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LOST NEEDING JESUS

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LOST NEEDING JESUS

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Director of the Lectureship and Editor of the Book

David L. Lipe

Lectureship Committee

Jody Apple

Tom L. Childers

Jacob Evans

Steve Higginbotham

Edwin Jones

Jonathan Jones II

David L. Lipe

James Meadows

Layout

Tom L. Childers

Images

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Cover Design

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WE OWE THEM

David L. Lipe

I am debtor both to the Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: as it is written "The just shall live by faith."

Romans 1:14-16

The phrase, "All roads lead to Rome," is a familiar expression to all of us. Some think the phrase simply means that there are many different routes to the same place; however, the phrase has historical roots because at one time, all roads, did in fact lead to Rome. At one time, Rome was the center of everything. Everyone wanted to visit Rome at least once in his lifetime to behold it in all of its glory. Like others, Paul wanted to go to Rome but not just as a sightseer. He was eager to go because he wanted to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:15). Further, Paul had some very specific reasons for being so enthusiastic about preaching the gospel.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Paul was eager to preach because he was debtor to all. We are all familiar with the concept of being in debt to someone. Practically none of us are exempt from being in debt. When we think of being in debt, we typically think of a debt in the sense of owing something to someone because of a loan, which has been made; however, there are other senses in which we might owe something. We might be in debt to pass on something, which has been given to us by another. No one exemplifies this more than the apostle Paul who said, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me: yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"¹ Paul felt deeply his obligation to share with everyone the good news of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul could think of many to whom he was in debt. "In the providence of God, he had a Jewish heritage, a Greek education, and Roman citizenship. Above all, he would have recognized his indebtedness

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

to the Lord.”² He was in debt to the Lord for his very salvation (cf. Gal. 2:20; 1 Tim. 1:15). Further, Jesus entrusted Paul with the gospel. Paul was made a debtor because the Lord Jesus had committed to his trust the blessed gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1f; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11-12; Tit. 1:3). As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was in debt to the Gentile world, “both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to wise and to unwise” (Rom. 1:14). Paul was emphasizing his indebtedness to the cultured and the uncultured, the educated and the uneducated—in short, he was indebted to all people.

Paul was eager to preach the gospel because the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Of the blessed gospel, Paul makes it clear that he is not ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16). The preaching of Christ crucified was foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23). It may well be that there were those in Rome who despised the simplicity of the message and would look down on Christians for their unusual message.³ On the contrary, Paul stands for the message; he is proud of it and has good reasons for it—it is the power of God for salvation. The Greek word for “power” (*dunamis*) is the word from which we get such words as “dynamic,” “dynamo,” and “dynamite.” The gospel is God’s explosive power for salvation. This power is for everyone who believes—to the Jew first and also to the Greek (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16). The basis for this is in verse 17; namely, in the gospel is revealed the righteousness of God. Although “righteousness” of God is used as an attribute of God, the context indicates that a divine attribute is not being discussed as much as a divine activity. The gospel message is the means by which God enables people to be made right; to have good standing with him.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- We Must Be Eager to Preach the Gospel.
- We Must Not Be Ashamed of the Gospel.
- We Must Realize the Gospel Is for Everyone.

We must be eager to preach the gospel. One cannot read Paul’s eagerness to preach the gospel without considering our own obligation. Like Paul, we owe so much to so many. We are in debt to those who have shared the gospel with us. This may be parents, elders, teachers, preachers, or other acquaintances. Whoever they may be we are in debt to them. Our faith comes by hearing and our hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

² David Roper, “I Am Eager to Preach the Gospel,” *Truth for Today* (ed. Eddie Cloer; Searcy, AR: Truth for Today, August 2005), 23.

³ D. A. Carson, *The Epistle of the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 66.

Someone enabled us to hear the message of the cross. Moreover, we are debtors because of the grace and mercy which has been shed on us by our Lord Jesus Christ who “has loved us and given himself for us” (Eph. 5:2). It is Jesus who has entrusted earthen vessels with the gospel (2 Cor. 4:7).

There are good reasons we should be eager to spread the gospel. (1) We should be eager to tell others because of what it will do for them. They will enjoy blessings now and in the world to come (2 Tim. 4:8; Mark 10:28-30; John 10:10). They will be a blessing to themselves in that they will have forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

They will be a blessing to others. Their righteous lives will build up a nation (Pro. 16:34). They can lead others to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1, 2; cf. Heb. 11:4; Rev. 14:13). Finally, they will enjoy blessings for



all eternity (Matt. 25:46). (2) We should be eager to tell others the gospel because of what it will do for us.⁴ Sharing the good news will enable us to have “more appreciation for what the Lord has done for us.” Further, we will experience “the joy of seeing souls saved and strengthened.” We will derive “great satisfaction in knowing we are doing what the Lord has asked us to do.” Again, we will have “hearts like those of Paul and others who burned with zeal for the lost.”

We must not be ashamed of the gospel. We may think it strange that anyone would be ashamed of the gospel. However, the very fact that Paul said he was not ashamed of it indicates the possibility that some might be ashamed of it. Apparently, some were ashamed of the gospel then. The same is no less true today. Paul warned Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord (2 Tim. 1:8). If we examine ourselves we should wonder how we could be ashamed of the gospel. The gospel is the power by which we have been saved. We have been forgiven of so much; therefore, we should love much (Luke 7:47). Some do not love much because they do not realize how much for which they have been forgiven.

We must realize the gospel is for all. This is taught in both precept and example. In the text under discussion Paul makes it clear that the gospel is God’s power for salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16; cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8; 8:4; 2:39). It is also taught in example. It was a surprise to people that Jesus shared good news with the Samaritan woman

⁴ Roper, 25.

(John 4). It was not uncommon for Jesus to associate with sinners (Luke 7; 19; John 8). Sinners are the ones Jesus came to save (Luke 19:10; Matt. 9:12-13). Although Peter said the gospel was for all (Acts 2:39), it took a miracle for him to fully understand it (Acts 10). The message is clear for us today—the gospel is for all—red, yellow, black or white; rich or poor; cultured or uncultured; educated or uneducated. God help us to take this message to everyone.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Because we were lost and someone snatched our soul from a path bound for Hell, we are debtors to the lost. Jesus has entrusted us with a message we must hand down (2 Tim. 2:2). After all, we are the only hands he has; the only feet he has; the only mouth he has. We should be eager to share this message. Are we as eager as Paul? We should be. The gospel will not be shared unless we do it. We have not received the gospel in order to keep it to ourselves. This good news, which we have received, must be given to others. We must remember that we are not reservoirs of the gospel; we are pipelines through which the gospel passes. Only by passing on the good news will we grow and develop ourselves. This is a message about which we must not be ashamed. Just as others were not ashamed to pass the message

Because we were lost and someone snatched our soul from a path bound for Hell, we are debtors to the lost.

on, neither should we. The first thing Andrew did after finding Jesus was to find Peter and tell him (John 1:41). Philip found Nathanael and told him (John 1:45). One torch lights another and thus the gospel will be spread to all men. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we owe others. God help us to carry out the task of spreading the good news.

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss different ways in which one might be in debt.
2. In what way was Paul a debtor?
3. Why was Paul eager to preach the gospel?
4. Why should we be eager to preach the gospel today?
5. Think of some ways one might demonstrate shame for the gospel.

David Lipe is Director of Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies and may be contacted at dlipe@wedopreaching.com.

I OWE HIM

Billy R. Smith

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake, among whom you are also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:1-7

We sometimes sing, “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand new song, ‘Amazing Grace.’ Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.”

In order to comprehend the magnitude of our indebtedness to God, we must possess two fundamental convictions. First, we must be convicted about the seriousness of our sin, for it separates us from God. Second, we must share with Paul the conviction that only the gospel of Christ with its glorious power can save us from the consequence of our sin. In describing himself as the chief of sinners, the beloved apostle detailed his blasphemy, persecution of saints, and violent aggression. But he received the abundant mercy and grace, the faith and love found in Christ Jesus that rescued him from eternal condemnation. As a result, a third conviction was his gratitude that in being found faithful to God’s call, he was placed into the Lord’s service (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

The same must be true for us. Because we, too, have received the grace of God in response to our guilt of sin, we accept His call to faithful and obedient service.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

We are called by God. Paul opens the letter of Romans by describing himself in three ways (1:1). First, he is a “bond-servant of Christ Jesus,” by which he is bound by love to serve his Lord until his final breath (2 Tim.

4:6-7).¹ Second, he was “*called* as an apostle” (emp. added), specifically chosen of God to be His ambassador to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 26:18). An apostle spoke and wrote with the very authority of the Lord. Third, he was “set apart for the gospel of God.” Once he learned the truth and obeyed the gospel, Paul’s entire life was dedicated and devoted to the Lord’s work (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Now, he tells the Romans they “also are the *called* of Jesus Christ” (1:6, emp. added). They heard the purity and simplicity of the gospel, they believed it, and they were obedient to its commands of repentance, confession of faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Rom. 6:1-4).

Paul adds the Romans were “*called* as saints” (1:7, emp. added). In doing so he does not refer to some super spiritual status reserved for the few; rather, he refers to all who are faithful in Christ Jesus, who have accepted the call to live a life of holiness in humble service to their Lord. As the Romans were called by the gospel of God, we, too, are “the called” when we obey, serve, and live according to the gospel’s simple yet profound and powerful message. That message which is “God’s power to save” (Rom. 1:16) is the very message that produces the saints of God. We are *called* to walk in His steps and to do His work.



We are loved by God. Paul tells the Romans they are “beloved of God” (1:7). In one sense God loves everyone, since He makes the sun and the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). However, later in this first chapter of Romans he makes clear the certain judgment of God upon the wicked: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (1:18). Therefore, only those who are obedient to the

¹ All Scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

Father's will are truly loved of God and enjoy the privilege of being His children (1 John 3:1).

The gospel itself is the story of God's love "which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2). This love story is based upon the greatness of Jesus as God's Son, the divine One who became one of us, "born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). He came to *save us* from our sins by enduring the shame and torture of the cross (Heb. 2:9-10) and to *identify with us* in becoming our merciful and faithful high priest, able to come to our aid in times of greatest need (Heb. 2:17-18). After referring to the Lord's humanity while He was on the earth, Paul now affirms His divinity, "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

Yes, we are saved by the grace of God, but through obedient faith (Eph. 2:8). That obedience is an ongoing growth process that presents to God in the presence of others a life dedicated to Him, disciplined by Him, distinctive for Him, and able to determine His will in all the issues of life.

This is the gospel, the greatest love story ever told originating in the heart of God from eternity (Eph. 3:8-11). Though our sins made it necessary for Him to taste death, the power of death could not hold Him! The power of God is greater than the power of the god of this world (1 John 4:4). Through Jesus our Lord, "we have received grace" (Rom. 1:5), the undeserved favor of God, "and peace from God our Father" (Rom. 1:7), the blessed peace of knowing we are the children of God, indeed, the *beloved of God!*

We are transformed by God. Being the recipient of God's grace, Paul refers to his own conversion and "apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Rom. 1:5). This is the consistent theme of the New Testament, that we are saved in order to save others (1 Cor. 9:22; 1 Tim. 4:16). In a marvelous text later in this letter, Paul pleads with the Romans to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God" (12:1-2).

Outside of Paul himself, there is perhaps no greater example of a people who were transformed by the obedience of faith than the Corinthians, of whom the apostle said, "you were *washed*, you were *sanctified*, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11, emp. added). Like the Romans, their sins were washed away

by the blood of Christ in baptism, they were set apart for service in the kingdom of God, and they stood justified in the eyes of Almighty God. What a transformation! The same must be true of us. Yes, we are saved by the grace of God, but through obedient faith (Eph. 2:8). That obedience is an ongoing growth process that presents to God in the presence of others a life *dedicated* to Him, *disciplined* by Him, *distinctive* for Him, and able to *determine* His will in all the issues of life. Again, this transformation enables us to live, worship, and serve as the *saints* of God (Rom. 1:7). How we owe Him!

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **We Are Called by Grace to Obedience.**
- **We Are Called to Obedience That Is Joyful, Not Burdensome.**
- **We Are Called to Obedience That Is Humble, Not Arrogant.**

We are called by grace to obedience. The New Testament clearly presents the three elements involved in our salvation. First, if not for *the grace of God*, we would be dead in our sins and without hope in the world (Eph. 2:12). Second, if not for *the cross of Jesus*, there would be no shedding of blood for our redemption (Eph. 1:7). Third, without *the obedience of faith*, there would be no forgiveness of sin and no hope of heaven (Rom. 1:5). You see each of these elements revealed in the golden text of the Bible: “For God so loved the world (God’s part), that He gave His only begotten Son (Christ’s part), that whoever believes in Him (our part) shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Upon accepting the grace of God we live changed lives. Obedience is the true result of faith.

We are called to obedience that is joyful, not burdensome. The aged apostle John knew something about being obedient to the Lord’s commands. He was there when Jesus asked, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say” (Luke 6:46)? He gave decades of faithful service to his Lord, and now, as he comes to the end of his journey, he writes to younger saints with this encouragement, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). The Lord has not given us a load too heavy to carry; rather, He has given us the very best life to live on earth in joyful anticipation of living with Him eternally in Heaven. Paul writes, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2).

We are called to obedience that is humble, not arrogant. In viewing the Pharisees we see spiritual arrogance at its worst (Matt. 23; Luke 18:9-14). Our obedience to God and the Lord Jesus is bathed in the knowledge that we are “saved by grace through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). If there is one thing the Lord loves it is humility, as revealed in His own perfect obedience to His Father’s will (Phil. 2:6-8). The same must be

true of us. One writer describes it this way: *“We are no better than anyone else in the world . . . but we are better off. We are better off because of Jesus. We are headed to Heaven; the rest of the world is headed to Hell. We know forgiveness and peace; the rest of the world pursues it. If we really understand, if we grasp His mercy, we will serve Him, and those around us. We will, like Paul, consider ourselves a willing servant of the Lord. We will give ourselves to proclaiming the message of salvation to anyone who will listen. We will do this in love, humility and with an undying gratitude for the privilege of being a part of His family.”* To God be the glory, honor, and praise!

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Paul could not have had a more encouraging opening to his brethren in Rome than what we find in this text. That encouragement has been shared with saints down through the ages, it is now shared with us, and it will be shared with those of like precious faith until the Lord appears. May we determine to be His people of absolute faith and faithfulness, may we comprehend the magnitude of being called to do His work, and may we live in joyful anticipation of taking our place in that land that is fairer than day.

DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to be “called of God?”
2. What is the significance of the term “saint?”
3. In what sense are we “transformed” by God?
4. What is the relationship between God’s grace and our obedience?
5. How is our obedient faith translated into lifelong service?

Billy R. Smith serves as the Dean of the School of Biblical Studies at Freed-Hardeman University. He also serves as a minister for the Henderson church of Christ in Henderson, TN. He may be contacted at bsmith@fhu.edu.

Lesson 3 - Scrutinizing Sin

CHARACTERIZATION OF SIN

Bill Irby

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

1 John 3:4

Our time in the history of the world is unusual to say the least. It is a time when words do not mean any particular thing. Reasonable people, and by “reasonable” I mean people who operate their lives in a more or less rational manner, know that definition is at the core of understanding. In these days of post-modern confusion, definition is under attack. Instead of a word representing a specific set of ideas for a particular time based on the meaning in the mind of the writer or speaker, words now have meaning only in the mind of the hearer or reader. This, of course, is nonsense and renders communication impossible.

Our task here is to go to the Bible, the Word of God, and allow God through that instrument to define or characterize sin for us (2 Tim 3:16-17). In this way we will be relying on God, the source of all actual wisdom, while at the same time rejecting the malleable and frequently false wisdom of man.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

What the world thinks of sin. Contrast is an effective learning methodology, so we will begin by considering what the world thinks of sin, and then we will contrast that with God’s definition. The difficulty with this methodology is that there is not a single source for the definition of sin favored by the secular world. We can, however, look to how our secular culture operates and discern its functional definition of what sin is and what it is not. A rather obvious example is the area of what readers of this essay would call sexual immorality. According to popular culture, nothing that people want to do with themselves sexually is sin. Marriage is irrelevant to many these days as is whether a person partners with someone of the same sex. Another illustrative area is the practice of abortion as birth control. Killing unborn children is for many no longer a sin; instead, it is just a matter of choice. On the other hand, for many in our society, owning a firearm is a sin. Driving a large truck is thought to be sinfully irresponsible.

So, by the simple process of observation we can come to understand the world's definition of sin. It is whatever a particular person decides it is at the moment. The only standard for sinfulness is the perception held within an individual's mind at the time the matter is introduced. As we shall see, God is not pleased with this elevation of man's little mind over His infinite one (Isa. 55:8-9).

What God thinks of sin. In distinct contrast to the world, God's Word is as clear as a bell on the subject of sin, just as we would expect from the objective standard for judging all of human behavior (John 8:32, 12:48). Sin is defined as coming up short of the mark set for us by God: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).¹ Sin is lawlessness: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). To be lawless is to transgress the law or, in other words, to act as if law did not exist. God also counts as sin situations in which we know what we ought to do and do not do it. This is the import of James 4:17: "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." Sin is also defined by James as surrender to one's desires: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15).



Thus, we have a threefold examination of God's definition of sin: (1) coming short of God's will, (2) acting as if His laws did not exist, and (3) not doing the good things God has said for us to do.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Redefining Sin Does Not Make It Go Away.**
- **We Must Call Sin by Its True Name.**
- **Sin Is Best Stopped Early.**

Redefining sin does not make it go away. One of Satan's most effective devices is redefinition, and we must not be ignorant of it (2 Cor. 2:11). Young people today are encouraged by their peers and the full force of the media to redefine what is right and wrong. This headlong plunge into

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

subjectivism is contrary to the will of God. God condemned calling evil good and good evil a very long time ago (Isa. 5:20).

We must call sin by its true name. We are being pressured by the popular culture to modify God's definition of sin. For example, rational discussion of homosexual behavior is almost impossible today. Some would have preaching out of Romans 1 categorized as hate speech. We cannot allow that pressure to have its way. However, we must also remember an important element of discussion of that sin or any other: the problem of sin is solved by Jesus Christ. A person can repent of his sin, no matter what it is.

Sin is best stopped early. As James told us, the damage of sin comes about as a result of a progression. As soon as we see ourselves beginning to miss the mark, go beyond it, or failing to do as God would have us do, we need to stop and redirect our lives.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

The old preachers were famous for blistering the paint in the auditorium with fire-filled sermons on sin and its consequences. They would remind us that sin will take us farther than we want to go, that it will keep us longer than we want to stay, and that it will always cost more than we want to pay. They would remind us of the horror of hell that will surely be ours if we do not repent. There is a place for that, a place perhaps too often neglected in this world.

But there is also an important element of the battle with sin that must not be neglected: We can win! There is no hope of victory if we try to go it

As soon as we see ourselves beginning to miss the mark, go beyond it, or failing to do as God would have us do, we need to stop and redirect our lives.

alone: our only hope is in Jesus Christ. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). If a man can see his way clear to believe and obey God, God will eradicate that man's sin (Heb. 5:8-9). This is a marvelous encouragement.

We also ought to be encouraged by the way God has dealt with us with regard to sin. He has made it so that we are able to sin and to reject the opportunity to sin. He made us like Him in one grand and specific way: He gave us free will (Ezekiel 18 is a wonderful exposition of that subject). That we might be able to exercise that free will He put us in this world full of choices. God's definition of sin provides us the rational foundation to exercise the phenomenon of choice in the only way that pleases Him.

DISCUSSION

1. Has the redefinition of sin had an effect on your family, workplace, or school?
2. Why do people sin? Consult 1 John 2:15-17.
3. Can you think of passages in the Bible that define sin?
4. How might the three-fold definition of sin suggested be applied to the event involving David and Bathsheba or Ananias and Sapphira?
5. Cite examples of the “success” of the redefinition of sin in popular culture.

Bill Irby preaches for the West Hobbs Street church of Christ in Athens, AL. He may be contacted at birbydad@gmail.com.

CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Alan Judd

Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

Isaiah 59:1-2

In an attempt to give an answer to the benefits of wealth, Cephalus remarked: "Socrates, when a man faces the thought of death there come into his mind anxieties that did not trouble him before. The stories about another world, and about punishment in a future life for wrongs done in this, at which he once used to laugh, begin to torment his mind with the fear that they may be true. And either because of the weakness of old age or because, as he approaches the other world, he has some clearer perception of it, he is filled with doubts and fears and begins to reckon up and see if there is anyone he has wronged. The man who finds that in the course of life he has done a lot of wrong often wakes up at night in terror, like a child with a nightmare, and his whole life is full of foreboding; but the man who is conscious of no wrongdoing is filled with cheerfulness and with hope."¹

Scripture makes clear that there will be a "payday" for sin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom.6:23).² This lesson will offer an examination of the terrible consequences of sin, which should prompt every reader to strive more earnestly in their attempts to avoid sinning in their lives.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Sin has physical consequences. God announced to Adam and Eve that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they would die (Gen. 2:17). In the very next chapter, we watch them disobey God and hear him declare the consequences for their disobedience: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19).

¹ Plato, *The Republic* (London, England: Penguin, 2003), 6-7.

² All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

Ezekiel records this blunt truth from the Lord: “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Paul reflecting on the sin in the Garden adds: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Since all are guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), our enemy, which is death (1 Cor. 15:26), cuts down millions across the globe each day. Disease and sickness are also physical consequences of sin that eventually bring about physical death. Adam and Eve, after being banished from the “tree of life” in Eden, were thus susceptible to physical maladies, and today, as their descendants, we still battle infirmities, but we also shall finally succumb to death when the spirit is separated from the body (Jas. 2:26).

Sin has psychological and emotional consequences. After sinning, Adam and Eve were fearful of God and tried in vain to hide from his “all seeing eye” (Gen. 3:7-10). They felt shame, guilt, and the loss of innocence as a result of their transgression. The Psalmist vividly describes the emotional and psychological damage done when sin is committed against God with phrases like “groaning all day” and “they are too heavy for me” (Ps. 32:3-5, 38:1-10). Regret and remorse may continue even after one has done what is necessary in order to gain forgiveness. Worse, people may ignore the emotional distress and “pricks of conscience” until the capacity for feeling guilt renders their heart impenetrable and their conscience seared (John 12:37-43; Eph. 4:19; 1 Tim. 4:2).



Sin has social consequences. In addition to hurting the individual perpetrator, sin also has consequences that resonates outward and affects others. The evening news report of crimes of all sorts testifies clearly to this reality. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah stand as a reminder to this truth (Gen. 19; Jude 7), and history is littered with nations that confirm that the Psalmist was exactly right to warn: “The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God” (Ps. 9:17). Israel, the chosen nation of God, was not exempted from the consequences of sin. They reached a point where they lost the capacity to be embarrassed or blush when confronted by their iniquities (Jer. 6:15), and they were overthrown and destroyed. Should America expect to be treated differently?

