your way into Heaven? Will God overlook disobedience because a person has great possessions? Will there be an advantage to having a large bank account when the time of death comes? What another person is able to obtain through legitimate work is that which he deserves. We have no right to covet his possessions. Gambling encourages us to lust after the possessions of others and to seek them for ourselves.

Consider also the stewardship principles taught in the Bible. All of the blessings that come our way during life are only loaned for a little time. There will be a time when we will account to God for what we have done with these blessings. In Matthew chapter twenty-five, Jesus reminded us that the talents or possessions we receive in this life also carry with them a time of accountability. One man was given 5 talents, another 2, and one man was given 1 talent. Each had to account to his master concerning his use of his talent. When we apply these verses to our situation today, they remind us that all of our blessings come from our God and He will hold us responsible for

how we use them. Picture yourself standing before God and accounting for the use you have made of the blessings He has given you. How will you explain the losses you sustained from betting your money in a gambling situation? Is this good stewardship? "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

Gambling is always accompanied by some of the worse evils we could invite into our communities. When gambling is approved, look for these evils to follow very closely. Is it just harmless fun?

The typical gambler, according to John Goodman of "Focus on The Family," is a male in his thirties without any financial resources. He is deeply in debt to banks, loan companies, credit card companies, friends, business associates, and his family. He is behind in mortgage payments, and has no life or disability insurance, or hospitalization coverage.

- A study of financial liabilities accumulated by gamblers found that the typical addict is from \$53,000 to \$92,000 in debt. The average compulsive gambler's debts exceed \$80,000.
- About 500 billion are wagered every year legally in America: add in illegal gambling and estimates go up to one trillion dollars. Ten percent of all money earned by people in America is gambled away!
- Ten percent of all new gamblers will become addicts. Each started out saying, "I can quit at any time." Psychiatrists and psychologists say gambling is as addictive as alcohol. In fact, compulsive gamblers are harder to rehabilitate than alcoholics.

Professionals describe a typical gambler as ‘immature, hostile, passive, dependant, rebellious, obsessive, masochistic, magical in his thinking, and prone to act out his impulses.’”

- Gamblers have confessed to robbing children’s piggy banks to play. Others have sold themselves into prostitution for a night’s wagers. (“House To House, Heart To Heart,” p. 3)

Prostitution is quickly found following the gambling scene. Most areas have a problem controlling this evil, but it is far worse in areas where gambling is legalized. Nude bars and all forms of pornography can be seen surrounding the area where people gamble. Who could argue that the problem of addiction does not follow legalized gambling? Signs that promote gambling also give warnings in regard to “responsible gambling.” Problem gamblers are urged to call 1-800-GAMBLER. If it is just innocent fun, why are we warned to gamble responsibly? Each of us knows of someone who has lost his home and belongings to gambling. Divorce is even more commonplace in the lives of constant gamblers. It used to be that people left their homes unlocked when they had to leave for a while, but with the increasing statistics concerning crime and break-ins it is necessary to make our homes as secure as possible. To have money for gambling and to be able to pay gambling debts, many have resorted to criminal activities. Fathers, who are depended upon for the income of a family, seem to be content to let their families go without what they need so that they can satisfy their desire to gamble. The plight of their family appears less important to them then the thrill of wasting the family income in the hope that someday there will be a jackpot waiting for them. The chances of this happening do not

seem to cause any restraint in throwing this money away. This irresponsible conduct is commonplace in the presence of gambling. Consider the crime connection and ask yourself if you want to invite this conduct into your community.

- The American Insurance Institute estimates that 40% of all white-collar crime is gambling related.
- Las Vegas has one of the nation's highest crime rates. The FBI found that criminals there committed five times as many violent crimes as police were able to solve – the worst ratio of any large U.S. city.
- Nevada has the nation's highest incarceration rate, and 40% of felons jailed there are from out-of-state. Nevada also has the highest per capita consumption of alcohol (by the way, casinos give away alcohol because drunk people gamble more).
- When gambling was introduced in Gulfport, Mississippi, robberies increased by 218%; vehicle theft went up 166%; arson 150%; and assaults 66%.
- After gambling is legalized, social-welfare budgets must increase by 100% to 550% to maintain the same quality of life as before.
- Gambling debts in New Jersey exceed \$514 million a year. This pushes compulsive gamblers into forgery, theft, embezzlement, drug dealing, and property crimes. A congressman found that insurance fraud directly attributable to gambling alone exceeds \$1.3 billion per year.
- Because of crime associated with casino gambling, New Jersey spends nearly \$60

million a year to police and monitor Atlantic City's casinos. The year after gambling was legalized, Atlantic City's annual police budget had to be doubled, while population declined 20%. In three years, Atlantic City went from 50th in the nation in per capita crime to first. Between 1977 and 1990, crime in that city rose 230%.

- Since Atlantic City legalized gambling, its population shrunk 20%, unemployment increased, crimes rose 380%, the police force doubled, half of the 2,100 businesses closed, and four of six consecutive mayors were indicted for corruption (three served jail terms).