Sin has spiritual consequences. As bad as the consequences already cited might be, they pale in comparison to the dreadful consequences that result spiritually when one sins against God. The prophet Isaiah affirmed: “Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2). Sadly, there are multitudes who are ignorant of their estranged condition and thus the duty to preach the Gospel to every creature is a directive that Christians dare not take lightly. The ultimate spiritual consequence of sin is spiritual death, which is also known as the “second death,” and it is described as a lake of fire burning with fire and sulfur whose inhabitants will be eternally tormented (Rev. 20:10-15, 21:8).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Sin Robs One of Physical Health.**
- **Sin Robs One of Emotional Health.**
- **Sin Robs One of Spiritual Health.**

Sin robs one of physical health. Consider how much less suffering people would endure if they would simply avoid behaviors that Scripture declares sinful. Sexual immorality, whether in the form of adultery or the promiscuous conduct of the unmarried or homosexuals, spreads diseases that would soon disappear if all people kept themselves pure before marriage and then remained faithful to their spouse after the wedding day. Even though Scripture warns against intoxicating drink and describes the folly of those who seek such destructive substances (Prov. 20:1, 23:29-35), millions still ruin their physical health and also destroy the lives of others by driving drunk, depriving their family of necessities, and other such actions that have severe physical consequences resulting from sin.

The horror that results from the separation that sin makes between the Holy God and those made in his image is beyond the ability of the mortal mind to comprehend or human words to describe.

Sin robs one of emotional health. Peace of mind and emotional tranquility may be the rarest commodity in our world that is characterized by its pressures, stresses, and worry. However, sin is the true culprit in robbing mankind of peace. As Isaiah noted, “The wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up mire and dirt. ‘There is no peace’ says my God, ‘for the wicked’” (Isa. 57:20-21). As noted above, even when one obtains forgiveness of sin, bad memories of past behavior may remain,

and the guilt of poor choices might still linger. The lives of King David and the apostle Paul might be examined for verification of this truth.

Sin robs one of spiritual health. The horror that results from the separation that sin makes between the Holy God and those made in his image is beyond the ability of the mortal mind to comprehend or human words to describe. Sin keeps one from having access to the throne of heaven and thus his prayers are to no avail (1 Pet. 3:12). Sin prohibits one from knowing that God will always “guide, guard, and direct” him through the twists and turns of life. Worst of all, it will result in an eternal separation where the wicked “will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (1 Thess. 1:9).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

All of these terrible consequences are described in Scripture so that they might deter all to avoid receiving them. God is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (1 Pet. 3:9). God allowed his son Jesus to suffer the penalty of sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:28, 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:2). Obeying the gospel of Christ and living the Christian life faithfully enables one to escape the consequences of sin. Take God’s offer of mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness and obey him today!

DISCUSSION

1. Do we live in a time when people are encouraged to take responsibility and accept the consequences of their actions? How can this be seen?
2. What are some additional physical consequences of sin other than the ones mentioned in the lesson? Emotional/psychological? Social? Spiritual?
3. What are some examples of the consequences of sin that might remain even if a person is forgiven of the sin?
4. Why do you think so many react as Felix did in Acts 24:25 when Paul preached to him about the consequences of sin?
5. Are there any sins without consequence?

Alan H. Judd is the minister for the Allons church of Christ in Allons, TN. He also serves as a licensed Tennessee funeral director on the staff at Anderson-Upper Cumberland Funeral Home in Gainesboro, TN. He may be contacted at alanhjudd@gmail.com.

THE CAUSES OF SIN

Michael D. Rogers

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

James 1:14-15

Sin is a choice. When the serpent deceived Eve, she, as well as Adam, made a conscious choice to eat the fruit (Gen. 3:6). God had given Adam the information needed to remain pure and sinless for eternity. One simple command, “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. 2:17).¹

God has always given man the information needed to make right choices. After Cain offered an unacceptable sacrifice, God told him, “[S]in is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7b). Cain had a choice. Noah lived in a time dominated by sin, yet he “found favor in the eyes of the Lord” because he was a righteous man and chose to walk with God (Gen. 6:8-9). Time and again God informed people of his will and allowed them to choose their own path. Some, such as Noah, Joshua, and Caleb, chose God’s way and enjoyed his blessings. Others, such as Adam, Eve, and Cain, chose the wrong way and suffered the consequences. Understanding the value of right choices, Joshua challenged Israel, “. . . choose this day whom you will serve. . . .” (Josh. 24:15).

Sin is, and has always been, a choice. One cannot blame others for his sin. He cannot blame God. He cannot blame Satan. One can only blame himself.

Below are four prominent factors that cause people to choose to sin:

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Temptation is the root cause for sin. Jesus warns, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). James explains temptation in this way: “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (Jas. 1:14 NKJV). Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted, but was “without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Sin comes when one gives in to the temptation of fleshly desires (Jas. 1:15).

¹ All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

Sin is often caused by our own selfishness. It has been said that the essence of sin is to dethrone God and enthrone self. James discloses, “For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (Jas. 3:16). Paul teaches, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4 NASB).



Worldly influence is a prominent cause for sin. Two influences exist in this world. One is bad; the other is good. Scripture refers to these as flesh and Spirit, darkness and light, Satan and God, evil and righteousness. Paul says, “The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6 NASB). Paul encourages, “. . . let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12b). In Paul’s defense before Agrippa, he describes how Jesus had called him to preach to the Gentiles and “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18a). Solomon declares, “Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die” (Prov. 11:19). These verses reveal that worldly influence causes sin. Only submitting to the righteous influence can cause us to overcome temptation.

False teaching is a cause for sin. Jesus warns, “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” (Matt. 11:24). False teachers often present themselves as innocent lambs, but are truly “ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). They “disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:15), yet they lead others from the truth. Peter cautions, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be

blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words” (2 Pet. 2:1-3a). Therefore, we must “[a]void the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20) and “[be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Sin Is Still Sin Even If Everyone Else Is Doing It.**
- **Sin Is Still Sin Even If One Refuses to Admit It.**
- **Sin Is Still Sin Even If It Is Difficult to Make It Right.**
- **Sin Is Still Sin Even When Under the Grace of God.**

Sin is still sin even if everyone else is doing it. We cannot determine right and wrong based on the actions of others: “Do not be conformed to this world . . .” instructs Paul (Rom. 12:2). Paul further warns, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

We empathize with those who have been taught wrong and have become comfortable with their beliefs. Yet, we must never lead them to believe that sin is acceptable just because it is difficult to make right.

Sin is still sin even if one refuses to admit it. Solomon writes, “There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). Before meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul was persecuting Christians. He believed that he was doing the will of God. After twenty plus years of preaching the gospel, Paul declared to the Sanhedrin: “Brothers, I have lived in all good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1). Even while persecuting Christians, Paul did not associate his behavior with sin. But, it was still sin.

Sin is still sin even if it is difficult to make right. We sympathize with those who are struggling with drug addiction, unnatural sexual impulses, or even unscriptural marriages. We empathize with those who have been taught wrong and have become comfortable with their beliefs. Yet, we must never lead them to believe that sin is acceptable just because it is difficult to make right. Jesus declares, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin” (John 15:22). James exposes, “So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17; cf. Matt. 19:16-22).

Sin is still sin even when standing in the grace of God. Some people teach that one cannot sin and be lost after being saved. But Paul discloses that grace does not permit one to sin (Rom. 6:1, 12). Paul further divulges that grace does not keep one from sinning: “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Paul also warns, “Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

“[T]he Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Pet. 2:9a NKJV). Paul affirms, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). As a Roman prisoner, Paul asserts, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). Yet, knowing that the flesh is weak, John declares, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

DISCUSSION

1. The Bible states that Eve was deceived (Gen. 3:13; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). Is there a difference in being tempted and being deceived? If so, why was Eve not tempted?
2. What does it mean to be “enslaved to sin” (Rom. 6:1-14)?
3. What does it mean to be freed from sin (Rom. 6:1-7)?
4. If sin is a choice, is it possible to live without sinning (cf. Eccl. 7:20, 29; Rom. 3:10; Matt. 26:41b; 1 Cor. 10:13b)?
5. If sin is a choice, how can some claim that all people are born sinners?

Michael D. Rogers is the pulpit minister for the Covington church of Christ in Covington, TN. He may be contacted at mdrogers57@comcast.net.

Lesson 6 - Solving the Sin Problem

THE GIFT NEEDED

Gary Knuckles

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8

In 1999, Joshua Piven and David Borgenicht published *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook*. The back cover describes it as a “how-to” book with step-by-step instructions for fending off a shark attack, jumping from a car, surviving when a parachute fails to open, and “dozens of other dire situations.” Admittedly, all of these are difficult situations, but most of us will likely never find ourselves facing the circumstances described.

But, there is a “worst-case scenario” all mankind faces that is more serious than fending off a shark or facing other dire situations. It is the problem of sin! In Romans 1-3, the apostle Paul describes man’s descent into sin, finally concluding that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).¹

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

What is sin? In the New Testament, three words appear that help us understand the nature and meaning of sin:

Sin means “to miss the mark.” It pictures a target at which one is aiming, but misses. When we sin, we have failed to measure up to the standard God has set before us. Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” *Iniquity* refers to “lawlessness or wickedness.” It translates a word in Greek which means “without law.” It is a “rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self.”² No other passage best describes iniquity than 1 John 3:4, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness” (ESV). *Transgression* means to “overstep.” It is a breach of law. Adam and Eve overstepped God’s law when they ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Romans 5:12 tells us, “Wherefore, as by one man sin

¹ All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

² W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1989), 357.

entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14).

How is man drawn into sin? Sin is not something that happens to man without a choice on man’s part. The comedian Flip Wilson popularized the phrase, “The Devil made me do it.” We can blame society, those around us, the circumstances of life, and a host of other factors in an effort to justify our sinful behavior. Ultimately, though, we are responsible for our sins. James wrote, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:13-15). Man is drawn into sin when his own desires are unchecked and seek satisfaction. Without question, James is putting the responsibility for sin upon man!

Furthermore, as alluded to in the introduction, everyone who has ever lived on earth, except for Jesus Christ, has freely chosen to sin (Rom. 3:23). That all have sinned is well-attested in Scripture. Genesis 6:5-6, 11-13 tells us that the wickedness

of man was great in the days of Noah. Isaiah tells us that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth



upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities” (Isa. 64:6-7). Even Solomon recognized the prevalence of sin when he wrote, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccles. 7:20). Without question, sin is universal: we are all sinners in need of saving.

What are the consequences of sin? The real problem with sin is the consequences that come with it. First, sin will cause God to forsake us (2 Chron. 24:20). Second, the hand of the Lord will be against us (1 Sam. 12:15). Third, sin brings death (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23a). Fourth, God’s wrath will be upon those that do evil (Rom. 2:8-9). In other words, every benefit that man can enjoy with God is lost and only sorrow will follow. As the Parable of the Prodigal Son demonstrates, sin will take you farther than you wanted to go, cost you more than you wanted to pay, and make you stay longer than you wanted to stay. Sin is destructive and takes us away

from the source of real joy and happiness. Sin is not only universal, it is also lethal.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **There Is a Solution to the Sin Problem.**
- **Man Has a Responsibility.**

There is a solution to the sin problem? As mentioned above, our worst case scenario is this: we have all sinned and stand condemned. The penalty is death: death on earth (Heb. 9:27) and death (punishment) in eternity (Matt. 25:46a). Is there any hope for us? If there is any hope for us, where does our hope reside?

1. *Gold and silver* are not enough. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (1 Pet. 1:18). Money can be a great tool for good if it is used wisely. But God, who owns all things (Ps. 50:10; Ezek. 18:14; Exod. 19:5), does not need our money and will not receive it as a bribe nor a ransom for man’s soul.
2. *Works of righteousness* are insufficient to pay the price. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3:5). Man’s works, however sincere, will perish with this earth.
3. *The blood of bulls and goats*, though once accepted under the Old Law, is not enough to rescue man from his condition. “For it is not possible that the blood of bull and of goats should take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).
4. *No name other than that of Jesus* can release us from condemnation. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Mohammed, Buddha, Joseph Smith, Jr., and all other names associated with religion have no power or influence with God in absolving man of his sins and preparing him for life eternal.

Jesus Christ is the only answer! “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly . . . But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6, 8). Sin demanded the penalty of death, but Jesus was sinless (1 Pet. 2:22) and gave himself as the perfect sacrifice for man’s sins (Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14).

We needed a savior who could identify with our infirmities without submitting to sin lest he himself fall into the same condemnation. In this, Jesus is more than adequate (Heb. 4:15, 7:27). But, we also needed a savior whose sacrifice could satisfy the demands of God’s justice. Only Jesus could meet this demand (Heb. 1:3; Rom. 3:25)! Because of him, we now are released from condemnation (Rom. 8:1) and have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

Man has a responsibility. God seeks to reconcile all men to Himself through Jesus Christ. While man is the guilty party, Jesus died in our place to help effect that reconciliation. His sacrifice is perfect! There is nothing earth offers that we need or can use to find the salvation of God. It was God's love that sent Jesus to earth and it is remarkable that, of all of God's creation, only man is the special object of God's love and redemption! There is no other way to God than Jesus Christ (John 14:1).

Sin is destructive and takes us away from the source of real joy and happiness. Sin is not only universal, it is also lethal.

But, does man have any responsibility in the matter of salvation? Hebrews 7:25 reminds us, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (NKJV). Two things are noteworthy in this passage. First, Jesus is able to save "to the uttermost." That is, he is able to save completely. Second, he saves those "who draw near unto God through him" (NASB). Jesus' sacrifice is for all men and none can be saved without it. At the same time, that sacrifice is effective only for those who come unto God in obedience.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Man is lost in sin. It is all around us, we are daily affected by it, and the consequences are felt here on earth. At the last, sin will cause us to be lost in eternity, but there is a way out of it—Jesus Christ, the hope of the world. *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook* can help us out of difficult situations on earth, but it can never secure for man a home with God in heaven. Only God's word can give us the help we need by producing faith in the heart. The sin problem is serious, but there is hope through Jesus Christ!

Discussion

1. Discuss the meaning of sin and how man is affected by it.
2. Discuss inadequate ways to deal with the sin problem.
3. What is the solution to the sin problem and what roles does man play?

Gary Knuckles preaches for the Briensburg church of Christ in Benton, KY. He may be contacted at knuckles1213@yahoo.com.

Lesson 7 - Solving the Sin Problem

THE GIFT GIVEN

Keith Parker

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

Several years ago, I was driving home from church on a Sunday night. I looked in my rearview mirror and saw the K-mart special—the blue light flashing. I pulled over to the side of the road and the policeman walked up and asked for my license. As he began his speech, suddenly he stopped and asked, “Don’t I know you?” After again looking at him, I recognized the policeman who had stopped me. The policeman was named Jim, and he is a member of the church of Christ. He said, “Keith, do you know how fast you were going? Fifty-five in a thirty-five zone.” My heart sank. He smiled and said, “This one is on me.” Know what he gave me? Grace. He gave me what I needed instead of what I deserved.

So it is with God. God looks down from Heaven and he sees us breaking his law (Rom. 3:23). Because of his son Jesus, God picks up the ticket. He smiles and says, “This one is on me.” God gives us grace. He gives us what we need instead of what we deserve. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

God loved me when I was a sinner. It’s easy to love people who love me. You take me to lunch, and I’ll take you to lunch. You compliment me, and I’ll compliment you. You buy me a birthday present, and I’ll return the favor. The amazing thing about God’s grace is that he shows kindness to the unkind. He blesses those who curse him. He loves the unlovable. Notice some of the words that Paul uses to describe our sinful condition in Ephesians 2: dead (v. 1), disobedient (v. 2), desired the flesh (v. 3). “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).¹

Recently my mother was robbed. The thief stole some valuables from her house and even stole her car. Do you think that I want to invite that thief over to the house for Sunday dinner? Do you think that I want to have

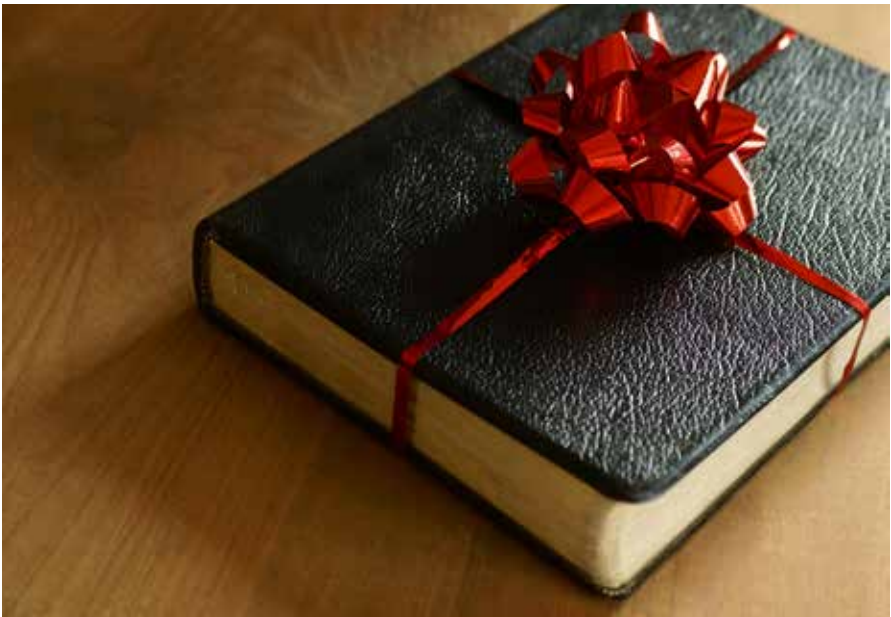
¹ All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

table-fellowship with someone who has hurt a family member? Not me, but God does. He invites sinners to his house for Sunday dinner (1 Cor. 6:9-11, 10:16-17).

The amazing thing about God's grace is that he shows kindness to the unkind. He blesses those who curse him. He loves the unlovable.

God loves me now. Observe the language of Ephesians 2:6: We have been raised (from our dead sinful state) and have been seated with Christ. Now we are in Jesus. Jesus is the answer to our sin-problem, and he is the source of all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). In other words, we don't have to wait till we get to heaven to enjoy the blessings of the Christian life. Because of God's amazing grace, we can now experience his love.

God will always love me. In Ephesians 2:7, Paul speaks about the coming ages. That is not the past or the present, but the future. God's love will abide when everything else fails. God's love will continue when this life is over.



How long will God's love last? "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, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

We are saved by grace. G-R-A-C-E. God's riches at Christ's expense. It is the gift of God. The gift given.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Grace Means That I Have a Father.**
- **Grace Means That I Have a Family.**
- **Grace Means That I Have Forgiveness.**
- **Grace Means That I Have a Future.**

Grace means that I have a father. There is "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6). Last year, I lost two fathers. My dad passed away in January of 2013 and my father-in-law passed away in May of 2013. I greatly miss them and think about them every day. But here's the good news: I still have a Father, a heavenly Father. And he loves me just as I am.

Dads, do you want your kids to go to heaven? You know you do, more than anything in the world. If we want our kids to be saved, don't you know that the Father in heaven wants his kids to be saved? You see, God is not against us; he's for us (Rom. 8:31).

Grace means that I have a family. I'm not talking about my wife or children or brother or sister, not my physical family, but my spiritual family. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:14-15). "God is our father, Jesus is our brother and the blessed Holy Spirit is our guide. The devil is no relation, we are new creations, members of the family of the sky."

The greatest people in the world are members of God's family, the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16). Everywhere I travel, I have brothers and sisters who love me, support me, entertain me, pray for me, and are gracious to me. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you" (Phil. 1:3).

Grace means that I have forgiveness. We have in Jesus the forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7). Forgiveness is a "letting go." If you forgive someone, you release the offense, turn it loose, let go of it. Through the blood of Jesus, God has dropped our sins. To those who are not Christians, I would say what Peter said to the ones who crucified Jesus: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). To those who are Christians, I would remind you of the promise of the apostle John: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Grace means that I have a future. It is secured in heaven by God. Listen again to the promise of Ephesians 2:7: "That in the ages to come, he might

show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” You can take away my money, cars, clothes, house, wife and life, but you can’t take away my future. God holds it in the palm of his gracious hand.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

A few years ago, I was teaching a Bible class and asked them this question: If you were to die right now, or if Jesus were to come today, would you go to A) Heaven, B) Hell, C) I don’t know, or D) Neither heaven or hell? Guess what the number one answer was: I don’t know. Three said that they would go neither to heaven or hell (I don’t understand that answer). Eleven said that they would be lost in hell. Thirty-one said that they would go to heaven (they had hope for the future). But forty said that they did not know. Without God’s grace, there is no hope. But because of what Jesus did at the cross and because of his powerful resurrection, we are saved. Believe it. Know it. Rejoice in it.

DISCUSSION

1. What are some false teachings about grace, and how would you refute them?
2. Since we are saved by grace through faith, discuss the meaning of faith and the difference in a dead faith and a dynamic faith (Heb. 11 and Jas. 2).
3. How have you seen the grace of God in your life?
4. Why do so many Christians lack the assurance of eternal life (1 John 5:13)?

Keith Parker makes his home in Hendersonville, TN and for the last four years has been in full-time meeting work. He may be contacted at kparkers5@bellsouth.net.

THE GIFT RECEIVED

David R. Pharr

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

A conversion appeal often used by radio and TV evangelists says: "Receive Christ as your personal Savior." We have tended to avoid such wording because, in the first place, it is often connected with the error of faith only which denies the essentiality of baptism. Also, "personal Savior" may suggest that one might be saved through some unique experience that serves in place of the gospel plan of salvation.

On the other hand, rightly used, the terms are certainly in keeping with Scripture. Salvation is indeed a personal thing and accepting Christ is the thing done when one obeys the gospel. Salvation is not a thing to be earned, but a gift to be received (Eph. 2:8f). The view is from two directions. When we receive Christ, he receives us.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

The gift offered is salvation in Christ (John 3:16-17; 4:10; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:14; Tit. 2:14; 1 John 5:11-12). How salvation is defined in Scripture helps our comprehension of how this is indeed an "unspeakable [indescribable] gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).¹ The benefits of such a gift are expressed in terms such as pardon, ransom paid, washed, saved, born again, eternal life, forgiven, justified, etc. The gift is the difference between heaven and hell. The point to be appreciated is that it is all by Christ and in Christ (Eph. 1:3). He is "our life" (Col. 3:4), "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1), our "all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

The gift is offered only by grace, but not by grace only (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:24; Tit. 3:5-7). We must not miss the emphasis on our absolute inability to earn or merit the gift of God. That which is "not of yourselves" is salvation. It is "not of works," meaning that one could never do enough or be good enough to earn the gift. But to say it is only by grace is not to say it is by "grace only" as that notion is sometimes erroneously applied. "Grace only" advocates deny the necessity of man's involvement in his own salvation and may even contend that one is saved by grace regardless of his conduct, whether good or evil, whether in obedience or rebellion. Sin is so offensive

¹ All scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

to God that there can be no atonement except by grace. But accompanying the assurance that we are saved by grace is the provision that it is “through faith,” which is something required on our part.

The gift is received only by faith, but not by faith only (Eph. 2:8-9; Jas. 2:14-26; Gal. 3:26-27; 5:6b). “Faith” is used in the Scriptures in both an objective sense and a subjective sense. First, it sometimes refers to the gospel, the doctrine of Christ, or the Christian system. In this sense it is sometimes (but not always) so designated by the Greek article translated “the,” i.e., “the faith.” This is the “one faith” of Ephesians 4:4 (cf. Jude 3; Gal. 1:23; I Tim. 4:1). When Galatians 3:26 says we are children of God “by faith” it should be understood as “by [the] faith,” i.e., by the Christian system as contrasted with “the law” (of Moses).²



In the Bible’s subjective uses of “faith,” the reference is to the mental trust in and application of “the faith once delivered.” Saving faith is never presented in Scripture as mere belief without obedience. The only time “faith only” is named is to say we are “not justified by faith only” (Jas. 2:24; cf. verses 14-26). The only way the gift can be received is by complying with the terms of the offer.

The gift refused means life without hope (John 1:10-13; 6:66-69; Eph. 2:12; John 8:24). God’s Son coming into the world was to provide the gift of salvation. It was his world, and the people to whom he came were his own people (Israel), but “his own received him not” (John 1:11). Though this has special reference to his rejection by the Jews, it illustrates the tragedy

² Many choose to treat this as subjective, i.e., personal belief in Christ, but in this context the apostle is contrasting “the law” as a system with the Christian system (“the faith”). Note verses 23-25. See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub.), loc. cit.

of anyone not accepting Christ. Only those who accept him, i.e., believe in him, can have the right to become the sons of God (John 1:12f). Hope is not a mere wish, a maybe, or a mere desire. Hope is a certain expectation based on the promises of God, but without Christ there is no hope (Eph. 2:12).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Nothing Is More Urgent Than Accepting Christ.**
- **Nothing Is More Satisfying Than Having Christ.**
- **Nothing Should Interfere With Accepting Christ by Faith.**

Nothing is more urgent than accepting Christ. Because of frequent debates over whether it is essential, it is often assumed that the most difficult thing about winning a convert is persuading him to be baptized. In fact, however, the thing hindering most people is not a failure to understand baptism, but a failure to be convicted as to their own lost condition. Once a person is truly convinced by the word of God that he is a lost and hell-bound sinner in need of a Savior, he/she will usually be willing to do whatever it takes to escape hell.

**One is not saved because he is in the church. He is
in the church because he is saved.**

The Philippian jailer did not ask, “What must I do to be saved?” in order to have a discussion on what steps are necessary in the plan of salvation (Acts 16:30ff); rather, it was out of fear for his soul. Saul of Tarsus came into Damascus carrying a grievous burden of guilt. There was neither protest nor delay when he was told how his sins could be washed away (Acts 22:16). The Bereans did well to examine matters (Acts 17:11), but the Athenians were foolish in not pursuing matters immediately (Acts 17:34).

Nothing is more satisfying than having Christ. The Ethiopian was baptized and “went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). So also the jailer “when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:34). “Blessed,” as used in the various beatitudes, indicates happy or favored. It is not to be understood as happy in the sense of pleasant earthly circumstances; rather, it is the inner satisfaction of knowing by God’s word in conjunction with one’s own conscience that he has accepted the gift of God. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:18).

Nothing should interfere with accepting Christ by faith. Again we should emphasize that accepting Christ is not mere mental assent. “By [the] faith” means according to the terms of the gospel system (Gal. 3:26f). The Ethiopian asked, “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Numerous are the hindrances that must be overcome, including worldly practices and erroneous doctrines. The key to overcoming all of these is

in one's supreme personal desire to have the gift (Matt. 13:44ff). The gift is not offered to corporate groups, as some might imagine. It is not because one has the right connections, religious or otherwise. It is an offer from a personal Savior for personal acceptance. It is indeed a personal thing. One is not saved because he is in the church. He is in the church because he is saved.

The process of accepting Christ by faith is demonstrated in New Testament examples. There are no alternative methods. Receiving Christ and being received by Christ always requires trust when it comes to believing the gospel, repenting of our sins, confessing Christ, and being baptized in the name of Christ.

Even those who were once saved but have since neglected Christ may open the door to welcome Christ into their penitent hearts and lives (cf. Revelation 3:19ff.).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

None of us can solve our own sin problem. In the flesh the struggle goes on. Our hope can never be in ourselves, but, thank God, it does not have to be in ourselves (Rom. 7:14-8:2). "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). The gift is offered. Faith is the trust that accepts it.

DISCUSSION

1. What are some notions as to the meaning of accepting Christ as one's personal Savior and how do those various notions compare to the truth?
2. What is meant by "only by grace, but not by grace only"?
3. What is meant by "only by faith, but not by faith only"?
4. What seems to be the greatest obstacle in persuading someone to receive the gift of God's love?
5. On what basis can we be confident of our salvation?

David R. Pharr is an associate minister and elder at Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ in Rock Hill, SC. He may be contacted at DRPharr@msn.com.

FAULTY COMPARISONS

Jonathan Jones II

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

Romans 2:1 ESV

A fictional story tells how Bill Gates (co-founder and chairman of Microsoft) once made a derogatory comment about the automotive industry by stating, “If GM had kept up with technology like the computer industry has, we would all be driving \$25 cars that get 1,000 miles per gallon.” General Motors supposedly responded, “Yes, but would you want your car to crash twice a day?” This apocryphal tale demonstrates the danger of faulty comparison.

When it comes to spiritual matters, too often we are guilty of making incorrect comparisons as well. Too often we compare our own righteousness against the unrighteousness of others. Such comparisons divert our attention away from the real issue—we are all sinners in need of a Savior. We cannot be righteous by our own efforts; we must depend upon God attributing his righteousness to our account.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

We must be wary of comparing ourselves with others. In the letter to the Romans, it seems that Paul is writing to Christians from both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. As the letter opens, Paul describes the sinfulness of the Gentile world’s almost universal rejection of God that is characterized by the depths of moral depravity (1:18-32).¹ In chapter 2, Paul turns his attention to Jewish Christians. He anticipates the Jewish tendency to look down their noses at the Gentiles (2:1). After dealing with the lost condition of the Gentile world, Paul imagines the typical Jew looking over his shoulder and, “under his breath he excitedly roots Paul on against these Gentile scum: ‘Go get ‘em Paul! Lay it on ‘em! That’s right! Amen!’”² These Jewish Christians would have the tendency to pass judgment on others while excusing themselves because they are “not *as* sinful.” Such comparisons are faulty and create roadblocks that prevent us from admitting our own personal sin (cf. Matt. 7:1-5; Luke 18:9-14).

¹ All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

² Jack Cottrell, *Romans* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2005), 102.

We are all lawbreakers. It is right that the judgment of God should come upon the Gentiles in their pagan immorality (Rom. 2:2). But the Jews had wrongly concluded that they would escape judgment because of their status as God's chosen people. The Jews had confused "election to service with election to salvation."³ This belief led to a spirit of arrogance among the Jews. Paul shows that God's judgment will be based upon the way every person has lived. God will not play favorites (2:6-11). The truth of the matter is that both the immoral Gentile and the moral Jew are both lawbreakers. Both the unrighteous and the self-righteous are in need of salvation. The unrighteous person ignores the need for a Savior. The self-righteous person is guilty of the same sin (as if he can somehow save himself by his own goodness). We are all lawbreakers equally in need of God's saving grace (cf. Rom. 3:23).

Rather than comparing ourselves against the moral behavior of others, we should "examine ourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5) by measuring our lives against the perfect standard of Christ, the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

We must realize that grace motivates repentance. God had been extremely patient and kind toward the nation of Israel. He had held back his wrath toward their sin. But the Jews had misinterpreted God's kindness and patience as "indifference toward their sin."⁴ The Jews had come to the conclusion that God's wrath would come severely upon the immoral Gentile world, while they would "get a pass" by being God's chosen people. Such an attitude presumes upon the riches of God's kindness and patience (Rom. 2:4). God's patience and kindness was meant to motivate their repentance, not excuse their sin (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9, 15).

We should engage in spiritual introspection. It is spiritually hazardous to fail to admit personal sinfulness by comparing ourselves against those whom we perceive to be "more sinful." A self-righteous, arrogant, hard, and impenitent heart is storing up (*thesaurizo*, literally "treasuring;" cf. Matt. 6:19-20) the wrath of God (Rom. 2:5). It is a tragic irony to repudiate the "riches" of God's kindness (vs. 4) and instead opt for the "treasure" of God's wrath by refusing to admit your own sin (vs. 5).⁵ Rather than comparing ourselves against the moral behavior of others, we should "examine ourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5) by measuring our lives against the perfect standard of Christ, the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). This spiritual introspection makes

³ Cottrell, *Romans*, 107. (emp. in orig.)

⁴ Cottrell, *Romans*, 105.

⁵ Cottrell, *Romans*, 106.

clear that we are all in equal and desperate need of being “justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Realize That There Is Danger in Competitive Comparisons.**
- **Don't Put Yourself in the Place of Savior.**

Realize that there is danger in competitive comparisons. Morally good people can have a tendency to look condescendingly toward those who make immoral decisions in life. Religious folks can sometimes begin to trust in their own goodness and decency as a means of self-righteousness. We must be careful about trusting in our own righteousness and treating other people with contempt (Luke 18:9). Like the Pharisee standing in the temple, we can also be guilty of having feelings of moral or doctrinal superiority over others (Luke 18:11-12). We must not fall into competitive comparisons believing that God favors us because of our doctrinal stances, styles of worship, or moral behavior while we display hostility toward those without these things.⁶ The irreligious person breaks all the rules, i.e., he/she is morally bad and unrighteous (i.e. the tax collector). The religious person “keeps all the rules,” i.e., he/she is morally good but self-righteous (i.e. the Pharisee).⁷ By making moral comparisons, both are avoiding the real issue—the need for a Savior.



Don't put yourself in the place of Savior. Timothy Keller has observed, “It is possible to avoid Jesus as Savior as much by keeping all the Biblical rules as by breaking them.”⁸ We tend to think of sin in terms of breaking a list of rules. For instance, we focus more on the younger son who lived in sin when we refer to Jesus’ parable in Luke 15 as “the parable of *the*

⁶ Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 61.

⁷ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead, 2008), 183.

⁸ Keller, *Reason*, 183.

prodigal son.” In reality, the parable is about *two* lost boys with the primary emphasis upon the *older son*. Jesus is responding to the self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees who grumbled over the fact that Jesus associated with “sinners” (Luke 15:1). Jesus reveals that the older son (i.e. the Pharisee) is also lost, but for a different reason. He was not *lost in irreligion*, but he was *lost in religion*. His self-righteousness was keeping him from a real relationship with the father (Luke 15:28-32). Sin is not just about breaking the rules; it is also about putting yourself in the position of Savior by your own self-righteous attitude.⁹ There are two ways of trying to be your own Savior: (1) breaking the rules and setting your own course and (2) keeping all the moral rules, being good, and trying to save yourself by your own works.¹⁰ It is often the case that the Pharisee is in the worse situation because he is blind to his “spiritually desperate condition.”¹¹

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

The great message of hope that resonates from the gospel is that our salvation is not dependent upon our own righteous deeds. All of the righteous actions of humankind are like “filthy rags” in the sight of a holy God (Isa. 64:6, KJV). Righteousness cannot be attained through human effort. Righteousness attained by perfect law keeping (human works) has proven to be impossible in practice (Rom. 3:23; cf. Tit. 3:4-7). Our only hope is righteousness that comes as a gift from God (Rom. 3:24). This “gift” is *God’s own righteousness* that is credited (imputed) to the sinner’s account. This is the message that the Law of Moses and the Prophets predicted, namely, “*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*” (Rom. 3:22, emp. mine). Rather than trusting in our own “filthy rags” of righteousness, Christians are clothed with God’s very own “robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10).¹² Christ has set us free from the “yoke of slavery” of salvation-by-perfect-law-keeping (Gal. 5:1) and the bondage of fear that results (Rom. 8:15). Rather than trusting in our own moral sweat, we put our faith in Jesus’ blood (Rom. 3:25; cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

The confidence of our salvation is placed completely upon our trust in (and relationship with) Jesus Christ. We rely completely upon him to deal with our sin problem. But in order for this to occur, we must acknowledge our need for a Savior. This involves admitting our sin and lost condition. In order to admit our lost condition, we must stop trusting in our own righteous deeds by measuring our morality against the immorality of others.

⁹ Keller, *Prodigal*, 50.

¹⁰ Keller, *Prodigal*, 51.

¹¹ Keller, *Prodigal*, 54.

¹² Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2002), 322.

DISCUSSION

1. Why do we have a tendency to measure our “goodness” by the barometer of the unrighteousness of others?
2. Why is self-righteousness just as spiritually detrimental as unrighteousness?
3. What is the only way that we can truly be righteous before God?
4. How might being very religious actually be a way of avoiding God?

Jonathan Jones II is the pulpit preacher for the Maryville church of Christ in Maryville, TN. He may be contacted at jonathanbjonesii@gmail.com.

FLAWED DEFLECTIONS

Cliff Goodwin

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Romans 14:12

A mindset common to modern American society can be expressed in five words or less: “It’s not my fault!” Responsibility seems to be in such short supply. People are trained and conditioned to blame their shortcomings on someone else: their parents; their friends; their teachers; their bosses, etc. The list goes on and on. Nonetheless, the Bible paints a different picture. The Bible teaches that each accountable person is responsible for his or her own actions. It further emphasizes the fruitlessness of making excuses or otherwise deflecting when it comes to personal sin.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Sin cannot be deflected on the basis of extenuating circumstances. Hard times and difficult situations confront all people. However, such circumstances do not change what God has written in His word! One must ever cling to God’s will, regardless of the situation in which he finds himself. King Saul stands as an example of one who swerved from obedience because of extenuating circumstances. He had been commanded to tarry seven days, waiting for Samuel’s arrival (cf. 1 Sam. 13:8, 13). There is debate as to whether this rendezvous is the same as the one mentioned in 10:8. If this appointment were, in fact, different, it seems the general purposes would have been the same. As a priest, Samuel could have acceptably offered sacrifice unto God on behalf of Saul and the people. As a prophet, Samuel could have directed Saul as to God’s will in the conflict with the Philistines. Saul, however, acted presumptuously, insisting on offering the sacrifice himself—something a Benjamite was **not** authorized to do under the Law of Moses (1 Sam. 13:9). When confronted with his sin, Saul deflected by citing the extenuating circumstances he faced: 1) a mustered enemy; 2) Samuel’s delayed arrival; and 3) a scattered, dwindling army (1 Sam. 13:11-12).

Sin cannot be deflected because of pressure exerted by the majority. With very few exceptions, God’s people have always been in the minority. John

would write that “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19).¹ Paul warned of the world’s pressure to which a Christian must not be conformed (Rom. 12:2). The righteous have always had to resist the pull of the world.

Aaron was a leader who faltered in this respect. Moses had ascended Mount Sinai in order to receive the law given by God. When his return from the mount was delayed, the Israelites grew worried and restless. They insisted that Aaron fashion gods for them in the absence of Moses (Exod. 32:1-6). Instead of standing up

and being God’s man, Aaron complied with the sinful wish of the people. No doubt the pressure was great—seemingly an entire nation against one man—but God’s way is always right. “And Moses said unto



Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they *are set on mischief*” (Exod. 32:21-22).

Sin cannot be deflected out of self-victimization. It is sometimes difficult for one to accept the consequences of his actions. Wrong choices are made, and negative repercussions follow. Pride, or “ego,” steps in, making it difficult for a person to say, “I was wrong. I accept responsibility for my actions.” As long as such responsibility is shirked, or denied, the situation only grows worse. One who is pressed concerning his fault might ultimately seek to present himself as the victim.

King Ahab was certainly not a victim, except in the sense of being a victim of his own choices. The Biblical record depicts his rebellion and willfulness in the worst light. “And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16:33; cf. 21:25). Ahab plunged Israel only deeper into idolatry and worldliness, following in and even furthering the steps of his wicked forefathers. Elijah withstood this wicked monarch, being very jealous, or zealous, for Jehovah and for His cause (1 Kings 19:10, 14). Ahab grew to view Elijah as his personal nemesis. He focused on Elijah and his actions, instead of taking careful consideration of his own. He blamed the terrible drought on Elijah, not on his own idolatry and rebellion (1 Kings 18:17-18). In his own eyes Ahab was a victim before Elijah. “And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have

¹ All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

found *thee*: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 21:20). Sadly, in his self-victimization Ahab’s eyes were blinded to the truth.

When all other arguments have been made and refuted, some point a finger at God for their own transgressions.

Sin cannot be deflected by blaming God. When all other arguments have been made and refuted, some point a finger at God for their own transgressions. As incredible as this seems, it is among the oldest deflections. When confronted with his own choice and the gravity of its consequences, Adam essentially blamed God. “And he said, Who told thee that thou *wast* naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:11-12).

Many today misunderstand God’s sovereignty and power. They erroneously conclude that, because God is in control, He is to be blamed for the condition of the world (including their own WRONG choices). Such is simply not the case. Solomon sagely noted, “...that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Eccles. 7:29). God created man as a free moral agent. He did so with the full intention of judging all men one day and rewarding them according to their own deeds (Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **A Lack of Faith Leads to Poor Decisions.**
- **God’s Children Should Expect Opposition from the World.**
- **Responsibility and Accountability Are Hallmarks of Godly Character.**

A lack of faith leads to poor decisions. Trusting in God is paramount to living a godly life. God is the Creator; man is the creature. With this in mind, man must trust in his Creator, submitting to His will in all things. Sin results from exactly the opposite mindset. Instead of trust, sin comes from suspicion (cf. Gen. 3:5). Instead of submission, sin results from willfulness. This is seen in the cases involving Saul and Aaron: a lack of faith led to poor decisions. Faith trusts in what God says, not what the eye sees (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7)!

God’s children should expect opposition from the world. It is “a given” that living the Christian life will be difficult. Jesus taught this (e.g. Matt. 7:13-14), and so did His apostles (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 3:13). Therefore, no excuse should be made on the basis of persecution or pressure. Christians would

do well to accept these realities from the beginning, praying to God for boldness and rejoicing as partakers of Christ's sufferings (cf. Acts 4:29; 1 Pet. 4:13-14).

Responsibility and accountability are hallmarks of godly character. A Christian has learned that deflection and "passing the buck" are all fruitless. Personal accountability before God is an eternal axiom (Rom. 14:12). When this lesson is learned and accepted, one is equipped to appreciate the preciousness of God's grace. Such an individual says, "I have sinned. There is no denying that. Is there any hope?" The Bible responds with a resounding "Yes!" God's grace both instructs and saves (Tit. 2:11-12; Eph. 2:8).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

God is ready, able, and willing to forgive (cf. Mic. 7:18-19). On your part, the keys are honesty and humility; contrition and submission. Are you willing to "own up" to your own sins? Are you willing to trust God and do what He says? Confession can have a cleansing effect. Repentance carries renewing results. Obey God's plan today!

DISCUSSION

1. What kind of atmosphere is most conducive to a brother's "opening up" and "owning up" with regard to personal sin?
2. Discuss the harmony existing between these two facts: 1) one is responsible for negatively influencing another; and 2) the individual is still responsible for his or her own decisions.
3. To one who trusts in God, how important are the promises found in 1 Corinthians 10:13?
4. How will a true leader respond to negative pressure, especially pressure from those whom he leads?
5. When a brother is publicly rebuked, censured, or otherwise disciplined for personal sin, what can the faithful do to prevent the offender from developing a "victim mentality?"
6. Think of some ways one might demonstrate shame for the gospel.

Cliff Goodwin is the minister of Ironaton church of Christ, located outside of Talladega, AL. He is the host of Searching the Scriptures and Preaching the Gospel, both of which can be seen on GBN. He may be contacted at cliffbethwartide@gmail.com.

FALSE CLASSIFICATIONS

Jason Moon

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19-21

On one occasion Oliver Cromwell was posing for a self-portrait. The artist, noticing a disfiguring wart, suggested that Cromwell attempt to conceal the wart by resting his head on his hand. But Cromwell sternly replied, “No, paint me as I am, warts and all.”

What if every sinner had the same self-awareness of their sin? What if we viewed sin, called sin, and treated sin the way God does? We live in a world where sin is usually called something else. Because of this, Wendell Winkler once observed, “It is getting hard to find an old-fashion sinner.”¹

The story is told of Abraham Lincoln asking a group, “If you call a sheep’s tail a leg, how many legs would he have?” They answered, “Five.” “Wrong,” Lincoln responded, “Calling it a leg doesn’t make it one.” The same applies to this discussion. Falsely classifying sin is a roadblock to admitting it.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

It is false to classify sin as “big” or “little.” In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, alongside of adulterers, homosexuals, and drunkards, there are sinners mentioned who are “covetous” and “extortioners.”² In Galatians 5:19-21, the list of the “works of the flesh” contains adultery, sorcery, and lewdness, but there are sinful works like “hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions” that are mentioned too. Then in Romans 1:18-32, the idolater, homosexual, and haters of God are listed alongside

¹ Wendell Winkler, *Studying Sin Seriously* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Winkler Publications, 1976), 56-57.

² All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

“backbiters,” “proud,” “unloving” and “unforgiving.” God makes no classification between “big” and “little” sins.

It is false to classify sin as “legal” or “illegal.” Sin, in its truest light, is always a moral issue that separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Some have tried to make “sinful things” a divisive political issue, too. Now and ages ago, certain sins have been legalized, but that doesn’t make them right with God. Prostitution is sometimes called “the oldest profession in the world.” Yet, calling it a job or legalizing it never made it right. Solid biblical evidence and sound reasoning suggests that “Rahab the harlot” (Heb. 11:31, Jas. 2:25) changed her legalized business and morals after she learned about God. “Her decision was to fight on God’s side. Faith prompted this decision.”³



It is false to classify sin as if ignorance is bliss. We understand that one form of “secret sin” is committing sin unknowingly, undiscerningly, or even ignorantly (c.f. Lev. 5:14-19, Ps. 19:12). While this will sometimes be true of all sincere people who try to follow God, it is far from being like some who seem to revel in not knowing or learning better. Is it even possible that some don’t study the Bible or listen to the preacher to avoid learning and being convicted by the truth? By the time Paul preached to the Athenians, ignorance was no longer a convenient option! He said, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

³ Eddie Cloer, *Difficult Texts of the Old Testament Explained* (ed. Wendell Winkler; Madison, AL: Winkler Publications, 1982), 263.