John Kindt, Ph.D., professor of commerce and legal policy at the University of Illinois, contends that for every revenue dollar generated by gambling, taxpayers must pay out at least three dollars in increased criminal justice costs, social welfare expenses, high regulatory costs, and increased infrastructure expenditures. States who plan to get rich from lotteries and other gambling end up putting money into a bag with holes (Hag.1:6). (*ibid*)

Does it make sense to spend three dollars in order to get one? Are the jobs we are creating a further drain on our community? Is it worth it to invite the rankest of crimes and criminals into our area? Surely, someone is wise enough to figure out a legitimate way for us to support our Senior Citizens. We certainly can find better ways to pay for government functions. Our young people need to see their educational needs met in a better way. Gambling is certainly not the answer!

STANDING FOR THE RIGHT

Ephesians 6:10-19

Allen Webster

INTRODUCTION:

Paul's favorite images of the church are taken from the common ideas of army, architecture, anatomy, and agriculture. This lesson emphasizes the church as an army. Living in a military state, the New Testament writers would be expected to use military figures. The Christian life is pictured as a battle (2 Corinthians 10:2-6; 2 Timothy 4:7).

Becoming a Christian is deporting a prisoner of war from Satan's army into Christ's camp (Colossians 1:13, one meaning of *translated*). Precepts are "commands" (*parangello*, a military command by a superior officer, 1 Thessalonians 4:2, 11; 2 Thessalonians 3:4-12). Our brethren are "fellow soldiers" (Philippians 2:25), our protection is "armor" (Romans 13:12; 2 Corinthians 6:7), paying the preacher is "warfare charges" (1 Corinthians 9:7), and vigilance is a "night watch" (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8). There are even "prisoners of war" (Ephesians 4:8; cf. Luke 4:18).

Since the church is an army (1 Timothy 1:18), so it must train its soldiers for war. To "wage a good warfare" against temptation (1 Timothy 6:20), we need adequate training. We must learn to obey orders (2 Corinthians 10:5-6), please our Captain (2 Timothy 2:4); be disciplined (1 Corinthians 9:25-27), use our weapons (Ephesians 6:13-17), be tough (2 Timothy 2:3), courageous (2 Timothy 4:7-18), and fight hard (1 Timothy 6:12).

JOIN UP!

For those who have not enlisted, this is your draft card (Matthew 28:18-20). Paul said, “Finally, my brethren, be strong *in the Lord*...” (6:10; cf. 6:21). Jesus, our Captain (Hebrews 2:10), is calling for volunteers. A person doesn’t accidentally end up in the Lord’s army. You have to enlist. To become a soldier of Christ, you must learn about Him (John 6:44-45), believe He is God’s Son (John 8:24), repent of sins (change your life and try to live like Him, Luke 13:3, 5), confess that you believe He is God’s Son (Matthew 10:34-35), and be baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins (to reenact His death, burial, and resurrection, Romans 6:3-4; Acts 2:38). The first step to successful warfare against Satan is to get “in the Lord.” Joshua said, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve...” (24:15). No one can “sign you up”—you have to do it yourself.

WATCH OUT!

Paul said, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places . . . watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (6:11-12, 18). Peter was more straightforward: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith...” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

What is the origin of the devil? Some think that if you believe in the devil, you never really graduated from childhood. The Bible, however, is not unclear about his existence. It should be enough to say that Jesus believed in Satan and warned us of him (Matthew 25:41; John 8:44).

The word *Satan* is found in the Bible 55 times (19 times in the Old Testament; 36 in New Testament) and *devil* is found 59 times (all in NT). Satan was on the scene as early as the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1). But since he is not introduced and no account of his origin is given, how do we know it? Consider that there are only three kinds of beings: Deity, angels, and human. Satan is not divine since he is obviously subject to God (cf. Job 1). He is not human because he possesses powers superior to humans (cf. Matthew 4). Therefore, he must belong to the class of angels.

God does not create evil⁴ (James 1:17), so he must have been created “good” and then became “evil” (like man). It follows that Satan is a rebellious angel who was judged by God and fell from holiness to wickedness. Jesus indicated this: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Peter adds, “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell” (2 Peter 2:4). Pride seems to have been the cause of his fall (1 Timothy 3:6). The angels who fell with him make up his army of spirits (Ephesians 6:10-13; Luke 11:18; Jude 6).

What will happen to the devil? Evidently, Satan has access to God (Job 1-2; Zechariah 3) but one day will be thrown out (Revelation 12:7-12). He works feverishly since he knows his time is short (12:12). When Jesus returns, He will cast Satan into hell to be tormented forever (Revelation 19:11-20:3).

What is the devil like? *He is a slanderer (Job 1:7-8; Psalm 109:6). Devil means "accuser." Satan slandered Job, but take heart for God defended him. Jesus is defending us as our Advocate. Take comfort –a faithful Christian’s case*

⁴ Isaiah 45:7 says that God creates evil, but means that He brings adversity on His people to test them—*evil ra'*, adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, sorrow, trouble.

is in good hands (1 John 2:1-2; Romans 8:31-39; Revelation 12:10)!

He is a counterfeiter (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). An easy way to confuse is to duplicate—with significant but hard to notice changes—God’s creations. In the parable of the tares, the enemy (Satan) sows tares (a poisonous plant that looks like wheat) among the farmer’s wheat (God’s world). Satan is in the religion business! He has counterfeit gods, religions, Bibles, churches, and preachers. He might prefer that we all become atheists, but he is content with idolatry or false religion. The light of the Gospel will make clear a fake every time (1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 John 4:1).