It is false to classify sin as a matter of personal privacy. Solomon said, “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccles. 12:14). This passage reminds us that secret things matter to God and will be deemed as evidence at judgment, whether they be good or evil! “Secret faults” (Ps. 19:12) need cleansing just as much as our public sins.

It is false to classify sin as a matter of culture. Sin, as defined earlier, is a violation of God’s word (1 John 3:4, Rom. 3:23). Therefore, God’s word, not culture, declares what is sinful. Since the Word is unchanging through time (1 Pet. 1:23-25), the definition and description of what is sinful never changes. Cultures change. Truth doesn’t. Postmodern thought has affected how many understand truth, but “[d]ivine revelation, found in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, constitutes the ‘bottom line’ of the decision making process.”⁴

Since the Word is unchanging through time (1 Pet. 1:23-25), the definition and description of what is sinful never changes. Cultures change. Truth doesn’t.

It is false to classify sin as a matter of tradition. Truth is not the same as tradition, unless it’s the kind that came from the apostles (2 Thess. 3:6). Yet, in most cases the “traditions” cited in the New Testament are not mentioned favorably (c.f. Matt. 15:2-6, Mark 7:3-13, Col. 2:8, 1 Pet. 1:18). Caution should be observed when we have traditions in mind as the criteria for determining sin.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **There Is No Such Thing as a Big Sin or Little Sin.**
- **Sin Is Always “Illegal” Even If Society Says It’s Legal.**
- **Ignorance Can’t Be Used as an Excuse to Sin.**
- **Sin Committed in Privacy Is Still Sin.**
- **Culture Never Determines What Is Right or Wrong.**
- **Tradition Can’t Be Used to Determine Sin.**

There is no such thing as a big sin or little sin. Some people apparently believe that Jesus only died because of “big” sins. You know, sins like “adultery,” “murder,” and “stealing.” Yet, even among those passages that give us a lengthy list of sins, there is no classification of “big” and “little.”

⁴ John Jefferson David, *Moral Issues and Christian Response* (eds. Paul T. Jersild and Dale A. Johnson; Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 22.

Sin is always “illegal” even if society says it’s legal. Today, one can legally drink alcoholic beverages, go to a strip club, marry and divorce multiple times, and, even in some states, enter a homosexual union. However, no amount of legalization or harmonization with culture can make a sin acceptable in the eyes of God or his true followers!

Ignorance can’t be used as an excuse to sin. Pleading “ignorance” has been the option of many who never wanted to face sin. It’s an easy cop out! People say, “What you don’t know won’t hurt you!” But if you don’t know the bridge is out at the bottom of a steep hill, will ignorance prevent you from crashing to your death?

Sin committed in privacy is still sin. Nobody can claim that sin is a matter of one’s own “personal business.” Personal sin has the tendency to affect others just as it made Jesus have to suffer in the wide open before people! If our lives are shaded with dark secrets, keeping them secret from the church or the public doesn’t justify us. Committing any sin in the privacy of your own home doesn’t lessen God’s knowledge of that sin and his ability to bring it into the open at judgment.

Culture never determines what is right or wrong. Even when culture has noticeably shifted and it seems “reasonable” to shift with it, God’s word must be the guiding principle. For instance, in the first century the woman’s role in society was notably more repressed than today. Some think it was reasonable for the woman’s role in worship and church leadership to be limited (c.f. 1 Tim. 11-12) because of the cultural implications, but today they feel culture should allow us to change. Yet, God saw fit in the same context to remind us this was not based on the first century culture but upon the rule of creation: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13). Therefore, the Scriptures dictate the reason for the rule, not culture.

Tradition can’t be used to determine sin. Three songs, a prayer, another song, the Lord’s Supper (and giving), another song while standing, and then the sermon may be a tradition from which some churches never deter. However, if one uses that “order” or “tradition” to determine if another congregation is “progressive” is not equal to using “truth” to determine such.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

It happens routinely when we use a GPS. You encounter a “roadblock” on your planned route and you have to take a slight detour to get back on track. While you are following the “detour” signs you are suddenly directed by a friendly woman’s voice (in a British accent) to “take the next turn.”

Have you ever noticed the longer you ignore the woman's voice the more irritated she seems? Obviously the GPS is trying to get you "back on track" but until we get back on the "straight and narrow" the voice haunts us.

Someone has suggested that every person needs a spiritual GPS. It's the Bible! It might be described as "God's Positioning System." The voice, when we get off track in life, is God calling you back to the plan he has for you. Listen to his voice. Take the next U-turn and come back to him!

DISCUSSION

1. What if we treated "missing the mark" with God the same as "keeping it between the lines" while driving a car? What makes us more upset: sinning or denting a fender?
2. Why is "secret sin" possibly more dangerous than public sin?
3. What are some ways we can make the Gospel story, the New Testament church, and New Testament worship more relevant to our modern culture without changing the message and truth of God's word?
4. What are some traditions that have been helpful to the church that are not harmful or sinful?

Jason Moon is the pulpit minister at the Roebuck Parkway church of Christ in Birmingham, AL. He may be contacted at jasonmoonmail@yahoo.com.

Lesson 12 - Sins Against God

NOT BELIEVING

Jody Apple

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans 1:28-32

Inspector 47 guarantees that the final product rolling off the assembly line meets industry standards. Each item must pass a multi-point inspection. Products that fall short are pulled and repaired or scrapped. Meeting those expectations benefits the company, its employees, and every consumer using the product.

There are no inspectors on an assembly line to guarantee that souls meet God's expectations, but the principle applies. How we measure up according to divine standards determines our usefulness in God's kingdom today and our eternal destiny tomorrow.

Our purpose: examine the closing verses of Romans 1 to learn how we can fail to pass God's inspection process.

Here's a clue: it's all about faith.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Faith starts in John with evidence. Though not the central focus in Romans, John's approach to faith centers on its origin: the miraculous signs prove Jesus is the Christ. John's conclusive evidence compelled first century witnesses to recognize that Jesus rose above all men (John 3:2).

Faith continues in Romans through obedience yielding righteousness. The obedience of faith that opens and closes Romans is founded on good hearts (Luke 8:15); a faith that accepts the specific content of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-4); obeys that gospel (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17); produces specific behavioral changes as a result (Matt. 3:8; Phil. 1:11); and displays God-

patterned righteousness. Through faith we develop the image of Christ and take God's nature as our own (Rom. 8:29; 2 Pet. 1:4)

Every failure reflects a lack of faith. God's inspection process does not parallel an industrial assembly line, but His expectations are still real. In Luke 14:19, a man sought to be excused because he "bought five yoke of oxen" and was "going to test them."¹ *Test* in this passage, from *dokimazo*, means "to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing, often through actual use."² The term can also mean "to regard something as genuine or worthy on the basis of testing" (cf. Romans 14:22).³



In Romans 1:28 we see the exact opposite meaning. The same word appears but with one telling difference. The text uses *adokimazo*. *Adokimazo* means that, rather than passing a test, a test was failed.

God applies the term to souls who fail to live up to his expectations. It reflects an overall "rating" of disapproval, and like our assembly line illustration, it is based on failure to live up to God's expectations in multiple areas of testing.

Two related perspectives and their failures come to mind. The Romans did not view God as being worthy of worship. From their perspective God failed *their* test. And, second, because these souls deemed God unworthy of

¹All Scripture references are from the NJKV unless otherwise indicated.

² Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989. Electronic Text.

³ Louw §30.114.

worship, God “gave them up,” to a “debased” (or unapproved mind). From this perspective they failed *God’s* test.

Failing God’s test merits serious consideration. Though there are many ways to fail, we will only examine eight of them.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **We Must Realize That We Can Fail.**
- **We Must Live Up to God’s Expectations.**
- **We Must Complete an Honest Self-evaluation.**

We must realize that we can fail. Romans 1:28-32 lists many ways we can fail God. We will examine only eight of them. When we succumb to them we are no longer fitting for His purposes.

The term, *adokimos* (1:28), rendered “debased mind,” means that they did not pass God’s test. These souls were a disappointment to God. They failed to meet universal standards that were best for those who followed them, best for the souls around them, and best to glorify God

The expression “not fitting” (1:28), from *me katheko*, indicates that souls were *not fitting* because they *lowered* God’s standards. If we want to pass the test, we can do one of two things, do what God wants, or fudge on the qualifications.

The phrase “filled with all unrighteousness” (1:29), from *adikia*, means the opposite of being filled with righteousness. Rather than a life originating from faith that yields obedience leading to righteousness, these souls filled themselves with unrighteousness.

Disobedient, in this context, specifically to parents (1:30), comes from *apeithes*, meaning unable to be persuaded. It indicates a rebellious attitude against authority. Paul stated: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” (Tit. 1:16). The term disobedient here is also *apeithes*. The souls who professed God but failed to show it were “disqualified.” That’s *adokimos*, the first term on our list, a term that shows they failed to meet God’s approval because they failed to pass God’s test. Every act of disobedience is not just a rebellion against God that causes us to fail God’s test, it is also a failure of faith. The evidence God plants in the world and the Word is sufficient to produce faith. Rejecting that evidence deems us as unfaithful, or unbelieving.

Undiscerning, comes from the term *asunetos* (1:31). It means without understanding. In context it indicates that these souls failed to properly use the minds God gave them. In this sense they were senseless, or spiritually foolish.

Untrustworthy, comes from *asunthetos* (1:31). The word means these souls did not consider themselves obligated by any agreement. ““They feel no obligation to keep their agreements’ or ‘they do not feel bound to do what they have promised to do.”⁴

Unloving, from *astorgos* (1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3), means “without normal human affection, without love for others.”⁵

Unmerciful, from *aneleemon* (1:31), means without mercy, but that does not do justice to its meaning. It is not just the “lack of mercy,” it is also “the refusal to be merciful.” The term can mean “to refuse to look at, to turn one’s back on, or to refuse to hear a person’s cries for help.”⁶ Rather than being without mercy (Jas. 2:13), we must be filled with it (Jas. 3:17).

If we are faithful to God, doing all that he expects of us, then we will consistently walk in the direction that he has mapped for us, and we will not shirk any responsibility that faith requires.

We must live up to God’s expectations. This series of terms demonstrates quite forcefully that things were not as they should be. In fact, they are the *opposite* of what they should be. If we are faithful to God, doing all that he expects of us, then we will consistently walk in the direction he has mapped for us, and we will not shirk any responsibility that faith requires.

Obviously, what we *fail* to do in service to God is exactly what God *wants* us to do. God wants us to be approved based on his standards, not ours. He does not want us to substitute our own, lower standards. He wants us to be filled with righteousness, to be persuaded of truth based on the evidence, and to live consistently with it every day.

We must complete an honest self-evaluation. The list of failures depicted in Romans 1 are not meant to discourage us. They are intended to warn us so that we do not succumb to them. Being ever vigilant in our lives to remain true to God’s character takes effort, but it can be done.

How do you measure up? Yes, God has high expectations. Yes, he carefully points out possible pitfalls and their consequences. But behind it all is the assurance that *we can* do what he asks.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

The possibility of God’s approval might sound unlikely when you consider all of the ways listed in this passage that we can fall short, but a

⁴ L&N §34.45.

⁵ L&N §24.42.

⁶ L&N §88.82.

more complete picture tells us otherwise. While the Jews fell short in their effort to “approve (*dokimazo*) the things that are excellent” (Rom. 2:18), Romans also teaches that we can be “acceptable” (*dokimazo*) in God’s sight (12:2). It is reasonable, as this passage affirms, to state that we can do what God wants us to do.

That has always been the case. If, in the midst of the sinful population of the city of Rome new testament Christians were expected to be faithful to God, then certainly we can do the same today.

DISCUSSION

1. Does God require anything of us? To become Christians? To remain faithful as Christians?
2. Can we recognize God’s standards of righteousness? Can we follow them?
3. If God’s expectations applied to Christians in the first century, why would they not also apply today?
4. Are God’s expectations of us too high? Too low? Or just right?
5. What tools are available to us to help us both understand and follow God’s expectations?

Jody Apple is the Director of Information Technology at the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies. He may be contacted at japple@wedopreaching.com.

Lesson 13 - Sins Against God

NOT HONORING

Edwin S. Jones

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Romans 1:21

My experience indicates that most people think about words of praise when they consider honoring God. The Psalms as well as other Scriptures certainly do honor God with words (Ps. 3, 92, 145, 146, 148, 150, etc.). Such passages serve a vital role in helping us better honor the Lord.

Nevertheless, before we get to the place where we may honor God with our words, there are some prerequisites to be understood. Words may come easily, but a relationship of trust and obedience is a more difficult commitment (Matt. 7:21-23; Mark 7:6).

Jeremiah, in a very pointed way, addressed the need for deeds to be joined with words, “Do you trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord . . . Behold you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail’” (Jer. 7:4, 8; note the full context of 7:1-11).¹

This lesson will help us properly honor God and thus avoid sinning against Him.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

Honoring God must begin in the heart (Deut. 4:29; 6:5; 1 Sam. 16:7; Mark 12:30). As was true at Babel, we often resort to pridefully honoring ourselves through what we see as great personal achievements (Gen. 11:4). When pride erupts within the heart, it fills space God seeks. In this way we come to be obsessed by what others think of us and how they rank us compared to our fellows (John 5:44). There is no honor for God in this.

With this acknowledged, the obvious solution is to direct our hearts toward things above rather than to things of this life (Col. 3:1-3). With a correct perspective, God has an opportunity to win our hearts. If we do otherwise, as with Solomon’s “under the sun” fixation, we will find vanity. Only God can fill the empty place in our hearts (Ecc. 3:11; 12:13). To honor God He must own our hearts.

¹All Scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

Honoring God must include planting truth in the heart (Deut. 32:46; Ps. 119:11). Though the heart is the only suitable place of origin for honoring God, an empty heart presents a dangerous void (Matt. 12:43-45). Our hearts will be filled with something. Even reform, if it does not fill the heart with Christ-like virtues will make us the worse for the experience.

Truth must fill the heart if God is to be honored. Yet it is here where many stumble. Filling the heart with truth is not to be confused with simply memorizing Scripture. God would fill us up with truth that is personalized in the form of Jesus (Eph. 4:20-24). The new mind of repentance is to be the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5).



Memorizing the Bible is certainly not to be discouraged; it should be encouraged. My point is that simply remembering Scripture is very different from the transformation Christ would create in the heart through the Word. Let me illustrate.

I am currently reading a book about Abraham Lincoln. It is a long book and I have learned many new things about Mr. Lincoln. I have come to admire him in many ways; he was a rare man! Like me, Paul doubtless knew many things about famous people. However, would he have said of any of them what he said of Jesus: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20)?

The answer to my question is easily given. While Paul knew many things about many men, several of whom he undoubtedly admired, he would not have said of anyone what he said of the Christ. Knowing truthful things, even about an admired person, is much different from being radically transformed into that person's image. To honor God, we must be walking in a transforming way (Rom. 8:29). To do otherwise is to dishonor God.

Honoring God must include following his purposes (Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 1:24-29). A vital part of being transformed in our hearts to be like Jesus is to know God's purposes. In short, there is a plan. It is also true that an initial determination to be Christ-like may not result in discovering God's plan. There are side roads and cul-de-sacs the evil one has created to take us off course.

One of Satan's most effective strategies is to have us confuse true Christianity with a distortion of Christianity. These substitutions have some representation of Jesus. Additionally, substitutions may encourage good deeds and hold to various biblical positions. However, only Jesus' church follows God's purposes. In this the New Covenant is clear; God has not left us to fend for ourselves when it comes to His purposes.

Ephesians 4:11-16 is very instructive at this point. In just a few verses, a broad overview is given of how Christianity is designed to work. Applied to our day, teachers are to equip Christians with the tools they need to build up the body of Christ. The completed New Testament is the source of the equipping, and it informs us fully relative to a mature understanding of Christ and His will.

To honor God, we must be walking in a transforming way (Rom. 8:29). To do otherwise is to dishonor God.

All Christians are thus charged with growing up individually and working together collectively. We are a body (1 Cor. 12:12-27). Our identity is the identity of Jesus. We are to conduct the Father's plan in the way of the Christ. In oneness and through love the church grows into a captivating, challenging body of believers (John 13:34-35; 17:21-23). In this way God is honored.

Honoring God must include loving people (1 John 4:20-21; Gal. 6:10). Regarding the Ephesian mandate to work together, unfortunately this is often our downfall. Surely, this is why God includes so much information and so many admonitions in Scripture about how we should get along (Eph. 4:20-32; 5:21-6:9; Col. 3:1-4:6, etc.).

People can be difficult; none of us are immune to this. Difficult people must not, however, be allowed to derail the cause of Jesus. While dealing

with those determined to go against truth in either teachings or actions, we still need to find kind and forbearing ways to make Christianity work. Certainly, “Why can’t we all just get along,” is a naive sentiment. However, we still need to give God’s idea of a united, loving body every reasonable chance to work.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **We Should Desire to Know Jesus.**
- **We Should Practice, Practice, Practice.**
- **We Should Encourage One Another.**
- **We Should Be Motivated to Evangelize.**

We should desire to know Jesus. When an incredulous Nathanael thought nothing good could come from Nazareth, Philip was very wise to simply say, “Come and see” (Jn. 4:46). Not only is this a great evangelistic model, it also works well for developing Christ-likeness.

Let us therefore challenge ourselves to spend time each day listening to or reading the Gospels. The entire Bible needs to be studied, but Jesus is the heart of all Scripture. To know Him well must be nonnegotiable. As we read or listen to the story of Jesus, let us do so thoughtfully. Let us desire to be captivated by the Man, as well as to grow in our understanding and love for Him (John 14:15, 23).

We should practice, practice, practice. Hebrews 5:12-14 is easily understood. When we do not consistently, persistently train, we become weak spiritually. Understandings about Jesus that would otherwise be well within our grasp go over our heads. Thus the “diligence” God seeks in 2 Timothy 2:15 (better translation than “study”) involves a rigorous commitment to all aspects of Christian service. Reading, considering, and applying are indispensable in honoring God.

We should encourage one another. Modern culture has virtually destroyed a neighborly sense of community. As followers of Jesus both in the church and in our families, we must not let culture influence our hearts. Our coming together to bring praise to God should also be a time of mutual encouragement to go and serve with zealous hearts.

Similarly, our homes must not become mere stopovers for meals and sleep; they should be primary safe havens to build us up and express our mutual love. Such opportunities are easily within our grasp. Let us seize the day!

We should be motivated to evangelize. Did you notice I did not mention evangelism? The Epistles also say almost nothing about evangelism by way of explicit admonition. I believe I know why. As we are transformed into the image of Jesus, we acquire both the ability and the motivation for evangelism (1 Pet. 3:15). Take Jesus with you in your heart and you will

honor God in all the ways of the Christ! We will never dishonor God by being Christ-like.

Dishonoring God is a horrific offense. Though commonly associated with “heinous” sins, this lesson has demonstrated how principles often overlooked allow the insidious sin of dishonoring God. Among Christians, we must be vigilant. Prevention is the cure. Our hearts must be open to God, His word, His purposes, and His people if we are to develop safeguards against dishonoring God. In so doing, we will give God the honor He deserves.

DISCUSSION

1. How has this lesson helped you better understand honoring God?
2. What specific actions do you therefore intend to take?
3. In particular, how does the biblical emphasis on Christ-likeness allow us to better understand and practice evangelism?

Edwin Jones is the Dean of Admissions at the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies. He may be contacted at ejones@wedopreaching.com.

Lesson 14 - Sins Against God

NOT OBEYING

James Meadows

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.

Matthew 7:21

God's will must be obeyed and when one disobeys he commits sin and grieves God. This emphasizes the need of knowing the truths about sin, which, in turn, raises several questions about sin.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

What does sin mean? “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the Law” (1 John 3:4).¹ “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin unto death” (1 John 5:17).

Sin is engaging in religious acts outside the realm of faith. “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23). “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3).

When did sin begin? God gave man a command when he placed him in the garden of Eden. God told man “. . . of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eateth thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16b, 17). Satan convinced the woman that “she would not surely die, but would be as gods” (Gen 3:1-5). Eve ate of the fruit “. . . and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6).

Does the Bible reveal the awfulness of sin? First, the cross of Christ reveals how awful sin is. Yes, the cross of Christ highlights the awfulness of sin in the most dramatic and emphatic way. Sin is so bad that God himself (the Supreme Being who created everything, who upholds it all in the word of his power, in whom we live and move and have our being) became flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ to save us from its consequences.²

¹ All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

² James Gibbons, “The Awfulness of Sin” *The Sword and Staff* 49.4 (2011): 7.

Second, the awfulness of sin is seen in the damnation of a lost soul. The wicked are cast into hell. The word *hell* appears twelve times in the Greek New Testament and Jesus used it eleven times. It is a place of undying worms and unquenchable fire (Mark 9:44-48). There is wailing and gnashing of teeth in hell (Matt. 13:42). Hell is a place of eternal separation from God. Indeed, those who go there “shall be punished with everlasting punishment from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (1 Thess. 1:9). Hell is a place of darkness (Jude 13; Matt. 25:30).

Third, the awfulness of sin is realized by what it does. First, it deceives. “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14).

Second, it entices through lust.

“But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (Jas. 1:14).

Fourth, it offers pleasure. Moses refused the pleasures of sin to serve God (Heb. 11:24-25).

Fifth, it makes sad victims of its servants. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his

servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Rom 6:16).

Sixth, it hides the face of God from the sinner. “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2).

Seventh, your sins will find you out. Some of the children of Israel wanted to build on the east side of the Jordan, but they promised to cross over Jordan to help take the land (Num. 32:16-17). Moses told them, “But if you will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out” (Num. 32:23).

What should be our attitudes toward sin? First, we should admit it. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me: (Ps. 51:1-2). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:9-10).

Second, we should hate it. “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov. 8:13). We avoid things we hate. No one keeps a barrel of rattlesnakes in his house. Accordingly, an intense hatred of sin contributes a safeguard against



committing it. God hates sin (Deut. 16:22, Prov. 6:16-19). Sin stirred Jesus with righteous indignation (Mark 3:5; John 2:13-17).

Third, we should shun sin. We are to “shrink” from all evil (Rom. 12:9), we are to “abstain” from all evil (1 Thess. 5:22), and we are to “flee” from all evil (2 Tim. 2:22). When one “shuns” sin, he will not see how close he can get to it without overtly sinning. We are not to make provision for sinning (Rom. 13:14).

In resisting sin and the evil one, we are not to give an inch or compromise a particle.

Fourth, we are to resist sin (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8-9). Jesus resisted sin and the evil one (Matt. 4:1-11). In resisting sin and the evil one, we are not to give an inch or compromise a particle. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand” (Eph. 6:13).

Fifth, we are to expose sin. God condemns sin (Rom. 8:3). The Holy Spirit reproved sin (John 16:7-8). John the Baptist condemned sin (Matt 14:1-12). The apostles denounced sin (Acts 13:6-10). Gospel preachers are to rebuke sin (Acts 13:6-10). Yes, all Christians are to reprove sin (Eph. 5:11).