He is a liar, deceiver, and murderer (John 8:44). Since the Garden, he has been lying to us, and has brought death to every single person (except those translated—Enoch and Elijah—and those living presently). Paul warned, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

He is the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19) and the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). He has more followers presently than God does (Matthew 7:13-14). In fact, the only times the “good guys” have outnumbered the “bad guys” were when Adam stepped into the Garden and when Noah stepped off the boat. Nonetheless, when God gets ready to enforce His will, Satan will bow just as will the knee of his every follower (Revelation 22:2-3; cf. Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10).

He is our adversary (1 Peter 5:8-9) and a destroyer (Revelation 9:11; Abaddon means "destruction"). Satan means "adversary." The devil sets invisible traps (2 Timothy 2:24). His goal is to wreck every couple’s marriage, every person’s health, every mind’s sanity, every

heart's peace, every maiden's virtue, every friendship's bond, every good work's capability, every servant's ministry, every church's harmony, every sermon's effectiveness, and every soul's destiny.

We must not underestimate our enemy. The Israelites made this mistake when they sent only two thousand men to fight against Ai the first time and, because of sin, were defeated (Joshua 7:3). When Joshua returned, he took 30,000 troops (8:3)! Some Christians underestimate Satan's strength. They never study the Bible at home and hardly ever pray for God's help. They tune their parents out, and refuse to listen to their preachers, Bible teachers, and elders (Proverbs 6:22-23). Some do not even attend Bible classes to gain faith and knowledge (1 Peter 2:2). They "play" at Christianity and think they can survive. They are mistaken. When they leave the safety of the training barracks (go with unchristian friends or leave home for college), they find that in the war zone, it's hard to come back (spiritually) alive (cf. Matthew 13:1-9). Hell was prepared for Satan and his angels, but people who reject Christ will suffer there with him (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11-15). After your conversion to Christ, you must remain faithful to Him in order to avoid returning back to the devil's ways (Revelation 2:10).

How Does Satan Fight?

Satan tries to get us to distrust God. This is his oldest tactic. He used it on Adam and his new bride (Genesis 3). Since we are safe only when we trust God, Satan tries to get us to doubt God's words ("Has God said?" or, today, "Does it really mean that?") and motives ("God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God," 3:1, 5, or, today, "God won't let us have any fun").

Satan tries to get us to give up by making life hard. Satan tried this tactic with Job, but failed (Job 1:13; 2:4-7). Paul called his "thorn in the flesh" a "messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Corinthians 12:7). He may use normal body afflictions and disasters to tempt us. Interestingly, Satan disputed with Michael over Moses' body (Jude 9). Satan persecutes (Revelation 2:10). God's people are on the battlefield, and at times *are* the battlefield. He uses others to deliver his blows, but he is behind all evil (Matthew 16:23; Luke 22:3; Acts 13:10). If we obey God's Word only during the good times (cf. Job 1:9-11), then our faith is shallow (Matthew 7:24-27; 13:20-21). Faith that cannot be *tested* cannot be *trusted* (James 1:1-8; 1 Peter 1:3-9). He hinders our spiritual work (1 Thessalonians 2:18, *hinder, egkopto*, "to cut into, impede, be tedious unto"). Galatians 5:7 uses the root (*anakopto*) which means a "roadblock" (literally, "to beat back, check"). The KJV margin has "who did drive you back."

His best tactic today is persecution and the most common form is peer pressure. Fear of criticism and the desire to be accepted by friends leads many people to compromise God's Word. If you face this problem (we all do, 2 Timothy 3:12), then consider these verses: "I will speak of thy testimonies . . . and *will not be ashamed*" (Psalm 119:46). "For *I am not ashamed* of the gospel of Christ . . ." (Romans 1:16). Satan opposed Paul through "many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Timothy 3:8). Today, he may use a teacher. One college philosophy class discussed God's existence. The professor asked: "Has anyone heard God?" Nobody spoke. "Has anyone touched God?" No answer. "Has anyone seen God?" When no one answered, he stated, "Then there is no God."

A student raised his hand. Curious, the professor called on him. He asked: "Has anyone heard our professor's brain?" Silence. "Has anyone touched our professor's

brain?" Absolute silence. "Has anyone seen our professor's brain?" When nobody dared speak he concluded, "Then our professor has no brain!" (He later received an "A" in the class.) Truly, "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" (Psalm 118:6).

In 1924 Eric Liddel was the world's best sprinter and favored to win the 100-meter race in Paris. A few weeks before the Olympics he learned the preliminary races were scheduled for Sunday. He had a problem. He thought it was wrong to play sports on the Lord's Day. But he had trained most of his life for this race. The British Empire was counting on him to bring home a gold medal. The next few weeks he excused himself after dinner each night and hours later returned exhausted. Everybody wondered what he was doing, but thought it was his training regimen. A few weeks later the world learned his secret. He had been practicing for an event scheduled for a weekday that required a different type of speed and endurance. At the closing ceremonies he received a Gold Medal, not as a sprinter, but as the 400-meter champion. Liddel, who became a missionary, died as a prisoner in a concentration camp during World War II. His story was told in the film *Chariots of Fire*.

Satan attacks through doctrinal confusion and false teaching (1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Peter 2:1-2; Jude 3-4). Satan deceives (Genesis 3:1ff; Matthew 16:21-23; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 11:3, 14), snatches away God's Word (Matthew 13:19), misuses Scripture (Matthew 4:6), and turns men from the Truth (1 Timothy 5:15). Whenever the Word is preached he turns attention from it by the crying of a baby or the color of the preacher's tie. If we are confused about Truth, we cannot fight error (Proverbs 1:4; Ephesians 4:14). Christians who can learn to run a computer, work algebra equations, memorize sports statistics and plays, and fix cars, can surely learn the Bible.