Sixth, we are to conquer sin. We are to conquer, not continue in sin (Rom. 6:1-17). Jesus taught that drastic measures must be taken at times to conquer sin (Mark 9:43-48). The overcomers, not the overcome, are promised the blessings of God: “. . . to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is the midst of the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).

What must we do to receive forgiveness of sins? On the day of Pentecost, Peter convinced his hearers that they crucified the Lord: “God hath made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). They were pricked in their heart and asked, “Men and brethren what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter replied, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **We Should Aim to Get Right with God, for the Judgment Day Is Coming.**
- **We Should Appreciate What the Lord Has Done for Us and Live for Him.**
- **We Should Aspire to Be Soul Winners for Christ.**

We should aim to get right with God, for the judgment day is coming. “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). “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

We should appreciate what the Lord has done for us and live for him. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:8-10).

We should aspire to be soul winners for Christ. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:19-20). “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized should be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16-16).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

The word of God clearly reveals the nature of sin. The word of God clearly reveals God’s attitude toward sin and tells us how to overcome it. God gave his Son in order that his blood might remove our sins. All of these warnings and blessings should move us to be obedient to God’s word.

DISCUSSION

1. What are some ways in which we can overcome sin?
2. What are our responsibilities toward sinners?
3. What are some things that should motivate us to overcome sin?
4. What are some things that show how wicked man can become?
5. What are the blessings that await those who overcome sin?

James Meadows is the Dean of Students at the Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies. He may be contacted at jmeadows@wedopreaching.com.

WHAT I THINK OF OTHERS

David Powell

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interest of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

What we think of others is critical to the way we end up treating them. If we think of others the way Jesus did, we stand a greater chance of reaching them. Conversely, if we think selfishly, then we risk closing an evangelistic door we may never get open again. People will never know the love of God until they see it first in our lives in the way we treat them or others.

I have a friend who is a gospel preacher. At one time he preached for a large congregation. It was a tremendous opportunity. Through this congregation he could have done great things for the Lord. Sadly, the elders fired him. It did not surprise anyone. The elders had talked to him before. He was not terminated for poor preaching or teaching false doctrine. He was an excellent speaker and solid as a rock doctrinally. He was fired because of the ugly way he treated his wife and children in public. His lack of patience and inability to control his temper cost him his job. Greater still, it cost him his reputation. To his credit, he got help, learned to think of his family in the right way, and today is preaching more effectively.

In one of the best-loved passages in all the Bible Paul shares with us the secret to thinking of others in a Christ-like way. He encouraged the church at Philippi that the way they thought of each other was critical to how they ultimately treated one another (Phil. 2:1-4). He provided them with a powerful illustration introduced by the admonition, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).¹ Our text is Philippians 2:5-11.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Context is always critical to understanding any passage. In the church at Philippi, Paul dealt with two Christians who demonstrated attitudes detrimental to their relationship and the congregation. He had encountered this situation with other churches (Eph. 4:1-3). He encouraged these

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

Christians to be of the “same mind in the Lord,” the mind of Christ (Phil. 4:2).

The way we think of others is important. It motivates the way we treat one another. Today, sadly, we see in congregations of the Lord’s people Christians who “bite and devour each another” (Gal. 5:15), thus hurting the church. In hoping to avoid these problems, how do we think of others as Jesus thought of them? Let us look more closely at our text in Philippians 2:5-11 and glean five keys that will help us.

The way we think of others is important. It motivates the way we treat one another.

How did Jesus think of others?

First, he submitted to the will of his Father. Our passage begins with Jesus’ preexistence: “He existed in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6). In other words, he existed in heaven with God (John 1:1-3; 17:1-5). Amazingly, he “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation” (Phil. 2:6-7). The meaning is that Jesus did not cling to his equality with God to the point of not being willing to give it up for a greater purpose. That purpose was to do the will of God and come to this earth to save us (Heb. 2:5-9). His thoughts about us began with his submission to his Father (Luke 22:39-46). The first step in thinking of others the way Jesus thought of them is be submissive to the will of God.

Second, he humbled himself. Paul says that he made himself of “no reputation” (Phil. 2:7). The idea is that he “emptied himself” (NASV): not of his deity, but of his place in heaven (John 1:12). Then, incredibly, he took the “form of a bondservant” and came



in the “likeness of men” (Phil. 2:6-7). He, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, came to us in the person of a servant! He “humbled himself” (Phil. 2:8). He came “not to be served but to serve” (Mark 10:45). The second key to thinking of others the way Jesus looked at them is humility.

Third, he obeyed. Paul says Jesus “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8). And then, as if to add emphasis, he concludes, “Even to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8). Jesus took obeying

his heavenly Father seriously. It was by his “obedience” that he was made “perfect” or completely equipped to be our Great High Priest (Heb. 5:8-9). A third key to thinking of others in a Christ-like way is to obey God.

Fourth, he loved us. What made Jesus do all that God asked him to do, including dying such a horrible death on the cross? The answer is that he loved us (Gal. 2:20). Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:13-14). The fourth key to thinking of others as our Lord thought of them is to love them.

Fifth, he knew the victory that lay before him. Paul ended his illustration of the mind of Jesus with God “highly exalting Him” (Phil. 2:9). God rewarded him with a name that is above all names (Phil. 2:9) and a throne before which every knee will ultimately bow (Phil. 2:10-11). Because of the “joy set before Him” Jesus “endured the cross” and is seated today at the right hand of God (Heb. 12:2). A final key to thinking of others as Jesus thought of them is to remember the blessings or crown of life that awaits us in heaven (Rev. 2:10).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- We Need to First Think of Jesus.
- We Need to Think of Others As Jesus Thought of Them.
- We Need to Love Others As We Love Ourselves.
- We Need to Practice the Golden Rule.
- We Need to Be Humble.

A stranger visited a congregation on one occasion. As he parked, a family parked next to him. The man got out of the car and said, “Mister, that’s where we park. You took my place.” Upset, the stranger continued on into Bible study. As he sat down, a woman came up to him and rudely said, “That’s where I sit. You took my place.” Once more the stranger was shaken but since he was already in church he decided to stay for worship. As he found a place to sit, a man walked up to him and said, “Sir, this is where I sit. I always sit here. You’ve taken my place.” The stranger sat in silence, contemplating the ugly way in which he had been treated. The congregation began to worship and prayed that Jesus would come and be among them. The stranger began to stand and as he did his appearance changed. He began to glow with radiance. Cruel scars began to appear on his hands and his sandaled feet. Someone in the congregation spoke up, “Hey, what happened to you? Who are you?” Then Jesus said, “I took your place.”

Indeed, Jesus took our place on the cross. Why then are we so hateful to other people? Why do we think so highly of ourselves that we fail to remember what Jesus thought of us, even in all of our sins that he would die for us on the cross (cf. Rom. 5:6-8)? What practical lessons can we glean from our lesson today?

We need to first think of Jesus. We need to put him first in our lives (Matt. 6:33).

We need to think of others the way Jesus thought of them. He saw each of us as a soul worth saving. Nothing is more important than our soul (Matt. 16:26).

We need to love others as we love ourselves. It is a commandment (Matt. 22:39). And if we love Jesus, we will keep his commandments (John 14:15).

We need to practice the Golden Rule. Jesus said to treat others the way we want to be treated (Matt. 7:12). The way we want others to think of us should be the way we think of them.

We need to be humble. Jesus was (Matt. 11:28-30). No one is perfect (Rom. 3:23). We all make mistakes. Therefore, let each of us “esteem others better than ourselves” (Phil 2:4).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Jesus thought of others the way his heavenly Father thought of them. This is the example that he lived before us. Because of the New Testament, we can follow his example (1 Pet. 2:21). The work is not easy and often takes us out of our comfort zones; however, the payoff is well worth it. In the end, we all want to hear God say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss Paul’s statement that Jesus emptied himself.
2. Consider and discuss some examples of Jesus’ humility.
3. In light of the Golden Rule discuss some ways that our culture seeks to redefine this rule.
4. Why do we struggle with the way we think of others?

David Powell currently serves as pulpit minister for the North Jackson church of Christ in Jackson, TN and teaches at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN. He may be contacted at dpowell@fhu.edu.

WHAT I SAY ABOUT OTHERS

Jerrie Barber

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Colossians 4:6

You probably have heard and maybe you have said the statement: “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.” There is a Greek word for the sentiment in that sentence: BALONEY!

The writer of Proverbs said, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21).¹ What we say about others can destroy someone’s confidence, outlook, goals, joy, and reputation. This lesson is designed to make us aware of how we can sin by what we say about others and to encourage us to avoid this sin.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

When I talk about others, I should tell the truth. Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus and told them to put away lying and speak truth (Eph. 4:25). This letter was addressed “To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). It was possible then and it is possible today for saints and faithful brethren to tell things that are not so when they know better.

Sometimes it is better not to tell the truth about others. I am not suggesting that it is right to be dishonest. But just because something is true does not mean that it should be said. When there is continual conflict in a group, it is because someone is gossiping (Prov. 26:20, 21). Saying true things to the wrong people at the wrong time is sinful. If I have not gone to talk with my brother alone, it is wrong to tell the church, whether face to face, by phone, or by email (Matt. 18:15-17).

When I talk about others, I should say good things. Rather than saying bad things to and about others, my words should build up and be a valuable gift to those who hear and about whom the words are said (Eph. 4:29).

Sometimes when I talk about others, it is better not to say good things. Honesty demands that I not say good things about another when good things are not the truth about that person (Eph. 4:25). A popular proverb not found in the Bible is, “If you can’t say something good about someone,

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

don't say anything." That is not always the best advice. I have heard of elders who gave their former unfaithful or ineffective preacher a good recommendation to get him out of town and away from them. That is not kind or honest. Paul, by inspiration, wrote about a certain man: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works" (2 Tim. 4:14).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- Do I Have Enough Information to Talk About This Person?
- Where Did I Get This Information? Is It Reliable, True?
- Even If It Is True, Is It Time to Talk?
- Will What I Am Considering Saying Be Helpful?

Several questions should be asked to evaluate whether what I am saying about another person is helpful or not.

Do I have enough information to talk about this person? If I have only heard from one person in a conflict, I have not heard enough. I do not need to take any action in a conflict involving others until I have heard it in stereo: all sides. "The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him" (Prov. 18:17). There is a reason for cross-examination in court. We may not learn the truth until we hear it from different angles.

**Just as harmful words can inflict much hurt,
encouraging words can lift and encourage.**

Where did I get this information? Is it reliable, true? I am amazed how otherwise honest people will forward e-mails about others without making an effort to determine whether the information is true or false or mixed. It is not right to spread untrue things even about evil people.

Even if it is true, is it time to talk? Jesus gives an order, or progression, about how to deal with someone who sins against us. It begins with one-on-one. The unresolved matter then includes one or two more. After that, if there is no resolution, it is time to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:15-17). Mark 16:16 is red in my Bible. That means Jesus said it. I teach people to obey it. Those who refuse to obey what Jesus said are in sin. Matthew 18:15-17 is written in red in my Bible. That means Jesus said it. It is my understanding that those who refuse to obey what Jesus said are in sin. Incidentally, what is written in black in the Bible is true also.

Will what I am considering saying be helpful? My words are to encourage and are to be considered a gift when I speak to and about others (Eph. 4:29).

That does not necessarily mean that good, helpful words will always feel good. My message can produce several results and feelings:

- It can be helpful and painful.
- It can be harmful and painful.
- It can be enjoyable for us and painful to the person being discussed.
- It can be painful now but beneficial later when the truth is spoken in love (Eph. 4:15; Luke 17:3-4).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

You and I do not have to sin when we talk about others. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11). Just as harmful words can inflict much hurt, encouraging words can lift and encourage. We are doing everyone a favor when we recommend and commend someone for work well done. I have had people tell me good things about teachers, preachers, elders, other Christians, and mechanics. Because what they said was true, I have been able to develop trust in those people and be blessed by their service as they used their gifts from God.



Not only do I need to avoid saying bad things about others, I do not need to sin against others by not saying true and good things about them. “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

DISCUSSION

1. How can I determine if what I am considering saying about someone is true or false or mixed?
2. What should I do if I am in doubt?
3. Does writing, texting, e-mailing, or tweeting remove responsibility for being truthful in what I communicate? Discuss.
4. Discuss situations when it would be wrong to tell something that was true about someone.
5. What has been your observation and experience in Christians following or not following Jesus' commands in conflict resolution (Matt. 5:23-26; Matt. 18:15-17)? If you have been reluctant to follow Jesus' commands in conflict resolution, do you know why and how can you overcome that?

Jerrie Barber is currently working as an interim preacher with the church at Maury City, TN. He may be contacted at jerrie@barberclippings.com.

WHAT I DO TO OTHERS

Phil Sanders

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

Proverbs 6:16–19

How we treat others matters to God, matters to others, and matters to our soul. The Lord Jesus said, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12).¹ Treating others the way we wish to be treated means we must regard others with the same respect we treat ourselves. Indeed the Lord asks us to treat others even better. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Phil. 2:3-4). We are to love others the way that the Lord Jesus has loved us (John 13:34-35).

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Some sins against others involve the heart. Jesus taught that anger towards a brother is sinful (Matt. 5:21-22). Cain rose up in anger and killed his brother Abel. Christians who have sinned against a brother are to reconcile quickly (Matt. 5:23-26). Christians who have been forgiven by God are expected to be forgiving with others (Matt. 6:14-15). “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:31–32). “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

Christians should love and treat everyone with respect, not showing partiality (Jas. 2:1-10). God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:6, 11). “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s” (Exod. 20:17).

Envy is the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing the advantage or prosperity of others (Matt. 27:18; Gal. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:1) and may lead to

¹ All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

great cruelty. Envy desires to deprive another of what he possesses; jealousy desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for oneself (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; Jas. 3:14, 16, 4:2).

Judging according to appearances is wrong; Christians are to judge righteously (John 7:24; cf. Luke 7:36-51). Since we do not know the motives of other people's hearts, we must be careful not to judge. The Lord warns us against judging others frivolously (Matt. 7:1-5).

Some sins against others involve the flesh. As a sin, fornication always involves another person. Because fornication stands condemned (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21), Scripture urges us to "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Cor. 6:18; cf. 2 Tim. 2:22). We are called to a more noble life. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Because we belong to God, we must live holy lives (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

When a married person has sexual relations with another person, he commits adultery.

Those who commit adultery are guilty of breaking a covenant with their spouses (Mal. 2:14-15). A single person commits adultery when he has sexual intercourse with a person who is married to someone else.

Incest takes place when people have illicit sexual intercourse with members of their family (Lev. 18:6-18; 20:11-21). The daughters of Lot willfully made him drunk, so that they might lie with Lot to "preserve offspring from our father" (Gen. 19:32). Both became pregnant and gave birth to sons who fathered nations that became enemies to Israel. Amos mourned that a man and his father would go in to the same girl (Amos 2:7).



So horrible was the outcry to God against sin in the cities of

Sodom and Gomorrah that God rained sulfur and fire out of heaven on the city (Gen. 18:20, 19:24). 1 Corinthians 6:9 condemns the practice of homosexuality, both those who are effeminate and those who dominant as sexual partners. Many dominant males are pederasts who recruit younger

males into their perverted behavior. Paul said of lesbians: “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature” (Rom. 1:26).

Some sins against others involve the eyes. Paul lamented, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:10). Greed and covetousness have led to stealing and murder. Jezebel had Naboth falsely accused and stoned so Ahab could have his vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16).

The prophets describe how thoughtless some have been towards others in order to gain some money or advantage. Joel said some “have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it” (Joel 3:3). Amos described how the unjust used false balances, sold the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sold the chaff with the wheat (Amos 8:5-6).

How we treat others must be rooted in who we are and whose we are.

One sin of the eye involves sexual lust. Peter spoke of those who had “eyes full of adultery” (2 Pet. 2:14). The Lord Jesus said, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28). Job said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1).

Some sins against others involve pride. Arrogance is the attitude of exalting oneself so that one is better than others. God spoke through Isaiah the prophet against those who say, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.” God said, “These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day” (Isa. 65:5).

Out of pride many intimidate and abuse others. John observed, “Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:42-43).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- God Hates Sin, Because It Harms Others.
- We Treat Others Kindly and Mercifully, Because We Are God’s Children.
- When You Are Abused, Consider Jesus.

God hates sin, because it harms others. God hates sin, because he loves people. “There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers” (Prov. 6:16–19). When you treat others unkindly or unjustly, God hates your sin. God asks us to abhor what is evil (Rom. 12:9) and that includes the evil we ourselves commit.

We treat others kindly and mercifully, because we are God’s children. “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:44–45).

When you are abused, consider Jesus. “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (Heb. 12:3). Jesus did not call for twelve legions of angels when the crowd came for him with swords and clubs (Matt. 27:51-56). Jesus did not revile or threaten in return when he was reviled and suffered on the cross (1 Pet. 2:23).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

How we treat others must be rooted in who we are and whose we are. As children of God we must live holy and noble lives (Matt. 5:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:14-16). When Jesus suffered the most extreme hostility and pain of death, He “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23). Peter urges us, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Pet. 4:19).

DISCUSSION

1. Would you ask God to search your heart to see if there be any grievous way in you and lead you into the everlasting way (Ps. 139:23-24)?
2. Psalm 15 and Job 31 present some high moral standards. How would you measure up?
3. In what ways did Jesus love us, and how does that affect how we treat others?

Phil Sanders is the speaker for “In Search of the Lord’s Way,” a nationally broadcasted television ministry of Edmond church of Christ in Edmond, Oklahoma. He may be contacted at phil@searchtv.org.

Lesson 18 - Sins Against Self

PRIDE

Melvin L. Otey

Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18

Pride, also known by its respective Greek and Latin designations, *hubris* and *superbia*, has a curious place in the church. On the one hand, its ignominy is codified, in a manner of speaking, in that it occupies the first place among the “seven deadly sins.” On the other hand, no “heart disease” may be more prevalent. There are few attributes we recognize so quickly and abhor so greatly in others while being simultaneously oblivious to its prominence within us. It is as if we can spot the slightest speck of arrogance in our neighbors from 1,000 yards while simultaneously being blinded by the plank of pride that blinds the very eye with which we spy it. It is indeed curious.

The word “pride” can be used either positively or negatively, of course. Positively, it refers to a proper sense of one’s own dignity and value. Negatively, it refers to arrogant or disdainful thinking and its corresponding conduct. Consider the following descriptions of the renegade variety:

Similar to self-sufficiency, pride involves a trust in one’s own power or resources, and a tendency to derive satisfaction from the contemplation of one’s status, capabilities, or accomplishments, especially as these are compared with others who seem to have less.¹

Pride is arrogant self-worship. It is the sin of exalting oneself and placing one’s own interests above the interests of others. Pride craves admiration and even adoration, and will not share the limelight. . . .

The proud are in love with themselves and seek to call attention to their admirable qualities (Campolo 74-75).²

While the Bible teaches that all should have healthy self-esteem (cf. Gen. 1:26-27; Matt. 22:39), it also admonishes against excessive personal valuation and the attendant attitude of superiority over others (cf. Rom. 12:3). One reads, for instance, that God hates “haughty eyes” and will “root

¹ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling* (3d ed. Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 810.

² Anthony Campolo, *Seven Deadly Sins* (Wheaton: Victor, 1987), 74-75.

up the house of the proud,” and He rightly becomes wary of those who esteem themselves too highly (Prov. 6:17, 15:25).³

Make no mistake; pride is dangerous. In Proverbs 16:18, the inspired penman solemnly warned, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Moreover, there is no virtue in pretending it is solely our neighbor’s problem, so we must be careful lest we believe that we are somehow immune. We are all susceptible to bouts of arrogance. We have all endured episodes of thinking more highly of ourselves than we should (Rom. 12:3). We do well, therefore, to carefully consider the manifold dangers that accompany this spiritual cancer.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Pride imperils us personally. People of sound judgment carefully avoid ingesting poisons because they know that such substances will injure, or even kill, them. Arrogant pride, though, does to the heart what poisons do to the body. It corrupts and destroys.

For example, Adam and Eve, our first parents, fell, in part, because, when pride compromised their innocent hearts, they tried to become equal with God (Gen. 3:5). In so doing, they followed Satan’s example (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6) and lost, among other things, their comfortable life in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22-24). Likewise, Pharaoh’s heart was darkened by arrogance, and he refused to repent while his kingdom was destroyed around him (cf. Exod. 5:1-2, 8:15-17, 8:31-9:5, 10). Even when we are already hurting, pride can lead us to incur and accept further unnecessary injury and loss. It unquestionably brings us down (Prov. 29:23, 11:2). Truly, “Pride is self-centered, self-satisfied, and ultimately self-destructive.”⁴



Pride imperils us socially. Not only will pride cause us to fall down personally, but attitudes of superiority based on intellect, social status, material wealth, ethnicity, and such like are corrosive to our relationships. They engender mistreatment of others (Psa. 10:2), foment contention and strife (Prov. 13:10), and alienate people from one another (cf. Prov. 16:19). Then, when we behave poorly, arrogance

³ All Scripture references are from the ASV unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 810.

prevents us from confessing our faults and making reconciliation possible. As one writer explained, “Pride deludes its victims into believing that they have no peers and drives them to try to destroy anyone who takes recognition away from them.”⁵ Because pride causes us to think less of others while we think more of ourselves, it invariably leads us to abuse people in some fashion, and no healthy, abiding relationship includes maltreatment. It is little wonder, then, that the Bible teaches Christians to limit our interactions with proud people (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

Pride imperils us spiritually. While the personal and relational costs of pride are significant, the spiritual costs are, ultimately, most important. Hubris essentially amounts to self-worship (cf. Dan. 5:22-23; Acts 12:20-23), an affront to God, so it is no wonder that it sits atop the list of things He hates (Prov. 6:16-17). It is inherently sinful (Prov. 21:4; Mark 7:20-23), and all sin separates people from God (Isa. 59:1-2). God cannot accept the proud into fellowship with Him (cf. 1 John 2:15-16). Rather, He distances Himself from those with haughty spirits (Psa. 138:6), refuses to hear their prayers (Job 35:12-13; John 9:31), and generally resists them (1 Pet. 5:5). He will bring the haughty down (2 Sam. 22:28; Isa. 2:12), smite the proud (Job 26:12), and destroy his house (Prov. 15:25). Clearly, then, pride is a barrier to salvation and a passport to condemnation.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Humility Protects Us Personally.**
- **Humility Protects Us Socially.**
- **Humility Protects Us Spiritually.**

Humility protects us personally. We have all seen the Christian who persists in a questionable course of conduct while knowing that others have been overtaken in the same pursuit, arrogantly believing, “It will not happen to me.” We have been baffled by his recklessness and watched him suffer for his stubborn pride. Still, we understand his conduct better than we sometimes admit because we have traveled this path ourselves on occasion. This is true, in part, because pride robs us of the ability to see ourselves as we truly are (cf. Rev. 3:17). One key to protecting ourselves from the injurious personal effects of pride, then, is peering into the Word of God. There, we can see ourselves as we truly are, that is, the way God sees us, with the good and the bad (cf. Isa. 64:6; Psa. 139:14). The resulting humility will provide a safeguard against the personal perils of arrogance (cf. Luke 14:11).