In Bible times, shepherds learned to fear wild dogs. These fierce creatures could devour a whole flock. In the Bible, the church is God's flock; Christians are sheep; and false teachers are the wild dogs or wolves. Atheists and persecutors do little injury to the church, like an eagle stealing a lamb, but false preachers, like wolves, kill whole flocks. In the wild, wolves attack the young first. In Christ's flock, false teachers often go after young people. They try to convince teens that the Bible is too difficult to understand and out-of-touch with today's world (2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:12). David did not seem to think so: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? . . . Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:9-11).

Satan discourages by division in the congregation (John 17:11, 21-23; Matthew 5:25; 1 Corinthians 1-3). A family was returning from worship one Sunday with the parents talking in the front and two little boys "play fighting" in the back. The father was upset about a decision of the elders and was emphatically making the point to his wife. He did not even think the boys were listening until one stuck his head between the seats and said, "We just hate those elders, don't we dad?" He did not realize he was turning his children against the very ones who could help them go to heaven. Adults who promote division will answer for the souls of children they turn from God.

Christians must be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). If Satan can get the adults to whom others look up feuding among themselves and back-biting each other, then it is easy for them to quit altogether.

Satan tries to get us to trust in ourselves. Right doctrine is wrong without right devotion. Jesus attacked self-righteousness, because He knew we have to feel guilty before we seek forgiveness (Matthew 9:10-13; 23:29-31;

Luke 7:36-50; 2 Corinthians 10:12). Queen Elizabeth I was right when she said, “They are most deceived that trust the most in themselves.” After David successfully defeated many enemies, Satan moved him to number Israel. He decided to count his own resources (1 Chronicles 21:1-8), and forgot what he had known before—that “God is . . . my strength, and my refuge...” (Psalm 62:7).

Satan tries to get us to be worldly. He wants the world to squeeze us “into its mold” (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15-16). If we act like the world (Galatians 5:17-21), dress like the world, talk like the world, and go the same places as worldly friends, then we have revoked our heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20). *Conversation (politeuma)* in Philippians 3:20 means “citizenship.” Satan wants to control the mind (Acts 5:3). Books, magazines, radio, television, the Internet, and conversation are all tools. Paul speaks of his *snare (pagis)* which is a “trap fastened by a noose; a trick or stratagem” (2 Timothy 2:26). Worldliness is one trap (1 Timothy 3:7). James warned, “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (4:4).

How can we win against Satan?

Aqaba seemed impregnable in 1917. A vessel approaching the port faced huge naval guns above the town. To the east lay the deadly "anvil of the sun" and barren desert was in every other direction. The Turks believed it completely safe. Lawrence of Arabia led a force of irregular Arab cavalry across the "anvil of the sun." On July 6, 1917, they swept into Aqaba from the blind side. A climactic moment of the film *Lawrence of Arabia* is a panning shot of the Arabs galloping past the useless naval guns facing the wrong direction. Aqaba fell, and the Turkish hold on Palestine was broken.

The Turks failed because they made two mistakes. They did not know their enemy, and they did not have the right weapons. We must be careful not to make the same mistakes. Ephesians 6:12 makes it clear who our enemy is—our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against powers of this dark world. We must never underestimate the devil. And, we must not over-estimate him, either.

God gave us his “play book.” *Bruise* (*suntribo*) in Romans 16:20 means, “to crush, shatter.” We can be delivered from darkness (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 2:14). In His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ defeated Satan and his evil hosts (John 12:31-33; Ephesians 1:15-2:10; Colossians 2:13-15; 1 John 3:8). There are three steps to our defeating him:

(1) *Recognize* when the devil is at work (2 Corinthians 2:11; cf. 1 John 3:10).

(2) *Respect* his subtlety (2 Corinthians 11:3).

(3) *Resist* him with the Word and prayer (Matthew 4:1-11; James 4:7, *resist, anthistemi*, “to stand against, withstand”).

Some say, “The devil made me do it,” but *we* control our actions. Satan is cunning, but he can be outsmarted. We know what he wants to do (make us miserable and send us to hell), and how he goes about it. God promised we will not be tempted beyond our power to resist (1 Corinthians 10:13). God limits Satan’s power (cf. Job 1-2; Revelation 20:2). We can beat him—in fact, we can *whip* him (James 4:7; Romans 16:20)! To resist we must:

- ◆ *Put on protective gear* (Ephesians 6:10-18). We wouldn’t go into a radioactive area without putting on breathing equipment. How foolish to go against Satan without the gear God gave us!

- ◆ *Rely on Christ and the Spirit* (Revelation 12:11; 1 John 4:4). When Satan desired to sift Peter as wheat, Christ prayed for him (Luke 22:31; Acts 26:16-18).
- ◆ *Take away his advantages* (Ephesians 4:27). Paul names some sins that give him a foothold. Any sin we enjoyed before conversion can be added to ruin the new life, so we must keep our hearts clean.

STAND UP!

Paul said, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore . . .” (6:11, 13-14). Ben-Gurion and another Zionist leader were in a hotel in Haifa where they argued all night whether the windows should be closed or open. Ben-Gurion wanted them open, his roommate, closed. As the sun rose the roommate said, “Look, we’re idiots —the windows don’t have panes.” “I knew that,” said Ben-Gurion, “it was the principle of the thing.”