Humility protects us socially. We have all observed the Christian brother who well knows he has acted inappropriately or spoken harshly to a family member or fellow Christian and wounded this person in the process, yet refuses to turn again, acknowledge his error, and ask for forgiveness. All the

⁵ Campolo, *Seven Deadly Sins*, 74.

while, he reasons, whether quietly in his own heart or aloud to those who encourage him to make peace, that the other person somehow deserved the ungodly treatment. We know the damage that such an arrogant spirit causes in families and congregations of the Lord's church, perhaps because it has resided in us at times, and we have been the source of turmoil as a result. One key to protecting our relationships from the injurious social effects of pride, then, is esteeming others better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3-8). The resulting humility "becomes a preventative treatment for unhealthy relationships."⁶

... pride is a poison to the human heart, a scourge to human relationships, and a death knell to human fellowship with God. There is nothing redeeming about it.

Humility protects us spiritually. Perhaps we have watched the sister who, when questioned about her lack of commitment to the Lord and His Church, perhaps manifested through sporadic attendance at corporate assemblies or persistent ungodly behavior (e.g., unsavory speech, immodest apparel, or riotous living), would rather wrest the Scriptures to her own destruction rather than repent and be reconciled to God. We have not only witnessed such arrogance; we have likely fallen prey to it at one time or another. We are not self-deluded, though. We know this is a tremendous impediment to our communion with God. One key to protecting ourselves from the injurious spiritual effects of pride, then, is humbling ourselves in light of our continuing need for God's mercy. Without humility, we cannot be justified by God (cf. Luke 18:9-14). He resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

While it may seem unduly dramatic, perhaps it does not go far enough to say that pride is a poison to the human heart, a scourge to human relationships, and a death knell to human fellowship with God. There is nothing redeeming about it. This is why Paul, by inspiration, called Christians to "[h]ave this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:3). The world celebrates haughtiness and braggadocio and self-promotion, but we are better off personally, socially, and spiritually when we take the opposite tact and follow our Lord's example of humility. We do not need to promote ourselves. God will do that for us, and He can elevate us to greater heights than we could ever reach on our own: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you" (Jas. 4:10).

⁶ Rick Mathis, *Making More of Life with Less* (Liguori: Liguori/Triumph, 2004), 22.

DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe “pride”?
2. What are the personal dangers associated with a proud and haughty spirit?
3. What are the social dangers associated with a proud and haughty spirit?
4. What are the spiritual dangers associated with a proud and haughty spirit?
5. How does humility protect against the perils of pride?

Melvin L. Otey preaches for the Georgia Avenue church of Christ in Washington, DC and serves as a trial attorney for the federal government and a college professor. He may be contacted at uobeythegospel2@yahoo.com.

SEXUAL IMMORALITY

Jeff A. Jenkins

Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

When God's man Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he refused her with a most insightful response, "How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).¹ Joseph had come to learn something that every child of God needs to know. While sin is always against us or someone else, sin is ultimately against God.

Temptation in and of itself is not a sin. It is certainly not new in any sense. Temptation is the same for us as it was for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan tempts us today in the same way he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. It is the common experience of every person (1 Cor. 10:13). From the very beginning, a battle has raged for the souls of men and women, a battle that touches all of us sooner or later.

Many Christians feel needless guilt because they have equated temptation with sin. Yet we know that our Lord was tempted and was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Was the temptation real? The answer must be "Yes." But if the sinless Son of God could be tempted, then temptation itself cannot be sinful.

While Joseph said "No" to Potiphar's wife, David said "Yes" to Bathsheba, and today many of God's people say "Yes" to sexual sins. In this lesson we will seek to find what Scripture says about how we can overcome enslavement to sexual sin.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul discusses two motivations for our saying "No" to sin.

The danger of slavery. Paul's attitude was that once we have been washed, once we have been "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 6:11), that we are not to be "mastered by anything" (1 Cor. 6:12).

¹All Scripture references are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

Paul then discusses how we cannot become enslaved to immorality because we have been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

When Christians refuse to say “No” to sins that can enslave us, we run the risk of hardening our hearts and our conscience. When we reject our conscience,

it can make shipwreck of our faith (1 Tim. 1:19). Our Lord thought this was so serious that He said, “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you, for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be



thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29). We are given this instruction that we might realize that bringing our body under control is no minor matter.

The joy of freedom. When we say no to sin and enslavements, particularly the sins against the body that Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 6, we enjoy freedom from guilt, sorrow, and shame. In Romans 14:22 Paul gives us a great word of encouragement, “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”

When we say “Yes” to sin and “No” to God, it brings about a life of misery. However, when we avail ourselves of the law of the Spirit of life and bear the fruit of self-control, we will enjoy a life of victory and joy. This is the joy of understanding of what it means to be bought with the precious blood of Jesus (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Christ Is for Us, Not Against Us.**
- **Our Body Is the Dwelling Place of the Spirit.**
- **We Should Never Use Our Body for Immorality.**
- **Our Goal Is to Glorify God in Our Body.**

Christ is for us, not against us. Notice the end of 1 Corinthians 6:13, “Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body.” Don’t miss that last phrase: “The Lord is for the body.” If we are not careful, we will leave the reputation that we are against the body and that God is against the body. We can leave the false impression that our needs and appetites are all evil and that the best thing we can do is to get rid of it as soon as possible. That is just not true. The Lord made our bodies, and He is for our bodies.

The good news for our lives is that we can overcome temptation.

Our body is the dwelling place of the Spirit. When we were purchased with the blood of Jesus, it was not as slaves. We were bought to be dwellings. That is why Paul says, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19). We are to be “filled with the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

We should never use our body for immorality. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:13, “Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord.” Verse 18 says, “Flee immorality.” The reason we are not to use our body for immorality and the reason we are to flee immorality goes much deeper than not wanting to contact some sexual disease or not to get pregnant.

The reason is that our body has been purchased with the blood of the Son of God. Our body belongs to Him. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). He gave Himself for us to redeem us from wrong deeds and to purify us (Tit. 2:14).

Our goal is to glorify God with our body. Verse 20 says, “For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God with your body.” What that means to us is that we are to use our body in ways that will show that God is more satisfying, more precious, more to be desired, more glorious than anything the body craves. Whatever we do in our life is to be done for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Temptation is not new in any sense. Temptation is the same for us as it was for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Satan tempts us today in the same way he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. From the very beginning a battle has raged for the souls of men and women, a battle that touches all of us sooner or later. The good news for our lives is that we can overcome temptation. In the same way that Jesus overcame temptation, we can also be victorious over Satan.

Romans 12:1 teaches that we are to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices. Why does God say to present your body? Why doesn't he say to present your soul or your spirit? The answer is simple. If God has our body, he's got us. If we ever decide that our body belongs to God, we'll find it much easier to say "No" when the devil comes knocking at our door, and we can be sure that he will come knocking. He walks about on the earth like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). He is our great adversary who accuses the brethren before God both day and night (Rev. 12:10).

If we ever decide to get serious about temptation and become completely committed to our Lord, we'll find a level of joy and freedom in Christ we never knew before. Temptation is the common experience of the people of God. We will never escape it as long as we live in a fallen world, but God has given us everything we need to win the battle every time.

Children of the King, it is time for us to stand and fight. The Lord is on our side!

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think so many Christians struggle with sexual sins?
2. What are some things we can do to help one another as we deal with these specific temptations?
3. How can learning how Jesus overcame temptation be of value to us in our daily lives?
4. What are some practical ways we can fulfill Paul's instruction in Romans 12:1?

Jeff A. Jenkins is the preaching minister for the Lewisville church of Christ in Lewisville, TX. He may be contacted at jeff@lewisvillechurchofchrist.org.

Lesson 20 - Sins Against Self

GREED

James Gardner

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Greed is lust for wealth. The tenth commandment under the Mosaic Law prohibited coveting anything that properly belongs to other people (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).¹ The commandment thus suggests a close connection between greed and other sins, such as sexual lust, and a common spiritual disease that underlies both greed and other forms of covetousness. At the least, all such sins are expressions of selfishness, and a direct betrayal of the duty to love others as oneself. Such sins also imply a restless dissatisfaction with what God has provided for our happiness, and a search for happiness where it can never be found, using means that inevitably cause us to injure each other and to separate ourselves from God.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Greed is a universal problem. Many have viewed greed as the sin most characteristic of modern America. We face distinctive and powerful temptations with respect to materialism. We are not only the wealthiest society in human history, but we have also chosen to base our economic life on free market capitalism, an economic theory that sees individual self-interest as a powerful force for good. Wealth itself is not sinful, but it poses spiritual dangers that few of the wealthy overcome (Matt. 19:23-26). Similarly, economic freedom and competition are not sinful, but our system easily permits and even glorifies successful selfishness. Nevertheless, greed is not a distinctively American or modern evil, but a spiritual illness that has plagued human beings throughout history. Writing about 400 A.D., John Chrysostom describes greed as a kind of insane rage that “has laid waste the world.”² He compares it to a fire burning equally out of control in

¹ All Scripture references are from the ESV unless otherwise indicated.

² Homily XVII. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (First Series; Vol. XIII; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 470.

the hearts of kings and of the poor. He claims that everyone spoke against it, but no one changed. From his day to ours, this is the disturbing reality of greed, a sin widely recognized, widely condemned, and widely embraced as though it had not been recognized or condemned.

Greed corrupts faith. Jesus teaches, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt. 6:24). As in much of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not laying down an arbitrary rule of conduct, but warning us of an inescapable truth about how our minds work. Greed and faith cannot long coexist. God has promised to provide our material needs if we “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Greed necessarily implies that God cannot be trusted. Effective faith must embrace both God’s existence and his faithful generosity towards us (Heb. 11:6). Further, the conflict between faith and greed naturally grows worse over time. Every decision to make wealth our goal makes it harder to find our way home to God as our father. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

Greed ruins love. Paul warns Timothy that “the love of money is a root of



all kinds of evils” (1 Tim. 6:10). The Bible presents many examples. Ahab’s lust for his neighbor’s vineyard led his wife to murder, who in turn involved the elders of Jezreel in falsehood and perverted justice to kill the innocent (1 Kings 21). The wealthy elite of Israel allowed greed to destroy honesty in everyday life and so to overwhelm natural human feeling as to “buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (Amos 8:4-6). Similarly, Micah describes both Israel and Judah as dominated by wealthy oppressors who plan evil from the moment they wake up (Mic. 2:1-2) and “make crooked all that is straight” (Mic. 3:9) in order to amass “the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked” (Mic. 6:10).

Greed destroys hope and peace. God has made us thinking beings who, though limited in our actions to the present, naturally look ahead and derive much of our happiness and sorrow from our thoughts about the future. Greed directs those thoughts to a goal both uncertain and illusory, guaranteeing only anxiety and ultimate disappointment. “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money” (Eccl. 5:10). Paul warns that greedy desires “plunge people into ruin and destruction” and those whose lives are controlled by greed have “pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:9-10). It is “the deceitfulness of riches” that chokes the word of truth and prevents it from creating in us the abundant life God intends (Matt. 13:22).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Don't Measure Yourself by Worldly Standards.**
- **Positively Treasure up Goodness.**
- **Be Content with God's Provision.**

Don't measure yourself by worldly standards. Society very commonly measures success by wealth. In this, we are not unlike the people of Jesus' day whom he felt it necessary to warn that “one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Lk. 12:15). Christians are called to be salt and light for the world, a role we cannot play without the courage to live by distinctive values (Matt. 5:13-16). We are not to be conformed but transformed (Rom. 12:2). This is not easy. All around us the explicit message and subtle undertone of our mass culture is that wealth validates personal worth and that lack of wealth demonstrates failure and not honorable choice. We must learn to give honor to whom honor is genuinely due and to value in ourselves “whatever is true...honorable...just...pure...lovely” so that the God of peace may be with us (Phil. 4:8-9).

A secret of Christian happiness is to hold constantly in our minds that the greatest worldly gifts cannot compete in value with the giver.

Positively treasure up goodness. The teaching of Jesus about wealth and ambition is not exclusively negative. We are warned not to lay up for ourselves earthly treasures, but commanded to lay up heavenly treasures. Even in regard to material things, Paul teaches that the motive for honest labor includes the ability to share with those who are in need (Eph. 4:28). Wealth is a power to do good. Christians should see clearly that all we own or can ever obtain is a gift to be used in the master's service and a source of joy for us even more in our giving it to others than in our receiving it from God (Acts 20:35). When Paul tells the Corinthians that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7), he uses a Greek word from which we derive the English word “hilarious.” Wealth can be a “grievous evil...under the

sun” when people acquire and use it to their own sorrow (Eccl. 5:13), but it also can be life to the needy and joy to the giver if we will but let it.

Be content with God’s provision. Jesus teaches that anxiety about material things makes no sense for someone who believes in a loving God who provides for the birds and clothes the lilies (Luke 12:22-34). On this very point of material needs, Paul says that he has “learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (Phil. 4:12). That “secret” is a grateful and trusting confidence: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). Note that this includes wealth without worry quite as much as it includes poverty without worry. In describing the moral ruin of the ancient world, Paul says that they worshipped the creature more than the creator (Rom. 1:25). A secret of Christian happiness is to hold constantly in our minds that the greatest worldly gifts cannot compete in value with the giver. All worldly things wither and fade; God remains, a sure source of happiness in this life and the next.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Though difficult, mastery over worldliness offers a wonderful opportunity to “shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). Precisely because they are so rare in our society, unselfish generosity and quiet contentment naturally and genuinely herald the gospel of peace. Like Cornelius, whose charity went up “as a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4), we can choose a path of generosity that leads both ourselves and others to God. Greed holds power in our hearts by a lie: the “deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22). We can know the truth and be made free by it.

DISCUSSION

1. In Joshua 7, why would Achan have stolen beautiful clothing that he obviously knew had to be kept secret? In what way do we value property that can never be used?
2. What lessons should we as Americans have learned about wealth, given the nature and history of our society?
3. How much attention should we give to money? For example, how might having a household budget and keeping track of our expenses help or hurt the battle with greed?
4. Why does our culture equate wealth with success?
5. The Old Testament condemns financial oppression of the poor just as strongly as it does financial fraud. How might we sin against the poor, beyond just failing to be generous?

James Gardner is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN. He may be contacted at jjgardner@fhu.edu.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Sam Jones

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.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Christianity requires a willingness to take a stand for what a person believes to be right, even when facing persecution or death. John encourages all believers to “be faithful,” i.e., to stand for the right even if it costs you your life (Rev. 2:10). In Acts 5, Peter and the other apostles were faced with a situation to conform to their Jewish culture as instructed by the Sanhedrin or to confront their culture and do as the Lord had commanded them. They selected the latter; they made the decision to obey the Lord and not man. When Christians are faced with challenges in life, the exhortation is to do the right thing and don’t be afraid (1 Cor. 16:13).

In March of 2013, Karlyn Bowman and others, in an article entitled “Polls on Attitudes on Homosexuality and Gay Marriage,” cited several polls on Americans’ attitudes related to homosexuality or sexual relations between two adults of the same-sex. The findings are disheartening but not surprising. One poll conducted by National Opinion Research Center traced Americans’ attitudes on sexual relations between two adults of the same-sex from 1973 to 2010. According to the survey conducted in 1973, 73% of Americans reported this behavior as “always wrong” and another 7% as “almost always.” In 1991, 78% of Americans reported sexual relations between people of the same-sex as “always wrong” and an additional 4% as “almost wrong.” Some 19 years later (2010) a combined 50% described it as “always wrong” and “almost always.”¹ Since the 1970s, Americans’ attitudes towards homosexuality have undergone rapid and significant changes. Another poll conducted by a religion-based research

¹ Karlyn Bowman, Andrew Rugg, and Jennifer Marsico, “Polls on Attitudes on Homosexuality and Gay Marriage,” *American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research* (March 2013): 4. Cited 24 November 2013. Online: <http://www.aei.org/outlook/politics-and-public-opinion/polls/polls-on-attitudes-on-homosexuality-gay-marriage-march-2013>.

group (LifeWay Research) found that just over a third of Americans (37%) view homosexuality as a sin.² America is a nation in trouble; it's time for Christians and all God-believing individuals to take a stand for the Lord.

The objective of this lesson is twofold: **first**, to provide both a Biblical view and an emerging cultural perspective of homosexuality with an explanation as to how America has gotten to this point in our culture; and **second**, to suggest ways Christians and God-believing people can effectively and appropriately confront our culture.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Homosexuality: a biblical perspective. In Genesis 1:27, Moses describes the Creator's plan for populating the earth for which He had created. He created "male and female" because creating males only or females only would not have permitted Him to achieve His plan. One of the first responsibilities given to male and female (man and woman) was "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28).³ Homosexuality is unnatural in light of God's plan. God or the Biblical perspective on homosexuality (e.g. gay, lesbian, or bisexual) is made absolutely clear by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:26-27. A sexual relationship between two women (lesbian or homosexual) is against nature or contrary to God's intention when He created male and female. Also, a sexual relationship between two men (gay or homosexual) is a departure from the original plan of the Creator. One of the intentional designs of male and female is to procreate. God's acceptable sexual norm (behavior) is to be between a male and female. In Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, a sexual relationship between two people of the same-sex is described as deviant or "an abomination." People who continue to engage in lesbian, homosexual, or bisexual relations are not eligible to enter heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-10). People are encouraged not to deceive themselves by thinking God will save those who refuse to discontinue same-sex relations.

Homosexuality: an emerging cultural perspective. As stated earlier, since the 1970s, there has slowly been emerging a new dominant cultural view of homosexuality within the American culture. The word "culture," as defined by sociologists, refers to the values, beliefs, norms, etc. that constitute a people's way of life. Based on this definition, culture includes at least two key elements: what we think and how we act. This definition of culture is closely akin to a biblical truth stated by Solomon, which says, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). The behavior norms (expected behavior patterns) of people are a result of people's beliefs (shared ideas)

² Russ Rankin, "Fewer Americans Believe Homosexuality Is a Sin," n.p. [cited 24 November 2013]. Online: <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/News-fewer-americans-believe-homosexuality-is-a-sin>.

³All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

and values (what is desirable and morally correct). In the 1990s, a rapid change began to emerge in the American culture related to homosexuality and same-sex marriage. Between 1991 and 1998, there was a significant drop in those who view sexual relations between two adults of the same-sex as “always wrong,” from 78% to 59%, respectively.⁴ In 2003, Massachusetts became the first state in America to legalize same-sex marriages; since then, eleven additional states and the District of Columbia have approved same-sex marriages. In 2012, the Gallup organization’s question to its sample population was “Do you think gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?” Sixty-four percent of the sample reported it “should be legal” and 33% said it “should not be legal.” These facts and other changes convey that a new perspective on homosexuality has emerged in America.⁵



Homosexuality: an explanation for the transition. Why has a cultural shift occurred in America related to Americans’ attitudes on homosexuality? This shift is partly a product of the apathy and indifference of Christians and God-believing people. God’s people, during the days of Joshua, were challenged by their surrounding cultures. Joshua charged the Israelites to make a decision. Are you going to conform to the culture of the Amorites or to the Lord (Josh. 24:15)? Joshua made the decision to confront the Amorites’ culture. Joshua’s courage spread among the people of God. Judges 2:7 declares that “the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord.” But the young parents didn’t continue the parenting style of Joshua and his generation of parents; thus, the Bible says “another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10). Today, there is a significant decline in the percentage of people who believe in God and value their relationship with Him. This has a direct correlation with the transition in the beliefs and values of the American culture related to homosexuality. In addition to this,

⁴ Bowman, Rugg, and Marsico, “Polls on Attitudes on Homosexuality and Gay Marriage,” 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

there is a decline in the percentage of Americans who believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of God or who have knowledge of it. Beliefs and values are powerful tools in a culture. These two tools are no longer predominantly shaped by the Bible. The culture of this world is influencing America's beliefs and values. America is a nation approaching chaos and confusion because her norms are being influenced by the desires of people rather than God's word (Judg. 21:25).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **Christians Should Stand for the Right Sexual Orientation.**
- **Parents Should Serve Their Functions.**
- **Christians Should Demonstrate Love and Understanding.**
- **Churches Should Reach Out to This Group of People.**
- **Christians Should Be United for the Good of Our Nation.**

Christians should stand for the right sexual orientation. In 2 Thessalonians 2:15, Paul encourages believers to “stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught.” The word “traditions” refers to instruction passed on from the truth revealed in God's word. The appropriate sexual orientation for our culture based on Scripture is heterosexuality (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:2-5; Eph. 5:22-25). God's desire is for a sexual relationship to exist between a man and a woman in a legal marriage (Heb. 13:4). Those who choose to engage in any sexual relationship other than this are violating God's instruction (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19). Let us with a heart of humility correct those who are in opposition to God's word (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

If God can forgive (homosexuals) who repent, then the church must do the same (Gal. 6:1).

Parents should serve their functions. The institution called the family is one of several key institutions for the stability and continuation of a society. The family serves essential functions for the American society. The family needs to step up to her responsibilities for her family members and society. Two of those responsibilities are: (1) to teach the children God's acceptable beliefs, values, and norms and (2) to teach the children the appropriate sexual orientation that will please God (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4). The failure of parents to serve these two responsibilities is a significant contributing factor to the increase in homosexuality and other problems within our society. Let's never forget what happens to a nation when parents cease to perform their responsibilities. Remember what happened to Israel after the death of Joshua (Judg. 2:10).

Christians should demonstrate love and understanding. God loves all people—prostitutes, murderers, alcoholics, fornicators, homosexuals, etc.

Jesus died to free all sinners from the curse of sin (1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9). God didn't wait until we turned our lives around to start loving us; He has and will always love all of us (Rom. 5:8). Any person who is willing to "repent" and obey the gospel of Christ can be forgiven (1 Cor. 6:9-11). If God can forgive (homosexuals) who repent, then the church must do the same (Gal. 6:1).

Churches should reach out to this group of people. In Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all." "All" is inclusive of homosexuals. What programs, classes, or sermons can be offered, taught, or presented to let this group of people know that we, like God, love them? How can we really demonstrate to the world that we not only stand for the truth, but we practice the truth? Let us not be like the Pharisees (Matt. 23:13ff).

Christians should be united for the good of the nation and the church. Division in the "brotherhood" has and is making the Lord's church ineffective. Our respect within various communities has declined because they see us as people who can't get along among ourselves. It is time for us to unite; it's time for us to cease fighting among ourselves and come together to do God's will, to save our nation, to save those who are struggling with homosexuality, and to save our souls. Unity is powerful (Gen. 11:6).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

America is a nation in trouble. One example that demonstrates this point is the rapid and increasing acceptance of a sexual relationship between two people of the same-sex. Our culture has changed because we have allowed the beliefs and values of the "minority group" within our culture (those who don't believe in God) to control culture, while the "majority group" of our culture (those who believe in God) have remained silent.

When God's people have made a decision to "speak up" or "stand up" in situations against culture or subculture, great things have happened. Remember Joshua and Caleb (Num. 13:1ff), remember Peter and the Apostles (Acts 5:22-30), remember the three Hebrew boys (Dan. 3:8ff), and the list goes on. Together, we can make a difference; together, with God's guidance, we can restore or bring America back to God. In Lamentation 1:12, the once beautiful city of Jerusalem cries to her inhabitants, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?" Is it nothing to you that our nation is in trouble? Are you willing and ready to come out of your "silent mode" and "ring out" God's message on homosexuality?

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Americans' attitudes toward homosexuality have shifted from "always wrong" to more acceptable and favorable perceptions?
2. From a Biblical perspective, homosexuality is contrary to God's plan. Why?
3. What programs or classes can be offered by churches to reach out to help those struggling with homosexuality and those who need to overcome prejudice or hatred against homosexuals?
4. What can parents do to help their children to develop the appropriate sexual orientation and reduce the number of homosexuals in America?

Sam Jones is currently serving as Vice President for Spiritual Development at Freed-Hardeman University. He conducts gospel meetings, marriage workshops, and travels on behalf of Freed-Hardeman University. He may be contacted at sjones@fhu.edu.

ENTERTAINMENT

Allen Webster

For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Hebrews 5:13-14

I recently asked a mixed-age auditorium Bible class to participate in an unscientific poll by answering two questions: (1) How many of you as parents have finished rearing your children? Approximately seventy-five empty-nesters raised their hands. (2) As a follow-up, how many of you would prefer to be rearing your children now? Only a single hand went up.

Doubtless there were various reasons, but many simply tremble at the thought of rearing children in the current moral climate.

When Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, he could never have anticipated that future moment when he would wake up with a hangover to discover his daughters had done the unspeakable with him (Gen. 13:12; 19:31-36). Lot may have wondered, “How did it ever come to this?” Perhaps then he recalled his earlier choice with regret. Hindsight is far clearer than foresight.

What influences had left their marks on his daughters growing up in Sodom? What kind of neighbors and friends did they have? What was school like? What boys did they date? What did they do for entertainment?

Scripture does not tell us, but the results of Lot’s choices suggest that he failed to protect his family from the evil around them, and he failed to train them in righteousness.

Our present moral landscape resembles Sodom. Homosexuality is openly practiced with government and cultural sanction. Violence stalks the land—and is reported on the 6:00 p.m. news. Sexuality has come out of the private world of adults to enter the public consciousness of adolescents. What preadolescents now see, hear, watch, and know was not known by young married couples two generations back.

Entertainment is a primary tool Satan uses to destroy faith. Navigating entertainment choices is challenging for Christians of all ages, so we need to

study *Confronting Culture: Entertainment*. Our purpose is to equip readers with concepts and Scriptures to aid in making wise entertainment choices.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Entertainment is beneficial. God is not anti-entertainment. Like Christian parents, God wants His children to enjoy their days. “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile” (1 Pet. 3:10).¹ Jesus came to bring us an abundant, joyful life (John 10:10; 15:11; 16:24). The father (Father) of the returning prodigal threw him a welcome home party (Luke 15:22-23). Solomon enjoyed entertainment (Eccles. 2:8). He said there is a time to laugh (Eccles. 3:4). Like us, God must love to hear His children laugh.

Entertainment serves at least three positive purposes:

1. Spiritual renewal. Jesus wants His servants to come apart and rest awhile to prevent frustration and burnout (cf. Mark 6:31). We should enjoy the right mixture of work and entertainment to keep life in balance.
2. Family cohesion. In a time when families are often torn asunder, we must take steps to avoid becoming casualties of the culture war. Spouses should “sport” together (Gen. 26:8; cf. Prov. 5:18). Children who enjoy family life will be less tempted by sensuality, depression, suppressed rebellion, and gang affiliations (Ps. 127; Eph. 6:1-4). Remember, a family that laughs, lasts.
3. Social connections. Friendship is a virtue (John 15:13-14), and to have friends, we must be friendly (Prov. 18:24). Periods of wholesome enjoyment allow youthful friendships to blossom and adult friendships to grow (1 Sam. 18:4; 23:16).

Entertainment is not a playground; it is a battleground. Entertainment may appear all fun and games, but a spiritually minded person knows a spiritual battle takes place on the playground. Paul warned, “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” (Col. 2:8; cf. 2 Cor. 10:5). While arts and media are not inherently evil, they are often misused to promote sin.

God is not anti-entertainment. Like Christian parents, God wants His children to enjoy their days.

Holiness is often a casualty of this war. A holy person is one set apart for a divine purpose. Separation from sin is a primary characteristic of holiness (Rom. 6:12-19; 1 Thess. 4:3-4). Entertainment activities should

¹ All Scripture references are from the KJV unless otherwise indicated.

reflect this (Lev. 11:44-45; 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2:11). As a group and as individuals, Christians are Christ's body and the Spirit's temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:15). We must not do anything in our bodies that Christ would not do in His. We must not be *unholy* with the *Holy Spirit* indwelling us (1 Pet. 2:4-5; cf. Eph. 6:17).

Should we become separatists, then? No. Monks in monasteries cannot be salt, light, and leaven to a lost world (Matt. 5:13-16; 13:33). At the same time, we must come out "from among them," and be "separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). We should be separatists from all sinful entertainment. Some claim pre-marital sex (1 Cor. 6:18), dancing (Gal. 5:19-21), alcohol (Prov. 20:1), and blood sport (Luke 3:14) are legitimate entertainment, but Christians remain separate from such things.

Entertainment choices must be made using Bible principles. Many would never think about turning to Scripture before deciding about weekend entertainment. Yet the Bible claims to have "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

There are three types of artistic expression:

1. Positive. Positive entertainment inspires one to make the world, another, or oneself better.
2. Neutral. This promotes neither virtue nor vice. Many sporting events fall into this category.
3. Objectionable. Such entertainment promotes immorality, violence, lust, pride, selfishness, rebellion, greed, or alcohol/drug use and usually shows sin as glamorous, fun, and beneficial.²

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- Don't Take an "All Or Nothing" Approach to Entertainment.
- Set a Family Media Standard.
- Do Your Research.
- Set the Right Example.
- Recognize that Changing Media Rules Isn't Easy—Especially When Teens Are Involved.
- Leave a Margin.

Learning to discern (cf. Heb. 5:12-14) about entertainment can be compared to eating fruit. Imagine you are about to eat a pear but notice a rotten spot. Will you eat it anyway? Throw it away? Cut the bad part out and eat the rest?

² http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/protecting_your_family/resolving-disputes-over-family-entertainment/encourage-positive-entertainment-alternatives.aspx

Entertainment is like that. Some consume whatever entertainment the world offers. They eat the rotten parts. A few avoid all entertainment to avoid exposure to anything harmful. They miss the good part. The rest avoid the harmful but enjoy the wholesome.

Parents can apply these truths in several ways:

Don't take an "all or nothing" approach to entertainment. With children, this can lead to extremes:

1. Permissiveness. Some don't take the time to get involved in children's media decisions. Others want to be liked so much that they won't risk setting limits. This leads to "indecent exposure."
2. Legalism. Few families can maintain austere media boundaries successfully.³ It is a rare person that will unplug the television, listen only to gospel music, and never go to a ballgame. Parents who make hard demands without explaining decisions (especially to teens) can breed rebellion. They also fail to equip them to make good decisions on their own.

The better approach is a discerning middle ground—one that tests entertainment by biblical principles on a case-by-case basis.

Set a family media standard (cf. Josh. 24:15). Take movies, for instance. What is your family's standard? "We don't watch R-rated movies." Or, "We watch only G-rated movies."

Or, something in between. What TV shows or channels are off-limits? What artists or music styles are allowed? What books and magazines can be read? Put boundaries around temptations. Your family decisions may differ somewhat from other Christian families, but having a standard gives your



children a reasonable basis for why they can or cannot watch/listen to the programs, movies, songs their friends discuss with them.

³ http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/protecting_your_family/resolving-disputes-over-family-entertainment/encourage-positive-entertainment-alternatives.aspx

Do your research. Search the Bible (Ps. 119:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:15). Talk with other parents. Research the Internet for parental reviews of movies, songs, and shows.

Set the right example (1 Cor. 11:1). While there can be different rules for appropriate shows for adults, don't fail to practice what you preach.

Recognize that changing media rules isn't easy—especially when teens are involved. Be consistent. Be strong (1 Cor. 16:13). Let them participate in the process. God asks us to honor Him by making sacrifices—giving up what is valuable to us (Deut. 15:19-21; Prov. 3:9-12). When we do, He rewards us (Deut. 28:1-14; Matt. 19:29).

Leave a margin. Avoid “such like” (Gal. 5:21).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Given the attractiveness and availability of inappropriate entertainment, parents may feel overwhelmed. The situation is not hopeless, but reversing it takes time. By adding prayer and patient conversations (Pro. 25:11), we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).

With God's help, many parents right now are rearing godly children to be great kingdom workers. Some of the finest youth ever reared in the church of Christ are attending today's classes. Remember, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

DISCUSSION

1. What are some practical ways to use entertainment to foster family cohesion?
2. What Bible principles have helped you make good entertainment choices (e.g., Prov. 23:29-35; Matt. 5:8, 28; 6:33; 22:37-39; 1 Pet. 2:11)?
3. Do you feel children are exposed to too much sexuality and violence at too young an age? If so, what can young parents do?
4. How does Ephesians 5:16 and the stewardship of time apply?

Allen Webster preaches for the Jacksonville church of Christ in Jacksonville, AL. He is the director of www.HouseToHouse.com. He can be contacted at allen@housetohouse.com.

PORNOGRAPHY

David R. Shannon

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 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 Peter 1:13-16

Pornography is destroying our loved ones, and possibly even the reader who holds these pages. The addict knows the painful battle that regretfully reoccurs, leaving feelings of shame, helplessness, and hopelessness. The battle of recovery is possible, but it isn't easy. It isn't for the weak. Pornography is arguably one of the strongest addictions today. No doubt, it is an epidemic as 9 out of ten boys and 6 out of 10 girls are exposed to pornography before 18. “Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material



been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions,” as stated by the U.S. Department of Justice. The majority of parents do not know the problem or the extent of it as 70% of all teens hide their online activity from their parents. What most parents don't know is that 65% of teenage boys and 18% of young women use porn

at least once a week. The first-time exposure to pornography for young men is usually 12 years of age. But it isn't just the children that are losing this battle. Adults are too, as 50% of men and 20% of women who describe themselves as Christians are addicted to pornography. Many Christian users feel that they are the only ones with the struggle, which is far from the truth. Statistically, if a congregation has 2 men and 5 women, there are at least two who struggle with pornography.

Pornography is most likely the biggest problem facing the church today, yet it is often the least addressed. Satan is slaying souls while many of us sit in silence as spiritual lives bleed to death in our congregations and families. Let's break the silence in order to live!¹

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

The Stockholm syndrome is real. In 1973 robbers in Stockholm, Sweden, held four bank employees hostage in a bank vault for six long days. Criminologists assigned to help the police began to notice that the hostages had become sympathetic to their captors. During a phone call, one of the dynamite strapped hostages said they were disappointed in the police and revealed their trust in the captors by saying, "I fully trust Clark and the robber. I am not desperate. They haven't done a thing to us. On the contrary, they have been very nice." Later she begged to be allowed to leave the bank with the kidnappers. From this episode, criminologists and psychiatrists began to refer to the sympathy of a victim toward the abuser as Stockholm syndrome. One could say that the children of Israel struggled with "Spiritual Stockholm Syndrome."

Israel's captor was deadly. The nation of Israel had moved to Egypt to survive seven years of famine. By God's providential care Joseph was there to aid his family who could have otherwise perished. Years later the Pharaoh who respected Joseph died, as did Joseph. The children of Israel continued to grow as a nation, which intimidated the new Pharaoh of Egypt (Exod. 1:1-10). This Pharaoh decided to use extremely hard working conditions to afflict them. He "made them serve with rigor" (Exod. 1:13).² The word "rigor" means to break or crush. He planned for the work to break them. He even had their baby sons cast into the river (Exod. 1:22). Their freedom had been stripped. Their health weakened through inhumane demands and their baby sons killed. If someone could escape

¹All stats are taken from www.coventanteyes.com/pornstats/.

²All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

this, would they ever long to return? Yes, much like those with Stockholm syndrome.

Israel's Stockholm syndrome is shameful. God didn't leave Israel in slavery. Through Moses he sent word he was going to lead them from beneath the burdens of slavery and give them a land of rest (Exod. 6:6). After 10 plagues, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. As they felt trapped between the pursuing Egyptians and the Red Sea, they lost faith in God. They even said, "For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness" (Exod. 14:12). God answered, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today" (Exod. 14:13). God parted the waters allowing the children of Israel to cross and allowed the walls of water to collapse on the soldiers from Egypt. Trust in God removes fear and opens up doors that are only seen by faith, not with eyes. Consider a few other times Israel displayed the Stockholm syndrome: Exodus 16:2ff—The food was better in Egypt; Exodus 32:1ff—Paganism of Egypt was appealing so they built a golden calf; Deuteronomy 1:30 / Numbers 14:13—God offered them a home flowing with milk and honey, yet they wanted to go back to Egypt.

Israel's defeat was fatal. The generation of Israel who practiced unbelief did not enter the land of rest (Heb 3:16-19). The unbelievers were not atheists. Neither would they have said they didn't believe the Word of God that they had heard on Mt. Sinai. Yet, they exercised unbelief by failing to live as God commanded. This is the same definition James uses to describe dead faith and the belief practiced by demons (James 2:17-19). The children of Israel were sent to the wilderness to die as they wandered for 40 years. After this, the younger generation would have the opportunity to prove their belief and enter into the land of rest. It didn't have to end this way for their parents. If they would have trusted God the way Caleb did it would have changed everything for them. Caleb pleaded against the 10 wicked spies by exhorting, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30). Instead of overcoming with God, they were defeated in unbelief.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **The Stockholm Syndrome Is Real in Its Association with Pornography.**
- **The Addiction Is Deadly.**
- **The Addict's Stockholm Syndrome Is Shameful.**
- **The Addict Can Overcome.**

The Stockholm syndrome is real in its association with pornography. Addicts usually don't want to be addicts. The damage and pain of their addiction is real, yet sadly the urge to return is real, too. Most addicts eventually realize how pornography robs them of a proper view of people, relationships, sexuality, and time. Pornography addicts over time will move deeper into perversion through interactive on-line experiences. From there some will move on to strip clubs, prostitutes, or meeting up with those who they have engaged online. Often their guilty conscience says, "Not again." In spite of all the pain, they still have a strong urge to return, like the addict to alcohol described in Proverbs 23:29-35 who has blood shot eyes, staggers, vomits, and wounds without cause yet when he awakes says, "Give me another drink." That is the horror of addictions. The very captor that brings injury is the one the addict defends and returns to time and time again. This represents a version of the Stockholm syndrome.

The addiction is deadly. We are called out of the lust that corrupts us (2 Pet. 1:4) in order to live holy as our God is holy (1 Pet 1:13-16). If we do not achieve this break from the world into holy living we remain spiritually dead. In other words, this sin will separate us from God. Pornography has also lead to the separation of many addicts from their families. It has separated individuals from their ability to have healthy relationships. There is never a blessing about this sin, yet the temptation is to return.

The addict's Stockholm syndrome is shameful. God describes sexual perversion as shameful or dishonorable (Rom. 1:24, 26-27). Yet many who are guilty of these shameful acts are like those of Hosea who no longer knew how to be ashamed or blush (Jer. 6:15). Although some in the world would feel no shame, Christians must see through the deception in order to see God's holiness. God looks at the return to corruption in the same way of a dog returning to its own vomit (2 Pet. 2:22).

Pornography is most likely the biggest problem facing the church today, yet it is often the least addressed.

The addict can overcome. One can take courage in knowing that Christ views addictions with sympathy (Heb 4:15). Jesus Christ knows sin can be addicting. He also knows those who are truly devoted and penitent can overcome. In Thyatira there was gross sexual immorality under the influence of Jezebel as a prophetess. Jesus writes to this fourth of seven churches of Asia, exhorting them to overcome (Rev. 2:18-29). Christians in Corinth had overcome many sexual perversions; they "were washed,"

“sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11). God wants to help you overcome!

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

The church must be a place where addicts can come to find healing. The path of recovery for addicts begins with confession (Prov. 28:13; James 5:16). Even though the addict can be forgiven immediately, the path to overcoming the addiction (not returning to it) will only be traveled with the help of other Christians. Support groups and accountability is vital. An eldership must make sure they have men and women in their congregation educated and willing to help those who are ready to be delivered from their captor. If someone is in a horrible car accident, the family of the injured longs to hear the doctors say, “They are going to live.” But the family also understands when the doctor says, “It is going to take a year of your support as they learn to walk and talk again.” Overcoming pornography isn’t accomplished immediately or alone. Don’t believe the lie that recovery happens the moment someone asks for prayers of the church; that is simply the first step of a long journey. The confession lets the church know this person will need ongoing support. How will the congregation you are a part of respond to the addict’s confession? The church ought to be the place addicts can turn for healing and support in the journey.

The addict must first humbly admit, “I am an addict.” Second, the addict must repent—this involves a change of heart, mind, and behavior, while turning from sin and to God (Acts 26:20). Third, the addict must confess his or her sin. This breaks the cycle of addiction fueled by isolation. Satan tries to convince the sinner they are the only Christian struggling. The addict must find a few trusted supporters to whom they can confess and rely upon for accountability. Those in recovery must find the trigger points that prompt this sinful behavior and set firm boundaries that will avoid those trigger points in the future. Those who recover omit whatever is necessary in order to be pure (Matt. 5:27-30). All should join the godly man of old, Job, who also realized his potential to look lustfully upon a young woman as he humbly said, “I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman” (Job 31:1)? The commitment must be strong.

Pornography addicts will not overcome their struggles without God and others. You can learn more about starting a recovery program in your congregation by emailing rtc@mtjuliet.org. The children of Israel didn’t trust God enough to face their giants; therefore, they didn’t enter

the land of rest. Will you trust God enough to join with Him and His people to conquer the giant of pornography addiction?

DISCUSSION

1. Why do many congregations have such difficulty being the hospital for sinners?
2. Most likely several among you are struggling to some degree with pornography addiction. Are they safe to confess this to the congregation? Will they receive continual support while walking the path to recovery?
3. Discuss the difference in the moment the Lord forgives sins and the recovery that one experiences while healing from addictions. Remember the victim of the car accident mentioned earlier.
4. Many addicts identify well with Romans 7:14-17. Why do you think this is true? What hope does verses 23-25 add?
5. Sexual perversions are not new, but the internet has added a method of presenting this sin that is new. Discuss why the availability, anonymity, and affordability combine to make this sin so tempting.

David R. Shannon is the minister of the Mt. Juliet church of Christ in Mt. Juliet, TN. He may be contacted at davidrshannon@juno.com.

Lesson 24 - Responding to the Culture War

NOT AS A CHAMELEON

Tom Holland

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:2

The Lord Jesus Christ did not design pure New Testament Christianity for angels in heaven; He planned it for men and women living in a Satan-corrupted culture/world. Christianity is not a religion that requires the Lord's people to live in isolation from the culture in a convent or a monastery, but to live in the culture without the culture living in them.

The power of the culture to "corrupt good habits" is seen in the direct statements of the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:33).¹ The danger of the corrupt culture is seen in the Lord's prayer for His people and also in the Holy Spirit's warning about the culture. The Lord Jesus urges His followers to convert the world, not to compromise with the culture.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

The danger of a corrupt culture. The Lord's prayer for His apostles and also for those of us who believe on Him through their word (John 17:1-21) reveals the awareness of the Lord Jesus relative to the corrupting influence of the world. He prayed: "I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). The Savior prayed that His followers would be sanctified by the "word of truth" (John 17:17). "Sanctification" means to "make distinct," or different. "Sanctification is also used in N.T. of the separation of the believer from evil things and ways."²

The "church," those people called out of the Devil's domain by God's power in the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:2-3) are called to be a distinct people, a holy people (1 Pet. 2:9). Although the saved have been called

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

² W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1989), 999.

out of a condemned world, the world with its charms, temptations, and deception, is still the environment in which the Lord's disciples are to be different.

To those in Rome who had been "called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7), the Holy Spirit exhorted through Paul's inspired pen, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).



The word "conform" means "to form or mold after something."³ There is an implication in this admonition, namely, that we can identify those forces of the world or culture which have the potential of destroying our identity as saints.

The power of a transformed mind. The power of saints to withstand the efforts of the culture to get saints of God to identify with the culture is in the mind of the Lord's people. Satan seeks to "corrupt the minds" of God's people the way the Devil deceived Eve in the dawn of time (2 Cor. 11:3).

Satan convinced Eve that she could "be as God;" the Devil deceived Eve into believing that God did not really mean what He warned, "You shall surely die" (Gen. 3:4-5). How many people have been taken in by Satan's philosophy of relativism? This popular philosophy denies the reality

³ Cleon Rogers, Jr. and Cleon Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 339.

of absolutes and those who embrace the philosophy (4 of every 5 adults, Barna) become their own “god.” They look for truth in pragmatism. If it works for them, it must be the right thing. In rejecting the reality of absolute truth, one rejects the Lord Jesus Christ who said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Those who reject the absolute truth of God’s Word are described as “ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

A religious chameleon who accepts the relativistic approach to religion will find it difficult to declare the necessity of obeying the gospel in order to be saved (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The rejection of absolute truth means one cannot teach/preach that Jesus purchased one, true Church (Eph. 5:25). How could one contend for a pattern for worship, church government, and specific ethics if truth is relative and each person is to decide what is truth for him/her?

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- “No Fellowship” Means No Chameleon Religion.
- We Must Follow the Example of Paul and Jesus.

“No fellowship” means no chameleon religion. The inspired letter of Ephesians contrasts the true religion of the Lord Jesus Christ with a chameleon-type religion. The apostle Paul wrote: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Eph. 5:11). The word translated “fellowship” means “to have part in a thing.”⁴ “Fellowship” means “a sharing in common...partnership, a partaker.”⁵

Some of the works of darkness are identified: fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and coarse jesting (Eph. 5:3-4).

The old adage, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do,” may work in politics and in some social circumstances, but this approach to life will not work for a Christian. The faithful Christian is not controlled by the culture. The true child of God seeks to convert people who are under the control of the culture. God’s people are not to adapt to a pagan, godless culture. They are to expose the works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). To stand against the ungodly culture requires conviction, courage, and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching of the New Testament.