The “principle of the thing” matters! A Christian who won’t stand for something will fall for anything. A faith that’s not worth dying for is not worth living for. How much conviction do we have for the Truth? Are we willing to stand up for what we believe? Do we let non-Christians sway us?

Don’t let anything sway you. An Amish restaurant in Florida has an instructive sign that reads: “It’s hard to please God when you’re trying to please men.” *Wiles* are “tricky and deceptive methods.” Early Christians did not let violence sway them. They counted it a blessing to “suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41; Isaiah 51:7). Paul suffered afflictions (2 Corinthians 11:28-32; 2 Timothy 1:8) but viewed them as a way to “fellowship with Christ’s

sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). His Lord suffered, so he was glad to suffer (John 13:16).

We hope never to be physically persecuted, but if so, let’s turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). Truly, “In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me” (Psalm 56:4). We know nothing else of him, but one of our brothers died because he would not deny Jesus (Revelation 2:13). Antipas was not alone (6:9). The Roman emperor could *slay* them, but he could not *sway* them. He could *chastise* them, but he could not *change* them. He could *persecute* them, but he could not *persuade* them.

They’ll whisper when you walk by. They’ll make cutting remarks only half in jest. They leave your name off their invitation lists (Luke 6:22). Jesus did not see that as a reason to give up. He saw it as a compliment! “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven...” (Matthew 5:11-12). He wants us to go home smiling because we just got rich (Matthew 6:19-21).

Do trivial or avoidable hindrances—football/band practice, studying, errands, family reunions, vacations, a ballgame—cause us to miss church services (Hebrews 10:25)? Are our convictions strong enough to keep us from taking something from Wal-Mart or a concession stand when we can get away with it (Ephesians 4:28)? Does our conviction about modest dress keep us away from cheerleader tryouts and the beach (1 Timothy 2:9)? Are we convicted enough that others are lost (John 8:24) to invite them to a Gospel meeting?

WORK OUT!

Woody Allen said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.” This is not true of a Christian soldier. We

cannot just “show up” at church services and expect to be successful at fighting Satan. We have to train. An early king of England was called “Ethelred the Unready.” That is a bad nickname for any Christian soldier (Ecclesiastes 9:12; Matthew 24:38-39, 45-51; 25:6-10; Luke 21:34-35). A properly conditioned athlete does not tire easily, and neither does a strong Christian (read Isaiah 40:30-31).

Paul wrote, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (6:10). Athletes know the importance of “working out.” During the summer, football players spend hours in the weight room so they’ll have an advantage in the fall. Soldiers, too, have to “work out.” The United States Army gives sixteen weeks of basic training to each enlistee. During this time they become better conditioned—physically and mentally. “Working out” means we study hard, pray hard, and try hard to develop a pure heart and good habits.

DRESS UP!

“Put on the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11). Paul compares a Christian’s offensive and defensive armor with a first century Roman soldier’s. When he wrote this his wrist may have been chained to such a soldier. Roman soldiers could not have conquered the world without armor and weapons. A Christian can never whip Satan without them, either. Let no part be exposed to the enemy. God gives us six pieces of armor and one weapon. As the old commercial said, “Don’t leave home without it.”

Don’t forget your belt (“girdle”)—it protects the secret parts. Roman soldiers draped a “tunic” made of a large, square piece of material with holes cut out for the head and arms loosely over the body. Since most ancient combat was hand-to-hand, a loose-fitting robe was dangerous in a sword fight. Before the fight, soldiers carefully tucked tunics under their heavy leather belts.

Ordinary citizens of that day also wore similar robes. When they were in a hurry or had heavy work to do, they tucked them around the waist or sometimes took them off entirely (Exodus 12:11).

Christians must have “loins girt about with truth” (Ephesians 6:14) which means God’s Word must be very near us. (*Loins, osphus*, “the hip; procreative power,” refer to what we call the “private parts.” *Girt* means, “wrapped around”). We should always be prepared for Christ’s Second Coming. Jesus tells us to “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning” (Luke 12:35), which is literally, “be dressed in readiness” (cf. 1 Peter 1:13). Truth (*aletheuo*, “to be true in doctrine and profession; tell the truth”) refers to the Bible—every word of which is true (1 Timothy 4:1). The girdle protected the part of the body others were not supposed to see. We must guard our inner man (the part others can’t see) against hypocrisy.

Don’t forget your breastplate—it guards the heart (*Proverbs 23:7*). About sunrise one morning police officer Bob Vernon saw a red pickup run a stop sign and quickly pulled him over. The driver thought, “The cops already know!” His hand rested on a gun he had just used to rob a convenience store. The officer said, “Good morning, sir, may I see your . . .” He never finished. The driver fired the gun into his chest from just inches away. Bob was knocked seven feet backward to the ground.

To the criminal’s shock, he stood up, pulled his revolver, and fired twice. The first bullet smashed the windshield; the second went through the door and ripped the thief’s left leg. “Don’t shoot!” he screamed, throwing out the gun and the stolen money. What saved Bob’s life was dozens of layers of Kevlar, the super strong three-eighths inch thick fabric used for bulletproof vests.

Our “Kevlar” breastplate is righteousness (right living). It deflects temptations. “Awake to righteousness, and sin not . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:34). A righteous reputation can make accusations “bounce off.” Words can be little defense against false accusations—but a good life is hard to argue down. Someone accused Plato’s followers of certain crimes. “Well,” said Plato, “we must live in such a way as to prove that his accusations are a lie.”

Don’t forget your shoes—they are your foundation (6:15). A good soldier keeps his feet planted. Quarterbacks are coached to plant their feet before making a long throw. Workers are shown how to find a good place to stand before lifting a heavy object. God’s man is like a tree *planted* by the water (Psalm 1:3). Some runners start strong but never win because they do not have the stamina to finish with a kick. God’s man finishes strong (Galatians 6:9; Philippians 4:13).

We are firmly “rooted...in him” (Colossians 2:7). A godly man’s faith is “founded upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24-25), and his feet are “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (cf. Romans 10:15). He is “grounded and settled” and “not moved away from the...gospel” (Ephesians 1:23; Ephesians 3:17). The stony soil heart proved an inhospitable host for the seed “had no root” and withered away (Matthew 13:6). Good soil has depth enough to support the Word—even when the “heat is turned up” by persecution or tribulation. The “leaf” of the godly man doesn’t *wither* (Psalm 1:3).

Shoes represent preparation. Preparation is important. Jesus prepared His twelve "generals" for three years before sending them to face the world (Mark 16:15). Saul offered David his armor to use against Goliath. David refused “for he had not proved it” (1 Samuel 17:39). A young Abraham Lincoln said: "I will prepare myself and when the time comes I will be ready." When his country

needed him, he was prepared. We must be "*ready* of every good work" (Titus 3:1; Romans 1:15).

Don't forget your shield—it protects against daily temptations. One of the most dangerous weapons in ancient warfare was the "fiery dart." It was tipped with a substance that could be set on fire and shot from a bow. To protect themselves, the Romans developed shields made of two sections of wood glued together. When an enemy shot fiery darts, the soldiers simply stood their large shields side by side in front of them to form a wooden wall almost as tall as the soldiers. When the darts sank into these shields, they went out. Faith deals with "darts" of temptation in the same way.

A shield was very special to the soldier. It was his badge of honor. If he lost it he could not attend town meetings or participate in certain religious rites. If he were killed in battle, fellow soldiers would bring his shield back to his wife. (If close by he was brought back lying across his shield.) She saved the shield and gave it to the oldest son when he went to war the first time. Sometimes he was told, "This is your father's shield. Come back home with it, or come back on it."

Roman soldiers actually had two shields—a small round one and a large oblong shield. This one was shaped like a door, and comes from a root meaning "door or portal." The Roman army was the best trained and most-feared of its day. Few enemies could stand against it. Before a battle, Roman legions lined up behind these tall shields, drew their swords, and started tapping the shields in unison. They started slowly and got louder and faster. The noise often so intimidated the enemy that they lost their nerve and fled. It was called the "tapping of doom." As Christ' army, we have nothing to fear from ungodly

peers or the devil. We are well-armed and protected. Our “tapping” ought to frighten our enemies, not the other way around. Are you tapping your sword?

The Bible applies these customs to the Christian's faithfulness: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:38-39). Greeks used the words *draw back* to refer to soldiers who dropped their shields and ran from battle. He was completely dishonored; if caught, he was put to death for deserting his fellow soldiers. God says any Christian who drops his shield of faith and runs is not worthy to be called a Christian (Luke 9:62). Do not let anything or anyone take your shield.

Don't forget your helmet—it protects the decision-maker. We must protect our minds against evil thoughts (Matthew 5:28).

Don't forget your sword—it's your only offensive weapon. James I once said that armor “was an excellent invention, for it not only saved the life of the wearer, but it hindered him from doing harm to anybody else.” God never intended for Christianity to only be a *defensive battle*. We can fight back! The Christian's place is on the frontline, not on the sideline. “If we are to better the future we must disturb the present” (Catherine Booth). All Christians are soldiers. Soldiers fight—it's their job. “*Fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Timothy 6:12). “Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood” (Jeremiah 48:10). What does this mean in practical terms of present-day church work?

We fight ungodly government (“spiritual wickedness in high places,” 6:12). Elected officials

betrayed us by legalizing abortion, homosexuality, gambling, drinking, and, in some places, prostitution. When you can vote, don't vote for those who promote these. Remember, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34; cf. Psalm 9:17).

We fight immorality. Pornography came out from under the counter and is now in *Sports Illustrated*. The Bible still says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11). Churches used to fight sin in their communities. God's preachers still preach against dancing (Galatians 5:19-21), social drinking (Matthew 24:49), immodest dress (1 Timothy 2:9), mixed swimming (Matthew 18:6; Romans 14:13, 21), and gambling (Romans 12:17). Today, regrettably, none of these are opposed in most communities, and are sometimes tolerated among God's own people! Churches have "pool parties" and go as groups to the beach. "Sin in the camp" will bring defeat every time (cf. Joshua 7).

We fight denominationalism. Jesus built only one church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 4:4); the devil has built many. Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13). If there is only one church, then we must be busy telling others which church it is.

We can't win God's battles without God's book. The battle with denominationalism and false doctrine is a battle for souls (2 John 9-11). If Lucifer wins, eternal suffering awaits (Matthew 7:21-23). If Christians win, eternal glory (Matthew 25:46). The stakes could be no higher (Matthew 16:26). We fight liberalism (loosing where God bound) and radicalism (binding where God has not). These are, among us, perhaps even more dangerous than things we talk more about (cf. Matthew 26:49; Hebrews 6:6). Paul "gave place" to false teachers not even

for an hour (Galatians 2:5, 11; 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17).