We must follow the example of Paul and Jesus. In his letter to the “church of God at Corinth” and to people who had been called “to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2-3) the apostle said, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22). Paul said, “to the Jews I became as

⁴ Ibid., 444.

⁵ Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, 430.

a Jew...to those under the law as under the law...to those without law, as without law...to the weak I became as weak.”

Paul, identifying with these various individuals, did not mean that Paul was converted to their way of life; rather, he tried to identify with them so that “he might by all means save some.”

Paul’s situation was much like that of Jesus who associated with unpopular tax collectors and prostitutes. He did not become a partaker of their greed and lusts, but rather called them to repent and to experience a different kind of life.

In commenting on the paragraph in which Paul said that he became “all things to all men,” Alfred Martin explains:

This paragraph (1 Cor. 9:19-23, TH) has been widely misunderstood and misapplied, as though Paul were endorsing partaking of other men’s sins in order to make a good impression on them (but see Ephesians 5:7 and 1 Timothy 5:22). Instead of this Paul was saying that he had tried to work with people on their own level and to give as little offense as possible in order to procure a hearing of the gospel.⁶

Martin goes on to explain that the Lord Jesus Christ also followed this principle of identifying with the lost to the extent that He was accused of being “a winebibber and a glutton” (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). Jesus did not associate with sinners to participate in their sins, but to gain their hearing so He could save them from their sins. The Savior had come to “save sinners from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). When Jesus heard that the Pharisees were accusing Him of, as they said, “eating with tax collectors and sinners,” and their implication that Jesus was condoning their sinful ways, the Lord said, “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:11-13, esp. verse 13).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

The light of Christian influence can shine in the workplace as Christians use pure speech and demonstrate a good work ethic so they do not steal from the company by wasting time. Christians can let the light of Christian influence shine as they try to be the best employees that the company has, or if a Christian has a management position he/she can show respect for workers, commend them for jobs well done, and never embarrass them before fellow employees.

⁶Alfred Martin, *First Corinthians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1990), 90-91.

The Lord's people can be distinctive and they will be different unless they have a chameleon religion. If they are religious chameleons, then their speech will not be different from non-Christians and their view of work will be the same as too many workers, namely, "I want the highest pay for the least work that I can do."

The Lord's people can be distinctive and they will be different unless they have a chameleon religion.

The opportunity to lead people to Christ demands that the Lord's people be distinctive and not become a type of religious chameleon. In their distinctiveness the Lord's followers will indeed be the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13).

DISCUSSION

1. Explain the methods used by a corrupt culture to get a compromise from saints of the Lord.
2. How can a Christian keep his/her mind from the deception of a corrupt culture?
3. Identify places where a Christian may use his/her influence as "the light of the world."
4. Explain the difference in compromise and conversion relative to the corrupt culture.
5. How does the philosophy of relativism influence the corrupt culture?

Tom Holland is the Director of the Nashville School of Preaching and the evangelist for the Riggs church of Christ. He conducts gospel meetings throughout the year and does a television program called "Tom's Pastime Porch." He may be contacted at thomasholland1@bellsouth.net.

NOT AS A MONK

Dan Winkler

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11-12

It is hard to live a good life in a bad world. Look at the above passage more carefully.¹

- First, Jesus spoke of those who were “persecuted for righteousness sake,” and the verb he used pointed to those who had been mistreated and were forced to live with the consequences of their mistreatment (i.e. he used the perfect tense which “describes an action that was fully completed [with] present-day consequences”).²
- Second, Jesus alerted us to the prospect of our being mistreated by: (a) the thoughts of others—“when they revile you,” (b) the action of others—“when they...persecute you” and (c) the words of others—“when they...say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.”
- Third, Jesus reminded us that bad people hurting good people has been the course of action ever since the days of “the prophets.” It is to be expected (2 Tim. 3:12), but how are we to respond?

We can isolate ourselves and withdraw from an emerging pagan culture but, if we do, how will the light of the gospel ever illuminate a dark, perverse generation? We must trust in God and thrust ourselves into a world that needs him.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Moses was sent into a pagan culture. Egypt was known for heathen idolatry. In his Old Testament History, William Smith reminds us that they cherished three types of gods.

¹ All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

² William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 218.



1. Gods of places:
 - a. At Memphis: Ptah (creator god, who was incarnate in the sacred Apis bull).
 - b. At Thebes: Amon (often confused or combined with the sun god, Re).c.At Abydos: Osiris (god of the underworld); his wife Isis; their son, Horus.
2. Cosmic gods:
 - a. Sun god, Re (national deity of Egypt).
 - b. Sky goddess, Nut.
 - c. Earth god, Geb.
3. Gods responsible for functions of life:
 - a. Sekhmet, lion-headed goddess of war and disease.
 - b. Hathor, cow-goddess of love.cThoth, Ibis-headed god of wisdom; recorder of gods.³

We must trust in God and thrust ourselves into a world that needs him.

Egypt was so pagan that the plagues are even described as a judgment against their gods (Exod. 12:12; cf. Num. 33:4; Jer. 46:25). Even so, God

³ William Smith, *Old Testament History* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1970), 114.

commissioned Moses to step into this ungodly culture to prove that he was the only true and living God (Exod. 3:8-11, 14:4).

Jonah was sent into a pagan culture. Nineveh was the capitol city of ancient Assyria who, according to F. W. Farrar, “tormented” their world. Farrar went on to say:

They exult to record how “space failed for corpses;” how unsparing a destroyer is their goddess Ishtar; how they flung away the bodies of soldiers like so much clay; how they made pyramids of human heads; how they burned cities; how they filled populous lands with death and devastation; how they reddened broad deserts with the carnage of warriors; how they scattered whole countries with the corpses of their defenders as with chaff; how they impaled “heaps of men” on stakes, and strewed the mountains and choked rivers with dead bones; how they cut off the hands of kings and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities...how they cut down warriors like weeds, or smote them like wild beasts in the forests and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs.⁴

The people of Nineveh were a vile, violent people but God wanted this heathen world to know of his moral expectations, and he commissioned Jonah to call for their repentance with a simple message: “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jon. 1:2, 3:1-4).

Jesus was sent into a pagan culture. God sent him “when the fullness of the time had come” (Gal. 4:4), meaning, “when the time for his purpose had come.”⁵ And it should not go unnoticed that Jesus was placed into a world of Caesars (Mark 12:16-17), civil injustice (e.g. Acts 2:23, 3:19), and carnal appetites that came from heathen idolatry (Rom. 1:20-23).

Words like “uncleanness,” “vile,” “shameful,” “error” and “debased” were used to describe their “unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness” and such (Rom. 1:20-32). Still, God sent Jesus into this world not “to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). And, in keeping with God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph. 3:10-11), he came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10; cf. 1 John 4:14).

Paul was sent into a pagan culture. He was singled out by God, the Holy Spirit, to serve as a missionary (Acts 13:1-3). He was dispatched by

⁴ F. W. Farrar, *The Minor Prophets* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, Co., n.d.) as quoted in Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1972), 251.

⁵ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1931), 4:301.

the Spirit into Macedonia where he encountered: (a) the black magic and malicious treatment of Philippi (Acts 16:16-24), (b) the idolatry and mob violence of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1; 1 Thess. 1:9), (c) the pantheism and condescending philosophies of Athens (Acts 17:16-32), and (d) the selfish immoralities of Corinth (Acts 18:1-17; 1 Cor. 5-7).

Despite the antagonism he faced, Paul preached a message of salvation (Acts 16:17), hope (Acts 17:18) and repentance (Acts 17:30) that turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- We are to “season” our culture.
- We are to “shine” within our culture.

We are to “season” our culture. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13), and this same comparison is used elsewhere in the New Testament to point out three ways we can positively season our surroundings. First, as the “salt of the earth,” we can influence our world by promoting peace (Mark 9:50). Second, as the “salt of the earth,” we can influence our world with a transparent commitment that loves Jesus more than anyone or anything else (Luke 14:26-35). Third, as the “salt of the earth,” we can influence our world by the gracious words we employ in responding to others (Col. 4:2-6).

We are to “shine” within our culture. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14-16) and, again, this same metaphor is used elsewhere in the New Testament to point out three ways we can positively touch our world. First, as “the light of the world,” we can take the message of Jesus to others (Luke 1:76-79). Second, as “the light of the world,” we can be pleasantly unique (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Third, as “the light of the world,” we can be constructive instead of critical (Phil. 2:14-15).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Some of the greatest men of the Bible felt alone amidst their pagan culture. Listen, for example, to David in Psalm 13. Listen, learn to “look up” and be encouraged!

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed against him;” lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

But I have trusted Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me.

DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe the world in which your grandparents lived?
2. How does our world positively differ from that in which our parents lived?
3. In your opinion, what is the greatest threat “Christianity” will face in the next ten years?
4. How--brain storm and be very specific--can we employ technology to alter the course of our culture?

Dan Winkler is a minister with the Huntingdon church of Christ in Huntingdon, TN and an adjunct faculty member of Freed-Hardeman University.

NOT AS A ZEALOT

Lovell C. Hayes

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

Fire! That word shouted in certain environments will evoke emotions and responses. It will bring a noisy room to silence and a silent room to noise depending on the circumstance and the emotions that are evoked by it. That's because of the power of fire. That power is demonstrated in the comparison James uses in James 3:5-6. Like a little fire can ignite a forest, so the tongue can stir up great strife.

Fire comes to mind as we enter into a discussion of zeal or being a zealot. According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the root word from which "zeal" is derived is *zeo*, which literally means "heat." Helps Word Studies states that the word *zealous* is "an onomatopoeic term that mimics the sound of water bubbling over from heat and perhaps derived from *zeo*, 'to boil.'" In everyday usage, we sometimes equate zeal with "being on fire."

Fire can be a useful tool or an utter terror. Even the fire associated with zeal is constructive in Romans 12:11, "be fervent (*zeo*) in spirit," but destructive in Romans 13:13, "not in strife and envy (*zelos*)."¹

In the midst of the cultural deprivation present today, we as Christians must be a people who deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts" and live "soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" and show that we are God's purified and special people who are "zealous for good works" (Tit. 1:11-14). However, we have to evaluate whether our zeal, our "*zeo*" (heat), is a useful tool to bring the lost to the way of Christ or an utter terror that destroys their proper view of Christ.

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Most people do not mind being described as a person with zeal, defined as a normal enthusiasm for an object or a cause. However, because of its

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

negative connotation, most would not want to be called a zealot, as one whose zeal is abnormal or to the extreme.

One of the Lord's chosen 12 was "Simon, called the Zealot" (Luke 6:15). At that time, the Zealots were a faction of the Jews who openly advocated for Jewish independence from Rome. Nothing more is said about Simon, but we assume that he was not like the Zealots who developed about AD 69 into a radical, warlike, patriotic group who advocated the overthrow of Roman rule.

I am advocating that zeal is necessary. In John 2:13-17, Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple and this reminded the disciples that it was written "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." Paul said in Galatians 4:18, "But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always." However, a fanatical zealot attitude is detrimental to our goal of evangelizing the world.



Zealousness is detrimental when it is zealotry for the wrong thing, as the Jews were toward the law of Moses (Rom. 10:1-3) and Saul of Tarsus was before his conversion (Gal. 1:14). And by this we can tie in our assigned text of Romans 6:15—7:6. Here Paul is demonstrating that righteousness is through faith in Christ and not through the deeds of the law, which the Jews so ardently held on to. Their zeal was misplaced.

Zealousness is detrimental when it is for the right thing, but by the wrong method. That's a lesson Peter had to learn in the garden when Jesus was about to be taken and tried. Peter wanted to protect the Lord, so he employed his sword (Matt. 26:51-54).

Zealousness is like fire as a useful tool, but zealotry is like fire as an utter terror.

So, I say "Yes" to being zealous and "No" to being zealots. Zealousness is like fire as a useful tool, but zealotry is like fire as an utter terror.

Elements of zeal as a useful tool. Fire is useful when it is controlled. Going back to the comparison of James 3:5-6, we can see that an unbridled tongue is like a fire out of control. Later in that chapter, James shows that a zealot attitude is detrimental and a zealous manner is helpful. He teaches in verses 13-14 that the person of wisdom and understanding has good conduct and "his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy (*zelos*) and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth."

Even the context of Romans 6 advocates control as Paul admonishes them at the beginning of the chapter not to continue in sin. In Romans 6:19 he talks about control in spite of the weakness of the flesh, culminating with the admonition: “now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”

Fire is useful when it is concentrated. An example of that is the furnace in our homes that is controlled by a thermostat. On a cold day, when you turn up the thermostat, your furnace works zealously to heat up your home. But once it reaches the desired temperature, it moderates and maintains equilibrium. In our text, Paul shows that the law was not perfect as a thermostat for righteousness, but being in Christ through faith and obedience is.

Emphasis of zeal as a useful tool. A family may come to a counselor’s office focusing on a child’s misbehavior, but the behavior problem can be evidence of a marital or family problem. Likewise, we can zealously focus on man’s misbehaviors and not address the real, underlying issue: the heart. Paul shows that these Christians had a change of heart and their change in behavior would result from there. They had “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17) that had been taught to them.

Our country can pass laws to regulate behavior, but without a change of heart, such is doomed to failure. The same is true in the body of Christ. Yes, we must teach the word, and God’s word does have converting power (Ps. 19:7; Heb. 4:12), but as seen in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, without a penetration into man’s heart, the seed of the word will not germinate properly. Therefore, the focus of our zeal must be to change man’s mind to the will of God and then man’s behavior will be properly regulated.

This surely can be seen from man’s attempt to keep the Law of Moses. Perfection was not through the law; thus, Paul shows the Romans that they are “dead to” and “delivered from” the law to “serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom. 7:4-6).

Effect of zeal as a useful tool. When men’s hearts are changed, their attitudes and behaviors will be changed. Men will then “walk in the newness of life” (Rom. 6). Men will “no longer be slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6-7). Men will present their “members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13). Men will have their “fruit to holiness” (Rom. 6:22) and bear fruit to God (Rom. 7:4). Therefore, we, as the body of Christ, must be zealous in teaching the word in such a way that hearts are pricked to the extent that they are motivated to gladly receive God’s word.

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- Let us peruse our perception.
- Let us be zealous and not zealots.

Let us peruse our perception. At times there is a difference in how we see ourselves and how others see us. I can remember a time when I was teaching a lost individual, but he got hung up on how he perceived my enthusiasm. I was not successful in leading him to Christ that day. However, he was later exposed to another person in another environment who taught him, and he obeyed the gospel and is a faithful Christian today. My conscience still pricks me as I think about that. A thermostat for zeal can be found in 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Let us be zealous and not zealots. We must love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37). We must be willing to “spend and be spent” (2 Cor. 5:15) for the cause of Christ. We must be what God re-created us to be, “a people zealous for good works” (Tit. 2:14). But we must always speak the truth in love knowing that we cannot regulate the behavior of others, but God can through His word. When dealing with others, always “aim for the heart” in humility and love.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

As zealous as you may be, the power is still in God and His word (Rom. 1:16). If you yield yourself to the Lord (Gal. 2:20), He can and will use you and will work in you in ways that are beyond what you ask or think (Eph. 3:20).

DISCUSSION

1. Name some other differences between a person who is zealous and one who is a zealot.
2. If you made an honest assessment of how others view you, would you conclude that you are zealous for the Lord? A zealot?
3. In what ways does the experience of Paul and Silas in prison in Acts 16:25-29 demonstrate zealousness under control that brings a positive effect?
4. Discuss reasons we should “aim for the heart” when trying to reach others for Christ (cf. Prov. 4:23; Luke 6:45; Matt. 15:7-8, 17-20).
5. How does the philosophy of relativism influence the corrupt culture?

Lovell C. Hayes serves as the pulpit evangelist for the East Jackson Church of Christ in Jackson, TN. He may be contacted at eastjacksonprchr@bellsouth.net.

Lesson 27 - Responding to the Culture War

AS A PRIEST

David R. Shannon

Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:15-16

What should Christians do as our country slips or even plunges toward moral decay? Is the best way to address the homosexual agenda to buy a Chick-fil-A sandwich on designated days? The problem is this action translates to homosexuals as, “We hate homosexuals.” Is the best way to address evolution being taught in school to pull our children out of public schools? So far, it hasn’t helped the problem, nor has it helped the millions



of children we abandoned there. How effective has it been for most of us to address abortion only in the voting booths? We have lost the vote, but more importantly, we must ask, what single mother have you adopted with extra, consistent care? How can we expect people who have never opened a Bible, or never lived within a Christian home or never darkened the door of a church to have the moral standard established by God as revealed in Scripture? It is impossible for them to stand where we stand in their present condition. How foolish is it for us to demonize them personally for

doing what they understand to be compassionate and best? No, we must never accept their sin, but we should admit their situation of ignorance. For example, a year ago I sat down with a 32-year-old, mother who had never been married and who had never attended one religious service until two of our young men in their 20's invited her. She was drawn to the love she saw among us. "I want what you people have" she explained. We began to study weekly. She was shocked to learn fornication was considered immoral by God. She had lived with different men never once understanding that it was sinful. During our studies her 70-year-old mother moved out of their house to live with her boyfriend.

What can we do to build relationships which give us the opportunity to teach the "truth in love" (Eph. 4:15)?¹ It is almost impossible to reach someone who has completely written us off as haters. Loving relationships break down this hatred. Jesus was hated, but it wasn't because he was hateful. He knew the enemy. Flesh and blood is not our enemy (Eph. 6:12). To hate the sinner is only going to continue to create barriers to their salvation and ours. To love the sinner is to be like Jesus. Let's be like Him!

THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Paul's great desire was for Israel to be saved (Romans 10:1). Israel had been cruel to Paul at times. One of the many times Paul referred to the Jews making his life difficult is recorded in Acts 20:19, wherein he writes, "serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews." Yet, he didn't go around on an "anti-violence" campaign. He didn't advocate that the Jews need to be labeled as violent and shunned by society. Instead he desired for them to be saved.

Paul's prayer was for Israel to be saved (Romans 10:1). Prayer should be deeper than just a religious habit. Prayer is leaning upon God as our only sufficient source. Paul approached the only One who can save to make intercession through prayer for Israel. The ones who crucified Jesus and brought much hardship into Paul's life were the very ones he prayed to be saved. Again, his prayer wasn't for them to be less violent, but saved. Coming to Jesus stops the violence! Christ is the answer to all our woes.

Paul became a priest to the outcast (Romans 15:16). Many Jews would have protested the Gentiles acceptance into God's family because of their

¹All Scripture references are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.

heathen ways. Many would have kept their distance from them just as we often treat neighbors who live in sin. Not Paul. He was sent to them! In Romans 15:16, we read, “that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” The word “minister” means “to serve.” It is used in this text in the same way priests would minister in temple service. The word “offering” is used in this verse in the same way a priest would offer a sacrifice on an altar under the old covenant. Paul speaks about God giving him the opportunity to “offer” Gentiles as an “acceptable” gift to God. They can be found “sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” Paul didn’t attack these people who would have often been immoral; instead, he approached them “ministering the gospel of God.” The core of the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-5). If that message reached the immoral people of Corinth and Rome, it would do the same today if we become priests of the Gospel and not priests of culture!

MESSAGES FOR TODAY

- **A Desire to Save Souls Is Our Greatest Solution for Our Culture.**
- **Pray for Our Culture.**
- **We Must Be Dedicated to Spreading the Gospel.**

A desire to save souls is our greatest solution for our culture. Remember Jesus approaching the Samaritan woman in John 4. “He needed to go through Samaria” (John 4:4). In other words, it was his decision to meet up with this woman who was highly immoral. Five husbands and one live-in-boyfriend later Jesus met her at the well. He didn’t form a picketing gang to march around the well, decrying the rampant sexual immorality in Samaria. Instead he gently formed a relationship that began by asking for a drink of water. Her surprise in his personable approach is revealed in her words: “For Jews have no dealing with Samaritans” (John 4:9). I can’t help but wonder if Jesus were going to live a modern, Americanized version of this story, would he have not intentionally met a homosexual to talk about his or her soul? Note that it isn’t the Lord’s standard of morality that attracts people. It is the fact that He is God, Lord, and Savior. When they humbly obey Him as Lord, the immorality will be purged.

Pray for our culture. How often does the decay of America’s morals cause us to say, “I want to do something, but I don’t know what to do.” Perhaps there are several things you can do, but don’t do anything until you have deeply and fervently prayed. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). Pray for sinners to be saved! Pray God will give you the opportunity to talk with an immoral person about Jesus. Pray they will visit the congregation of which you are a part. Pray the congregation will not write them off because

of their immorality, inappropriate dress, inking, or piercing that might be more than your average member. James taught we don't have because we didn't ask (Jas. 4:2). Have you prayed this past week or even month about immoral individuals? Have you prayed about the moral decay in our culture?

It isn't the Lord's standard of morality that attracts people. It is the fact that He is God, Lord, and Savior. When they humbly obey Him as Lord, the immorality will be purged.

We must be dedicated to spreading the gospel. Who is going to reach the immoral if we pretend the Great Commission is only for those who are moral? God sent Paul to the Gentiles. Paul said, "I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more" (1 Cor. 9:19). He interacted with Jews as well as those without the law and even the weak in specific ways to reach each group. "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22b). Why would he do this? "Now this I do for the gospel's sake" (1 Cor. 9:23a). Our dedication must be to spread the gospel. This should never be abandoned to proclaim morality as a higher priority. The day we abandon "our soul winning heart" to become "moral police" we have lost our way!

A MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR YOU

Everyone who truly comes to the Lord as their Savior will begin living a moral life. It may take a while to learn to "observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20). Trying to attract people to a moral code of conduct without first introducing them to Jesus is almost impossible. By nature people tend to live with the attitude, "Don't tell me what to do". Introducing them to Jesus is a wonderful way to allow Jesus to tell them what to do! When they learn this through Jesus, they have a great motive to change their immoral life. Let's be honest. I wouldn't change what I love to do just because some group told me it was wrong, but by coming to Jesus, we "deny our self" (Matt. 16:24).

DISCUSSION

1. Giving up immoral ways to become a Christian isn't easy. Imagine someone coming to the Lord after living a life full of immorality. How could Romans 8:18 or 12:1-2 make it easier to give up immoral behavior?
2. Christians are never taught to become moral police in the world. Yet, this does not dismiss our opportunity to run for public office, vote, or enter into peaceful dialogue. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26 to see how we are to interact with those who disagree with us. Comment upon what is the most challenging part of these three verses for you.
3. Matthew 25:31-46 gives insight to how we are to do good so as to cause others to have an open heart toward listening to what we have to say about the gospel. Imagine this scenario: a homosexual couple moves into a neighborhood where one neighbor takes them a pie and introduces themselves and another puts out a yard sign declaring their hate for same-sex relationships. Which neighbor is going to have the better opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus with the homosexual couple? Which one has been most like the Good Samaritan?

David R. Shannon is the minister of the Mt. Juliet church of Christ in Mt. Juliet, TN. He may be contacted at davidrshannon@juno.com.

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