BOW DOWN!

Finally, Paul comes to our greatest weapon—prayer: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (6:18). The early church was known for its prayer meetings (Acts 1:14; 12:5-17; 16:13; 21:5). In our self-sufficient age, prayer gets crowded out. It’s time we get back on our knees (James 5:16). Queen Mary said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than the armies of her enemies. Though neither were New Testament Christians, both believed in prayer’s power. The devil fears a single faithful Christian on his knees more than a whole church of indifferent members. Prayer must be:

(a) Constant. Our tendency may be to pray only in during hard times, but *daily* prayer brings *daily* strength (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

(b) Intense. Limp prayer never got a man anywhere (Colossians 4:12).

(c) Unselfish. My prayers may be too much for “me” and too little for others (James 4:1-3).

We all believe in prayer, to be sure, but many do not feel proficient at it. Since Jesus said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1), let’s look at some practical suggestions (made popular by the late Batsell Barrett Baxter, source unknown):

- *Pray first thing in the morning.* In what better way can we start our day?
- *Pray before every meal.* Even in restaurants!
- *Pray at set times.* Regular times keep us from getting too busy to pray.

- *Pray with your family.* Ask your parents, brothers, and/or sisters to pray with you.
- *Pray when you feel discouraged.* God comforts those who pray.
- *Pray at odd times.* Pray while in the car, while on lunch break, while working at a desk, while waiting for a friend. Prayer need not be long—perhaps only a sentence or two. It need not be spoken aloud.
- *Pray when you are happy.* Don't forget to say “thanks” for the good times, too.

Conclusion: Yes, Christianity has suffered its apparent loses. Jesus was killed; the apostles were beaten; the church was scattered. But God always won in the end! Jesus was resurrected (Mark 16:6); the apostles preached to the whole world (Colossians 1:23); and the church multiplied in number (Acts 6:1,7; 9:31). We cannot sheath the sword until there is complete victory. Do not give up. God is on our side! “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37). We have enemies to fight against, a captain to fight for, a banner to fight under, and rules to fight with. “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14).

You need not worry about who will win this battle with Satan. *God will win.* During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was asked, “Are you sure God is on your side?” His thoughtful reply was, “I am not so concerned if God is on our side, but whether we are on God’s side.” We need only concern ourselves with being faithful to Him. Paul wondered, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57; cf. Psalm 106:47; 148:14).

IMMODEST APPAREL

Warren F. Kenney

In 1999, *The Free Press* published a book written by Wendy Shalit entitled *A Return to Modesty-Discovering the Lost Virtue*. The first chapter of the book is *The War on Embarrassment*. It seems to me, that evidence abounds to prove that this war has been won or at the very least we are losing it. No one seems to be embarrassed by anything anymore.

Jeremiah lamented conditions of his day by speaking to this very issue (Jeremiah 6:15 and Jeremiah 8:12). What frightens me about this is that a nation that loses its ability to be embarrassed, to blush, is a nation well on its way to destruction. Jeremiah was not talking about wicked people who know not God; the sad scene he described involved God's own people "from the prophet even unto the priest" (Jeremiah 6:13, Jeremiah 8:10). Even in our day, we can and in some instances have, reached the place where we can sin without fear, without shame and without regret.¹

My purpose is to be on one part of the problem we now face i.e. that of immodest apparel. Although others could deal with this far more effectively, I commend those who planned this lectureship for realizing the need to address such a subject. This shows them to be men who understand the times in which we live and the need to seek out God's will for living. Perhaps the need for such men and women has never been more critical than the present.

The aforementioned Wendy Shalit in a related article lists four myths about modesty that need to be

exposed.² The first myth is that modesty is Victorian. The second myth about modesty is that it is synonymous with prudery. I went to “Wikipedia” the free on-line encyclopedia and asked, “What is a prude?” Here, in part, is what it said: “A prude is a person who is described as being overly concerned with decorum or propriety. They may be perceived as being uncomfortable with sexuality, nudity, alcohol, drug use or mischief...” The name is generally considered to mean excessive modesty, and is often used as an insult...These reservations may stem from shyness or strict moral beliefs.”³ The third myth is that modesty is not natural and the fourth myth is that modesty is solely a concern for women.

After discussing these four myths, Shalit makes a case for restoring modesty. We cannot restore something until we understand what it is, so we move on.

Modesty has been well defined as “observing standards of proper dress and behavior; free from coarseness or indecency, chaste in thought and conduct”.⁴ On the other hand, immodesty can be defined as “the wearing of clothing that reveals or emphasizes parts of the body that, when seen by the opposite sex, draw attention to your and create evil desires.”⁵ This is what Paul called ‘lasciviousness’ in Galatians 5:19, and he labeled it as a work of the flesh. The prohibition is against dressing or acting in a way that excites lust in another that cannot be lawfully satisfied.

Fashion is not wrong in and of itself; it becomes wrong when it arouses unlawful passions, lusts and desires. There was a time when Christian men and women recognized the difference between modest and immodest, but today that seems not to be the case. Instead of looking to the Bible for their guidance, they look to the latest

popular clothing designer. They then ask “how short is too short?”

David Baker said that what they are really asking is how much skin can I show; how many body parts can I leave hanging out; how tight can my clothing be; and how much attention can I draw to myself and still make it to heaven.⁶ Instead of fleeing lust, they flirt with it (2 Timothy 2:22).

When it comes to immodest apparel, we must know what the issue is. As is often the case, we get a better view of the issue if we first remove some things that are not the issue. It is not a comfort issue, and although closely related, it is not a seasonal issue. It is not exclusively a gender problem. I mention these things because many are inclined to the idea that the wearing of immodest apparel is the problem.

I would impress upon you that immodest apparel is not the problem; it, to quote David Baker, “...is just the horse on which the problem rode out.”⁷ This means that immodest dress is not the problem; it is only symptomatic of an even greater problem. This is important because if we are not aware of this, we end up treating the symptoms rather than the disease. Sometimes, you have to treat symptoms, but we as preachers, elders and teachers must focus primarily upon the disease.

In her article *Modesty Matters*, Pam Hardy rightly suggests that the real issue is the heart.⁸ When we address the heart of man, we are not speaking to the physical organ that beats within our chest. Biblically speaking, the heart has to do with our intellect, emotions, conscience and will.⁹

We must feed our intellect upon the milk and meat of God's word to the point that we can recognize the difference between right and wrong (Peter 2:2 Hebrews 5:14). We must control our emotions to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30). We must adequately train our conscience so that it will guide us into godly living. When it comes to our will, we must condition ourselves to the point that it is subject to God's Will.

The most important question then is not "what shall I wear?" but "what is the condition of my heart?" John MacArthur said, "The train of sin runs on tracks that were laid in the heart."¹⁰

Of course, the Bible says it much better.

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. "Eat and drink!" he says to you (Proverbs 23:7).

As in water face reflects face, so a man's heart reveals the man (Proverbs 27:19).

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-24).

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matthew 15:19).

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

In John MacArthur's commentary on First Timothy, we encounter this arresting statement:

"How does a woman discern the sometimes fine line between proper dress and dressing to be the center

of attention? The answer starts in the intent of the heart. A woman should examine her motives and goals for the way she dresses. Is her intent to show the grace and beauty of womanhood? Is it to reveal a humble heart devoted to worshiping God? Or, is it to call attention to herself and flaunt her beauty, or worse to attempt to lure men sexually? A woman who focuses on worshiping God will consider carefully how she is dressed, because her heart will dictate her wardrobe and her appearance.”

During the hijacking of the Santa Maria in 1967, the women on board thought the rebels might have designs on them, so they stopped wearing shorts and halter tops. Isn't it amazing that the “women of the world” know something the “daughters of God” do not want to admit?¹¹

What we wear must pass certain tests. While I will not develop this, I encourage your further study. The tests our dress must pass are:

The chastity test (1 Peter 3:1-6)

The modesty test (1 Timothy 2:9)

The propriety test (1 Timothy 2:9) KJV has shamefacedness

The moderation test (1 Timothy 2:9) KJV has sobriety, this means discretion (Proverbs 11:22 Proverbs 12:4)

The godliness test (1 Timothy 2:10)

The lasciviousness test (Galatians 5:19)

It is when these tests are passed that we can know we are dressing in a way that pleases God.

In her book *The Look*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss, says there is a vast difference between what the world says about how we should dress and what the Bible says. The world says beauty is external and physical; the Bible says beauty is internal and spiritual. The world says we should

dress to get noticed; the Bible says we are to dress to glorify God. The world says we should dress to uncover and reveal; the Bible says the purpose of clothing is to cover and conceal.

There are great blessings in store for those who adhere to the message of the Bible. Peace that comes through obedience; freedom from enslavement to the gods of fashion; protection from the wrong kind of attention from others.

It is my prayer that whenever you decide what to wear, your decision will please God. May God bless us all to that end.

All scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

¹ Article “Neither Could They Blush” by Harry Hafley

² Article: “Modesty Revisited” --- www.orthodoxytoday.org

³ <http://em.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prudery>

⁴ Don Humphrey, “A Modern Look at Modesty” (Great Bend, KS. Don Humphrey, 1963) page 10, quoted by David Lipe in “The Spiritual Sword”; July 1971, pg. 9

⁵ David Lipe quoting David Sain in “The Spiritual Sword, July 1971, page 8

⁶ Worldliness—24th Annual Bellview Lectures—June 12-15, 1999—Michael Hatcher, editor, page 221

⁷ Worldliness—24th Annual Bellview Lectures—June 12-15, 1999—Michael Hatcher, editor

⁸ Article “Modesty Matters” by Pam Hardy

⁹ Worldliness—24th Annual Bellview Lectures—June 12-15, 1999—Michael Hatcher, editor, page 218

¹⁰ James MacArthur quoted by Pam Hardy in article “Modesty Matters”

¹¹ The Santa Maria was a 609 foot long passenger liner owned by Companhia Colonial of Lisbon. On January 23, 1961, it was hijacked, by a group of 24 Portuguese and Spanish rebels led by Portuguese military officer Henriques Galvilo, to bring attention to the Estado Novo of Portugal and related fascist regime in Spain. The incident

lasted 13 days; the hijacked ship evaded both the U.S. and British Navy for 11 days before docking at Recife, Brazil. The hijacking was also known as Operation Dulcinea by the hijackers.

The Santa Maria continued in service until it was scrapped in 1973.